

H.R.2389 (Pub. L. No. 106-393)

Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (Enrolled Bill
(Sent to President))

TITLE VI--COMMUNITY FOREST RESTORATION

SEC. 601. SHORT TITLE.

This title may be cited as the 'Community Forest Restoration Act'.

SEC. 602. FINDINGS.

The Congress finds the following:

- (1) A century of fire suppression, logging, and livestock grazing has altered the ecological balance of New Mexico's forests.
- (2) Some forest lands in New Mexico contain an unnaturally high number of small diameter trees that are subject to large, high intensity wildfires that can endanger human lives, livelihoods, and ecological stability.
- (3) Forest lands that contain an unnaturally high number of small diameter trees have reduced biodiversity and provide fewer benefits to human communities, wildlife, and watersheds.
- (4) Healthy and productive watersheds minimize the threat of large, high intensity wildfires, provide abundant and diverse wildlife habitat, and produce a variety of timber and non-timber products including better quality water and increased water flows.
- (5) Restoration efforts are more successful when there is involvement from neighboring communities and better stewardship will evolve from more diverse involvement.
- (6) Designing demonstration restoration projects through a collaborative approach may--
 - (A) lead to the development of cost effective restoration activities;
 - (B) empower diverse organizations to implement activities which value local and traditional knowledge;
 - (C) build ownership and civic pride; and
 - (D) ensure healthy, diverse, and productive forests and watersheds.

SEC. 603. PURPOSES.

The purposes of this title are--

- (1) to promote healthy watersheds and reduce the threat of large, high intensity wildfires, insect infestation, and disease in the forests in New Mexico;
- (2) to improve the functioning of forest ecosystems and enhance plant and wildlife biodiversity by reducing the unnaturally high number and density of small diameter trees on Federal, Tribal, State, County, and Municipal forest lands;
- (3) to improve communication and joint problem solving among individuals and groups who are interested in restoring the diversity and productivity of forested watersheds in New Mexico;
- (4) to improve the use of, or add value to, small diameter trees;
- (5) to encourage sustainable communities and sustainable forests through collaborative partnerships, whose objectives are forest restoration; and
- (6) to develop, demonstrate, and evaluate ecologically sound forest restoration techniques.

SEC. 604. DEFINITIONS.

As used in this title--

- (1) the term 'Secretary' means the Secretary of Agriculture acting through the Chief of the Forest Service; and
- (2) the term 'stakeholder' includes: tribal governments, educational institutions, landowners, and other interested public and private entities.

SEC. 605. ESTABLISHMENT OF PROGRAM.

(a) **FOREST RESTORATION PROGRAM-** The Secretary shall establish a cooperative forest restoration program in New Mexico in order to provide cost-share grants to stakeholders for experimental forest restoration projects that are designed through a collaborative process (hereinafter referred to as the 'Collaborative Forest Restoration Program'). The projects may be entirely on, or on any combination of, Federal, Tribal, State, County, or Municipal forest lands. The Federal share of an individual project cost shall not exceed 80 percent of the total cost. The 20-percent matching may be in the form of cash or in-kind contribution.

(b) **ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS-** To be eligible to receive funding under this title, a project shall--

- (1) address the following objectives--
 - (A) reduce the threat of large, high intensity wildfires and the negative effects of excessive competition between trees by restoring ecosystem functions, structures, and species composition, including the reduction of non-native species populations;
 - (B) re-establish fire regimes approximating those that shaped forest ecosystems prior to fire suppression;
 - (C) preserve old and large trees;

- (D) replant trees in deforested areas if they exist in the proposed project area; and
- (E) improve the use of, or add value to, small diameter trees;
- (2) comply with all Federal and State environmental laws;
- (3) include a diverse and balanced group of stakeholders as well as appropriate Federal, Tribal, State, County, and Municipal government representatives in the design, implementation, and monitoring of the project;
- (4) incorporate current scientific forest restoration information; and
- (5) include a multiparty assessment to--
 - (A) identify both the existing ecological condition of the proposed project area and the desired future condition; and
 - (B) report, upon project completion, on the positive or negative impact and effectiveness of the project including improvements in local management skills and on the ground results;
- (6) create local employment or training opportunities within the context of accomplishing restoration objectives, that are consistent with the purposes of this title, including summer youth jobs programs such as the Youth Conservation Corps where appropriate;
- (7) not exceed 4 years in length;
- (8) not exceed a total annual cost of \$150,000, with the Federal portion not exceeding \$120,000 annually, nor exceed a total cost of \$450,000 for the project, with the Federal portion of the total cost not exceeding \$360,000;
- (9) leverage Federal funding through in-kind or matching contributions; and
- (10) include an agreement by each stakeholder to attend an annual workshop with other stakeholders for the purpose of discussing the cooperative forest restoration program and projects implemented under this title. The Secretary shall coordinate and fund the annual workshop. Stakeholders may use funding for projects authorized under this title to pay for their travel and per diem expenses to attend the workshop.

SEC. 606. SELECTION PROCESS.

- (a) After consulting with the technical advisory panel established in subsection (b), the Secretary shall select the proposals that will receive funding through the Collaborative Forest Restoration Program.
- (b) The Secretary shall convene a technical advisory panel to evaluate the proposals for forest restoration grants and provide recommendations regarding which proposals would best meet the objectives of the Collaborative Forest Restoration Program. The technical advisory panel shall consider eligibility criteria established in section 605, the effect on long-term management, and seek to use a consensus-based decisionmaking process to develop such recommendations. The panel shall be composed of 12 to 15 members, to be appointed by the Secretary as follows:
 - (1) A State Natural Resource official from the State of New Mexico.

- (2) At least two representatives from Federal land management agencies.
- (3) At least one tribal or pueblo representative.
- (4) At least two independent scientists with experience in forest ecosystem restoration.
- (5) Equal representation from--
 - (A) conservation interests;
 - (B) local communities; and
 - (C) commodity interests.

SEC. 607. MONITORING AND EVALUATION.

The Secretary shall establish a multiparty monitoring and evaluation process in order to assess the cumulative accomplishments or adverse impacts of the Collaborative Forest Restoration Program. The Secretary shall include any interested individual or organization in the monitoring and evaluation process. The Secretary also shall conduct a monitoring program to assess the short- and long-term ecological effects of the restoration treatments, if any, for a minimum of 15 years.

SEC. 608. REPORT.

No later than 5 years after the first fiscal year in which funding is made available for this program, the Secretary shall submit a report to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the United States Senate and the Committee on Resources of the United States House of Representatives. The report shall include an assessment on whether, and to what extent, the projects funded pursuant to this title are meeting the purposes of the Collaborative Forest Restoration Program.

SEC. 609. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

There are authorized to be appropriated \$5,000,000 annually to carry out this title.

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Vice President of the United States and

President of the Senate.