

RURAL DEVELOPMENT FORESTRY NETWORK

Developing Institutions for Community Forestry in Northern California

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Building Capacity for a Sustainable Non-Timber Forest Products Industry in the Trinity Bioregion: lessons drawn from international models

Yvonne Everett

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Community-based Forest Management: International lessons applied in the Trinity Bioregion of Northern California, USA

Yvonne Everett and Cecilia Danks

Overview

Over the past two centuries, natural resource management of non-agricultural, forest and wild-lands in the Western United States has been defined by large scale extraction of gold, other minerals and lumber, and by extensive grazing. Now as we approach the new millennium, a frontier of comparative resource scarcity is emerging.

Legislation is one indicator of approaching limits and of the degree of public awareness of the issue at hand. From the early 1970s onward, fuelled by the growing environmental concerns of the American public, major legislation to control the environmental impacts of resource extraction and industrial processing all over the United States (US) has been passed. This includes the Clean Air, Clean Water and Endangered Species Acts. In 1992, the US Forest Service was found in violation of the Endangered Species Act for its failure to adequately protect the habitat of the Northern Spotted Owl on federal land. Biologists believe the owl to be dependent upon large tracts of undisturbed old growth forest. The courts halted all timber harvesting on public land and gave the US government the order to come up with an alternative plan for the future management of the public lands in the Pacific Northwest states of Washington, Oregon and Northern California.

The plan finally agreed upon in 1994 (USDA, 1994) calls for the implementation of Ecosystem Management. This approach, if fully implemented over the coming decades, represents a dramatic shift toward restoring and maintaining ecosystem function as the primary goal of public land management. The Record of Decision for Ecosystem Management calls for the maintenance of a healthy forest ecosystem with habitat that will support populations of native species (USDA, 1994). A much reduced resource extraction programme (timber, grazing, non-timber forest

products) must comply with a series of checks and balances to ensure long term ecosystem sustainability. In the past, though subject to environmental restrictions and guidelines for multiple use, the primary activity of the USFS consisted of growing trees for and administering timber sales.

From an ecological point of view, Ecosystem Management should be a step toward a sustainable future and indeed, this is where the primary focus of the policy change has lain. However, implementing Ecosystem Management requires people – people to manage and carry out the ambitious process of fire management (which entails the landscape-wide strategic reduction of dead, fallen, suppressed and diseased biomass that has built up over time, to the point at which the natural function of fire can be reintroduced safely through controlled burning); people to monitor vegetation and wildlife populations; people to maintain roads to avoid soil erosion into streams where salmon and trout depend upon clear water; people to carry on sustainable levels of resource harvesting; people to provide services for, guide and rescue recreation visitors; people who know the forest.

People who work in the forests often live in small communities in or near the woods. If people are part of the Ecosystem Management equation, then put simply, healthy forests need healthy forest communities. Yet, so far, efforts to implement the federally mandated Ecosystem Management have been hard on forest communities, especially those surrounded by public lands. In the short term, some communities who have depended upon large scale timber harvesting have lost their major source of employment. This sudden shift in rural forest economies away from a large industrial model is leaving a vacuum. While a certain amount of funding was set aside to assist communities with the change, this complex social aspect of the new federal forest policy was not fully anticipated. Essentially, people in forest-dependent communities have been asked to stand by while ‘Uncle Sam’ (the US government) spends a few years re-tooling its management strategy. But people do not and cannot wait for years for their next paycheck – instead, the most versatile and highly skilled community members have moved on to work in private forestry or in the cities.

A few models for alternative economic development are emerging among formerly timber-dependent towns. One approach, as taken by the community of Forks, Washington, is to invite in a federal prison. As a result, the local economy has improved markedly. However, initial reports from Forks’ citizens suggest that the quality of life in the town has changed for the worse, with family violence and

crime on the increase – loggers and mill workers may not easily adapt to becoming prison guards.

In contrast, Trinity County, California is trying the approach of diversification of local worker and infrastructure capacity to undertake the new Ecosystem Management activities and make them pay through small scale value-added production of a variety of forest products. These local efforts toward building community-based forest stewardship in the county have been boosted by examples drawn from regional, national and international sources. In the following two reports by Cecilia Danks and Yvonne Everett, the Trinity community forestry approach and the role of non-timber forest products in the plans for the future are discussed.

