

Tuolumne County Resource Advisory Committee and Title III Case Study

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Introduction

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

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

fund. Title III in the legislation involves county officials recommending projects to fund.

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

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

Background

The Tuolumne County Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) advises the Stanislaus National Forest in California. The Stanislaus National Forest extends into four counties, with nearly 70 percent of its landbase in Tuolumne County on the western slope of the central Sierra Nevada. The county's 2,229 square miles offer diverse and dramatic terrain with Mount Excelsior standing at an impressive 12,446 feet sloping down into the foothills and to the edge of California's massive Central Valley. The Stanislaus National Forest and Yosemite National Park together make up nearly two-thirds of Tuolumne County's landmass, with additional public lands owned by the Bureau of Land Management and the State of California. The Stanislaus River traverses the northern end of the county, and the Tuolumne River crosses the southern end.

Tuolumne was established in 1850 as one of California's earliest counties, when the legendary California Gold Rush brought miners from all over the world to the area by the thousands. In the face of in-migration, disease, and slaughter, the population of the Central Sierra Me-wuk¹ people, shrank from an estimated 8,000 before European contact to about 700 by 1910. Today two bands of Central Sierra Me-wuk peoples live on their traditional lands in Tuolumne County—the Tuolumne Rancheria in Tuolumne and the Chicken Ranch Rancheria in Jamestown.

Counties in the western Sierra Nevada have historically relied on the extraction of natural resources through mining, logging, and hydroelectric power, as well as farming and ranching, as primary economic activities. As a gateway to the spectacular Yosemite National Park and the Stanislaus National Forest, Tuolumne County also

depends on the environment's amenity values, and has a long history of nature-based recreation and tourism.

The area that is now the Stanislaus National Forest was first managed by the California State Board of Forestry in the 1880s in response to intensive logging, poor regeneration, over grazing, and devastating fires following the gold rush.² Federal forest reserves were set aside in the 1890s, and in 1905, Congress established the US Forest Service and designated the Stanislaus National Forest. Grazing and timber harvest continued to be major land management activities on the forest.

Tuolumne County has historically had among the highest timber production of the central and southern Sierra counties. Logging was especially prevalent following World War II up through the 1980s. However, with the declines in the timber industry and restrictions on harvesting, timber harvesting in the county has declined dramatically over the last two decades, from a peak of 179,623 thousand board feet in 1986 to only 23,570 thousand board feet in 2004. While the majority of the county's timberland acreage is on the Stanislaus National Forest, with the shift toward land management that incorporates ecosystem, watershed, and habitat values and federal laws aimed at protecting endangered species, the percentage of the timber harvest that occurs on the national forest has declined significantly since the 1980s, from a peak of 69% in 1986 to 20% in 2004. Table 1 summarizes timber harvests in Tuolumne County from 1950 to 2004.³

Within its 898,099 acres, the Stanislaus National Forest encompasses three designated wilderness areas and a range of diverse ecosystems, including wildlife habitat for eight species listed

¹ Me-wuk is one of the traditional names of the people who belong to the Miwok Tribe. Information on the Me-wuk people is drawn from the Alliance of California Tribes website.

² Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project, Chapter 2, 1996.

³ The data presented represent only timber harvest in Tuolumne County. The Stanislaus National Forest extends into four counties and its timber harvest data varies slightly, with a peak in 1969 of 192.1 thousand thousand board feet (MMBF) and a spike in 1988 of 189.0 MMBF following a major fire on the forest in 1987.

Table 1. Tuolumne County Timber Harvest, 1950 – 2004

Year	Timber harvest by volume thousand board feet, local scale	% public
1950	162,789	*
1960	74,186	*
1966 (peak)	191,725	*
1970	153,861	*
1980	116,701	57%
1986 (peak)	179,623	69%
1990	152,515	64%
1995	78,593	39%
2000	61,061	36%
2004	23,570	20%

Sources: California Department of Forestry (1948-1977), in Waddell and Bassett 1997
 California State Board of Equalization, Timber Tax Division (1978-1990), in Waddell & Bassett, 1997
 California State Board of Equalization, Timber Tax Division (1995-2004)

as threatened and endangered. It includes two wild and scenic rivers, four major watersheds, and supplies seven reservoirs.

In addition to timber and grazing management, the Stanislaus National Forest manages multiple other human uses on the forest. The forest’s roads and recreation infrastructure includes an extensive roads system of nearly 3,000 road miles. With nature-based recreation as well as wineries and historic towns, the area is a significant tourism destination; the national forest maintains multiple campgrounds, day use sites, and winter sports sites. The 752 recreation residences on the forest and numerous vacation homes in adjacent communities create management implications for fire prevention and road maintenance. With an arid climate, a legacy of intensive logging and fire suppression, and a growing wildland-urban interface, Stanislaus has a his-

tory of devastating wildfires, and fire prevention is at the forefront of land management conversations. The Stanislaus National Forest invests significant resources in fuels and fire management, including maintaining a crew of 155 fire personnel.

The foothills town of Sonora is Tuolumne County’s largest town at 4,423 residents.⁴ Although the mountainous county is relatively isolated, it provides the easiest access to Yosemite National Park from San Francisco and Sacramento, and is one of the counties along historic Highway 49, which meanders through the foothill wine country and historic tourist towns. Despite historically rich cultural diversity⁵ – Me-wuk people fought to remain on their lands, miners came from all over the world, enslaved African Americans came with their masters, and Chinese laborers built much of the Sierra Railway – today Tuolumne County, like

⁴ US Census Bureau, 2000.

⁵ Tuolumne County Historical Society website.

most of the Sierra, is largely Caucasian. However, as in the nation and California as a whole, Latinos are a growing population. The percentage of Latino children enrolled in Tuolumne County schools grew from 5.3% during the 1992-1993 school year to 9.3% during the 2004-2005 school year. Latino school enrollment is followed by Native Americans at 3.5%, Asian/Filipino/Pacific Islanders at 1.7% and African Americans at .9%.⁶

With the steady decline in timber harvests since the 1990s, many family-wage natural resource jobs have been lost in Tuolumne County, although overall employment continues to grow. However, much of that growth is in lower wage jobs, such as retail and services. A state prison provides a number of jobs. Overall poverty remains below the statewide average, but poverty deepened in certain pockets of the county, including Sonora.⁷ In the late 1990s, when the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project examined socioeconomic wellbeing and “community capacity”—a community’s ability “to respond to external and internal stresses, to create and take advantage of opportunities, and to meet the needs of residents”⁸—Tuolumne County scored in the medium range. Interestingly, some of Tuolumne County’s communities that scored the lowest on socioeconomic wellbeing scored high on community capacity, such as Sonora and Tuolumne, while some of the wealthier communities scored lower on community capacity.

Like many of the mountain retreat areas in the Sierra, Tuolumne County is aging and gaining pockets of wealth, as young people and families leave in search of educational and employment opportunities, and more retirees and vacation homeowners move into the county, bringing transfer incomes and wealth with them. These demographic changes can result in differing priorities among

long-time residents and part-time or new residents which may not always translate into community-wide investments that strengthen local institutions.

