
Communities and Forests

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

Volume 4, Number 3

Fall 2000

Fire policy on the front burner

The summer of 2000 was the worst wildfire season in the Intermountain West in at least 15 years—perhaps the worst in 50 years. A combination of factors, including prolonged heat, drought, and forests with large fuel loads intersected to produce the extreme conditions favorable to wildfires.

For the past century, federal land management agencies have pursued a policy of fire prevention and suppression, a standard drilled into generations of American schoolchildren by Smokey Bear. The 1988 conflagration in Yellowstone National Park dramatically demonstrated the consequences of this policy: Years of fire suppression had allowed underbrush and small trees to clog the forest, creating disease and insect infestations and fueling extreme, high-temperature, stand-replacing fires.

The U.S. Forest Service estimates that 39 million acres are at extreme risk of wildfire and has announced the goal of mitigating the risk of catastrophic wildfire on these lands by 2015. A 1999 General Accounting Office (GAO) report, however, questions whether that goal can be achieved absent a comprehensive plan and significant reallocation of agency resources, incentives, and priorities.

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Fighting the Valley Complex Fire in the Bitterroot National Forest near Hamilton, Montana, summer 2000.

Photo by Karen Wattenmaker, courtesy of the National Interagency Fire Center.

Tracking the county payments bill

County officials, environmentalists, and community forestry practitioners have been paying close attention to a bill making its way through Congress this summer: The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (S. 1608), commonly referred to as the county payments bill.

The county payments bill would update a system put in place almost a century ago, when federal legislation was enacted to compensate counties situated within federal lands for the loss of tax revenues they would have received if those lands were under private ownership. Since 1908, 25% of revenues derived from national forests lands have been paid to states to fund schools and roads in those counties. Since those revenues are generated primarily by federal timber sales, many counties in heavily forested western states have suffered sharp declines in payments due to significant cutbacks in timber harvesting over the past decade.

As currently configured, the county payments bill would address this problem by calculating “stabilized” county payments based on the average revenue from the three highest timber-yield years of the 1980s, when the timber industry was thriving. This would increase county payments by \$200 million each year. Of particular interest to community forestry practitioners, the bill also would promote projects that “improve the maintenance of existing infrastructure, implement stewardship objectives that enhance forest ecosystems, and restore and improve land health and water quality,” and aims to “improve cooperative relationships among the people that use and care for federal lands and the agencies that manage those lands.”

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Communities and Forests is published by The University of Arizona's Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy for the Communities Committee of the Seventh American Forest Congress. Subscriptions are free upon request.

Comments, subscription requests, and submissions may be sent to:

Communities and Forests
Communities Committee of the
Seventh American Forest Congress
Box 356, Hayfork, CA 96041
530-628-4206 (phone)
530-628-5100 (fax)
wsc@tcoe.trinity.k12.ca.us

Editorial board:

Maia Enzer, American Forests
Wendy Hinrichs Sanders, Great Lakes
Forest Alliance
Bryant Smith, Parks & People Foundation
Kevin Smith, Governor's Office of Oregon

Ann Moote, Editor
Kathleen Veslany, Copy Editor

Contributors:

Elizabeth Beaver, Jim Beil, Meagan Cahill,
Carol Daly, Maia Enzer, Michael Goergan,
Gerry Gray, Carolyn Herb, Mary Mitsos,
Jennifer Shepard

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 to the Members

Five or six years ago no one in Washington, D.C., had heard of community-based forestry. If they had, they probably thought it was a failed experiment in the former Soviet Union. We are happy to report that national policymakers now know where Belarus is, and they have a pretty good idea of what community-based forestry is as well. The Communities Committee has played a big part in educating Washington about community forestry.

Since 1996, the Communities Committee has worked to create opportunities for community forestry practitioners to inform national policymakers of their activities and their policy needs. We have worked to increase access to Congress, agencies, and interest groups by providing forums where people can come to Washington and speak for themselves. More importantly, people from Washington, D.C. are now approaching Communities Committee members to learn about the community forestry innovations that have been developed by practitioners around the country.



Michael Goergan co-chairs the Communities Committee's policy task group with Maia Enzer (see page 4).

The Communities Committee doesn't take positions, isn't partisan, and most certainly doesn't make contributions to campaigns. It does, however, provide a voice; a voice that has always been there, but is now being heard more often.

