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March 14, 2011

ISSUE: Reauthorization of Stewardship Contracting

PROPOSED POSITION: The Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI) Regional Coordinating Council supports the reauthorization of stewardship contracting for the United States Forest Service (USFS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Background

Current law authorizes the USFS and BLM, to undertake stewardship end results contracting projects, also known as stewardship contracting. The term of the stewardship contract may not exceed 10 years. The current authorization will expire at the end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2013.

Stewardship contracts are a means for achieving forest management and addressing rural community needs by focusing on the end result ecosystem benefits and outcomes. Restoration activities, including fuels management, are addressed in a contract or agreement that may include multiple partners such as federal, tribal, state, and local agencies; non-governmental organizations; and other interested groups or individuals. The goals of stewardship contracts include reducing hazardous fuels, improving forest and rangeland health, maintaining or improving water quality, restoring fish and wildlife habitat, and providing resiliency to native plant species. Key elements of the stewardship contracting process include the following:

- Collaboration occurs upfront and during the development and initiation of a project;
- Initiation may be started by agencies and organizations outside of the USFS and BLM;
- Retention of receipts from forest products collected as a result of restoration efforts may be applied to restoration needed in the project area;
- Provides authority to trade goods or services (such as restoration needs);
- Provides authority to use subcontractors; and
- Allows evaluation of a contractor's proposals by the Best Value contracting process (USFS), which are based on the quality of a proposal, expertise and past work history as a contractor as opposed to a single focus of lowest bid.

Importance to the Sierra Nevada Region and Achievement of SNFCI Objectives

Stewardship contracting is being used in the Sierra Nevada, however many of the projects are relatively small in size. At the same time, many of the discussions around the development of larger landscapes approaches, such as Collaborative Forest Landscape Program projects, include the anticipated increase in the use of this tool.

Stewardship contracting is a cooperative means of achieving forest management and restoration and is in accordance with SNFCI goals. These contracts would also assist in providing a higher degree of certainty for those interested in investing in wood processing and energy infrastructure.

Recommended Position

The SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council should adopt a position of support of the reauthorization the stewardship contracting authority for the USFS and BLM, including support of the following items:

- ✓ Extend the maximum length of such contracts up to 15 years.
- ✓ Provide for a portion of the proceeds from these contracts to be returned to local governments where the work is occurring.

The SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council also encourages the USFS and BLM to address the following issues under a new authorization:

- Ensure that contracts and agreements are designed to increase local benefit and to fit or build the capacity of local businesses and workforce to provide restoration services and develop markets for local utilization of materials.
- Increase support for stewardship contracting and collaboration in all phases of project development, implementation, and monitoring.
- Ensure contracts and agreements are designed to achieve the ecological objectives of restoration.

To Whom It May Concern:

The Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI) is an effort coordinated by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy designed to restore public forests to ecological health, reduce the threat and consequences of large damaging fires and contribute to sustainable local economies. The SNFCI represents a broad coalition of interests committed to a collaborative approach to create consensus on actions needed to achieve these objectives. The effort is guided by a Regional Coordinating Council comprised of the various stakeholders involved in these issues in the Sierra Nevada.

The SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council supports the reauthorization of stewardship contracting for the United States Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. This tool is critically important if we are to make significant progress in restoring the ecological health of our forests and create sustainable economic activities in our rural communities. Recently, the Regional Forester for Region 5 identified the need for a significant increase in the pace and scale of restoration work in our national forests. It is important that this work be guided by the principle of ecological health and stewardship contracts are an essential tool in meeting this challenge.

In reauthorizing this authority, Congress should ensure the following components are included:

- ✓ Extend the maximum length of such contracts up to 15 years.
- ✓ Provide for a portion of the proceeds from these contracts to be returned to local governments where the work is occurring.

Stewardship contracting provides an opportunity to address landscape level restoration efforts in a collaborative manner that takes into account not the project's ecological objectives, but local community needs. As much of the wood processing infrastructure has disappeared in the Sierra Nevada Region, our communities are facing increasing threat of large damaging fires and substantial poverty. Long term, landscape contracts can create the stability needed to protect existing infrastructure and create opportunities for new operations, resulting in jobs, green energy and more sustainable communities.

We encourage members of Congress to act in a timely manner to ensure that the stewardship contracting authority is reauthorized and improved to meet the needs of regions such as ours.

Sincerely,

SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council Members