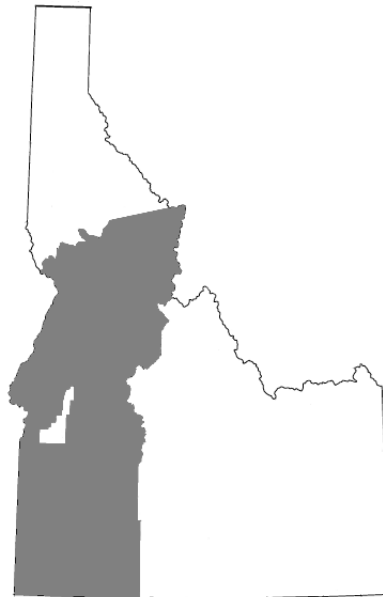


Southwest Idaho Forest Service Resource Advisory Committee and Title III Case Study

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Background

The Southwest Idaho Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) was established by the Forest Service using a boundary established by the Idaho Association of Counties. It contains two national forests, the Boise and the Payette, and 10 counties that encompass rural areas and the growing urban area around the state capitol of Boise. Six of the 10 counties contribute Title II funds to the RAC in various percentages of their total P.L.106-393 payments. Four counties are on the RAC without contributing to Title II. Most of these non-contributing counties do not receive a P.L.106-393 payment (except Ada County, which receives a total payment of approximately \$6,000 per year). The six counties that do contribute to Title II are: Adams, Boise, Elmore, Idaho, Valley, and Washington Counties. These counties are described in more detail below. Like many counties in this region, logging and ranching were once the primary economic activities. Consistent with regional trends, these sectors plummeted over the last 20 years. For example, in Valley County, mills began closing in the mid-1990s and recently Boise Cascade, Inc. closed the last remaining mill in the area.

Federal land covers 33 million acres, or 63%, of the state, making Idaho fifth among states for the most federal acreage. The Boise National Forest covers 2.6 million acres and the Payette National Forest covers 2.3 million acres of southwestern Idaho, although the majority of the Payette National Forest is outside of the Southwest Idaho RAC boundary. The Boise National Forest Annual Report documents that in 2004, 43.4 million board feet of timber and products other than timber were harvested from the forest (Boise National Forest, 2004). A decade ago, sawmills in Southwest Idaho consumed 229 million board feet of logs, down from the peak in the late seventies, when mills in the area used 263 million board feet annually (Northwest Natural Resource Group, 2001). The closure of many mills in Idaho has resulted in the current mill capacity of the area dropping to about 45 million board feet annually.

Recently, there has been a shift from harvesting timber from the national forests to thinning and under-story clearing. With far less merchantable product, this has created a palpable resentment on behalf of many rural residents and foresters who feel that the forest is not being managed properly. Yet, the focus on forest thinning and grazing to reduce fire hazards is associated with changing national policy and changing agency mandates. The Healthy Forests Restoration Act and the Forest Service's hazardous fuels reduction plan both focus on mechanical and hand thinning. Last year, nearly 6,000 acres of southwest Idaho forestland was thinned.

Like many areas of the West, Southwest Idaho is shifting from a landscape of rural production to a landscape of recreation. Southwest Idaho is home to what many say is the first new ski area to open in the West since the mid-1980s. Tamarack, a large skiing development several miles north of Cascade, opened in 2004. Locals say that housing prices within the vicinity of the ski development have increased three-fold. While there are mixed feelings about the recreation and service-related jobs that the new development will bring, for the most part, residents and county commissioners look forward to the employment opportunities. The construction sector is already booming in the region. Driving through the small town of Council, about 10 miles north of Tamarack, a construction company has a large sign announcing "now hiring for all positions."

There is a considerable amount of nonfederal rural and urban land within the boundaries of the Southwest Idaho RAC that are also undergoing significant change. Rural cropland, for instance, decreased by 873,000 acres between 1982 and 1997. Much of this decrease is attributed to development and acres enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2001). Development is an increasingly powerful force. Boise was recently named the third largest city in the Pacific Northwest, growing at a

rate of 26% and accelerating land use conversion in the region. All of these factors contribute to shifting social and demographic characteristics.

The shifting social and demographic characteristics, along with a growing demand for recreation and other services in Southwest Idaho, has led to a dramatic increase in the immigrant population. The 2000 Census recorded 64,080 foreign-born residents in Idaho. This is 5% of the state's overall population and an increase of 122% above the 1990 foreign-born population of 28,905

residents. The rate of increase in the foreign-born population is the thirteenth highest in the country. A comparison of the increase in the immigrant population from 1990 with the change in the overall population during the same period shows that immigrant settlement directly accounted for 12% of the state's overall population increase over that decade. Almost half (47%) of Idaho's foreign-born population has arrived in the state since 1990, which is a slightly higher share than the national average of 43.7%.

County Elections for Titles II and III

Adams, Boise, Elmore, Idaho, Valley, and Washington Counties currently allocate between 15% and 16% of the total payment under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act towards Titles II and III (see Table 1). The four other counties within the boundaries of the RAC (Ada, Canyon, Owyhee, and Payette Counties) do not participate financially. Canyon, Owyhee, and Payette Counties do not receive P.L.106-393 payments, while Ada County receives a small payment that they allocate solely to Title I (around \$6,000 per year). Amongst the participating counties, differences can be seen in the split between Titles II and III. Idaho County has consistently contributed 13% to Title II and 2% to Title III since the establishment of P.L.106-393. Valley County, as well, has fairly consistently contributed 14% to Title II and 2% to Title III.