The Communities Committee has helped Community forestry practitioners come to D.C. to speak at hearings on non-timber forest products, urban forestry, appropriations, federal land management, economic action programs, stewardship contracting, and many other issues. The Communities Committee suggested many of these hearings and made sure members of Congress knew who to invite to them so they would hear new ideas and not get caught up in the same old us-versus-them politics. The Communities Committee has even conducted field tours for congressional staff so that they can see community forestry in action (see *Communities & Forests* vol. 3 no. 4).

We have done all of this because Communities Committee members have expressed just how important policy is to community forestry. The Communities Committee doesn't take positions, isn't partisan, and most certainly doesn't make contributions to campaigns. It does, however, provide a voice; a voice that has always been there, but now is being heard more often. We will continue to work to create points of access for urban and rural community forestry practitioners to participate in the national policy arena.

The truth is, the work that you do on the ground is far more important than anything that occurs in Washington. But convincing Washington of the importance of that work is critical to its success. We know the Communities Committee will continue to make progress in the policy arena, and that all of you will be a part of our continued success.

*Michael Goergan
Maia Enzer*

Revamped CARA would support community efforts

by Meagan Cahill

Senator Frank Murkowski (R-AK), chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, calls it "the most significant commitment of resources ever made for conservation by Congress." President Clinton has described it as "an historic opportunity to build a truly enduring conservation endowment." Naomi Edelson, president of the national coalition Teaming with Wildlife, says it "will help us assure that our children stay connected to the outdoors and the nation maintains its strong conservation commitment."

They're all talking about the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA) recently passed by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. CARA would provide almost \$3 billion funding per year to a wide array of conservation activities, from historic preservation efforts to wildlife habitat protection to urban park renewal.

More than \$150 million is specifically earmarked for programs that support community forestry, such as the U.S. Forest Service's economic action, urban and community forestry, and forest legacy programs. The money to fund these conservation activities would come from federal offshore oil and gas leases.

CARA easily passed the House in May with bipartisan support, and was passed by the Senate committee on July 25. The Senate is likely to vote on it in September.

Opposition to CARA centers on funding source, fears of land grabs

Widespread support to date does not ensure that CARA will pass the Senate, however. Some local and state governments, and some Senators, particularly in the West, oppose the bill because they believe it will result in even more federal land acquisition in areas already dominated by public lands.

Critics say CARA provides no funds to address resource management problems on federal lands—lands they say are poorly managed. In a report published by the Political Economy Research Center, Holly Fretwell writes that despite

the millions spent each year on public land management, national forests "are inhospitable to both wildlife and recreational visitors and at risk of devastation from disease, insects, and catastrophic wildfire."

Meanwhile environmentalists fear the bill will encourage continued and increased degradation of coastal ecosystems. While CARA does not provide explicit incentives for increased oil production, critics say it encourages seeking new areas for drilling. They also criticize the bill for funding infrastructure projects in coastal areas, which could cause even more environmental damage.

Community conservation programs help broaden CARA's focus beyond land acquisition

According to Gerry Gray, vice president for forest policy at the conservation group American Forests, many of the programs related to community forestry were added in later versions of the bill to address the concern that CARA was aimed mainly at federal land acquisition.

Programs championing "collaborative stewardship" were added so that communities in areas where new public lands are purchased could receive education on ecosystem maintenance and sustainable resource management that would apply to private as well as public lands.

Funding for community forestry

CARA would fund a number of existing programs that support community forestry, including rural community assistance, urban and community forestry, and forest legacy.

Rural Community Assistance

The Forest Service's Rural Development and Rural Community Assistance programs are poised to receive at least \$50 million from CARA, two-and-a-half times the current appropriation. These programs aim to help local communities in resource-dependent areas strengthen and diversify their economies.

Urban and Community Forestry

As currently written, CARA would allot \$50 million to the U.S. Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry Program, almost double the appropriation for fiscal year 1999.

In 1998, almost one-quarter of all cities and towns in the United States received assistance from the Urban and Community Forestry Program for community forestry projects carried out by over than two million community volunteers. The program encourages participation by anyone who influences or relies on natural resources and has a goal of promoting both environmental health and economic well-being.

