

Communities and Forests

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

www.communitiescommittee.org

Winter 2006 • Volume 10 • Number 1

Urban and Community Forestry at Work: The Vermont Town Forest Project

by Jad Daley

Inside this issue

Feature

Urban and Community
Forestry at Work:
The Vermont Town
Forest Project
page 1

From the President
Opportunities and Needs
Within the 2007 Farm Bill
page 2

Urban Forests –
The Devastated
Gulf Coast
page 3

Perspective
Mandated
Collaboration:
An Assessment of
Resource Advisory
Committees
page 4-5

Position
Announcement
page 7

Events
page 8

A remarkable coalition of public and private organizations has come together over the last year to launch the Vermont Town Forest Project. It is a statewide initiative designed to deepen the connection of Vermonters to the woods and their neighbors through town forests. The project is sparking new cultural and educational projects, enhancing stewardship of existing town forests, and helping interested communities acquire new town forests.

The timing for the Vermont Town Forest Project's development and launch has not been coincidental. Difficult public conversations about public land management, off-road vehicle use, and other thorny issues have sometimes split forest-loving Vermonters from each other and obscured common ties and values.

This deteriorating public dialogue has coincided with an unprecedented wave of subdivision and development that is rapidly transforming Vermont's forests — owners controlling less than ten acres almost doubled during a recent fifteen year span. Of even more concern, the *Forests on the Edge* report released this summer by the U.S. Forest Service projects that most of Vermont's private forestland will see either medium or high change due to development over the next



PHOTO COURTESY OF NORTHERN FOREST ALLIANCE

Overlooking town of Sharon, Vermont.

twenty-five years.

In response to fraying community ties and increasing threats to forests, the non-profit Northern Forest Alliance — a fifty-member coalition dedicated to conservation, sustainable forestry, and community well-being in Vermont and the broader Northern Forest region — and its partners designed the Vermont Town Forest Project to reclaim the common denominator among Vermonters of love for forests and deep community ties to the land. It was hoped that if Vermonters could rediscover common ties through familiar town forests, it would also warm other important forest policy conversations in a state facing real challenges from sprawl development, forest health, and increasing public demand for everything from water supplies

to outdoor recreation.

The Vermont Town Forest Project was designed around three major areas of activity: 1) deepening community ties through town forest cultural and educational initiatives; 2) improving stewardship of town forests through planning, technical assistance, and increased public participation; and 3) helping interested communities acquire a new town forest or add to existing acreage.

The project is being implemented through a broad and diverse leadership team of public and private organizations that includes the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation, Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions, University of Vermont, Middlebury College, Vermont

See VERMONT on page 6

Communities and Forests

The newsletter of the Communities Committee of the Seventh American Forest Congress is published biannually by the Alliance for Community Trees.

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

Alice Ewen Walker, Publisher
Communities and Forests
c/o Alliance for Community Trees
5010 Sunnyside Ave., Suite 305
Beltsville, MD 20705
(ph) 301-220-2251
alice@actrees.org
www.communitiescommittee.org

Editorial Board

Christina Cromley
Alice Ewen Walker,
Alliance for Community Trees
Ian Leahy, Editor
Kathryn Mutz
University of Colorado School of Lab
Rock Termini,
National Audubon Society

Contributors:

Carol Daly, *President,*
Communities Committee
Jad Daley, *Vermont Town Forest*
Project Director, Northern Forest Alliance
Ian Leahy, *Editor*
Zhu Hua Ning, *Professor, Urban Forestry*
Southern University
Laura Schweitzer, *Director*
Forest Policy Center, American Forests

Design and layout:

Lynn Eppard & Associates

Listserv

The Committee's listserv has integrated with "Forest Community News," a regularly updated listserv focusing on federal policy related to and affecting community-based forestry. Existing subscribers will be automatically transitioned.

To subscribe (or unsubscribe) to Forest Community News: The National Perspective, please email Paige McClanahan at pmcclanahan@pinchot.org.

