

# SUCCESS

REGIONS 1 & 4, STATE AND PRIVATE FORESTRY

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*Much of the history of the Silver Valley in northern Idaho is tied to minerals and forests.*

*Up until about 30 years ago, mining, smelting, and timber harvest were mainstays of the area's economy.*

*The closure of many mines and smelters, the declaration of a Super Fund site around the former Bunker Hill smelter, and the decrease in timber harvest from nearby national forests has led local elected officials to search for a new economic foundation for their communities.*

*Many of the enterprises officials are pursuing are linked back to the history of mining and forestry in the valley.*

## Idaho's Silver Valley

*A wide array of partners across Shoshone County are working to improve forest health, reduce wildfire threat, and rebuild the local economy through biomass utilization in Idaho's Silver Valley via the Shoshone Forest Health Collaborative and other efforts.*



100 years after the forest fires of 1910 burned 660,000 acres of forest in Shoshone County and devastated the communities of Wallace, Kellogg, Osburn, and Murray, Shoshone County is now the hub of local collaborative effort focused on improving forest health and reducing wildfire threat.

The third objective of the *Shoshone Forest Health Collaborative* is to support the use of the biomass that is product of the forest health and fuels reduction projects.

The Shoshone County commissioners wanted to see healthy forests throughout the county. They started the discussion by asking what could be done to improve forest health on public and private lands

within the county. They also wanted to bring back jobs in the county where employment had steadily decreased with the decline of mining and timber harvest. They knew the forests needed care, and they saw the opportunity to use the forest products from forest health and fuels treatments to help rebuild the economic base in their communities.

One of the first steps occurred in 2009 when the commissioners convened forest health experts, biologists, engineers, and interested citizens and organizations to a forest restoration and biomass roundtable to discuss ecologic conditions of the areas' forest and potential to build an energy producing biomass facility.

The *Shoshone Forest Health Collaborative* was formed from that meeting. The collaborative has two working groups: the forest health group, which focuses on identifying and developing projects to promote forest health and reduce wildfire threats and the biomass working group, which focuses on economic development and biomass utilization.

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To help private forest landowners in the Silver Valley plan and implement projects to promote forest health and biomass utilization, the University of Idaho Forestry Extension conducted workshops to teach landowners about thinning and pruning trees.

The Idaho Forest Owners Association hosted a field day for forest owners which featured demonstrations to help landowners plan and implement sound forestry practices on their land. Local businesses, elected officials, entrepreneurs and others involved in community development participated in the Small Scale Energy from Forest Biomass Workshop.

A forest stewardship project is being developed by the forest health group to protect the city of Mullan from wildfire threats. Shoshone County is capitalizing on many different

funding sources to help further the goals and projects of the collaborative. The US Department of Energy awarded the County a grant to begin quantifying the potential sustainable supply of biomass from private lands within the county.

A concerted effort in the late 1970s to re-forest 5000 acres of bare slopes surrounding the Bunker Hill smelter has been a great success, so successful that it is now time to thin the densely growing stands of white and ponderosa pine. The effort to maintain the health of those forests is benefitting from a \$1.8 million Recovery Act grant from the Forest Service's State and Private Forestry to the Idaho Department of Lands. That grant is funding a forest health assessment to help prioritize the forest areas to be treated. The project is employing crews of local

residents to thin and prune trees on the reforestation area and to establish fuel breaks around 12 communities surrounded by forests. A second S&PF Recovery Act grant awarded \$1 million to the Idaho Department of Agriculture to work with Shoshone County to conduct additional fuels reduction projects, including treating noxious weeds.

Mary Fritz, Idaho Department of Lands says "Using partnerships to accomplish their goals, Shoshone County is reducing wildfire threats and improving forest health."

Together, communities throughout the Silver Valley remain focused on ensuring sustainable and healthy forests, providing jobs through stewardship and private contracts, and developing local wood products and energy from biomass.