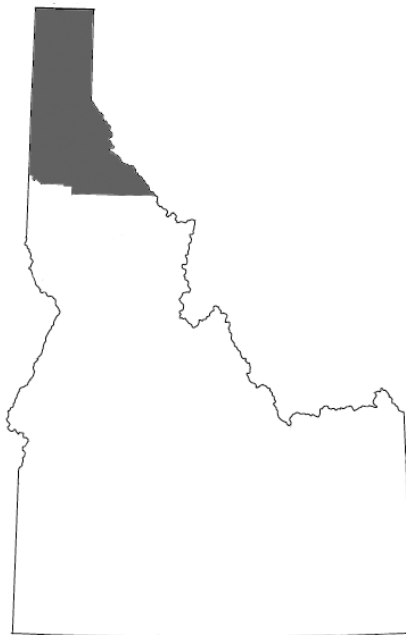


# **Idaho Panhandle Resource Advisory Committee and Title III Case Study**

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## Background

The Idaho Panhandle RAC involves Idaho Panhandle National Forest lands, which are a recent combination of three national forests, and five northern Idaho counties. These five counties comprise the northern portion of Idaho—the top of the Panhandle—starting with Benewah and Shoshone Counties to the South, Kootenai and Bonner Counties in the middle, and ending with Boundary County reaching to the Canadian border. To the east is the state of Montana and to the west is the state of Washington.

The land is heavily forested, with over 90% of Boundary and Shoshone Counties and 75% of Kootenai and Benewah counties classified as forestlands. Much of these lands are managed by the federal government: 75% of Shoshone County, 61% of Boundary County, and 44% of Bonner County are in federal ownership. Only in Kootenai and Benewah Counties is a majority of the land privately held. A total of 40% of the land in Benewah County is part of the Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation. The Kootenai Tribe has a small reservation in Boundary County.

The population of the five counties differs greatly, the largest being Kootenai County with a population of 122,350.<sup>1</sup> Benewah County is the smallest, with a population of 8,961. Boundary County and Shoshone County are a close second and third smallest, with 10,396 and 12,827, respectively. Bonner County is in the middle with 39,872 people. Popu-

lation change in the counties also differs. Shoshone County lost population in the 1990s and continues to decline. While Benewah County gained population in the 1990s, it has lost population since 2000. This contrasts with the tremendous growth in Kootenai and Bonner Counties: Kootenai has grown over 40% since 1990 and continues to do so, adding 13,365 people since 2000, and Bonner County grew over 30% and continues to grow, although at a slower rate than Kootenai County. Boundary County has experienced moderate growth, in the decade of the 1990s and since 2000. Much of the growth in Kootenai County can be attributed to both its proximity to the Spokane metropolitan area (pop. 428,000), and the natural beauty of Coeur d'Alene and Hayden Lakes. Similarly, in Bonner County, the city of Sandpoint is growing because of its proximity to the beautiful Pend Oreille Lake and surrounding area.

All five counties had 2004 unemployment figures higher than the Idaho and U.S. averages, and all five counties had per capita income levels less than the 2002 Idaho and U.S. averages. There are, however, substantial differences even between these counties. Three of the five counties, Benewah, Boundary, and Shoshone, are struggling economically. Tables 1 and 2 offer a glimpse of the economic condition of these five Northern Idaho counties, and highlight some of the differences between them.

**Table 1. Unemployment Rate—1990-2004**

UNEMPLOYMENT %	1990	2000	2004
Benewah	11.5	12.4	8.9
Bonner	9.8	9.0	7.1
Boundary	9.3	8.6	7.1
Kootenai	8.0	7.4	6.0
Shoshone	9.9	11.1	11.6
Idaho	5.5	4.6	5.1

<sup>1</sup> All population data are from County Profiles, Idaho Department of Commerce and Labor, Labor Market Information: [ci.idaho.gov/mi](http://ci.idaho.gov/mi).

**Table 2. Per Capita Income 1990-2002**

PER CAPITA INCOME \$	1990	2000	2002
Benewah	13,932	20,217	22,271
Bonner	13,177	17,396	17,872
Boundary	17,872	17,045	18,316
Kootenai	15,776	23,014	24,164
Shoshone	14,293	19,152	20,714
Idaho	15,866	24,076	25,476

*Shoshone County* continues its struggle to recover from devastating mine and smelter closures in the 1980s. Following the closures, Shoshone County's population declined by 28% in the 1990s. The county continues to lose population, declining by 1,000 people between 2000 and 2004. Out of 44 Idaho counties, Shoshone is one of the two with a net population decline during this time. At 11.6%, Shoshone County's 2004 unemployment rate is the highest of the five northern Panhandle counties. The county's per capita income is nearly \$5,000 below the state average. With the mill and mine closures, and following two decades of double-digit unemployment rates, Shoshone County has gone from being one of Idaho's three most prosperous counties to becoming one of the more impoverished. The largest employers in Shoshone County are Dave Smith Automobile Sales and Kellogg School District, both employing between 300 and 399 and 200 and 299 employees, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

*Benewah County* has the second highest unemployment rate among the five counties and has also lost population since 2000. Benewah County's economy remains heavily dependent upon forest products. The Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation, extending from western Benewah County into southern Kootenai County, has been the main force for economic growth in recent years. The tribe is the largest employer in the county, employing roughly 400

people at its casino and hotel in Worley, just over the county line. Benewah County's per capita income is the second highest among the five Panhandle counties, largely due to the timber industry and tribal enterprise wages. Potlatch Lumber and Wood Products is the second largest employer in the county, employing between 300-399 people.