Questions and suggestions should be emailed to Paige McClanahan and/or Laura Schweitzer at lschweitzer@amfor.org.

From the President



Carol Daly

This issue of *Communities and Forests* focuses on opportunities and needs within the 2007 Farm Bill. With public and private resources dwindling for most conservation and restoration work, the 2007 Farm Bill could provide necessary authorities and adequate funding levels for federal agencies to collaboratively assist landowners in sustainably managing their lands. For that to happen, however, our voices must be heard on Capitol Hill. The following talking points summarize the Communities Committee's hopes for the upcoming Farm Bill. They reflect our on-going efforts to find and promote collaborative, market-based and voluntary solutions that recognize the inextricable link between the long-term health of the land and the economic and social well-being of rural communities.

Please enjoy this issue. We can always use your help to increase visibility of and support for our critical work,

2007 Farm Bill Talking Points: Achieving Conservation and Environmental Goals

CURRENT PROGRAMS

Provide technical and educational assistance to nonindustrial private forest owners.

There are many obstacles to on-the-ground implementation of current technical and educational assistance programs. USDA agencies need clear authorities and capacity to provide technical and educational assistance to landowners and encourage peer-to-peer mentoring. Given limited capacity, we encourage the use of collaborative efforts (such as the State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committees) to prioritize needs based on restoration and social goals.

Increase funding for cost share assistance to non-industrial private landowners and clarify intended recipients of existing legislation.

Adequate and predictable funding needs to be available for adequate restoration. Cost-share programs for private forest landowners, such as FIP, SIP, and more recently, FLEP, have been effective. However, as funding for these programs has diminished, landowners are left with great expectations and little realized gain. In addition, current legislative language regarding other agricultural conservation programs, such as EQUIP, needs to explicitly clarify opportunities available for private forest landowners.

Support tools such as conservation easements.

Conservation easements maintain working forests, preserve environmental values, protect communities from excessive development pressures, and provide long-term certainty to those selling or donating easements. The Forest Legacy Program has been instrumental in addressing development pressures on family-owned forests and could continue to be useful in addressing land divestment issues. It might also be useful in the creation of markets for ecosystem services as it could provide long-term assurance of protection of enrolled lands to those investing.

NEW IDEAS

Provide incentives to non-federal forest landowners to restore their forestlands and cooperate across ownerships.

- *Develop a process for prioritizing allocation of cost-share funds* based on criteria and needs agreed to by a diverse and collaborative group such as the State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committees.
- *Develop tiered incentives for forest landowners*, wherein the more they do to restore and sustainably manage their lands, the more resources they receive.

See FARM BILL on page 7

Urban Forests – The Devastated Gulf Coast

by Zhu Hua Ning

Approximately 1,200 people died. More than 400,000 structures were damaged beyond use. There is no need to again describe the incomprehensible horror this year's hurricanes brought to the Gulf Coast. The world watched in disbelief; many of us could not believe that the images we saw were actually of events happening in the United States. But as relief finally moved in and the waters from both Hurricanes Katrina and Rita receded, one of the starkest connections between human struggle and ecological instability was revealed. Are these hurricanes, like the fires of the West, more intense now due to the last century of human activity? Would their impact have been less if coastal homes had not replaced coastal wetlands?

We may never know. But as Gulf Coast residents pick up the pieces, the need to restore and maintain a largely devastated, yet critical, aspect of the long-term health of the region must be considered: the urban forest. Many trees that survived the initial disasters stand in precarious positions of high risk to people. Others have endured further damage and negligence due to massive clean up activities. Debris and heavy machinery rest upon their roots. Many healthy trees have also been cut down by residents due to a perception that they are posing an inherent risk to properties.

It may seem inappropriate to consider trees when there is still so much human disarray left to address. But many trees that shaded streets and homes, cleaned the air, protected the coast, and enhanced quality of life to the point of defining an entire region's heritage have been destroyed. One can hardly think of New Orleans without the large live oaks that typified its landscape.

