

Local Government and Collaborative Engagement

The DNRC is working with local government officials to help them more effectively engage with the Forest Service on federal forest management issues that affect their cities, towns and counties. Insects, disease and heavy fuels on federal lands adjacent to communities are very real risks for local governments, volunteer fire fighters and local communities. Continued Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) funding and economic value of forest industry are also objectives of this effort.

“The Local Government Forest Advisor from the DNRC has helped us initiate a project with the Forest Service that will result in significantly reducing the fuels south of Thompson Falls.”

- Carol Brooker, Sanders County Commissioner

Montana Counties Forest Summit

In October of 2016, 30 county commissioners from 20 different counties along with USFS personnel from the National Forests in Montana participated in the first Montana Counties Forest Summit. The Summit offered a venue for shared learning, partnership development and discussion of PILT, collaboration, litigation and Forest Service budgets.



Chair Chilcott, Vice Chair Peck, and Past Chair Brooker of the Montana Coalition of Forest Counties lead a panel discussion on PILT and federal forest management.

Commissioners and Forest Service personnel engaged in policy and forestry discussions, shared examples of successful and unsuccessful county engagement in federal land management, and discussed how counties and the Forest Service can communicate better to get more work done on the ground.

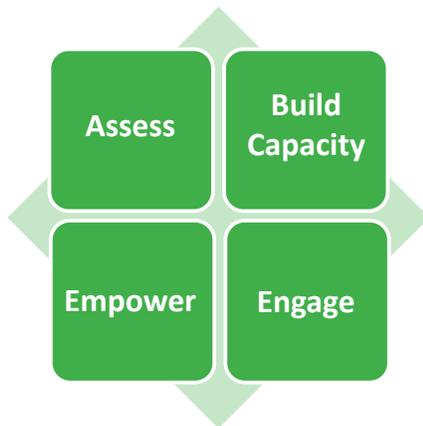
Communication is essential in building relationships and trust leading to more on the ground work. This workshop will be an biannual event to continue this progress.

“The Forest Summit was a valuable learning opportunity for members of the Montana Coalition of Forest Counties. The presentations and discussions provided participants tools to be more effective in working with our local Forest Service personnel to identify and meet community needs and expectations.”

- Greg Chilcott, Ravalli County Commissioner & Chairman of the Coalition of Forest Counties

Engagement Strategies

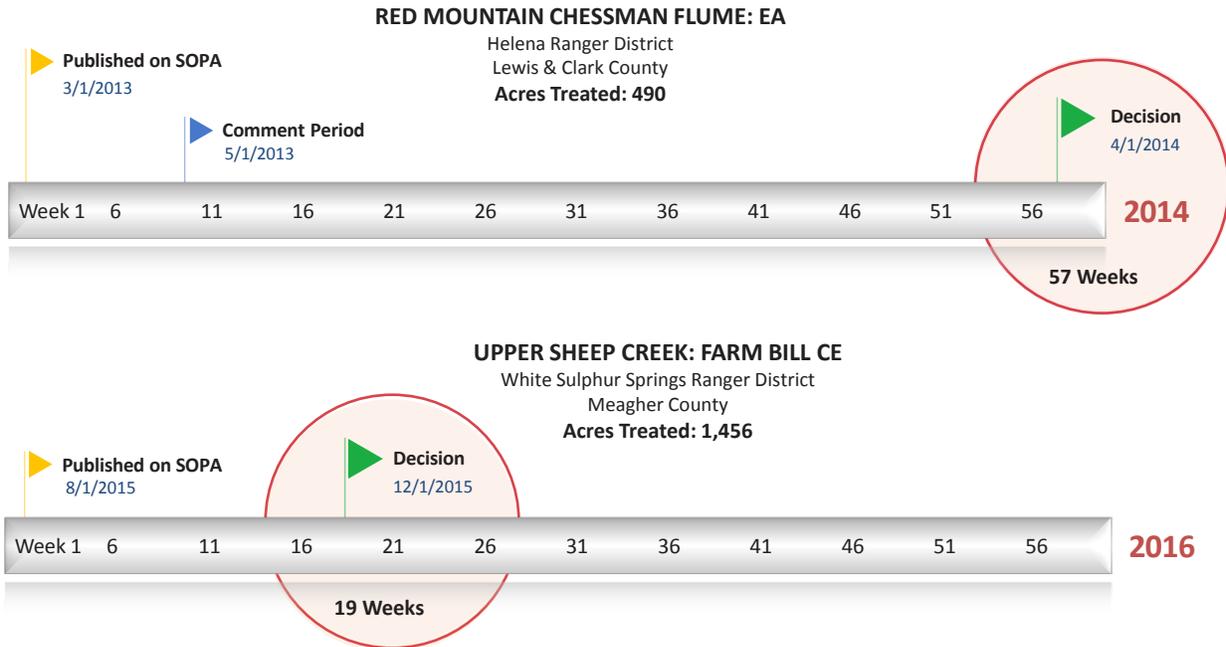
- **Assessing current county capacity** around federal engagement;
- **Building capacity** through tool kits, training sessions, technical assistance;
- **Empowering with tools** such as, Farm Bill Priority Landscapes and FIF funding opportunities;
- **Engaging with MACo and the Montana Forested Counties Coalition** to promote proactive federal forest management. Encourage active participation in project design, implementation, legal challenges and implementation.



The DNRC will continue to work with citizens across Montana to expand meaningful engagement on federal forest management decisions.

Forests In Focus Funding: Effectiveness Comparison

Using a Farm Bill CE for Upper Sheep as compared to the traditional EA used in Red Mountain, the Forest Service produced a Decision with triple the acreage in one-third of the time.



CASE STUDY: Upper Sheep Creek Farm Bill Project

- Forest:** Helena and Lewis & Clark National Forest
- District:** White Sulphur Springs Ranger District
- County:** Meagher
- NEPA Tool Used:** Farm Bill/Insect & Disease Categorical Exclusion
- Timeline from Initiation to Decision:** 8 months
- Acres Treated:** 1,456
- FIF Funding:** \$75,000
- Contract Awarded:** R-Y Timber

State Funding Impact: state dollars allowed the district to triple their field capacity, resulting in a Decision with three times the acres to be treated.

Highlights: The Upper Sheep Creek project is in the process of implementing a range of management activities to maintain a forest system that has been adversely affected by insect and disease. The project addresses forest conditions that pose a higher risk for severe wildfire along the U.S. Highway 89 corridor and around homes in the wildland urban interface. Additionally, the activities are promoting whitebark pine regeneration, protecting older, large trees and thinning several previously harvested units to improve growth and resiliency of younger forest stands.

Because additional funding was made available through the Forests in Focus initiative, the Forest Service was able to hire an additional four biological science technician temporary employees to conduct lynx habitat and old growth surveys. This additional workforce capacity and data collection allowed the project to treat triple the acres and produce more forest products.



A Montana Conservation Corps intern learns to age a tree to complete old growth surveys in the project area.