

“Southwest Strategy” Update

Steve Kluge

Abstract—The Southwest Strategy is an effort by federal agencies to work with each other, the public, and tribal, state, and local agencies to maintain and restore the cultural, economic, and environmental quality of life in Arizona and New Mexico. This update explains the strategy and its progress to date.

On December 16, 1997, nine federal agencies in Arizona and New Mexico committed to working with the public and each other in a collaborative effort which is now known as the “Southwest Strategy.” This is a bulletin to share information with employees about what has happened since that date. If your questions are not answered, please see the last section of this update for contacts.

What is the Southwest Strategy? _____

The Southwest Strategy is a commitment by federal agencies involved in natural resources management to work in collaboration with each other, the public, and tribal, state, and local governments. The federal agencies participating in the Southwest Strategy recognize and respect the jurisdictional authority of the Governors and sovereign nations of Arizona and New Mexico. The goal of the strategy is to maintain and restore the cultural, economic, and environmental quality of life in Arizona and New Mexico. The strategy will address community development and natural resources conservation and management within the jurisdictions of the involved federal agencies. It will proceed in a manner that is scientifically based, legally defensible, and implementable.

Which Federal Agencies are Involved? _____

Many agencies within the Departments of Agriculture, Defense and the Interior are currently participating in the Southwest Strategy. Agencies included to date are the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Geological Survey, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park

Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Forest Service, Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Defense. Other departments or agencies may join later.

Why Do This? _____

Management of federal lands has become increasingly complex in recent years. Arizona and New Mexico have large expanses of public and tribal lands intermingled with private lands, fast growing metropolitan centers, scarce water resources, unique cultural resources, diverse and fragile ecosystems with numerous endangered species, and many competing demands on public lands and water resources. Agencies, tribes, and the public need to work better together in a comprehensive, rather than piecemeal, effort.

How Will This Be Done? _____

A collaborative problem solving approach will be used to address natural resources issues. Collaboration is a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions. Through this approach concerns are heard and addressed, information is shared, and technical knowledge sought out.

Collaboration is not an end in and of itself, but is a means to achieve more consistent and responsive service to the public. It is also an agreement to continue talking despite differences and changing circumstances.

Will This Strategy Affect Ongoing Agency Business? _____

No and yes. Agency work will continue as collaborative processes are being developed. The legal and regulatory responsibilities for each agency will remain the framework for agency work, as always.

However, this is a new way of doing business. We want to learn from and build upon existing successes as we deal with increasingly complex issues in Arizona and New Mexico.

What is Happening? _____

During the first stage of the strategy, federal agencies have greatly improved interagency communication and collaboration. A number of internal interagency teams are addressing issues of immediate concern to federal agencies in the Southwest, such as community development, Endangered Species Act Section 7 streamlining, legal issues, and communications.

In: Finch, Deborah M.; Whitney, Jeffrey C.; Kelly, Jeffrey F.; Loftin, Samuel R. 1999. Rio Grande ecosystems: linking land, water, and people. Toward a sustainable future for the Middle Rio Grande Basin. 1998 June 2-5; Albuquerque, NM. Proc. RMRS-P-7. Ogden, UT: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station.

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In the second stage, the public and the federal agencies will jointly design processes for future collaboration. State, tribal and local governments, nongovernmental organizations, the private sector, and interested individuals will be encouraged to participate. A few contacts have already been made as interested groups have sought information about the Southwest Strategy, such as Arizona's and New Mexico's Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the Arizona Resource Advisory Council.

In the third stage, the participants will use the new processes to develop a comprehensive strategy to manage natural resources in a manner that maintains and restores the cultural, economic and environmental quality of life in the Southwest.

Two small Southwest Strategy offices are being established in Albuquerque and Phoenix. There will be two individuals working in Albuquerque and one in Phoenix. These offices will coordinate activities, collect and disseminate work products, and act as points of contact for both the public and agency personnel. The Albuquerque Southwest Strategy Office will be up and running in mid-May and the Phoenix office sometime later this summer.

How Will Non-Federal Partners Participate?

