Communities and Forests

The newsletter of the Communities Committee of the Seventh American Forest Congress

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Harvesting from the urban forest

What do Chinese chestnuts, puffball mushrooms, raspberries, grape vine, and pokeweed have in common? They're all products collected from urban forests for human consumption or economic use.

Foresters and planners have long documented a plethora of benefits provided by urban trees and forests, including improved air quality, cooling effects, soil stabilization, wildlife habitat, and scenic beauty. But until recently, scant attention has been paid to the role of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) in urban life.

In an effort to improve understanding of these products, Community Resources, a nonprofit organization based in Baltimore, Maryland, undertook a detailed study of urban NTFPs between 1998 and 1999. Already, this research has yielded some remarkable insights about the diversity of uses and users of urban forest products.

Through interviews, observations, and phone surveys, Community Resources has documented a total of 103 forest products harvested by urban residents in Baltimore alone. These include fruits and nuts, seedlings, bark, roots, sap, flowers, cones, vines, mushrooms, and honey.

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Forest workers Cece Headley and Juan Mendoza show their affinity for the forest in Redwoods State Park on the California Stewardship Field Tour. Jane Braxton Little photo.

Congressional staffers visit pilot stewardship contracting projects

On a mountainside high in the Trinity Mountains of northwest California, a group gathers on a dirt road winding through the woods northwest of Hayfork. It is by all means an eclectic crew: Congressional staff members representing both Democracts and Republicans, U.S. Forest Service officials and timber contractors, forest policy specialists, community leaders, and forest workers.

What brings them together, and to this remote forest site, is an experiment in forest stewardship management on federal land. At Grassy Flats, the Forest Service hopes to demonstrate that it can improve forest health using contracts spanning several years and requiring work that helps restore the ecosystem as well as produce sawlogs. In addition to thinning 272 acres of the Trinity National Forest, the Grassy Flats contractor must maintain a 305-acre plantation, build a shaded fuel break on 211 acres, and put to bed over four miles of road.

Agency officials don't know whether it will work, says Andrei V. Rykoff, U.S. Forest Service coordinator of the Hayfork Adaptive Management Area. "It's a new thing for us. We're talking about what the land needs and trying to treat all of those needs at the same time."

Across the West, the Forest Service is conducting stewardship experiments on 28 sites under legislation authorized by Congress last year. Some test new methods of harvesting timber, some new ways to pay for it. Other stewardship pilot projects include the harvest of non-traditional forest products and test ways to improve the use of local workers' skill and knowledge.

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Mission Statement

The purpose of the Communities Committee is to focus attention on the interdependence between America's forests and the vitality of rural and urban communities, and to promote:

- improvements in political and economic structures to ensure local community well-being and the long-term sustainability of forested ecosystems;
- an increasing stewardship role of local communities in the maintenance and restoration of ecosystem integrity and biodiversity;
- participation by ethnically and socially diverse members of urban and rural communities in decision-making and sharing benefits of forests;
- the innovation and use of collaborative processes, tools, and technologies; and
- recognition of the rights and responsibilities of diverse forest landowners.

Letter from the Vice Chair

Sharing community forestry lessons

Partnering with American Forests and communities in California and Montana to conduct two stewardship demonstration project field tours in August not only helped the Communities Committee increase awareness and knowledge of community-based forestry, it also gave us valuable experience to use to help other communities tell their stories.

Photo by Jane Braxton Little

Raising public awareness of our activities and issues is essential to our mission. For most of us, deliberately seeking publicity is not something that comes naturally, but if community-based forestry is to have a lasting impact, we cannot afford to hide our light under the proverbial bushel. Indeed, we need to keep the spotlight trained on our key issues: process, stewardship, reinvestment, and monitoring.

Carol Daly is Vice Chair of the Communities Committee of the Seventh American Forest Congress.

Field tours—for Congressional staffers, media, community groups, or others—are a great way to share what we're doing and learning. Letters to the editor or op-ed page articles work well too, and direct communication through speeches and even one-on-one discussions with concerned individuals can be very effective.

Making sure your field tour goes the way you planned—and suggestions on how to cope if its doesn't—are the subject of a new Quick Guide being prepared by the policy task group.

