

APPENDIX II RESEARCH METHODS

This research project is an assessment of the implementation of P.L. 106-393, the Secure Rural School and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000, on public lands managed by the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. The Sierra Institute examined specific Title II and Title III project outcomes, and evaluated the institutional mechanisms established at the federal and county levels to implement P.L. 106-393. The study also assessed if and under what conditions stakeholder collaboration, as structured by the RAC process, leads to innovative approaches that satisfy both social and resource management objectives. A fundamental research objective was understanding how effective these mechanisms were for implementing the legislation.

In order to explore these questions, the Sierra Institute designed an approach combining 16 case studies with a legislative analysis of the origins and development of P.L. 106-393. The Sierra Institute also conducted two ancillary studies. One involved the collection and analysis of statewide data on Title III expenditures for California. The other reviewed how agencies have charged and collected administrative and project overhead costs related to the Title II program.

Advisory Committee and Research Team

At the beginning of the study, the Sierra Institute convened an advisory committee to assist in reviewing the research design and to make recommendations concerning case study selection, study criteria, and research products. The eight committee members come from five states. Most of them have direct responsibility on behalf of one of the federal agencies for some aspect of the secure payments program, or they have first-hand experience in a RAC, or with county deliberations on the implementation of the program. One member of the advisory committee is also a member of the Forest County Payments Committee, established by Congress to review the legislation and mechanisms for payments to counties with federal lands. The advisory committee has participated in the project through six conference calls, one in-person meeting with the research team, detailed review of the draft final report, and on occasion, as direct informants on issues with which they have first hand experience.

A seven-person research team carried out the case study research. The full team met on three occasions to discuss research process, questions, and protocol. Team members worked as pairs during the initial period of case research to standardize field research methods and approaches. Eight of the 16 cases had two researchers involved in the fieldwork. In some cases two team members jointly wrote the final case study report. A subset of the research team met three times to develop the structure and organization of the final report. This subset of three team members was jointly responsible for writing most of the final report.

In addition to the case study research team, other individuals involved in this research include Dr. Hannah Cortner, a recently retired professor from Northern Arizona University's Ecological Restoration Institute, and two Sierra Institute interns. Working with the study's principal investigator, Dr. Cortner led the institutional assessment involving research and analysis of the origins and development of P.L. 106-393. The Sierra Institute interns were responsible for conducting the two ancillary studies on Title III expenditures in California and on agency overhead and administrative expenses.

Case Study Methodology

The community-based assessment uses a multiple case study design to analyze Titles II and III of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act. This approach involves the joint study of a number of cases to understand a particular phenomenon, population, or general condition (Herriott and Firestone 1983, Stake 2000). Yin defines a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (1993:13).

A multiple case study approach allowed the research team to examine a diverse array of projects. This made it possible to address the complexity associated with Titles II and III and their associated projects, and at the same time to examine the relationships between communities, their contextual settings, and Title II and Title III outcomes. This study design consequently allows us to develop a richer and more clearly articulated understanding of rural community outcomes and project and program outcomes than would have been possible using either random sample surveys or a single case study approach.

The researchers working on the 16 case studies in this study spent from one to three weeks in the counties and communities associated with a RAC (or with one forest, in the case of Pennsylvania). The community-based nature of this fieldwork involves extensive, semi-structured interviews with a wide diversity of people, an approach that is characteristic of much of the research conducted by the Sierra Institute, and for which the Institute is well known. This approach to empirical research, while it requires care and skill in the interpretation of data, also generates more integrated and holistic analyses than the commonly used formal survey-based research method. Furthermore, the Sierra Institute routinely shares initial findings in the form of a draft report with interviewees, soliciting their feedback, and incorporating interviewee comments where appropriate as the final report is refined and completed. This practice improves the accuracy of the final product.

