

Communities and Forests

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

www.communitiescommittee.org

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Embarking on New Territory: The Community-Owned Forest Conference

by Jane Braxton Little

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Rural community leaders from Maine to California gathered in Missoula, Montana in June for the first national focus on community-owned forests. Galvanized by an unprecedented shift in the ownership of industrial timberlands, woods workers, elected officials, and environmentalists spent three days exploring how – and whether – to become involved in the management of the forests that surround their towns.

The conference, “Community Forests in the United States: Possibilities, Experiences and Lessons Learned,” stimulated as many solutions as the over 130 participants it attracted. Among the most surprising results was the extent of interest in owning and managing local forests, says Carol Daly, president of the Flathead Economic Policy Center in Columbia Falls, Montana.

“This is not an Eastern issue or a Midwestern issue. We’re all dealing with it,” says Daly, also president of the Communities Committee of the Seventh American Forest Congress, which sponsored the conference.

Response to Divestiture

Even for conference participants who have spent years fostering community acquisi-



U.S. Senator Conrad Burns (R-Montana) joins Anne Dahl, director of the Swan Valley Ecosystem Center, and Jim Stone, chairman of the Blackfoot Challenge, at the Community-Owned Forests Conference organized by the Communities Committee.

tion of privately owned forests, the upwelling of concern over the widespread divestiture of timber industry owned forests was unexpected. Ann Ingerson, a research associate with The Wilderness Society in Craftsbury Common, Vermont, says the fervor and commitment are inspiring.

“It’s the energy – the feeling part of something bigger. This is a movement,” says Ingerson, chair of the Communities Committee’s private lands task group.

Daly, Ingerson, and the Communities Committee organized the conference in response to this unprecedented transfer of industrial timberlands from private companies

to other ownerships. Half the industrial forestland in the United States – more than thirty million acres – has changed hands since 1996, says Tom Tuchmann, president of US Forest Capital in Portland, Oregon. The new owners are primarily financial institutions: timberland investment management organizations (TIMOs), real estate investment trusts (REITs), limited liability and master limited partnerships. Instead of focusing on conventional logs-to-the-mill management, they focus on diversified portfolios and bottom-line profits.

For communities accus-

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Communities and Forests

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Listserv

The Committee's listserv is integrating 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.

From the President

MONITORING OUR PERFORMANCE, ADJUSTING OUR COURSE



Carol Daly

In the Fall 2004 issue of this newsletter, I wrote that the Communities Committee and other organizations with leadership roles in community forestry "need to regularly take a clear, comprehensive look at our own progress. Are we meeting our existing goals...? Why or why not? Are there additional goals we should be setting? Are we giving our members and constituents the help and services they expect from us? Are we being effective advocates for community forestry?"

In response to that need, you will find in this issue an examination of the findings of the first (qualitative) part of a two-part survey we have been conducting to help us honestly answer those questions. The results of the second (quantitative) part won't be available until next spring, but we have already learned a lot.

The most striking – and reassuring – find is that, while participation in the community-based forestry (CBF) movement and the range of issues being addressed have expanded dramatically over the last decade, the movement's core principles have remained rock solid. According to the survey report, "Almost all participants feel that community-based forestry is participatory, collaborative, and involves cooperation across diverse, interested parties. ... The one constant amongst all respondents is a sense that community-based forestry somehow implies a taking of responsibility for forest stewardship by those who care about those forests, whether they live in an urban setting, on a forest they own, or in communities surrounding publicly or privately owned lands."

Funding

Most CBF participants are hands-on people – working in local or regional efforts "to accomplish economic development, forest restoration and sustainable forestry, [and] ground-level project implementation..." But respondents made it clear that too often they are undertaking those daunting tasks with sadly limited resources.

It is not surprising that funding tops the list of needs. Available government grant program budgets are at best stagnating (and at worst shrinking or disappearing altogether), while at the same time the number of CBF groups and projects competing for funding is growing rapidly. In the private foundation sector, meanwhile, CBF has struggled to find a foothold with all but a few major funders. Clearly one of the most urgent tasks of the Communities Committee is to address the financial aspects of CBF, both for our own survival and the survival of CBF in general.