Nevertheless, the rebuilding has begun. Some of the most progressive leaders in urban design have been called in to help guide redevelopment in a more sustainable manner than the auto-dependent, strip

mall development pattern that has dominated Gulf Coast growth in the last half century. Yet any effort to guide comprehensive economic, environmental, and cultural redevelopment without including plans to restore and maintain urban ecological health as part of that effort will ultimately fail.

First Responders

Just like those first military vehicles rolling through the flooded streets, several national, regional and local conservation organizations have already taken up the charge to stabilize and restore devastated urban forests all along the Gulf Coast. The Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition, a coalition of several national conservation organizations, has begun assembling resources to help the region. American Forests, the nation's oldest national conservation organization, has set up Katrina ReLeaf as a means for citizens and businesses to contribute directly to planting trees where they are needed most. In addition, The Home Depot Foundation contributed \$75,000 in additional focus support to the national Alliance for Community Trees to provide technical assistance and seed money to help Gulf Coast communities restore urban forest canopy.

Already working on the ground, the Society of American Foresters, International Society of Arboriculture and Society of Municipal Arborists have been collaborating with federal agencies and regional



Amidst hurricane recovery efforts, debris is piled atop tree roots.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ZHU HUA NING

community groups to assist with damage assessment and hazardous tree removal. Spearheaded by Southern University, the Communities Committee is assisting the "Making New Orleans Green Again" campaign. This campaign is focused on helping small landscape and lawn care business owners affected by Katrina become operational again as a way to both help in the recovery and benefit from it. The list could go on and on and will continue to grow, as restoration of this magnitude will no doubt be a long term task.

Long-Term Strategy

But while this is a good start, there must be a long-term strategy to both maintain existing trees using sound arboricultural practices such as pruning, mulching, salt remediation, and hazard reduction, as well as to plant the right new trees. Therefore, damage assessment, arboricultural management planning, storm management, community education, and training must be crucial components of any green infrastructure restoration plan.

In addition, site and environmental

See KATRINA on page 5

Mandated Collaboration: An Assessment of Resource Advisory Committees

by Ian Leahy

In 2006, Congress will vote on the reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act of 2000 (County Payments Bill). From a community-based forestry perspective, this piece of legislation has been nothing short of groundbreaking. It is the first time collaboration between diverse interest groups has ever been mandated by law. The success or failure of these “Resource Advisory Committees” could set a legislative tone for years to come, beginning with the upcoming Farm Bill reauthorization.

So how effective has such mandated collaboration been? Through 16 case studies in 9 states and a review of the implementation of the Act, the California-based organization Sierra Institute for Community and Environment sought to find out.

History of the Legislation

As a way to protect rural communities from negative effects of expanding federal land acquisitions, the Twenty-Five Percent Fund Act of 1908 was passed to pay states and counties 25% of all receipts from National Forests for schools and roads. But after decades of declining timber receipts and increasingly tenuous relationships between extractive forestry and education, the County Payments Bill was instated in 2000 to allow counties to restore stable payments to states and counties stabilizing payments to rural schools and roads, and, to county general funds in the case of Bureau of Land Management land in Oregon. The bill has created jobs in those counties and provided other opportunities associated with restoration, maintenance, and stewardship of Federal lands.

In order to determine best implementation of this funding locally, Resource Advisory Committees (RAC) were legislated to include state, county, and tribal elected officials, representatives from outdoor recre-

“Many historically clashing groups have shown a surprising amount of comity and effectiveness in working together.”

ation, energy or mineral development, commercial timber, and federal grazing permit holders, as well as national and regional environmentalists, dispersed recreation, archaeological or historical interests, and even wild horse and burro interests.