Case Selection Process

The research team chose the locations of the case studies with the help of the advisory committee. In choosing the cases, we wanted to make sure that a wide array of outcomes, challenges, and issues associated with RACs and counties would be covered. We did not set out to find successes or failures, but diverse programs, and, to the extent possible, diverse outcomes. We selected case studies, specifically, that would cover a wide range of key variables including the amount of funds available for RAC project recommendations; single versus multiple county participation in the RAC; geographic size and complexity of the area; state and regional diversity; variation in Title II and Title III allocations; stage of RAC development; and extent and diversity of project funding. The Forest Service and BLM databases were used in this process to assist researchers with RAC and project identification. Since receipt payments from the Bureau of Land Management-managed Oregon and California (O&C) lands account for some 25% of the almost two billion dollars spent to date on Titles I, II, and III, three Oregon Resource Advisory Committees that receive Bureau of Land Management receipt payments are included in the study. The remainder of the cases involve U.S. Forest Service national forests and, with the exception of Pennsylvania which had no RAC, Forest Service RACs. The states in which cases were conducted include the eight states receiving the highest P.L. 106-393 payments. The ninth state, Pennsylvania, is ranked number 10 in terms of its full receipt payment. Case studies are in

states where collectively 99% of Title II allocations and 86% of Title III allocations have been made.

Case Study Fieldwork

Researchers spent between 7 and 14 weeks to complete the research, analysis, and writing of each case study. The first step in conducting a case study was to collect information on community and county background and Title II and Title III projects. Researchers gathered background information from the agencies, counties, libraries, and through preliminary phone interviews. Title II and Title III project information was collected from agency websites, the Resource Advisory Committee itself, and relevant county offices. Interviews were set up prior to fieldwork with RAC members, project recipients, county and agency personnel, and other key informants.

Researchers collected comprehensive information on Title II projects for each case study. Where possible, this included quantitative information on the socioeconomic and ecological accomplishments of RAC-recommended Title II projects. In most, but not all cases, researchers also obtained comprehensive information regarding Title III projects. Some case studies of multi-county RACs do not include all Title III projects. Researchers followed a standardized decision-making procedure to determine whether or not to attempt to collect information on all Title III projects. Following this procedure, the preferred approach is to include all Title III projects in the analysis (this is most feasible with single-county RACs). For multi-county RACs, if it is not possible to include all Title III projects in the case study, then a sample of projects within the RAC area were selected or the array and pattern of projects in the participating counties were examined along with a sample of projects. Also, with multi-county RACs, the process of project selection or funding allocation, and contrasting approaches among counties with the RAC, were discussed.

Once in the field, researchers conducted interviews with RAC members, county officials, project leaders, agency leaders—locally and regionally when appropriate—and other key people knowledgeable about the Title II and Title III implementation in their area and natural resource management issues in general. The interviews were semi-structured. Researchers used key questions to structure the interviews, but also encouraged interviewees to follow lines of thought that were particularly interesting or important to them (see Addendum 1 for a list of case study questions). Researchers took extensive written notes during the interviews and kept separate files regarding lessons learned and other key institutional issues, including possible implications of local understanding for national legislation, and suggested revisions to or modification of the legislation.

Researchers also added to the sample of interviewees by asking and following up on recommendations for further informants in the course of interviews. Researchers visited RAC projects to observe and to learn first hand about their outcomes. When possible, researchers also attended RAC meetings, either by scheduling the fieldwork to overlap with a meeting or by making a return trip to attend. Depending on the size and complexity of the case, researchers spent from one to three weeks in the field.

Case Study Write-Up

Following the period of fieldwork, researchers began the task of interpreting the data collected and writing up the results. Each case study is organized in a similar manner. After reviewing the broader county and regional context within which a particular RAC and Title III

program is situated, researchers examine how counties chose to apportion funds between Titles II and III. This leads into a discussion of the Title III program, which includes analysis of the process through which counties award Title III funds and the types of projects that are supported. Also included in this section is a discussion of several individual Title III projects.

