

Colville Forest Service Resource Advisory Committee and Title III Projects Case Study

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Introduction

This study of the Colville Resource Advisory Committee and three Northeastern Washington county “Title III” expenditures is part of a larger study of Public Law 106-393, the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act. Since the early twentieth century, states and communities throughout the U. S. have received funds through the sharing of receipts from revenue-producing activities on the Forest Service’s national forests and the Bureau of Land Management-administered Oregon and California (O & C) lands. In 2000, following many years of declining timber harvests—the primary revenue producer on much of this land—Congress passed P. L.106-393 to restore and stabilize county revenue payments from both national forests and O & C lands. The legislation was also to replace the “safety net” county payments in the area of the Northwest Forest Plan.

The Secure Rural School and Community Self Determination Act is novel legislation for two reasons: 1) it standardizes road and schools payments for six years; and 2) perhaps most unique, it pays for something other than roads and schools (which virtually all of the previous “receipt payments” were used for) through potentially innovative mechanisms. The legislation combines the creation of employment opportunities and maintenance of existing infrastructure with the enhancement and restoration of forest ecosystems and watersheds. The legislation also calls for strengthening cooperative relationships between local people that use and care for the land and the agencies responsible for it, and it establishes mechanisms and money for these groups to do so. Direct citizen involvement is achieved through the establishment of Resource Advisory Committees (RACs), and involving local government in project identification and recommendation. Title II establishes new roles for local stakeholders through the creation of RACs that recommend

projects to fund. Title III in the legislation requires recommendations from county officials.

The unique aspects of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination legislation offer important opportunities for community involvement—but only if systematic monitoring and assessment are undertaken. Whether it represents a model for the future or not, implementation of the legislation and Title II and Title III projects needs to be examined to determine if funded projects are innovative, achieve desired outcomes, and are genuinely successful.

With support from the U. S. Department of Agriculture, the Forest Service Research, the U.S. Department of Interior, and the Bureau of Land Management, Sierra Institute (formerly Forest Community Research) is evaluating Title II and Title III of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act. The Sierra Institute is assessing Title II and III projects and their outcomes in 16 cases across the country. In addition to examining specific project outcomes, Sierra Institute is examining if and under what conditions stakeholder collaboration, as structured in the RAC process, leads to innovative approaches that satisfy both social and resource management objectives. Sierra Institute is also evaluating the institutional mechanisms established to implement P.L. 106-393. A fundamental research issue is understanding how effective these mechanisms are for implementing P. L. 106-393, as well as how they might be improved. This assessment will provide valuable information that can enhance the effectiveness of the ongoing implementation of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination legislation and will contribute to the discussion of its reauthorization. Results of this assessment may also be used to inform broader policy discussions concerning community-based natural resources management approaches, such as the National Fire Plan.

Background

The Colville RAC in northeastern Washington State is composed primarily of representatives from the lands of the Colville National Forest, the Colville, Spokane, and Kalispell Indian reservations, and surrounding communities. From west to east the counties involved are Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille. The area is bounded by Canada to the north, the state of Idaho to the east, Okanogan County to the west and Lincoln and Spokane Counties to the south, and covers 6,068 square miles (just over nine percent of Washington's total land area).

The U. S. Forest Service owns much of the land in the three counties, with Ferry and Pend Orielle counties consisting of 70% and 85% federal land, respectively. Considerable parts of the southern portions of Ferry and Stevens counties are parts of the Colville and Spokane Indian reservations.

Population Changes

Population growth in the three counties was significantly higher than the statewide average during the 1970-2000 time period. The population of the three counties grew from 27,085 to 59,058, a 118% increase. In comparison, Washington State,

as a whole, grew about 73% in this period. Stevens County, with a 2000 population of 40,066 grew by 130%. Pend Oreille County grew by 95% to a 2000 population of 11,732. Ferry County, the least populated of the three, grew by 99% to a 2000 population of 7,260. All three counties have continued to grow. In 2004, Stevens and Pend Oreille Counties exceeded statewide population growth rates, and Ferry County was only slightly below the average. The southern end of Stevens County, in particular, is growing because of its proximity to the Spokane metropolitan area.

Economy

While this three-county region is not as distressed as many others we have reviewed for this study, neither is it thriving compared the statewide economy. The key economic indicators of unemployment rates, per capita income, and workforce change are detailed in the following tables.