Assessing RAC Impacts

Jonathan Kusel, a social scientist with the Sierra Institute, is the lead investigator of this study designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the RACs and the Title II projects they recommend, along with Title III and county projects, both novel aspects of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act. Title II provides funding for ecosystem and watershed restoration, as well as road, trail, and infrastructure work. Title III provides funding for search and rescue, forest related education, community service work camps, fire prevention planning, easement purchases, and community forestry. This summary will focus on preliminary findings related to Title II. Findings to this point may be modified when the analysis is complete. Final results of the two-year study will be released in February.

Findings

With expected bumps and glitches, some states and counties have been far

more successful launching RACs than others. Some of this discrepancy is due to experience and commitment at the state and local levels. A working hypothesis is that more local experience in collaborative activities significantly increases the likelihood of a RAC starting sooner, becoming functional more quickly, and becoming more successful at implementing projects. At the same time, lack of commitment within the agencies at the regional or local level will appreciably decrease the likelihood of RAC success, regardless of local experience.

As a social scientist with major responsibilities for both the Forest Ecosystem Management Assessment Team (FEMAT) in the Northwest and the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project, Kusel expected to see open conflict between individuals reflecting different interest group values. Rancor, however, has not materialized to the degree anticipated. Many of the individuals representing historically clashing groups in RACs have shown a surprising amount of comity and effectiveness in working together. There are multiple factors for this. A few that Kusel outlined in a preliminary report include:

1) Discussion of resource management at the project level changes the discourse from a focus on philosophy and values to a discussion of local needs and goals. Agreement with regard to improving watershed health and reducing forest fire risk is therefore more easily achieved.

2) Project money is a powerful motivator for RAC members to work together. Members understand that projects will not get off the ground unless they work together.

3) In general, agencies are working with RAC members and their groups more as partners and collaborators than they have previously. Whether they want to or

See RAC on page 5

RAC from page 4

not, or know how to or not, they are required to do so.

4) RAC projects have leveraged additional dollars and volunteer hours.

Not every RAC, however, is working perfectly. Existing dysfunctional relationships between divergent interest groups have slowed RAC development in a few cases, but in a surprise to the researchers, this has been a relatively minor problem. A more complete understanding will have to wait until the final analysis is completed said Kusel. Other shortcomings are faced by those RACs operating within a limited geographic area or with limited funds. Such groups are unlikely to or cannot address issues at what some consider critical landscape-scale levels.

Monitoring

Project monitoring has been, at best, inadequate. Some counties have neither systematically nor accurately recorded projects, making review and analysis difficult. A large reason for this inadequacy is because there has not been adequate dollars allocated to monitoring. The blame cannot, however, fall completely on the shoulders of any one entity as constituents often want money to be used for projects. A possible remedy is to legislatively or administratively dedicate a small percentage of Title II and Title III project funds for monitoring to assure learning and adaptive project and program improvement.

Despite the struggles, in preliminary discussions of what they are learning, researchers have revealed that this legislative experiment has been overwhelmingly positive. There is no doubt that where RACs have been successful there has been marked improvement in relationships between local and regional interest groups along with local practitioners and the agencies. RAC commitment to on-the-ground success and real project outcomes may well herald a new way of doing business that goes beyond the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination legislation.

KATRINA from page 3

planning must be prioritized as species selection is extremely important to ensure that the future urban forest be dominated by storm and salt tolerant species. Live oak, the most valued and dominant tree species in the Gulf Coast, had a higher survival rate after Katrina than other major tree species such as Southern magnolia, Water oak, Crape Myrtle, Southern Red oak, and Southern pine.

All of this hurricane recovery work can be looked at as both a burden and an opportunity. For example, officials are struggling with managing the overwhelming urban wood waste. Yet properly processed and treated wood waste can be utilized as biomass mulch for enhancing the urban soils and helping maintain a clean environment. Some could also be salvaged for telephone poles or such value-added products as furniture or pallets.

The final phase of any restoration plan is monitoring and feedback to ensure that objectives are being achieved and any shortfall corrected. Adhering to the proper guidelines recommended by credible sources, such as state forestry or extension agencies, The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) and the USDA Forest Service would increase the potential for success during the entire process.