The next section of the case study involves the Title II program. It begins with a general review of the pattern of Resource Advisory Committee support for projects by project category (see Addendum 3 for a list of these categories). This is followed by a discussion of each project category, often including descriptions of particularly significant individual projects. After reviewing Title II projects, the study addresses the various processes associated with the formation and operation of the Resource Advisory Committee. This discussion includes analysis of the decision-making process within Resource Advisory Committees and the relationships between the committee and the federal agency, and between the committee and county government. Conclusions, including, in some cases, recommendations, are presented at the end of the report. During the writing process it was not unusual for researchers to follow-up particular issues or questions through further phone interviews with key informants.

Drafts of each case study were reviewed internally and re-written two to four times. Following the preparation of the draft case study report, hard copies were mailed to every individual who had been interviewed during the fieldwork. This was to solicit comments, corrections, suggestions, and critiques from our informants. Without exception, the comments received for each case study allowed the researchers to improve the quality of the final product – both in matters of factual reporting, as well as offering further insights for nuanced interpretative analysis. Some cases were again sent out for review after the first round of comments had been incorporated. Throughout this process the Sierra Institute responded to and incorporated feedback while retaining editorial control and final decision-making authority over the interpretation and conclusions presented in the case studies.

The fieldwork for the case studies was conducted during two different phases because the study was funded by two sequential contracts. The first contract allowed the Sierra Institute to initiate the assessment and to test the methodology through four initial case studies. After a five-month gap, the second contract supported the rest of the case studies and associated research and report writing. The four case studies conducted during the first stage of the project only covered the first three years of P.L. 106-393. Most of the cases studies were conducted during the second phase. These cases include four and sometimes five years of implementation of the secure payments program.

Legislative Analysis Methodology

Analysis of the legislative origin and history of P.L. 106-393 was undertaken to complement the detailed community-based research of the case studies. This analysis includes a detailed review, based on secondary data sources, of the history of payments by the federal government to rural counties that contain federal public lands and the efforts of local and interest groups to stabilize and secure such payments. Using documentary sources and interviews with key informants, the analysis discusses the intent of Congress in relation to P.L. 106-393. It examines issues surrounding the legislative debate in order to understand the actions congressional and administrative negotiators undertook to achieve an acceptable piece of legislation. The analysis reviews the debates regarding this legislation that occurred both in the House of Representatives and the Senate, and it elaborates on the diverse forces whose influence gave the final version of P.L. 106-393 its structure and function. Through a close reading of the

provisions of the legislation, the analysis also describes how legislators envisaged the implementation of Title II and Title III, including how Resource Advisory Committees would be formed and operated.

Because of the close relationship between the Secure Rural Schools legislation and the Forest Counties Payments Committee legislation (Sec. 320 P.L. 106-291), the legislative histories of both pieces of legislation were reviewed. Documents scrutinized included House and Senate hearings and reports, floor debates contained in the Congressional Record, and briefing documents prepared for congressional members by the Congressional Research Service. Other documentary sources included published research reports and scholarly articles addressing the two acts.

This part of the project combined documentary research with extensive interviews. Researchers interviewed key administration officials and congressional staff for their insights about congressional negotiations, their understanding of the legislative intent, and their perspectives on successes and challenges with implementation. Other interviewees included representatives of key stakeholder groups. Researchers reviewed the legislative record and consulted with members of the study's advisory committee to select informants for interviews. (see Addendum 4 for a list of interviewees). To preserve the anonymity promised to each interviewee, quotes from interview material are not attributed to any particular individual. Approximately 30 interviews of approximately one hour each took place between July and August 2005. Researchers conducted some interviews by telephone and some in person. All interview questions were open ended (see Addendum 2 for a list of questions). Generally, however, questions fell into the following categories: 1) development and passage of the act, including issues and negotiations during the legislative process; 2) origins of Title II and the structure of the RACs included within Title II; 3) what is working and not working with RAC processes and recommendations for change; 4) origins of Title III, expectations, and implementation issues; 5) reauthorization issues and prospects.