The largest employers in Pend Oreille County, which range in number of employees from 130 at the mine to nearly 300 at the hospital, are the Newport Community Hospital, the Ponderay Newsprint

Table 1. Unemployment, Per Capita Income, and Workforce Change

Year	County			
	Pend Orielle	Ferry	Stevens	Washington
1990	13.9%	11.5%	8.2%	4.9%
2000	9.6%	13.7%	9.5%	5.2%
2003	10.4%	12.5%	8.0%	7.5%
Per Capita Income				
1990	\$12,923	\$12,578	\$12,978	\$25,985
2000	\$20,743	\$15,019	\$18,281	\$33,464
2003	\$22,009	\$18,955	\$21,089	\$33,254
Workforce Change				
1995-2000	+13%	-7%	+7%	+16%

Company, the Kalispell Tribe, TeckConimco Mines, and the school district and county government. The largest employers in Stevens County are three wood products companies (Boise Cascade, Stimson, & Vaagen Bros.), Hearth & Home Technologies, which makes wood & pellet stoves, Wal-Mart, the school district, the county, and the Forest Service (Colville N.F). These employers have workforces ranging from nearly 400 at Boise to 130 at Vaagan Bros. The largest employers in Ferry County, which number from 117 at the county to 95 at Columbia Cedar are Ferry County, the Kinross gold mine, and Columbia Cedar.

This region has not seen the dramatic and sometimes disastrous decline in the forest products industry that other regions and counties experienced throughout the 1990s and beyond. There are five operating mills in Stevens County and a large

newsprint plant and one sawmill in Pend Oreille County. Ferry County has just one sawmill left after the closure of the Vaagen Bros. mill in Republic, Washington in 2001. There has been a significant decline in timber harvest from federal lands, but not as great as elsewhere. Timber harvest from the Colville National Forest went from a high of 135.3 mmbf in 1989 to a low of 30.4 mmbf in 2003, a 77.5 percent decline. However, federal timber harvest levels have fluctuated on the Colville National Forest since 1989, with harvests as high as 43.4 mmbf as recently as 2001. These harvest levels can be favorably compared to the over 90% federal timber harvest declines experienced by many Pacific Northwest national forests and BLM districts. While the reductions have been significant, the area has avoided the collapse of the timber industry. This has helped to preserve the local economy.

Title III Overview and County Elections for Titles II and III

The most notable fact about any overview of Title III in these counties is that two of them no longer have a Title III program and Ferry County is considering discontinuing its Title III allocations. All three counties began with Title III allocations, but that has changed over the four years of the program. Table 2 shows Title II and Title III allocations by the three counties since the beginning of the Act.

The Stevens and Pend Orielle County Commissioners ceased making Title III allocations because of the impact of Title III funds on the county's federal Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) funds. Because Title III money is considered to be county, rather than federal, money it affects how much a county receives in PILT funds from the federal government. These commissioners stated that Title III funding directly reduced their PILT funds, so they made a decision to put all of their P.L. 106-393 funds into Title II, which is considered federal funding and does not have the same impact on PILT. Based on interviews with two Ferry County Commissioners, it is apparent that Ferry County is

also headed in this direction. The county has reduced its Title III allocations in each of the last two years and both commissioners said they would consider eliminating Title III in FY 2006.

This PILT impact may be a growing concern among Washington counties. In FY 2003, six of the 26 Washington counties receiving P.L. 106-393 funds put all of their funds into Title II; in FY 2004, this was up to eight counties; and in FY 2005, the number of Washington counties opting out of Title III is nine.

Another factor in the elimination of Title III funding in Pend Orielle and Stevens Counties is that the commissioners in those counties believe the RAC is functioning well and that it will fund projects of priority to their county governments. As one commissioner put it, "As long as county projects are funded by the RAC and Title II dollars, there is no reason to put our funds into Title III." It is clear that Ferry County now shares this view, since it has joined the RAC and increased its Title II allocation in FY 2005.

Table 2. County Title II and Title III Allocations 2002-2005

Ferry County		
Fiscal Year	Title II	Title III
2002	0	\$182,725
2003	0	\$184,187
2004	\$55,919	\$83,879
2005	\$113,292	\$75,528
Pend Oreille County		
2002	\$168,999	\$56,333
2003	\$227,134	0
2004	\$229,860	0
2005	\$232,848	0
Stevens County		
2002	\$60,273	\$25,832
2003	\$60,756	\$26,038
2004	\$87,835	0
2005	\$88,977	0

Title III Projects

Each county has a somewhat different history with Title III projects. Ferry County has had four years of Title III projects, although the number and funding for those projects has decreased in each of the last two years. Pend Oreille County only had a Title III program during the first year of this six-year Act, and Stevens County only for the first two years.

Ferry County

Ferry County has had a Title III program in the first four years of the Act. In fact, for the first two years, Ferry County allocated all eligible P.L. 106-393 funds to Title III. That changed after the first two years, with 60% of the P.L. 106-393 funds going to Title III in FY 2004, and then 40% of the funds going to Title III in FY 2005. But interestingly, Ferry County, instead of taking 20%, or all eligible P.L. 106-393 funds, reduced this total to 15%, thereby reducing the amount of funds

available for Title II and Title III. This is discussed further below.