The Tuolumne County RAC operates in a context of a growing capacity for collaboration to address natural resource management. Because of its rich scenic and ecological amenities, the area has a long history of environmental activism—sometimes initiated by urban Californians—from the Hetch Hetchy battle in the early 1900s over the damming of a Yosemite-like valley, to the formation of the Tuolumne River Trust that unites local and urban user groups, to local groups such as the Tuolumne County Land Trust and Tuolumne County Citizens for Responsible Growth. The Central Sierra Environmental Research Center in Twain Harte is a visible center of research, monitoring, and activism for environmental preservation in the Central Sierra. With a different approach, the Tuolumne County Alliance for Resources and Environment, promotes “conservation and the wise use” of natural resources with a focus on sustaining natural resource industries.⁹

The people interviewed for this assessment commented that the Tuolumne County Resource Advisory Committee is building the capacity of disparate activist groups to work together to address resource management issues on the Stanislaus National Forest and neighboring lands. Simultaneously, newly formed fire safe councils are working collaboratively across geographic and administrative boundaries to create corridors of fire safety. The fear of catastrophic wildfire, partnered with designated funding to combat fire risk, is providing a catalyst for groups that have traditionally been at odds to work together and accomplish outcomes on the ground.

⁶ California Department of Education Ed-Data website.

⁷ Berck et al 2000; US Census 2002; SNEP 1996

⁸ Kusel et al. 1996. Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project.

⁹ TuCARE website.

Table 2. Receipts, Elections, and Allocations for P.L. 106-393, Federal Fiscal Years 2002-2005

Year	Full PL-106-393 Payment	Title II/Title III split (percent)	Amount Allocated for Title II	Amount Allocated for Title III
2002	\$2,480,634	73/27	\$279,071	\$93,024
2003	\$2,500,479	73/27	\$281,304	\$93,768
2004	\$2,530,485	67/33	\$243,939	\$135,634
2005	\$2,563,382	60/40	\$225,000	\$162,000
Total	\$10,074,980		\$1,029,314	\$484,426

Sources: USFS Payments to States website and Tuolumne County Office Administration

County Elections for Titles II and III

Tuolumne County receives about 2.5 million dollars annually from P.L. 106-393. While the payments are modest, they provide critical funds for maintaining roads, keeping school budgets afloat, and accomplishing projects. Table 2 shows how Tuolumne County allocates its Title I, Title II, and Title III funds. Tuolumne County elects to allocate 15 percent of its total payments to Title II and Title III projects, in keeping with the minimum requirement of P.L. 106-393. Of the funds set aside for Titles II and III, the county supervisors have chosen on average to invest two-thirds in Title II, demonstrating significant commitment to the RAC process and the types of projects the RAC can fund through Title II.

The county board of supervisors makes their final elections between Titles II and III after the RAC has recommended projects for that federal fiscal year. While the RAC has preliminary figures

to work with, the county retains final judgment on whether the slate of projects the RAC has recommended will receive the full Title II allocation. This appears to reflect not only a philosophical orientation to maintain county control of the funds, but also the fact that counties are dealing with three different fiscal year calendars: federal, state, and county.¹⁰

In 2004, in response to cuts in state funding for counties, the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors initially planned to allocate fewer dollars to Title II than it had in previous years, and to reserve more funds in the county budget for its Title III program. However, as it became clear the impact that this would have on the county's Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) allocation,¹¹ the board chose to allocate an additional \$125,000 to Title II, thereby moving the funds out of the county budget, and keeping PILT payment levels intact.

¹⁰ In this case study, funds allocated to Title II are referred to by the federal fiscal year, which runs from October 1 through September 30 of the following year. Funds allocated to the Title III program are on the county fiscal year. Thus the funds allocated to Title II in August/September 2004 may be referred to as Fiscal Year 2005, while the companion funds allocated to Title III are referred to as 2004 funds.

¹¹ Payment-in-Lieu-of-Taxes are federal funds paid to counties in forest dependent areas. Title III payments are deducted from PILT payments, resulting in a discount to PILT payments two years after the fact.

Title III Projects

Title III projects funded by Tuolumne County are discussed in this section. As of September 2004, a total of \$464,300 in Title III funds had been allocated to projects and departments by Tuolumne County. Tuolumne County did not allocate its full payments for 2001 through 2004, reserving approximately \$19,500 to carry over into 2005.

Project Solicitation, Prioritization, and Selection

Tuolumne County allocates its Title III dollars through internal budget discussions based on needs within county program budgets, rather than a public call for proposals with a formal application process. The county natural resources administrator writes a memo to the board of supervisors recommending allocations to county programs that fall within the categories outlined in the legislation. There is a public hearing and budget allocation decisions undergo a 45-day public comment period. The legislation requires that the county inform the Resource Advisory Committee of its Title III project allocations. Two county supervisors serve on the Tuolumne County RAC, and a liaison from the county administration office attends RAC meetings, so the two entities regularly receive updates about each other's work.

Consistent with the requirements of the legislation, Tuolumne County has published a list of proposed expenditures within the appropriate time frame and has notified the RAC, but the county has blurred the distinction between a budget allocation and a project, defined as a discrete activity or event with a proposal that includes stated purposes, objectives, and actions associated with a budget. Project solicitation is differentiated from internal allocations in that solicitation involves a request for proposals, in effect opening access, while the latter involves internal county decision-making that is not open to others. As such, notification involves a statement of already determined plans. Several interview participants commented that the Title III dollars have helped to backfill holes in the county budget left by cuts in state funding, enabling them to provide services they would otherwise be challenged to provide. Tuolumne County's use of Title III funds for closing critical gaps in the county budget, however, comes at the expense of developing discrete projects and providing an open and transparent process involving parties beyond county administrative units, as was intended by the legislation.¹²

Table 3. Title III Projects 2001-2004 by Category and Allocation.

Type of Project	Number of Grants*	Total Amount
Search & Rescue	6	\$220,550
Fire Prevention and County Planning	9	\$153,750
Forest Education	2	\$90,000
Total	17	\$464,300

*Some programs have received multiple one-year grants.

¹² Some Tuolumne County officials assert that the county has assigned expenditures in a manner in keeping with the law as written, stating that the law is not specific about "projects" for Title III. However, the law is specific about projects and an open solicitation process for Title II. Given that Title III follows Title II in the legislation, "project" can be assumed to have a similar meaning for both titles. One of the purposes of P.L.106-393 is to "improve cooperative relationships among the people that use and care for Federal lands and the agencies that manage these lands" (Section 2(b)). Rather than to evaluate compliance with the law, it is our intent to identify lessons for how counties can best uphold the spirit of the law and improve cooperative relationships.

Approved Projects

What kinds of projects and programs has Tuolumne County supported with its Title III payments? Ascertaining the number of discrete Title III projects funded by Tuolumne County proved challenging, because it was not always clear which allocations to county departments were tied to particular project proposals. Some were clearly administrative allocations. However, the allocations appear to fall within the categories of activities consistent with the legislation. Table 3 provides a best estimate of the types of grants funded.