When I was a local economic developer, it always amazed me that my fellow professionals never had anything but success stories to tell. Everything was always going GREAT with them. I used to go home and wonder what was wrong with me. Sure, I was making slow steady progress, a few jobs at a time, but I had more than a few deals fizzle, and my board of directors would definitely have been more excited about a 500-job facility than all those little businesses.

But what really puzzled me was that I kept getting invited to make speeches at conventions of economic developers. Then one day someone clued me in: I was the only one who was willing to talk about what hadn't worked and why! Most economic developers are trained to always put their community's best foot forward, so admitting that something didn't go exactly as planned was totally against the grain for them. Yet they were eager to listen when someone else talked about problems, and the resulting discussion helped them improve their own programs.

We practice community-based forestry in many different places and ways—urban and rural, nonprofit and for profit, focusing on public lands and private, using tried and tested methods and exploring new approaches. Wherever we are and whatever we're doing, there are other practitioners who could benefit from our experiences—both the good and the less-than-good.

Fortunately, community-based forestry has a solid commitment to relentless self-examination, to transparency, and to all-party monitoring. We are the first to identify any problems we have and face up to them. Sharing those experiences as well as our successes with fellow practitioners helps us all do a better job. Let's make a special effort in 2000 to step up our individual outreach work—not only to the general public but with each other.

Carol Daly

***Congressional tours**, continued from page 1*

The projects are part of a national demonstration in land stewardship aimed at finding new ways to manage national forests that bring long-term benefits to the land and involve local communities. Instead of taking out the biggest and the best trees for lumber, the program focuses on what is left on the ground.

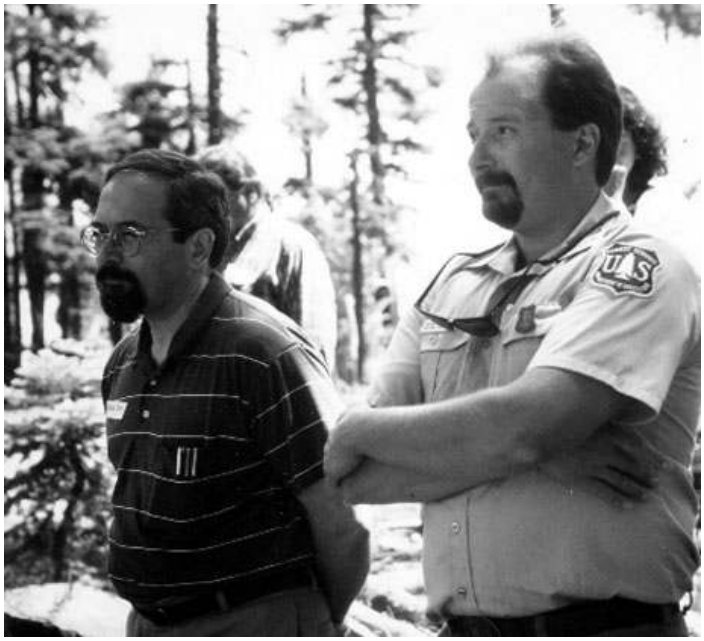
Maia Enzer, forest policy director with American Forests, designed the California field tour and a similar tour in Montana to show Congressional staff members how rural communities participate in national forest management. She says that stewardship contracting can benefit local workers as well as the federal land.

"Stewardship is everything from improving salmon habitat to water quality, from maintaining community parks to thinning for forest health. It is not about fiber production. The role of local communities is critical to caring for the land," says Enzer.

Separating restoration funding from board feet

Rural communities were developing stewardship projects before the recent involvement of Congress. Community leaders in Montana worked with Flathead National Forest officials on several contracts testing the stewardship approach. The problem they encountered—and one of the primary reasons for the 1999 legislation—was funding.

The Forest Service has historically paid for stream restoration and other ecosystem improvements through the sale of timber. With nationwide timber harvests plummeting in the last decade from 13 billion board feet a year to four billion board feet, the agency has very little money for forest health projects. If stewardship contracting is to continue beyond the demonstration projects authorized by Congress, it will require a new approach to Forest Service funding that separates on-the-ground restoration from board footage.



Mark Rey, Congressional staff, and Andrei Rykoff, U.S. Forest Service, at South Fork Mountain, CA. Jane Braxton Little photo.

How Congress will view increases to the agency's budget is one of the questions posed during the California stewardship field tour by Mark Rey, professional staff member for the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. Given the public criticism of Forest Service management and accounting, Rey was skeptical that Congress will increase the agency's budget even if it approves of the stewardship program's innovations.