Adams County allocated 13.5% to Title II and 1.5% to Title III during the first year, but

has since chosen to allocate 15% to Title II each year, and nothing to Title III. Washington County, on the other hand, went from allocating 15% of their total payment to Title II the first two years, to allocating 10% of the total to Title II and 5% to Title III. Boise and Elmore County allocations have been the most variable: Boise County initially allocated 11.25% to Title II and 3.75% to Title III. The following year it allocated 15% to Title II, but over the last two years it has allocated 13% to Title II and 2% to Title III. Finally, Elmore County dedicates the largest amount to Title III for reasons that are discussed below. Elmore County went from initially allocating 3.75% to Title III, to increasing it to 8% for two years, then to reducing it to 5% in 2005, the most recent fiscal year. The county commissioners have made it clear that if they do not see more projects implemented in their county, they will decrease the Title II allocation again.

Title III Projects

Boise, Elmore, Valley, and Washington Counties have consistently allocated money to Title III. Adams County, which allocated \$11,208 to Title III in fiscal year 2002 (1.5% of its Title II and III total for that year), has since allocated all of its Title II and III eligible funds to Title II. Only three of

the five counties that support Title III have a formal project proposal and selection process. The other allocations are made through the county budget process. In the words of one county commissioner, "We don't wait for a project to come along, there's no formal project proposal process... We've bought

Table 1. Contributions to Title II and Title III by County by Fiscal Year

FY	County	Total Payment	Title II	Percent to Title II	Title III	Percent to Title III
2002	Adams	\$747,189	\$97,135	13.00%	\$11,208	1.50%
2003	Adams	\$753,166	\$112,975	15.00%	\$0	0.00%
2004	Adams	\$762,204	\$114,331	15.00%	\$0	0.00%
2005	Adams	\$772,113	\$115,817	15.00%	\$0	0.00%
2002	Boise	\$1,372,311	\$154,385	11.25%	\$51,462	3.75%
2003	Boise	\$1,383,290	\$207,494	15.00%	\$0	0.00%
2004	Boise	\$1,399,889	\$181,986	13.00%	\$27,998	2.00%
2005	Boise	\$1,418,088	\$184,351	13.00%	\$28,362	2.00%
2002	Elmore	\$1,036,602	\$116,618	11.25%	\$38,873	3.75%
2003	Elmore	\$1,044,896	\$83,592	8.00%	\$83,592	8.00%
2004	Elmore	\$1,057,434	\$84,595	8.00%	\$84,595	8.00%
2005	Elmore	\$1,071,181	\$107,118	10.00%	\$53,559	5.00%
2002	Idaho	\$4,927,130	\$689,798	14.00%	\$98,543	2.00%
2003	Idaho	\$4,966,548	\$695,317	14.00%	\$99,331	2.00%
2004	Idaho	\$5,026,147	\$703,661	14.00%	\$100,523	2.00%
2005	Idaho	\$5,091,484	\$712,808	14.00%	\$101,830	2.00%
2002	Valley	\$3,008,610	\$406,162	13.50%	\$45,129	1.50%
2003	Valley	\$3,032,679	\$424,575	14.00%	\$60,654	2.00%
2004	Valley	\$3,069,070	\$429,670	14.00%	\$61,381	2.00%
2005	Valley	\$3,108,969	\$435,256	14.00%	\$62,179	2.00%
2002	Washington	\$181,327	\$36,265	20.00%	\$0	0.00%
2003	Washington	\$182,778	\$36,556	20.00%	\$0	0.00%
2004	Washington	\$184,971	\$27,746	15.00%	\$9,249	5.00%
2005	Washington	\$187,376	\$28,106	15.00%	\$9,369	5.00%

material things and made allocations with Title III rather than do projects.”

A clear emphasis emerges from this examination of Title III expenditures, namely the high percentage of funding going to emergency preparedness and services. Emergency preparedness covers the equipment to respond to emergency situations, including radio repeaters, avalanche predictors, snowmobiles, extrication equipment, and medical supplies. Emergency service funding also includes payments for search and rescue crews, helicopters, and emergency equipment for rescue missions

According to the Adams County clerk, the first year’s Title III funds (which amounted to \$11,208) were distributed equally between three fire districts and the search and rescue unit. Since then, Adams County has chosen not to allocate funds to Title III.

The Elmore County commissioners view Title III as a means of addressing critical gaps in county services. As one commissioner pointed out, there are still areas of the county with no radio access, which is particularly dangerous in a region with severe fire and snow hazards. Commissioners, quick to note that the county is economically disadvantaged, have spent the majority of their Title III dollars to install radio repeaters (at a total cost of \$199,545). The second largest Title III expenditure, totaling \$51,820, is for the provision of emergency services on national forest land. This includes expenditures for search and rescue equipment (including GPS devices, snowmobiles and trailers, medical bags, and immobilizing spine boards). Together, search and rescue equipment and radio repeaters represent over 80% of Elmore County’s annual Title III allocations. Another portion of Title III allocations goes to actually providing emergency services. This amount varies by year, depending on the number of rescues, but a helicopter rescue in 2005 cost \$2,008 and the use of extrication equipment cost \$20,000. Overall, the overwhelming majority of Elmore County’s Title III funds are used for emergency preparedness and emergency services.

Boise County is one of the three counties to have a Title III project proposal process. The county commissioners solicit proposals through articles

in the local newspaper and by speaking with and educating individuals that work on public lands about the Title III program. Only three projects, however, have been approved since the inception of the Act. The first, a small woods demonstration project, received \$52,253 and was administered by the West Central Highlands Resource Conservation & Development District (RC&D). The second, an easement purchase in the Garden Valley Recreation District, cost \$26,000 and was administered by the Idaho Foundation for Parks. The last project, for Boise County Sheriff’s Department search and rescue program, received \$11,118. This money was used exclusively for rescue missions. When asked why there have been no more Title III expenditures, the clerk indicated that Title III is very limited in its scope and, as a result, it is difficult to find projects that fall within the legislative intent.

