

Rural Natural Resource Green Jobs

Growth in green jobs is an integral part of the strategy to reinvest and rebuild the American economy. In addition to renewable energy development, energy conservation, and green product development, our green economy must support rural jobs that restore and steward our forests, rangelands, and watersheds. Rural America is a critical part of the green jobs discussion because 80% of our country's land base, and almost 64% of its counties are rural. Rural communities reside on public lands, and rural families own productive forests and farms. Rural communities, and the landscapes in which they are situated, are fundamental to America's energy, water, food, and natural resource security. These communities' responsible land management practices help protect and restore environmental quality, while sustainably realizing the economic potential of natural resources.

The developing green economy presents a huge opportunity to positively affect the socioeconomics of rural America. Rural green jobs not only help local economies recover, but also create a durable entrepreneurial workforce. They expand local value-added businesses and industries, which improve product worth and worker skills. In addition to direct employment benefits, green rural jobs generate high positive multiplier effects in rural communities. These include economic activities that maintain or enhance essential local businesses, such as hardware stores, sawmills, feed stores and, by extension, schools and hospitals. High quality, living-wage green jobs in rural areas allow business owners and workers to secure stable employment close to their families and communities. They can provide safe and dignified working conditions and generate sustained benefits for natural and human communities in rural areas.

A recent study by the Ecosystem Workforce Program finds that an average of 14.9 jobs are created per \$1 million invested in forest and watershed restoration activities in Oregon¹. Utilization of restoration by-products for bioenergy or value added products creates additional jobs and stimulates economic growth. Conservation improvements will increase opportunities for providing ecosystem services and participation in these emerging markets.

Taking advantage of these opportunities can provide rural communities with new pathways to sustainable growth,

¹ Max Nielsen-Pincus and Cassandra Moseley, A Preliminary Estimate of the Economic Impact and Job Creation the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's Restoration Investments, EWP briefing paper # 13 <http://ewp.uoregon.edu/pdfs/bp13.pdf>

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Federal policies investing in green jobs should include:

1. Workforce training that provides durable and transferable skills to rural people.
2. Small business assistance to encourage local growth of rural restoration and stewardship oriented businesses, including biomass utilization and ecosystem services.
3. Federal contracting reforms to ensure quality, long-term employment opportunities in rural communities.

entrepreneurship, and workforce development, while simultaneously enhancing the health of our forests, rangelands, and watersheds. Programs that support green economic development need to foster economic opportunities that will ensure high-quality jobs, wealth creation and retention, and local ecological and community benefits in rural America.

WHAT ARE RURAL GREEN JOBS?

The RVCC uses the following definition for rural green jobs:

Rural green jobs provide high quality, living-wage employment protecting, restoring, and stewarding environmental quality. They include jobs that restore and maintain ecosystem functions and services, such as clean air, clean water, forest and rangeland health and biodiversity, as well as those that reduce energy, material, and water consumption and move us toward a low-carbon economy.

THREE DIMENSIONS OF THE RURAL NATURAL RESOURCE GREEN ECONOMY

The green economy and green jobs include a broad array of activities designed to improve the environment while creating economic opportunity. The restoration and stewardship of the "ecological infrastructure" of our nation – its watersheds, air sheds, forests and grasslands—is one key component. Rural green jobs that restore and maintain our ecological infrastructure consist of work in the following three dimensions:

- On-the-ground restoration and stewardship activities on public and private lands that improve ecological conditions and facilitate climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- Utilization of the byproducts of forest restoration and stewardship to create renewable value-added wood products, heat, and electricity.



WHO WE ARE

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition is comprised of western rural and local, regional, and national organizations that have joined together to promote balanced conservation-based approaches to the ecological and economic problems facing the West. We are committed to finding and promoting solutions through collaborative, place-based work that recognizes the inextricable link between the long-term health of the land and well being of rural communities. We come from Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon and Washington.

- Payments for ecosystem services—such as carbon sequestration, wetlands restoration, clean air and water, and biodiversity—through incentives, certification, and markets.

CHALLENGES TO RURAL NATURAL RESOURCE RELIANT COMMUNITIES

Rural communities face many challenges that have not been well-addressed in green jobs or stimulus policy.

