

SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FORESTERS

Western Forester

September/October 2004

Oregon • Washington State • Inland Empire • Alaska Societies

Volume 49 • Number 5

Focused Science Delivery Makes Science Make Sense

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AND JAMIE BARBOUR

Science does not exist in a vacuum, but reading scientific publications might make you think it does. Although the policy and management implications of their findings could often touch a much wider audience, many scientists write only for the few people in the world who share their area of expertise. In addition, most scientific publications provide information that is more like clues than complete answers. Making science truly meaningful in the formulation and implementation of natural resource management policy requires an additional step where the clues are fit together and polished so that they tell a story we can all follow and understand. This "synthesis and integration" of the small bits of information provided by individual publications (often from a variety of disciplines), makes scientific knowledge much more available for application. This is where the Focused Science Delivery (FSD) program comes in.

The purpose of our program is to enhance the use of scientific informa-



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PHOTO COURTESY OF BOB NICHOLS

The PNW Research Station's Focused Science Delivery Program helps forest managers understand the scientific basis of forestry, ultimately assisting them in making land management decisions.

tion by translating it into clear and effective formats. In the course of our work, we keep three primary audiences in mind: those who set natural resource policy (policymakers), those who implement policy (forest managers) and those who seek to influence policy (the public). Many of the groups and individuals in these audiences may not have the time or expertise to gather and digest original scientific research. The FSD program performs this function.

To do so, we analyze and disseminate technical or esoteric data in accessible ways, often looking to unconventional sources for related information that might provide further insight to the management questions at hand. In order for a truly successful

exchange of information, we believe the process should be participatory and interactive. Therefore, we work to form creative partnerships between those who manage the resource and those who study the resource, we foster collaborations across disciplines, and we encourage interagency communication. Our goal is to create dynamic and reciprocal relationships that dispel the notion that science operates in a vacuum.

We accomplish our goals in these specific ways: 1) establishing discussion processes to identify target issues; 2) assembling teams of scientists from different disciplines to address complex resource policy questions; 3) providing a framework for scientists to

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analyze the results of management activities to hone the decisionmaking process; 4) facilitating collaboration between researchers and resource managers; and 5) continually exploring new and creative ways to transfer scientific information for use in policy debates, management decisions and public discussion.

One example of our efforts was our participation in a series of workshops in the spring of 2003 on wildland fire

organized in conjunction with the Joint Fire Science Program, National Fire Plan, and the USDA Forest Service. More than 250 participants—land managers, policymakers, educators, researchers and community leaders—gathered to forge partnerships, to explore various wildland fire management tools and to develop a list of prioritized recommendations for research. FSD was a co-sponsor of the workshops, helped organize them, and also helped facilitate and record the dialogue that unfolded. Our main contribution was a General Technical Report titled *Bridging the Worlds of Fire Managers and Researchers: Lessons and Opportunities from the Wildland Fire Workshops* (PNW-GTR-599), in which we compiled the workshop's highlights.

A completely different type of example is our creation of a financial analysis tool that can help managers make nuanced decisions on dollar costs of reducing hazardous fuels in dry inland forests—see the sidebar: My Fuel Treatment Planner on page 3.

The FSD program is part of the

USDA Forest Service's Pacific Northwest Research Station (PNW), located in Portland, Ore. The FSD program's geographic scope predominantly covers the western United States, but also includes national issues that influence western forestry. We concentrate on high priority management issues that cover a range of research topics. The topics we concentrate on shift over time as we track changes in forest policy in an attempt to remain relevant to the needs of land managers.

An ongoing goal of the program is to encourage the involvement of our audience in the whole process—from determining potential issues to participating in analyses to reviewing final products. By promoting these types of interactions we try to build synergistic relationships, maintain direct and open communication, and establish new information channels among researchers, resource managers, policymakers and the public. New topics are selected through a formal discussion process that involves groups within and outside of the Forest Service, and which repeats on a two-year cycle. We use a flexible process to select new topics that includes input from many levels, from small groups of interested individuals up through the highest ranks of Forest Service staff, and from private associations, state and other



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Western Forester

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Western Forester is published bimonthly by the Oregon and Washington State Societies' Northwest Office

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Other than general editing, the articles appearing in this publication have not been peer reviewed for technical accuracy. The individual authors are primarily responsible for the content and opinions expressed herein.

Seth White is Guest Editor

Many thanks to Seth White for being a guest editor for this issue. White is a science writer-editor for the Focused Science



Delivery Program, PNW Research Station, USDA Forest Service, and a graduate student in the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife at Oregon State University.

Seth helped coordinate with authors, edited articles and provided other organizational skills that were invaluable to the *Western Forester*.

Next Issue: Status of Forestry Education in the Pacific Northwest



PHOTO COURTESY OF JAMIE BARBOUR

Forest managers and researchers visit a burned area. By working together, they hope to devise management solutions to fire.

federal government agencies, companies and nonprofit organizations. We strive to go beyond conventional bureaucratic boundaries to encourage networking among employees across a range of scientific disciplines.

Within our rolling portfolio of research topics are some issues that demand more in-depth coverage. These topics become "initiatives," or core issues, that involve a formalized two-to three- year process. Each initiative is headed by a mid- to senior-level researcher who provides technical and administrative oversight. Initiatives currently being undertaken by the FSD program include: 1) Reducing Fire Risk to People and Resources; 2) Recreation and Tourism; 3) Sustainable Wood Production; and 4) Biodiversity. In addition, there is a permanent team that assists with all research topic areas called the Science Delivery Team. Through these initiatives, we work to improve the use of science in natural resource planning and management by delivering complex information in forms decisionmakers can use.

This issue of the *Western Forester* is devoted to the FSD program. The following articles feature the initiatives mentioned above, and have been written by initiative leaders and other FSD staff. For more information, you can also visit www.fs.fed.us/pnw/about/programs/fsd/index.shtml.

We appreciate the chance to connect with practitioners, and we wel-

come correspondence, which can be directed to Program Manager Jamie Barbour as listed below. ♦

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My Fuel Treatment Planner: An Example of Delivering Science to Practitioners

One of the ways the Focused Science Delivery Program brings science into the hands of practitioners is through the development of tools that capitalize on existing information. My Fuel Treatment Planner (MyFTP) is such a tool—a fuel treatment cost calculator that assists in determining the economic feasibility of wildfire reduction treatments.

Whether a treatment is feasible depends on many factors, including site-specific forest conditions, climate, topography, management objectives, distance to the nearest mill and the economic gain (or loss) expected in nearby communities. MyFTP takes these and other factors into account, and using accessible software (MS Excel), aids managers in the decisionmaking process. MyFTP fits into the larger vision of Focused Science Delivery by drawing on decades of existing forest data from across the western United States and by making science findings directly applicable to managers. The calculator has recently been beta-tested by a focus group and is now available online at www.fs.fed.us/pnw/data/Temp/MyFTPbeta/.



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