

Community Forest Conference Missoula, Montana June 16-19 2005

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Arcata Community Forest Arcata, California

Ownership/Management Structure and Governance

The Arcata Community Forest and Jacoby Creek Forest totals 1,984 acres of forested uplands and consists of two separate tracts. The City also owns over 600 acres of wetland/riparian lowlands that are within the same small coastal watersheds. Much of the acreage was purchased in the 1930's and 1940's for municipal watershed/water supply purposes but is no longer used for water supply. The forest is a 120-year-old second growth redwood stand. Other conifer species include Douglas fir, grand fir, western hemlock and Sitka spruce.

The 1994 forest management goals are:

1. *Maintain the health of the forest system, specifically, maintain the integrity of the watershed, wildlife, fisheries and plant resources, their relationships and the process through which they interact with their environment.*
2. *Produce marketable forest products and income to the City in perpetuity, balancing timber harvest and growth.*
3. *The Community Forest shall also be managed to provide forest recreational opportunities for the Community.*
4. *The City's forests shall serve as models of managed redwood forests for demonstration purposes.*

The forests are used for research and educational purposes and provide the visual backdrop for the town. The adjacent Humboldt State University school of natural resources is a frequent user of the forest as an outdoor laboratory.

The property is owned by the City and managed by the City's Environmental Services Department. A volunteer Forest Management Committee advises staff and the City Council on forest policy matters. The Committee consists of seven members with backgrounds and expertise in botany, forest ecology, wildlife, fisheries, geology, recreation and forestry. All committee meetings are public meetings whereby the public is encouraged to attend and participate.

The operation of the community forest is tied to the approved forest management plans and a 1979 voter approved initiative to manage the forests using "ecological principles" with a portion of the net revenue to be used for parkland acquisition. The Arcata Forest was the first municipal forest certified in the U.S. under the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

The Arcata forest is subject to the California Forest Practice Rules. Management plans and operations are subject to approval and inspection by the state.

Acquisition

Staff and the Forest Management Committee have planned recent forestland acquisitions strategically. Priorities for acquisition include sensitive habitat, contiguous areas that improve manageability such as improved access and linkages to other public open space areas. Staff works with private landowners to

acquire key parcels or conservation easements when consistent with the City Forest Plan and or the Open Space Program. The acquisitions are usually contingent upon funding (usually grant funding). The only part of the process that is discussed in closed session is price and terms.

The main parts of the forests were purchased more than 50 years ago from medium sized forest landowners. Recent additions include transactions with larger timber companies and or industrial forest landowner.

The establishment of the Community Forest as a “Community Forest occurred in 1955 and was done so by the City Council.

Funding

Recent acquisitions have been funded with a combination of sources including:

- Timber harvest revenue
- * California Wildlife Conservation Board (grants)
- California Transportation Commission (grant)
- Forest Legacy Program (federal grant)
- Subdivision open space dedications (as conditions of approval)
- Private Foundations

** State ballot measures Prop. 40 and 50 provided funding for parks, open space and forestland.*

Prior acquisitions were partially donated or funded with water customer revenue.

Currently, the Community Forest generates approximately \$500,000-\$700,000 of revenue per year which is more than is needed to be self –supporting. No tax revenues are used for the forest management activity. Excess net revenue is used to purchase and maintain other City parkland and open space. Several parks and open space areas have been purchased with timber harvest revenue, including the City’s main Community Park. The City pays timber yield tax to the state on timber harvested even though it does not pay property tax.

Long-Term Management

The forest is being managed to maximize habitat diversity with an emphasis to grow late-seral forest habitat (move the forest towards an old-growth condition). Management priorities include watershed, wildlife habitat, recreation, carbon sequestration and timber harvest revenue. Wildlife habitat objectives drive the silviculture. Silvicultural systems include selection, group selection and variable retention. Approximately 40% of the land base is in reserves. The current timber inventory on the land available for timber production is 65 million board feet. The maximum allowable annual harvest is ½ of the annual growth increment on the “working landscape” portion (excluding the reserves). Therefore, the forests are accruing volume and age over time.

Community

Although the 16,000 town residents own the Arcata forest, stakeholders include the surrounding communities and the greater Humboldt County area. The forest is a recreational and research draw for other areas as well.

The forest forms the headwaters for five salmonid streams that flow to Humboldt Bay via state, federal and local wildlife areas. The quality of those areas is influenced by management activities in the Community Forest. Revenue from timber harvests has been used to purchase wetlands, creek side conservation easements and parkland that has benefited the Humboldt Bay area ecosystem and recreational users around Humboldt Bay.

Lessons Learned

Would advise other communities considering undertaking a community forest to:

- Take the time to get community buy in and secure funding for long-term management monitoring and adaptive management. Sustain the community buy in by involving the community in the management activities i.e. volunteer invasive plant removal days, trail building days, field tours to view proposed timber sales etc. Also provide a forum such as a newsletter to communicate with the community.
- Set up a system whereby future management goals are clear and not radically altered by the political changes in the town leadership. Consider third party certification (FSC in Arcata's case) to provide elected officials with comfortable parameters to operate within. This also helps with public relations.
- Conduct periodic community "visioning" sessions to make sure that the community continues to support goals and objectives. This is in addition to the usual public hearings for adopting management plans etc.
- Do not wait as increasing land values in the urban interface may make large acquisitions unfeasible. Starting small with a particularly vulnerable tract of land is probably a good idea from which momentum can build for later additions.
- Acquiring and managing a community forest requires technical expertise, collaborative partnerships, willing landowners and a bit of luck with timing. Landowners are more likely to participate after a track record and the community establishes a level of commitment.

Mission Statement Revised in 3/29/01

The Community and Jacoby Creek Forests are managed whereby:

Biological and physical elements of the forests, specifically wildlife, aquatic and plant species; plant and animal communities; and watershed processes are maintained,

Forest stewardship, including timber harvest, maintains forest integrity while generating public benefits,

Forest stewardship is fully supported by the community,

Community and visitors enjoy the forest setting and recreate in a respectful manner,

Public land ownership extends to include watersheds and headwater areas as well as corridors to neighboring communities,

Forests serve as outdoor laboratories for local schools and the university; research and other academic studies are fostered, and

The City's forests continue to serve as a model, nationally and internationally, of managed redwood forests while striving for resource protection, revenue generation, and opportunities for public enjoyment.

**Adopted following public scoping/visioning process in 2001*