The Trinity Bioregion of Northern California lies at the Southern tip of the Klamath Floristic Province which includes the Klamath and Trinity River Drainages of Southern Oregon and Northern California. With its highly variable topography, geology, soils and micro-climates, the Klamath Province is one of the most biologically diverse in the continental United States. As far as non-timber forest products are concerned, this diversity translates into a high degree of variation in species frequency and abundance influenced by numerous local microclimates. Many species are at the Northern or Southern most edge of their range. A species which is quite common and abundant in one area may be found infrequently and in low abundance only 20-30 miles (some 50 km) away, or 500-1,000 ft (160-330 m) higher or lower in elevation. This variation in plant populations is a challenge to managers requiring specialised guidelines for management and harvest to avoid overharvesting. Roughly 80% of the Trinity Bioregion landbase is federally owned and managed by the USDA Forest Service and the US Bureau of Land Management. The primary management units are the Trinity (1.053 million acres, or 426,316 ha) and the Six Rivers (958,470 acres or 388,044 ha) National Forests.

Developing Institutions for Community Forestry in Northern California

Cecilia Danks

Introduction

‘Healthy Communities, Healthy Forests’ is the theme on which nearly everyone in Hayfork, California agrees – loggers, environmentalists, storekeepers, and school teachers. But achieving that goal seems beyond the ability of local residents in a county where nearly 80% of the land is owned by the US government. Therefore residents are trying several approaches to get a greater role in decision-making, and a greater share of the benefits of national forest management – the two main elements of community forestry.

Using the term ‘community-based stewardship’, a number of formerly timber-dependent communities in the American West are trying to define new social and economic roles as caretakers of sustainable forest ecosystems. Unfortunately, federal law prohibits groups of local residents from working with government employees in making decisions about forest management. Other laws forbid local bias in awarding contracts for national forest work or products. Therefore efforts towards community forestry in the United States are focusing on opening up decision-making, and access to work and products, for the people who live in and around the forest. Does this sound familiar? As Hayfork is finding out, these are the same objectives sought by forest communities around the world – and Hayfork residents have been eager to learn about models that could work for them.

Hayfork is located in the middle of Trinity County and the Trinity National Forest in Northern California. Trinity County is mountainous with rich, mixed coniferous forests as well as some oak woodlands and grasslands. Forest products and recreational opportunities provided by national forests comprise the largest part of the County’s economy. Timber harvests have dropped dramatically in the past five years for a combination of reasons, including fewer stands of old growth trees and increased environmental concerns. Residents have been working to diversify their

economy including expanding economic opportunities derived from forest resources. The Watershed Research and Training Center, a non-governmental organisation based in Hayfork, has been a leader in developing the concept of community forestry in the rural US context and in putting together the pieces necessary to implement it on the ground.

Asian Community Foresters come to Hayfork

Visits from people involved in community forestry abroad have been important in the development of the idea in Hayfork. In April 1995, a group of Hayfork residents who are active in forestry issues listened intently as the Chief Conservator of Forest Monitoring and Evaluation from West Bengal (Prabir Das), described Joint Forest Management in India. He came, accompanied by a Research Fellow (Jeff Fox) from the East-West Center in Hawaii, to learn about the community GIS (Geographic Information System) programme centred in Hayfork. However, it was the Hayfork residents who learned the most. They questioned the Chief Conservator about forest types and products in India and compared what he told them with their own situation. It was an exciting moment – could such an arrangement be instituted in Trinity County? Would the US Forest Service ever agree to it?

Hayfork residents were still thinking over the idea of Forest Protection Committees when in June, a community organiser from Orissa, India (Neera Singh), came to Hayfork. She discussed Joint Forest Management from the perspective of a non-profit organisation (*Vasundhara*) that works with the local community. It became clear that community forestry initiatives that came from the grassroots, rather than being instituted by a government agency, were usually stronger and more successful. Hayfork residents were encouraged to hear that communities often led government agencies in these issues, and that agencies would come around to supporting successful community forestry models.