Staffers enthusiastic about innovations

But Rey was enthusiastic about the work itself and the cooperation between the Forest Service and local contractors. If they can develop creative approaches to federal appropriations, he says, they may not need new legislation to authorize and fund future stewardship projects.

Other Congressional representatives on the tour also expressed interest in the innovations that could change the way the agency manages its land nationwide. The questions they posed focus on the specifics of how to accomplish it. Dave Tenny, a professional staff member for the House Committee on Agriculture, raised the issue of how the Forest Service will redefine its relationship with contractors. Susanne Fleek, a staff member for Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vermont, questioned how much flexibility the Forest Service has in its policy guidelines to reach producers of non-traditional forest products.

Kira Finkler, minority counsel to the Senate Natural Resources Committee, said stewardship contracting has such potential that it deserves the serious attention of lawmakers. She says that Congress and the administration can agree to put more money into natural resources. "This is such an incredible breath of fresh air—a bigger idea than traditional either/or politics. We can have healthy communities and healthy forests... If the people say this is what they want, a bigger piece of the pie will go to natural resources," Finkler says.

New ways of business for the Forest Service

The Forest Service does not need new Congressional approval to do most stewardship contracting, says Bill Wickman, the California region's stewardship contracting coordinator, who attended the field tour. He says that the agency can bundle contracts for various types of work and authorize service contracts if the work is associated with the sale of timber. What agency officials lack, says Wickman, is training in new ways to do business under existing regulations.

"The idea for stewardship has been there, but we haven't forced ourselves to use it. We have to look at the very big picture, which the agency and many contractors have not traditionally done," Wickman says.

Enzer says that stewardship contracting is a good way to simultaneously improve forest health and community health. When loggers, tree planters, and equipment operators accept contracts to build fuel breaks or improve streambeds, they are taking home paychecks for work that restores the ecosystem.

"Communities did not benefit from the industrial model of forestry. We know that now," she says. "We have to allow communities to have a constructive role and give workers a valued place in the process. If they are not treated properly, what's their incentive to treat the land well?"

Jane Braxton Little

Member Profile

Jim Beil

Basically, I'm a city kid. My first introduction to urban forestry was when the American elms died of Dutch elm disease. The city cut down all the elm trees on my block and replaced them with concrete slabs. That was it, done deal!

Looking beyond boundaries, making linkages

Years later, I studied at what was then the College of Forestry in Syracuse. After a brief stint with the U.S. Forest Service and a U.S. Army tour in South Korea, I took a job with the New York Department of Environmental Conservation, in their forest insect and disease control unit. Essentially, insect and disease control was the forerunner of the forest health programs of today. Working in insect and disease control forced me to look at forests on a much larger scale, beyond a single woodlot. Insects and pathogens don't respect boundaries.

I'm an active member of the Society of American Foresters and the National Association of State Foresters, and I work closely with state foresters in the four northeastern states that make up the Northern Forest lands. I also work with the U.S. Forest Service through the State & Private Forestry branch. Collaborating with these groups has also given me the opportunity to think about forestry more broadly.

New York is in a key geographic location. It links the MidAtlantic states and the Midwest with New England. A lot of international forestry trade flows through this state. I'm very aware that what happens on New York woodlands and in its cities, while locally significant, also has global implications.

Because of these connections, landowners and non-landowners need to get to know each other and work together to improve the nation's forest health. Between New York and Pennsylvania there are about one million forest landowners. But we also have about 30 million people who don't own forest lands, and there's little understanding between these two groups. We need to find a way to link urban and rural communities. One way to do that may be by wedding ecological restoration and environmental justice programs. Urban, suburban, and rural communities could learn valuable lessons from each other through environmental justice and restoration projects.

Expanding options for urban youth

One of my responsibilities following the insect work was setting up a New York state urban forestry program. That, coupled with working as a Project Learning Tree instructor in Buffalo, is how I got started in community forestry.

Today, New York state has a one million dollar urban forestry program. In recent years we've reinvigorated our program, and we now give about one-fifth of our urban forestry budget directly to communities and organizations. We have become much more sensitized to assisting traditionally underserved communities.