Legislative Needs

There is no doubt that the inclusion of urban forestry in the Farm Bill in 1990 and thereafter has helped the development of the nation's urban forests. But for the past 15 years urban forestry has been significantly under funded. With so many human relief needs at hand, there is little hope of this trend reversing unless advocates are able to help Congress recognize the direct link between the economic, social, and ecological well-being of communities and the stability and health of their urban forests. If that connection can be effectively made during deliberations over the upcoming Farm Bill reauthorization, then much-needed funding for Gulf Coast forest restoration may be provided through federal Urban and Community Forestry appropriations.

Position Announcement

Program Coordinator

The Communities Committee seeks a program coordinator to lead the organization's projects, liaise with board task groups, develop sources of funding, and provide support to the board of directors. This is a new position for an entrepreneurial candidate with a background in community-based forestry. Excellent written and verbal communications skills and a willingness to travel are required. Location of the position is negotiable. See www.communitiescommittee.org/pcjob.html to apply or contact Carol Daly at 406-892-8155 for information.

CONTRIBUTE TO THE COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Help support the Communities Committee's mission to promote collaboration and greater stewardship by local communities to restore forested ecosystems.

- | | |
|--|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Forest Steward | \$500 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Woodland Collaborator | \$250 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grove Planter | \$100 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tree Tender | \$ 50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seedling Grower | \$ 25 |

Your contribution is tax deductible and will be used to help the Communities Committee spread the word about collaborative restoration and community forestry. With your support, we will share Communities and Forests with more readers, continue the work we started at the first Community Owned Forests Conference, and reach out to policymakers about the issues that impact our land.

NAME _____

Mailing ADDRESS _____

e-mail _____

Make payable to:

Communities Committee
919 Elk Park Rd.
Columbia Falls, MT 59912

VERMONT from page 1

Land Trust, Trust for Public Land, Vermont Natural Resources Council, Audubon Vermont, and Green Mountain Club. The leadership team, facilitated by the staff of the Northern Forest Alliance, provides direct technical assistance and other resources to towns that want to engage in one or more of the project's three major activity areas.

Bridging Generations

One of the highlights to date has been a pilot project launched with the Town of Stowe. Stowe is blessed with remarkable natural assets, including ample state forestland along the spine of the Green Mountains and the Worcester Range. The town also has two town forests. The 2100-acre Sterling Town Forest is home to a significant stretch of the state-long Catawampunk Ski Trail, while the much smaller McCutcheon Town Forest lies hidden right in the middle of town.

The members of the Vermont Town Forest Project and the Stowe Conservation Commission partnered to bring greater attention and citizen engagement to the McCutcheon Town Forest through a series of activities that continue to build. The first step was an intergenerational oral history project orchestrated by George Gay, Executive Director of the Northern Forest Alliance and long-time Stowe resident. He facilitated a day of interviews between the fourth grade Stowe Elementary School class and a group of thirty elders in the community.

The students learned many things about Stowe's forest heritage and the McCutcheon Town Forest in particular. As Gay describes the experience, "You had students inhaling pizza and asking questions just as fast, or even faster, than the community elders could answer them! The sense of excitement from the students was contagious and anyone there could also see the quiet sense of pride that these elders felt in having a new generation that really wanted to hear their stories."

Perhaps the most exciting revelation for the students was the existence of an

old pavilion in the town forest where these elders once danced on summer nights. In addition to completing student essays that have become the basis for a new oral history, the students are working with community leaders to restore the dance pavilion, using wood from the town forest, so that another generation of Stowe residents might dance there on summer nights.

