

Communities and Forests

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

Winter 2004 • Volume 8 • Number 1

The Healthy Forests Restoration Act: A Community-based Perspective

by Ian Leahy, Editor

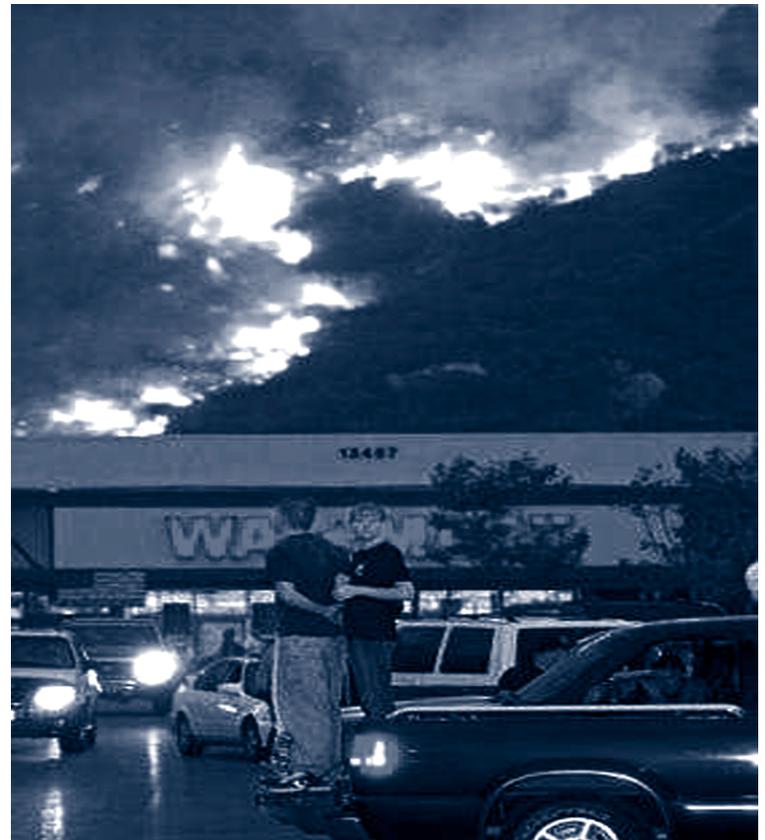
Remember the “good old days” when a 5,000-acre fire was considered large? Chances are you do, since they were only about 15 years ago. It has, after all, only been since 1990 that the average size of Western wildfires has tripled.

Take, for example, the largest single fire in Arizona’s history, the Rodeo-Chediski. It ravaged Arizona’s White Mountains in the summer of 2002. It was originally two fires that combined to burn 468 homes and 467,000 acres, costing over \$40 million to contain. Unlike the 2003 California wildfires that burned mostly private land covered in chaparral, over 98% of the Rodeo-Chediski fire burned on reservation and forested federal lands.

Yet, when the ashes cooled, the most important lessons to be learned turned out to not lie in the charred remains, but rather in the still-smoldering political battles. These battles brought to light decades of ideological gridlock and opened the door for massive legislative change in forest management.

Homes vs. the Environment

Politicians and special interests immediately directed public outrage toward environmentalists, claiming their appeals had delayed thinning



A Southern California wildfire encroaches on the urban fringe.

projects that could have prevented the Rodeo-Chediski fire. According to the Ecological Restoration Institute at Northern Arizona University, lawmakers used “unconfirmed data” from the Forest Service claiming that nearly half of all thinning projects are appealed.

The environmental groups at the center of this maelstrom, such as the Pacific Biodiversity Center, were quick to counter that the Forest Service and a century of forest mismanagement were the real cause. Using General Accounting Office statistics they claimed that

only 1% of all timber sales were appealed. Amidst a flurry of public outcry against them, environmentalists contended that management strategies in the Rodeo-Chediski throughout the 80s and 90s focused on logging larger trees, doing little or nothing to reduce fuel build up. This logging potentially added to the problem when small, young trees, which added to the fuel loads, grew in place of the larger trees.

Determining who is ultimately right or wrong, or (more

See HFRA on page 4

Inside this issue

Feature

Healthy Forests
Restoration Act:
A Community-based
Perspective
page 1

From the President

Carol Daly
page 2

Member Profile

Sam Burns, Ph.D.
page 3

Viewpoint

California Smokescreen
Shrouds the Nation
page 6

Resources

page 7

Events

page 8

Communities and Forests

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

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Listserv

The Committee's listserv, communityforestry@lists.nau.edu, is a bulletin-board type list where committee members post weekly federal policy updates, announcements of upcoming workshops and conferences, job announcements, and related notices.

