National Fire Plan

STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTING CONGRESSIONAL FIELD VISIT IN IDAHO AND MONTANA 2002

An August 2002 Stewardship Field Tour for Congressional Staffers allowed participants to share information and discuss the use of stewardship contracting authority in the Northern Region (R1) of the Forest Service. The projects visited were on the Lolo, Bitterroot and Idaho Panhandle National Forests and provided the guests with a look at a wide range of stewardship authority applications and an opportunity to learn how this contracting authority works and is being implemented on the ground.

The trip began with a tour to the small community of Seeley Lake, northeast of Missoula, where the Clearwater Stewardship project represents the Region's first project nearing completion. The second day included a visit to the Bitterroot Valley south of Missoula, where the significant fires of 2000 burned. The Bitterroot's restoration work has incorporated stewardship contracting authorities on a variety of projects with emphasis on fuels reduction. The last day of the tour was on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest in Idaho, where the Lakeface Lamb project has the distinction of being the first stewardship contract project awarded to an all-volunteer committee working with the Forest Service.

The primary purpose of the tour was to focus on the Pilot program as provided by Congress and to build an understanding about what Stewardship Contracting is and is not, how it is being applied, what challenges are faced, what is being accomplished on the ground and ultimately, to share support for permanent authority.

Each of the project areas visited share the commonality of stewardship contracting applications yet differ in their specific purpose, their public involvement, level of success and challenges.

Lolo NF - The objective for the trip to Seeley Lake was to view the Clearwater Stewardship project designed to test "best value" awarding, designation by description, retention of receipts, exchange of goods for services and multi-year contracts. The specific objectives of the Clearwater project included: reduction of road densities and motorized access to improve grizzly bear habitat; reduction of sediment sources and improvement of water quality in a primary bull trout watershed; noxious week treatment; improvement of wildlife habitat through low intensity burning and contribution to local economy.

Bitterroot NF -The objectives for the trip to the Bitterroot National Forest were two fold. First, the Bitterroot Forest was one of the major sites impacted by the fires of 2000 and a major recipient of the restoration and recovery funding through the National Fire Plan. As such, there was interest in seeing some of the fires' impacts as well as evidence of the significant work being done by the forest and the community in its recovery.

The Bitterroot NF is testing "best value" award, goods for services, "designation by description", and multi-year contracts as provided by the Pilot authorities. Although the Bitterroot NF has proposed extensive restoration and recovery projects to rehabilitate the land after the severe fires of 2000, not all projects are currently funded. The Big Bull and Robbins Gulch stewardship projects provide a mechanism to get needed but un-funded work done on the ground. The stewardship work focuses on rehabilitating roads to meet Best Management Practices as well as obliteration of unneeded roads.

The second objective and the one that ties in with the Stewardship tour objectives was the use of Stewardship contracting authority in the area's recovery and restoration efforts. The group visited the small community of Pinesdale whose citizens partnered with Forest personnel to reduce fuels around their community following the 2000 fires.

Idaho Panhandle NF- The objective for Thursday's trip to the Lakeface Lamb Stewardship Project on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest was to view a project in its early stages. Lakeface Lamb is the first stewardship contract project awarded to an all-volunteer committee in cooperation with the Forest Service. The project created community collaboration through door-to-door hazard identification, development of public education and evacuation plans and encouraged treatment of private lands in the proposals development.

The Lakeface Lamb stewardship project is testing the use of "best value" award, goods for services, designation by description, local employment and multi-year contracts as provided by the Pilot authority.