Shortly after the oral history project, the Vermont Town Forest Project led a Town Forest Celebration in Stowe to bring the entire community into the exciting dialogue and process of discovery that the students had begun. Vermont's Lieutenant Governor Brian Dubie was the keynote speaker for the celebration and organizations from across Stowe and Vermont put on workshops throughout the town forest to educate Stowe residents about everything from forestry to wildlife to recreation management. A new community movement has sprung up in the wake of these events. The conservation commission is working with interested residents to explore new activities that it wants to facilitate in the McCutcheon Town Forest.

A New Vision

Some efforts by the Vermont Town Forest Project have saved nearly-forgotten existing town forests from development, others have created new ones. A pilot project in West Fairlee exemplifies the potential for new town forests. A little over half of Vermont's towns have a town forest, and many such towns have been acquiring additional acreage in recent years as a tool to manage growth and conserve important resources. West Fairlee is a rural town in the Connecticut River Valley just north of booming Hanover, New Hampshire. Hanover is one of the largest growth centers in northern New England and has been radiating development pressure to Vermont's side of the Upper Valley.

The Vermont Town Forest Project connected with the visionary Select Board Chair in West Fairlee, Patricia Ayres Crawford. She saw the potential for a new town forest to help bring her community

together while also protecting some of the natural values and rural feel town residents treasure. Crawford worked with her newly formed conservation commission to engage town residents and reach out to neighboring towns with overlapping areas of conservation interest, including two adjoining towns with town forests bordering the area most desirable for a new West Fairlee Town Forest.

Crawford also did research and learned that West Fairlee had previously considered a town forest in the area of greatest current interest as far back as the 1970's. Using the community energy she had generated, Crawford successfully got the prospective town forest written into a new town plan completed in early 2005. She is now working with the Trust for Public Land to further explore the possibility of acquiring its first parcels. West Fairlee's exemplary process of community engagement and consensus building has provided a perfect blueprint from which many communities are already putting their own plans into action.

Funding

There is no doubt far more interest and excitement for new pilot projects than the mostly volunteer-driven Vermont Town Forest Project is immediately able to serve. However, political support has been strong, including enthusiastic support from Lieutenant Governor Brian Dubie, bipartisan support from state legislators, unanimous support from Vermont's congressional delegation, and a strong collaboration with county foresters. The Project's leadership team is using such broad support to expand dedicated staff capacity and fund pilot projects, as well as explore with leaders whether it can tap state and federal funding to assist the project and adopt new towns with resources of their own.

One notable source of support and a key player throughout has been the Urban and Community Forestry Program, run in

See VERMONT on page 7

VERMONT from page 6

Vermont by Danielle Fitzko. The U&CF Program was first initiated in the 1990 Farm Bill and is currently pending reauthorization. Its funding will depend on the success of programs such as this. Regionally, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) has long been a source of funding for community conservation projects, including acquisition of town forests.

The Northern Forest Alliance, through its sibling organization the Eastern Forest Partnership, is also taking a leadership role on the national stage in exploring establishment of the Suburban and Community Forestry and Open Space program as proposed by Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) and Representative Michael Fitzpatrick (R-PA). The Northern Forest Alliance and Eastern Forest Partnership helped facilitate introduction of the House companion bill and believe that the program would provide funding for community-oriented forest conservation projects that increasingly cannot compete effectively for Forest Legacy Program dollars. These dollars are often tilted toward larger parcels with outstanding natural resource values over forests more notable for their community values. It is hoped that the proposed program would ease pressure on Forest Legacy and provide a separate arena for community-oriented projects to be evaluated.

Next Steps

New programs planned for 2006 include a traveling photo exhibit funded by the Vermont Humanities Council. The exhibit will feature images of Vermonters enjoying their town forests and connecting with fellow citizens. There are also plans to develop a Vermont Town Forest Stewardship Guide and website as a resource for town officials, as well as a series of events to provide hands-on educational opportunities. The group also aims to launch a new citizen forest health monitoring project that will have Vermonters out in their town forests gathering forest health data to help track statewide trends.

For more information about the Vermont Town Forest Project, visit www.northernforestalliance.org.