Subscribers may also post questions or comments for general discussion. However, use of the listserv for extended debate is discouraged and personal attacks are not tolerated.

To subscribe to the listserv, send the following message to listserv@lists.nau.edu:

Subscribe communityforestry NAME

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From the President



Carol Daly

As President of the Communities Committee, I would like to welcome you to both a new year of *Communities and Forests* and a new format.

Our members are forest practitioners, policymakers, scientists, researchers, environmentalists, businesspersons, and public officials representing a broad spectrum of interests. We work from the halls of Congress in Washington, D.C. to western tribal lands; from the forests of New England and the Great Lakes to those of the South and the West; from vacant lots in inner city Baltimore to the urban/wildland interface of Durango, Colorado.

Having such diverse interests come together to pursue common objectives on local, regional and national scales is critical to our success in fostering and promoting community-based forestry. As forest economies across the country take on more of a restoration focus, we are working to end contentious gridlock in forest management, instead advocating and modeling collaborative approaches to resolving dif-

ferences and finding positive solutions.

We hope this newsletter will serve as a resource in that effort, helping others understand who we are, where we stand, and what our urban and rural members and partners are doing across the country.

With this issue we begin focusing on connections between community projects and the national policies and global economic factors that affect them. We will highlight local projects with broad applicability, helping others learn from the problems community forestry practitioners encounter and the successes they achieve.

This issue looks at recent large wildfires in the West and the resulting Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003, both of which have significantly impacted community-based forestry. We hope you enjoy it, and that you will share with us your thoughts on our articles, on other community-forestry issues you would like to see us cover, and on ways we might improve our services to you.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Carol".

by Ian Leahy, Editor

Raised on a Kentucky farm, educated in economics, with a Ph.D. in sociology — one can't help but wonder how this could be the resume of a leader on the forefront of western forest management. To anyone in community forestry circles, though, all you have to say is "Sam Burns" and it makes perfect sense.

It is Sam's intellectual yearning to understand and incorporate diverse perspectives toward a situation, combined with his rural pragmatism to want tangible results that define his professional accomplishments. "Most of my interest in community involvement lies in building partnerships to get work done, not just saying we're doing collaboration."

As the Research Director for the Office of Community Services at Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado, Burns couldn't have entered the community forestry arena at a better time. A century of fire suppression and the past 15 years of explosive wildfires provide enough evidence that 'critically unhealthy' forests are in need of radical land management changes.

One of the biggest challenges is the fact that the industry to do the work collapsed when forest-dependent communities became trapped between the cut-and-run tendencies of the timber industry and litigation from environmental interests. Within a 300-mile radius around Durango, only a spattering of family-oriented timber businesses remains.

Many forest communities, such as Show Low, Flagstaff, Santa Fe, and Durango, are now



PHOTO BY JANE BRAXTON-LITTLE

Sam Burns with his grandson Andrew Christopher Burns.

much larger and less dependent on the land than they were 50 years ago. Seasonal residents and tourists have diversified the economy, bringing both opportunities and challenges. In the middle of this struggle between the traditional West and the new West is where Sam Burns has helped to build optimism about collaborative stewardship.

The Importance of Communities

Sam will be the first to tell you that what drew him to community-based forestry was more the 'community' than the 'forestry'. He is passionate about the critical role communities play in orchestrating this transition to more diversified economies, working to ensure that

local cultural values are incorporated into management plans.

In a recent keynote address to western forest communities, he summarized, "What is abundantly clear is how important you are to the future of sustainable forestry in this region. Clearly, the work to improve forest health and reduce fire danger cannot be accomplished by the federal land agencies, state forest organizations, county and city governments, or local fire districts, either alone or together. While these organizations can be partners with you, none of them [is] capable in and of [itself] of creating the economic capital and skills, and the wood production methods and techniques, necessary to

undertake the enormous forest stewardship work that lies before us."

Sam began his community-based forestry work in the early 90s with a wilderness study on the San Juan National Forest. By committing a year and a half to a community group that helped define how their wilderness should be managed, he learned that a National Forest could avoid the usual tension between environmental and forest management interests. From that experience he became engaged in the Ponderosa Pine Forest Partnership (PPFP) restoration effort to build collaboration between diverse interests as a means of reducing catastrophic wildfire hazard and creating jobs. PPFP continues to this day, with about 9,000 acres restored and about 900 acres projected to be restored each year through restoration prescriptions.