Tuolumne County has made Title III grants in three of the six project categories outlined in the legislation: Search and Rescue, Fire Prevention and County Planning, and Forest Education. Search and Rescue is the highest priority for Tuolumne County, with six grants totaling \$220,550 dedicated to this category. Four of these grants supported a deputy salary at the Tuolumne County Sheriff's Department for search and rescue activities. One grant supported a deputy at the Pinecrest Station and a vehicle to be used for incidents on national forest lands. Pinecrest is a heavily used recreational area, and is one of the last towns before one crosses the divide into the Eastern Sierra, making it a strategic location for incident response and search and rescue activities. Another grant of \$9,000 purchased a snowmobile for the Pinecrest Station's rescue team. It is useful to note that counties across the nation have struggled with the question of using Title III dollars for equipment and vehicle purchases and have come to differing interpretations of the legislation. In the absence of regulatory guidelines, county associations have cautioned county governments to prorate Title III expenditures on these items based on how much of the time the vehicle or equipment is actually used on federal land. Identifying the percentage of use dedicated to search and rescue activities on national forest land is one way Tuolumne County can justify using Title III funds for a portion of vehicle and equipment purchases and thereby improve overall program accountability. Sheriff's department staff comment that Title III dollars have filled a critical funding need – "We'd be in serious trouble without

these funds."

The second category Tuolumne County has funded is Fire Prevention and County Planning. Housing and other development have outpaced fire services, and Title III dollars help the county address these needs. Four grants in this category totaling \$106,800 supported the project coordinator salary for the South West InterFace Team (SWIFT), a local interagency management group charged with developing a fire defense strategy across jurisdictions for the south county, including a fire plan, fuel breaks, and other means for fuels reduction and fire prevention. SWIFT developed a strategic fire plan prior to the National Fire Plan legislation, and has received national recognition for its work. By 2003, 40.5 acres had been treated. Several Title II projects supported by the RAC interface with the SWIFT program, and will be covered in the section on Title II projects.

In addition, four grants in this category totaling \$27,250 supported the Tuolumne County Fire Prevention Program to develop and distribute fire prevention educational materials to county residents, with a special effort to reach low-income residents. Materials for children include coloring books and a playhouse to learn about smoke detectors. Fire Marshall Kari Hubbard commented, "We are getting to groups we never would be able to get to. This support has given me such a good foundation. It gives me the tools to do the job." Finally, the Community Development Department received a grant of \$10,700 to purchase Geographic Information System software for fire prevention mapping and planning.

The third category of projects the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors has supported is Forest Education. With two Title III grants totaling \$90,000, the Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools developed a high school work-learning program, the Tuolumne County Forest-Youth Partnership Summer of Success. Title III funds supported the first two years of implementation, and the RAC has supported it with Title II grants each year since. The collaborative partnership between the Superintendent of Schools Office, Mother Lode Job Training, and the Stanislaus National Forest employs 18 youth for six weeks each summer, building com-

munication, problem solving, teamwork, and job readiness skills. In addition to gaining meaningful employment, youth crews accomplish projects on the forest, assisting with the forest's interpretive program, trail maintenance, timber cruising, wildlife monitoring, clearing brush, watershed restoration, recreation infrastructure maintenance (campgrounds, trails, fences), and office/clerical assistance. Forest Service staff commented that "the kids are helping us to achieve what we wouldn't otherwise be able to do. This is the first agreement where everybody wins." While the Stanislaus National Forest initially donated crew supervisors' time, now the program pays for these hours, helping to offset unfunded staff time. A Forest Service staff member commented that the program boosts the morale of participating staff, "It's a re-energizer for my batteries."

Project leaders and participants highlight that the project builds youths connections and investment in the forest and their home community, and builds their interest in natural resource management careers. As one youth participant commented, "When friends party in the forest, two years ago I would have thrown trash too. This year...I'd probably push them to pick it up. I four-wheel, and I'm learning to be more gentle on the trails." Another student commented, "It's not about the money. At the beginning it was, but now I'm learning, making good friends,

working with good people. We get an understanding of how the forest works, our 'footprint' and [ecosystem] benefits."

In sum, Title III grants in Tuolumne County have supported diverse work that successfully meets the goals of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act. Some grants enabled the start of new projects and strategic planning efforts. Others filled gaps, enabling existing county programs and infrastructure to operate more effectively, such as the Sheriff's Department search and rescue and fire prevention education. The Tuolumne County Youth-Forest Partnership and the SWIFT program in particular demonstrate productive partnership and leveraging of in-kind goods and services, multiplying the scope and potential effect of project outcomes.

In interviews, county officials and project leaders highlighted that Title III funds helped them to complete work they otherwise would have been unable to accomplish, particularly given losses in state funding for services. Most like the openness and flexibility of the legislation, although it sometimes poses challenges for interpreting intent and limitations. Counties elsewhere have benefited from training and tools to help them understand how Title III allocations affect their federal PILT payments.¹³ Tuolumne County would benefit from similar tools.

Title II Projects

During federal fiscal years 2002–2005, the Tuolumne County RAC granted approximately \$918,300 for 37 projects. RAC members are proud that the Tuolumne County RAC has supported a strong slate of projects that respond to what they feel are some of the area's most critical forest management needs. The Tuolumne County RAC places a premium on encouraging projects to leverage funds to match their Title II grants to magnify the

effects of the RAC's work on the ground. Project proponents have successfully leveraged nearly \$1,000,000 in matching funds, with more than half of it coming from the Forest Service.

All interviewees were pleased that the Title II program and the RAC process have encouraged cooperative relationships among diverse – and formerly antagonistic – stakeholder groups, county government, and the national forest.

¹³ For example, the Washington State Association of Counties created an interactive website to enable counties to simulate what their PILT payments would be with different Title III allocation scenarios.

Table 4. RAC Projects by Applicant, Fiscal Years 2002-2005

Year	Forest Service # of Projects	Amount	Public # of Projects	Amount	TOTAL \$ (Projects)
2002	5	\$47,650	1	\$50,000	\$97,650 (6)
2003	6	\$341,962	5	\$58,500	\$400,462 (11)
2004	2	\$15,261	7	\$193,904	\$209,165 (9)
2005	4	\$35,047	7	\$176,014	\$211,061 (11)
Total	17	\$439,920	20	\$478,418	\$918,338 (37)

Project Solicitation, Review, and Selection

The Tuolumne County RAC takes an active role in soliciting project proposals from the public. RAC members and interested others get the word out to their interest groups and towns, and place announcements in Sonora’s newspaper and radio stations. Interestingly, with the countywide coordination on fuels reduction and fire prevention, in 2004 one of the Title II grant recipients did outreach for project solicitation with the Highway 108 Fire Safe Council and homeowners associations. The Forest Service assists with fliers and notifying Forest Service employees.

There was a delay in the initial release of P.L. 106-393 funds; in calendar year 2002 the RAC was charged with allocating funds for both fiscal years 2002 and 2003. Given the short time frame for allocating FY 2002 funds, the RAC did not make a formal call for proposals with the public, but RAC members did personal outreach for projects they wanted to see funded. Five of the six FY 2002 projects funded were developed by the Forest Service. Over time, groups outside of the agency, including county and state programs, have submitted more proposals. Table 4 documents the change over time with recent years showing more grants going to projects developed by groups outside of the agency, although some of these projects were in collaboration with the agency. For the most part, the RAC

spreads its funds over multiple small grants, ranging in size from \$2,000 to \$50,000. In 2003, there were two exceptions in order to fund large Forest Service projects. The first grant, for \$100,000, supported maintenance of 35 miles of road, providing critical access to the forest and surrounding communities in the event of fire. The project was done in cooperation with Tuolumne County Public Works Department. The second grant for \$137,000 supported the Little Sampson Fuels Reduction Project, which treated nearly 800 acres of national forest land bordering private land, helping to protect the community of Cedar Ridge. This RAC grant was matched with \$178,500 of agency funds. Since that time, the Forest Service has been funded for fewer and smaller grants.