*Boundary County* faces more difficult economic times following a relatively prosperous 1990s. In the 1990s, Boundary County enjoyed strong job growth, but since then the timber industry's decline and the broader U.S. economic slowdown have eroded the county's employment base over the last four years. The county suffered a serious economic blow in 2003 when one of its two largest mills closed, putting 140 people out of work. The county's per capita income is the second lowest among the five counties and its unemployment rate is 2% above the state average. The largest employer in Boundary County is the Boundary County School District. Boundary Community Hospital, Kootenai River Inn, and Riley Creek Lumber are the next largest employers, with roughly 200 workers.

*Bonner County* is growing economically healthier. While its per capita income lags and its unemployment rate is 2% above the state average, manufacturing rose 59% between 1993 and 2003. Businesses producing salad dressing, airplane, and electronic and high-tech manufacturers are leading the

<sup>1</sup> This and other employer data is drawn from County Profiles, Idaho Department of Commerce and Labor, Labor Market Information: [ci.idaho.gov/mi](http://ci.idaho.gov/mi).

way. The biggest source of new jobs has been Coldwater Creek, a Sandpoint catalog company, which now employs close to 400 people in the county. The largest employer in Bonner County is Lake Pend Oreille School District, employing between 600 and 699. Along with Coldwater Creek, the next largest employers are Bonner County itself, Bonner General Hospital, Litehouse Food Products, and Wal-Mart, all with reported employment of between 300-399 people. Tourism is growing rapidly with the development of the Schweitzer Mountain Resort, which employs roughly 250 people. Construction and the real estate market in the county are shattering previous records. J.D. Lumber, Riley Creek Lumber, and the West Bonner School District round out the top employers in the county, employing roughly 250 each.

*Kootenai County* is also booming. From 1993 to 2003, its population grew by 42%, nearly double the statewide average. During this same period, the number of private-sector employers increased by 16%, from 3,637 to 4,207. Coeur d'Alene is the largest city in the Panhandle with 37,300 people. Post Falls and Hayden are the next largest with population totals of 20,000 and 10,400, respectively. The opening of the Coeur d'Alene resort in 1987 launched an incredible growth in tourism that was spurred on by the opening of the Silverwood theme park in 2004. Other events promoting diversification and growth of the economic base over the last ten years include the relocation of many manufacturing operations and six call centers to Kootenai County. About 4,100 people

work in the county's manufacturing businesses and 1,700 people work at call centers. With roughly 1600 plus employees, the largest employer in Kootenai County is the Kootenai Medical Center. The second largest is the Coeur d'Alene School District, with roughly 1,350 employees, followed by the Coeur d'Alene Resort, with 950 employees, and the North Idaho Community College with 850. Coeur d'Alene Tribal Casino, Verizon Northwest, and Kootenai County's Post Falls School District are the other top county employers.

Like most western states and Idaho in general, the Idaho Panhandle has seen a dramatic decline in timber harvests from federal lands. In 1987, the Idaho Panhandle National Forest Plan established an average annual allowable sale quantity of 280 million board feet (mmbf) with a 350 mmbf level envisioned for the second decade of the forest plan. In 1991, just 201.6 mmbf were offered for sale and 163.2 mmbf actually sold. In 2000, 76.3 mmbf were offered for sale and 78.2 mmbf were sold. This amount decreased to 42.2 mmbf offered in 2003 and 22.1 mmbf sold. This nearly 86% decline in timber volume sold since 1991 is typical of Northwest federal forests and has had a dramatic effect on those communities dependent upon harvests and processing wood. All of the five counties in the Idaho Panhandle RAC have been affected by this decline in federal timber harvest, but the three smaller counties, Benewah, Boundary, and Shoshone Counties, have been affected the most.

## County Elections for Titles II and III

Since the beginning of the program Title III funding has decreased in four of the five counties. All five counties funded Title III in 2002, but by 2005 only Benewah and Boundary Counties continued to allocate funds to it. Table 3 shows Title II and Title III allocations for each of the five counties since the beginning of the legislation.

Support for Title II and the RAC increased from \$336,388 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2002 to \$1,196,579 in

FY 2005. During the same time, Title III funding declined from \$793,287 to only \$41,231. The reasons interviewees gave for this shift were the adverse impact of Title III funding on Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT), particularly in Shoshone County, the greater flexibility of Title II, and an increasing acceptance and appreciation of the role of the RAC. Higher Title III payments typically reduce a county's PILT, which are payments received from

**Table 3. County Title II and III Allocations<sup>2</sup>**

Benewah	Title II	Title III
2002	\$8,654	\$8,654
2003	8,723	8,723
2004	8,827	8,827
2005	8,942	8,942
Bonner		
2002	\$139,014	\$69,507
2003	140,126	70,063
2004	212,711	0
2005	215,477	0
Boundary		
2002	\$104,154	\$104,154
2003	178,479	31,496
2004	180,620	31,874
2005	182,968	32,289
Kootenai		
2002	\$30,350	\$121,402
2003	152,966	0
2004	154,802	0
2005	156,815	0
Shoshone		
2002	\$122,393	\$489,571
2003	616,859	0
2004	624,261	0
2005	632,377	0

the federal government to compensate for the loss in tax base associated with federal land in a county. Title II has no effect on PILT. This is the primary reason counties have opted to allocate most of their P.L. 106-393 payments to Title II. Shoshone County Commissioner and RAC Chair Jon Cantamessa stated that once Shoshone County was comfortable

with the RAC process and projects funded, it was an easy decision to put all of its funds into Title II. A Bonner County commissioner stated that the reason they decided to allocate all of their recent year's funds to Title II was that the county was not using Title III funds effectively and the RAC was doing a better job of selecting projects.