The New York Division of Lands & Forests also runs a tree nursery and a free school seedling program. Through these efforts and urban outreach programs like Green Horizons, USDA Urban Resource Partnership programs, and New York ReLeaf, we teach schoolchildren, teachers, volunteers, and forestry professionals about forestry, tree identification, ecology, and outdoor ethics.

Still, I'd like to see New York expand its assistance for urban youth. They should have more opportunities to get out and see rural landscapes, to learn about their role in the natural environment, and to be guided by professionals in fields like fisheries management, wildlife, and environmental law.

Right now the Department of Environmental Conservation runs summer conservation education camps for youth. That could be expanded to allow youth stimulated by the camp experience to return as paid counselors or get summer jobs in the field. I hope we can develop a scholarship program that will allow more urban youth to study natural resource management and use Americorps to strengthen this link. As Bryant Smith said in an earlier member profile, tying together the need for employment and environmental improvements is a strong motivator.

Jim Beil, Assistant Director of the Division of Lands and Forests, New York Department of Environmental Conservation, joined the Communities Committee's steering committee in October 1999.

At the Seventh American Forest Congress, I chose to be on an urban community forestry focus group. That's where I learned that community forestry is bigger than urban forestry. The Communities Committee's mission statement rings true for me. A local role in ecosystem stewardship, recognition of the rights and responsibilities of diverse forest landowners, and participation by ethnically and socially diverse community members—these are important values for me, too.

I think the Communities Committee is the best mix of individuals from different walks of life and interests that I've ever seen. It's a forum where people can share ideas and feelings without being attacked. It's the only forum I'm aware of where decisions about community needs, interests, and definitions can take place without programmatic and territorial interests overpowering free thinking.

I don't believe many policy thinkers or policymakers realize it yet, but in the coming century, the action will be at the community level. The Communities Committee is positioned to be a leader in that action.

News & Views

Policy matters

Newly proposed legislation and regulations are promoting forest-landowner rights and collaborative forest planning—is it possible that community forestry is catching on? At the same time, some forest workers are organizing to fight an attempt to weaken federal controls on hiring foreign guest workers.

Environmental group proposes landowner-friendly forest regulations

In California, new forestry regulations are being proposed as part of the recovery program for federally-listed Coho salmon populations. Concerned that the proposed regulations mean "more and more complex rules that make logging difficult on small holdings while providing big timber interests with loopholes to continue unsustainable logging," the Klamath Forest Alliance—a locally-based environmental group—is proposing an alternative approach.

The Alliance has designed a two-tiered system that would let landowners in watersheds of concern choose which set of regulations they need to comply with.

Landowners choosing option A would be held accountable to the current regulations, on the conditions that they not log streamside zones, steep slopes, and other erosion-prone areas, and avoid logging during the winter when wet weather increases the erosion risk.

Those landowners who want to log in erosion-prone areas or during the wet season would choose option B and be held to new regulations currently being developed by the California Board of Forestry. The new regulations would require an extensive review of the landowner's logging plan, a pre-cut impact assessment, and ongoing monitoring during the cut to assure that the operation doesn't degrade water quality or salmon habitat.

The Alliance says the two-tiered system would allow small-scale forest practitioners without the capacity to comply with the new regulations to continue operating while assuring that all forestry activities comply with the federal Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act.

To learn more, contact Felice Pace of the Klamath Forest Alliance at 530-467-5291 or <felicep@sisqtel.net>.

New U.S. Forest Service planning regulations emphasize collaboration

"If national forests are going to accomplish anything worthwhile, the people must know all about them and must take a very active part in their management." So says the U.S. Forest Service, quoting Gifford Pinchot, first chief of the agency, in its preamble to proposed regulatory revisions released October 5, 1999.

The preamble further reads, "A key element of the proposed rule is increased emphasis on collaboration as a means to encourage broader public participation in the planning process."

The proposed regulations themselves state, "Collaboration in land and resource management planning enhances the ability of people to work together, build their capacity for stewardship, and achieve ecological, economic, and social sustainability."

The agency's proposed regulations build on the Committee of Scientists' report released last spring. Once finalized, they will guide both the next round of forest planning and future project planning.

The proposed regulations can be reviewed in S. 219/12-219.21 in the Federal Register of October 5, 1999, or on the Web at <www.fs.fed.us/forum/nepa/rule>. Written comments are being accepted until January 4, 2000.