Other visitors followed, including a Ford Foundation representative who had helped develop community forestry programmes in Indonesia and the Philippines (Fran Korten); the president of the People-Centred Development Forum (David Korten), whose professional work has been in Asia, Africa and Latin America; a forest economist from India (Kailash Govil), and a forest policy professor from the University of California at Berkeley (Jeff Romm) who has worked on forestry in

Nepal, Thailand, India and the United States. In each of these cases, a meeting was held with community leaders who had much to ask and share. These visitors were also given brief tours of nearby national forest lands. The Indian visitors remarked on the richness of the forest resources in the area – large areas of which are considered by US standards to be extensively burned and exploited (cut over). The visits were hosted by the Watershed Research and Training Center, and were made possible by connections with UC-Berkeley, the Ford Foundation, and the East-West Center in Hawaii.

How do these Models Relate to US Conditions?

What do forestry issues of communities in tropical, developing countries have in common with those in a large, temperate, industrial power? There are at least five similarities between many (though not all) rural, forest dependent communities in the US and those abroad:

- ! government control of forest land
- ! extraction of resources for export to urban areas and abroad (some primary processing done locally but little of the final product value returned to the community)
- ! external ownership of processing facilities and private land
- ! lack of local capital
- ! relatively high poverty.

Residents in Hayfork have been grappling with these issues for years and often referred to themselves and the Trinity region as ‘a colony’. They suspected that people in places like India struggled with such problems. However, in their discussions with visiting Indian foresters, they were surprised at the extent of the similarities regarding forestry issues.

Academics and community activists also see the connection between the issues of rural forest communities in developing countries and the US. Many feel that institutions developed for community forestry in the South are much more sophisticated than in the US. Indeed, the US government’s approach to forest communities has been simply to offer a steady amount of timber for sale which was thought to promote community stability (see e.g., the National Forest Management

Act of 1976). A number of American researchers and practitioners have used their experience and insights of community forestry programmes abroad to help develop such models in the US. There are several working in Hayfork alone, including the authors of these articles (Yvonne Everett and Cecilia Danks). A member of the NeoSynthesis Research Center in Sri Lanka (Jerry Moles) has worked in Trinity County helping local residents to organise themselves effectively to address forestry issues. In addition, a natural resource sociologist from UC-Berkeley (Louise Fortmann), who has worked primarily in Africa, and a former Peace Corps volunteer who worked in Nepal on community forestry (Constance McDermott), are working with the Watershed Research and Training Center on socio-economic research. Hayfork is not the only place where Americans are bringing their Southern experience home. Other organisations in which this is happening in the Pacific Northwest include Ecotrust and Sustainable Northwest, both in Oregon.

Background: Forest Ownership, Forest Dependence and the US Forest Service

In the United States, the federal government owns 34% of forest land, or 250 million acres (some 101,173,600 hectares), which is managed by several federal agencies. The United States Department of Agriculture's Forest Service manages 140 million acres (some 56,657,200 hectares) of that land, called 'national forests', and revenue generated from their management and recreational activities is returned to the federal treasury. This paper focuses on the relationship between local communities and nearby national forests (rather than private forest lands). Trinity County, California represents an extreme case of dependence on national forests with nearly 80% of its entire land area held by the federal government. Other areas have a greater proportion of private forest land; however, community residents still have little control over local forests as they are often owned by non-residents. Of Trinity County's 250,000 acres (about 101,170 hectares) of private industrial timber land, 96% is owned by people or corporations located outside the county (Kusel and Fortmann, 1991).

Trinity is a rural county of about two million acres (809,380 hectares) and 14,000 people. Weaverville, the county seat has a population of 3,200 and Hayfork, the second largest town has a population of 2,600. The timber and recreation industries are the core sectors of the economy, making Trinity County one of the most forest

dependent areas in the Pacific Northwest. More than 30% of employment wages in Trinity County were related to the timber industry in the late 1980s (Greber, 1994). 70% of the homes in Trinity County are heated with wood (US Census, 1993). The only remaining sawmill in the county is located in Weaverville. In the spring of 1996, the mill in Hayfork closed. It was formerly the major employer in the community and one of the largest in the county.

Even before the mill closure, 30% of individuals and nearly 50% of children in Hayfork lived in poverty (US Census, 1993). County-wide, 19% of all residents and 27% of children live below the poverty level, compared to 13% of Californians and 18% of Californian children (US Census, 1993). People living in poverty in the US are those whose incomes are not adequate to provide the least costly nutritionally adequate diet plus basic living expenses. The poverty level varies for families of different sizes, e.g. the threshold annual income for a single individual is \$6,310; for a family of four it is \$12,674 (US Census, 1992). Unemployment in Trinity County is highly seasonal and has averaged about twice that of the state of California in the past decade (CA-EDD 1996).

