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Eye on the Environment

An update on the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program

By Mo Bookwalter, Northwest Connections

Last fall the Southwest Crown (SW Crown) region— which encompasses the bulk of lands in the Blackfoot, Seeley Lake and Swan Valley regions --was one of ten landscapes chosen to receive funding through the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP).

The goals of CFLRP include working to restore forest health, reducing wildfire risk around communities, employing our skilled local workforce as well as utilizing forest restoration byproducts. Funding for the program will help to promote landscape scale restoration and stewardship projects on National Forest lands.

This work will include, but is not limited to, fuels reduction near homes, creation of fuel breaks, road improvements and decommissioning, weed treatments, fisheries habitat improvement and stream restoration.

The SW Crown project can expect to receive funding for a 10 year timeframe with the maximum of \$4 million per year if fully appropriated by Congress. The funding we received in 2010 was \$1,029,000 shared across the three Ranger Districts. A sampling of the projects that were funded in 2010 include:

- Lincoln Ranger District: \$25,000 for weed treatment will be accomplished through a partnership agreement with the Ponderosa Snow Warriors. Exclosure/fence installation was awarded to a Montana contractor for 1200 acres of riparian improvement and protection.
- Swan Ranger District: Fuels reduction work in the Meadow Smith and Cooney- McKay

planning areas on 160 acres. Roadside weed treatment in the Holland Pierce planning area on 432 acres.

- Seeley Ranger District: Horseshoe Hills weed treatment on 500 acres. Hand piling and burning on 70 acres in the Monture Fuels Reduction project. Landline survey completed for the Colt Summit Restoration and Fuels Reduction project.

Congress has allocated a total of \$25 million for CFLRP in 2011. The exact amount the SW Crown will receive in 2011 is uncertain; however, there is a possibility we could receive full funding for project work.

A sample of priorities for the three Ranger Districts in 2011 include:

- Lincoln Ranger District: Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) fuels reduction including piling and burning on 300 acres. Trail reconstruction in the Scapegoat Wilderness on 6.5 miles.
- Swan Ranger District: Legacy Lands fuel management on 300 acres in the WUI in the Upper Swan Valley. Pre-commercial thinning in the Meadow Smith Planning area. Swan River bridge replacement on Piper Creek.
- Seeley Ranger District: Trail Creek culvert replacement. Colt Creek road relocation survey and design. Colt Creek Road culvert replacement. Auggie Creek restoration and fuels project.

Funding provided through the CFLRP, must be matched, dollar for dollar, by existing Forest Service budgets, outputs from forest management projects, or through other public and private support. The upshot is that dollars from CFLRP will double the investment annually for restoration projects, fuels reduction, and monitoring in the SW Crown. If fully funded, an economic analysis suggests that this program of work has the potential to create 179 full and part-time jobs during each of the next 10 years.

The SW Crown Collaborative, which is made up of economic development firms, conservation groups, federal and state land agencies, timber groups, land trusts, and the University of Montana and open to any interested group or citizen, is dedicated to providing opportunities for local contractors.

“It’s important to keep our local contractors employed and part of our communities – because of their tie to the land and we know we’ll get a quality job that we all benefit from.” said Amber Kamps, Lincoln District Ranger. “These upcoming projects will provide various sizes and types of contracts they can bid on.”

Work will be bid in a variety of ways – from straight up timber sale and service contracts, to stewardship contracts where “best value criteria” is used. Best value criteria includes a contractor’s experience, work quality, and past performance as well as the benefits the contractor can provide to the local community, such as employing local workers.

To assist local contractors in learning about this program of work and how to bid on the contracts, the SW Crown Collaborative, in partnership with the Montana Logging Association, held a workshop in Seeley Lake in mid-April. Our hope was not only to answer questions about the program and scope of work, but also to learn from contractors how the program can best benefit the local economy.

The second day of the workshop was dedicated to better understanding the different types of federal contracts that will be used to bid out this work.

"The different types of contracts and the many application forms can be downright confusing," said Jason Todhunter, Safety Management Consultant for the Montana Logging Association. "We want to ensure contractors know how to put their best foot forward when applying for upcoming projects. I think the Forest Service contracting officers did a great job of explaining the federal contract process giving our contractors the tools to bid on this work. The bottom line is jobs and that real work gets done and logs get sent to the mill."

There was a great turnout at the 2 day event – with almost 70 contractors attending day 1 and 45 attending the contracting training on day 2. The importance of increasing natural resource based work in our region was exemplified when Jim Nethercott, a contractor from Polson, said, “Years ago this room would have been filled, standing room only. The time to talk is quit, the

time to get something done is now, or the rest of us won’t be here next time.”

The SW Crown Collaborative will continue to work hard to ensure important landscape scale restoration work gets accomplished in our region and that local contractors are employed to get the job done. We not only welcome, but encourage community members to get involved in this 10 year program of work. Please visit www.swcrown.org for more information on the SW Crown project.