Valley County has allocated the largest portion of Title III funds to search and rescue equipment, including “Aval-lungs” (for avalanche rescue crews), snowmobiles and trailers, and rescue sleds. The county has also allocated funds to emergency preparedness measures, including avalanche predictors, radio repeaters, and lightning arrestors to protect radio repeaters. Emergency services consumed over half of the budget in fiscal year 2005; helicopter expenses for three rescues were also covered by Title III funds. Finally, a portion of Title III funds went to individual salaries. In fiscal year 2005, \$15,000 of Title III funds were provided as a match to the sheriff’s office to fund an employee working on federal land.

Idaho County solicits proposals through newspaper advertising. The clerk noted, however, that much of the public has yet to realize that Title III money is available. Some programs that have been funded include forest education programs for grade-school aged children. However, over the last several years, only a small portion of Title III funds have been allocated, attributed in part to an aversion to using federal dollars.

Finally, Washington County receives the smallest dollar amount from the payments to counties program and only began allocating 5% of the

total payment to Title III in 2004. The commissioners request proposals from local schools, fire districts, and other organizations and then award money to projects that benefit national forestland based on funds available. In 2004, the majority of these funds went to sheriff's search and rescue expenses (\$6,022); another \$1,000 was allocated for soil conservation. The project with the soil conservation district developed physical models of the groundwater system to show the impact of land use, fires, and pollution on groundwater throughout the county. The search and rescue expenses reimbursed a rescue in the Hells Canyon area, near national forest land. In 2005, the commissioners have approved Title III funding for a Learning Tree class about the forest and noxious weed control for teachers. A county commissioner reports that they are currently talking to the sponsors of after-school programs to see how curriculum might be developed to help at-risk students better understand the forest areas in the county. They are encouraging the local fire districts to apply for funds for wildfire mitigation education as well.

Overall, Title III is providing funds for important projects in the participating counties of Southwest Idaho. There are a few ways in which

these funds could be leveraged further and be made more accessible. Across the board, Title III monies are allocated separately from Title II. An opportunity exists within the legislation to propose "joint projects"—where participating counties may propose to pool project funds and jointly propose a project or group of projects to a resource advisory committee (Title II, section 203, 2). Secondly, in several counties the Title III allocation process does not include a formal project proposal process. There is an important difference between an open proposal process, which allows broader access to funds, and a county budgetary allocation, which in effect closes access to those outside of county offices. By opening access, counties may receive a wider variety of projects from community organizations. The third concern regards the use of Title III funds expenditures for individual salaries. Several county clerks and commissioners mentioned that some Title III funds were allocated to support the salaries of sheriff's office employees or public works employees. There is an important difference between discrete projects that include a stated goal and a budget, and funding a portion of an individual's salary. It is unclear whether using Title III dollars to pay their individual salaries is within the intent of the legislation.

Title II Projects

The Southwest Idaho RAC has approved 61 projects and allocated a total of \$3,497,951 of Title II funds since its inception (see Table 2). Approximately 80% of all approved projects are administered by the Forest Service. Several RAC members expressed the desire to receive project proposals from a wider variety of organizations because of a concern that they are a group that supports only "second-string" Forest Service projects. This concern is rooted in the assumption that the agency is supporting all of its highest priority projects. One RAC member recalled that at the inception of the RAC, a few district rangers came in with a list of projects that had been on the books for 20 years, but had never been funded.

Yet, most RAC members do not share this concern, citing the RAC's rigorous process for evaluating projects along with the importance of projects that, without RAC funds, would not have been done. A Forest Service scientist concurs that, although the projects may not have been a high priority within the agency, this is due to the agency's orientation towards timber and fuels reduction projects rather than the quality of the project—"Watershed or roads-related work is the most beneficial in terms of habitat, yet falls prey to shrinking budgets." One former RAC member suggested that it is the reduction in the agency's funding that has resulted in so many Forest Service projects coming to the RAC.

This individual added that the agency, as the land manager, is most attuned to national forest resource management needs and is equipped with staff for planning and completing permitting processes like NEPA.

Project Solicitation

At the time of the RAC's formation, public service announcements were placed in local newspapers announcing the availability of RAC funds. Since then, the RAC has relied on word-of-mouth to announce the availability of funding. It is, in the words of one RAC member, "something we need to work on." The only organization that receives frequent email updates regarding the availability of Title II funds is the Forest Service. As one Forest Service employee put it, "you kind of have to be in the business" to know about the availability of RAC funds in Idaho. Recently, the RAC has reached out to the counties to inform them about the RAC's new policy of funding dust abatement projects with a percentage of the annual carry-over funds. The RAC can increase the number and diversity of proposals submitted by increasing public outreach and project solicitation.

The RAC continues to receive and review project proposals monthly. Projects ideas and proposals are pre-screened by the Designated Federal Official (DFO) and the RAC chair. Projects that the DFO and the chair decide meet the legislated requirements are asked to submit a first-stage proposal to the entire RAC. The first-stage proposal is a conceptual description of project goals. If the concept proposal is supported, the applicant is asked to submit a second-stage proposal that includes more details about project implementation and a budget. After the first and second stage evaluations, projects are either recommended to the forest supervisor for funding or refused and withdrawn.

Project Review, Prioritization, and Selection

The RAC meets eight or nine times a year depending on the number of proposals received. The RAC will meet when a minimum of three or four proposals have been collected by the DFO.

The RAC has created a series of criteria to evaluate projects. First-stage project proposals are examined using the following criteria: (1) includes matching funds, (2) provides multiple benefits, (3) is affordable, (4) is feasible, (5) provides long-term benefits, and (6) has clear outcomes. The final screening criterion is the amount of project administrative costs. RAC members tend to disfavor high administrative costs or a request of Title II funds to cover federal agency employee time. However, there is no specific cost threshold that guarantees that a project will move forward or be dropped; rather, projects are analyzed on a case-by-case basis. If approved, a project proponent is asked to complete a second stage proposal. A simple majority of RAC members present at an official meeting is required to advance the project, however the group prefers to reach consensus. Projects not receiving a simple majority are dropped from further consideration.