## Title III Projects

This section focuses primarily on Benewah and Boundary Counties, both of which have had a Title III program for four years. Boundary County has had considerably more money to allocate, hence, the two programs are quantitatively different. Boundary County reduced its Title III allocation from \$104,154 in the first year to just over \$30,000 in each of the three subsequent years. Benewah County, receiving the smallest P.L. 106-393 allocation of the five counties, maintained an even split between Title II and III throughout the first four years of the program. The amount allocated to each Title has always been just under \$9,000 annually. The other Title III allocations discussed in this section include the large first year allocation of Shoshone and Kootenai Counties, and the FY 2002 and 2003 allocations of Bonner County. Shoshone and Kootenai Counties made no Title III allocations after the first year, and Bonner County ceased after FY 2003.

### Boundary County

All three Boundary County Commissioners stated that the county does not have a formal process for determining Title III allocations. Decisions about Title III spending are made through the county budget process. The county has allocated funds to the same two programs each year: Search and Dive Rescue Equipment and Geographical information System (GIS) Mapping and County Addressing. Because these Title III allocations were not offered through open competitive processes, they are classified in this report as administrative allocations.

Funds for the Search and Dive Rescue project were used to purchase office equipment and supplies, communications equipment, avalanche equipment, an all-terrain vehicle, and dive equipment for wildland search and rescue operations on national forest land. Funds are also used to train volunteer personnel to conduct search and rescue. Over four years, \$79,614 has been approved for this work. Search and rescue funding received \$14,998 in FY 2002, \$26,000 in FY 2003, \$5,350 in FY 2004, and \$33,266 in FY 2005.

The GIS Mapping and County Addressing project partners Boundary County with the Bonners Ferry Ranger District of the Panhandle National Forest to map roadways in the county. This work contributes to the development of a GIS map program and countywide addressing system to improve emergency preparedness and emergency service delivery. For the first two years this project paid young adult crews for a period of six weeks with Title II funds to perform the on-the-ground work. The Bonners Ferry Ranger District has been a close partner on the project. Over four years, \$83,523 has been allocated to this effort: \$14,916 in FY 2002, \$22,974 in FY 2003, \$20,633 in FY 2004, and \$25,000 in FY 2005.

For the first four years Boundary County allocated \$199,813 to Title III. Of that amount, \$163,137 went to these two multi-year efforts. The county retained an unallocated or holdover amount of \$36,676. These funds are being held for county emergencies.

### Benewah County

Benewah County has allocated \$35,146 over four years to Title III. The only Title III expenditure is \$5,377 in 2005 for radios for the Sheriff's Department Search and Rescue. The balance, totaling \$29,769, has been reserved for future use.

### Kootenai County

Kootenai County's Title III allocation of \$121,402 in FY 2002 was used for two activities in that year. One was a \$7,829 budget request by the Sheriff's Department to support search and rescue operations. The second was a \$44,170 Arbor Day forest restoration and tree-planting project for the four largest cities in Kootenai County—Coeur d'Alene, Post Falls, Hayden, and Rathdrum. Kootenai County has placed the balance, totaling \$69,403, from FY 2002 in a trust fund for future projects. No additional money has since been allocated to Title III.

### Bonner County

Bonner County allocated \$69,507 in FY 2002 and \$70,063 in FY 2003 to Title III. The only expenditure the county has made with these funds is a 2003 administrative transfer of \$34,857 to the Sheriff's Department for law enforcement during a large music festival on the south end of Lake Pend Orielle next to Forest Service lands. The remaining \$104,713 has been placed in an Auditor's Trust for future use.

### Shoshone County

Shoshone County allocated \$489,571 to Title III in FY 2002. A total of \$80,000 as a four-year grant was committed to the Pulaski Project, a multi-agency effort involving many participants and other funders. The project goal is to construct a trail to an old mine where Ranger Ed Pulaski and his crew of firefighters ran for survival in the renowned fire of 1910. The project was also supported with Title II funds, and is discussed further below. A second Shoshone County allocation of Title III funds involved an administrative transfer of \$37,549 over two years to the Sheriff's Department for search and rescue activities. A third allocation supported two tree beautification projects in fiscal years 2003 and 2004—one in Smeltonville for \$10,400 and another in Pinehurst

for \$16,300. Shoshone County holds in reserve a balance of \$350,719 of Title III funds, which includes \$5,398 in interest income.

The largest use of Title III funds in these five counties was by sheriff departments for search and rescue activities, collectively totaling \$248,749 (see Table 4). A total of 25% of all Title III funds, or 62% of all Title III fund used, went to search and rescue activities. These funds were distributed through administrative transfers with limited documentation. There is no record, for example, of whether the counties allocated a proportionate share based on current or historic search and rescue activities on federal land. Other allocations involving specific projects included \$70,870 for tree planting and beautification projects in Kootenai and Shoshone Counties and \$80,000 for recreation and trail development in Shoshone County. These project allocations totaled 38% of expended Title III funds.

The most startling fact about Title III funds in the Panhandle Region is how much is held in reserve by the counties. Administrative transfers for search and rescue and county projects totaled \$399,619, or 40% of all Title III dollars. A total of \$591,280 (or 60% of all funds) are reserved for future use.