In recognition of the area's historical dependence on the timber industry, the Forest Service designated 400,000 acres (some 161,880 hectares) of national forest as the Hayfork Adaptive Management Area. It was intended as a place to experiment with innovative forestry activities that would benefit Hayfork and 15 neighbouring communities.

Implementing 'adaptive management', however, is complicated by the layered authority structure of the US Forest Service. The Forest Service budget is determined by Congress while the President and his appointee, the Chief of the Forest Service, is responsible for administrative direction. The Forest Service itself is a somewhat decentralised bureaucracy that must deal with the tension between maintaining the flexibility for locally appropriate, site-specific decisions, and maintaining compliance with national laws and allegiance to the agency. National forests are divided into a number of districts, each headed by a district ranger – the person closest to the ground with decision-making authority. Community members are most likely to deal with district rangers; however, their ability to respond to community concerns is constrained by higher levels.

Community Forestry in the US Context

Community forestry as discussed and implemented internationally often focuses on achieving:

- 1) a local voice in management, and
- 2) local access to forest resources, most often vis-à-vis a government forest management bureaucracy.

These institutional issues are clearly present in the US forestry context. In addition, perhaps the paramount issues are:

- 3) how the profits from the sale of national forest resources can be reinvested in the resource base, and
- 4) how a larger portion can be directed to the local people who work as stewards of the land.

What is at stake is creating a sustainable relationship between local human communities and healthy forest ecosystems. The barriers to accomplishing these goals are largely institutional, and are found in the government, market, and the capacity of local communities.

In some places, community forestry involves distributing proceeds from the sale of commercial forest products to the local community. In the US, it has long been the practice of the Forest Service to give 25% of timber and other forest revenue to local counties for roads and education. These are important funds in small rural areas and can lead to a local bias toward continued timber cutting. In Northern California, advocates of community forestry hope it will bring more than a share in timber revenues. Local residents want a chance to:

- 1) do woods work on a 'for profit' (appropriately paid) basis,
- 2) market raw forest materials, and/or
- 3) do value-added processing of local forest products and market the final product – with a maximum return to the local area.

Therefore, marketing, processing and entrepreneurial issues must be addressed to achieve community forestry goals in the US context.

The term ‘community forestry’ is also commonly used in the US for urban forestry, including street tree plantings and wooded areas owned by municipalities. This paper focuses on small, rural towns that are economically and culturally dependent on federally owned forest land. Rural and urban community forestry share some common elements such as organising the community, working with the bureaucracy, and improving environmental quality and social well-being.

Institutional Issues

At the core of community forestry efforts is the development of appropriate institutions and institutional relationships. In Pardo’s (1995) multi-country review of community forestry efforts, he identifies 12 ‘ingredients for successful community-based forestry management’. All of them are institutional components. Perhaps the greatest similarities between community forestry efforts in the United States and most of those abroad are in the institutional issues that they all must address. Challenges they all face are:

- 1) working with the government, i.e. community-government relations,
- 2) community institutions for management, i.e. community-community relations, and
- 3) regional and global markets, i.e. community-market relations.

As institutional environments vary from place to place, so too do the solutions.

Other specific institutional issues that arise in the Trinity region, as well as elsewhere in the US and other countries, include the following:

- ! Defining the community, where the boundaries are, and who is included.
- ! Resolving conflicting claims on resources, the most predominant in the US being timber industry versus environmental interests, although proponents of mining, grazing and recreational access also place competing claims. Indigenous or Native American claims and cultural concerns must also be considered in any reallocation of forest resources.
- ! Changing how resource management agency personnel see and practise their roles (described as ‘bureaucratic reorientation’ in Peluso and Poffenberger, 1989).

- ! Validating the existence and usefulness of local knowledge in professional management.
- ! Resolving internal conflict, and ensuring the inclusion of diverse community elements.
- ! Developing the local institutions for community input into forest management.

Crucial to the success of community forestry efforts is ‘community capacity’, i.e. the ability of the community to deal with these and other institutional issues. Kusel (1996) defines community capacity as,

‘the ability of residents in a community to respond (or communal response) to external and internal stresses; to create and take advantage of opportunities; and to meet the needs of residents, diversely defined.’