Forest workers and immigration laws

Contract workers are expressing concern about two new bills introduced in the Senate this fall that they say could strip them of the protections and benefits currently extended to them by federal law or possibly replace them with new "guest workers."

The Graham-Smith bills (S. 1814 and S. 1815) recommend changes to federal laws governing immigrant agricultural workers. The bills address the "H2A program" that regulates foreign guest workers. Agribusiness interests, which say farm labor is in short supply, advocate "streamlining" the current H2A program to make it easier to bring in foreign workers.

Currently, an employer must demonstrate that there is an inadequate supply of farmworkers in the region before she can receive permission to import workers. The bills would repeal this requirement, change the way minimum wages are determined, and let growers provide workers with housing vouchers instead of actual housing.

Workers' advocates contend these bills seek to undermine the worker protection provisions farmworker unions fought for over two decades. They say the proposed changes would mean a return to conditions like those experiences under the *Bracero* program of 1942-1964. Bracero is Spanish for "day laborer."

The federal Bracero program was established during World War II to bring foreign workers to the United States to fill jobs vacated by American soldiers. It allowed growers to bring in foreign workers under temporary work permits. It also gave employers the right to send workers home if they objected to poor working conditions.

The Bracero program was abolished in the early 1960s when organized labor successfully fought its renewal, citing poor working conditions and low wages. Lee Williams, a former director of the Bracero program, has called it a form of legalized slavery.

Sponsors of the Graham-Smith bills had hoped to quell some of the opposition to the proposed changes by including an amnesty program that would grant current farmworkers permanent resident status, provided they continued working in agriculture for five more years. Workers' advocates have been quick to blast this as the reintroduction of indentured servitude.

To learn more about the campaign against the Graham-Smith bills, visit the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation's Web site at <www.crlaf.org/gworkers.htm>.

Urban NTFPs, *continued from page 1*

Collectors of urban special forest products come from all sectors of the urban community. Community Resources has identified collectors from households with annual incomes of less than $10,000 and more than $100,000. They are African-American, Anglo-American, Italian-American, Greek-American, Korean-American, and Native American. They range in age from five to 65 years.

Food, craft, medicinal, and economic uses

Community Resources researchers found collectors harvesting nuts from street trees, fruit in backyards, pokeweed from vacant lots, berries by the roadside, cones and green in open parks, and mushrooms from closed canopy forests. People collect from their own yards, in local parks, and in some cases, will travel across town or into the city from the surrounding counties to reach some of these valuable urban resources.

A woman washes ginkgo nuts she collected from urban trees from a channelized stream in Baltimore. *Photo by Rick Hersey.*

The uses of urban forest products are as diverse as the people who collect them. Many products—such as berries, mushrooms, pokeweed, honey, and nuts—are gathered for food. Others are used for craft projects, such as baskets and wreaths. Some people even collect medicinal products from the urban forest.

Many individuals and institutions collect seeds and seedlings they will transplant elsewhere. In most cases, urban forest products are gathered for personal use and gifts. But in some instances, collectors sell raw products, food, craft items, or seedlings for personal income or institutional fundraising. For example, senior centers often hold holiday greens sales as fundraisers, and their greens come from local trees and shrubs.

Many benefits from urban NTFPs

Collectors derive a variety of benefits from urban NTFP collection. For many, collection offers a pleasant form of recreation—a back-to-nature activity in busy, urbanized life. For others, it reinforces cultural traditions and gives older family members an opportunity to teach younger members about traditional foods and medicines. For example, collecting Chinese chestnuts is a traditional family activity for many Korean-Americans in the same way that picking out a Christmas tree is an important activity for many European-American Christians.

For some, freshly harvested foods are a particularly nutritious (and inexpensive) dietary supplement. Finally, many collectors derive economic benefits either from collecting products for personal use or from selling products directly to restaurants, at farmers' markets, or at holiday fairs.

As part of its study, Community Resources made an effort to quantify some of the benefits of urban NTFP collection. They have documented financial benefits for individual collectors from reduced food costs, income from sales, and other savings. The direct net economic value of products ranges from about 30 cents per pound for pokeweed to over ten dollars per pound for some seeds and mushrooms.

The widespread use of urban NTFPs is not limited to Baltimore. In just a handful of calls to people in other major U.S. cities, Community Resources' staff was able to confirm that forest products collectors are active in urban areas from Seattle to Philadelphia to Boston.

