

## Forests Without Borders: State, Payette forest cooperate to produce healthy timber stands

BY MAX SILVERSON

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Clark Lucas works for the Idaho Department of Lands, but his latest project is located on land managed by the Payette National Forest.

Lucas, an IDL forest resource specialist, has been surveying Payette forest land in the Sloans Point area east of Donnelly under a new program called the Good Neighbor Authority.

The national program was included in the 2014 Farm Bill passed by Congress. The agreement allows for the two agencies to work as partners to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration, with each entity contributing to a single project, officials said.

Work in the Sloan's Point area will focus about 1,500 acres of Payette forest land containing Ponderosa pine and western larch. Work would include stream restoration, controlled burns, and thinning trees both to produce lumber and to reduce the risk of wildfire.

"The intent is to help move conditions closer to what nature would have done if wildfire had not been excluded over the past 100 years," Payette Public Affairs Officer Brian Harris said.

The area has become overpopulated with Douglas fir and grand fir that have thrived during decades without periodic forest fires, Harris said.

"We have not in the past had a partnership with IDL that allows us to plan and go through the public and ecological oversight process, and then actually implement projects together on the ground," Harris said.

Combining the two agencies' abilities brings extra capacity to the Forest Service where it otherwise doesn't exist, he said.

By contracting through IDL and using their specialists, the Sloans Point restoration project could start as early as 2020, far earlier than what would have been possible without the Good Neighbor Authority, Harris said.

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Even though the state is coordinating the project, the Payette will keep its role of environmental protection and regulation under the Good Neighbor Authority.

"It brings another tool to the table so the Forest Service can continue our work with forest restoration," Harris said.

The Idaho Department of Lands contributes not only labor and personnel, but also provides an avenue for timber sales from restoration work on Forest Service lands," IDL Resource Supervisor Chris Clark said.

"Forest management strategies like planting and thinning and burning are tools that we have readily available that we can utilize in the cooperative process," Clark said.

Without the Good Neighbor Authority, the project would not be able to focus on where the need for restoration is most severe, but instead continue to be restricted by jurisdictional boundaries.

“Mother Nature doesn’t really recognize that arbitrary boundary that we have placed on the land,” Harris said.

There are 18 other projects across Idaho that have been conducted under the Good Neighbor Authority since 2014, eight of which have included commercial timber harvests, officials said.

Another upcoming Good Neighbor Authority project in the Payette National Forest is slated for the Brundage Mountain area, with planning scheduled to start next year.

The Good Neighbor Authority was started with funds from the Forest Service, the forest products industry and the Idaho Legislature.

It is expected to be funded from profits of its own operations in three to five years, officials said.



Photo for The Star-News by Max Silverson

Idaho Department of Lands Forest Resource Specialist Clark Lucas, left, points out an old fire scar on a mature ponderosa pine to Payette National Forest Silviculturist Paul Klasner in the Sloan’s Point area east of Donnelly.