

National Fire Plan
Community Feedback Report

Denver, Colorado
October 16, 2002

The following reflect several informal reports from Community Forestry groups and others involved in the implementation of the National Fire Plan through telephone interviews, and discussions at a Community Forestry leadership group meeting in Baltimore October 14,15, 2002.

Quick Response

1. Suppression responses and suppression forces: Forest Communities are basically very happy with the quick response to fire starts. They are aware that hundreds of fires have been contained and controlled in very dangerous situations. They are also aware that the use of prescribed fire has increased. They are encouraged by the investments in fire suppression hard infrastructure. They are less aware and encouraged by the development of soft infrastructure. Coordination, collaboration and the development of local private sector crews is not so apparent.

Those "borrowed" funds

2. The funds "borrowed" from USFS programs to pay for suppression have had a *profound* impact on the local partners, contactors, workers, and the entire infrastructure of fuels reduction and utilization. As we warned congress this summer when OMB and the Forest Service was assuring the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee that everything would be all right, everything is not all right.

Contractors with IDIQ contracts were left with payments for new equipment and no work, mobilized thinning crews were left with no jobs. Many will not be financially able to make commitments to fuels reduction work again. Partners involved in utilization projects have laid-off and lost key personnel and have lost key partners and funders.

There is profound cynicism regarding the restoration of "borrowed" funds and an oft-stated certainty that if and when funds are restored, they will be "reprogrammed", and unavailable to the projects they were borrowed from. We would hope that is not the case.

Likewise, the Continuing Resolution for FY 03, coupled with the '02 experience, has left the agency unable to commit to and partner in a collaborative approach to fuels reduction, strategic fuel-break build-out, and planning. We would encourage the Wildfire Collaborative to find a long term solution to funding suppression and a short-term solution to the restoration of the borrowed funds. The March-April time frame for such a solution is intolerable.

Private Lands NEPA

- 3 Most of the fuels reduction work has been accomplished on private lands. Last year's projects were speedily implemented. This year's projects on private and municipal lands are meeting obstacles having to do with NEPA on private lands, requirements for Survey and Manage on private lands in the Northwest, and requirements for Management of Indicator Species on private lands. This has led many private landowners to back away from federal dollars for fuels reduction because the NEPA cost is too high in time and money. We need to work together to solve this problem and the field needs clear direction regarding the required NEPA analysis when federal dollars but not federal decision-making is involved.

Community-Led Public Lands NEPA

- 4 Many of our forest service districts do not have the planning dollars or staff to put to projects identified through the strategic fire planning process. As a result we have seen the agency request a community-led NEPA process. We hope you will join us in monitoring the success of these innovations and support ranger districts in this experiments.

Access to work-Local Crews

- 5 There is a part of the 10-year strategy which speaks to the building of local private sector businesses and crews to implement the fire plan. We have found that in many cases procurement is turning to large out-of-area contractors for both fire suppression crews and reforestation/rehabilitation crews brought in after the fire. We need to find a way to give local crews and contractors access to this work.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our learning from the field.

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