Communications

Closely allied with that priority is the need expressed by many to improve communications within the movement and with key publics, particularly the media, private funders, public policy makers, and concerned interest groups. Respondents told us our newsletter, listserv, and website have proven to be useful tools, but the information on the website needs to be expanded and more regularly updated. The survey also revealed a demand for more "stories" about communities' specific CBF activities – what worked, and what didn't. Summaries of and links to relevant CBF-related research also would apparently be appreciated.

Some years ago, the Communities Committee sponsored a media field tour: an attempt to spark increased print and broadcast media coverage of CBF activities. Attendance was disappointing and resulting articles were few. I believe maintaining more regular and effective contact with media or other information sources used by our target audiences – funders, policy makers, and key interest groups – should be a goal for the future.

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A Summary of Phase I of a Community-Based Forestry Survey

by Laura Schweitzer and Ian Leahy

From time to time it is important to take stock of one's life, be it a person, an organization, or a movement.

The days in which U.S. community-based forestry (CBF) consisted of a relatively small collection of groups focused on western public land issues have passed. Over the past decade, community-based forestry has made significant inroads into urban centers from coast to coast, community-owned forests, and private forestlands. This extraordinary diversification exemplifies the wide applicability of and interest in CBF principles to address an array of natural resource management concerns. But such growth has not come without a cost. Available financial and political resources have not kept pace. Urban groups find themselves competing with rural, public land interests with private, all for ever dwindling or stagnating financial resources.

These growing pains present a hard reality for community-based forestry advocates: they can either splinter into competing special interests, abandon the cause altogether, or find the ties that bind them and work toward common ideals through which any community forestry-related concern can be addressed.

With that in mind, questions have naturally arisen about the scope, clarity, and focus of the movement and the roles that national organizations such as the Communities Committee, National Network of Forest Practitioners, the Pinchot Institute for Conservation, American Forests, and others play – or should play — in assisting local and regional participation in the movement.

For its part, the Communities Committee has sought to help answer these questions for itself by contracting with American Forests to undertake a two-phase survey. In the first phase, individuals who have been involved in community-based forestry for a sizable duration of time (a minimum of four years) were asked to share their perceptions of the movement. The resulting data will be used to help develop a second-phase quantitative survey, scheduled for

completion by spring of 2006.

Sixty participants were initially identified for possible participation. Thirty-five actually completed the survey. Surveys were conducted by telephone interviews and ranged from a half hour to one and a half hours. Respondents represented academic, conservation, environmental, industry, tribal, foundation, and governmental entities distributed across the country in urban and rural communities.

The following is a summary of select responses that give some indication of where community-based forestry is, where it is perceived to be going, and what role national groups such as the Communities Committee could play in reaching future horizons. Contradicting interests and a staggeringly wide array of ecological, economic, and social issues identified might at first seem overwhelming. Deeper inquiry, however, uncovers a diehard commitment to a common vision of collaboration and participation.

If someone asked you to explain community-based forestry, what would you say?

One of the most reassuring findings from this survey is the fact that, despite vast discrepancies, almost all participants still feel that community-based forestry is participatory, collaborative, and involves cooperation across diverse, interested parties. The one constant amongst all respondents is a sense that community-based forestry somehow implies the taking of responsibility for forest stewardship by those who care about those forests, whether they live in an urban setting, on a forest they own, or in communities surrounding publicly or privately owned lands.

It is a movement that allows 'non-forestry professionals' and communities of place and/or interest to get involved in resource management decision-making using local, practical, and historical knowledge. Many participants discuss the importance of considering economic, social, and ecological concerns so as to more holistically accomplish land management. Some explain com-

The complete survey conclusions are available at www.communitiescommittee.org.

community-based forestry as a movement creatively addressing social, economic, and environmental justice issues, reengaging disenfranchised communities, and creating locally-based, family-wage jobs.

Do you understand community-based forestry differently now than when you first became involved? If yes, how?