Second-stage project proposals are evaluated using the following criteria: (1) provides multiple benefits to federal land resources, (2) contributes to community stability and local job opportunities, (3) improves cooperative relationships among those that use and manage the forests, (4) costs relate to project benefits and available RAC funding, (5) there is high quality project planning, design, organization, and coordination with Forest Service staff and county commissioners, (6) matching funds are provided by applicant or other sources, (7) high urgency to respond to project and associated opportunity, and *8) produces a tangible outcome.

Projects are ranked by the RAC members on a scale of zero to five; a score of five indicates that the project fully meets the criteria. A final composite score for each project is then determined by summing the ratings for each criterion, the maximum composite score being 40. After reviewing and rating all proposed projects, the RAC members vote on whether to support a project. The RAC prefers to come to consensus, but if a decision is not unanimous, they revert to the supra-majority approval by all three sub-groups as required by the legislation.

Most of the projects recommended by the RAC have been approved by the Forest Service, with two

exceptions. The first is a snowmobile warming hut that the Boise National Forest supervisor determined provided only recreational benefit. He felt the recreation benefit was not supported in the legislation. The second project was a weed management plan that included a goat grazing element on private lands. The Payette National Forest supervisor would only approve the project if the goat grazing element was eliminated. Several RAC members mentioned that, as a result, this project was a missed opportunity, as the final project relied on herbicides rather than the more innovative goat grazing approach.

Approved Projects

Approximately 80% of RAC projects are proposed by the Forest Service. This alone is of concern to some RAC members, as previously discussed, however it is further exacerbated by the fact that a significant proportion of those proposals are submitted by one ranger district in a single county. The ranger from this district explained that the RAC grants play a critical role in providing initial funds and local matching funds for important projects that he previously had not been able to get off the ground. He commented, "Once we realized how easy it was to get money through the RAC, we re-tooled to focus on RAC funds and slowed down on other projects. The projects that the RAC allowed had previously been out of the financial realm." In reflecting on several decades within the Forest Service, this district ranger concluded that, "In 30 years with the Forest Service, nothing has had such a positive impact on my work." Yet, the forest supervisor communicated his concerns regarding the distribution of RAC funds, particularly with respect to ensuring that each county and ranger district receives their fair share—"If you have one district ranger that is real aggressive about putting in proposals, it can throw the balance off." The supervisor also stated that he did not want to set project quotas, but he recognized that more equity across the forest was needed to avoid souring relationships with counties. Indeed, one county has threatened to decrease their contribution to Title II due to the lack of projects occurring in their area. This is discussed further below.

Related to this discussion is the low number of project proposals from the local community. Many local agencies and organizations either do not know about RAC funding or are choosing not to apply. There are several obstacles that currently limit the amount of community participation in the process; these include: (1) lack of knowledge about RAC funds and the project proposal process (which is slowly improving with time); (2) the inability of community groups to complete required studies/assessments (like NEPA assessments and Environmental Impact Reviews, which the RAC does not like to fund); and (3) the focus on matching funds in the evaluation criteria, which can exclude organizations that are not large enough to secure substantial matches. A RAC member suggests that while the RAC is doing good things, it is not yet fostering real change in the community. S/he suggests that, "If there was a way that you could train the agencies that have the expertise to work with citizen groups to not only make projects happen, but to really improve community relations...that, to me, would start moving things in a new direction."

Roads, Trails and Infrastructure Maintenance or Replacement

The RAC approved three culvert replacement projects, two of which were sponsored by the Emmett Ranger District. The \$70,000 Third Fork Culvert Replacement project on the Emmett Ranger District replaced two fish passage-blocking culverts with open-bottom arch culverts (see Figure 1). These fish-friendly culverts provide fish passage at two stream-road crossings that had been prioritized in a Forest Service survey. They allow fish to access 14 miles of upstream habitat. This project had matching support from the Forest Service in the form of in-kind services (\$8,900) and funds to cover contract costs (\$54,101), along with matching funds from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Bull Trout Recovery Program (\$15,000). In-kind services included field work, engineering design, NEPA permitting and Section 7 consultation. Construction bids were competitively solicited and two bids were received. While the contractor for the project was