**TABLE 4. Title III Allocations 2001-2005**

County	Administrative Transfers (search and rescue)	County Projects	Unspent
Benewah	\$5,377	0	\$29,769
Bonner	\$34,857	0	\$104,713
Boundary	\$163,137	0	\$36,676
Kootenai	\$7,829	\$44,170	\$69,403
Shoshone	\$37,549	\$106,700	\$350,719
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$248,749</b>	<b>\$150,870</b>	<b>\$591,280</b>

Commissioners in Boundary County said that they are retaining \$36,676 for emergencies and future Title III projects. This is similar to the views of commissioners in the other four counties, where Title III monies are also retained as “rainy day funds.” Some county commissioners felt that Title III was restrictive in its permitted uses and therefore difficult to use. According to Shoshone County Commissioner and RAC Chair Jon Cantamessa, the Title III guidelines are vague and it would have been helpful if the federal government had developed an information service, which could have pro-

vided answers to their questions about permissible uses of the funds. Another county commissioner flatly stated that their county had no plans for the use of its remaining Title III funds, which amount to more than \$100,000. Lastly, counties are operating under recommendations from the Idaho Association of Counties that the legislation does not require the money to be spent by 2006—only allocated. As a result, counties believe that since they have made allocations, though not necessarily to projects, they still have some time to allocate those dollars to specific uses.

## Title II Projects

After the initial year of funding, when most of the five county P.L. 106-393 money was allocated to Title III, the RAC budget increased to \$1.1 million. Funding increased dramatically in FY 2003 as result of Kootenai and Shoshone Counties allocating all of their Title II and Title III eligible funds to Title II. As mentioned above, this reflects both an acceptance and approval of the RAC, along with concern over the effectiveness of Title III funds. It stands today at just under \$1.2 million. County contributions to the Panhandle RAC are shown in Table 5.

mendations at each meeting. However, it usually takes more than one meeting for a project to be recommended. There is a call for new projects within the Forest Service three weeks prior to any RAC meeting, and the Forest Service asks for priority projects from their district rangers prior to the scheduled RAC meeting. The Idaho Panhandle National Forest is moving towards establishing forest-wide project priorities for RAC projects, rather than relying on priorities from each ranger district. The RAC also receives project requests from the counties and from non-governmental organizations, although these are few in comparison to the number of proposals received from the Forest Service.

### Project Solicitation and Applications

The Idaho Panhandle RAC accepts project applications on a continuous basis, unlike the annual application process of some RACs. The RAC meets monthly and makes funding recom-

### Recommended Projects

Over the four years of its operation, the Idaho Panhandle RAC has recommended funding for 139

**Table 5. Idaho Panhandle Counties Title II Funding**

County	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	FY 2005
Benewah	\$8,654	\$8,723	\$8,827	\$8,942
Bonner	139,014	140,126	212,711	215,477
Boundary	104,154	178,479	180,620	182,968
Kootenai	30,350	152,966	154,802	156,815
Shoshone	122,393	616,859	624,261	632,377
<b>RAC TOTAL</b>	<b>\$404,565</b>	<b>\$1,097,153</b>	<b>\$1,181,221</b>	<b>\$1,196,577</b>

projects. The vast majority of these projects are developed and led by the Forest Service. A total of 118 projects (85%) are Forest Service projects. Of the 21 remaining, 17 (12%) are county projects. The RAC is aware of the preponderance of Forest Service projects, and some members have expressed frustration with this. Given that few applications are received from other entities, there is also appreciation among RAC members that the Forest Service projects proposed are generally good ones, and, as a result, most of them are supported by the RAC.

**Project Types**

The projects fall into six categories as identified by the Forest Service and the RAC: Noxious Weeds, Water Improvement/Fish Passage, Recreation/Trails, Youth Crews, Hazardous Fuels/Vegetative Treatments, and Road and Bridge Improvement. It is important to recognize that a project listed in one category may have elements that would allow it to be reasonably listed in another category. For example, youth crews are sometimes used for trail work.

Recreation/Trails and Road and Bridge Improvements, for which this RAC spent 24% and 28% of its total funds, respectively, are the highest priorities for this RAC. This preference has been fairly consistent over the four years of the RAC’s existence.

However, Hazardous Fuels/Vegetative Treatment projects, which received no funding in the first year, have since received 10-20% of the RAC’s yearly allocations.

Several of the more innovative and significant RAC projects funded over the past four years follow.

*Mickinnick Trail Project*

This project meets a long-standing Sandpoint community objective and highlights how RAC dollars can be used to bring partners together, leverage additional dollars, and complete projects that enjoy a wide variety of partner support and participation. The project started in 1997 when a local resident donated 160 acres of land to the Forest Service in memory of her late husband. The donated land connects two parcels of national forest land and borders land owned by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the City of Sandpoint.