Because community forestry efforts in the US are quite ‘bottom-up’, adequate community capacity is a prerequisite for community-based forest management.

The Status Quo: how US communities normally participate in national forest management

While it is always risky to generalise for an entire country, the following is presented to provide readers with some background on federal forest management in the US. It is presented from the community perspective, and draws on the situation in California and the Pacific Northwest.

Local voices

Community members have been able to voice their concerns about national forest management both formally and informally to the Forest Service. Their influence on management decisions, however, depends on a number of factors – from the disposition of the district ranger to the funding allocated by Congress. Both the formal and informal opportunities to comment on Forest Service decisions are a far cry from joint decision-making or joint management of forest resources as envisioned in many community forestry programmes in Southern countries.

Formal opportunities for public comments on forest management plans and projects are mandated by the National Environmental Protection Act of 1970 (NEPA),

which applies to all government-sanctioned activities which alter the natural environment. There are two main constraints to the effectiveness of community participation via NEPA. First, public participation under NEPA is open to all interested parties, not just those geographically proximate to the forest. These are national forests, and everyone in the US has an interest in their management and a right to voice their opinions about it. Lawyers and lobbyists from powerful special interest groups in urban areas often speak louder than the individual voices of local community members. There is no requirement that the Forest Service or other federal agency seek consensus among competing public claims; they merely need to consider public comments in making the final decision. Secondly, the basic decisions about what to do where are nearly completed by the time of the NEPA public comment period.

There are many informal ways for communities to voice concerns and influence decisions at the local level. District rangers may choose to hold meetings and field trips on programmes that are likely to be controversial. They sometimes work closely with local environmentalists and/or timber industry representatives to make sure their concerns are addressed in specific plans of work. While district rangers are moved fairly frequently from place to place, lower level Forest Service employees are often long time residents of the local area and bring community perspectives with them to work. Informal influence is not restricted to the local level. Lobbyists, politicians and others can exert subtle and not-so-subtle pressure at higher levels in the Forest Service, can affect Forest Service budgets set by Congress, and can even influence directives issued by the White House. Thus despite proximity to the forest, the informal community voice is still weak compared with non-local voices.

Local access

As in forest areas throughout the world, US forests provide multiple outputs – including subsistence and commercial, timber and non-timber products, minerals, and recreational opportunities, as well as clean air, clean water and the conservation of biodiversity. The mix of these forest outputs varies from place to place. One distinction between community forestry in the US and elsewhere is the stronger emphasis on commercial uses by the local community rather than subsistence uses. In Northern California and the Pacific Northwest, the commercial production of sawlog timber has been a primary product in terms of value and institutional orientation of both the Forest Service and the forest products industry. The

commercial value of non-timber forest products, such as mushrooms, medicinal products and floral 'greens' (foliage), is substantial and growing in some areas (see Everett, joint paper). Subsistence uses of national forests, such as the collection of firewood and non-timber forest products (e.g., medicinal products, foods, basketry materials) for personal use, are important to some community members. However, due to the relatively low intensity of collection (again, this varies), there is relatively little resource degradation associated with subsistence uses, and they are not major forest management objectives. Recreational access (e.g., hunting, fishing, hiking, boating, camping) is also important. However, this paper focuses on access to forest resources and ecosystem management work.

In some developing countries, the issue of local access to forest resources is primarily concerned with access to subsistence needs – fuelwood, fodder, fruits, etc. – and perhaps a share of the value of commercial products when they are harvested. In Northern California, when forest communities ask for access, they generally want the ability to participate in the commercial extraction and maintenance of forest resources. Currently that participation takes many forms: logging, working in a sawmill, replanting trees, maintaining forest roads, conducting inventories, cutting fuelwood, collecting non-timber forest products, restoring streams, and others. The ability of community members to participate often depends on: a) the Forest Service offering resources for sale or paid work, and b) the competitiveness of local buyers and contractors.