Table 2. Approved RAC Projects Categorized by Purpose

Southwest Idaho RAC: Title II Projects, FY02-FY04			
Category	Project Name	County	Title II \$
Roads			
	Boise County Roads Dust Abatement	Boise	\$39,600
	Evergreen Bridge and Picnic Area Rehabilitation	Adams	\$145,000
	Kline Mountain Road Stabilization	Valley	\$145,000
	Mann Creek Road Dust Abatement	Washington	\$11,880
	Mountain Home Highway District Dust Control for 2005	Elmore	\$18,195
	Valley County Dust Abatement and Road Stabilization	Valley	\$102,696
	Boulder Bridge	Valley	\$13,000
	Dust Control and Road Stabilization	Elmore	\$8,072
	Boise Peak User Created Trail Rehabilitation	Boise	\$8,500
	Monumental Creek Trail Maintenance	Valley	\$88,012
	Cascade RD Trailheads Improvement Projects	Valley	\$61,800
	Third Fork Resurfacing	Gem	\$183,525
	Salmon River Road Surfacing (Joint Proposal with NorthCentral Idaho RAC)	Idaho	\$300,000
	Pine Bridge Engineering Study	Elmore	\$35,000
	South Fork Trail Rehab (Demo) Project	Valley	\$12,000
	Fall Creek Rd Engineering Study	Elmore	\$25,000
	Burgdorf-French Creek Road Cutslope Stabilization	Idaho	\$68,500
	Gravel Burgdorf-French Creek Road	Idaho	\$120,000
	Josephine Lake Road Improvement	Idaho	\$137,500
	Middle Fork Payette River Road Restoration	Valley	\$100,000
	Price Valley Parking Lot	Adams	\$25,000
	Third Fork Culvert Replacement	Gem	\$70,000
	Replace Monumental Summit Road Culverts	Valley	\$4,000
	<i>subtotal roads</i>		\$1,722,280
Soils			
	none		
Forest Health			
	Deadwoon Thin	Valley	\$18,400
Watershed			
	Protect and Restore Little Salmon River	Adams, Idaho	\$222,109
	Brownlee Watershed Improvements	Washington	\$22,500
	Council Mountain Riparian Fencing	Adams	\$22,000
	Indian Mountain Allotment Riparian Fencing	Adams	\$43,500
	Indian Mountain Cattle Allotment Rider	Adams	\$24,000
	EFSFSR Dam Removal	Valley	
	South Fork Salmon River Salmon Fishing Event	Valley	\$105,681
	South Fork Salmon Fishing Event II	Valley	\$49,600
	<i>subtotal watershed</i>		\$489,390
Habitat			
	East Fork Ditch Co. Fish Screen and Passage	Adams	\$16,305
	Silver Creek Weir Removal Project	Valley	\$5,000
	Bear Community Ditch Diversion and Fish Screen	Adams	\$11,550
	Council Mountain Bull Trout Habitat Fencing	Adams	\$5,000
	Middle Hornet Ditch Users	Adams	\$7,245
	<i>subtotal habitat</i>		\$45,100

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Category	Project Name	County	Title II \$
Weeds			
	South Fork Payette Noxious Weed Treatment	Boise	\$10,000
	Upgrade Adams County Weed Department	Adams	\$49,085
	Joint Weed Control Facility	Boise	\$114,000
	Valley County Integrated Noxious Weed Control	Valley	\$43,843
	South Fork Payette Noxious Weed Treatment	Boise	\$20,000
	Boise County Spray Truck	Boise	\$40,000
	Lower Payette CWMA's Noxious Weed Program	Washington	\$45,000
	Idaho City Noxious Weed Program	Boise	\$3,000
	Idaho Marina Signage to Prevent Invasive Species	Boise	\$2,000
	<i>subtotal weeds</i>		\$326,928
Native Vegetation			
	<i>none</i>		
Fuels			
	Yellow Pine SST	Valley	\$34,200
	Church Camp Hazardous Fuels Reduction	Valley	\$66,622
	Circle C Ranch Subdivision Fuelbreak	Adams	\$151,250
	Yellow Pine #5 Hazardous Fuels Reduction	Valley	\$76,654
	Timberjack Slash Bundler (Demo Project)	Boise	\$10,000
	Stibnite Forest Concepts (Demo Project)	Valley	\$7,000
	Hwy 21 Mechanical Fuels Reduction	Boise	\$75,000
	Hwy 21 Mechanical Fuels Reduction	Boise	\$95,000
	<i>subtotal fuels</i>		\$515,726
Recreation			
	Mores Creek Summit Improvement Project	Boise	\$66,810
History			
	<i>none</i>		
Other			
	YCC Program for the Idaho City Ranger District	Boise	\$15,000
	YCC Program on Cascade Ranger District	Valley	\$14,800
	Fire Ecology Teacher Workshop	Valley	\$3,500
	Mountain Home YCC	Elmore	\$16,500
	Payette National Forest YCC	Adams	\$8,000
	USFS Fire Lookout Project	Boise	\$50,000
	Mountain Home YCC	Elmore	\$16,000
	Lowman Emergency Services Building	Boise	\$24,817
	<i>subtotal other</i>		\$148,617
TOTAL			\$3,333,251

Source: Forest Service web database, 6/17/05

http://www.notes.fs.fed.us:81/r4/payments_to_states.nsf/Web_Projects_by_RAC?OpenView&Count=1000

Figure 1. Fish Culvert on Wilson Creek Before Replacement



Figure 2. Fish Culvert on Wilson Creek After Replacement



not local, local expenditures on project materials totaled \$97,680. One local laborer was hired for a month. A second culvert replacement project on the Emmett Ranger District received funds in 2005 to restore fish passage to another stream-road crossing prioritized by the Forest Service. While the project was approved, several RAC members expressed misgivings about the importance of such work, commenting that, “It seems like a lot of money to replace a perfectly good culvert.”

Another group of road maintenance projects addressed dust abatement. The RAC was initially unenthusiastic about supporting dust abatement, however, each year the RAC has had a significant carryover budget (in the tens of thousands of dollars). Thus, this past year the RAC resolved to reserve a percentage of these carryover funds for dust abatement projects proposed by counties. Thus far, Washington, Boise, Valley, and Elmore Counties have received RAC funds for dust abatement. At a recent meeting, the RAC decided to fund proposed dust abatement projects at 66% of their requested amount.

Noxious and Exotic Weed Control

Weed control projects have, for the most part, focused on programs for integrated planning and treatment of invasive species through herbicide treatment. One project particularly popular among RAC members proposed experimenting with goat grazing to suppress invasive species on private lands near the Payette National Forest. While the project was approved by the RAC, it was rejected by the forest supervisor, who disapproved of the goat grazing element since it took place on private, rather than public lands. The rest of the proposal involving private land and the purchase of herbicides was approved for \$45,000. Many RAC members commented that this project was a missed opportunity.