The RAC contributed \$133,425 in Title II funds over FY 2003 and 2004 to this project. The Title II funds included \$7,500 for survey and design work in the first year, and \$125,925 in the second year for the trail (\$59,075), the trailhead (\$60,350), and roadwork (\$6,500). There are three primary public entities with interests in the Mickinnick Trail project. The Sandpoint Ranger District is requesting

**Table 6. Project Funding**

Category	2002	2003	2004	2005	TOTAL
Noxious Weeds	\$93,663	\$142,195	\$113,437	\$142,763	\$492,058
Water Improvement/ Fish Passage	\$65,800	\$71,100	\$72,868	\$90,926	\$300,694
Recreation/Trails	\$61,000	\$185,620	\$357,495	\$305,020	\$909,135
Youth Crews	\$24,525	\$67,150	\$151,812	\$179,434	\$422,921
Hazardous Fuels/ Vegetative Treatment		\$205,000	\$276,850	\$120,000	\$601,850
Road and Bridge Improvement	\$117,000	\$204,880	\$326,943	\$386,628	\$1,035,451
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$361,988</b>	<b>\$875,945</b>	<b>\$1,299,405</b>	<b>\$1,224,771</b>	<b>\$3,762,109</b>

funds to construct the trail, the city of Sandpoint is requesting funds to construct the trailhead facility on city property, and Bonner County is requesting funds to meet Bonner County planning and zoning road reconstruction requirements for access to the trailhead. Additionally, the trail project received \$16,100 from the city of Sandpoint for trailhead construction and an easement on city property, \$500 annually in volunteer labor for trail maintenance from Friends of Mickinnick, \$250 annually in trail maintenance from Monday Hikers, and \$500 in labor from a local Eagle Scout for construction and installation of two benches.

The Sandpoint Ranger District has constructed and will maintain the trail. The trail is 3.4 miles long with moderate grades as it switchbacks around huge rock outcroppings and meanders between large trees and through grassy meadows. The trail offers an attractive forest setting and vistas of Sandpoint and Lake Pend Oreille. It is also designed as a single-track trail with a surface suitable for hikers and mountain bikers alike.

#### *Senior Community Service Support*

The Senior Community Service Employment Program is a “work, learn, earn” program, granted to the Forest Service by the U.S. Department of Labor. Participants must be 55 years or older and at or below the poverty level. Participants in the program work a variety of tasks including, but not limited to, managing campgrounds and rental cabins, providing dispersed facilities maintenance, and doing general clearing and repair work at Forest Service facilities. Tasks may also involve carpentry, plumbing, site refurbishment, painting, welding, fleet maintenance, and facilities surveys. The Senior Community Service Employment Program has been a Forest Service program for over 30 years, but recent budget cuts have forced dramatic reductions in the program. Many ranger districts lost all their funding for the program while others, like the Bonners Ferry Ranger District, were significantly cut. The program was considered important enough that in FY 03 the Bonners Ferry Ranger District leveraged funding for a \$47,990 Senior Community Service Employ-

ment Program with \$10,640 in Title II RAC funds, \$19,500 from a U.S. Department of Labor grant, and \$17,850 in Forest Service funds for vehicle support, safety equipment, supplies, supervision, and program management. In FY 04 the funding mix was similar with \$13,760 in Title II funds, \$19,500 in grant monies from the Department of Labor, and \$20,850 in Forest Service support. The FY 03 program allowed four participants to work full time for six months, and the FY 04 program provided employment for one full-time person and five part-time people. The Title II portion of the program permits two or more participants to work full time on the Ranger District for up to five months.

#### *Placer Creek Project*

This is a two-year, two-phase project designed to carry-out pre-project data collection and prescribed burns in watersheds to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire and protect municipal watersheds. Additionally, the project is designed to improve late seral conditions involving the Western Larch. First year funding totaled \$150,000 for data collection and other pre-project National Environmental Policy Act compliance work. The second year proposal requested support for prescribed burning and aquatic work. The Forest Service provided \$40,000 of in-kind support for pre-project work. This project follows recommended management direction under the Shoshone County Fire Mitigation Plan for work in municipal watersheds. It also complies with the National Fire Plan and the Healthy Forests Initiative and local work associated with these initiatives.

#### *Idaho Panhandle National Forest Youth Crews*

The RAC supported projects totaling \$165,674 that was supplemented with another \$116,862 in Forest Service funds and \$25,100 of in-kind contributions for a five-county youth crew project. Funding was divided among ranger districts, all of which operated slightly differently.

- Sandpoint Ranger District: \$30,000 in Title II funds and \$50,000 in Forest Service funds to employ 12 Youth Conservation Crew (YCC)

- youth and two leaders for eight weeks.
- St. Joe Ranger District: \$43,422 in Title II funds and \$6,758 in Forest Service funds, plus tools and equipment, to employ a three-person trail crew plus a supervisor for the summer.
  - Priest Lake Ranger District: \$17,700 in Title II funds and \$2,000 in Forest Service funds, plus tools and equipment, and \$2,000 in in-kind time from the Back Country Horsemen to employ a six-person Youth Conservation Crew and supervisor for the summer. Youth will be recruited from local high schools and alternative schools.
  - Kootenai County Youth Crew and Shoshone County Youth Crew: \$32,400 in Title II funds and \$48,842 in Forest Service funds to employ a six-person trail crew of college students using the Student Training Employment Program.
  - Shoshone County and the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District: \$24,852 in Title II funds and \$9,262 in Forest Service funds. These funds will be used for a six-person crew to maintain or reconstruct existing trails and eradicate noxious weeds. The county will hire crew members who will work for a period of 12 weeks. The target age is 18 years or older.
  - Bonners Ferry Ranger District: \$17,300 in Title II funds and \$23,100 of in-kind contributions (\$6,300 Forest Service, \$16,500 Workforce Investment funds, and \$1,500 in State of Idaho grant funds) to employ five Boundary County youth and one supervisor for ten weeks, in addition to the Workforce Investment crews.