Announcements and outreach begin in January and February, with proposals due in early May. At the May meeting, RAC members review their packets of proposed projects in light of the legislative intent and the RAC’s internal project selection criteria. They identify those projects that pass this first evaluation and invite project proponents to present their proposals at the June and July meetings.

The RAC schedules multiple meetings for August to prioritize and vote on their project recommendations to the Forest Supervisor. There are multiple steps in this process. After discussing any lingering questions about the projects presented,

the RAC, including replacement members, participate in a “dot sensing” exercise to prioritize projects. Each participant is given 7 dot stickers and they use them to mark their favorite projects, which are posted around the room. Results are tallied and clustered in groups according to the number of dots received (e.g., 6–10 dots, 4–5 dots, 1–3 dots, and 0 dots). Then the RAC proceeds through discussing, lobbying, and voting by dot cluster. Projects that receive 6 to 10 dots are voted upon first, as they are easiest to agree upon. Then the RAC votes on projects that received 4 to 5 dots, and so on. Through the lobbying and discussion process, RAC members can champion projects that received fewer dots, and occasionally these are accepted. Replacement members do not participate in voting after the initial dot-sensing exercise.

P.L. 106-393 makes clear that replacements are not voting members of the RAC, unless a RAC member steps off of the committee, in which case a replacement member moves into a permanent position. Replacement members of the Tuolumne County RAC participate in the dot-sensing vote. While the dot-sensing exercise is an effective way to identify where the priorities lie among participants, it approaches the line of including replacement members in what could be considered a first round of voting. To its credit, the Tuolumne County RAC demonstrates a strong commitment to collaborative decision-making and to honoring the time that replacement members give to attend RAC meetings; in this case, it appears to have erred on

the side of inclusion. The RAC could remedy this inconsistency by including replacement members in project discussions, but not in any portion of the voting process.¹⁴

Approved Projects

As of September 2004, the Tuolumne County RAC had supported 37 projects over four rounds of funding. Some of the RAC’s grants support multi-year projects, but proponents must re-apply each year for funding. Thus, each grant is presented below as a project. The projects are categorized according to their primary purpose and funding levels and presented in Table 5.¹⁵ Many of the projects the Tuolumne County RAC has supported serve more than one forest function. For example, a number of the projects categorized as “recreational infrastructure” also serve watershed health functions, such as vault toilets installed in heavily used areas. Through a review of project proposals, interviews, and site visits, the primary purpose of the project was estimated and projects were categorized accordingly; thus, categorization may vary slightly from that provided by the forest. Appendix A lists all projects. In this section, project types are discussed by category, and key projects and accomplishments are highlighted. While it is not possible to provide an accurate summary of accomplishments to date since not all funded projects are complete, presented below is a summary of the anticipated accomplishments listed in project proposals.

Table 5. Approved Tuolumne County RAC projects, Fiscal years 2002-2005

Project Category	# of Projects	Amount	Accomplishments (Anticipated or Completed)
Fuels Management	15	\$525,348	2700 acres treated (surface & ladder fuels) 3.35 road miles treated 2,230 homes or parcels affected 3,050 reached with fuels education 19 jobs

¹⁴ Officials at the Stanislaus National Forest make it clear that they do not consider the dot-sensing exercise to be voting, given that projects that are eliminated in that round can be included in the formal RAC voting process if RAC members want them to be.

¹⁵ Information comes primarily from a spreadsheet prepared by Beth Martinez of the Mi-wok Ranger District who provides staff support to the Tuolumne County RAC, as well as project summaries posted on the USFS Payments to States website.

Project Category	# of Projects	Amount	Accomplishments (Anticipated or Completed)
Roads, trails & infrastructure maintenance	5	\$160,734	.9 miles decommissioned 40.1 miles maintained .7 acres soil & habitat improved 11 jobs
Recreational infrastructure & facilities (including trails)	7	\$125,401	4 vault toilets installed 35 trail miles maintained 2 acres fuels treated 20 acres habitat restoration 43 structures maintained 10 campsites built; 4 campgrounds maintained. 1,850 reached w/environmental education 34 jobs
Watershed restoration & maintenance	2	\$52,647	.5 stream miles/fish habitat improved .4 road miles decommissioned 40 acres soil/habitat/range improved 2 jobs
Soil productivity improvement	2	\$34,358	2,500 acres soil/range improved 1 job
Forest ecosystem health	2	\$7,500	120 yards garbage & debris cleaned up
Historic Preservation	2	\$7,350	2 historical structures repaired/maintained
Noxious & exotic weed control	1	\$2,000	1 acre/1 trail mile treated
Wildlife & fish habitat	0	\$0	
Re-establishment of native species	0	\$0	
Other: Environmental Education	1	\$3,000	1 educational display
TOTAL	37 projects	\$918,338	

Fuels Management and Forest Ecosystem Health

Fuels reduction and management is the highest priority for the Tuolumne County RAC, with well over \$500,000 devoted to projects that reduce the threat of catastrophic fire. Projects involve cutting fuelbreaks and removing surface fuels (such as pine needles) and ladder fuels (such as manzanita and other brush). Projects in this category have been exemplary in engaging citizens to work collaboratively with one another, the Forest Service, and local fire districts and Fire Safe councils. These projects have leveraged significant funds from other sources, as well as countless hours of

volunteer and in-kind time and services. Five projects totaling approximately \$205,000 motivate and assist homeowners in meeting California Fire Code 4291, which requires that they maintain defensible space on their properties. One project, the Lair of the Bear Demonstration Project, and its follow-up project, “1000 Tons of Fuel,” was presented with an award at the 2005 National RAC Meeting. The project, led by the University of California Alumni Association and subsequent projects, have motivated residents and owners of over 3,000 vacation cabins to clean up over 1,000 tons of surface fuels on lands adjacent to the national forest. The project

hauls away the fuels, grinds them, and takes them to the co-generation plant to produce power as well as income, which is then invested back into the project. It has become a model for other fuels clean-up projects the RAC has supported. Another project assists seniors and disabled residents who would otherwise be unable to meet state defensible space laws to reduce fuels around their homes. While these projects rely heavily on volunteers and in-kind services, they also employ local contractors and crews for temporary contracts.

Six RAC grants totaling nearly \$300,000 supported fuelbreaks and thinning projects on the Stanislaus National Forest and adjacent private and county lands. The Mi-Wuk Sugar Pine Fire Protection District One led a multi-agency fuelbreak project to protect a subdivision of 1,600 homes adjacent to the national forest. The project, which builds on 20 years of discussion, included the Highway 108 Fire Safe Council, the Stanislaus National Forest, the California Department of Forestry, the local homeowners association, the California Conservation Corps, and the Tuolumne County Fire Department. The \$18,000 RAC grant enabled the partnership to launch on-the-ground work, including purchasing rock for a road and treating 40 acres of forest. The project employed local youth through the California Conservation Corps to build the fuelbreak, and educated homeowners about fire prevention.

