



Full Stream Ahead

January/February 2008

News and Highlights of Creeks and Communities: A Continuing Strategy for Accelerating Cooperative Riparian Restoration

Creeks and Communities Strategy—Aspects of Success

Formal evaluation and experience implementing the Creeks and Communities strategy has shown it is absolutely critical to blend bio-physical and social science in a collaborative process that facilitates joint-fact finding and conflict management. It has also demonstrated that one time interventions are seldom successful therefore, a phased approach has evolved. Greater success is achieved when the initial step is a situation assessment (stakeholder interviews). These are done prior to actual on-the-ground assistance and uncover vital facets (e.g., key stakeholders, issues or needs) that are unknown or not recognized as important by all parties, enabling the National Riparian Service Team (NRST) to design activities accordingly. The next phase is usually a combination of facilitated training and on-the-ground assistance. Following up with the groups on their agreed upon actions is essential to meeting objectives and ensuring lasting outcomes. Below are some interrelated and Integrated aspects of the Creeks and Communities approach found to be vital:

1. An inclusive, place based (on-site), participatory approach that fosters local solutions and collective action.

Truly successful and long-lasting solutions must meet the needs of both the resource and the community. This is accomplished through gaining participation of the widest diversity of stakeholders possible, in any activity, to ensure that local experience, knowledge, and needs are crafted into solutions. Effectiveness is directly related to the diversity of participants and the degree to which all stakeholders are represented and fully participate. Participants must understand and be comfortable working with each other to mutually develop viable solutions rather than just attending to observe or make position statements. Relative to the Creeks and Communities strategy, formal evaluation and experience substantiate that while training courses are useful, value is gained from either tying the training to a specific on-the-ground area or using it as a precursor to, or component of, an on-the-ground service trip, addressing actual issues. This provides the opportunity for people to actively apply the information in a hands-on, meaningful way with assistance available, thus reinforcing knowledge gained. In addition, working directly with communities of stakeholders fostering the creation of respectful environments and mutual learning, is proving far more effective than approaches which rely solely on providing expert advice.

2. Results are achieved through building relationships, trust, and a common vision of what is possible.

Collaborative solutions come about because individuals are able to discover, and work to advance their common interest. The goal is to acknowledge and manage any elements of conflict with the expected outcome of reaching enough agreement to collectively set objectives, implement a course of action,

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monitor the results, and make adaptations over time. A core concept in the Creeks and Communities strategy is the importance of establishing a common vocabulary and understanding (terms, definitions and concepts) among stakeholders regarding the physical attributes and processes of riparian-wetland areas; what they need to function and how a properly functioning system produces desired benefits.

Use of the Proper Functioning Condition assessment method as a principle tool in this approach puts into practice joint fact-finding, a critical component of building relationships, trust and a common vision of what is possible for riparian resources. This can best be described as a framework for bringing diverse groups together on the ground to identify current resource conditions, limiting factors (what attributes or processes are not in a working order), additional information needed, possible management prescriptions and short, mid and long-term monitoring options. This process places science in the hands of the average person, getting over the enormous hurdle of power and distrust that often comes with restoration intentions and projects. It also helps confer legitimacy on the scientific information and creates a foundation for joint decision making thereby building the individual ownership and commitment necessary for effective implementation.

Learning fundamental concepts together helps stakeholders better identify and agree upon the appropriate decision space -- should they be focused on developing management and monitoring plans for desired future condition or should they first take a step back and initially focus on restoring those systems to proper functioning condition. This not only helps set the sideboards for a discussion of riparian-wetland issues, it also supports formation of a shared vision among diverse stakeholders. Once stakeholders begin to recognize that they each hold basic outcomes in common, i.e., properly functioning systems, it is much easier to begin to trust each other and work together to produce a plan designed to provide a range of values that are mutually acceptable and sustainable.

3. Emphasis on building individual, institutional, and community capacity.

The fundamental objective of any assistance within the framework of the Creeks and Communities strategy is to build the capacity of the participants to cooperatively develop solutions to present and future resource issues. This emphasis is instrumental in determining the design of service trips. While in some situations technical skill building may actually become less important than building collaborative skills, every situation requires both to address resource and community needs. Without this capacity, in-depth outside assistance will again be required when the next situation arises. It also limits the extent of effectiveness of any national level team as it is impossible for them to address every issue, every time given a broad geographic focus.

The NRST is often asked to evaluate an issue and provide technical advice as to a solution. Considering the complexity and typical level of controversy of assignments taken on by the NRST, this is seldom, if ever, completely effective and can serve to create or add to a “dueling scientists” phenomenon. Again, this supports the importance of incorporating a process of joint fact-finding so that people understand where information came from and therefore are more likely to feel it is legitimate rather than just another expert opinion. In most instances, adequate technical expertise is available locally. While the NRST usually does bring valuable new advice to a situation, it is through fostering and contributing to the development of a local, collective solution that their efforts are most effective and lasting.

The Creeks and Communities approach also relies heavily on the creation and maintenance of social networks, or relationships that connect individuals and organizations both vertically and horizontally. Whether various ties are strong or weak, social networks play a critical role in determining the way problems are solved, organizations are run, and the degree to which individuals and groups succeed in achieving their goals.

Creeks and Communities Strategy—Aspects of Success continued

4. Federal agencies participating as a member of the community, fostering the integration of ecological, economic, and social factors, and the participation of all interests.