Forest Legacy

A third forestry program that would benefit from CARA is the Forest Legacy Program (FLP), set to receive \$50 million, a tenfold increase over current appropriation levels. The FLP protects private forested lands from development through a voluntary program of selling conservation easements to federal or state government. One purchased, easements cannot be resold and are protected from non-forest uses such as housing or commercial development. The FLP also supports forest maintenance, including brush reduction, tree thinning, and new tree plantings.

Youth Conservation Corps

The Youth Conservation Corps, another program that benefits natural resource communities, would receive \$60 million under CARA for projects on federal lands that provide jobs and training for young adults.

Funding implications unclear

Many questions remain on how CARA would affect funding for natural resource programs. There are questions about how to deal with budget caps, which only allow a certain amount of spending on natural resource programs; questions about what will happen with other funding for these programs, which has traditionally come through the Interior Appropriations bill; and questions about what will happen to spending on natural resource programs not included in CARA. If CARA passes Congress this fall, a great deal of work will still need to be done to iron out the details of this historic investment in conservation programs.

Member Profile

Maia Enzer

I come from a community organizing background. After college, I worked in eastern Kentucky, Boston, and New York City organizing people on environmental issues. When I went to graduate school at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, I thought I'd end up doing sustainable development and environmental work in an international context. Instead, I moved to Washington, D.C., in 1993 and got a job at American Forests. I never planned to end up in community forestry. Community forestry found me.

Helping bring citizens' voices into national policy

I started out at American Forests working on forest health, but I quickly got involved in the Building Partnerships for Ecosystem Management Project. That project introduced me to community forestry in the United States.

Community forestry was a perfect fit for me because it integrates issues of social justice, poverty, and environmental sustainability. It was a perfect fit for American Forests, too, because as the oldest environmental organization in the country, American Forests has always served as a bridge among different groups, whether that's Congress and public agencies or industry and environmentalists.

Gerry Gray and I established the Community-based Ecosystem Management (CBEM) Program at American Forests in 1996, to help bring citizens' voices into national policy dialogues about the interdependence of healthy forests and healthy communities. American Forests' CBEM Program promotes open, inclusive, and transparent decisionmaking processes. It promotes good stewardship focused on end results—the condition the land is left in. The CBEM program also promotes investment in the natural and social capital of communities adjacent to national forests, and monitoring and evaluation of ecological, economic, and social impacts of activities on public forestlands.

Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities

This September, I began working at Sustainable Northwest, a regional nonprofit based in Portland, Oregon. I direct a relatively new program at Sustainable Northwest, the Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities (HFHC) Partnership.

The HFHC Partnership focuses on marketing the byproducts of restoration forestry. We help with the design, manufacture, marketing, and distribution of paneling and flooring products, furniture, and commercial fixtures in an effort to increase the economic value of materials resulting from ecosystem management. Our intent is to be a catalyst for low-impact, small-scale, locally-based wood products processing, manufacturing, and business development opportunities as well as a model for cooperative marketing for community organizations, local entrepreneurs, and nonprofit entities involved in rural economic development.

The new environmentalism

My work is a reflection of my values and ethics. As an environmentalist, I believe that if we cannot look at people's well-being as part of what defines a healthy environment, we will never get past the image of an elitist, "lock it up and take people out of the picture" environmental agenda that has created an "us versus them" mentality around environmental issues.

We can no longer afford to have environmental policies disconnected from communities. It is unacceptable to have poverty adjacent to public lands. The people in those communities are the stewards of our natural resources and should be respected and supported as such. Transitioning into a service economy is not a sufficient response to poverty in rural America.

As a consumer, I want access to national public lands for recreation, spirituality, and my commodity needs. I don't want to have to rely exclusively on industrial commodity production from private lands in this country and from other countries. As an American, I want to know that the products I consume come from lands protected by environmental regulations—and our national public lands are some of those places.

I believe community forestry, or, if you prefer, community-based conservation, can be the new environmentalism. It gives people a chance to focus on doing—taking care of the land in a very active way. By this I don't mean intensive management; I mean careful, high-skill approaches to restoring and maintaining ecosystems.