A challenge of forest thinning and fuelbreak projects is that vigilance and resources are required to maintain them. A fuelbreak costs between \$400 and \$600 per acre for the initial treatment. The area needs to be treated with prescribed fire a few years after treatment or the rapid re-growth of ladder fuels will present a high fire hazard. Follow-up treatments cost approximately \$200 per acre. The RAC is concerned about sustaining fire prevention, and encourages project leaders to involve landowners in hauling away surface fuels and regularly maintaining fuelbreaks.

The Tuolumne County RAC is concerned with

the need for fire prevention planning at the landscape level, and increasingly favors projects that fit into broader fire planning strategies. One RAC grant supported a new coordinator position for the Highway 108 Strategic Fire Plan, a planning effort for a corridor comprised of a patchwork of public and private ownership. In addition, the RAC wants to support projects that dovetail with an integrated vegetation management plan that the Stanislaus National Forest is developing.

The Tuolumne County RAC has supported two non-fuels related forest ecosystem health projects including clean-up of illegal dumping on the Mi-Wuk Ranger District, and a county project to educate homeowners on Sudden Oak Death and to survey permanent and vacation properties for the disease. Some RAC members questioned the Sudden Oak Death project's benefit to national forest resources, since the surveys were conducted on private land. Project supporters, including Forest Service personnel, argue that if Sudden Oak Death appears anywhere in the county, it could spread and wipe out oak populations on the Stanislaus National Forest.

Roads

The Tuolumne County RAC recommended funding five grants, totaling over \$160,000, for road maintenance projects.¹⁶ The Forest's road budget is historically tied to timber sales, and, with the decline in timber harvests, the Stanislaus National Forest is severely challenged to maintain a road system totaling over 3,000 miles. Title II dollars allow the Forest to do road projects, particularly decommissioning and restoration, both of which are inadequately funded through existing budget appropriations. The largest project the Tuolumne County RAC supported was a Forest Service project to maintain a fire access road. Another RAC project, led by homeowners who have a special use permit for road maintenance, improved drainage and chip-sealed a Forest Service road that provides access to a number of Forest recreation sites, as

¹⁶ A trails project is included in this category if its primary purpose is roads decommissioning or watershed protection; otherwise, trails projects are categorized under recreation infrastructure.

well as to private parcels. The Forest Service and another grant source matched the Title II grant. The project will defray future maintenance costs. Two grants supported the re-routing of an OHV trail to protect the watershed through decommissioning, protect a degraded cultural site, and maintain recreation access. Because of the importance of the cultural site, the Tuolumne Rancheria contributed \$4,900 to the project. Finally, the Twain Harte Horsemen received a grant to re-open a spur road to create a gated overflow area for the Eagle Meadow Horse Camp. Heavy use was negatively affecting an aspen restoration project in the camp area. Title II funds were supplemented by the Forest Service and monetary and in-kind contributions from the Twain Harte Horsemen.

Recreation infrastructure

The Tuolumne County RAC has supported seven projects totaling over \$125,000 that enhance or maintain the recreation infrastructure on the Forest. Two grants totaling \$65,000 supported the Tuolumne County Youth-Forest Partnership Summer of Success. The project employs local youth to work with crew leaders on the Stanislaus National Forest to maintain trails, clear brush, assist with interpretive programs, and maintain campgrounds and fences, as well as cruise timber, monitor wildlife, work on watershed restoration projects, and assist with clerical needs. The project was initially funded through Title III dollars, but when the county faced a budget crisis in 2003 due to reduced state funds to counties, the school district, which leads the project, no longer received the Title III funds. The RAC stepped in with Title II funds to keep the project going. One RAC member commented that she was initially skeptical of investing RAC dollars into the program, given other pressing priorities, but after a field trip to see outcomes on the forest and talk with youth participants and Forest Service crew leaders, she strongly supports the program.¹⁷ The Summer of Success project has

been very successful in leveraging RAC grants with nearly \$43,000 of matching funds, a significant portion of which is from the Stanislaus National Forest. This exemplary program is described in more depth above in the section on Tuolumne County's Title III program.

Four RAC grants totaling \$45,401 funded projects to improve or maintain infrastructure for horseback riding groups on the national forest, such as installing vault toilets and camping infrastructure at heavily used horse camps, wiring a clubhouse and arena with electricity for evening use, and consolidating and clarifying a trail system to streamline use. Given that there are also two other grants that improve the road access to Eagle Meadow horse camp, several RAC members perceived that a disproportionate number of grants benefiting horse groups, and they question the public benefit.¹⁸ In addition, the vault toilet projects create an unfunded mandate for the Forest Service to maintain these facilities. These concerns notwithstanding, the Twain Harte Horsemen matched the RAC grants with other funds, volunteer labor, and in-kind services, and, given the heavy use of these areas, the projects protect water quality and reduce impacts to soils and vegetation. Finally, one RAC grant for recreation infrastructure (\$15,000) paid for installation of a vault toilet in a day use area along the Tuolumne River, protecting both human and watershed health.

Watershed restoration and maintenance

The RAC supported two projects totaling \$52,647 for projects specifically focused on watershed restoration and maintenance. However, as noted above, many other Title II projects have watershed benefits, such as reducing impacts in recreation areas by installing vault toilets, consolidating trailheads to reduce erosion, installing a new stream crossing for a road, reducing the threat of catastrophic wildfire, or cleaning up garbage in the forest near streams. The first project the RAC

¹⁷ 8/15/05 Tuolumne County RAC Minutes

¹⁸ Advocates for the projects highlight that the improvements benefit other user groups such as backpackers and fisherman, and that the vault toilets benefit human and watershed health.

funded specifically in this category rehabilitated a creek gully at the downstream end of Dry Meadow. The project demonstrates public-private collaboration between the Summit Ranger District and Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI), the largest timber company in the Sierra Nevada. Project proponents doubled the RAC grant with matching funds. The second grant in this category funded Phase II – restoring portions of a creek crossing – of an OHV trail re-route and repair project which protected the watershed and an archaeological site. Phase I and a subsequent budget shortfall were funded by other RAC grants as roads projects.

Soil productivity

Two grants totaling \$34,358 supported a University of California Cooperative Extension project which experiments with prescribed burning as a means to convert dense brush that had overtaken after wildfire to a landscape of native grasses and brush. The project, with matching funds totaling over \$380,000, is working in cooperation with the Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service, and SWIFT to learn about soil productivity and other ecological impacts of conversion to native species, as well as its cost-effectiveness as a means of fire prevention. Some RAC members initially questioned the appropriateness of a Title II grant for the project, given that the site is on BLM land, but with strong support from both the Forest Service and county commissioners, the RAC agreed to support it to protect adjacent national forest lands from brush encroachment and to learn about fuels management.

Historic Preservation

Two RAC grants totaling \$7,350 support stabilization and restoration of the historic Jawbone Station, constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. The site is used by the California Department of Fish and Game and the Mule

Deer Foundation for their annual mule deer count, both of which donated project labor. While the project dollars are relatively small, some RAC members expressed concern that the project was pushed through Group B for a special interest group, mule deer hunters. The USFS Groveland District Heritage Program hopes to restore the structure for use by the Forest and other groups.