In May 1997, initial meetings were held with representatives of organizations, state and local governments, and individual citizens. Meetings will also be held with tribal leaders. These meetings seek input on ways to launch future collaborative efforts that will ultimately define the comprehensive strategy for resolving complex natural resource issues while still recognizing and respecting federal Governors', tribal and local authority.

How Are the Federal Agencies Organized Today to Proceed with the Southwest Strategy?

The Regional Executive Committee is comprised of Southwest regional agency heads. The Regional Executive Committee is co-chaired by the U.S. Forest Service's Regional Forester and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Regional Director. The Department of Defense Environmental Coordinator participates for the Department of Defense. The Regional Executive Committee meets at least once a month.

The Regional Implementation Team serves as staff to the Regional Executive Committee. Each participating agency has a representative on the Regional Implementation Team.

The national executives and their staffs provide support, guidance and oversight to the regional executives and their staff. The national executive co-leads are the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Chief of the USDA-Forest Service. The national executives and their staff bring a broad perspective to the issues in the Southwest. The national executives will also resolve issues elevated by the Regional Executive Committee.

In the first stage of the Strategy, federal work groups were established with representatives from the field, regional, and national staffs. The roles of the work groups vary. Some were designed to help get the strategy started. Others were charged with developing ways to solve critical, immediate issues. Immediate issues are those that involve species of animals or plants or resources or the public at immediate risk, or those issues that involve litigation.

Some of the groups will only have a short-term life span while others may be ongoing. The Regional Implementation Team provides guidance and direction to these groups.

What Work Groups Have Been Organized to Date?

The Communications/Collaboration Design Work Group is comprised of two teams. The Communications Team (COM) develops and releases information about the Southwest Strategy to both federal employees and the public. The Collaboration Design Team (CDT) will assist agencies, tribes and the public in developing processes for collaboration.

The Information Resource Management Work Group will identify ways for participants to share information and provide information in usable formats.

The Research and Data Collection Work Group will identify and respond to scientific data gaps and research needs.

The Section 7 Streamlining Work Group is developing ways to make the Section 7 consultation process under the Endangered Species Act more efficient.

The Legal Work Group provides technical and legal support, and coordination of litigation issues.

The Water Resources Work Group will collaborate with federal, tribal, state and local authorities to design an interagency process to address Clean Water Act compliance and the Clean Water Action Plan.

The Community Development Work Group identifies ways to address the economic and social effects on communities resulting from grazing management changes and other natural resource decisions.

The Endangered Species Act Work Group will coordinate the implementation of requirements found in Biological Opinions, as well as recovery activities among federal agencies.

How is This Funded?

Funding to develop this strategy is coming from within existing agency budgets.

How Long Will it Take to Develop the Southwest Strategy?

Developing collaboration processes with the public is starting. This will proceed at different paces in different areas and will take at least several months to evolve. Some contacts have already been made. The agencies are encouraged by the number of individuals and groups who have asked to participate.

How do I Obtain Further Information?

Questions regarding this interagency strategy may be addressed to the Directors of Public Affairs for the Southwestern Region of the Forest Service in Albuquerque, Carolyn Bye, 505/842-3290, or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Albuquerque, Tom Bauer, 505/248-6911.

In addition to these interagency spokespersons, each agency has designated a contact point within their offices located within the Southwest. These contact persons will handle internal and external requests for information:

Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management:

Kitty Mulkey (NM)	505/438-7514
Deborah Stevens (AZ)	602/417-9215

Bureau of Indian Affairs:

John Philbin (AZ)	602/379-6798
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National Park Service:

Cecilia Matic	505/988-6014
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Geological Survey:

Pat Jorgenson	650/329-4011
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Bureau of Reclamation:

Vicki Fox (NM)	505/248-5371
Bob Walsh (AZ)	702/293-8421

Fish and Wildlife Service:

Tom Bauer	505/248-6911
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Department of Agriculture

Forest Service:

Carolyn A Bye	505/842-3290
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Natural Resources Conservation Service:

Gerry Gonzalez (AZ)	602/280-8777
Rebecca de la Torre (NM)	505/761-4404

Department of Defense

Region VI (NM):

Thomas Rennie	214/767-4678
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Region IX (AZ)

Cindi Flemming	619/532-2297
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