Most survey participants' perspectives have changed in some way since they first became involved in community-based forestry. Some respondents' understandings have deepened. They have developed networks they were not engaged in prior to their involvement. Some discuss the growing respect they have for traditional knowledge and the role it can play in planning and decision-making. Due in large part to the collaborative methods community-based forestry employs, some have learned to trust and work with groups they formerly would not have. Experiential learning is hugely important and a number of survey participants note that simply getting to know a few people and starting to learn about community-based forestry may be enough to further engage them down the road.

Others discuss the impacts of their previous involvement in international community-based natural resource management, which eventually led them to community-based forestry in the United States. These respondents see community-based forestry in this country involving a more diffuse and diverse set of players, as well as incorporating more issues of social, economic, and environmental justice than in other countries. Some who have been involved in strictly U.S. community-based forestry agree that the movement has become more diffuse and diverse, even divided, since its beginning. It is a larger movement that

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helps to bring in new voices and strives to increase capacity across the movement.

Finally, some who became involved early in the community-based-forestry movement and initially saw it as a way for opposing groups to find common ground and avoid litigation maintain that perspective. However, they now feel that community-based forestry does more than that. It gets people involved in and informed about what is going on in the forests around them, and engages people in management by using collaborative processes to achieve goals.

Are there ways that you would like to be more involved in community-based forestry? If yes, please describe.

While there are those who already commit as much time as they are able, about 2/3 of respondents expressed interest in becoming more involved in:

- Expanding the number and diversity of voices heard at the national policy level,
- Doing more work on specific issue areas, such as social justice, town forests, the Farm Bill, and development of biomass alternatives
- Doing pilot projects
- Researching and sharing information
- Working more closely with the environmental community and industry, though in a way that does not blur their independent roles.

Is there information that would increase or improve the effectiveness of your community-based forestry efforts? If yes, what kinds of info?

Many participants feel much could be learned from others' experiences. They need stories of other communities' successes and failures. Closely related to this is a need for a way to share timely information, research, and experiences, though some respondents discuss the need for information filters, as there is simply too much information to sort through.

Are there resources or services besides information that would increase or im-

“... the movement has become more ... diffuse, even divided, since its beginning.”

– Survey respondent

prove the effectiveness of your community-based forestry efforts? If yes, what?

Far and away, the most common need is financial. Several respondents suggested long-term, flexible grants or government programs that may be used to pay for operational costs. Many other respondents mention needs that also depend on higher levels of financial support – resources such as more staff and an ability to attend more networking opportunities and training workshops. Also listed is the need for mentoring and peer-to-peer learning with practitioners from other regions so as to learn from their experiences. There is a high level of concern for how to get the community-based forestry message across to the public and to decision makers. Many feel that stronger connections to the media would help to accomplish that objective. Respondents also discuss the need for greater involvement of social scientists, economists, and researchers from a variety of fields. Their involvement could help inform the work of community-based forestry practitioners and lend credibility to their efforts. This might help meet the primary need of securing more funding by increasing the support and acceptance of government agencies.

Do you think there are groups and/or individuals who should be engaged in community-based forestry movement who are not currently?

Strengthening the community-based

forestry movement means growing the movement. Growth will come in part by better understanding who is and who should be involved in community-based forestry. Some believe there are connections to an academia (such as landscape architecture) mostly unaware of the movement that could help legitimize the movement within the scientific community. Others identify non-forest industry businesses, children of private landowners, city/county planning departments, elected officials, educators, environmental groups, and fringe pro-cut and anti-cut groups.

What issues are of greatest concern/importance to you regarding community-based forestry?

• The first and most common concern is that **community-based forestry is not receiving the resources it needs**, particularly in regards to funding. Communities have diminishing capacity to “keep forests as forests” as development pressures force many private landowners to sell their land and consequently fragment forest landscapes. Key programs like the Economic Action Programs (EAP) are receiving reduced funding or are proposed for elimination. There is great concern about where funding for local capacity building and infrastructure will come from in the future.