Generally, youth crews work on trails and recreational facilities. Targeted trails are those in need of bridge work and maintenance, culvert and drainage repair, brush cutting, and sign installation and repair. Work in developed recreational facilities includes painting, cleaning, repair, and minor carpentry work. As important as the benefits are to

the forest, perhaps of greater importance is the provision of employment opportunities for 42 youth from the five counties.

#### *Pulaski Tunnel Trail Project*

Among RAC members, Forest Service staff, and community leaders, the Pulaski Tunnel Trail project is ranked as one of the most significant of all Idaho Panhandle RAC-funded projects. This project has long been the dream of many residents in the city of Wallace and the Shoshone County area. In 2004, a committee comprised of local residents was formed for the purpose of constructing a trail to the old mine where Ranger Ed Pulaski and his crew survived the great fire of 1910.

Funding for the project includes a Congressional appropriation of \$297,000 to the Forest Service, a \$60,000 Forest Service Centennial grant, \$60,000 from the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, \$80,000 in Title III funds from Shoshone County for a full time executive director and part-time staff, and \$26,500 in Title II funds from the RAC for trail bridge construction.

The project involves construction of an accessible trailhead including a parking lot, toilet, and interpretive day use area; five trail bridge structures; Pulaski Tunnel access closure; and interpretive signage and construction of 1.8 miles of trail to the historic mine.

Project proponents hope that this trail and accompanying interpretive facilities will be an important tourism attraction drawing visitors to Wallace and Shoshone County. Proponents look forward to having a facility and operation to tell the full story of the 1910 fire, the largest forest fire in the history of the Western United States.

#### *Shamrock/Stump Creek Meadows Rehabilitation*

This project provides for restoration of Shamrock and Stump creeks, which includes building stream structures to create pools and provide channel stability, introduction of large woody debris to enhance fish habitat, physical reconstruction of eroded banks, and seeding and planting native vegetation for bank and bed stabilization. This restora-

tion project is funded with \$46,000 of Title II funds, and \$33,500 of Forest Service in-kind support for National Environmental Policy Act planning and administration, and noxious weed treatment. The Northwest Access Alliance and the Back Country All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) Association have pledged \$4,800 in volunteer labor.

A primary objective of the project is to restore and enact measures to prevent further damage to the area by motorized use. The area will be closed to motorized use by the construction of a fence along access points, re-contouring unwanted road access, placing woody debris and rock in areas where the meadows have been breached or might be breached, building physical barriers such as earth berms and trenches, and adding signage explaining meadow closure. There is hope among RAC members and project advocates that the project will generate support from other motorized recreation groups to help monitor progress and report the riders who misuse the national forest. Lastly, the restoration of both Stump and Shamrock Creeks in the Hayden Lake

Drainage will remove a chronic sediment source to an impaired water body, helping to improve overall stream conditions within the Hayden Lake Basin.

These highlighted projects are cited by RAC members, Forest Service staff, and county officials as some of the best projects the RAC has funded. While they may be at the top of the list, they are still fairly representative samples of the 139 Idaho Panhandle RAC projects funded over the past four years. There is a general consensus that the RAC has done a good job of getting work done on the ground that improves national forest lands. However, the RAC and the Forest Service are subject to the criticism that the majority of the projects are Forest Service-run projects. This suggests that the local communities and local organizations either are unaware of the RAC and its funding, or possibly lack the necessary capacity to develop proposals and engage in the RAC process.

## **RAC Formation and Composition**

The Idaho Panhandle RAC began with a facilitated orientation session in December 2001. Those interested in serving on the RAC filled out an application. This resulted in more applications than needed. Selections were made in consultation between the Forest Supervisor and county commissioners. With the exception of the representative of the Kootenai Tribe, all RAC members re-applied after their initial three-year terms expired and were re-appointed in 2004. The Kootenai Tribal representative asked that a different individual be appointed to represent the tribe and this was done.

The RAC currently consists of 15 members from all five counties. The Forest Service and the county commissioners work together to assure adequate representation from each of the counties. Three of the RAC members are County Commissioners—Jon Cantamessa of Shoshone County, Gus Johnson of Kootenai County, and Jack Buell

of Benewah County. All three commissioners have long term ties to their communities: Cantamessa as the local grocer in Wallace, Johnson as a thirty-year aluminum worker and union official at Kaiser, and Buell as a regional owner-operator of logging trucks and equipment. With the exception of wild burro and horse interests, all of the statutory categories have been met. Timber interests seem to be somewhat over-represented with four members having either active or previous timber industry connections. In addition to the member appointed to the timber industry position, the person appointed to the state elected official position works full time for Associated Logging Contractors when the legislature is not in session, the Dispersed Recreation representative works for Potlatch Corporation, and the Public-At-Large member is a retired forest products company employee and active in the group Women in Timber.

From its inception, the RAC chair has been Commissioner Jon Cantamessa of Shoshone County. RAC members accept Cantamessa's continuous leadership and, in fact, give Commissioner Cantamessa credit for much of the RAC's success. Cantamessa said that a critical factor in his ongoing chairmanship is Shoshone County's contribution of half of all RAC funding. Given member's overall satisfaction with his performance, it is anticipated that Commissioner Cantamessa will continue as RAC chair for the foreseeable future.

### **RAC Operation**

With the exception of July and August, the RAC meets monthly at the Forest Supervisor's Office in Coeur d'Alene. The RAC has met in every one of its participant counties except Boundary. In addition to the monthly meetings, the RAC holds two field trips per year that are highly regarded and well attended.