In order to receive applications for Title III projects, Ferry County advertises in the local newspaper in June that it is accepting project applications, with a July 15 deadline for project submission. The Commissioners review the projects, tentatively approve them, and put them out for a 45-day public comment period. A public hearing where any interested parties may testify is held in early September, when the counties usually know how much Title III funding is available. At this hearing, the Commissioners determine which projects will receive funds for that fiscal year.

All of the Ferry County Title III projects fall into the categories of Search & Rescue, Forest Related Education, or Fire Prevention and County Planning. Ferry County does not have a large number of Title III projects. In FY 2002, six projects were proposed to the commissioners and four were approved

for a total expenditure of \$182,000. In FY 2003, seven projects were proposed and all seven were approved. However, the award for Ferry County Search & Rescue was for only \$5,000 (for training) of the \$120,000 requested. The total expenditure for FY 2003 was \$161,150. In FY 2004, four projects were proposed and all four approved, but not all for the full amounts. The total FY 2004 expenditure was \$62,000. In FY 2005, Ferry County approved three Title III projects with one other—a \$1,500 request from the Arts Council is on hold pending more information. The total amount awarded for FY 2005 is \$89,000. Ferry County has taken 11.3% of the Title III allocation for county administrative fees. Through FY 2004, this has amounted to almost \$51,000.

Most of Ferry County's Title III projects are relatively small. One of the three largest projects (\$338,000) is the acquisition of property for and construction of the Curlew Fire and Ambulance Facility. Of that amount, \$120,000 was Title III money, \$100,000 in cash came from Fire District #14, and \$30,000 from an in-kind contribution. Another \$35,000 came in the form of an in-kind donation of land. The North Ferry Enterprise Committee (USDA) added a \$50,000 cash contribution to the project. This is an important project for the north end of Ferry County providing year-round fire and ambulance service to approximately 5,000 people and lands involving state, federal, county, tribal, and private ownerships. This project has been planned for some time with Fire District #14 and Ferry County working cooperatively to secure the land for this facility.

A second large project is a \$448,000, multi-year project to construct a training facility for Joint Ferry/Stevens FPD. This project received \$75,000 in Title III funds in FY 2003 and another \$20,000 in Title III funds in FY2004. The applicant provided \$112,324 in cash and in-kind contributions. Another \$25,000 came from the North Ferry Enterprise Community and \$11,504 from FEMA. This is a very rural area with volunteer fire departments from within each county serving the emergency needs of the area. This project will

result in increased opportunities for quality training of JFPD personnel by constructing a building to house classrooms, district offices, kitchen and bathroom facilities, and an adjacent building for hands-on training of firefighters, search and rescue, and emergency medical services personnel. The project has the enthusiastic support of four fire districts and both the Ferry and Stevens County Sheriffs.

Another Title III project is the Ferry County Forest-Watershed Fisheries Education Program sponsored by the Ferry County WSU Cooperative Extension program. This project has been funded for \$48,640 in FY 2004 and another \$50,387 in FY 2005. It is a multi-year project with another \$48,640 request planned for FY 2006. This Ferry County 4-H Youth education project will provide for the development of forest-related education opportunities offered in out-of-school settings. After school programs and day camps will focus on forestry, watersheds and fisheries, forest based recreation, and water quality, along with developing life skills. Curlew Lake Fish Pens will be utilized to emphasize the forest-watershed-water quality connection and to demonstrate their benefit to local recreation activities and how a healthy forest watershed is linked to the local economy. Programs will be conducted throughout Ferry County with a focus on Curlew Lake and its watershed area. The applicant will also contribute \$20,150 in space, supervision, support, and other in-kind services to the project.

Pend Oreille County

Pend Oreille County only had a Title III program the first year of P.L. 106-393. In that year, the county allocated \$56,333, or 25%, of its total allocation, for Titles II and III. After the first year, the county stopped allocating funds to Title III. This is primarily due to the impact of a reduction in PILT payments to the county as a result of its Title III allocation. The commissioners also stated that the success of the RAC was an important factor in Pend Oreille County's decision to allocate all of its funds to Title II.