Management considerations

Given the importance of urban NTFP collection, forestry and community-development professionals may want to familiarize themselves with the potential products and the collection processes in their cities, and consider ways to address collectors' needs and impacts.

As it now stands, collectors are a decentralized and largely disempowered group. Decisions regarding the management of street trees and city parks rarely, if ever, consider the implications for NTFP collectors.

Among the issues that may need to be explored in greater depth are the potential health risks of consuming urban forest products, especially when those products are collected from the sides of roads where traffic is heavy or in areas where pesticides are sprayed. Also, it is worth considering the potential impacts of harvesting on the urban ecosystem. While many products are harvested from common and even invasive species, others may be depleting populations of rare or endangered plants. Finally, some efforts may be needed to prevent or defuse conflict among collectors targeting the same limited resource.

Despite these concerns, the documented benefits of NTFP collection are so great that urban foresters may wish to increase opportunities for collection, especially on streets and in parks. Just as planting trees on city streets improves the urban quality of life by reducing temperatures and improving air quality, so might planting cherry trees or raspberry bushes provide significant benefits to urban residents and increase their investment in community parks and public spaces.

In many ways, urban areas are an ideal place for non-timber forest product collection. The combination of native and introduced species means a greater variety of products are available to residents. The heat-island effect gives urban areas a longer growing season than surrounding suburbs and rural areas. Finally, the abundance and diversity of urban residents means there are plenty of people knowledgeable about forest products and eager to collect them.

Sara St. Antoine and Paul Jahnige, Community Resources

Resources

Organizations

Community Resources. This Baltimore-based NGO offers technical assistance to MidAtlantic urban communities on topics like natural resources and forest stewardship, neighborhood nurseries, market gardens, and urban non-timber forest products. Community Resources' Web site includes training modules for vacant land restoration project design, site maintenance, and environmental education. Publications, including Community Resources' recent study of urban non-timber forest products *(see article, page 1)*, are also listed on the Web site. Contact Community Resources by phone at 410-448-4900 or via email at <info@communityresources.org>, or visit its Web site at <www.communityresources.org>.

Community Forestry Resource Center. This center, established by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy in Minneapolis, aims to promote responsible forest management through the organization of sustainable forestry cooperatives and associations of private forest owners. The Community Forestry Resource Center offers business development advice, assistance with forester and logger training, assistance developing forest management plans and preparing for certification audits, prototype geographic information systems for planning, and other services. Call 612-870-3407, or check the Web site at <www.forestrycenter.org> to find out more.

Bolle Center for People and Forests. The Bolle Center, located at the University of Montana's School of Forestry, provides interdisciplinary education and research on the relationship between human communities and forests. It also coordinates the Interior Northwest Information and Collaboration Network. The network works to give rural residents in the Intermountain West access to scientific natural resources information; provide opportunities for land management agency staff, local government, and interested citizens to participate in place-based deliberations; and provide skill training to agency staff, local governments, and interested citizens. For more information, check out the center's Web site at <bolle.forestry.umt.edu>.

Massachusetts Community Forestry Council. The Massachusetts Community Forestry Council is a coalition of professional organizations, non-profit groups, interested citizens, and state agencies. Its purpose is to act as a forum for discussions and dissemination of ideas and as a stimulus for educating all citizens to become responsible stewards in the protection of Massachusetts' community forests. The council provides tree care workshops, networking events, and materials and monitoring activities. For more information, contact the council at <mcfcouncil@aol.com> or at 888-307-TREE (toll free in Massachusetts).

Upcoming Events

Steps Toward Stewardship: A National Conference Joining Ecological Restoration and Conservation Sciences in Ponderosa Pine and Related Ecosystems. April 25-27, 2000. Flagstaff, Arizona. This conference, sponsored by the Grand Canyon Forests Partnership and the Ecological Restoration Program at Northern Arizona University, will bring together experts in conservation biology, restoration ecology, forestry, economics, watershed sciences, sociology, and wildlife ecology to discuss restoration in southwestern forests. It's timed to coincide with the first-ever Grand Canyon Forests Festival. For more information, contact Gina Vance at 520-423-7187.