The RAC considers projects as they are submitted on a rolling basis. At the first meeting following RAC receipt of a new project proposal, the RAC will review the proposal and discuss it. At the following meeting, if invited by the RAC, the project sponsor will present the proposal to the RAC for further RAC discussion. The RAC may make a decision at that meeting or defer the decision until the next meeting.

The RAC tends to set its own priorities and these have been flexible and evolving over the four years of its operation. There is no project prioritization from the Forest Service except for road and weed projects. The RAC asked the Forest Service for this prioritization. There do not appear to be any conflicts among the three primary groups that make up the RAC. It is the policy of the RAC to make decisions as a group. Votes on individual projects are also taken as a group. As a result, project vetoes come from the group as a whole. Yet, while the RAC votes on projects as a group, they do so recognizing the subgroups and the requirement of a supermajority approval in each subgroup. According to the Chair, there have been some projects that were viewed negatively by the RAC. Some of these

were re-worked and then funded, and others were dropped.

Nearly all of the interviewees, including the Designated Federal Official, the RAC Coordinator, district Forest Service staff, and commissioners in all five counties, among others, felt the RAC is working well. The primary challenge has been obtaining a quorum for a couple of meetings out of the 9 or 10 it holds in a year. When the RAC coordinator determines that the RAC will not have a quorum, the meeting is cancelled to spare RAC members from traveling long distances to a meeting in which no decisions can be made. The chair felt that the major reasons for the lack of a quorum are conflicts members have with other meetings, such as those of the state legislature or its committees, along with the considerable distances some members must travel to participate.

### **Public, Agency, and Interest Group Relationship Building**

This RAC does not appear to have divisions along interest group lines and, in fact, RAC members from timber and environmental interests have developed a good working relationship. No one reported divisive debates or significant conflicts over project funding. RAC members get along well. This is reflected in the fact that fourteen of the fifteen RAC members agreed to serve another three-year term. Decision-making as a group has served the RAC well. While the environmental interests appear to be under-represented relative to the number of RAC members representing timber interests or with timber industry backgrounds, no one mentioned this as a shortcoming.

This RAC is unique in its regional and multi-county focus. Unlike other multi-county RACs where members are preoccupied with assuring a dollar-for-dollar return in project support for their county RAC allocation, project proposals are decided on the merits of the project first. Counties do want and have agreed that commensurate dollars will be returned. This agreement was established in the early days of the RAC following extensive discussion. As a result, there is a trust and an assump-

tion that this will take place. Should county dollar totals fall out of balance, end of the year project allocations will address inequities. This trust is built on a foundation of working relationships between the counties that preceded the formation of the RAC. There also have been a number of multi-county projects, particularly in the areas of noxious weed control and youth crews.

The Idaho Panhandle RAC has limited involvement of community groups and outside organizations. There are few non-governmental organizations funded by the RAC. This is because few proposals are submitted by outside groups and a large number of good project proposals are submitted by the Forest Service district rangers. One county commissioner commented that the district ranger in Sandpoint was so good and so aggressive in bringing projects forward that the Sandpoint District was getting a disproportionately high number of projects funded. The RAC coordinator stated that community groups approach the counties for project funding and some county projects better reflect community involvement. Still, non-Forest Service projects account for only 15% of the total number of projects. The limited involvement of other groups has contributed to a public uninformed about the RAC and RAC projects. This reduces the educational potential of RAC projects, as well as the ability of the RAC and the agency to broaden the circles of collaborative work and partners. Increasing community outreach and broadening the circle of project applicants is an area that warrants more attention for both the RAC and the agency in the future.

### **County-RAC-Forest Service Relations**

All five counties strongly support the RAC in both word and deed. The dramatic increase in Title II funding is perhaps the best example of this support. Overall county allocations to Title II have increased threefold, moving from just over \$400,000 in FY 02 to \$1.2 million in FY 05. Three county commissioners are RAC members and the two counties without direct commissioner participation discuss RAC activities with RAC members

from their counties. County concerns and priorities are heard by the RAC and the Forest Service and given serious consideration. One county commissioner said, "I do think that this [RAC] process has had some very good background benefits and development of a relationship with the agency. We get way more contact with our Forest Service people as a result of this."

The relationship between the RAC and the Forest Service is excellent. The Forest Service provides support, information, and assistance to the RAC. Suzanne Endsley, the RAC Coordinator, is not only given high marks for her performance in this role, but nearly every RAC member mentioned how important she is to the success of the RAC. Endsley coordinates all RAC activities, including scheduling and staffing meetings, organizing field trips, gathering project proposals, assembling briefing books, and assisting both the RAC chair and the Designated Federal Official in the operation of the RAC. Forest Supervisor Ranotta McNair, the Designated Federal Official, is also given high marks by RAC members and is involved in the RAC process. Idaho Panhandle National Forest district staff are also deeply involved in the RAC through bringing proposed projects to the RAC, lending technical expertise, and supervising projects on the ground. They conduct field trips and provide feedback to the RAC on the success of particular projects. Involvement of different levels of Forest Service staff both helps people better understand the agency and its work, and generates good will for the Forest Service. Interestingly, one Forest Service employee said that the RAC process creates a different way of looking at priorities for the Forest Service that benefit the agency as well as the public. What this individual is alluding to is an open communication process and agency responsiveness that, in turn, generates more public engagement and support. The forest supervisor felt that this legislation required the Forest Service to work with a broader array of individuals and organizations than it ordinarily would have in order for the RAC to succeed. She said that relationship building with a broader

community in the five counties was the greatest benefit of the legislation.