The explanation of how Pend Oreille County used its Title III funds from FY 2002, the one year in which they had a Title III program, is confusing. It appears that nearly all of these funds were allocated administratively over four years according to the information provided by the Pend Oreille County Clerk's office. Title III funds were spent on the following:

- \$6,226 Snowmobile acquisitions for Search and Rescue
- \$5,221 Computers for county commissioners
- \$916 Computers for county extension office
- \$4,999 Fire Prevention Week, wages, benefits, supplies, and travel
- \$22,603 Salary and benefits for two extension office employees, 2002-04
- \$7,064 Indirect cost to the county
- \$9,300 Amount of Title III holdover funds budget for 2005

With the addition of a few small miscellaneous items, these expenditures total the initial \$56,333 allocated to Title III by Pend Oreille County in 2002. Title III monies are at the discretion of the county commissioners and are not subject to any formal application or solicitation process. This kind of administrative allocation is inconsistent with the idea of the legislation in two ways: the allocations are not based on "project" applications and a portion of the funds stretch or go beyond the definition of Title III purposes.

Stevens County

Stevens County had a Title III program for the first two years of the Act. In FY 2002, Stevens County allocated \$25,832, 6% of its total Title II and III allocations. In FY 2003 Stevens County allocated \$26,038 to Title III. After that, all eligible funds have been allocated to Title II. As in Pend Oreille County, the reasons cited by Stevens County Commissioners for this decision included the negative impact of

having a Title III program on PILT payments and a general feeling that the RAC was operating well and was responsive to the needs of Stevens County.

In the two years Stevens County had a Title III program, it funded only three distinct multi-year projects. Information about each of these projects follows.

The Youth Forestry and Natural Resources Education Program was funded for \$37,602 between FY 2003 and FY 2004. Sponsored by the WSU Cooperative Extension Program of Stevens County, the program provides forestry and natural resources education to the youth of Stevens County. The program also supports and provides a structured learning environment to bolster the natural resources programs in area High Schools and 4-H Programs by teaching forestry classes in school and after school settings.

Search & Rescue on Federal Lands and Water was funded for \$13,800 between May 28, 2002 and Jan. 26, 2004. Tri-County Divers sponsored this project, and funds were to be used for the acquisition of equipment used in water rescue. These materials helped to equip trained volunteer search and rescue units for activities in waters associated with federal lands. An additional \$800 was allocated in 2003 for the same project.

The Water Festival Committee received \$490 to put on the Lake Roosevelt Water Festival, a water resources workshop for fourth grade students held on the shores of Lake Roosevelt. Seven hundred students attend the workshop and learn about historic, cultural, and natural resources.

These three projects have a total budget of \$52,714, which includes a \$22 allocation from FY 2003.¹

The Stevens County Title III experience provides an example of how misinformation, incorrect interpretation of the law, or just confusion can determine the outcome of a project strongly supported by the County. County Commissioners stated that they wanted to fund a relatively large search and rescue program for Lake Washington with a Title III allocation. However, their legal counsel told

¹ This number is based on the county totals that differ slightly from the Forest Service reported Title III allocations.

them that this was not permitted under P.L. 106-393 rules because it did not benefit federal land, the lake obviously being water, not land. This is a rather narrow interpretation of the statute, in that most feel that the intent was to benefit federal assets, not just the land itself. Lake Roosevelt is a federal lake that was created by the construction of Grand Coulee Dam.

This again points out the difficulty a county has in determining the proper use of Title III funds.

Since P.L. 106-393 provides no direct oversight authority for Title III funds, counties have no one to ask about their proper use. Counties ask the Forest Service for direction, but are told by the Forest Service that they have no authority involving Title III funds and any advice given would be only an opinion. This is a problem for counties, not just in the area of county inquiries, but in the area of monitoring how the counties use Title III funds.

Title II Projects

Evidence of the RAC's fluctuating budget over its four years of existence can be seen in Table 2.

The RAC has enjoyed increased funding in each of its four years. This is due to Ferry County deciding to join the RAC in FY 2004 and decreasing its Title III allocation in both FY 2004 and 2005. It is also due to Pend Oreille and Stevens Counties eliminating any allocation for Title III starting in FY 2004. The increased RAC budget further reflects a growing acceptance and approval of the RAC by the commissioners in all three counties.

Project Solicitation and Applications

Applications for RAC funded projects must go through the following process. In a typical year, announcements for a fiscal year's projects

are made around February 11 and a completed project application must be submitted to the Forest Service one month later. On or near April 4, the project applications are forwarded to the counties for their recommendations. As indicated to us by the Forest Supervisor and the RAC Coordinator, the Colville National Forest considers the counties' recommendations important. In the beginning of May, the County makes its recommendations on the proposed projects. Around the end of May, the proposed projects are mailed to the RAC members for their review. The first RAC meeting to consider that fiscal year's projects is at the end of June. A second meeting is held to decide on projects about one month later. If it is needed, a third meeting is scheduled in the first half of August for the RAC to complete its work.