*Maia Enzer
co-chairs the
Communities
Committee's
policy task
group.*

*Photo by
Jane Braxton Little*



Communities Committee promotes diversity, access

The Communities Committee's commitment to helping forest practitioners come to Washington, D.C., and speak for themselves has been incredibly valuable. The Committee has brought really diverse people to D.C. and trusted them, allowing them to speak from their own perspectives. It speaks very well of the Communities Committee that it has been willing to accept people with diverse backgrounds and issues. It is my hope that the Communities Committee will continue to provide access points for people to engage in the national policy dialogue around both urban and rural issues.

Country debates roadless plan

by Meagan Cahill

Recreation, water, timber, and fierce debate—these are a few of the products of the nation's roadless areas. In May, the U.S. Forest Service unveiled a plan to ban all roadbuilding in existing roadless areas in the national forests, proposing instead to focus on repairing and reconstructing existing roads, a task for which there is an \$8.4 billion backlog.

Public comment on the proposed roadless area plan has been intense, with over one million comments revealing strong—and strongly divergent—views on the proposed policy change.

Much of the debate stems from different philosophies of forest management. Those favoring the roadless areas plan say it will help protect biodiversity, old growth, and other environmental values. Others contend that people need access to forests to manage them for optimum ecological conditions as well as an array of economic uses.

Fire management debates

Fire management issues are frequently featured in the debates. Those who oppose the roadless areas policy contend that a ban on roadbuilding will make it difficult, if not impossible, to access forests to fight wildfires and manage forests to reduce fuel loads. Residents of western states in particular are concerned about this issue, and many feel that this summer's forest fires have provided them with a prime example of the need for adequate forest access.

Supporters of the roadless policy, however, point out that only 25 percent of the fires burning this year were in roadless areas. Many in favor of the roadless policy also support the National Forest Protection and Restoration Act (H.R. 1396), a bill that would prohibit commercial logging in national forests and place emphasis on forest restoration activities, particularly prescribed burning.

Economic impacts

A second argument over the proposed roadless areas plan concerns its effect on national forest and 62% of that area is roadless, the Forest Service estimates a

20% loss in timber sales as a result of the proposed policy. Idaho officials claim the state would lose \$163 million in timber revenues earmarked for local roads and schools.

Supporters of the proposed rule, on the other hand, claim that the Forest Service would see only about a seven percent reduction in timber sales nationally. They also cite potential economic benefits to local communities from increased forest stewardship activities.

Local communities neglected

Yet the plan puts little emphasis on community-based stewardship of national forests, leading others to assert that the agency failed to consider the long-term effects of the proposed policy on forest-dependent communities.

Gerry Gray, vice president for forest policy for the conservation group American Forests, wrote in a formal statement to the Forest Service that the agency needs to consider the needs of local residents and the benefits that can be accrued through local management of national forest lands. By supporting local management of national forest lands, Gray wrote, the agency would increase "the capacity of rural communities to develop and sustain vital local economies based on restoration and long-term stewardship." He also warned that "the proposed rule is widely perceived as top-down" and will lead to increased distrust in federal policies because it does not take local issues into account.

Michael Goergen, director of forest policy at the Society of American Foresters (SAF), has also voiced support for more local involvement in forest management. Local residents, Goergen wrote, "can tell me which trails need work, where the bears live, and which forest stands they are afraid are going to burn down their homes. These are not abstract wild places to people who live with them." SAF's official policy statement further contends, "A decision that affects all roadless areas through one national decision cannot address the unique forest conditions of each individual roadless area."

Perspective

Community foresters play a critical role in national forest policy

by Meagan Cahill

Over the past few years, community forestry practitioners have been coming to Washington, D.C., to share their concerns and needs with national policymakers. They testify before Congress and meet with federal agency officials, national interest group representatives, and Congressional staff.

As one who has worked in the D.C. policy arena for six years, I believe it is critical to have this community voice at the national policy level. Having people who actually implement projects on the land engage in national policy is our best hope for restoring and maintaining ecosystems—and a system that supports people. That community voice helps ground national forest policy discussion in reality and provides a link to issues of labor and workforce.

Community forestry practitioners have a degree of integrity and honesty and a willingness to be self-critical that's not normally found in Washington, D.C. That combination gives forest practitioners a lot of credibility in the national forest policy process.