Noxious weeds

The Tuolumne County RAC granted \$2,000 to Tuolumne County Agriculture Commissioner's Office to control Canada Thistle, an exotic, invasive plant that began encroaching into the Carson-Iceberg Wilderness after hay bales carrying the seed were used to control erosion after a fire. The county government has been mandated since 1911 to protect forestlands in the county, but this has been an unfunded mandate. The RAC grant enabled treatment at the head of the most used trail on the Forest, work that otherwise would not have been accomplished. Efforts included herbicide application as well as educating trail users and requesting their help in spotting thistle growth sites.

Other: Environmental Education

Finally, the Tuolumne County RAC supported a unique stewardship education project to raise public awareness about illegal dumping on the national forest and to invite volunteers to participate in forest clean-up events. Trash collected from the forest will be constructed into a "tower of trash" display to be used at public events such as the county fair. As a partnership among the Forest Service, the Highway 108 Fire Safe Council, the Tuolumne County Solid Waste Management Department and its citizen committee, and the City of Sonora, the project is an excellent example of creative collaboration among the federal agency, local governments, and the local citizens.

RAC Formation, Operation, and Relations

This section focuses on the formation and operation of the Tuolumne County Resource Advisory Committee (RAC). Included is a discussion of the ways that the RAC process has cultivated relationships among local communities, interest groups, county governments, and the Forest Service, and has built capacity for mutually beneficial collaboration. The section includes an exploration of the RAC's decision-making process and its implications for collaborative outcomes.

RAC Formation

In 2001, the Stanislaus National Forest chartered the Tuolumne County RAC. The Forest and county solicited the first round of RAC applicants through press releases in local newspapers, announcements to other collaborative groups, personal outreach, and through the recommendations of local county supervisors, the superintendent of schools, the forest planner, and the director of public works.

All Resource Advisory Committees are required to include representatives of interests in three major categories, or voting groups. The Stanislaus National Forest takes seriously the charge to fill each category of representation outlined in the legislation. While there are no wild horses and burros on the forest – one of the interest groups in the legislation – leadership has tried to look at the representational intent in a manner appropriate to the region, and a member of the Twain Harte Horsemen serves on the committee in this slot. Each voting group has a replacement member, should a member of the committee leave mid-term, though that replacement member may not necessarily represent the interest of the vacated position.

In 2004, the Tuolumne County RAC was chartered for its second term and most RAC members reapplied and were accepted. New members learned about the legislation and the responsibilities of the RAC through handouts and one-on-one conversations, and orientation appeared to be done

on an ad hoc basis.

RAC Operation

The Tuolumne County RAC meets about nine times per year for three hours at a time to develop collaborative processes, identify shared priorities, address issues of concern, review project proposals, and vote on funding recommendations. Some meetings are fieldtrips, not only to observe project progress and outcomes, but also to learn about forest management needs. Members appreciate that the RAC provides a forum and a process to learn from other interest groups, and to receive training about natural resource management and Forest Service functioning, such as the National Environmental Projection Act (NEPA) process, forest budgeting, and watershed analysis.

In March 2002, the Forest Service held an orientation meeting for RAC members. Chris Nota, Forest Service Region 5 RAC Coordinator, provided an overview of the intent and limitations of the legislation and the responsibilities of serving on a federal advisory committee. She answered questions about what types of projects were eligible and how they should interface with other legislation and management plans, such as the National Environmental Protection Act, the National Fire Plan, and the Forest Land Management Plan. The RAC elected an interim chair to lead the first few meetings, and after the group knew one another better, they elected Ginger Armstrong of the Tuolumne County Alliance for Resources and Environment as a permanent chair. The RAC explored a number of decision-making models and came to an agreement that their process would include both consensus and voting elements. Initially, a Forest Service facilitator helped the RAC design and implement its decision-making process. After the first round of project decisions, the RAC chair facilitated meetings. The specific process the RAC uses to evaluate and make project recommendations is described in the

Title II Projects section above.

Interviews and review of RAC meeting minutes show the RAC's commitment to build trust across diverse interests and to develop collaborative processes that all can agree to. For example, in April 2002, RAC members developed a list of criteria, supplementing the legislative mandate, to guide their project selections. Criteria included projects that:

- can be implemented fully, or at least partially, in the calendar year
- are not currently or likely to be funded
- can be done in coordination with another funded project
- maximize community involvement with volunteers and other partners
- contribute to protecting communities from catastrophic fire
- provide local private sector employment
- involve a mix of private and public land
- leverage additional local or outside funding

Criteria were not weighted in any order, to allow for flexibility and a diversity of opinions on the RAC. Additionally, the group developed two post-selection criteria against which to evaluate the entire slate of projects:

1. Projects represent a mix across all forest values (though not necessarily in dollars), and across geographic areas, providing widespread current or future benefit.
2. 50% of funding is for watershed improvements/restoration or roads maintenance/obliteration, as mandated by the legislation.

A discussion that occurred during 2004 and 2005 RAC meetings provides a powerful example of the Tuolumne County RAC's commitment to understand and uphold the legislative intent, and

to jointly explore and reach agreement on issues of concern. During the FY 2005 project selection process, Forest Supervisor Tom Quinn reminded the RAC that the legislation requires that "at least 50 percent of all project funds be used for projects that are primarily dedicated— (1) to road maintenance, decommissioning, or obliteration; or (2) to restoration of streams and watersheds" (P.L. 106-393, Section 204(f)). There was significant discussion about whether fuels reduction constituted watershed restoration, as had been the RAC's assumption to date. The RAC's project selection criteria document draws upon phrasing from the U.S. Forest Service legislative summary which specifies "watershed improvement/restoration" rather than "restoration of streams and watersheds," the phrasing used in the legislation itself.¹⁹ For the Tuolumne County RAC, watershed "improvement" included watershed protection and enhancing forest ecosystem health. The Forest Supervisor commented that while there is "clearly a link between fuels reduction and watershed protection, the linkage between fuels reduction and watershed restoration probably [was] not adequate to meet the intent."²⁰

For the purposes of FY 2005 project selection, the RAC decided to identify projects that met the 50% requirement, even if it was decided that fuels reduction did not meet the legislative intent for watershed restoration, and moved ahead with voting. Throughout its subsequent meetings, the RAC continued to discuss the 50% requirement. Forest Supervisor Tom Quinn, who in the first years of implementation was the Legislative Liaison for the USFS Washington Office, indicated that Section 204(f) was added at the last minute by Democrats and was seen as a requirement for passage of the bill. He commented, "it would not have been added if it meant fuels reduction/increase in ecosystem health, as these categories of projects are already specifically listed in the legislation."²¹ Several calls to the Washington Office and discussion at a USFS Region 5 meeting yielded no hard and fast clarification, other than that the decision was devolved to

¹⁹ See Forest Service legislative summary online at http://www.notes.fs.fed.us:81/r4/payments_to_states.nsf/Web_Documents.

²⁰ Tuolumne County RAC Meeting Minutes 8/9/04.

