

Forest Products Modernization: Innovation Underway

Good Neighbor Authority Agreements: Dynamic Partnerships in Region 9

A Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest district ranger with a Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources forester on a Good Neighbor Authority sale. Photo by: Mike Schlafke, Futurewood Corporation.

The Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) allows the Forest Service to delegate responsibility to State agencies for restoration projects on National Forest System lands. The GNA helps the Forest Service build partnerships with State agencies to enable more efficient and effective cross-jurisdictional restoration. Since 2014, several national forests in Region 9 have taken advantage of flexibility under the GNA to engage in innovative and successful approaches to restoration with their State partners.

- On behalf of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, the State of Wisconsin has carried out 56 individual timber sales from beginning to end. The program has expedited landscape-scale forest health improvement, and in the coming years, the State will invest program income into additional restoration projects.
- The Superior National Forest and the State of Minnesota have crafted a dynamic GNA agreement that encompasses both Federal and State lands. The Forest and the State have aligned the GNA agreement with the Wyden Authority to enable the State to also work with private partners.
- The Green Mountain and Finger Lakes National Forests and the State of Vermont are sharing resources for more efficient project execution. Under their GNA agreement, the national forests and the State have jointly hired a forester to oversee vegetation management on both Federal and State forest lands.
- On behalf of the Hoosier National Forest, the State of Indiana is using aerial surveys to map the occurrence of invasive ailanthus trees and other forest health issues.

Ingredients for Success

Successful implementation of GNA agreements in Region 9 has resulted from mutual trust, sharing of resources between parties, and commitment from both State and Forest Service leadership. Despite the benefits of flexibility, the success

of GNA agreements has also depended on clear definition of roles and responsibilities for staff from both parties. In addition, careful planning to prioritize GNA projects and ensure appropriate timelines has provided efficiencies and accountability to GNA partners in Region 9.

Lessons Learned

Experiences with partners in Region 9 have yielded several important GNA lessons for national forests:

- Pre-prepared National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation expedites the GNA process. National forests can assist State partners by hosting trainings for State staff about Forest Service NEPA mitigation measures.
- The Forest Service should always consider the significant risk and investment undertaken by State partners in large, long-term agreements.
- Regular communication among parties is critical to overcome challenges related to employee turnover and multi-forest participation under a single master agreement.
- National forests should give States operational flexibility and readily defer to State processes when appropriate.

Next Steps

National forests across the country are continuing to develop innovative approaches to forest health restoration using GNA agreements with States. In Region 9, the Allegheny, Monongahela, and White Mountain National Forests are all currently entering or expanding GNA agreement opportunities.

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