

OUTREACH PROGRAM FOR CONIFER VALLEY

U.S. FOREST SERVICE AND
U.S. BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT



Denise Valentin
Gabrielle Morrow
John Nelson
Sarah Marten

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Consensus & Natural Resources

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Forest Service (“Forest Service”), U.S. Bureau of Land Management (“BLM”), State Parks, and the Conifer County Planning Agency are in the pre-planning stages of a large-scale forest restoration program in the lands surrounding the Conifer Valley community. Over time, these lands have seen very little active management.

The forests and natural areas are either already degraded or are moving towards the direction of becoming degraded. Forest stand densities are high and are infested with insects and disease. Climate conditions are reaching new extremes for longer periods of time causing unwanted stress on the forest and its wildlife. Forest conditions are a hazard and risk levels for the forest, wildlife, and the community of Conifer Valley are no longer acceptable. Agencies that manage lands in and around Conifer Valley all agree that there is a need for a large-scale forest restoration program.

RESTORATION PROGRAM GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The proposed actions of the large-scale forest restoration program would include a combination of standard management activities designed to restore and enhance watershed and forest conditions. Proposed watershed restoration and enhancement activities could consist of streambank restoration and stabilization, restoration of in-stream habitat, tree management in riparian zones, and plantings of native understory plants. Proposed forest restoration and enhancement activities could include prescribed burns, mechanical thinning, understory mowing, tree harvesting, tree planting, use of herbicides, and allowing natural processes to occur when appropriate (Shindler & Gordon, 2004).

Forests and watersheds would be inventoried and assessed to select for the best activity or combination of activities to help restore and enhance conditions. Throughout the project, restoration activities and forest and watershed conditions would be monitored to ensure set goals are being met (Shindler & Gordon, 2004).

CHALLENGES AND ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS FOR THE RESTORATION PROGRAM

There are a few challenging concepts that must be addressed in the restoration program. These concepts include:

Climate Change

To curb impacts from climate change, the creation of ongoing fire prevention programs to decrease fire danger, despite unusually dry and hot conditions, will include prescribed burns, understory mowing, and tree thinning will be necessary. Since healthy watersheds improve resilience to climate change, prioritizing watershed restoration is imperative to aid in the reduction of fire damage. Restoring the health of the soil and

the plants will also help aid in the reduction of soil erosion and landslides. (Schindler et al., 2002)

Ecosystem Services

Watersheds, including forests and grasslands, provide many ecosystem services. Figure 1 below is a diagram of ecosystem services derived:



Fig.

1 – Ecosystem Services

Source: Mavensnotebook.com

Restoring the health of the watershed will improve recreation services (boating, fishing, hiking, biking, etc.), improve social and cultural services, increase property value, increase tourism, improve water quality, and reduce fire risk. Fire prevention will improve recreation services (trails, opportunities for hunting, etc.), provide an increase in jobs from newly added staff, improve air quality, and improve wildlife habitat.

No matter how careful plans are made, there can still be risks involved in restoration. Prescribed burns can get out of control and start forest fires. Species diversity can change due to both modification in plant composition and structure differences from restoration. Also possible is an increased danger from human-wildlife interaction due to increased wildlife habitat (Maleki, 2008)

PUBLIC'S ROLE IN PLANNING & DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN RESTORATION PROGRAM

This restoration program will create an opportunity for leaders in the public domain to step forward and ask if a willing landowner(s) would allow a scaled-down version of the restoration plan to take place on their property. This could be a "pilot program" that builds trust and opens different avenues into the community via neighbors or friends of the landowner.

A meeting will be held just for public input. A meeting where the Forest Service and BLM listen and let the public speak, let them ask questions, and pitch their own ideas. Also, many of the most knowledgeable members of the Forest Service will communicate in layman's terms. The Forest Service and BLM will try and bring in some landowners from past projects to speak about their role in that project, and answer questions about their experience in participating in a forest restoration plan.