Income Opportunities from Specialty Products: Agroforestry in the Northeast. March 23-25, 2000. Portland, Maine. This conference will provide professionals and laypersons with information about agroforestry and the technologies and benefits it may bring to the Northeast. For more information, contact the conference organizers at 207-657-3131 or at <rcd@cypertours.com>, or check the conference Web site at <www.thresholdtomaine.org/agroforestry>.

International Landcare 2000: Changing Lanscapes—Shaping Futures. March 2-5, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. A little over 10 years old, Australia's Landcare movement is a community-based approach to tackling environmental problems and ensuring the long-term viability of sustainable agriculture and natural resource management. There are now more than 4,500 Landcare groups across Australia, and the program is about to go international. Participants in this conference will share practical examples of Landcare group activities and explore future opportunities and challenges. For more information, contact the conference organizers by phone at 61 (3) 96906744, by email at <*wscn@convention.net.au*>, or see the Web site at <www.nre.vic.gov.au/conf/landcare2000/>.

Web sites

TreeLink. This site was created to provide information, research, and networking for people working in urban and community forestry. It provides educational materials, how-to guides, a research database, online discussion forums, articles from several major news wires, a quarterly newsletter, links to related organizations, and more. Click on <www.treelink.org>.

Publications

Innovations in Forestry: Funding Forest Plans. The latest publication in the Natural Resources Law Center's forest policy series addresses the often-confusing federal budgeting process for forest plans. This six-page brochure gives a quick overview of the process by which Forest Service budgets are developed, the appropriations process, and alternative funding options for projects that are not adequately funded by appropriations. For a free copy of this brochure, contact the Natural Resources Law Center at 303-492-1272 or at <nrlc@spot.colorado.edu>.

Innovations in research: Linking the academy and the community

Jonathan Kusel of Forest Community Research represented the Communities Committee recently when he gave a presentation to the National Academy of Science's Board on Agriculture and Natural Resource. Kusel began by identifying a problem with existing forestry research.

"In recent years, I've witnessed a distressing trend: Community-based groups and the public generally are valuing forestry research institutions less and less because so many of the problems they face are not being adequately addressed, much less resolved, by the experts. Perhaps worse, there is a growing distrust of scientists.

"Many community-based practitioners have been whipsawed by interest-based science that has contributed to a reduced valuation and distrust of scientists. Interest-based science comes not only from traditional interest groups but from the academy and research stations. It is important to note—and I find it disappointing—that a number of community-based practitioners view university and other researchers as another interest group."

Involve communities in research

The solution to this disconcerting trend, Kusel says, is to involve the community in the research. According to Kusel, "People need to be brought into the research process not only to be informed and educated about the science, but to be engaged in order to share their knowledge and have a mutual exchange of information with scientists."

While involving the public takes time and effort, it is a way "to promote a mutual learning and feedback process between scientists and the public." According to Kusel, this feedback process both improves the quality of the research and makes the public more receptive to and knowledgeable about the results of the research. For a copy of the full text of Kusel's presentation, contact him at <kusel@fcresearch.org> or at 530-284-1022.

Consortium tackles research agenda

In October, the newly formed Consortium for Assessment and Research of Community-based Collaboratives met in Tucson, Arizona, to address some of the concerns Kusel raised as well as other questions regarding community-based conservation efforts.

Workshop participants included anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, communication experts, members and facilitators of collaborative groups, representatives of federal agencies, environmental activists, and others. Many are active proponents of community-based collaboratives. Others have raised concerns about the community-based conservation movement that they feel need to be addressed. What they have in common is a commitment work together to examine community-based collaboratives involved in natural resource management.

Consortium members identified dozens of research questions, which fall into four broad themes: (1) Can we characterize community-based collaborative groups by identifying their goals and the different forms they take, and perhaps develop a typology of groups? (2) How do collaborative groups fit into the broader social context of elected bodies, agencies, and national interests? (3) How can and should community-based collaboratives be evaluated? (4) How do group dynamics and approaches to decisionmaking work in these groups?

In an initial discussion of research approaches, consortium members showed a preference for qualitative over quantitative research. They stressed that researchers should avoid "drive-by research" and need to be immersed in the communities and issues they're studying. There was also considerable support for participatory approaches to research and for research that benefits the groups being studied.

For a draft of the consortium's research agenda, available in January 2000 from the Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy, call 520-884-4393 or email Alex Conley at <aconley@u.arizona.edu>. *Alex Conley and Ann Moote*

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