Not a special interest group

Community forestry practitioners are not yet organized for real political power, in part because most of them have resisted the temptation to operate like a special interest group, involve themselves in litigation, or create a single-issue based campaign.

So far, community foresters have taken a broad, multiple-interest approach and focused on integrating their interests with the interests of environmental and industry groups. As the community forestry movement matures, it may become necessary to articulate a more organized platform, but I hope practitioners will continue to be mindful of the unintended consequences that broad application of a single policy can have on small-scale efforts.

Fire policy, continued from page 1

Wildland/urban interlace fires fuel debates on management priorities. The enhanced potential for catastrophic fire is now complicated by an additional risk factor. The wildland/urban interface has grown as more people flee the cities and build their "dream houses" near or within rural forests only to find that their newfound rural serenity comes with a 'high risk of wildfire. Firefighters have a difficult time fighting fires in this expanding interface zone.

Federal fire policy has long required protecting lives first, property second, and then natural resources. As the interface expands, this policy dictates a diversion of resources from general forest firefighting to the protection of individual properties located in and around these forests.

Recent fires are causing some to question these priorities. Forest Service researcher Jack Cohen recently published a report suggesting that home ignitability, not timber fuel buildup, is the primary cause of property loss in the wildland/urban interface fires. Cohen recommends that homeowners be required to minimize the risk to their property from wildfire and that the agency concentrate on managing forests to meet natural resource needs.

Public perceptions, laws present challenges to fire management

Even if reducing catastrophic fire risk becomes a management priority on federal lands, both of the primary tools for reducing fuel—prescribed burns and mechanical thinning—face public resistance as well as legal and regulatory barriers. Public perception of agencies' ability to control prescribed burns is quite negative, particularly since the Cerro Grande prescribed fire burned out of control, charring almost 48,000 acres and 280 homes and threatening the Los Alamos National Laboratory. The fact that fewer than one percent of prescribed fires burn outside their prescriptive area and that most of those are quickly controlled does little to change this negative perception.

Prescribed burning also faces legal barriers. Smoke and debris from prescribed fires can violate the federal Clean Air and Clean Water Acts. Careful

coordination with air and water quality control agencies at both the state and federal level is an increasingly necessary part of prescribed burn planning. The state of Colorado, for example, has developed air quality guidelines for all prescribed burns—private, state, and federal. To be effective, such guidelines require the voluntary cooperation of federal land management agencies over whom the states have no direct jurisdiction.

Prescribed burns undertaken by federal agencies or on federal lands also must comply with the requirements of the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act.

Mechanical thinning also faces some challenges. First, some environmental interest groups oppose all tree harvesting on federal land, and some believe fuel reduction is merely a euphemism for continued commercial harvesting.

Second, mechanical thinning can be both expensive and commercially undesirable. The legal prohibition on goods-for-services contracts precludes agencies from allowing contractors to remove commercially valuable wood as payment for thinning. The GAO estimates the initial cost of adequately reducing the fuel load on the national forests at about 12 billion dollars.

Third, thinning can conflict with other management goals. For example, some areas in need of thinning to reduce fuel loads also provide habitat for endangered species. Such complications can invoke time-consuming and expensive formal compliance with a variety of environmental statutes.

Stewardship contracting pilots: innovative fuels-reduction projects

The Forest Service, with the approval of Congress, has established 28 pilot programs to examine the implications of stewardship contracting, including such devices as goods-for-services contracting. Of these, several specifically target fire-risk reduction in the wildland/urban interface.

One such project is located at Winiger Ridge near Boulder, Colorado. The project is a fuels reduction program Colorado State Forest Service, the Boulder County Open Space Department, the local electric utility company, and the

residents of the Magnolia Road Community.

Other pilot programs that specifically address wildland/urban interface issues are the Priest-Pend Onelle Project in Idaho, the Grand Canyon Stewardship Project in Arizona, the Baker City Watershed Project in Oregon, and the Grassy Flats Project in California.

New legislative initiatives address local fire management needs

The recent wildfire outbreak in the Intermountain West has resulted in new fire-risk reduction initiatives by members of Congress as well.

Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) introduced the Community Forestry Restoration Act, S. 1288, which would give grants to community groups in New Mexico to carry out collaborative projects that reduce the threat of wildfires, restore watersheds, or develop new uses for trees with small diameters. Communities receiving grants under this bill would be required to include a diverse and balanced group of stakeholders, utilize current forest restoration science, create local employment/training opportunities, and guarantee compliance with federal environmental laws.

Representatives Mark Udall (D-CO) and Joel Hefley (R-CO) introduced a similar bill, The Colorado Forest Restoration and Fire Reduction Act, H.R. 5098. This bill emphasizes interjurisdictional collaboration and would include grants for post-wildfire restoration projects.

Legislation with national scope, The Community Protection and Hazardous Fuels Reduction Act of 1999, H.R. 1522, was introduced by Representative Helen Chenoweth-Hage (R-ID). This bill would establish a five-year program requiring public land managers at the district level to identify wildland/urban interface areas at high risk for wildfires, and it would also authorize goods-for-services offsets in contracts for the sale of forest products to remove hazardous fuels buildup.

Resources

World Wide Web sites

Thomas (federal law). One-stop shopping for all of your federal law needs, the Library of Congress site is a very user-friendly way to get your hands on historical and current laws, regulations, and legislative comment. The site includes bill summaries back to 1973, full text of bills since 1989, and committee reports from the 104th, 105th and 106th Congresses. You'll also find the *Congressional Record* and links to your Congressional representatives. Click on <thomas.loc.gov>.

Fire management policy. A number of on-line sources offer additional information on fire management policy in the United States. General Accounting Office, *Western National Forests: A Cohesive Strategy is Needed to Address Catastrophic Wildfire Threats*, GAO/RCED-99-65 is available at <www.gao.gov>. Jack D. Cohen's report, *Reducing the Wildland Fire Threat to Homes: Where and How Much?* is available at <www.fs.fed.us/rm/pubs/cohen/cohen.html>. The U.S. Forest Service Report, *Forest Service Implementation of Stewardship Contracting Pilot Projects During FY 1999* is available at <www.fs.fed.us/land/fm/stewardship>.

Roadless areas policy. The U.S. Forest Service's official Website on the roadless areas plan is a good place to start learning about the proposed policy. Visitors can read the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, peruse other documents related to the policy, follow links to other Internet discussions of the proposed plan. Visit <roadless.fs.fed.us>.

Foresters' public policy guide. The Forest Resources Association recently unveiled its web-based Pro-Active Forest Resource Guide, intended to assist loggers and foresters in influencing public policy. The site provides tips on influencing state and federal legislative and regulatory processes, working with media, taking advantage of public speaking opportunities, organizing forestry tours, and building effective coalitions. The site also provides an extensive catalogue of educational resources. For more information, visit <forestresources.org>.

Publications

The Participatory Process for Supporting Collaborative Management of Natural Resources: An Overview. Andrew W. Ingles, Arne Musch, and Helle Qvist-Hoffman. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome, 1999. Part textbook, part handbook this publication explains what collaborative management is and how it compares to other forms of public participation in resource management, then describes tools and approaches to achieving collaborative resource management. Examples and references draw from international experience with community forestry. Copies are available for free from the Forests, Trees, and People Program Network; contact them at <istfius@ipc.apc.org> or at 301-897-8720.

Upcoming Events

Communities Committee of the Seventh American Forest Congress' steering committee meeting. October 12-14, 2000. Hayfork, California. For more information, contact Annette at The Watershed Research and Training Center at 530-628-4206 or at <wrtc@hayfork.net>.

National Network of Forest Practitioners annual meeting. October 25-29, 2000. Fairlee, Vermont. For more information, contact Wendy Gerlitz at 505-995-0000 or at <wgerlitz@nnfp.org>.

National Rural Community Assistance Conference. October 28-November 3, 2000. Stowe, Vermont. For more information, contact Susan Odell at <sodell01@fs.fed.us> or at 202-205-1385.

Money in the Mountains: Options for Creating Sustainable Wealth. November 2-4, 2000. Weston, West Virginia. This conference will focus on developing microbusinesses that use West Virginia's forest resources in a sustainable, ecologically sound way. For more information, contact the Center for Economic Options at 800-780-5652 or at <www.centerforeconomicoptions.org>

Promoting Participation in Community Development—Models, Methods and Best Practices: A Workshop for Practitioners, Researchers, and Community Organizers. November 30-December 3, 2000. Knoxville, TN. Hosted by the Community Partnership Center at the University of Tennessee, this workshop will give practitioners a chance to share models and methods for participatory community research and planning. For more information, contact Tony Hebert at <ahebert@utk.edu> or at 423-974-4562.