Finally, the Forest Service and BLM will set up a website where the public can provide anonymous input or comment on current ideas/plans or to introduce their own solutions. The public will also be invited to create their own council who will attend meetings with the Forest Service, BLM, and other stakeholders.

PUBLIC OUTREACH PLAN OBJECTIVES

This Outreach Plan will be performed conjointly by the Forest Service and the BLM. The Forest Service has been overseeing forests in the United States since 1905. The BLM has been overseeing federal lands in the western states since 1946.

One objective of this Public Outreach Plan (“the plan”) includes connecting with the Conifer Valley communities in both urban and rural areas, the Conifer Valley University, the local retail, restaurant, and recreational businesses, the local timber mill and local government. Gaining the communities trust is a top priority for the Forest Service and the BLM to achieve consensus in this restoration. Another objective is the creation of a collaboration team of multiple stakeholders that include the Forest Service, the BLM, community leaders, local businesses, indigenous tribes and local government. The collaboration process will allow an equal opportunity for all stakeholders to present their ideas and concerns.

It is our intent to survey the community to find what their primary concerns are for the forest stand. Speaking to community leaders about the community's needs and fears will also be completed. There will be a continuous effort to include community members and tribal members in the planning process from start to finish. The Forest Service and the BLM will both remain open to suggestions and solutions provided by the community. (Kelly, 1994; Oliver, 2011)

PUBLIC OUTREACH ASSESSMENTS

Halfway through the planning process, an assessment will be conducted to determine if the collaborative is working effectively and efficiently. To do so, all members of the collaborative will be surveyed by the facilitator. The survey will gauge the collaboratives receptiveness of the members knowledge and input, and how they feel the collaborative could be improved. Additionally, the outreach programs established by the collaborative will be assessed annually by sending surveys to the community to assess their sentiment towards the outreach activities, the restoration project, and the agencies leading the project. Based on these assessments, adjustments will be made to better serve the community and the collaborative members.

Expected positive outcomes include community involvement, diverse views resulting in diverse solutions, trust built between the community and management agencies, improved relationships between stakeholders, and improved understanding of ecosystem services and cultural heritage (Margerum, 2011).

COMMUNITY MEMBERS & STAKEHOLDERS

The Conifer Valley community includes a diverse population of 8,000. There are no private forest landowners in this area; only publicly held land. The stakeholders include:

Community members

Community members may or may not be concerned with the condition of the forests on their land and the forests on the neighboring properties of community members and government agencies. Some community members may be more concerned due to the higher frequency of catastrophic wildfires occurring in western North America.

Concerned community members are more willing to participate and back a forest restoration program if the restoration activities lower the risk of severe wildfires.

Those community members that are not concerned about the conditions of the forests and live adjacent to public lands think they are fine just the way they are. The unconcerned community members do not want to see visible forest impacts from forest restoration activities.

The main portion of the community includes the public of Conifer Valley. These community members love where they live. They enjoy the forest environment, the scenery, and the recreational opportunities the forest provides. They love living in Conifer Valley and do not want it to be affected by a wildfire or to have subpar natural resource conditions. These community members are split, some do not mind the short-term looks or lack of use due to forest restoration activities while the others do not care to see the unpleasant look and loss of access due to forest restoration activities.

Some of these community members also work in the surrounding forests and are loggers or recreational guides. The loggers see forestation restoration as an economic opportunity while the recreation guides see the restoration program as an economic loss and a hit to their lifestyle.

Business Owners

The business owners of Conifer Valley are also split. Some business owners do not care for the short-term negative impacts of a forest restoration program. Other business owners see the forest restoration program as a positive as it improves local conditions, lowers risks of a wildfire damaging their assets, and creates a better environment for the business and employees. Some businesses, such as logging companies and local mill, see the forest restoration program as an economic opportunity. Recreational outfitters

view the forest restoration program as a short-term hit to their business but realize it could provide a more secure future.