Today, Burns' work builds on these early models of collaborative stewardship. He does place-based recreational assessments in the 3 million acre San Juan National Forest, tackling unique challenges of a Forest managed by both the BLM and Forest Service. He also develops case studies on how community collaboration has been utilized in National Forests throughout the Four Corners region.

In the remainder of his time, Burns works with journalist Tim Richard to compile lessons learned from a five year, \$5 million project that defined community-based forestry. Known as the Four Corners Sustainable Forests Partnership (FCSFP), this federally funded program has been a visionary response to the challenging situation of making the forestlands of this

Stewardship Is

- Collaborative planning • Collaborative learning
- Collaborative deliberation • Inclusive & diverse
- Partnership & cooperative networks • Knowledge building
- Draws from science • Ecological monitoring
- Results-based on-the-ground forest restoration • Social monitoring
- Economic monitoring • Values biological diversity
- Understanding communities & ecosystems are interdependent
- Public participation

Source: Fort Lewis College, *Community and Ecosystem Stewardship*

See BURNS on page 7

HFRA from page 1

than likely), a bit of both, just perpetuates the gridlock. For from this battlefield, the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA) emerged as a way to cool the tensions. HFRA is a controversial piece of legislation touted by the Bush administration as the answer to the wildfire problem and criticized by many others as an excuse to open up national forests to logging. Tensions have only mounted.

By introducing the Healthy Forests Initiative, the Bush administration sought to overcome ideological gridlock and prevent the fast-burning wildfire catastrophes from crippling any more communities than they already have. Their tactic was to streamline the contracting process and focus on reducing fuel loads. While there was relatively widespread support, the environmental community protested that the bill was a front to justify commercial logging and cut the public out of the process. Politicians fought back in the name of communities and jobs.

Meanwhile, community-based forestry advocates approached the final Healthy Forests Restoration Act with both optimism and trepidation, reflecting their middle ground stance between environmental stewardship and economic stability. Overall though, the Communities Committee sees this particular legislation as, if not the perfect solution, at least heading in the right direction for catalyzing stewardship economies.

Maintaining an Open, Democratic Process

One of the most significant concerns expressed by environmentalists is that HFRA legislation creates a tension between the viability of an open, democratic system of government and the need for immediate action to protect communities. Foresters and politicians across the West blame the extraordinary paperwork of the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA), combined with environmental appeals and lawsuits, for significant delays that prevent critical thinning projects from moving ahead before catastrophe strikes.

Community-based forestry partners

Currently, the NEPA process brings the public in almost after-the-fact, creating a reactive arena, rather than involving people up front in the design of solutions.

are hardened veterans of the overwhelming NEPA process. Many have also felt the ramifications of what they have at times considered misuse of the appeals process. Appeals have shut down at the eleventh hour lengthy collaborative partnerships that have integrated many interests. For example, in the Thunderbird forest restoration project in Las Humanas, New Mexico, environmentalists filed an appeal on the final day to shut down a very long, collaborative restoration effort. Community members desperate to make money resorted to stealing high-grade timber from the forest under the cover of night.

Nevertheless, enacting prohibitive legislation that does not differentiate between abusive and legitimate appeals, all the while inhibiting the public's right to participate in the management of their national forests, is something the Commu-

Appeals have shut down collaborative partnerships that integrated many interests and represented significant community investment in time and energy.

nities Committee cannot support. Members instead search for innovative ways through the paperwork and political gridlock without jeopardizing ecological viability.

Currently, NEPA requires agencies to evaluate a range of alternatives for their potential ecological and social effects, and to issue a plan for public comment based on this analysis. This process brings the public in almost after-the-fact, creating a reactive arena rather than involving them up front in the design of solutions. Gerry Gray, Vice President for Policy at American Forests, instead suggests creating incentives for early collaboration on projects with partners outside the agencies. He suggests pre-NEPA analyses involving multiple interests to strengthen the legitimacy of and gather broad buy-in for decisions. This approach, however, requires patience and investments to support the costs of collaboration. Gray concedes that, without a proven history, many funders balk at supporting such an abstract objective.

The Ponderosa Pine Forest Partnership (PPFP) in western Colorado's San Juan Mountains provides one of many attempts at such pre-emptive collaborative action. With tensions between the traditional and the new western forest economies drawn taut in the 80s and early 90s, there was a need for core process change. Mike Preston and Sam Burns of Fort Lewis College (see *Member Profile*) were asked to frame a process for expanding relationships between agency and community needs in order "to move towards ecosystem management and adaptive management in the social and economic realms, as well the biophysical".