1. Many rural communities and governments have limited revenue streams.

Rural counties with large areas of public land have a smaller potential land base for economic activities and thus, a smaller tax base. This increases the tax burden on residents and limits the potential for capital creation to attract jobs. County governments may not have adequate resources for infrastructure services and maintenance.

2. Rural small businesses and landowners often lack access to business assistance, skill training opportunities, and information technology.

The often isolated nature of rural communities makes it difficult for them to access information regarding federal contracts, training opportunities, business assistance, and meet online registration requirements.

3. Contracts for federal land management are often structured to maximize administrative efficiencies by creating a small number of large contracts to be performed by large crews over short periods of time.

These contracts do not favor small rural businesses with limited access to a labor pool. Short-duration contracting results in unstable employment with longer hours and more intensive and potentially unsafe work.

4. Current policies favor quantity of jobs over location, quality and durability.

Recovery and reinvestment funds have primarily created jobs in urban areas. Rural communities also need jobs. More importantly, these jobs must build skills and generate and maintain local wealth. Temporary jobs that do not increase worker capacity are not a durable solution for rural communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Federal policy, procedures, and investments can be structured to ensure our nation creates green jobs that have significant economic benefit for our struggling rural towns and national economy. We must ensure that policies advancing green jobs create high quality employment opportunities for rural communities to steward the lands and resources that sustain our country.

ADMINISTRATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Create green job business assistance programs that support the work of the federal land management agencies.

The Administration should create and invest in programs within the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management that provide collaborative rural business assistance to retain and create jobs related to restoration and stewardship, as well as processing and manufacturing of value added products and wood to energy services. These programs should provide: a) grants and technical assistance to help existing and new small businesses, b) assistance to train workers in safety and advanced techniques in ecosystem restoration c) assistance to ensure employer labor law compliance and d) adequate staffing and training to local development organizations that are the trusted liaisons between the federal programs and the local contractors and businesses. Provision of technical assistance, green business loans, grants, and other types of assistance should be contingent on business compliance with all labor laws.

2. Structure work to create year-round employment in federal land management stewardship, service, and other contracts.

The federal land management agencies should scale federal contracts to local business and workforce capacity. Contractors need to have access to a consistent program of work in order to invest in equipment and workforce training (including training in occupational safety), pay living wages, and ultimately stay in business. Structuring contracts to require work over a long duration using a small crew can often accomplish this. Workers need consistent and reliable incomes in order to buy homes, educate their children, and enjoy other benefits of stable employment. Bundling seasonal activities into year-round employment opportunities benefits workers and makes contracts more accessible to small and micro businesses in rural communities. Public land agencies, through their procurement guidelines, should encourage and establish local preference in hiring of contractors and workers.

3. Make full use of best value contracting in federal service and stewardship contracts.

The federal land management agencies should make full use of best value contracting in both service and stewardship contracts to foster multiple goals, including improving ecological conditions, using highly qualified contractors, providing local rural community benefits, and ensuring that workers are treated fairly. Develop a benefit-cost evaluation tool to identify and determine real best values. Least-cost contracts rarely result in the highest return on investment when all of the benefits are accounted.

Effective best value contracting can reward contractors that perform high quality work, build and retain a trained workforce, pay living wages, are attentive to worker



safety, create local community benefits, and use the by-products of forest restoration. It can create a bridge between collaboration and implementation, enabling contractors to propose innovative approaches to achieving complex ecological goals, encourage local economic development, and build trust by ensuring that projects are implemented as federal land management agencies and their collaborators intended.

4. **Enforce labor laws on public land projects.**

The Secretaries of Labor, Agriculture, and Interior should prioritize the following administrative actions to ensure that quality jobs are created on public lands:

- a. Actively involve inspectors and contracting officer's representatives from the land management agencies in labor law compliance;
- b. Create opportunities for independent monitoring of labor intensive service contracts for labor law compliance;
- c. Ensure Agency contracting officer's representatives and inspectors who visit remote work sites record worker-days and other information. When activities show a discrepancy between worker-days and bid award, an investigation of wages should follow, with the help of the Department of Labor;
- d. Ensure that Agency field staff are given clear guidance, annual training, and performance standards to ascertain that they understand their roles, responsibilities, and obligations under applicable labor laws; and
- e. Proactively communicate workers rights. Agency public affairs officers could do this with radio spots and other means of reaching the public.