College Students

The college students at Conifer Valley University chose the university because of its beautiful setting in Conifer Valley and the easy access to outdoor recreation. Current students see the forest restoration program limiting their recreational opportunities and think it will be visually unappealing. Current students may want to get away from the learning environment when they can and escape to the plethora of public lands surrounding Conifer Valley. However, if the status of the local forests is not improved, the wildfire risk will remain high. This could lead to a severe wildfire that would affect current and future students. In other words, there might not be a university for students to attend if the town is subject to a large wildfire.

U.S. Forest Service

The Forest Service has the largest holding of land surrounding Conifer Valley. The Forest Service realizes that their land surrounding Conifer Valley has reached an unacceptable level of risk due to wildfire suppression, resulting in the build up of fuels. The Forest Service also realizes that climate change is benefiting wildfires by creating warmer and drier conditions. Due to climate change, the wildfire season now begins earlier and lasts longer.

Unfortunately, Conifer Valley lies within the region affected by historical wildfire suppression and extreme climate change conditions. The Forest Service would like to lower the risk of wildfire around Conifer Valley by implementing a forest restoration as soon as possible. The Forest Service realizes that recreation opportunities on its public land would be temporarily restricted. However, recreation opportunities would eventually be restored and potentially expanded.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

The BLM is similar to the Forest Service but has a smaller holding of land around Conifer Valley. Unlike the Forest Service lands, much of the BLM land is adjacent to local landowners. The BLM feels the same as the Forest Service when it comes to the restoration plan. However, the BLMs land are primarily adjacent to many Conifer Valley residents that live on the perimeter of town. The BLM feels obligated to provide the best conditions in and around the wildland-urban interface and believe the forest restoration program is the best way of achieving those conditions.

Local Native Indian Tribe

The Conifer Valley Native Indian Tribe have lived in the area known as Conifer Valley for centuries. They know the land well and would like to see the return of its natural beauty and ability to produce natural sustainable goods. The local tribes believe they have valuable local and traditional ecological knowledge that would be beneficial to the

forest restoration plan. The local tribe would love to participate in whatever ways necessary if it is beneficial to the land first and not just the people (Innes, 2010).

The State

Most of the state lands in and around Conifer Valley consist of state parks. These parks in Conifer Valley are beautiful. Some contain historic landmarks, and all boost highly valued recreational opportunities. The state parks are also a large source of funding for the state through the sale of access passes and the rental of facilities and equipment. The state does not want the natural resources harmed and would like to see their conditions improve for all to enjoy. The state is hesitant but accepting of a forest restoration program as long as any value loss on their land is short-term and the effort of the program is beneficial in the long run.

County Planning Commission

The county area around Conifer Valley consists of unincorporated rural property. The land under the control of the county is rural and has been subject to little maintenance over the years. The county commission could go either way with the forest restoration program. Some planning members see no reason in the restoration program, while other members feel the county land is a liability and should be improved.

IDEAS & CONCEPTS TO COMMUNICATE TO THE PUBLIC

Concepts and ideas to share about the restoration:

1. Why the health of the forest is important
2. What the forest provides – “Ecosystem services” such as water quality, food, fiber, timber, wildlife habitat, culture, individual well-being
3. What the current concerns about the forest are and how that relates to what the forest is currently providing
4. What is restoration? What will this project entail?
5. The specific end game of this project for what the forest needs to look like (unpolluted water, more older trees, more trees in good health, etc.).
6. What is prescribed burn and the tools used to make them safe

Other concepts/ideas to share in general:

1. How to mitigate human-wildlife interactions
2. Ways to help air quality and wildlife by planting native plants and trees
3. Gain interest in wildlife with ambassador animals visits to schools/university
4. Trail etiquette (leave no trace) to keep forests and other lands safe and pollution free
5. Volunteer groups and internships to help with invasive species and other small projects

The top selling points of this plan include: (1) an increase in the economy of Conifer Valley including the local businesses, (2) an increase in many ecosystem services (water quality and quantity, food, timber), and (3) a decrease in devastating forest fires.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE PROGRAM & COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Public engagement in the program is needed to ensure everyone feels that any questions or concerns they have about the restoration project have been answered (Schindler, 2004). Community resources that can be used include the town's library, where community members can go for information and updates in the restoration project. The community center is a great resource to connect with underrepresented community members.

