

PROFILE: COMMUNITY FORESTS ON PUBLIC LANDS

The Weaverville Community Forest

What is the Idea?

The Weaverville Community Forest (WCF), jointly managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Trinity County Resource Conservation District (TCRCD), and the community of Weaverville, California, encompasses 984 acres of productive timber land, historic and prehistoric resources, recreational areas and view sheds for the town of Weaverville. The WCF, through which the anadromous West Weaver Creek flows, also provides a wildlife corridor between industrial timberlands to the South and residential parcels to the North.¹

Using a stewardship agreement, BLM retains ownership of the forest land and collaborates with TCRCD to manage a set of objectives defined in the WCF strategic plan, which was developed with the community. The objectives are to: protect the view-sheds; maintain and improve forest health through timber harvesting; improve salmon habitat; eradicate invasive weeds; and promote recreation and education, fuels reduction, and firewood collection. Funds generated from sales of forest products from the WCF pay for forest health project costs. Excess funds are deposited into an account and used to cover expenses related to a work plan which TCRCD works with the Weaverville community to develop every year.

While community involvement in the WCF is “informal” – there is no formal membership or board of directors² – over the past decade, with organizing support from TCRCD, the Weaverville community has helped establish the WCF, articulated their values related to it³, and developed a three-year strategic plan that reflects those values. Drawing on this foundational work, TCRCD convenes the community at least three times a year to monitor progress vis-à-vis the strategic plan, develop the annual work plan, and discuss new project ideas, such as applying the same partnership model to U.S. Forest Service lands in the Weaverville community. Because Weaverville is a small community, and because TCRCD staff reside in the community, opportunities for informal contact and exchange about the WCF are abundant.

What is the Opportunity?

The WCF stewardship agreement between BLM and TCRCD provides Weaverville with an alternative to the

historical model of timber-based economies by providing and promoting opportunities for multiple-use of federal forest resources and for community-driven forest management that creates and retains living-wage jobs in an otherwise economically-challenged rural community. In addition, the WCF provides timber for the town mill, educational and historical venues for local and tourist populations, and it maintains high visual quality for the town residents.

Beyond management on the BLM-owned land (and eventually on U.S. Forest Service land), the WCF creates opportunities for promoting overall watershed protection by inspiring improved forest management on the private land near and around it. Activities at the WCF have increased private landowner interest in outreach and technical assistance focused on new forestry practices. To foster this interest, TCRCD collaborated with the Northwest California Resource Conservation and Development Council (formerly Trinity Resource Conservation & Development Council) to develop a “Program Timberland Environmental Impact Report,” which provides guidance for private landowners in stewardship and forest health projects under the California Forest Practices Act.

The high level of public involvement in the WCF, as well as its broad range of objectives and diverse community interests, have peaked the interest of community-based forestry advocates around the country in opportunities for replicating the WCF model in other regions. In many ways, the WCF reflects the spirit of stewardship projects. It has successfully recruited and sustained local involvement in federal land management by matching the resource needs of federal land managers with the skills of a locally-run conservation district and the needs, aspirations, and vision of the community.

What is Revolutionary from Current Practice?

It's more than just the forestry, it's about the management we can get done, the jobs we create, the trails that we build and maintain, or the salmon habitat we improve. It's about the things that people in our community are concerned about.

¹ This profile draws on information from the Weaverville Community Forest webpage http://www.tcrd.net/w-ville_forest/wcf_index.htm and on personal communication with Pat Frost of TCRCD, 7-29-08.

² Federal law prohibits formal groups of the public from advising federal entities like BLM and TCRCD unless they go through the processes established through the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

³ The key forest-related values defined by the community are high visual quality, fuels reduction, sustained revenue, recreation, timber harvesting, firewood collection, improved forest health, and wildlife habitat.

Because the WCF was established as a government-to-government arrangement, with a stewardship agreement as opposed to a stewardship contract, there is no profit motive. The excess funds generated through the sales of timber and other forest products go into realizing stewardship and community goals and not just timber harvesting. TCRC staff report, *“The forest health aspect of the project has to stand on its own and the retained receipts are for something else further down the road.”* This is different from other stewardship projects, where, according to TCRC staff, *“At the end of the day the work’s gotten done, but the retained receipt money has gone into doing the [harvest] project.”*

What is the Promise for Success?

The success of the WCF depends on the project’s ability to sustain and expand community interest and involvement. For almost ten years, the Weaverville community has actively participated in the WCF – this interest has been sustained through benefits such as jobs, educational and

recreational opportunities, improved forest health and wildlife habitat, and the visual quality of the forest, as well as the simple benefit that comes from investing in and working on a project collaboratively. Community interest is also expanding, which is evidenced through the community’s lively participation in establishing a new stewardship agreement with the U.S. Forest Service and through private landowner motivation to improve forestry practices based on the model they have seen at the WCF.

Support from outside the community is another critical factor in the continued success of the WCF. One outcome of this broader awareness is the interest on the part of community-based forestry advocates in replicating the model in other regions of the country. Another outcome is the ability of TCRC to leverage additional funding for the WCF from sources, such as the California State Water Resources Control Board, Trinity River Restoration Program (Bureau of Reclamation), and the Trinity County Board of Supervisors.