PPFP eventually comprised representatives from Montezuma County, the San Juan National Forest, Fort Lewis College, local and regional environmental activist organizations, private landowners, and the Colorado Timber Industry Association, among others. Skepticism and mistrust melded with a desire to work for common

See HFRA on page 5

HFRA from page 4

objectives as this loose partnership began laying the groundwork for demonstration thinning and burning projects in the ponderosa pine forest.

How Much is Too Much?

A second significant controversy with HFRA concerns exactly where logging activities are to be authorized and how intense they should be. Only half the money authorized in the Act is dedicated to thinning in the urban/wildland interface — an amorphous zone that generally refers to the area where homes and lives are most at danger, although the definition of this concept has itself created controversy.

Environmentalists view this funding allocation as evidence that the Bush Administration is using fire control as a front to let the timber industry cut in more remote areas of the National Forests. Based on this distrust, the environmental community advocated for no more than a ½ mile interface zone.

According to Gerry Gray, while many in community-based forestry understand the source of this mistrust, they feel that this limitation ignores local topography and important opportunities to create firebreaks along roadways and near municipal water supplies. Many Communities Committee members such as Sam Burns, working with communities in the Four Corners Region of Colorado, feel that the Senate's bipartisan compromise of the bill includes provisions that provide substantial safeguards against logging old growth or cutting in roadless areas. These new provisions focus most hazardous fuel reduction projects in the urban-wildland interface, as well as prioritize project locations and treatment methods through a "community wildfire protection plan."

PPFP seeks to foster healthy fires and prevent catastrophes by avoiding thinning contracts from the Forest Service. They

instead pursue market-based solutions to ecological restoration. They have therefore utilized the government for what it has always done best: help the private sector transition from an old economy to a new one. PPFP received a \$25,000 Economic Diversification grant from the USDA Forest Service's Rural Community Assistance Program to help the local timber industry gather data and develop small-diameter timber markets.

The reality at this point is that even well intentioned timber companies require the larger trees to make it economically viable for the smaller trees to be harvested in a restoration project. Dr. Dennis Lynch from the Department of Forest Sciences at Colorado State University concludes that, "for the loggers to make a profit from which they could consider

reinvesting under current market conditions, about a third of the fiber removed in a restoration sale should be saw timber." He emphasizes that ecological restoration must continue to define the harvest prescription, as he continues his own work to expand small diameter economies.

If a century of mismanagement creating over-fueled fires and ideological battles is ever going to be overcome, diverse on-the-ground collaborations capitalizing on the best opportunities within the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, and avoiding the contentious pitfalls, must be funded and pursued. The traditional West's economy, based on natural resource extraction, is giving way to the new West's migrant economy based on high-tech industries, tourism, recreation, and ecosystem-based management. Collaborative stewardship projects such as the Ponderosa Pine Forest Partnership, the Applegate Partnership, and the Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership can play increasingly important roles in forging this new path toward collaborative stewardship.

Ecological restoration must continue to define the harvest prescription.

Quick Guides are periodic publications of the Communities Committee, designed to help practitioners better understand and utilize programs and resources available through the Federal government. Easily available on our website, www.communitiescommittee.org, topics include:

Volume 3, Number 2 (October 2002)
Federal Resources for Supporting Urban Forestry

Volume 3, Number 1 (April 2002)
Understanding Washington, DC: A Power Map

Volume 2, Number 1 (August 2001)
Wildfire management and Forest county payments

Volume 1, Number 4 (December 2000)
Community Field Tours

Volume 1, Number 3 (March 2000)
Understanding the Federal Budget Process

Volume 1, Number 2 (February 2000)
Media Strategies for Community Practitioners

Volume 1, Number 1 (January 1999)
The Federal Appropriations Process

Quick Guides can be downloaded at www.CommunitiesCommittee.org or, for hardcopies, through American Forests at:

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"Eastern people need to keep steadily in mind the fact that the Westerners who live in the neighborhood of the forest preserves are the [ones] who, in the last resort, will determine whether or not these preserves will be permanent. They cannot, in the long run, be kept as forests and game reservations unless the settlers roundabout believe in them and heartily support them."

