

US FOREST SERVICE INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS



A 20-YEAR PARTNERSHIP:

Jewish National Fund/Keren Kayemeth Leisrael & US Forest Service

Background

Israel experienced one of its worst fire seasons ever in 1987. Devastating blazes ravaged the forested corridor between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. The US Forest Service responded by sending a technical team to assess the damage and subsequently recommended future mitigation and management strategies. Thus, a cooperative exchange program between the Jewish National Fund/Keren Kayemeth Leisrael (KKL) and the US Forest Service was born. The Jewish National Fund and the US Forest Service share many of the same values and challenges related to natural resource management. Over the last 20 years, the partnership between the US Forest Service (USFS) and the Jewish National Fund (JNF) has blossomed and expanded into a number of programs that have benefited both partners. The partnership has led to the application of better land management practices on behalf of both agencies. Key areas of collaboration have focused on the following:

- Technical Exchange
- Professional Education
- Conservation Education and Outreach
- Research

Technical Exchange

Over the years, both organizations have learned much from each other through technical exchanges focusing on some of the following issues: forest fire management, watershed monitoring, soil stabilization, grazing and range management, geographical information systems, recreation planning, silviculture, urban forestry and tree improvement. These two-way exchanges have improved training and forestry education programs for Israeli field staff and have led to better management practices for both agencies.

Education

A spectrum of learning exchanges, ranging from short courses on specific subjects to graduate level degrees in natural resource management, have allowed several hundred individuals in both countries to share ideas and solutions to forest and rangeland management problems.

Although graduate study programs in forestry are not yet available in Israel, twelve Israeli foresters have earned advanced degrees at US institutions like Colorado State University and the University of Arizona as a result of the JNF/USFS partnership. Additionally, JNF/KKL forestry professionals participate in Forest Service sponsored seminars on watershed, forested area and protected area management. Each year, a number of study tours are arranged in Israel and in the US on issues ranging from geographical information systems, natural resource administration and management, watershed assessment, rangeland and grazing management, fire and silviculture.

Conservation Education and Exchange

The Jewish National Fund and the US Forest Service share a common priority need for public outreach, particularly in the areas of water management and conservation. In the United States, the Jewish National Fund and the US Forest Service collaborate on education efforts including:

- **Tu B'Shevat** celebrations of life and promotion of conservation education programs for school children in urban and suburban areas;
- **World Water Monitoring Day** which enables Jewish students in both Israel and the United States to test water quality in streams, rivers, lakes and coastal areas. Students join participants worldwide in collecting and entering their data into the World Water Monitoring Day website. In the process, they learn about the importance of water, water quality, and its relationship to healthy forests; and
- **Curriculum Development** that addresses drylands conservation in both Hebrew and English for elementary school students in Israel and the US.

Research

More than eighteen research initiatives have been generated by the partnership between the JNF and the US Forest Service over the past 20 years. The results of these initiatives are often helpful to both agencies in improving their management techniques. Three examples of these current programs include:

❖ Hula Valley

As one of the few wetlands in the Middle East, the Hula Valley provides critical habitat for populations of birds migrating along the Great Rift Valley flyway. For instance, over 20,000 Eurasian Cranes spend the winter in the Valley and numerous species that are threatened on a global level find refuge in the welcoming confines of Lake Agmon.

Over the past four years the Forest Service has supported research efforts in the Hula Valley. This research applies a multi-thematic management approach to ensure the long-term conservation of the critical habitat for both birds and nature enthusiasts alike. The KKL conducts collaborative research projects in the following thematic areas:

- Monitoring of migratory and resident bird populations
- Implementation of agroforestry practices
- Avifauna and bird habitat conservation
- Eco-tourism in the Valley

❖ Israeli Tree Improvement Fund

One of the most recent and active research programs in the KKL focuses on tree improvement. Currently in its sixth year of research, the Israeli Tree Improvement Fund focuses on three objectives:

- Evaluate endemic and exotic tree species for afforestation in the semi-arid zone of Israel,
- Study the genetic diversity of significant tree species in Israel, and
- Develop new methods to improve tree propagation techniques.

An example of this Fund's research is the attempt to identify and study pine trees that are resistant to the gall wasp, a highly destructive insect.

❖ Middle East Regional Watershed Monitoring Project

The Middle East Regional Watershed Project, an environmental component of the Middle East Peace Process, has been underway since 1999. It addresses monitoring and evaluation of watersheds in the Middle East, and represents a collaborative research effort between partners in Israel, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Turkey, and the United States.

The participating countries provide the majority of the resources required to implement the pilot projects. The project is also funded by the US Agency for International Development Middle East Regional Cooperation Program (MERC), the US Department of State, and the US Forest Service. The MERC Program was



established as a result of the Camp David Peace Negotiations. It promotes Arab-Israeli cooperation by funding collaborative projects on applied research and technology in a variety of sectors between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

By participating in this unique program and by focusing on ecological resource issues such as the management of watersheds, the US Forest Service and its partners in the region hope to continue improving the quality of life in the Middle East and establishing and fostering strong working relationships that will last beyond the life of the project.

Summary of 20-Year Partnership

Technical Exchange: 16 USFS Technical exchange missions to Israel
31 KKL technical exchange visits to US

Research Projects: 18 research projects funded

Fire Fighting Assistance: In 2006, 100 Fire fighting suits, including nomex shirts and pants, gloves, helmets and safety goggles

Seminar Participants: 40 KKL participants at the International Seminars on Forested Area Management, Protected Area Management and Watershed Management

Masters Students: 12 master's level students at US universities

Natural Resource Management Courses: 6 technical courses at Hebrew University

Leaderships Visits: Chief F. Dale Robertson, Chief Jack Ward Thomas, Deputy Chief for Research Jerry Sesco, Chief Mike Dombeck, Associate Chief Phil Janik, Chief Dale Bosworth, Deputy Chief Joel Holtrop

For More Information

Please visit our website for further information: www.fs.fed.us/global.

If you would like to learn more about our program and/or to discuss possible collaboration with the US Forest Service, please contact our Middle East Program Staff:

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