

Collaborative Restoration Workshop

National Forest Foundation | April 2016

Future of Collaborative Stewardship | Plenary Session: Keynote address from Robert Bonnie, Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Speakers

- **Robert Bonnie**, Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Overview

Robert Bonnie discussed where we've been and where we're going with collaborative restoration and ideas about how we can work across boundaries, build diverse communities of practice, and demonstrate the value of the work we're doing.

Summary of Remarks

- We're here because our forests face significant challenges: climate change, insects and disease, loss of working lands, development on the wildland urban interface, invasive species, and others. All of these are big challenges that will require big actions.
- Gifford Pinchot created the U.S. Forest Service in the face of threats that affected the way Americans thought about their environment. Pinchot talked about involving people in the management of national forests. Of course, wildfire, population growth, the rise of production forestry and environmentalism, and many other changes have taken place since Pinchot's time.
- USDA sees a growing "middle" with greater alignment around forest issues. USDA has worked to encourage this alignment.
- Restoration is a word we all use, albeit a bit of an imperfect word. We're restoring forests to build resilience. We're advancing restoration in a way that is forward-looking and allows forests to be resilient to climate change and other threats.
- Secretary Vilsack recognizes that restoration should benefit forests, people, and water resources across all lands. And he recognizes that this requires collaboration.
- In the last several years we've built a better toolbox to restore forests at the landscape scale. For example, we have the 2012 Planning Rule, which at its core, has collaboration. The Rule will not succeed without the active involvement of stakeholders. We've made great investments and pushed the envelope through the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP), Watershed Condition Framework, and landscape-scale National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) activities in places like Arizona with the Four Forests Restoration Initiative. Other tools include tools from the 2014 Farm Bill (such as Good Neighbor Authority), stewardship authorities, Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership, and more.
- USDA has tried to do more work to promote wood products and develop local markets, develop new and strengthened tribal partnerships, and increase conservation on private lands.
- One of the greatest challenges to substantially increasing the pace and scale of work we do on national forests is the ever growing size of the Forest Service budget dedicated to fire. Fire suppression is more complex – and expensive – and ever before. In 1995, the agency devoted 16% of its budget to fire. Last year the agency devoted around 60% of the budget to fire. There



are 39% fewer employees on the non-fire side of the agency than in the 1990s. The fire costs are affecting everything that the agency does on the non-fire side of management.

- Capacity and partnerships will be key to solving many of our challenges. Luckily, we have the creativity and the people, represented by the vanguard who attended the workshop, to work on these challenges. Collaboration is not easy, and there are critics on all sides. Yet, we need to continue collaborating and increasing partnerships.



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