In addition, several weed control facilities have been built or rehabilitated to coordinate planning and treatment efforts. In Adams County, the weed department received \$49,085 of RAC funds to upgrade their building. In Boise County, the Joint Weed Control Facility received \$45,843 for

the initial construction of the building in 2003 and then another \$11,164 for an update of the building in 2005. Elmore County is now planning to submit a proposal to build a facility very similar to Boise County's facility.

Fuels Management

Millions of forested acres in the West are at high risk for catastrophic wildfire, in part due to high tree density and in part to a buildup of undergrowth. Reducing risk generally requires removing brush and some trees to reduce forest density. Recovering merchantable material is difficult because of the cost of doing the work and high capitalization required to obtain the needed equipment. The Timberjack Slash Bundler Demo Project (see Figure 3) was an experiment with fuels reduction equipment from Scandinavia. This technology may lower the cost of fuels reduction by providing an efficient way to dispose of brush, small trees, tree limbs, and tops, which are generally expensive and difficult to remove and of little commercial value. The bundler creates a commercial product and provides an alternative to openly burning slash. The bundler is also engineered for minimal impact to the ground.

The Idaho City Ranger District was the first to use a slash-bundler in North America. Its use was funded through a variety of partners and programs. They include: the Southwest Idaho RAC, National Fire Plan, John Deere/Timberjack, the Boise National Forest, USDA Forest Service Forest Operations Research and the Forest Products Lab, and the Small Diameter Utilization Program. The bundler moves through the forest, picks up "slash," compresses it, and rolls it into "logs" bound with twine. These can be fed into a chipper to make wood chips for heat or energy generation. This project received \$10,000 of RAC funds.

Fuels reduction projects include both hand and mechanically thinned work. Hand work includes hand chopping, gathering, and burning understory and young growth. The Cascade district fuels specialist estimates the costs of hand thinning to be approximately \$1,000 per acre. The Church Camp Hazardous Fuels Reduction project received \$66,622 of RAC funds. The RAC would not approve a project that included thinning on private property, even though this property was surrounded by national forest. The RAC has a

Figure 3. Timberjack Slash Bundler in action



preference for projects with merchantable timber products. A total of \$3,000 of posts and polls were produced and sold as a part of this project. Local fire crews, hired eight weeks early, implemented this project.

Watershed Restoration and Enhancement

The South Fork Salmon River Salmon Fishing Event and Restoration Project was one of the largest RAC watershed restoration and enhancement projects. It received two RAC grants totaling \$155,281. This project is a perfect example of a project with multiple objectives that defy easy categorization. During the summer, thousands of anglers gather along the South Fork Salmon River for Chinook salmon fishing season. Resource damage from the high density of anglers included erosion by cars driving on the unpaved single-lane road, cars parking on the cut banks, and the creation of a network of informal trails. Over-flowing campgrounds and the lack of bathroom facilities resulted in reduced water quality and raised public health concerns.

A unique partnership involving the Boise and Payette National Forests, Valley County Sheriff's Department, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, the Nez Perce Tribe, and Southwest Idaho Resource Advisory Committee developed this project. The project involved the construction of stairways to the river to reduce erosion problems caused by angler-created trails, built parking areas away from stream banks to reduce vehicle erosion, and added trash bins and "porta potties" to improve sanitation. Signage was also developed to help direct and control recreational use.

Another watershed restoration and enhancement project is the Indian Mountain Allotment Riparian Fencing project. This project is designed to protect bull trout by seasonally excluding cattle from 11 miles of spawning areas on grazing allotments. In cooperation with livestock permittees in the Council Ranger District, 21 miles of fencing was constructed along Dewey Creek, the East Fork of the Weiser River, and Sheep Creek. The RAC grant was for purchasing fencing material and spring development supplies, building the fence,

and paying personnel to ride and maintain the fence. The permittees repeatedly returned to the RAC with proposals requesting funds for fence maintenance and other ongoing costs. The first two requests were approved, but the third was denied because the RAC felt fence upkeep and other normal operational expenses were the permittees' responsibility.

Wildlife and Fish Habitat

The West Central Highlands RC&D is involved in several fish habitat and fish passage projects. The main goal is to recover bull trout on public land. Bull trout is federally designated as a threatened species. Once ranging from Northern California to British Columbia, today the main remaining populations are found in Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. Bull trout are sensitive to slightly higher water temperatures, poor water quality, low flow conditions, and passage barriers that block migration routes and spawning areas (USFWS, 1998).

The East Fork Ditch Fish Screen and Fish Passage Project on the East Fork of the Weiser River was designed to restore year-round fish passage over the diversion and eliminate fish entrainment in the ditch with a self-maintaining fish screen. The project cost a total of \$88,225, which included design, permitting, installation, and contract oversight. The RAC contributed \$16,305 to the project. Additional monies from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Forest Service, and Bureau of Reclamation totaled \$9,970. The largest contributor to the project is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through their Fisheries Restoration and Irrigation Mitigation Act.

The self-cleaning fish screen was the first of its kind to be installed in Idaho. The labor and heavy equipment operation was supplied through a local contractor and the installation took one and a half weeks. This project included a monitoring component as about 150 fish were implanted with radio tags both upstream and downstream of the diversion. Over the next two years, the tagged fish will be recaptured and checked for position in the creek to identify fish migration patterns.

