

**TESTIMONY of LESLIE WELDON**  
**DEPUTY CHIEF, NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM**  
**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**  
**FOREST SERVICE**  
**BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS, FORESTS AND MINING**  
**on COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES**  
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*Collaborative Initiatives: Restoring watersheds and large landscapes across boundaries  
through State and Federal partnerships*

Chairman Lee, Ranking Member Wyden, and members of the Subcommittee, I express my thanks to you for the opportunity to speak today about the work the Forest Service is undertaking with our state, federal, tribal, and non-governmental partners to accelerate the pace and scale of restoration on our national forests so forests remain resilient and provide the benefits Americans need.

Collaborative initiatives are a critical tool the Forest Service uses to deliver these benefits to the American public. Natural resource-focused partnerships can leverage funds, boost innovation, and speed up the timeline for getting projects done; they are a model for interagency coordination across state, federal, tribal, and private lands. In short, these initiatives allow the Forest Service to do more critical work in our nation's forests, enhance our relationships with the communities in which we serve, and often lead to more durable solutions to complex issues.

Today I will highlight a few examples of locally-supported efforts to address community-identified and science-based needs for the restoration of large landscapes. I will focus my remarks on resource and economic successes of the Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative, the Forests in Focus initiative in Montana, and our partnerships with water supply providers in Colorado. I will also highlight our efforts under the Good Neighbor Authority, and share results of 23 collaboratively designed projects across the country.

## **UTAH WATERSHED RESTORATION INITIATIVE**

The Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative, a partnership-based program to improve high priority watersheds throughout the state, is an example of a strong collaborative effort between the Forest Service, other Federal agencies, and local partners. It is unique because it pools funds and project proposals from state and federal agencies and non-profits, so that multi-agency regional teams can rank, select, and allocate funding to projects in watersheds that all parties consider to

be high priority. We give priority to landscape-scale, multi-partner and multi-phased projects in these high-priority watersheds. All five national forests in Utah have had projects approved and partially funded by this Initiative. The Forest Service's Intermountain Region currently contributes \$500,000 a year to the Initiative; most projects see approximately five to seven times return on that investment, when combined with state and partner funding.

For example, the Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative helped fund the completion of the Blacksmith Fork Canyon winter range restoration project. This project is unique because it accomplished work across multiple jurisdictions. The project was conducted on National Forest System lands and the adjacent state-owned Hardware Ranch Wildlife Management Area. Winter habitat for mule deer is in decline, especially in the Cache Valley. This project restored crucial mule deer winter habitat and reduced hazardous fuels around private property. Diverse partner organizations contributed nearly \$185,000 towards the \$206,000 project.

Utah's national forests have approved 26 projects for work during fiscal year 2018. Because of the success of the Initiative to date, the Forest Supervisors of the Utah national forests, in partnership with the Utah Department of Natural Resources, and the Utah Partners for Conservation and Development, have committed to achieving a million acres of watershed restoration on National Forest System lands in the state of Utah. Watershed restoration will be accomplished through a variety of methods, and will result in improved conditions for grazing, wildlife habitat, forest health, fisheries, and recreation.

In addition to existing projects, the Utah national forests will plan new projects and complete environmental analysis to prepare for implementation. We will seek and employ innovative, creative and efficient approaches to project planning such as district-, forest- or state-wide decisions for juniper removal and conifer removal from aspen stands.

We hope the Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative can serve as a model for other states for how we can work across federal, state, tribal, and private land, and harness the power of partnerships to complete crucial restoration projects.

## **FORESTS IN FOCUS INITIATIVE**

Montana Governor Steve Bullock's unique forest restoration initiative, titled the "Forests in Focus Initiative," is designed to address key challenges and opportunities in Montana, including forest restoration and industry retention, collaboration and partnerships, and restoration of Tribal, state and private forests. This state-led initiative is investing millions of dollars in projects across state-federal boundaries to accomplish priority projects, including the hiring of state-Forest Service and county-Forest Service liaison positions that focus on forest restoration activities across multiple jurisdictions.

The large-scale restoration work occurring on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest in Montana is an example of how collaboration and partnerships may lead to more lasting support for restoration and forest management activities. The Forests in Focus initiative provided funding to support the Beaverhead-Deerlodge working group, a local collaborative group consisting of area landowners, timber industry representatives, environmental groups, and county commissioners. This state investment leveraged partner funding, with in-kind services from private parties, non-profit organizations, and local government. The result is a 1,800 acre project that was collaboratively developed and has broad support. The project is currently being implemented, and will increase forest resilience to insects and disease, and reduce the risk of wildfire to local communities. Looking towards the future, this diverse group worked in partnership with the Forest Service to develop a “landscape strategy” document agreeing to restoration needs across the greater landscape.

