



Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership Workshop on Shared Stewardship

Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

**April 30-May 1, 2019
Boise, Idaho**

Introduction

On April 30-May 1, the Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership (IFRP) convened a two-day workshop entitled Shared Stewardship – Building a Common vision for Idaho. The goal of Shared Stewardship Initiative launched in 2018 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture is to reduce wildland fire risk and improve forest conditions through the coordination of strategic investments.

The IFRP workshop focused on the Idaho Shared Stewardship Agreement (SSA) signed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the State of Idaho in December 2018. The primary investment partners are the Idaho Department of Lands, the Northern and Intermountain Regions of the USDA Forest Service in Idaho, and their partners. The SSA states that: “To achieve landscapes that are more resilient to fire and other disturbances, we will take a more integrated approach to prioritizing investments where they will have the greatest impact to address risk across broad landscapes.” To accomplish this result, the parties agreed to “[j]ointly work with other stakeholders — federal, state, tribal, non-governmental organizations, communities, and universities — to help identify land management priorities and desired outcomes, using all available authorities and active management tools.”

The SSA provides that “[b]y 2025, the partners will work to double the annual acres treated through active management on National Forests and promote cross-boundary work on other lands within priority landscapes that reduce fuels and wildfire risk to communities, produce additional fiber, create and sustain jobs, and improve forest health and resiliency.”

The IFRP workshop was designed to inform and receive comments about SSA from diverse stakeholders. Participants included representatives from timber industry, conservation, local government, tribal, government agency, and other groups. Governor Brad Little and Undersecretary of Agriculture Jim Hubbard opened the event by laying out their priorities and expectations for the Shared Stewardship Initiative. Leaders from the Idaho Department of Lands and the U.S. Forest Service provided further clarity and details about their goals for SSA. The full agenda and participant list are attached as appendices.

This document sets out observations and recommendations from the Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership based on workshop presentations, content, and discussion.

Discussion

1. ***The Shared Stewardship Agreement (SSA) marks an important new initiative in national forest management.*** The SSA accords the State of Idaho unprecedented influence in defining goals and establishing priorities for restoration on Idaho's national forests. Leaders from the U.S. Forest Service and Idaho Department of Lands emphasized their commitment to working together and engaging a range of stakeholders in identifying land management priorities and desired outcomes. The SSA adopts an ambitious goal of doubling the annual acres treated using a variety of forest restoration tools.
2. ***Idaho has foundational elements for SSA success.***
 - Conservation, industry and community interests have found a general “zone of agreement” on how to conduct restoration actions that provide ecological, economic and social benefits. This zone of agreement means that Idaho has a distinct (yet fragile) opportunity to maintain broad support for actions that meet SSA to reduce wildfire risk, protect communities, and improve resiliency of forest ecosystems, while producing forest products to strengthen rural economies.
 - The State of Idaho's involvement and leadership in Good Neighbor Authority implementation and the Shared Stewardship Agreement provide important focus, momentum, and additional capacity and resources to help meet Idaho's wildfire and forest health challenges. Early results from GNA show that the State of Idaho can help accelerate implementation of science-based forest restoration efforts on federal lands.

- The SSA goal of doubling the annual acres treated through “active management” by 2025 provides a clear target that can help motivate and mobilize all stakeholders to work toward our shared goals.
 - Identification of two pilot project landscapes by July 1, 2019 allows the State of Idaho, Forest Service, and local communities to focus their efforts and demonstrate tangible results. National Forest plans and analyses, the State Assessment of Forest Resources/Forest Action Plan, and the scenario planning tool provide an ability to prioritize and allocate treatments where they will be the most effective at meeting SSA goals.
 - National forests in many parts of Idaho, particularly in the north and west central regions, have a viable timber industry that provides a viable market for forest products.
3. ***Significant questions and challenges remain.*** Key questions focus on the specific mix of actions will be undertaken, in what geographies and for what objectives. Challenges include maintaining and expanding the political support and securing resources that SSA needs to succeed and expand over the long-term.
- National forests differ from state endowment lands. National forests are ecologically diverse, vast in scale, subject to strong public involvement procedures, and managed under a broader legal framework that incorporates multiple values, including timber, wildlife, fish, ecological, recreation and other non-commodity values.
 - IDL has stated its commitment to adapting its forest management approach to reflect the special considerations that apply to national forests when working on federal lands. Open, transparent communication will be paramount to sustaining trust with partners and the public.
 - The SSA’s goals are appropriate – and diverse. They include: reducing wildfire risk to communities, improving forest health and resiliency, produce additional timber fiber and sustain jobs, and other ecological outcomes. Addressing these goals will necessarily involve deciding how to make trade-offs among these goals.
 - The scale of the challenges is huge. The Forest Service, with input from the State, has identified over 6 million acres of national forests in Idaho as priority landscapes in need of some form of vegetative treatment. Only an average of