Eighth International Community Forestry Workshop. February 5-March 2, 2001. Honolulu, HI. It's the eighth international workshop on community forestry, but the first one inviting mainland United States community foresters to participate. Selected participants will be asked to study and write on "policy frameworks for enabling successful community-based resource management." For more information, contact Dr. Jeff Fox at the East-West Center at 808-944-7248 or at <foxj@eastwestcenter.org>.

Funding opportunity

National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council (NUCFAC) grants. Keep your eyes peeled for NUCFAC's annual request for pre-proposals for Challenge Cost-Share Grant Projects. The RFP for 2001 grants is due out in October; final grants proposals will be due December 31. To view abstracts of previous grants and get more information on applying for funding, visit the NUCFAC website at <www.treelink.org/nucfac> or call Suzanne del Villar at 209-536-9201.

County payments bill, continued from page 1

Jane O'Keefe, county commissioner in Lake County, Oregon, where 75 percent of the land is either federally or state owned, supports the county payments bill. She feels it will stabilize infrastructure support while strengthening ties between local governments and adjacent forests. O'Keefe also hopes the stewardship and maintenance projects proposed in the bill will provide the funding necessary for local agencies in her county to carry out elements of a conservation plan they've been developing but have been unable to implement due to lack of resources.

Greens are seeing red

Not everyone is happy with the bill, however. The fact that payments would still be based on historical timber sale revenues and that states may elect to maintain their traditional 25% payments has many on the greener side seeing red. Many environmentalists would prefer a clean break, or "decoupling," of forest revenues from education payments.

Carol Wright of the Kiamath Forest Alliance in Etna, California, says, "The current incentive is to increase logging activity based on the emotionally charged issue of educational funding. It's a perverse relationship." Ideally, Wright would like to see legislation that compensates counties based on projected tax revenues if the land were under private ownership, removing logging from the calculation altogether. She also would also like to see states take a closer look at how they fund their small rural schools.

Others decry "welfare type" payments

County governments aren't entirely happy with the bill either. Carol Daly of the Flathead Economic Policy Center in Montana says that more conservative county officials in her area are wary of a stabilized, "welfare type" payment from the U.S. Treasury because they fear the payment would become one more promise that doesn't make it into the budget. Counties have some reason to be wary, Daly notes, since the federal government has historically underfunded their payments-in-lieu-of-taxes.

Amendments attempt to address some concerns

Changes made to the original legislation have appeased some of the bill's critics, while leaving others dissatisfied. A previous version required counties to use 25% of their aid to develop joint county-federal projects, such as tourism, road maintenance, and forest stewardship activities, on federal land. Since counties would share in the proceeds from these payments, environmentalists worry that most endeavors would be geared toward the prime revenue generator—logging.

Under the revised bill, only 15-20% of the aid would be set aside for projects on federal lands, with the remainder going to traditional roads and schools projects. Advisory committees comprised of equal parts environmentalists, commodity group users, and local community representatives would be required to oversee the resource management projects. Timber harvest would only be allowed for disease prevention or other forest health efforts.

Still, many environmentalists feel the guidelines for stewardship efforts are not defined specifically enough to ensure proper management and fear that there simply aren't enough qualified people to sit on these advisory committees to ensure the balance the bill requires. Others question the ability of already overburdened local agencies to take on the type of complicated, collaborative projects being proposed in the legislation.

With the bill coming up for a Senate vote by September 15, a number of additional amendments are in the offing. One proposed change would give counties the choice to not participate in any of the projects and would instead allocate 100% of their funds to schools and roads. Another proposed amendment would require revenues generated by special projects to be returned to the U.S. Treasury, lessening the incentives to choose projects based solely on their potential profitability. Other proposed amendments would require separate contracts for commercial logging, bar logging in roadless areas, bar logging of old-growth trees, and ensure that special projects promote restoration and don't increase logging.

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Communities Committee of the

Seventh American Forest Congress

PO Box 356

Hayfork, CA 96041