TABLE 3. Colville RAC Title II Funding

County	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	FY 2005
Ferry	0	0	\$55,919	\$113,292
Pend Oreille	\$168,999	\$227,134	\$229,860	\$232,848
Stevens	\$60,273	\$60,756	\$87,835	\$88,977
Totals	\$229,272	\$287,890	\$373,614	\$435,117
Four Year Total = \$1,325,893				

Approved Projects

Over the four years of its operation, the RAC has funded 47 projects. Of these, nine are multi-year projects and two are multi-county. This results in a total of 38 distinct projects. The nine multi-year projects were each submitted to the RAC as one project with the understanding that funding would occur over more than one year. One project has received funding in all four years, and others for two- or three-year periods. Of these 47 projects, 29, or 62%, are in Pend Oreille, 13, or 28%, are in Stevens County, and five, or about 10%, are in Ferry County. Pend Oreille County has the most projects because it has the most Title II money of the three RAC counties—currently over 50% of the money, with a higher percentage in the first two years because only two counties were participating in the RAC. Ferry County has just five projects because it only joined the RAC in FY 2004. However, it has significantly increased its allocation to Title II in FY 2005, so there will be more Ferry County projects in subsequent years.

The three counties operated 17 of the 47 projects funded by the RAC, including seven projects jointly operated for the Noxious Weed Control Boards in Pend Oreille and Stevens Counties. The Forest Service operated eleven projects, five of which are classified as watershed restoration, and four of which are classified as recreation. Other project operators were smaller, generally private entities, such as the Community Forestry Coalition, the Curlew Lake Association, and the Metaline Rod and Gun Club.

Project Categorization

The projects fall into a number of identifiable categories such as watershed restoration, noxious weed control, fuels management/wildfire protection, and road & trail improvements. This categorization can be difficult, in that a project often can reasonably be listed in more than one category. The RAC projects fall into the following main categories, with the number and amounts for each category reflected in the table.

Table 4. Projects Categories

Project Category	Number	Dollars
Watershed Restoration	11 projects	\$367,864
Noxious Weed Control	8 projects	314,594
Road Maintenance & Repair	7 projects	418,550
Recreation	4 projects	37,530
Fuels Management	4 projects	52,764
Other:	2 projects	25,600
NEPA costs & Colville		
Stewardship Project		
	Total	\$1,216,902

This breakdown indicates that the Colville RAC spread the funding roughly evenly among the three major categories of watershed restoration, noxious weed control, and road maintenance and repair.

RAC Projects

All of the Colville RAC projects are relatively small. Three multi-year projects, with multi-year allocations, exceed \$100,000. These projects are the Sicily Road project, funded in FY 2003 and FY 2004 for \$142,500 to improve access and parking at a recreation trailhead; a three-year project funded in the amount of \$136,354 to provide a salary for a biocontrol manager to work with local landowners to control noxious weeds; and the four-year Middle Fork of the Calispell project that has received four separate allocations totaling \$109,064 to do meadow restoration, including obliteration of ORV trails, treatment of noxious weeds, and stream bank stabilization. All three of these projects are in Pend Oreille County, and all are operated directly by the county or one of its agencies such as the Pend Oreille County Noxious Weed Control Board.

In addition to the three projects mentioned above, there are two Colville RAC projects that have some noteworthy aspects to them. The first such project is the Colville Stewardship project. This project allocates \$5,000 to a private group, the Colville Community Forestry Coalition, for seed money to develop a community coalition to work collaboratively with the Forest Service on wildland/urban interface projects. As indicated in the project description, "this project is a critical element in the program to organize community forestry in the Stevens County areas of the Colville National Forest. This project will form the foundation for creating the mechanism that will allow government, industry, the general public, and the conservation community to work together to develop forest restoration and fuels reduction projects." The Community Forestry Coalition is composed of a wide range and diversity of local organizations including the City

of Colville, Stevens County, the Ferry County Conservation District, Vaagan Brothers Lumber and local logging companies, the Kettle Range Conservation Group, the Lands Council, private forest owners, Washington State University Extension Service, the North Ski Area, the Tri-County Economic Development Council, and the Colville National Forest.

Funding to launch a community-based group such as this to work with a national forest on wild-fire issues is unique. There are examples in other areas of local collaborative groups influencing and helping to form RACs by their collective experience in working together, but this is the first project that funds actual partnering work by a local collaborative organization. Further, this effort has resulted in the Community Forestry Coalition, after its formation and startup funding, submitting another RAC project in FY 2005 for \$12,250 for the Roundtop Wildland/Urban Interface stewardship project to develop a community fire plan to reduce fire risk near communities in the county by doing stewardship thinning. This project is an excellent example of how the collaborative intent of a RAC has helped create an independent community-based collaborative organization to discuss and implement community forestry goals. The parties are now working on a memorandum of understanding that will govern the relationship between the Coalition and the Forest Service.