Ancillary Study of Administrative and Project Overheads

The Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management have covered some of the costs associated with implementing Title II using appropriated funds. However, they have not been able to pay for all Title II administrative and overhead costs with appropriated funds. As a result, the agencies have negotiated different arrangements with RACs for using a portion of the RAC's budget to cover agency-related overhead. In order to determine the range and variation of these negotiated arrangements, the Sierra Institute surveyed approximately 40 different RACs in California, Oregon, and Washington. The Designated Federal Officials (DFO) of Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service RACs in Oregon and California were contacted by phone to obtain information about the methods they used to cover the costs of administrative and project overhead. The survey asked about 1) the ways agencies cover the administrative costs associated with facilitating the RAC process; 2) the various overhead rates charged for agency ("in-house") projects and projects implemented by non-agency ("external") entities; and 3) how and why these rates have changed, if they have. Questions were also asked regarding the reactions of RAC members and project coordinators to overhead charges. The Sierra Institute also obtained data from a survey of overhead rates in all of the Forest Service RACs in Washington and Oregon. This information, supplemented with the data on overhead charges from the case studies outside California, Oregon, and Washington, was entered into a database for further analysis.

Ancillary Study of Title III Expenditures in California

The criteria we developed for selecting the 16 case studies ensured that a broad range of Title II programs and RACs were chosen for in-depth fieldwork. However, this approach also made it difficult to fully assess Title III. Therefore, in order to complement the analysis of Title III programs in the case studies, this project included a separate review of all of the Title III projects in California. This review of one state's experience with Title III was intended to provide a comprehensive picture of what sorts of projects were being supported with Title III funds, and how Title III programs were developing.

The Forest Service's Title III database was the starting point for this review. Each county listed on that database was contacted by phone and asked to provide data on how the county spent Title III funds, by category. Counties were also asked to describe the process by which they allocated Title III funds. Collecting this data proved to be challenging. It was sometimes difficult to find someone who knew about the program or who maintained the data. In some counties it seemed that there was no single person responsible for maintaining and tracking the data. In other counties, administrative staff kept only paper records with no electronic accounting system to facilitate access. Where records were electronically maintained, some counties sent reams of budget printouts from which it proved to be extremely difficult to extract specific data on Title III expenditures. In many cases it took repeated calls over a three-month period to secure data.

By the end of this sub-study, a total of 83% of all Title III expenditures through 2004 were included. It is less than 100% because not all 2004 funds had been expended by the time the survey of county expenditures ended in mid-August of 2004. (By August of 2004 we estimated that 95 to 98% of all expenditures were included.) Some funds were also carried over from 2004 to 2005. The information contained in this database informs the Title III analysis and discussion sections of the final report.

Final Report Preparation and Dissemination

Preparation of the final report involved integrating the findings from the case studies, the legislative analysis of P.L. 106-393, and the ancillary studies of agency overhead rates and of Title III expenditures in California. In addition to drawing on the interpretive and institutional findings of the 16 case studies regarding Titles II and III, the final report also analyzed counties' allocations of funds between Titles II and III from 2002 to 2005, as well as shifts in these allocations for the nine states in which case study fieldwork was conducted.

A smaller subset of the full research team took responsibility for writing the final report, following a full research team meeting to discuss the structure and content of the final report. The report is the outcome of numerous iterations of the various sections and case studies. Key officials within the Departments of Interior and Agriculture had an opportunity to review the draft report, as did the advisory committee. The completed final report has incorporated comments and feedback from these reviewers.

ADDENDUM 1

Title II and Title III Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews in Case Studies

This list is a starting point for the semi-structured interviews. Researchers are not expected to ask all of the questions below, nor should these be considered a complete list of possible questions. This list should be used as a guide as to what might be asked in an interview.

For case study researchers

Review and understand each of the projects and the local contextual setting. Look for overlap and trends in kinds of project support. Can the projects be categorized and discussed together by categories?