The Forest Service offering work

Anyone, including community members, can gain commercial access to national forest resources by purchasing timber sales by obtaining a permit for grazing, the collection of fuelwood or non-timber forest products, or special uses such as single events or on-going recreational uses (e.g. camps, ski slopes); or by filing mining claims. In addition, people can work for the Forest Service by undertaking service contracts, i.e. maintenance, inventory and restoration work that does not generate income from the extraction of forest products. Service work includes tree planting, thinning, watershed restoration, trail maintenance, road repair, etc. The implementation of ecosystem management requires a large amount of this service work, due to the history of resource extraction and fire suppression in much of the American West. However, to offer almost any of this work in the woods, the Forest Service must conduct a project plan with an environmental assessment, and the work or resource extraction must fulfil a long term management plan for the forest. In times of budget and personnel cutbacks, as the Forest Service is currently

experiencing, the Forest Service cannot plan and offer timber sales or service contracts quickly or continuously enough to support a local workforce. This situation is made all the more difficult by changing policy mandates.

Competitiveness of local contractors and buyers

Timber sales are awarded by highest bid, and service contracts are awarded to the lowest bidder with no preference being given to local workers. The Forest Service can and does offer some sales to small businesses, defined as those with less than 500 employees. Federal laws prevent the Forest Service from favouring local bidders even when local workers have site-specific knowledge or skills that would enable them to do a better job. Given the sporadic and fragmented way that service contracts are offered, large migrant crews that pay low wages often out-compete contractors from small communities in and around the forest. In 1995, Trinity County contractors only got 5% of the value of service contracts related to regeneration in the Trinity National Forest. Most of the work went to out-of-state contractors and others based in more urban areas. Likewise, large sawmills with outside operators can outbid local loggers. In 1995, only 19% of timber sales went to Trinity County bidders in the two Trinity County ranger districts for which data were available. Sawmills bought 85% of that timber, leaving only the smallest sales for loggers (Danks and Smith, 1996). Many local contractors are competitive, but many also struggle with lack of capital and lack of appropriate equipment to compete for the full range of work options as they become available locally from the Forest Service. They might do better to specialise and bid on distant projects and sales, but their remoteness and small size makes them less competitive against centrally located migrant crews.

Emerging Institutions for Community Forestry in Northern California

So what mechanisms, policies and institutional arrangements for community forestry are being attempted?

The government is listening – or trying to listen

Recent government mandates to include communities more in forest management have helped boost community forestry in California. The Resources Agency of California formed the Executive Council on Biodiversity in 1992, which comprises high-level officials of all federal and state natural resource agencies, as well as some county representatives for the purpose of preserving biodiversity and avoiding crises resulting from the listing of endangered species. Their goal was both to enhance inter-agency cooperation and to promote local input in resource management decision-making. In addition to providing a forum at which community members could address high level officials, the Council fostered the formation of local bioregional groups throughout California.

The federal government has also turned its ear towards forest communities. As a result, the Northwest Forest Plan for federal lands in the territory of the endangered spotted owl has several components that work to promote community forestry. The US President Clinton set the tone for enhanced community involvement when he invited forest workers and local activists as well as big industry, environmentalists and academics to the 'Forest Summit' held in April 1992. In response to timber industry pleas on behalf of forest communities, President Clinton compensated for reductions in timber harvests with funds for economic revitalisation that went to local communities – not big timber interests. In preparing community plans necessary to qualify for economic revitalisation funds, some communities worked together to analyse past resource exploitation and future resource-based opportunities, thereby laying the social and intellectual groundwork to pursue community forestry.

The Northwest Forest Plan itself calls for more community participation, particularly in the 'adaptive management areas' designated in part to assist struggling timber-dependent areas. Both agency personnel and community members see adaptive management areas as places where local communities should have greater input, and activities should have greater benefits for communities than in other national forest areas. Thus adaptive management areas are important because they provide a potential land base for community forest management. However, even for adaptive management areas, there are no clear institutional arrangements for community input.

Stronger voices

Community voices have become stronger through the formation of ‘partnerships’, ‘bioregional groups’, or ‘watershed groups’. These are groups where local residents – be they environmentalists, industry representatives, teachers, business owners, agency personnel or retired people – come together to discuss and discover their common concerns in local forest management. When these groups speak on forestry issues, the Forest Service and other agencies listen, because their views represent the agreement reached among diverse local interests. They are defining a ‘community voice’ which is distinct from the voices of competing interest groups. With agency mandates to respond to community concerns, these groups are growing in influence and are bringing community issues to national attention.