Teddy Roosevelt

Viewpoint California Smokescreen Shrouds the Nation

by Ian Leahy, Editor

Never have fires burned so violently so close to major American cities as the California wildfires of 2003 did. Thousands of homes were destroyed, \$100 million spent, and worst of all, civilian and firefighter lives lost. Yet, it was only because such catastrophe struck so near major metropolitan centers that the most important forestry legislation since the National Forest Management Act of 1976 was pushed through Congress.

It's no secret that western fires are burning on average larger and hotter than ever before. It's also no secret why: a century of fire suppression following the pioneering and industrial revolution eras of intense deforestation has created an extraordinarily volatile situation across the West. Add on top of that litigation to protect forests from logging and you have a volatile mix. These latest California wildfires simply turned the tide from tepid concern to public outcry for immediate Congressional action.

And turn the tide they did. Almost overnight, the Bush administration used California's blazing images and humanitarian stories to sell the Healthy Forests Initiative to the public. Brian Kennedy, a spokesman for Congressman Richard Pombo (R-CA), said, "I don't believe the bill would have moved in the Senate had it not been for the fires in California." The Congressman went so far as to say, "The California wildfires make an airtight case for President Bush's Healthy Forests Initiative."

For a few brief weeks, the complicated issue of fixing a century-old problem erupted into a black and white debate saturating the national media. Yet once the political fires and wildfires died down, closer scrutiny revealed limited correlation between these recent California fires and the Healthy Forests Restoration Act.

Southern California: "An Anomaly"

Jon Keeley, a U.S. Geological Survey



PHOTO BY KAREN WATTEMAKER, COURTESY OF NATIONAL INTERAGENCY FIRE CENTER

Firefighters work to contain a western wildfire.

fire scientist, says that the California wildfires are "largely irrelevant" to the Bush administration's Healthy Forests Initiative. While the fire suppression policy of the Forest Service over the past century has undoubtedly increased fuels and catastrophic wildfires in western conifer forests, the evidence is "exactly the opposite" in Southern California. "Southern California is an anomaly, sociologically as well as ecologically."

For starters, most of the land burned was privately owned. The Healthy Forests legislation specifically addresses forested, public lands. One could make the legitimate argument, as the National Cattlemen's Beef Association have, that "these programs will not only help the management of public lands, but also protect the neighboring private lands where many producers have operations."

Even with such logic, the reality is that over 90% of the land that burned was chaparral and brush. Keeley's recent research of California counties dominated by shrublands prone to high-intensity fires indicates that large-scale, intense wildfires were just as common in the

years before widespread fire suppression as they are today. Southern California's shrubland wildfires are simply an act of nature that forest thinning will not reduce. The amount of fuel has not changed.

Bringing the City to the Country

So, then, what has changed? Keeley suggests, "Fuels are not the problem in Southern California. Urban sprawl is, coupled with the Santa Ana winds that come every autumn." In addition to the scattered land use patterns that put homes and businesses in the path of these shrubland fires, the scientists found a correlation between the frequency of chaparral fires and Southern California population growth. "More than 95% of all our fires are started by people, either intentionally or carelessly." Keeley added.

So, if the President and Congress truly seek to protect homes and lives as their primary objective, then it seems in Southern California the questions turn away from thinning to 'are we building

See SMOKECREEN on page 7

www.redlodgeclearinghouse.org is an online clearinghouse recently established to help build capacity for building collaboration and overcoming conflict regarding natural resource activities in the interior West.

Wildfire Releaf for California: As part of its Wildfire ReLeaf program, nonprofit conservation organization American Forests announced the creation of a national fund to help communities and organizations restore forests damaged by the recent wildfires in California. American Forests has set a goal of planting a million trees in the state. For more information or to help plant trees, visit www.americanforests.org or call 800-545-TREE.

2003 International Urban-Wildland Interface Code: The full code is available by order from the International Code Council. Geared for builders and design professionals, the manual includes provisions addressing fire spread, accessibility, defensible space, water supply, and more for buildings constructed near wildland areas. Call 703-931-4533 and mention product number 3400S03 or visit online at <http://www.iccsafe.org/e/prodshow.html?prodid=3850S03>.

Conserving Wooded Areas in Developing Communities: Minnesota DNR produced this best management practices guidebook for communities seeking to conserve private forested lands. The goals of the BMPs are to provide communities with a better understanding of the social, economic and environmental benefits of wooded areas, provide decision makers with land-use approaches to conserving the integrity of wooded landscapes, and minimize construction damage. Visit <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/forestry/urban/bmps.html>.