5. **Rescind the newly-adopted H-2B guest worker rules.**

Department of Labor should rescind the newly-adopted rules for the recruitment of guest workers. These rules provide no new protections for workers, and increase the risk of worker abuse, which is known to be widespread in guest worker programs. Reexamine the entire guest worker program as part of broader, forthcoming comprehensive immigration reform.

LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Authorize and create a rural green business loan and grant fund in USDA Rural Development.**

This loan and grant fund should provide direct low-interest loans, zero-interest short-term lines of credit and grants to eligible businesses and non-profits in forest and rangeland restoration and stewardship related enterprises. Elements of the program:

- Eligible businesses should be those owned and operated in a rural county and/or can show that significant portions of their workers are residents of a rural county.

BENEFITS OF THE RURAL GREEN ECONOMY

- Economic contributions from rural communities in the form of tax revenues, reduced government assistance, and positive contributions to the national green economy.
- Contributions to ecosystem services such as improved water quality and quantity, clean air, maintenance of biodiversity, and climate change mitigation.
 - Eighteen percent of our national water supplies originate on Forest Service land – an annual consumptive value of \$27 billion.¹
 - About 425 species listed under the Endangered Species Act and an additional 3,250 at-risk species are found on Forest Service lands.²
 - Active forest management on private lands in the U.S. could provide 30 megatons of carbon offset.³
- Maximizing federal investments in restoration and stewardship:
 - Reduces federal expenditures on uncharacteristically large wildfires.
 - Produces non-governmental leveraged dollars for public land management. In communities that are already building green ecological infrastructure through collaborative land management, non-profit groups routinely bring in thousands of dollars of non-federal money per project to create jobs on both public and private forestlands.

1 United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Forest Health Protection, Forest Insect and Disease Conditions in the United States 2006: Healthy Forests Make A World of Difference. June 2007.

2 Ibid

3 McKinsey & Company. Reducing U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions: How Much at What Cost? U.S. Greenhouse Gas Abatement Mapping Initiative, Executive Report, December 2007.

- Eligible businesses include those in the start-up or expansion phase, as well as those trying to retain workforce.
- Require interagency coordination between the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and USDA Rural Development to maximize program effectiveness.
- Require coordination with Small Business Development Centers and Local Development Organizations to ensure business plans are sound before applying.

This forest and rangeland specific loan program, and the call for interagency coordination, is specifically recommended to address ongoing concerns that current USDA Rural Development programs are focused almost exclusively on agricultural issues, leaving small rural forestry and ranching businesses in public land dominated communities little access to comparable loans and assistance programs.



RURAL GREEN JOBS IN ACTION

In August 2004, the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest in Arizona awarded a 10-year Stewardship Contract to thin 150,000 acres of primarily small-diameter ponderosa pine trees. In the first year alone, the \$4 million Forest Service investment directly involved 13 businesses, created 450 jobs (318 of them local), and put \$12 million of private sector investment into the local economy for goods and services. Additionally, the Forest Service reduced treatment costs by over 50%.

Products created from the thinned wood fiber include wood pellets for home and industry heating, animal bedding and compost materials, wood molding, structural lumber, paneling, wood pallets and biomass to generate electricity. The Forest Energy Corporation, a small local business, increased their wood pellet mill capacity by 50% and recently doubled their supply contract with a major retailer. Several industrial wood pellet heating customers are on deck, including the Town Hall of Eagar, AZ and the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest Supervisor's Office.

2. **Foster rural green jobs through national energy and climate change policy.**

Federal energy and climate change legislation should include incentives for sustainable land management and associated rural green jobs in forest and rangeland restoration and stewardship and wood processing activities, including value-added wood products and wood to energy. Provision of technical assistance, green business loans, grants, and other types of assistance should be contingent on business compliance with all labor laws.

