

Forest Products Modernization: Innovation Underway

Using Collaborative Partnerships to Improve Forest Access

Despite its name, Forest Highway 13 (FH13) is a county jurisdiction road managed by the Delta and Alger County Road Commissions. The USDA Forest Service is committed to partnering in the management of this important road, which travels north to south from Lake Superior to Lake Michigan, bisecting the forest's west zone, thereby providing access to half the forest. A project to resurface the Delta County segment of this road demonstrates how multi-layered partnerships are supporting this community infrastructure improvement.

Forest Service engineers worked closely with the Delta County Road Commission to improve its Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) grant proposal for FH13 road repair funds. The engineers' suggestions resulted in two accepted applications totaling \$1,000,000.

Additionally, Hiawatha National Forest timber staff developed a linear sale (938,000 board feet) to clear trees from the right-of-way in preparation for the resurfacing. We implemented the sale in partnership with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources through Good Neighbor Authority, which has been active in Michigan since 2015.

Delta County Road Commission staff were on site to assist with traffic management on the road, and Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) implemented the Good Neighbor Authority timber sale.

Ingredients for Success

The success of this project depended on:

- Strong relationships with Delta County Road Commission and Michigan DNR. The Forest Service and the Michigan DNR have worked collaboratively to implement GNA supplemental agreements for the past 3 consecutive fiscal years. In addition, the agencies work side by side in other resource areas such as fire suppression and trails.
- A workplace culture that encourages "out of the box" thinking and a willingness to try new approaches.

Newly resurfaced Forest Highway 13 in October 2019. Forest Service photo.

- A workplace culture that encourages a multi-disciplinary approach to project work and communication between resource areas.
- Experienced staff familiar with various funding mechanisms.

Lessons Learned

Plan to spend more time with purchasers or contractors new to DxP. It is a learning process that requires collaboration until both the forest and purchasers have experience and feel comfortable using it.

A forester must know how to write a prescription for DxP so that it can be implemented. The wording in a contract with DxP is very important; one word can be the difference between success and failure. Contract modifications can be costly.

Next Steps

The Forest Service is developing and piloting use of digital prescription guides that will aid operators in implementing DxP. Instead of a small, bulleted document in his or her pocket, the operator would have a tablet in the cab with access to the prescription and a sale area map with GPS points. The map would indicate where the operator is in the sale unit and include polygons with prescriptions for that area. This digital technology could ease the implementation of DxP further and add more variability in prescriptions used.

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