• The second category of concern involves **the clarity of the goals of the community-based forestry movement**, which directly affect the movement's strength, appeal, and ultimately funding. Several participants discuss the need for a broad social and governmental paradigm shift, wherein community-based forestry and collaboration would become institutionalized as primary tools of forest management. Participants also express that the individuals in the movement need to think bigger and come together to develop and advocate for a strong, clear agenda. Some are concerned that if progress continues slowly, interest will diminish from both the practitioners who carry out community-based

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forestry activities as well as the foundations and agencies that fund those activities, and the movement will ultimately disintegrate. Many discuss the need for increased outreach and communication, noting that by sharing more of what they do and what they know; community-based forestry practitioners could increase public interest, which in turn could increase interest from the agencies and Congress.

- A third category of concern includes **issues of how agency operations and interactions affect community-based forestry**. Respondents express some resentment to the frequent turnover in Forest Service personnel, stating that the greatest impacts were on the local groups and private businesses that had to continue to support work crews and make payments on new equipment and facilities during delays caused by staff turnover, including delays due to different decisions made by new staff. Respondents also feel that emphasis ends up being placed on quantity and the ease of treating acres rather than quality and longevity of work accomplished. Many other practitioners struggle with the agencies' propensity to work in isolated sectors rather than through integrated decision-making approaches to which community forest practitioners have grown accustomed.

- The final category of importance includes several **ecological, economic, and local community issues that impact participants' work and lives**. Ecological issues include invasive species, forest insects and diseases, wildlife habitat, fire hazard mitigation, biomass cogeneration and utilization, and holistic forest health. Economic and local community issues include economic development challenges, land tenure and rights of access for local people, finding the balance between community needs and ecological needs, and how to pass on an interest for forestland management to future generations within families.

What issues are not receiving enough attention?

Several participants suggest a need for

“Far and away the most common need is financial.”

– Survey respondent

funding specifically designated for community-based forestry activities and for holistic restoration. Others feel that more attention from the media and from Congress is needed. Still others working within the realm of urban forestry are concerned that many in the public and in the press are not even aware that urban forests exist, let alone the benefits they provide in neighborhood and community building.

Several respondents are concerned with federal agencies' capacity to operate internally and consequently implement specific legislative provisions. Many say the agencies do not know how to apply tools such as stewardship contracting and elements of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, such as those dealing with local collaboration and community assistance, and that not enough has been done to increase the level of knowledge among Forest Service personnel. Participants also note that agency interpretation of how to apply these tools is inconsistent among personnel.

What issues are getting too much attention?

Fire is most commonly perceived as getting too much attention. Respondents indicate that they want to see more attention paid to overall forest health and holistic restoration than so exclusively to fire prevention and suppression. Other issues many respondents believe are paid too much attention include bioenergy, salvage, and cultural diversity. It should be noted

that other respondents feel these same issues do not receive enough attention.

What emerging/future issues do we need to be ready to address?

Participants' responses range from issues such as global warming and global trade to topics like urban sprawl and wood shortages in mills. Several people believe that air and water quality and quantity will require our full attention, while others say that the role of public lands will be most scrutinized. Perceptions of where community-based forestry should be looking are all over the map. While this might indicate a fragmented view, more than likely participants see community-based forestry as a reasonable and responsible way to approach many different issues in a broad range of natural resource related fields. One participant says that it is not as important to concern ourselves with specific issues, but rather to focus on building up and strengthening the structures and processes of the community-based forestry movement so that the movement will be able to deal with whatever issues may come along.

Think down the road 50 years. In an ideal world, what is your vision of the role community-based forestry will play in the United States? What will it take for us to achieve that vision?

Many respondents say that in their ideal vision of fifty years from now, community-based forestry will be the way in which people in communities, government agencies, and all other stakeholders will accomplish comprehensive, balanced, and sustainable land management. The public will be informed about and involved in forest management and decision-making.

They will understand the importance of forests and trees in both rural and urban landscapes. They will see that the best way to achieve economic health and living wage jobs in resource dependent communities is through the community-based forestry participatory process. Children will want to stay in their communities because they will be able to live and do meaningful work as adults.