Church groups would also be a resource to get to the community. The local businesses can get involved by sharing flyers and joining in the outreach picnics. The town's community garden can have classes on how to create native plant gardens for wildlife. The nearby Native Indian reservation has a cultural center and museum with demonstrations. People of the community can visit these programs and immerse themselves in the tribe's culture and more sustainable way of life (Innes, 2010).

EDUCATIONAL & INFORMATIONAL OUTREACH PROGRAMS

Both the Forest Service and the BLM will be responsible for all outreach programs. They will both be funding printed literature, community picnics, forestry staff-led tours in the forest, workshops, and the other activities shown below. To make sure all members of the community have a chance to share their ideas and concerns about the restoration project, a special questionnaire will be developed. This questionnaire will be handed out at all meetings and will also be provided on a special website run by the Forest Service.

Outreach activities will include:

- Meeting with homeowners at their HOA meetings to show a presentation on the forest project about why it is important and how it will help increase the ecosystem services to Conifer Valley (clean water, food, and fiber)
- Meeting with business owners (including minority businesses) at a community business luncheon to show a presentation on the forest project about why it is important and how it will help the economy of Conifer Valley
- Holding a Chamber of Commerce luncheon to promote project and gain their trust/approval
- Meeting with the Conifer Valley tribe to discuss ways to get tribe members involved with the restoration project
- Meeting with the community at Conifer Valley's community center to show a presentation on the forest project and why it is important for the community

- Meeting with church groups at their chosen location to discuss the project and its impacts on the community
- The Conifer Valley Native Indian Tribe Day. Community members can meet with the Conifer Valley tribe and learn their culture and their traditional value system of the forest.
- Field tour(s) with any interested parties in the forest to show in-person the concerns about the forest health (i.e., too much leaf litter, soil erosion, etc.)
- Educational workshop(s) on forest restoration at the local library's conference room
- Community picnic (sponsored by Forest Service) using local restaurants and bakeries (will also help local businesses to gain more customers)
- Community Farmer's Market (sponsored by Forest Service) where local farmers will sell their products located on either Forest Service or BLM land
- Wildlife outreach including animal-human interactions using ambassador animals to gain interest for the forest and wildlife
- College Night Free Movie with a short presentation prior to the movie about the forest restoration project
- Setting up a tent on the college campus and pass out flyers about the forest project and the availability of internships with the Forest Service or BLM
- High School Free Movie with a short presentation prior to the movie about the forest restoration project and the availability of school volunteering credits
- Social Media information through Facebook and Instagram
- An Online Questionnaire through a special Website/Facebook Page
- Informational Posters hung up in local businesses throughout the community
- Advertisements in HOA newsletters and other newsletters/newspapers.

(Rongerude and Sandoval, 2016).

CONCLUSION

While the community surrounding the Conifer forest may have reservations about the means with which to restore the site, we believe through active outreach, community involvement and public education the Forest Service will be successful in working with all stakeholders to restore this site.

Addressing fears concerning human-wildlife interactions, changes to recreational use, and addressing fire and water quality issues will allow us to demonstrate an understanding of the local community and how this forest impacts their daily lives. Having continued participation from community members, volunteers, interns, business owners, and local government will demonstrate this is not a decision to be made by the Forest Service but rather, an ongoing collaboration to better improve an important resource.

Helping the community understand and address the forest's resilience to climate change will be imperative to its ongoing success and demonstrating the services the forest can provide to the community will communicate its importance.

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