Governor Bullock has made \$2 million available from the state fire suppression account to engage directly with the Forest Service on projects. The state of Montana is investing in 25 Forest Service projects across the state, benefiting national forests and 14 counties. These projects are bolstering restoration outcomes on more than 200,000 acres of forest land, improving recreational opportunities, providing approximately 161 million board feet of timber to Montana’s mills, and necessary goods and services to support resource dependent communities, including indirectly sustaining 3,000 jobs.

## **FORESTS TO FAUCETS PARTNERSHIP**

In Colorado, the Forest Service has partnered with municipal water utilities, conservancy districts, businesses, and state partners to support forest and watershed restoration. Outcomes include resilient landscapes, reduced risk of catastrophic wildfires, and minimized erosion and sedimentation in reservoirs. Our watershed partnerships are principally funded through municipal and agricultural water fees – so they provide a financial link between downstream water users and upstream forests. Participating water utilities along the Front Range of Colorado serve over 3.2 million municipal customers and 900,000 acres of agricultural land. Colorado’s watersheds are the source of water for 19 downstream states, so these restoration initiatives have both regional and national benefits.

These partnerships are truly cross-boundary efforts, with forest and watershed restoration work accomplished on both public and private lands in critical watershed areas. A key outcome of these partnerships is reduced impacts of wildfire and post-fire floods to critical infrastructure and private property. The proactive forest health and restoration treatments conducted through these partnerships are projected to reduce overall costs in the long run for local, state, tribal, and federal governments. Collectively, our water provider partners have contributed over \$28 million, which has been matched by \$31 million in Forest Service funding for vegetation and watershed restoration treatments over the last eight years in Colorado.

So far, approximately 50,000 acres treated (hazardous fuel removal, prescribed burns, wetland and riparian restoration, and invasive species treatments), 920,000 trees planted in burned areas, and 80 miles of trails and roads restored, constructed or decommissioned have been completed through these watershed restoration partnerships. This work is conducted by private companies so also supports local economies. In 2016, this work created and maintained over 90 logging, wood processing, and other forest sector jobs.

Another example of working across boundaries is the San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership. The Forest Service is working with the Colorado State Forest Service and Natural Resource Conservation Service to reduce wildfire risk to community water resources in the Fourmile and Turkey springs areas in Archuleta County. Since 2009, the partnership has secured over \$1 million for forest restoration and resilience work. In addition, over the last two years, the Pagosa Ranger District and the Natural Resource Conservation Service were awarded nearly \$1.3 million to conduct more treatments on private and public land as part of the Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service Joint Chiefs' Initiative. This project is an example of how the Forest Service, working together with the forest products industry, is improving forest health, establishing wood-to-energy opportunities, and creating positive economic outcomes.

## **GOOD NEIGHBOR AUTHORITY**

Using tools such as the Good Neighbor Authority, the Forest Service is actively working with states to treat more acres across our forested landscapes and grasslands. The Good Neighbor Authority allows the Forest Service to enter into cooperative agreements or contracts with states and Puerto Rico to allow the non-federal partners to perform watershed restoration and forest management services on federal lands. To date, the Forest Service has executed 83 Good Neighbor agreements in 29 states to accomplish a variety of restoration services. This authority increases our capacity by allowing us to access state agency expertise to accomplish additional acres of restoration work.

For example, the Oregon Department of Forestry is assisting the Fremont-Winema National Forest to prepare timber sale and hazardous fuels reduction projects. Also, the Oregon Department of Forestry is leading a coordination effort with the Forest Service, local governments, collaborative groups, community members and other stakeholders under the Good Neighbor Authority to develop a statewide restoration priority map and a subsequent program of work. This will help the national forests in Oregon to identify future restoration priorities.

## **COLLABORATION AT WORK**

Twenty-three collaboratively designed Forest Service projects across the country provide a snapshot of the impacts that shared stewardship can have. Together with our partners on these 23 landscapes, we have:

- Created approximately \$1.2 billion in local labor income and an average of 5,180 jobs created or maintained each year<sup>[1]</sup>.
- Sold more than 2.1 billion board feet of timber.
- Improved access for sports enthusiasts and other recreational visitors by maintaining 630 miles of trails and constructing nearly 90 miles of aquatic passage to allow fish to move under roads and maintain healthy populations.
- Reduced hazardous fuels to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire on more than 2.4 million acres.
- Maintained or improved more than 16,600 miles of roads.
- Involved more than 200 local partners, and leveraged more than \$100 million in partner investments, for work on National Forest Systems lands through grant funding, stewardship agreements, job training for youth crews, monitoring, and more.
- Leveraged more than \$230 million in additional public-private partnership funding, including work on private and State lands.

## CONCLUSION

We are most successful when we work together with state agencies, tribes, and other organizations, and focus on the highest priority needs to benefit the land and surrounding communities. We are honored to be stewards of the national forests, and we seek to ensure these resources continue to meet the needs of generations to come by finding creative solutions to complex natural resources issues through state-federal partnerships and collaborative initiatives such as the ones I have described to you today.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Labor income and jobs created have been estimated for 2011 to 2016. Other accomplishments include all years from 2010 to 2016.