Figure 4. Volunteers Working on the Silver Creek Weir Removal Project



Funds for monitoring and screen maintenance and replacement fees for the series of boulder step pools constructed below it were not included in the RAC grant. Similar projects proposed by the RC&D include the Bear Community Ditch Diversion and Fish Screen, which received \$11,500 from the RAC, the East Fork Ditch Company Fish Screen and Passage, which received \$16,305, and the Middle Hornet Ditch Users project, which received \$7,245. Other projects that are part of the “habitat” category include the Silver Creek Research Weir Removal. Silver Creek has been used as a hydrological research site over the last five decades with research stations being established on seven tributaries to Silver Creek. Each station contained a weir, flume, and a small structure housing monitoring equipment. The structures, now no longer used, are large sediment traps and upstream barriers to previously occupied fish habitat. The RAC contributed \$5,000 to this project to remove these barriers in Silver Creek, which provides habitat to the bull trout (see Figure 4). The Rocky Mountain Research Station of the Forest Service consented to removal of the stations and offered consultation assistance

during project implementation. The project to remove the stations represents a partnership of the Ted Trueblood Chapter of Trout Unlimited, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game Community Challenge Grant Program, and the Emmett Ranger District of the Boise National Forest.

Other

There were several youth conservation corps (YCC) and education programs included in this catch-all category. Both types of projects are looked upon favorably by the RAC, especially YCC programs that provide employment and on-the-job training for local young adults. Idaho City recently began a YCC program, which was in great demand as 26 individuals applied for five positions. YCC programs on average receive approximately \$15,000 per project proposal. There were two education projects approved by the RAC. The first was a fire ecology teacher workshop in Valley County, which received \$3,500, and the second was a signage project to educate marina users about invasive species in Idaho Marina, which received \$2,000.

RAC Formation, Operation, and Process

This section focuses on the development and dynamics of the RAC. Included is a discussion of the initial formation and operation of the RAC and a discussion of ways in which the RAC has fostered relationships among interest groups, the broader community, and the agency. This section closes with a review of the RAC's approach to decision-making, the relationship between the county and the RAC, and the relationship between the Forest Service and the RAC.

RAC Formation

The Southwest Idaho RAC was formed in 2001. County commissioners in association with the Boise National Forest supervisor and the local Forest Service legislative assistant invited individuals to apply for positions on the RAC. The process of establishing the RAC was lengthy because all nominations must be approved by the Secretary of Agriculture (or designee) in Washington, D.C. Several RAC members pointed out that the selection approval process delayed the launch of the RAC. It also makes the process of finding replacement members for those who resign from the RAC cumbersome. One outcome has been that, in the interest of expediency, some outgoing RAC members have been replaced by replacements—referred to by some as alternates—from categories that do not match that of the vacated seat.

RAC Operation

The Southwest Idaho RAC usually meets monthly, on a Saturday, for a full day. The RAC usually takes a couple of months off during the summer and one month off for the annual national RAC meeting in April. The RAC has had the same chair since its inception, a Valley County commissioner and a rancher who also serves on the board of the National County Schools Coalition, a group whose work was critical in securing passage of the P.L.106-393 legislation. This individual shares the responsibility for maintaining the continuity of the RAC and dealing with organizational issues with

the Forest Service Designated Federal Official (DFO). The DFO conducts much of the administrative work related to compiling project proposals, distributing them to group members, and writing up agreements with recipients of RAC funds.

Meetings are scheduled once several project proposals are ready for review, though the meetings typically involve more than project reviews. A catered lunch is provided and there is often a speaker or a special presentation by past recipients of RAC funds to report on an implemented project. Several RAC members commented that they particularly enjoy these presentations. Meetings are held in Boise, which is problematic for some RAC members who commute for up to three and a half hours round-trip. One of the initial RAC members withdrew for this reason.

The Southwest Idaho RAC can be characterized as having a high degree of ethnic and economic homogeneity. Few of the RAC members hold full-time jobs and many RAC members are retired, have part-time positions, or are paid by the interests they speak for on the RAC. The chair hypothesized that this may be due to the time commitment required. As already described, the monthly RAC meetings are lengthy and take place in Boise. One member of the Forest Service asks, "The monthly meetings may allow for real collaboration, but who can afford to participate?" This raises an important concern regarding the groups interests and even the individuals that can participate in the RAC. While there remain many positive aspects to this process, the issue of whether the process limits who can participate remains.

RAC Decision-Making Processes

At its inception, the RAC spent several meetings discussing decision-making protocols and project evaluation criteria. The group agreed on the importance of determining ground rules before accepting project proposals. The decision-making process has remained fairly similar to the original design, with one significant modification. While

the RAC initially chose to make decisions by consensus, in 2002, they amended their rules to follow the legislated requirement that a majority of each sub-group present must approve the project for it to be recommended. Yet, the RAC still mostly decides via consensus; there have only been three or four projects that have required sub-group voting.

One particularly controversial project that did go to a vote was a proposal to repair an old logging road. The road had been an object of state-wide debate that a RAC member, and the organization he represented, vehemently opposed. With one member from sub-group B absent, two members of the sub-group were able to vote down and stop the road project from going forward since the legislation requires a supra-majority of each sub-group to approve a project. While this was described by several RAC members as frustrating, there was also a general acceptance of the law and little lingering hostility. The fact that this vote, which touched on many controversial issues, did not de-rail the RAC process is a testament to the resilience of the group and the appropriate functioning of the legislation.

Public, Agency, and Interest Group Relationship Building

Almost without exception, RAC members stated that their participation on the RAC has helped them build relationships with other RAC members. This includes those who represent interest groups with conflicting perspectives on natural resource and environmental issues. A RAC member representing environmental interests described the process as “more careful [to meet the intent of the legislation] than political.” Several RAC members felt that it has not become politicized because the different interests are able to balance each other. The relatively frequent meetings and the voting process encourages cooperation and allows individuals to explain their points of view to one another. One RAC member remarked that, “To just try and scuttle the process with a devious vote or by torpedoing a project won’t do you any good, [because] you won’t be persuasive.”

