

Multiple Party Monitoring in New Mexico

by Ann Moote, Ecological Restoration Institute

Many community forestry advocates have heard of the Collaborative Forest Restoration Program (CFRP), a pilot Forest Service program that funnels \$5 million per year to community groups in New Mexico. Funds available under CFRP go to diverse, multi-partner projects that promote forest restoration and improve the use of small diameter trees removed from restoration sites. Several advocates are clamoring to have this law expanded to provide similar funds for community forestry in other states.

What some may not know is that the Community Forestry Restoration Act, the legislation that created CFRP, also requires each grant recipient to conduct a "multiparty assessment." As written in the law, this assessment must "identify both the existing ecological condition of the proposed project area and the desired future condition" and "report, upon project completion, on the positive or negative impact and effectiveness of the project, including improvements in local management skills and on the ground results."

In 2001, the first year that CFRP grants were offered, no one associated with the program knew quite what Congress intended by this "multiparty assessment" requirement. The Technical Advisory Committee that reviews CFRP grant proposals interpreted the first part to mean ecological monitoring, but no one knew quite what indicators the projects should measure or what the multiparty piece meant.

"The proposals coming in clearly showed that the communities didn't know what it meant to monitor," says Melissa



Monitors review data during a break.

Savage, a forest ecologist who served on the advisory committee. "They hadn't budgeted for monitoring, they didn't understand the value of monitoring, and they didn't know how to proceed with it."

CFRP grant recipients were at best lukewarm when told that they had to monitor their projects. "While interested local people should be involved in monitoring if possible, much of the required monitoring for program substantiation and 'institutional' level learning should be done centrally, such as by the state," said CFRP grantee Gordon West.

Bob Moore, another Technical Advisory Committee member and coordinator of the Catron County Citizens Group in western New Mexico, noted, "The piece

that's going to be very critical as we move to monitoring is designing a system that isn't a research study but that has enough form that it has credibility."

Defining Monitoring for CFRP

In response to these concerns, CFRP program director Walter Dunn and other funders organized a group of researchers and foresters to better define the multi-party monitoring requirement. Their work was eventually translated into a series of handbooks on multiparty monitoring that are now provided to all CFRP grantees (*see sidebar*). Grant recipients are also encouraged to attend one of the CFRP's trainings in multiparty monitoring offered several times a year in different parts of New Mexico.

The handbooks explain that monitoring involves repeatedly measuring the same thing over time to see if project activities have caused expected or unexpected changes in the social, economic, or biophysical environment. The specific indicators and level of rigor grantees use will depend on the type of information and reliability they need.

The basic concept behind *multiparty* monitoring is mutual learning. Through this process, participants can gain greater understanding of ecological, economic, and social well-being, and the interconnections between all three through learning others' perspectives. Because it involves a diverse group of stakeholders tracking the effects of a project over time, multiparty monitoring can also allow a project to move forward in the face of conflict or controversy.

Choosing Goals and Indicators

Grantees are encouraged to use their project goals as the first step in develop-

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A policy paper on the impacts on rural communities of the Competitive Sourcing Initiative is available through Wallowa Resources and Sustainable Northwest. For more details visit www.wallowaresources.org and choose the publications tab to view the document.

“Urban and Community Forestry: Working Together to Facilitate Change” is a recently published 216 page book available for free through Committee board member Dr. Zhu Ning of Southern University’s Urban Forestry program. Call 225-771-2262, ext. 267 or e-mail zhu_ning@suagcenter.net.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Community Forests: Possibilities, experiences, and lessons learned
June 16-19, 2005,
Missoula, Montana

Community-owned forests may be the answer for communities confronting unanticipated and unwanted large scale land use changes. Organized by the Communities Committee, the conference focuses on private forest land conversion and practitioner tools for acquiring and managing community-owned forests. Registration will begin in January, 2005, and community forest practitioners who wish to apply for scholarships must apply no later than March 31, 2005. For information visit www.communitiescommittee.org or call or e-mail Carol Daly at 406-892-8155 or cdaly1@centurytel.net.

2005 Wildland Fire Conference
February 16-18, 2005,
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Wildland Fire 2005, “Partnering to Protect Our Communities,” will bring together fire service leaders at the local, state and federal levels to address this critical problem facing fire departments around the world—the wildland-urban interface. The International Association of Fire Chiefs has partnered with the USDA Forest Service and the U.S. Department of the Interior to provide you the opportunity to network with more than 1,000 of your peers – fire chiefs, company officers, firefighters, land use planners, military personnel and local, state and federal government representatives. For information, see <http://www.iafc.org/conferences/wildland/index.asp> or contact the International Fire Chiefs Association at 703-273-0911.

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ing monitoring goals. “If you don’t know what you’re monitoring, if you don’t have a goal, there’s no purpose in doing monitoring,” says Jan-Willem Jansens, a program director at Earth Works Institute who helped develop the CFRP monitoring guidelines.

Since most CFRP projects involve thinning the forest to reduce the threat of large, high-intensity wildfires, there are significant commonalities among the various projects. Many communities choose indicators such as the size and density of trees, canopy closure, and surface fuels. Those who are trying to diversify the local economy may measure such indicators as the number of value-added forest products industries in the community.

Other communities have developed more specialized goals. For example, Las Humanas, a group that represents villages and land grants along the eastern edge of the Manzano Mountains in central New Mexico, is mapping the distribution of medicinal plants across their project site to measure the effects of roads on areas where community members gather medicinal plants. A project on the Picuris Pueblo in northern New Mexico is monitoring the restoration ef-

fects of adding native fungi spores to slash left from small-diameter thinning projects.

Capitalizing on an Opportunity for Youth

Several communities train local youth to do the monitoring as a way to introduce them to biological and social science and to connect them to their local environment. The youth set up photo points, plots, and transects to monitor changes in vegetation and conduct surveys to monitor social impacts of the restoration projects. “Monitoring is great science training for students,” says grantee George Ramirez, executive director of Las

Humanas. “It’s also a way to connect them to the land and make them want to stay in the community.”

“We feel that it is very, very strong to have those youth out there with their diameter tapes and increment borers, gaining an understanding of the spatial relationships in the forest” says Bob Moore, coordinator of the Catron County Citizens Group in western New Mexico. Youth involvement in monitoring forest health helps build community support for the restoration work as well. Moore adds, “Over time, these skills are nurtured, these folks go back and talk to their families and say they had a great time doing this, and it builds on itself.”

CFRP Multiparty monitoring handbooks are available online at:
www.fs.fed.us/r3/spf/cfrp/monitoring/index.shtml

- Handbook 1 – What is Multiparty Monitoring?
- Handbook 2 – Developing a Multiparty Monitoring Plan
- Handbook 3 – Creative Budgeting for Monitoring Projects
- Handbook 4 – Monitoring Ecological Effects
- Handbook 5 – Monitoring Social and Economic Effects of Forest Restoration
- Handbook 6 – Analyzing Monitoring Data