Effectively addressing all the issues inherent in managing natural resources requires diverse and active stakeholder participation. With a focus on land health as the basis for the provision of societal benefits and values, federal agencies can play a key role in many communities to facilitate this. The model used by the NRST is one which provides a framework (structure and processes) where local federal agencies are fully engaged and yet not always leading. Assisting in, and contributing to cooperatively developed decisions as part of the community, federal agency personnel provide technical, legal and regulatory information while helping stakeholders arrive at solutions tailored to local situations. Developed using this kind of approach, solutions are more likely to be acceptable, both ecologically and socially, economically feasible, and meet the legal and regulatory requirements under which agencies must function. This does not transfer decision making authority from the federal agency but rather provides the agency decision maker with options which have the active support of the greatest number of stakeholders.

Water Resource Management for Line and Staff Officers - 2008

Mike Lunn, Sustainable Solutions

On February 27, 2008, I had the privilege to address a large group of Forest Service personnel from across the United States at their annual “Water Resources for Line Officers” workshop. The 29 District Rangers and 8 Forest Supervisors plus additional staff present came from six Regions and there were also individuals attending from the Washington Office. The course description summarizes the importance of this offering: *“National Forests were initially established for the purposes of securing favorable conditions of water flows and to provide a continuous supply of timber. As demand for high quality water from National Forest System lands increases, competition for water resources and decisions regarding the allocation of this finite resource is emerging as one of the most contentious issues the Forest Service will face in the future. This course explores the demands, values, tensions, and opportunities related to water and the management of National Forest System lands. Instructors include Forest Supervisors, researchers, professors and representatives from the broader water user community.”*

I spoke about the Creeks and Communities approach, and the importance of providing leadership within their communities to bring people together in respectful environments to confront and resolve the issues they face. Building on the mission of the National Riparian Service Team, I urged them to reach beyond their boundaries to build relationships and partnerships that would foster increased collaboration for accelerating cooperative riparian restoration. Much of the workshop was heavy towards understanding the many laws, regulations, global situation and broader issues faced by the Forest Service; my talk focused on what line officers at the local level could do to carry out their mission, *“...securing favorable conditions of water flows...”* across not only the National Forests, but across large landscapes.

A take-home message for me was the interest that line officers have in managing the conditions of their water catchments, and the importance of outreach by members of the Creeks and Communities Network. We have within this Network, individuals with both social and physical/biological sciences backgrounds to help them with this critical work. We need to make sure this important group of leaders is fully aware of our efforts and the opportunities we present in order to help us all to be more successful. Take the time to sit down with your local line officers in both the Forest Service and BLM, learn from them the issues they are concerned about, and provide information about the approaches and tools available to them through the Network and the Creeks and Communities approach.

Riparian-Wetland Area Grazing Management Mentoring Opportunity

The National Riparian Service Team is conducting Riparian-Wetland Area Grazing Management Courses in Springerville, AZ (June 3-5) and Salida, CO (August 26-28). These courses are based on TR 1737-20 *Grazing Management Processes and Strategies for Riparian-Wetland Areas*. We are offering a mentoring opportunity for both sessions aimed at individuals interested in becoming instructors for this course. Priority for selection will be given to those individuals who attended the 2004 Riparian-Wetland Area Grazing Management Train the Trainer Course held in Phoenix, AZ. Please contact Sandy Wyman, NRST, (541) 416-6886 or swyman@or.blm.gov if you are interested in this mentoring opportunity. Each grazing course provides a unique set of circumstances as related to local issues and conditions.

Society for Range Management – High School Youth Forum

At the Society for Range Management (SRM) annual meetings, high school students from around the country attend and participate in the High School Youth Forum and for the third year running, the National Riparian Service Team was asked to give a riparian workshop. This year's half day workshop was held January 30, 2008 and included 26 youth, four sub-committee members, and six adult visitors.

The National Riparian Service Team instructors included Sherm Swanson (NV Riparian Team Leader), Jim Eisner (OR Riparian Team Leader), Sandy Wyman, and Janice Staats which allowed us to model working as an interdisciplinary team with expertise in riparian-wetland vegetation, biology, rangeland management, and hydrology. Presentation topics included importance and characteristics of riparian-wetland vegetation, vegetation's influence on riparian proper functioning condition, floodplains role in energy dissipation during moderate to high flow events, fisheries habitat and other values associated with riparian-wetland areas.

The highlight of the workshop was a contest to test the student's recollection of the information presented. Each instructor submitted 5-10 questions with answers based on their presentations. Teams of students were formed, and points were given to whichever team could correctly answer the question first. The highest scoring team had first choice from a range of prizes with each team receiving a prize. The contest was a good way to reinforce main points while keeping everyone awake and engaged, which was important since the students have a very busy schedule including many late nights.

At the end of the workshop, the High School Youth Forum leaders encouraged the students to use the information they learned once they return home, and to keep observing and learning about riparian-wetland areas and their management.

Full Stream Ahead

Is there something you would like to see in a future issue of *Full Stream Ahead*? If so, send an email to nrst@or.blm.gov. The NRST utilizes this newsletter to share highlights, news and hot topics that pertain to the Creeks and Communities Strategy. This newsletter is for the entire network and we encourage you to send in ideas, questions and articles for us to publicize.

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