

Land, Water and People

Help Wanted!

By Mike Blakeman

If you care about the Rio Grande National Forest and would like to actively participate in recommending projects to accomplish meaningful work on the Forest and nearby lands, please read on.

In October of 2008, the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 was amended and reauthorized. That statement by itself probably doesn't mean much to most people, but the reauthorization of SRS means several million dollars will flow into the San Luis Valley over the next few years.

Most of the funds coming to the San Luis Valley will go to the counties to be spent primarily on roads and schools. Four SLV counties, Saguache, Mineral, Rio Grande and Conejos will also receive Title III funds for Firewise activities. These funds may be used to develop community wildfire protection plans, provide Firewise education to homeowners and communities, and reimburse counties for emergency services on federal land.

The Rio Grande National Forest will receive Title II funds for federal lands covered by the counties mentioned above and Hinsdale and San Juan Counties. Fifty percent of these funds must be used for road maintenance or obliteration, and watershed improvement projects. The other fifty percent may go towards a variety of projects, including wildlife habitat improvement, trail maintenance and controlling noxious weeds.

In order to tap the Title II funds, Resource Advisory Committees (RACs) must be established to recommend and monitor projects. The Rio Grande National Forest decided to establish two RACs: the Saguache County RAC and the Upper Rio Grande RAC (includes Conejos, Rio Grande, Mineral and Hinsdale Counties).

Deciding on having two RACs was the easy part. Now, the Forest must find people to be RAC members. Each RAC must have 15 members and three alternates that represent three "categories."

Category one includes people who represent organized labor or non-timber forest product harvester groups; developed outdoor recreation, off-highway vehicle users, or commercial recreation; energy and mineral development; commercial or recreational fishing; commercial timber industry; federal grazing permit holders or land use permit holders within the RAC area.

Category two includes people that represent nationally recognized environmental organizations; regionally or locally recognized environmental organizations; dispersed recreation; archaeological and historical interests; nationally or regionally recognized wild horse or burro groups, wildlife or hunting organizations, or watershed associations.

Category three includes people that represent state-elected office holders; county or local elected officials; American Indian tribal representatives from tribes within or adjacent to RAC areas; school officials or teachers; citizens representing the affected public at large.

If you would fit in one or more of the categories above and are interested in participating in a RAC, or if you know someone who would be a good fit for a RAC,

please fill out an Early Recruitment form and send it the address on the form. Nominees need to be Colorado residents and should be able to work collaboratively with diverse interests.

The Early Recruitment forms can be obtained from any SLV Public Lands Center office or can be downloaded at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/riogrande/>.

To learn more about the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act check out <http://www.fs.fed.us/srs/racs.shtml>. For more information about the start up of our two local RACs contact Mike Blakeman at 719-852-6212 or mblakeman@fs.fed.us.

Mike Blakeman is the public affairs officer for the San Luis Valley Public Lands Center. He spends much of his free time scrambling around the mountains with a camera in his hand.