FARM BILL from page 2

- **Provide incentives to participate in sustainable forestry certification programs.** Many landowners are interested in certification, but often the investment does not make fiscal sense.
- **Encourage the development of markets on private forestlands for ecosystem services** similar to markets developing for carbon credits.

Support community-owned forests

Across the country millions of acres of private forests are being put up for sale by forest products companies, other timberland investors, and non-industrial private forestland owners. If such lands are developed for residential or other purposes, nearby communities face losing the critical economic, environmental, recreational, social, cultural, and aesthetic values those forests have traditionally provided. One option being increasingly pursued is a centuries-old practice of acquiring the lands to manage them as community forests.

Ways in which the Farm Bill could help foster community forests:

- USDA should **propose a study** as part of the Farm Bill to explore conservation issues related to the sale, fragmentation, and conversion of private forestlands.
- **Authorize low-interest conservation bonds** that could help reduce the cost of capital for communities that want to acquire forestlands.

Enhancing Rural Economic Development

CURRENT PROGRAMS

Provide permanent authorities for the Forest Service to offer technical assistance to communities and private landowners.

Currently, the Forest Service is authorized annually to provide technical assistance to rural communities for sustainable development. To further encourage agency officials to engage in these technical assistance activities, they need to be reassured that the authorities have legislative will behind them, rather than being an annually authorized item which may or may not appear in the appropriations bill.

• **Strengthen Forest Service programs to provide both technical and financial assistance to rural communities.**

In the past several years, programs in rural development have been cut while small, flexible grants, such as those provided through the Economic Action Programs, have received diminishing support. The programs have played a critical role in the capacity building and business development needs of resource dependent communities. The Forest Service currently has the authorities to carry out technical assistance, capacity building, and rural development work, but greater clarity from USDA is needed.

NEW IDEAS

Workforce Training

Workforce training and certification programs focused on private land restoration are needed. This workforce needs to be able to connect with landowners as well as needs on the land. Jobs dealing with all stages of wood and nontimber forest product extraction and processing need to be developed. The agencies might consider developing a program like the Pacific Northwest Jobs in the Woods program for private forests.

Support flexible grants to build capacity and achieve forest restoration

Technical and highly-leveraged financial assistance is needed for community capacity building and for development of local infrastructure for business technologies, business development skills, and marketing capacity. In the past, Economic Action Programs accomplished much of that soft infrastructure development. Programs like SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) or Natural Resources Block Grants may be useful models.

Biomass utilization for sustainable rural development

As other programs for forest-based rural economic development have declined, there have been efforts through energy legislation and biomass grant programs to provide incentives and opportunities for woody biomass utilization. The 2007 Farm Bill should continue efforts to encourage appropriate energy and value-added uses of woody biomass associated with both public and private forest restoration.

Communities and Forests

Communities Committee
5010 Sunnyside Ave., Suite 305
Beltsville, MD 20705

Mark Your Calendars

National Training: Community Tree Leadership Forum February 27 – March 1, 2006

The Alliance for Community Trees and National Arbor Day Foundation announce a 2 ½ day training focused on strengthening non-profit organizations dedicated to urban and community forestry. Six core modules are offered through the event:

Individual Gifts & Grantwriting
Marketing Urban Forestry
Advocacy & Public Policy for Urban Forests
Collaboration & Partnership
Volunteer Management
Standards of Excellence & Accountability

The training is targeted to the needs of community groups engaged in urban forest protection, education, and advocacy. The conference is free, thanks to generous assistance from the USDA Forest Service. Limited air travel scholarships are available.

For more information visit www.arbodayfoundation.org or www.actrees.org, or call 402-474-5655 to request conference information. The event takes place at the beautiful conservation retreat, Lied Lodge, in Nebraska City, Nebraska, served by the Omaha airport only.

Mission Statement:

The purpose of the Communities Committee of the Seventh American Forest Congress 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
- The recognition of the rights and responsibilities of diverse forest landowners.