



## *Hands on Lands* Concept Paper

### The Problem:

- a. Landscape Challenges – Large scale management and maintenance needed on public lands which effect environment, economy and public safety of rural communities like those in Wallowa County...Federal budgets and staffing to address these needs have declined for the past 15 years, and are projected to continue to decline over next 3-5 years.
- b. Rural Community Challenges – Persistent and dramatic seasonal cycles in employment opportunities, decline in year-round manufacturing jobs compared to other sectors (especially medical, financial and tourism services), declining real income from farm and forest land in comparison to other sectors, declining support for land-use planning that favors working landscapes in face of housing development pressure, lack of inspiring jobs unemployed and underemployed residents (including young adults, displaced loggers and mill workers, and veterans) that teach important job skills and values, exodus of young adults from rural areas which affects social fabric and school systems.

### A Solution:

- c. The US has a long and continuing history of important and successful work programs that have committed public funds to the training and employment of adults rather than merely to continued welfare support for these people. Examples include Civilian Conservation Corps, Young Adult Conservation Corps, and AmeriCorps, amongst others. These programs target public service projects on public land and in disadvantaged communities. The Watershed Stewardship Work Program considers the development of people as an essential element of environmental conservation.
- d. The State of Oregon could develop its own program based on these models. The Government of Wallowa County, the City of Joseph, and several Wallowa County based non-profits are prepared to assist in such an endeavor. The Wallowa County Commissioners are prepared to commit some of its County Payment funding to this effort.
- e. This model program would invest in watershed stewardship activities through contracting with existing local professional contractors who are willing to employ, train, and supervise local workers who are currently unemployed or underemployed.
- f. The program would initially focus on hazardous fuel reduction programs in priority areas identified by the Wallowa County Community Wildfire Protection Plan, and trail system maintenance within the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area and the Eagle Cap Wilderness Area. Other work opportunities may develop over time. The initial work program would focus on fuels reduction on Mount Howard, and up to 250 miles of trail work in the HCNRA.

### Social Development:

- g. Aimed at poverty relief and the optimization of benefits from public programs.
- h. Investments will target a specific number of jobs per annum from previously unemployed (or underemployed) individuals, with specific targets to priority sub-groups defined by gender, ethnicity, age, and potentially disability.
- i. Each worker will receive a minimum of two days training per month employed in various job skills.
- j. Every project will have a functional steering committee to oversee progress on all elements of the program, and performance by the private contractors. The steering committee will include state and county government, USFS and local organizational partner representatives.
- k. Every project will ensure access to some childcare facilities as needed.

### Secondary Industries

- l. Wherever possible, secondary industries will be supported through this work program. Workers engaged in this program will be introduced to these other businesses through their scheduled training.
- m. Hazardous fuel reduction programs will work to sell suitable material to appropriate users, including post and pole and log furniture manufacturing, and any emerging bioenergy facilities including institutional wood heating facilities, small business generators and larger electricity producers. While there is not expected to be any significant commercial saw log component in this work, any such component that is generated and can be reasonably transported will be available for sale to existing mills.
- n. Linkages with new interest in place-based tourism, as well as natural and cultural history tourism, will be pursued. The primary linkage will be through the opening up of additional areas and trail systems for utilization, however interpretative material may also be developed including hip-pocket guides and interpretive signs.
- o. Non-timber forest product market opportunities will also be explored and pursued if viable.

### Core Partnership Vision

- p. The program envisions a model in Wallowa County of economic empowerment and social equity from watershed stewardship to improve the health of our public lands and larger landscapes, and eliminate the risks posed to public safety and rural businesses posed by the current public land conditions.
- q. The program requires a partnership between diverse state agencies, the United States Forest Service, county government, local non-profits and private contractors and businesses.
- r. Core funding must be provided by the State, but the local government, USFS, local non-profits, will make contributions. Agreements with participating secondary industries may generate additional revenue.