The Forest Service does not charge any overhead for its RAC organizing work. The agency allocates a small amount of RAC funds for meetings and field trips. This avoids RAC-Forest Service conflict over overhead costs. While the Forest Service organizes the RAC and receives the bulk of RAC project funds, the agency does not drive or dominate the RAC. Even though the vast majority of projects are Forest Service-generated and oper-

ated, RAC members feel strongly that the nature and the scope of projects are good and meet the intent of the legislation. The Idaho Panhandle RAC is comprised of many capable individuals with long-term community ties and strong visions of where they want both the RAC and natural resource management to go in the region. This strength will help the agency and RAC continue to improve RAC-Forest Service relations and, with a bit more effort, continue to expand relationships with other entities in the counties.

## Conclusion

Just under five years of implementation of P.L. 106-393 in the five-county Idaho Panhandle has resulted in a productively collaborative RAC, improved and effective county-Forest Service relations, and a declining Title III program with some questionable allocations.

As of this writing in late 2005, only two of the five counties retain a remnant of a Title III program. Title III funds have primarily been distributed through administrative allocation, and not through a formal and more open and competitive processes. Almost 60 percent of all Title III funds remain unspent, and have been reserved by the counties for emergencies or as “rainy day” funds. It is troubling that counties are retaining funds in this manner. Both internal allocation processes and reserving Title III dollars for future use appear inconsistent with the spirit and intent of the legislation.

Given a threefold increase in Title II from the first year of the program and the elimination of a Title III program in three of the five counties, this case study is mostly about the Idaho Panhandle RAC. The Panhandle RAC is a well functioning and effectively collaborative RAC. Participants get along well, leadership is strong and effective, and decisions are made as a group, and in a manner that is consistent with the legislation.

One area of criticism of this RAC and the Forest Service remains the lack of “outside” projects. The RAC is reliant on the Forest Service for pro-

posing and implementing the vast majority of its projects; a fact that has generated some concerns among RAC members, and led to some minor questions about distribution of funds in the region. Only 21 of the 139 projects are not Forest Service projects and, of these, 17 are county projects. Only four projects can be described as sponsored by “outside” or non-governmental organizations. Although the Forest Service appears to be doing a good job of guiding the RAC while being respectful of the RAC process and its role as a body responsible for recommending projects to fund through Title II, community outreach by the RAC and the Forest Service is needed to increase and broaden community participation. More visible or more widely distributed calls for project proposals appear to be needed. This will not only encourage a greater diversity of groups to get involved in RAC projects, but it could help more people learn about the successful work of the RAC and better understand some of the resource management issues in the area.

Refreshing about this RAC is not only its effective group decision-making process but also its focus on the region as a whole. RAC members are interested in seeing that their counties receive project funds equal to what their county has contributed to Title II, but this does not drive project selection. There are at least two reasons for this: 1) most of the project dollars are going to projects developed by the Forest Service, and 2) there is a history of

inter-county collaboration across the five-county region that precedes the formation of the RAC. The RAC has carried on the regional thinking that informed the creation of the Panhandle RAC in the first place. Successful previous collaboration offers a powerful foundation for a successful RAC. It by no means guarantees success, particularly given the new players and a new RAC process, but success appears to have bred success with the Panhandle RAC.

The overall conclusion of this case study is that, with the exception of Title III funds held and

the limited number of outside group involvement in projects, P. L. 106-393 is working the way Congress intended and hoped that it would. Good projects are being done and the federal lands and the communities near them are benefiting. The Forest Service is doing a good job with this RAC with its operation of the RAC and the quality of the projects it is sponsoring and implementing on the ground. RAC members have a vision for what they want the RAC to accomplish, and a commitment to the Idaho Panhandle region as a whole.

## **Interviewees**

Barbara Botsch, RAC Member, Historical Interests  
Jack Buell, RAC Member, Timber Interests, Benewah County Commissioner  
Maggie Colwell, Policy Analyst, Idaho Association of Counties  
Jon Cantamessa, RAC Chair, Local Elected Official, Shoshone County Commissioner  
Rob Davies, Forest Service Hydrologist  
Dan Dinning, Boundary County Commissioner  
Suzanne Endsley, Forest Service RAC Coordinator  
Pat Hart, Forest Service Recreation Specialist  
Greg Hetzler, Forest Service Recreation Specialist  
Sara Jerome, Forest Service Fuels Specialist  
Gus Johnson, RAC Member Labor Representative, Kootenai County Commissioner  
Senator Shawn Keough, RAC Member, State Elected Official  
Walt Kirby, Boundary County Commissioner  
Dick Kramer, Forest Service District Ranger, Sandpoint  
MariBeth Lynch, RAC Member, Mining Interests  
Bob McCoy, RAC Member, Environmental Interests  
Linda McFadden, Forest Service Deputy District Ranger  
Ranotta McNair, Forest Supervisor, RAC Designated Federal Official  
Jackie McVoy, RAC Member, Public At Large  
Patti Perry, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho  
Marsha Phillips, Bonner County Commissioner  
Michael Riapitti, RAC Member, Grazing Interests  
Neil Smith, RAC Member, Dispersed Recreation, Wildlife and Conservation  
Ron Smith, Boundary County Commissioner  
Robin Stanley, RAC Member, School Official  
Terry Steiner, RAC Member, Recreation Interests  
Ruth Watkins, RAC Member, National Conservation Group  
Peggy White, Shoshone County Clerk