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tomed to long-term relationships with their neighboring forests, these ownership changes are unsettling. Rural residents can no longer count on the woods work that stabilized their local economies or the generations-old access they have enjoyed for hunting and fishing, woodcutting and berry picking. Some have found innovative ways to acquire neighboring timberlands and manage them to meet local needs. More than 3,000 communities in 43 states own forests totaling 4.5 million acres. But many others are struggling to protect what they consider their rural heritage and job base.

The conference brought together experienced community-forest owners and wishful thinkers for learning, questioning and encouragement. Town selectmen from New Hampshire shared their successes and disappointments with natural resource activists from Washington State. Timber real estate consultants offered advice to non-profit group leaders, and conservation group officials listed government and foundation programs available for funding and other assistance. Through conference-sponsored panels and independent discussions that continued into the night, participants got a thorough dose of what has worked, what hasn't, and why.

Into the Woods

The conference included two all-day field tours. In Swan Valley, a spectacular area between the Mission Mountains and Bob Marshall wilderness areas, the pioneer culture of hunting, fishing, and a woods-based economy is colliding with new attitudes toward the land brought by people attracted to the scenery and recreation opportunities, says Melanie Parker, director of Northwest Connections in Swan Valley. The tour emphasized the difficulties of balancing management of forested lands rich in biodiversity with a checkerboard ownership that includes the U.S. Forest Service, Plum Creek Timber Company, the state of Montana and, most recently, private residences. Parker and other community leaders hope to acquire



PHOTO BY JANE BRAXTON LITTLE

Conference participants visited this site in Blackfoot Valley where the rancher is logging to improve the wildlife habitat and realize additional income.

lands now owned by Plum Creek to protect the natural integrity of the valley and retain the working forest.

A second tour went to the Blackfoot Valley, where a landowner-based group is in the process of acquiring 5,600 acres for a community conservation area. The Blackfoot Challenge, active since the 1970s and incorporated in 1993, is committed to protecting the working landscape of the gorgeous valley at the southern end of the Bob Marshall and Scapegoat wilderness areas. Threatened by development, sprawl, and unregulated recreation, landowners have worked with state and federal agencies and The Nature Conservancy to acquire 88,000 acres of Plum Creek lands. The tour included visits to active cattle ranches and timber harvests as well as the community conservation area on Ovando Mountain.

Major Transitions

With its combination of tours, panel discussions and speakers, the Missoula conference launched a new undertaking for the Communities Committee that will require "massive rethinking," says Daly. The committee was formed a decade ago to help communities engage federal agen-

cies over the management of public lands in an era of reduced timber harvests. Today forest-based communities are facing equally momentous transformations with the shift in timberland ownership. Accepting these needs as a part of the mission of the Communities Committee marks a major transition, moving the collaborative group from the realm of input into the management of government and industry-owned land to community ownership. "It's not them anymore," says Daly. "It's us."

Acquiring, restoring, and managing their own lands pose enormous challenges for community groups. Chief among them is financing. While conference panelists reviewed various government programs that can help communities fund forest acquisitions, they cautioned that the pot is getting smaller and harder to access. Several speakers addressed the need for new financial tools that allow communities to compete in the marketplace. Others suggested redefining the concept of community to include not just conventional geographic neighborhoods but also regional and national groups that constitute com-

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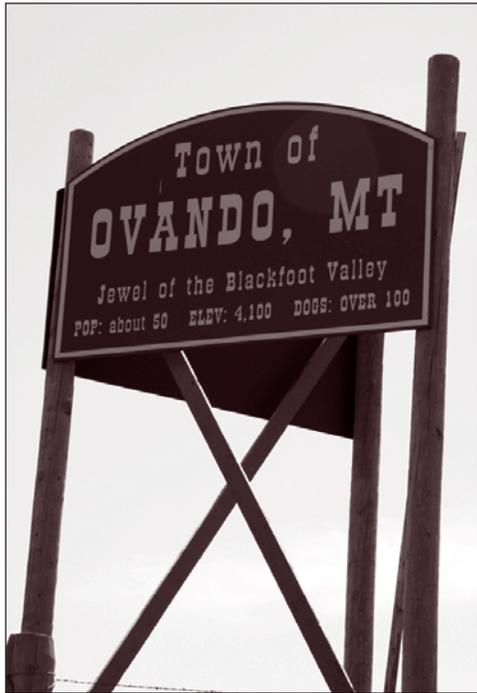


PHOTO BY JANE BRAXTON LITTLE

Ovando, the last stop on the conference's Blackfoot tour.

munities of interest.