about 50,000 acres per year are currently being treated through active management.

- Given the scale of the challenge, a collaboratively-developed strategy that targets investments to landscapes and project sites that will have the most impact in reducing wildfire risk to communities and forest ecosystems is essential.
- Doubling the annual acreage treated is an ambitious goal, but still represents a relatively modest effect on the overall landscape. This means it is essential to target treatments using landscape-scale strategies that maximize the benefits from each acre treated.
- Meeting the acreage goal of the SSA will also require a significant increase in the use of prescribed fire, where expertise and experience lies primarily with federal agencies.
- National forest restoration faces an “expectations gap.” Even with proactively treating 100,000 acres per year, wildfire occurrence and extreme fire behavior (and associated air quality effects of smoke) will change little in the short-term at a statewide or regional level. The public and political leaders are demanding change, but do not consistently grasp issues of scale and ecological dynamics.
- Southern and eastern Idaho generally have fewer markets and lower value forest products. This potentially creates a disparity between where program/project income can be generated, and where treatment is needed to protect communities and create resilient forests in those regions of the state.
- New scientific tools such as scenario planning will be useful to identify priority locations for treatment to reduce wildfire risk to communities and other values at risk.
- SSA does not currently have dedicated resources. While IDL does deliver important new, efficient implementation capacity, addressing forest health challenges across the state will require additional federal resources as well. SSA will be best able to attract the resources needed to scale-up effort if it has durable, broad, and bipartisan stakeholder support.

4. A high-level stakeholder engagement process can build effective support without burdening implementation.

- There was strong agreement among workshop participants that the success of SSA depended on building and maintaining the trust of groups that use national forest lands and have been actively engaged in past forest restoration issues. The long-term success and durability of SSA depend on building a broad level of support among national forest stakeholders that can serve as a foundation for the funding, commitments, and partnerships needed to maintain and ultimately expand the program over the long-term.
- The national announcement of the Shared Stewardship strategy and the supporting publication in August 2018 emphasize that the initiative is an outcome-based investment strategy. The public should be engaged in these significant investment decisions. Below are examples of related questions that can guide the discussions:
 - What program investments are involved (existing and potential)?
 - How will decisions be made?
 - Under the SSA, what changes to current decisions processes will be needed to coordinate investments for maximum benefit to the public?
 - How will success be defined and progress measured?
 - How will the SSA partners engage the public through an advisory function?
- Participants were open to different potential models for a stakeholder engagement and advisory function for the SSA. There was no clear consensus as to what the “right” advisory structure should be to support the identification of the two pilot projects, or how to develop Shared Stewardship into a statewide program. However, any structure that is developed should include representation from key stakeholder groups and potentially impacted communities. Collaboratives have an important role to play in assessment and planning processes but may be engaged at a more local level.
- The stakeholder advisory group should be comprised of up to 10 individuals with knowledge of the subject, credibility with diverse constituencies, commitment to cooperative approaches, and ability to work productively with people with views different than their own. An admonition to the advisory group to ‘do no harm’ was one message from the discussion, and that a statewide SSA group be respectful of the role of the forest collaborative groups at the local level.