Although agencies are willing to work with community-based groups, there are still no institutional mechanisms that allow them to do so. In fact, the Federal Advisory Committee Act prohibits federal officials from consulting community-based groups about management decisions. This is intended to prevent interest groups from influencing the decisions of any federal agency. Congress can designate an official advisory committee by appointing specific people who represent the different interests concerned, e.g. timber, environment, fisheries, grazing, county government, etc. The Provincial Advisory Committees, which were set up to provide diverse local input to the Pacific Northwest forest plan, are examples of such FACA-approved committees. However, the community voice is lost in these formalised fora. While participants may come from forest communities, each one is selected to represent a specific interest group identified at the national level – not to represent the common ground among these interests found at the local level. Thus members feel they should speak for their interest group, not for the community. Also, these PACs span several counties and include many communities. They may appear ‘local’ when viewed from Washington DC, but they lack the social interdependence and understanding developed in community groups.

The Trinity Bioregion Group (TBRG) is an example of the promise and problems of these partnership groups. TBRG was formed in 1993 with the help of a social scientist contracted by the Resources Agency of the state of California who had international experience in community organising and development (Jerry Moles). It began as a small group of Trinity County residents who represented either timber or environmental interests – adversaries who had never previously met together. It grew into a large community forum that sought common ground amongst

participants and improved communication with the Forest Service and other natural resource agencies. The group tried to provide direction to the Forest Service on how they could implement ecosystem management in a way that would meet community goals. Through painstaking group processes, TBRG worked out a proposal for specific projects and drafted a forest management policy that all could agree on.

While local Forest Service personnel were supportive of TBRG, and the Washington office voiced support for the idea of community partnerships, there was no real role for community input in Forest Service decision-making. Consequently, few of TBRG's specific requests were implemented, although the ideas that TBRG and other partnerships promote have gained increasing acceptance. Over time, TBRG's membership has dwindled for several reasons – including frustration at their inability to have real influence, the relative success of returning to interest group politics, and the difficulties of resolving internal conflicts. However, skills developed and efforts begun through TBRG are continuing to grow and bear fruit. In addition, TBRG representatives are joining with other partnership groups in the region to present the community voice to powerful national level interest groups and officials.

Better access

The new government mandate to conduct Ecosystem Management is changing the type of work conducted in the woods. Communities would also like to see changes in how that work is done. Specifically, they would like local people to have more opportunities to work as stewards of the land, rather than as resource extractors for the benefit of corporations. There is widespread support for some form of local stewardship, not only because it would increase benefits to local communities, but also because it should result in better management and healthier forests. The goal really is 'better' access, not just increased access.

In order to overcome the legal and bureaucratic barriers to local access, some communities are trying to change the laws that constrain government contracting and timber sales. Groups in Hayfork, Flathead, Montana and Quincy, California have each drafted federal legislation that would allow pilot programmes for community-based stewardship contracting on federal forest lands. These proposals were developed locally in consultation with pro-timber and pro-environmental residents. In general, they would allow for local contractors to do much of the integrated treatment for a given forest area as prescribed by ecosystem management

(including maintenance as well as extraction) with monitoring to ensure that the desired conditions are achieved. While the concept of community stewardship has been discussed in some circles for years, the idea of actually implementing such a programme is revolutionary to the Forest Service. Although these legislative proposals are unlikely to pass Congress, they have encouraged some innovative Forest Service officials to take a hard look at how some stewardship provisions can be implemented under existing laws.

Local stewardship can potentially improve ecosystem health by drawing on local knowledge of specific sites, increasing the effectiveness of limited dollars, and linking the workers more closely to the desired outcomes. An example of the inefficiency of the current system is the service contract work intended to restore forests after fires or logging. Service work is offered in discrete short term packages – usually lasting a few weeks – with separate contracts for different jobs on the same site even in the same year. For example, on one site, one crew will pile brush after a logging job, another crew will burn it. Next year a different contractor will plant trees and later a fourth will add plastic seedling protectors. In later years, a fifth contractor will measure seedling survival, a sixth crew will replant, and a seventh will attend to seedling protectors. Each job must be conducted within a short window of time and inspected by the Forest Service. None of the work crews are ultimately responsible for the successful regeneration of the site. A stewardship contract could make one local contractor responsible for all of these stages, as well as the logging and road work. It would allow the contractor to spread the work more evenly over the year and to conduct it in a way that made sense both economically and ecologically. Moreover, the Forest Service could get more work done for less money if they had fewer contracts to prepare, bid, and administer.