²¹ Tuolumne County RAC Meeting Minutes 8/23/04.

the Forest Supervisor.

The RAC decided to draft a position paper to have on record regarding its interpretation of the legislative requirement. In April 2005, Regional Forester Jack Blackwell issued a letter stating, “any fuels reduction project will not only help protect our watersheds but also restore these watersheds to a more natural and resilient condition” and that fuels reduction projects meet the goal of the 50% requirement for road maintenance and watershed restoration. This eliminated the need for the position paper, and in 2005, the RAC added a step to its selection process: prior to dot sensing, lobbying, and voting, the RAC identifies those projects that meet the 50% requirement for roads and watersheds. Given its emphasis on fuels reduction, the Tuolumne County RAC meets the requirement without difficulty.

These discussions about legislative intent, while ultimately resolved by direction from the Regional Forester, highlight an engaged Resource Advisory Committee that is committed not only to fulfilling the intent and spirit of the legislation, but to a local, collaborative process to resolve questions of concern.

The legislation requires that Title II projects include monitoring plans, but does not specify who should monitor projects and how. Monitoring for project outcomes and effectiveness is a challenge for RACs and forests across the nation, particularly for fire prevention or forest ecosystem health projects, which require years of scientific monitoring to determine project effectiveness. To its credit, the Tuolumne County RAC has been proactive in developing a mechanism for monitoring project implementation and preliminary project outcomes. The RAC developed a one-page “Title II Project Accomplishment Tracking Form” that requests a summary of accomplishments to date, assistance needed, availability for field trips, and photos of before, during, and after project implementation. The reports are submitted annually, and kept in a binder that is passed around for review at RAC meetings.

Interviewees in this study felt that the Tuolumne

County RAC had supported a worthy slate of projects that benefit the Forest and local communities. All expressed excitement that such a diverse group of interests could work so well together and accomplish work on the ground. Any disagreements or questions about projects were generally related to whether the project benefited the public as a whole – as opposed to a single interest group – or was the highest priority given limited Title II dollars. However, the work is not without tension. Some interviewees felt that one of the voting groups used its power inappropriately to influence RAC decisions, at times forming a voting block around a couple of interests, and using veto power to block projects “if they didn’t get what they wanted.” Re-charter of the RAC, with replacement and new members, seems to have assuaged the voting block concern. Finally, some RAC members and project proponents felt that some RAC members focused too much on their particular interest groups rather than thinking of the broader public interests.

These challenges notwithstanding, the Tuolumne County RAC functions very well as an engaged, collaborative body, committed to upholding the intent and the spirit of the legislation for the benefit of forest resources and community wellbeing.

Public, Agency, and Interest Group Relationship Building

One of the purposes outlined in the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act is “to improve cooperative relationships among the people that use and care for Federal lands and the agencies that manage these lands” (Section 2(b)).

People interviewed for this study appreciate that the Title II program involves community members in decisions to allocate funds that result in “real outcomes at the end.” RAC members, county officials, project leaders, and Forest Service staff were all enthusiastic about the difference that the RAC process is making in community relationships. Participants use words from “pleasantly surprising” to “it’s a miracle” to describe the productive communication and collaboration that is happening among interest groups that otherwise would not be

in the same room. The Title II funds and the RAC process bring something new to Tuolumne County – a venue for groups with historically antagonistic relationships to work together to effect change on the ground. As one RAC member reports, “We’ve learned that if we’re not throwing tomatoes at one another, maybe we can get things done. And we have. I was one of the sides throwing tomatoes. I learned that I can trust folks who have different agendas.”

This trust and mutual understanding among RAC members and the Forest Service is extending into other processes and projects, helping to build a culture of collaboration in Tuolumne County. For example, several of the groups represented on the RAC are now working together with other groups on the Stanislaus Recreation Stakeholders Group. Forest Service personnel noted that the RAC process is helping the agency to learn more about engaging communities, and the agency is incorporating more dialogue and collaborative style into scoping and public involvement processes that extend beyond the Title II program.

In addition, while most interviewees agree that the public is not very aware of Title II and the RAC, they know about RAC-funded projects, which are helping to improve the Forest Service’s relationship with interest groups and the public. For example, a member of the Twain Harte Horsemen, which has several special use permits on the forest, commented that working together on RAC funded projects has transformed an antagonistic relationship with the agency into a good working relationship. At the ranger district level, staff are assisting outside groups in the Title II application process and helping them to navigate Forest Service protocols to accomplish their projects. Through the fuels reduction projects in particular, citizens, local fire districts, county government, and the Forest Service are working cooperatively to protect their communities and national forest lands from catastrophic wildfire. The value of working toward a common goal to accomplish outcomes on the ground cannot be underestimated as a means to “improve cooperative relationships” (P.L. 106-393 Section 2(b)).

All federal advisory committees are subject to a Civil Rights Initiative Assessment (CRIA). The Stanislaus National Forest has submitted CRIA reports on behalf of the Tuolumne County RAC. There are two rancherias representing Central Sierra Me-Wuk people associated with the area. In the first round of recruitment for RAC membership, no tribal members were recruited; instead, a person who had applied for a different interest was placed in the position. She sought the permission of the Tuolumne Me-Wuk Rancheria Council to represent them on the RAC and served in that capacity for the first three years. In 2004, she recruited a Tuolumne Me-Wuk Rancheria member to serve on the RAC for the second charter. In some cases, the Forest Service interacts with tribes on projects. For example, the Tuolumne Rancheria contributed matching funds to a RAC-funded project that re-routed an OHV trail to protect a cultural site. Representation on the RAC is likely to bring more interaction with the rancherias regarding P.L. 106-393 and its provisions. The Title II program offers an opportunity for further relationship building and collaboration among the agency, tribal governments, and the RAC.

Like many rural areas in California, Tuolumne County has a growing population of Latino individuals and families. However, when asked if anyone was missing in the RAC process, none of the interview participants mentioned the local Latino community as a group to reach out to for inclusion or representation in RAC processes. While this is not unusual in rural settings where immigrants are largely “invisible” in civic processes, a public involvement process like the Resource Advisory Committee presents a remarkable, and yet untapped, opportunity for outreach, relationship building, and creatively engaging Latino communities in Forest processes, projects, and outcomes.

County Government-RAC-Forest Service Relations

RAC members and Forest Service personnel interviewed for this study spoke positively of the relationships between the agency and RAC mem-

bers, and felt that their work together was, for the most part, congenial and efficient. There was little to no acrimony among RAC members, county officials, and the participating Forest Service personnel.

Some interviewees talked about some anti-Forest Service sentiments in the county and among some RAC members, and noted unwillingness among these RAC members to support projects that they felt the Forest Service should cover out of its own budget, or that were addressing problems created by the agency's past management practices. However, these feelings seem to be diminishing as trust and collaboration build. RAC members, county officials and project proponents speak highly of individuals in the Forest Service who foster collaboration and community capacity, particularly the Stanislaus Forest Supervisor, the Designated Federal Official Ann Denton, and Beth Martinez, who supports the RAC and works closely with project proponents at the ranger district level. Several commented that Forest Supervisor Tom Quinn, who came to the Stanislaus National Forest a couple of years into the Title II and Title III implementation process, has brought a framework of collaboration. Review of RAC meeting minutes indicate a supervisor who is knowledgeable of the legislative intent and is committed to upholding it. He communicates what he believes the legislation allows and what he feels does not meet the intent—and follows up with the Washington Office—informing the RAC if he could not approve something, without imposing upon their decision-making process. As described previously, the RAC is very engaged in understanding and seeking to uphold the intent. The RAC also encourages coordination and collaboration with the agency by requiring project proponents to consult with the appropriate ranger district to ensure that proposed projects do not conflict with existing land management plans and requirements. As one RAC member commented, “it is important for us to hear the concerns of the district.”