- The structure of the advisory group should be relatively informal. The key is a commitment from the Governor, IDL, and from USFS leadership to support the effort and consider its recommendations. ILRCC does not currently have the right composition, focus, and meeting frequency, and the SSA stakeholders will likely not want (or be able) to take on ILRCC's current programmatic responsibilities.
- Roles of the advisory group (mentioned by David Groeschl at the workshop):
 - i. Define metrics and measures of success;
 - ii. Communicate and advocate with policy makers and the public;
 - iii. Identify and address policy barriers;
 - iv. Address funding issues; and
 - v. Bring the views of diverse constituents to bear in SSA implementation.

5. **Potential participants and roles.**

- USFS: NEPA and forest plan compliance, project planning, prescribed burning, prescribed natural fire, funding to underwrite costs of project planning and implementation;
- IDL: Advise on priorities, engage stakeholders, ensure accountability to objectives, and bring a statewide perspective. In addition, IDL brings significant new capacity in NEPA contracting and project planning, GNA contract administration, and private forest landowner and local government engagement;
- IFRP/Collaboratives: Provide on-the-ground knowledge, input and support on USFS projects within the zone of agreement;
- Conservation Groups: Ensure zone of agreement on USFS projects is maintained;
- Forest Industry: Workforce to implement projects, create and maintain markets to underwrite costs of project planning and implementation; and
- County/Municipal leadership: They have concurrent interests in the social, economic, and ecological goals of the SSA, and play a significant role in community wildfire protection.

6. **Metrics.**

- Available science should inform identification of priority areas. It will be important to rely on best available science rather than waiting for “complete” data.
- The SSI goal to “double annual acres treated through active management on National Forests” by 2025 will be measured proportionate to the type (commercial timber harvest, mechanical fuels treatment, prescribed fire) and location (near communities, front country, backcountry) of current treatment levels.
- Identified measures of success include change in fire regime condition class at the landscape scale, reduced loss of structures, infrastructure and lives from wildfires, increased economic opportunities, improved infrastructure, and greater consensus on (i.e., fewer legal challenges) to federal forest management projects

7. Resources and Capacity.

- A long-term, sustainable funding strategy will need to be developed for Shared Stewardship to maintain momentum and support. Additional agency capacity and resources are limited, and there is not yet broad engagement of the private sector. Innovative investment strategies should be developed that include the private sector and identify opportunities for funneling generated revenue into additional restoration projects.
- All existing tools, authorities, and partnerships should be tapped to implement projects. New policies and procedures may need to be develop, but should strive to streamline processes and expedite implementation. Flexibility and adaptation will be important.
- Traditional planning and contracting processes may be overly time-consuming to support the desired increases in pace and scale necessary to achieve SSA goals. Agencies will need to modify and adapt existing processes for contracting and analyzing projects to be successful.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Idaho has an excellent (but fragile) opportunity to develop a Shared Stewardship Implementation Strategy that reduces wildfire threats to our communities, restores resilience to priority forest landscapes, derives the associated economic and social benefits, and maintains trust among key stakeholders.

2. Communities at highest risk of wildfire (and associated WUI, fire-sheds, and watersheds) should be the anchor points that drive the identification and delineation of the first two pilot project landscapes, and identification of priority projects initiated under the SSA.
3. Vegetation management projects initiated under the SSA should follow appropriate restoration principles and demonstrate that they can be conducted at locations and scale adequate to create fire-adapted communities and landscape resiliency.
4. Persistent policy and political barriers to the use of prescribed fire and managed wildfire should be addressed by the SSA leadership and partners, to ensure that both fire management tools are ultimately incorporated into appropriate locations within SSA vegetation projects.
5. SSA leadership and partners should work diligently to ensure a balance of the ecological, social, and economic goals of the effort, as reflected in both the location and type of projects advocated by this partnership in the forthcoming years.
6. In addition to GNA program revenue allocation of significant federal and private funding will be instrumental to help ensure an appropriate balance of commercial timber and non-commercial fuel reduction/restoration projects implemented under the SSA.
7. Specific metrics should be developed to monitor and measure achievements of the SSA, and to help maintain trust among the SSA partners and stakeholders.
8. Governance should be established at the pilot project landscape and state-wide level to ensure appropriate coordination and transparency in decision-making within the SSA.