Perhaps even more tellingly, while one RAC

member initially suggested amending the legislation to require only a simple majority voting process, upon reflection s/he retracted the statement saying that although the legislated voting process often meant that this individual’s preferred projects are not approved, s/he believed that it achieved its goal of creating a collaborative decision-making process. This attitude is reflective of a genuine respect for collaboration that exists among many members of this RAC. A number of RAC members stated that these collaborative relationships have built trust among interests, conferring benefits far beyond federal forestland. A RAC member that represents grazing interests stated, “We have developed a dialogue, an understanding...[environmentalists] will take this to environmental groups and say that we don’t all wear black hats and I’ll do the same—we’ve found some common ground.”

County-RAC Relations

For the most part the county governments play a supportive and not controlling role in relation to the RAC. Only one county has threatened to withdraw funding for the RAC. Out of the six counties that contribute to the Southwest Idaho RAC, Elmore County has threatened to reduce or withdraw Title II funds. Officials there are unhappy that an insufficient amount of Elmore County funds going to the RAC are not being used for projects that benefit their county. One Elmore County commissioner noted that poorer counties are disadvantaged in the competition for RAC funds because they can’t afford to have a person researching and submitting projects for Title II funds. Another Elmore County commissioner felt that Title II funds should be more equitably dispersed among the counties within the RAC.

Forest Service-RAC Relations

The Forest Service plays a primarily administrative role in relation to the RAC. This may be due to the strong leadership provided by the RAC chair, who has held his position consistently since the RAC’s inception. The Forest Service DFO, on the other hand, was recently transferred into his current position from Northern Idaho. The DFO’s respon-

sibilities include: circulating the agenda, recording and distributing meeting minutes, fielding questions and calls from potential project applicants, reviewing proposals and circulating them to the RAC members, forwarding approved proposals to the forest supervisor for final authorization, and writing up legal agreements between the agency and grant recipients.

Several RAC members commented that working with the DFO has helped them understand the Forest Service's duties better, especially in relation

to NEPA requirements. One RAC member remarked that the RAC decision process has reversed the traditional relationship between the public and federal agencies as the agencies now have to present project proposals before the public rather than the other way around—"This gives the people some power to determine how the money will be spent, softening what has happened in rural communities...People feel helpless and this is returning some of that power."

Conclusion

The Southwest Idaho RAC is a well-functioning RAC that demonstrates the potential of this legislation to build bridges among interest groups and create meaningful collaborations that confer wide-ranging benefits. Perhaps one of the hallmarks of this RAC is supporting projects that involve a diverse array of partnerships and leverage additional dollars, as well as accomplish important on-the-ground work. The RAC has weathered some difficult votes on contentious issues, yet displays an internal resiliency that is the hallmark of a healthy organization. Many in the RAC attribute this success to the mix of personalities that compose the RAC membership—individuals who are known for their strong positions but also exhibit an ability and desire to work collaboratively. There are several ways that the Southwest Idaho RAC can build on this solid foundation to ensure continued success in the future. These include (1) increasing the number of proposals from community-based organizations, (2) balancing the geographic distribution of funded projects, and (3) improving monitoring of project outcomes.

Many RAC members expressed great interest in receiving more local, community-driven projects. It is helpful to identify obstacles in order to highlight potential responses. Key obstacles currently limiting local participation include a lack of knowledge about Title II funds and the proposal process, along with a limited capacity among community-based organizations with respect to the

experience, capital, and labor required to prepare and implement Title II projects. There are several potential responses to these obstacles: 1) the RAC and the Forest Service could take a more active role in advertising Title II funds by directly soliciting and encouraging project partners, particularly a more diverse array of local organizations, to apply for funding; 2) the RAC might fund projects that will build organizational capacity and ensure a flow of projects to a broader geographic area and that might diversify the range of projects that are supported. This latter point may mean reducing the match for some of these capacity building efforts. The RAC could even fund someone like a circuit rider whose responsibility it is to help organizations and counties develop proposals.

This may also help to address an area of concern for the forest supervisor and some county commissioners, which is the geographically equitable distribution of Title II funds. Elmore County has threatened to cut Title II funds completely next year if more projects are not approved for their area. One forest supervisor has responded to this issue by encouraging the district rangers to submit more project proposals in areas that have not received substantial RAC funding. Yet, RAC members lament that certain district rangers still rarely submit project proposals and therefore greatly reduce the possibility of the area receiving funds due to the dominant role the Forest Service currently plays in administering Title II projects.

The RAC could financially support capacity-building within these areas to develop the ability of local organizations to propose and implement Title II projects.

Finally, there is little formal monitoring of Title II and Title III project implementation. The Southwest Idaho RAC often learns about completed projects via voluntary presentations at their monthly meetings or during field trips to project sites. However, like many RACs, the monitoring process is ad hoc and in the words of one RAC

member, “seems pretty erratic—there’s no formalized check up and we don’t get a report that shows the money was all spent.” Creating a more rigorous monitoring process may help the RAC and the counties to avoid problems in the future and to enhance their understanding of cumulative effects on the community and its resources.

The Southwest Idaho RAC has built a solid foundation and internal resiliency that will facilitate its development and continued success in the future.

Interviewees

Bob Baker, RAC member
Andy Brunelle, US Forest Service
T.J. Clifford, US Forest Service
Connie Cruser, Elmore County commissioner
Phil Davis, RAC chair/Valley County commissioner
Mary Egusquiza, Elmore County commissioner
John Freemuth, Professor Boise State University
John Gebhards, RAC member
Trisha Giambra, US Forest Service
Tom Glass, RAC member
Doug Gochnour, US Forest Service, DFO
Ron Julian, US Forest Service
Mark Loseke, US Forest Service
Ed Mansfield, RAC member
Russ Manwaring, West Central Highlands RC&D
John McCarthy, RAC member
Sandra Mitchell, RAC member
Larry Rose, Elmore County commissioner
Barry Ross, former RAC member
Dick Smith, US Forest Service
Hana West, US Forest Service
David Whaley, RAC member
Melissa Yenke, US Forest Service

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