Strengthening the Ties that Bind: A Joint Workshop Between Community-based Forestry Groups and the USDA Forest Service™: A report has been published by the Pinchot Institute for Conservation summarizing the discussions that took place during this June, 2002 workshop. Specifically, the report highlights the current and potential contributions that community-groups and the agency bring to public land management and new initiatives within the agency to strengthen existing ties to community needs, interests, and focus. *Download a copy* at http://www.pinchot.org/pic/current_strengthening.htm. For hard copies, please call 202-797-6580 or email publications@pinchot.org.

Exploring Barriers to Collaborative Forestry: A report from the September 2003 gathering of Western community forestry groups is now available at: <http://www.eri.nau.edu/forms/files/Hart%20Prairie%20report%20-%20web.pdf>. Participants at the workshop explored reasons why collaborative forestry groups are not achieving their land management goals at the rate and scale they had anticipated. The report identifies eight critical barriers to collaborative forestry, provides detailed explanations of each barrier, and includes workshop participants' recommendations to Congress, land management agencies, and others involved in collaborative forestry efforts for addressing each of the barriers.

Federal Agencies Announce Guidelines for Stewardship Contracts and Agreements: The Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service recently announced guidelines to develop and implement stewardship contracts and agreements. The guidelines reflect public comments received in response to interim guidelines released in June 2003. The final guidelines are posted on agency web sites at www.blm.gov and www.fs.fed.us.

SMOKESCREEN from page 6

where we simply aren't supposed to build?"

Many lives and about \$100 million of public money stood in the paths of these fires on the ever expanding Southern California urban / wildland interface. To prevent future disasters, it becomes both a safety precaution and a financial necessity that people building homes on this interface understand the ecological and social responsibility for their lifestyle choices. Eleanor Torres, CEO of Integrated Infrastructures (a sustainable architecture and community development firm whose Ontario, California office was littered with debris from the Grand Prix fire), says there's a correlation between the half million-dollar homes on the urban fringe fueling the fires that eventually burned homes where people couldn't afford insurance.

Torres suggests that regional forest thinning on public land is necessary to

deal with the hazardous fuel build-up on the urban / wildland interface, but public education is far more important in Southern California. Torres adds, "Wildland interface money needs to be directed toward these communities for controlling hillside development." She suggests, "We could start with little things, such as requiring that regional shingles not be made of wood."

Jon Keeley agrees that education is critical, but looks to the bigger picture by suggesting, "land planning agencies need to take fire into account when they plan for development. They need to consciously try to consolidate development and reduce the amount of interface between urban areas and wildlands."

*Jon Keeley interview
Devlin, Sherry
November 5, 2003
Montanaforum.com*

BURNS from page 2

region more sustainable, the economies less narrowly focused on resource extraction, and the wildland interface communities safer and more stewardship oriented. FCSFP's major grant program distributed grants to small businesses and communities so they could emerge from the shadows of an extractive industry and build a new wood products industry based on collaborative solutions.

With such a strong vision for the future of collaborative stewardship, it's no surprise that Sam sees community-based forestry's greatest challenge rooted in finding a way to more effectively put the knowledge so many have developed into the hands of those who can get the work done. "We tend to talk in a way that's not usable for forest managers and community members. We're not putting it in terms people can use." Sam Burns: an intellectual pragmatist until the end.

Communities and Forests

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Events

2004 National Leadership Academy The Society of American Foresters' National Leadership Academy is a state-of-the-art seminar that aims to strengthen individual leadership and management ability and gives skills needed to help achieve personal and professional goals. The academy will be held May 22-25, 2004, at the Lied Conference Center in Nebraska City, Nebraska. Visit www.safnet.org/meetings for more information.

The Intertribal Timber Council's (ITC) Annual Timber Symposium explores problems and solutions to current issues confronting Indian natural resource management. The next council will be hosted by the Quinault Indian Nation at the Quinault Resort in Ocean Shores, Washington, April 26-30, 2004. Call 503-282-4296 for more information.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs National Fire Meeting occurs March 8-12, 2004, in Pechanga, California.

Wildland Fire 2004 Conference occurs March 3-5, 2004, in Silver Legacy Hotel Reno, Nevada. Call 703-273-0911 or visit www.iafc.org/conferences/wildland for more information.

The Community Forestry at Its Best Conference addresses new techniques, ideas, and trends in urban forestry geared specifically toward community size, budget, and human resources. The event occurs June 28-30, 2004, at the Lied Conference Center, Nebraska City, Nebraska. Call 402-474-5655 or see www.arborday.org/programs/conferencelist.html.

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.