As conference participants review the possibilities before them and the lessons learned from their counterparts across the country, the momentum generated in Missoula will propel the forest communities movement toward to new responsibilities and commitments. It's both a sobering and an exciting time, says Daly: "We're embarking on new territory."

Jane Braxton Little, a freelance journalist based in Plumas County, California, has been covering forest community activities since the 1996 Seventh American Forest Congress.

"Strengthen the structures and processes so that the movement will be able to deal with whatever issues may come along."

- Survey respondent

Expanding Focus

Our June 2005 conference (see *Embarking on New Territory* article) on "Community-Owned Forests" (C-OF) brought attention to an important and growing sector of CBF that had not previously been well recognized. The conference, touted by Buffalo-based board member Rock Termini as "[our] largest, most successful undertaking, and a major portion of our new direction." This conference afforded C-OF practitioners a valuable networking, information sharing, and learning experience. There is great demand for us to keep up our efforts in the C-OF arena, while seeking other opportunities to enhance the "state of the art" in other CBF sectors.

Toward a Paradigm Shift

What all of these needs and opportunities point to is the potential to creatively and diligently pursue what some survey respondents see as "a broad social and governmental paradigm shift, wherein community-based forestry and collaboration would become institutionalized as primary tools of forest management". We have already taken a major step toward this goal by beginning the search for a program director to help the CBF movement grow and become ever more effective (see *Position Announcements*). Until now, the Communities Committee has operated largely with volunteer effort.

We present to you highlights from this phase I of the survey as a way to begin a public discussion as to how best we can ramp up the level of our activities in this new era of CBF. We welcome your comments and insights.

Position Announcements

Editor / Writer

The Communities Committee seeks an Editor/Writer for the Communities and Forests newsletter. This position is responsible for developing newsletter themes in coordination with the editorial board, creating and/or securing content and images, editing the newsletter, and delivering text and images to the production coordinator. The Editor/Writer is not responsible for graphical layout or production. Travel is required one to two times a year. Familiarity with CBF issues is desirable. Experienced writers should submit a resume, bid, and a selection of writing samples by January 1, 2006 to Alice Ewen Walker, Publisher, Communities and Forests Newsletter, 5010 Sunnyside Ave, Suite 305, Beltsville, MD 20705. (301) 220-2251. We ask that you submit a bid for a flat fee per issue, inclusive of any writing or photo assignments you may choose to award. The newsletter is 8 pages long, with 3 to 4 photographs per issue. For multiple samples, an archive of back issues is available at www.communitiescommittee.org

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 with excellent growth potential 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.

Communities and Forests

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Mark Your Calendars

National Training: Community Tree Leadership Forum Feb 27-Mar 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. 6 core modules are offered through the event: Individual Gifts & Grantwriting, Marketing Urban Forestry, Advocacy & Public Policy for Urban Forests, Collaboration & Partnership, Volunteer Management, and 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 information call 402-474-5655 or visit www.actrees.org or www.arbordayfoundation.org to request conference information. The event takes place at the beautiful conservation retreat Lied Lodge in Nebraska City, Nebraska, served by both Omaha and Lincoln airports.

NNFP Regional Forums for Forest Practitioners

The NNFP and its regional partners are organizing six regional forums in 2005 and 2006. The regional forums will bring together about 40-60 participants to identify and address community forestry issues to deal with social justice, livelihoods, and sustainable forestry. Forums will be held in: Georgia; Anchorage, Alaska; Arkansas; Appalachia, the Pacific Northwest, and either the the Northeast or Southwest. Visit www.nnfp.org for more information.

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.