Beyond Access: training, processing, and marketing

People are working on many of the other elements necessary for successful community-based forestry in the United States. One of these elements is preparing the local workforce to carry out ecosystem management as stewards of the forest. Ecosystem management, with its emphasis on the thinning of potential fuel (for fire control), restoration and forest health treatments, requires a different combination of skills and equipment than the timber sales of the past. One way to make forest communities competitive in bidding for stewardship-like contracts is to provide local residents with training that certifies their ability to conduct such work with an

understanding of ecosystem functions. A retraining programme for displaced timber workers and long-term unemployed has been developed by Lynn Jungwirth and Watershed Research and Training Center staff. It combines real work in the woods for a family wage with college-accredited field classes in useful subject areas such as aerial photo-interpretation and aquatic ecosystems. The most difficult part of the programme was persuading government agencies to 'buy into' this unconventional kind of worker retraining. Now the Hayfork model is being implemented with government support throughout Northern California and Oregon.

Local processing of a variety of forest products needs to be developed. Currently, most whole logs leave Hayfork and Trinity County to be milled and manufactured elsewhere. Local processing – even if only at the level of a merchandising yard where logs could be sorted according to value before leaving the County – would increase the value returned to the community, and potentially the forest. Value-added activities are difficult to develop in small towns with little capital that are distant from urban markets. Several organisations in Northern California have looked into low cost technologies and niche markets that could help communities gain additional value for locally produced forest products of all kinds. Some groups, such as the Rogue Institute for Ecology and Economy in Oregon and the Institute for Sustainable Forestry in California, are working on green certification, which should help products receive a premium price in the market place while promoting sustainable forestry practices on the ground.

Community Forestry in California: early moves towards putting the pieces in place

While many of the processes have been set in motion, community forestry in Northern California is still a concept rather than a common practice. The barriers to its implementation are largely institutional, and institutions are often slow to change. Many pieces, however, are already in place. As discussed, government agencies are seeking increased community participation, adaptive management areas may be available to serve as land bases, some local fora exist to discuss and reach consensus on forestry issues, innovative ways to allow for local stewardship are being explored, the workforce is being prepared, and local NGOs continue to work out specific obstacles to agency and community involvement.

The activities of the Communities Committee of the Seventh American Forest Congress are evidence of how far these grassroots efforts have gone. This committee, formed in late 1995, has been the first national-level effort of such stature to promote community forestry. Its mission statement includes as goals,

‘... to promote ... an increasing stewardship role of local communities in the maintenance and restoration of ecosystem integrity and biodiversity’

and,

‘participation by ethnically and socially diverse members of urban and rural communities in decision-making and sharing benefits of forests’.

Several committee members have extensive experience with community forestry abroad. After the Forest Congress, which culminated in a four day meeting of nearly 2,000 participants in Washington DC in February 1996, the Communities Committee has been the most active of the Congress committees. Its membership has grown to over 100 people from forest communities, universities, environmental groups, government agencies and the timber industry nationwide.

If the Communities Committee is a sign of how far community forestry has come in America, the common property conference held in June of 1996 showed how much further it has to go. This year the annual meeting of the International Association for the Study of Common Property was held in Berkeley, California, which made it possible for many proponents of community forestry in California and Oregon to attend. With the theme ‘Voices from the Commons’, there was an emphasis on bringing practitioners of common property management to the meeting from around the world (made possible by the funding and staff of the Ford Foundation). As a result, there was an amazing concentration of people from 51 countries who had worked on common property resource issues in many capacities – as researchers, teachers, NGO leaders, government officials, economic development specialists, foresters, fishery personnel, community organisers and field workers. Most of the people mentioned in this article and several members of the Communities Committee participated in the panels and discussion sessions at the conference. This conference was remarkable not only for bringing academics and practitioners together around a single theme, but also for bringing practitioners from the North together with practitioners from the South. Participants from Northern California were impressed with community forestry models from the South. A report about the conference in a local newsletter stated,

‘Interestingly enough, the issues prominent in Europe and many developing countries are very similar to those we face in Northern

California....The work that has already been done internationally can provide good models for us as we begin developing new stewardship approaches to public lands. The overall perspective internationally was that the United States and Canada are just beginning to move out of the more 'primitive' industrial forestry model into a more sophisticated community-based ecosystem approach.' (Jungwirth and Danks 1996).

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