Use a snowball sampling procedure to identify people to interview. In addition to people who received project dollars (Title II and III), are there key people in the geographic RAC/Title III area who have a unique perspective on the RAC, distribution of Title II and Title III dollars, Forest Service or BLM management of the RAC, or the array of projects that have been supported? Are there key people to talk to whose project proposals have been rejected (and who have more than just sour grapes about being refused)?

Questions for interviewees

What was accomplished with the project(s)?

How did project accomplishments fit with what was proposed?

How did the project fit with other projects (both Title II and Title III)? Did it complement other projects?

Were any jobs produced? (short- or long-term? Might there be jobs produced in the future as a result of this project?)

Who received project dollars and the work contract(s)?

What contracting mechanism was used? Was there any attempt to assure local employment was generated? Was best value contracting used?

Was worker training a part of a project?

How many workers were served and for what duration? Did it lead to additional work or opportunities for workers?

What (if any) communities benefited?

How did they benefit?

How did this project fit with community needs and interests?

Using the capitals framework (involving financial, physical, human, social, natural, and cultural capital), how did the project (or suite of projects) affect community assets?

Has the RAC or Title III process led to more dialogue around resource issues? Has it affected perspectives or the ability and willingness of different interest groups to work together? How so? Has it affected group or individual relationships? If yes, how so?

What biophysical outcomes resulted from a project? Describe the outcomes in quantitative terms when possible (e.g., acres treated, sediment reduced, etc.), but you should by no means restrict responses to quantitative outcomes.

How many road miles were treated? How many acres were treated? How do these totals comport with what the applicant said their project would accomplish?

Did Title II or Title III dollars leverage additional funds? How much? Did they leverage additional work?

Have Title II and Title III projects been integrated in any way? (Have they leveraged each other?)

What kind of variation has there been in Title II and Title III authorities? Has this affected project selection and outcomes?

Agency/Institutional

For Title II

How effective has the direction by the Designated Federal Official been? How effective has the work of the RAC coordinator been? Have RAC members and others been pleased with their performance? Why or why not?

What role has the agency (Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management) played in identifying projects? What role has the agency played in determining the type and range of projects submitted or that can be approved? Are RAC members and others comfortable with this role? RAC-approved projects should benefit public land directly or indirectly. Do all projects do this? How many projects pay the federal agency for work?

Do some projects support NEPA work? What percentage?

Does the supervising agency take a percentage of project dollars? If so, what percentage? Is it consistent across projects? Does it seem reasonable?

How well do the projects meet the intent and (and breadth) of the legislation? How have projects been monitored? Who is taking responsibility? Are there periodic reports to the RAC on funded projects?

Characterize the functioning of the RAC. How effective has it been? How effectively have members worked together? How might RAC functioning be improved?

Has the RAC process affected public-agency interactions/relationships? If so, describe them. Describe the project application and selection process. Has it been effective? How might it be improved?

Has there been sufficient outreach to people/groups in the RAC region?

Have there been particular perspectives/interests that have dominated the RAC? Have there been some perspectives that have been mostly ignored or left out?

Has project innovation been encouraged?

What sort of innovation has taken place? What have you learned?

Ask interviewees to identify and describe their three favorite projects and their three least favorite. [This may reveal patterns or offer other avenues to pursue.]

Are there projects that were not funded that you think should have been?

ADDENDUM 2

Institutional Interview Questions

General questions about the act

How were you involved in the development, passage, or implementation of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act?

What are some of the ideas and principles that informed development of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act?

Who were the primary catalysts for its development?

Who was/were the lead(s) primarily responsible for moving the bill through the House? The Senate?

Can you identify key factors that helped motivate people to move the legislation?

How was the West able to sell the bill to Eastern constituents, given the distribution of the dollars?

Specific Title II questions

Who decided to create Title II?

Why was the model of the BLM RAC—along with the categories—seemingly adopted whole cloth?

What is your sense of the success of the RAC process?

What hasn't worked?

Knowing what you know now, what changes would you have made six years ago?