A second noteworthy Colville RAC project is the Curlew Lake Fish Net Pen operated by the Curlew Lake Association. This is a \$25,273 project that received \$19,800 from the RAC in FY 2004, and \$5,473 from the applicant. The project will help the Curlew Lake Association complete some maintenance and repair work on existing net pens located at Curlew Lake. The project continues and improves opportunities for raising and releasing trout to access the lower reaches of Trout Creek, Barrett Creek, and the North Fork of the San Poil River. This is a companion project to the \$150,000, multi-year (\$50,000 yearly) Ferry County Title III project, the "Forest, Watersheds and Fisheries Education Project," operated by the

Ferry County Washington State University Extension Service. That project intends to use the Curlew Lake Net Pens to demonstrate forest-watershed-water quality connections, showing how a healthy watershed can both benefit local recreation activities and contribute to the local economy.

While the Curlew Pens is a relatively modest project that is primarily engaged in maintenance and repair activities, it is interesting for two reasons. First, it is a good example of tying together Title II and Title III funds in a manner that makes good use of the purposes intended in each title. Here RAC funds provide for watershed improvements, which enhance recreational activities, and Title III funds provide support for forest and watershed health education that will demonstrate the importance and effectiveness of the Title II project. In this way, and with the support of contributions from the Curlew Lake Association, the Title II and Title III funds have helped to leverage each other, along with leveraging project impact.

The second reason this project is interesting is due to the internal debate within the Forest Service about the use of Title II, or “federal” funds. The

financial manager of the Colville National Forest argued that this project could not be funded with Title II funds because it was not on Forest Service land, and they had not funded a project on private land before. The Forest Service RAC coordinators argued that it could be funded because it benefited Forest Service land. These arguments played out in a number of ways, including the suggestion that use of these funds was permissible under the Wyden Amendment, which permits federal expenditures for watershed improvements outside of federal lands if such improvements benefit federal lands, but not under P.L. 106-393. In the final analysis, the Colville National Forest decided that this project was of benefit to Forest Service land and that the RAC could fund it.

This issue of what is an appropriate use of federal funds is a continuing one for the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management as they implement P.L. 106-393. What constitutes a benefit to federal lands will always be open to interpretation, and will be a source of concern to RACs, and local national forest and BLM districts as they determine if a particular project meets the proper criteria.

RAC Formation and Composition

Like most Western RACs, the Colville RAC was formed in late 2001. Interested individuals were encouraged to submit applications for membership. Notice was given by paid advertisements and news releases to the local papers in the three counties. There were no organized group solicitations for membership. None of the counties pushed or recommended individuals for RAC membership. The Forest Supervisor was consulted about RAC membership, particularly when it came to filling statutorily required categories.

The Colville RAC consists of 15 voting members from the three counties. A majority, (eight), are from Stevens County. Six members are from Ferry County. Currently, Pend Oreille County has only one member on the RAC. It had more initially, but people resigned, were not re-appointed, or as in the

case of a county commissioner, were not re-elected. This apparent disparity in membership does not seem to be an issue with anyone from Pend Oreille County. Of the RAC’s 15 members, four are newly appointed as of November 2004 and have yet to attend a RAC meeting.

The Colville RAC appears to generally meet the statutory categories of each of the three groups. Both timber and environmental interests are adequately and ably represented. There are three county commissioners on the RAC, although one is on the RAC as the representative of the Colville Indian Tribe. There is no organized labor representative, nor anyone from wild horse and burro interests, and those positions have been filled by other RAC members. It is not clear if the appointing authorities made a significant attempt to properly fill these particular

slots. Apparently, they were difficult to fill given the population of the three counties, so the positions went to others. This underlines a general problem of meeting all the statutory categories in all geographical circumstances. There really may not be an organized labor representative in a particular area. Can the RAC disregard these categories if no one fills them, or do they need to continue searching for people to represent organized labor, wild horse/burro, etc? There is no clear answer to this question and different RACs have come up with different solutions, but there is no known exception under the Act if all categories can't be filled.

The Colville RAC has had only one chair throughout its existence. That chair is John Eminger, the operator of the local ski area and lodge near Chewelah. Eminger appears to be very well respected by all participants, including other RAC members, the Forest Service, and commissioners from all three counties. Eminger is apparently quite adept at pushing the RAC to reach consensus and getting the members to work together cooperatively. When Eminger has considered stepping down as chair in order to give someone else a chance to be RAC chair, the participants have prevailed upon him to remain. A number of interviewees stated that they felt Eminger's chairmanship was one of the main reasons for the success of this RAC.