3. **Ensure rural communities can access the benefits of emerging markets for ecosystem services in national climate change policy.**

Federal climate change legislation should include worker training and business assistance to help residents of rural communities; a) participate in emerging carbon markets, including assistance to small, private landowners for carbon sequestration offset registration and marketing, and worker education in verifying climate change mitigation projects, and b) understand and address the potential impacts of climate change through adaptation plans and activities.

4. **Create benefit for rural communities by incentivizing efficient, community-scaled, thermal strategies in national energy policy.**

Congressionally created policy and tax incentives should prioritize the development of efficient and sustainable uses of natural resources by recognizing the role of thermal energy in reducing our dependence on petroleum. Creating incentives for appropriately scaled energy facilities in rural communities increases opportunities for local ownership, contributes to the creation of local green jobs, and ensures lasting economic resiliency.

5. **Include renewable biomass from public lands in national energy policy.**

When developing national renewable energy policy, use a definition of renewable biomass that includes material derived in an ecologically sustainable manner from private and public lands, including National Forest System lands, to ensure that rural public land communities can benefit from woody biomass utilization job opportunities.

APPROPRIATE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Invest in the restoration and maintenance of federal lands.**

Restore agency budgets to sufficiently steward and maintain the ecosystems they manage, coupled with a mandate to do this in a manner that creates high quality living wage durable jobs for rural communities. We support efforts in the President's FY2011 Budget Request for the Forest Service to move in this direction through its focus on restoration, stewardship and rural economic development as reflected in the new Integrated Resource Restoration line item in the National Forest System.

2. **Invest in private non-industrial land incentives programs in the 2008 Farm Bill.**

Invest in private land programs that utilize the rural green workforce. These include the Forest Stewardship Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program. These programs enable private landowners to conduct stewardship and restoration work that often would not happen otherwise. This work not only benefits the land (and the broader landscape), but also the businesses and workers who are contracted to do the work. These programs, and others like them, are an essential component of an all-lands approach to natural resource restoration and stewardship.

3. **Fund the Community Wood Energy Program established in the 2008 Farm Bill.**

Appropriate the full authorization of \$5 million a year to encourage the use of woody biomass as the primary fuel for heat or energy at publicly owned or operated facilities such as schools, town halls or libraries. This program offers the opportunity for local job creation through the use of restoration by-products on an appropriate community scale to maximize local economic gain from the resource.

4. **Invest in existing and developing rural broadband entities to increase rural access to federal jobs on public lands.**

Invest in the rapid diffusion of broadband technology into rural areas. Rural contractors, who must access federal contracting opportunities and registration systems on-line, are disadvantaged compared to their urban counterparts because they lack high speed Internet access.



5. **Invest in Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTAC).**

Invest in adequate funding and staffing for the Procurement Technical Assistance Program (PTAP), authorized in 1985 in an effort to expand the number of businesses contracting with the federal government. Administered by the Department of Defense, Defense Logistics Agency (DLA), the program provides matching funds to state and local governments and nonprofit organizations to create Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTACs). PTACs assist businesses in accessing federal contracting by helping them access DUNS, Central Contractor Registration, HUB Zone registration, and FEDBIZOPS.gov

CONCLUSION

Natural resource-based rural communities have long understood the importance of green economies focused on the restoration and stewardship of natural resources. Green job policies that fail to address the contribution afforded by our natural resources and the rural communities located near them will miss a critical opportunity. The future of both public and private land management and sustainability is dependent on a local, well-trained workforce that is invested in the working landscapes they call home. Simply put, we must support and make visible the jobs and enterprises needed in rural communities if we are going to succeed as a nation in the creation of a strong, equitable green economy.



COALITION PARTNERS

Alabama

Tuskegee Volunteer Power Corporation

Alaska

Sitka Conservation Society

Arizona

Forest Energy Corporation

California

Alliance of Forest Workers and Harvesters
Calaveras Healthy Impact Products Solutions
California Center for Rural Policy
Fourth Sector Strategies
Humboldt Area Foundation
Redwood Coast Rural Action
Trinity County Supervisor, District 3
Watershed Research and Training Center

Idaho

Framing Our Community, Inc.
Lemhi County Economic Development Association
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
Salmon Valley Stewardship
Shoshone County Board of Commissioners
Silver Valley Economic Development Corporation
Woody Biomass Utilization Partnership

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