What changes to Title II would you make today? Why?

Do you recommend that these changes be made legislatively or administratively?

Would any of the changes that have been proposed by others jeopardize the broad bi-partisan coalition that now seems to exist in favor of reauthorization?

The legislation mandated federal-local collaboration and collaboration among diverse national and local interests. Do you think there will be any extensions of this institutional model in federal land policy or in other policy areas in the future?

Specific Title III questions

What were the driving concerns (legislative intent) behind the establishment of Title III?

Who were the drivers?

Has Title III met expectations (yours and others)?

What has worked? What hasn't worked?

Concerns have been raised about Title III fund accountability.

Do you share any of these concerns?

If there are problems, how widespread are they?

How would some of the ideas that have been suggested impact the division of responsibility between federal and local authorities?

Do you have any preferences about how to handle this?

What changes do you favor in terms of Title III and why?

General Summary Questions

The legislation calls for counties (or in the case of Alaska some other entity) to determine the allocation of Title II dollars? Do you see any problems with this arrangement?

Some have suggested that the role of the county in this legislation is one that determines the amount of Title III or federal dollars. Isn't it unique to have the county determine how much federal government money is in Title II?

Another way of viewing this is that the county can be seen as holding power over the RAC in terms of allocating dollars (that is, if the RAC doesn't do what the county wants the RAC to do, it withdraws funding). How might this be avoided? What measures might be put in place to prevent the county from lording over the RAC with the power that comes from determining RAC funding?

Are there examples elsewhere of an arrangement in which the county determines how much money is allocated to a federal program?

What have been the biggest advantages/benefits of the institutional design of the Secure Rural Schools legislation?

What have been the biggest disadvantages of the institutional design put into place by the legislation?

Knowing what we know today, what would you have liked to do differently six years ago?

How specifically has this legislation altered federal-local responsibilities from the way they were under the 25% legislation, passed in 1908?

ADDENDUM 3***Standardized Project Categories***

(based on categories in P.L. 106-393, Section 2b)

Roads	Roads, Trails, and Infrastructure maintenance or obliteration
Soils	Soil Productivity Improvement
Forest Health	Forest Ecosystem Health
Watershed	Watershed Restoration and Maintenance
Habitat	Wildlife and Fish Habitat
Weeds	Noxious and exotic weed control
Natives	Re-establishment of native species
Fuels	Fuel Management
Recreation	Recreation infrastructure and facilities
History	Historic Preservation
Other	Includes Administrative Costs; NEPA

Appendix 2 - Methods

Addendum 4
Interviewees for Institutional Assessment

Sarah Bittleman	Natural Resources Counsel, Senator Ron Wyden
Linda Brett	Policy Analyst, U.S. Forest Service
Tom Brumm	Oregon Economic and Community Development Department, now Sierra Institute for Community and Environment
Andy Brunelle	Capitol City Coordinator, U.S. Forest Service
Mary Columbe	American Forest and Paper Association
Doug Crandall	Chief of Staff, House Resources Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
Kira Finkler	Staff Member, Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, now Trout Unlimited
Frank Gladics	Staff Member, Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Ross Gorte	Congressional Research Service
Chris Nota	Regional Foresters Representative, U.S. Forest Service
Randle Phillips	Executive Director, Forest County Payments Committee
Steve Quarles	Partner, Crowell and Moring, LLP.
Tom Quinn	U.S. Forest Service Washington DC, now Forest Supervisor, Stanislaus National Forest
Mark Rey	Undersecretary for Natural Resources and the Environment
Quinton Robinson	Staff Member, House Agriculture Committee, now consultant
Maitland Sharpe	Policy Analysis Director, U.S. Forest Service, now retired
Ed Shepard	Assistant Director, Renewable Resources and Planning, Bureau of Land Management
Andy Stahl	Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics
Dave Tenny	Deputy Undersecretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
Chris Wood	Assistant to Forest Service Chief, now Trout Unlimited