RAC Operation

The Colville RAC meets two or three times yearly at the community college in Colville. Meetings are planned for June and July to review projects, with an August meeting planned if project reviews are not completed in the first two meetings. Projects are sent to RAC members three weeks in advance of the first meeting for their review. Prior to RAC review, projects are reviewed by the Forest Service and the Ferry, Pend Oreille, and Stevens County commissioners. In Stevens County, the projects are also reviewed by a Public Lands Advisory Committee set up by the county, consisting of local timber, environmental, and public representatives who are involved in public lands issues. The Forest Service and the counties provide recommendations

on the projects. However, the RAC is free to set its own priorities. Each of the three statutory groups within the RAC looks at the projects and makes recommendations at the RAC meeting. There is regularly a consensus among the three groups. It is not uncommon, as a compromise, for the RAC to fund a project at a lesser amount than has been requested. Title II funds from a county are allocated to projects in that county only. There are, however, some multi-county projects, such as the quad-county bio-control project that focused on ecological control of noxious weeds and information to local residents. This project was funded through the Stevens County allocation in FY 2005 and the Ferry County allocation in FY 2005 for \$15,000 in each allocation. The RAC encourages representatives of various organizations—such as the Forest Service and county government, Pacific Northwest Trails, and the Community Forestry Coalition—to come to the meetings to discuss projects.

The Colville RAC has never done a field trip, but, last fall, the RAC collaborated with the Forest Service to host a poster session in Colville. Posters and narratives on projects were supplied and project managers were available to answer questions. The general public was invited to attend the session. While unique, the poster session was not judged a complete success. Attendance was low and more community interest was needed. Nevertheless, it was seen as a positive effort at community outreach, and both the RAC and the Forest Service reported that they are committed to trying it again.

All of the RAC members interviewed felt that the RAC was working well. RAC members get along, make their decisions by consensus, and generally feel that theirs is a well functioning RAC. The Forest Service and the County Commissioners in all three counties also shared this positive view. However, this perspective of the RAC has not always been the case. Ferry County did not participate in the RAC in the first two years. It is only in FY 2005 that Ferry County has allocated over half of its funds to Title II.

There are some areas of concern in the operation of the RAC. Some members expressed frustra-

tion that there were not enough “new” projects, and that they are tired of the RAC doing the “same old stuff.” Another RAC member said that it was hard for the RAC to be innovative when one large road project will use nearly all of Stevens County’s Title II allocation for one year.

There is also some concern among RAC members, particularly the environmental representatives, over changes the RAC might see with the addition of new members appointed earlier this year, many coming from a timber industry or recreational use perspective. While the balance of interests set forth in the Act has been maintained, a concern that was expressed is that these new members might be more confrontational and less cooperative than the previous members. These members want the “new” RAC to function as well as the “old” one.

Another area of concern is the small number of projects operated and/or sponsored by non-governmental organizations. It is hoped that as time goes by and the RAC becomes more institutionalized, that more “outside” organizations will seek RAC funding and support.

However, even the RAC members expressing these concerns emphasized how well the RAC operates and how successful its work has been in all three counties.

Public, Agency, and Interest Group Relationship Building

This RAC has done a laudable job of building working relationship across historical divisions between groups. All RAC members interviewed pointed out that all RAC decisions are made by consensus, and that RAC meetings are without rancorous debate. Creation of an organization like the Community Forestry Coalition is a powerful example of the commitment to consensus work in the three-county area, and speaks well for meeting the relationship-building goals of the RAC.

It is also significant that both local environmental and timber interests are represented on the RAC, and each feels that the RAC is working well. These entities also appear to be working well together, although the work of each sometimes continues to be

controversial. For example, the Kettle Range Conservation Organization is not entirely accepted in Ferry County. One County Commissioner mentioned in an interview that he still blamed that organization for the 2001 closure of the local (Vaagen Bros.) lumber mill in Republic. Vaagen Bros. is still a large and respected employer in Colville and Stevens County, and fully accepted in that part of the RAC, but their mill closure remains controversial in the Ferry County part of the RAC. Also, there is some concern about the buy-in to the RAC cooperative process by some national timber companies. Boise Cascade and Stinson Companies operate mills in Stevens County and remain a significant force in the region, but neither one has a representative on the RAC or has joined the Community Forestry Coalition. The same is true of the Ponderay Newsprint Company in Pend Oreille County. Many community leaders hope that the companies will eventually buy-in and participate in these local cooperative efforts. Industry buy-in is important to these three counties because the timber industry remains an important part of their economy, particularly in Stevens County with its five operating mills.

County-RAC-Forest Service Relations

Increasing support for the RAC is shown through the growth of Title II funding, particularly in the two counties allocating no money to Title III in 2003 and 2004. RAC funding has grown from \$229,272 in FY 2002 to \$435,117 in FY 2005. Another reflection of growing support for the RAC is Ferry County joining the RAC in 2003 after allocating all of its funding to Title III in the first two years.