Among RAC members and county officials there is a growing understanding of and empathy

for how the agency works, including the budgetary limitations it faces, and the process it must go through to satisfy legislation such as the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). While to date the RAC has not funded the NEPA—or the California Environmental Quality Act—aspect of project work, 2005 RAC meeting minutes show more willingness to contribute to NEPA costs for projects that address the RAC's shared goals, particularly fire prevention.

In the first years of implementation, the Stanislaus National Forest did not charge administrative fees on RAC projects to cover the cost of grant and contract administration. In the early years, the RAC resisted using any Title II dollars for Forest Service administration – and indeed a few RAC members were sensitive about “paying the Forest Service to do their jobs” – but by 2004, there was a growing empathy for the burden on the agency, and the RAC looked for solutions. They decided that for FY05 projects, Title II funds would cover \$1,000 per grant and for FY06 projects, agency staff would estimate grant administration costs on a proposal-by-proposal basis. For FY05, these funds were set aside from the overall Title II allocation for the year, rather than from the project proposals.

Finally, with its focus on protecting communities—and, by extension, forest resources—from fire, the RAC has been able to garner unanimous support for its fuels reduction and fuelbreak work. RAC members recognize that they will need to put the trust and collaborative skills they've gained to work if the RAC considers projects that are focused less on protecting human settlements and more on forest health and fire prevention in other areas of the Forest, particularly if these involve timber sales.

The RAC process is building mutual understanding of needs, interests, and constraints among RAC members, county officials, and Forest Service personnel, enabling collaboration to grow. As one county official commented, “The collaborative effort is like no other that I've seen.”

Conclusion

The Title III programs in Tuolumne County and the Title II Tuolumne County RAC effectively advance the intent and purposes of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act. They promote “employment opportunities through projects that improve the maintenance of existing infrastructure, implement stewardship objectives that enhance forest ecosystems, and restore and improve land health and water quality” (P.L. 106-393 2b). Many of the Title II and III projects dovetail with other collaborative planning and program efforts involving local, county, state, and federal partners, and to help to advance objectives that extend beyond the scope of a discrete project. Many projects leverage partnerships, community volunteerism, funds and in-kind goods and services, multiplying the scope and potential effect of project outcomes.

The Title III grants approved by the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors accomplish work on the ground that upholds the intent of the legislation, often complementing the intents and projects of the Title II program. Title III funds have been critical to launch or staff model programs such as the Tuolumne County Youth-Forest Partnership Summer of Success and the South West InterFace Team (SWIFT). Title III dollars are enabling counties to implement projects for ecological and community health that they would not otherwise be able to accomplish.

That said, Tuolumne County could make its Title III program even more successful by improving its project solicitation and selection processes. The county has blurred the distinction between the discrete projects envisioned in the legislation and internal administrative allocations to county programs. The Title III program in Tuolumne County will “improve cooperative relationships,” as called for in the legislation, by developing a public and competitive process for funding projects, including a call for project proposals that is open to groups beyond county programs. In addition, the Title III program would benefit from consistent reporting requirements to monitor and document project

outcomes.

The guiding priority of the Tuolumne County RAC is to invest in projects that work to prevent catastrophic fire, protecting communities and forest resources. These projects increase cooperation among local, county, state, and federal governments and between these entities and community residents. These projects have very successfully engaged both fulltime residents and vacation homeowners to address fuels buildup around homes adjacent to national forest lands. The projects have helped to build agreement and collaborative relationships among interest groups represented on the RAC that have historically been at odds with one another. Over time, the RAC has come to recognize and emphasize the need to look at fire prevention planning across jurisdictions and with a forest-wide view. They encourage projects that interface with and enhance broader fire prevention planning. Finally, many acres of private and federal lands have been treated. The challenge will be to build in sustainable ways to maintain the treated acres, in order to prevent rapid re-growth of ladder fuels and accumulation of surface fuels.

In keeping with the overall goals of the legislation, and despite relatively limited dollars, the RAC has helped generate and/or maintain some local employment through projects that are appropriate for local contractors and their crews. These include Civilian Conservation Corps crews building fuelbreaks, trucking firms hauling surface fuels, and crews working on roads projects. In addition, the RAC invests in job training and building a sense of place and stewardship in local youth through youth employment programs like the Summer of Success.

The Tuolumne County RAC has very successfully leveraged additional dollars, more than doubling its investment of Title II dollars. While this has always been one of the RAC’s criteria for selecting projects, recently it added matching funds as a requirement on the project application form.

The Tuolumne County RAC has also proactively developed a mechanism for monitoring preliminary project accomplishments.

The Tuolumne County RAC demonstrates a strong commitment to improving collaborative relationships across interest groups, learning more about forest management issues and agency functioning, and understanding and upholding the legislative intent. The RAC can assure that its voting process falls within the parameters of the legislation by continuing to engage replacement members in project discussions, but not in any phase of project selection voting.

The Title III and Title II programs have successfully implemented the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act to accomplish a diversity of worthy projects that benefit the social and ecological conditions of the communities and lands associated with the Stanislaus National Forest. The collaborative work of Tuolumne County, the Stanislaus National Forest, and the Tuolumne County Resource Advisory Committee provide lessons from which others engaged in implementing P.L. 106-393 can benefit.

Interviewees

Ginger Armstrong, RAC Chair
Steve Boyack, County of Tuolumne, Senior Administrative Analyst
Sherri Brennan, RAC Member
Marian Chambers, County of Tuolumne, Deputy Agriculture Commissioner
Ken Kolp, RAC Member
Jo Kolp, Public
Sergeant R. DeMartini, Tuolumne County Sheriff's Department
Ann Denton, Designated Federal Official, Stanislaus National Forest
Tricia Dunlap, Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools Office
Captain Jim Earll, Tuolumne County Sheriff's Department
John Hardin, California Alumni Association, Lair of the Golden Bear
Chief Sonny Hernandez, Mi-wuk Fire District
Rod Horne, Highway 108 Fire Safe Council
Carrie Hubbard, County of Tuolumne, Fire Marshall
Pat Kaunert, Stanislaus National Forest
Richard Jaspas, Twain Harte Horsemen
Kari King, RAC Member
Lieutenant Keith Lunney, Tuolumne County Sheriff's Department
Beth Martinez, Stanislaus National Forest
Jim Mori, RAC Member
Jay Norton, University of California Cooperative Extension
Tom Quinn, Supervisor, Stanislaus National Forest
Bill Seib, Stanislaus National Forest
Mark Thornton, RAC Member & County Supervisor
Richard Pland, RAC Member & County Supervisor
Brent Wallace, former RAC Member, County of Tuolumne