The RAC’s willingness to fund county projects with Title II funds helps cement the relationship between the RAC and the counties and is a further indication of their close cooperation.

The relationship between the RAC and the Forest Service is excellent. The RAC believes that the Forest Service provides strong support and assistance without directing the RAC’s decisions. Both Forest Service RAC coordinators, Diana

Baxter and Amy Dillon, are given high marks by RAC members. While Forest Supervisor Rick Brazell is relatively new, he too was rated highly by all parties. Much of this approval stems from attempts by the Forest Supervisor and CNF management to be accessible and involved in the community. Both the Forest Service and District Rangers attend community meetings and are involved and well known in their respective communities. Since the Colville

National Forest takes no overhead to coordinate the RAC, overhead funds have never become an issue. This is somewhat unusual for a national forest not to receive overhead, but this has been the policy of the CNF. The Forest Service assigns a staff member to assist in coordinating all Title II projects. This facilitates the projects and contributes to their success. It also generates good will for the Forest Service with the RAC about the projects it funds.

Conclusion

The Colville RAC is a successful RAC. Its members function well together and make decisions by consensus. All of the key parties, including the Forest Service, the counties, and interested local organizations, work well together with a minimum of controversy. The RAC has funded a good mix of projects with no one type of project dominating. Most of their projects are relatively standard restoration, road, weed control, and recreation projects. Nearly all of the projects are sponsored and operated by either the Forest Service or one of the three county governments. There are some truly innovative projects that bring parties together in unique ways. The best example of such innovation is the Community Forestry Coalition start-up and subsequent funding of that organization to plan and operate a community fire plan. This community forestry project breaks new ground for a RAC in spawning a broad-based community forestry organization.

The RAC has benefited from a good collaborative leader as its chair. John Emminger has helped the RAC run smoothly and with a high degree of consensus. It is no wonder that the RAC members will not let him step down as their chair.

How the three counties approach Title III reflects well on the success of the RAC. Title III programs in Ferry, Pend Oreille, and Stevens Counties are mainly characterized by a lack of programs. Two of the three counties now allocate all of their P.L. 106-393 funds to Title II and the third county may do so in FY 2006. The original

reason for this was the impact of Title III monies on county PILT funds, but there is ample evidence that all three counties now look favorably on the RAC and its ability to fund “good” projects. Also, the counties can get some of their projects accomplished through the RAC and Title II money. The increased funds and acceptance of the RAC have strengthened the RAC and built upon the citizen involvement process. While there are self-interested reasons for increased county involvement with the RAC, the outcome furthers the intent of Congress to create a new, effective citizen decision-making process.

While this RAC is considered successful by all parties, there are some concerns. One is that there is a need for more “outside” projects from community-based organizations. Too many of the projects are Forest Service or County sponsored. The Forest Service and the RAC need to do more community outreach to draw in more diverse project sponsors and projects.

On a different level is the concern over the use of Title III funds. Pend Oreille County, in particular, presents a confusing picture of its use of Title III funds and some expenditures appear to be questionable. It is difficult for counties to get assistance with Title III questions and concerns, but counties need to err on the side of clear accounting and precise expenditures of Title III funds or they will be open to criticism.

The overall conclusion of this case study is that in the Colville RAC, and in Ferry, Pend Oreille, and

Stevens Counties, P.L. 106-393 is working the way Congress intended. The Forest Service is doing a good job of implementing the Act in the region and all parties should be given high marks for the way the RAC is operating and the projects are benefiting the federal lands and the people in or near those lands.

Interviewees

Ron Bacon, RAC Member, Tribal Representative, Commissioner, Ferry County
Diana Baxter, Forest Service RAC Coordinator, Colville National Forest
Mike Blankenship, RAC Member, Commissioner, Ferry County
Rick Brazell, Forest Supervisor, Colville National Forest
Mitch Brown, Commissioner, Pend Oreille County
Tim Coleman, RAC Member, Kettle Range Conservation, NW Ecosystem Alliance
Amy Dillion, Forest Service Newport District, RAC Coordinator
John Emminger, RAC Chair, Owner/Operator, 49 North Ski Resort
Jenny Foreman, Director, Tri-County Economic Development District
Tony Gado, Commissioner, Stevens County
Christie Graham, Forest Service Budget Director, Colville National Forest
Rene Kubiak, Finance Manager, Tri-County Economic Development District
Russell Larsen, RAC Member, Special Use Permits
Margo Locke, RAC Member, general public
Lloyd McGee, RAC Member, Vaagen Brothers Logging
Shannon Rollins, Deputy County Clerk, Ferry County
Sherrie Schwenke, Forest Service District Ranger, Three Rivers Ranger District
Tom Schuda, Forest Service Biologist
Sharon Sorby, RAC Member, environmental organizations