

THE WEAVERVILLE COMMUNITY FOREST

Putting community in the forest

Patrick Frost and Kelly Sheen

Description and context

Trinity County in far northern California is a rural county dominated by mountains in the Klamath Bioregion.¹ Carl Skinner et al. note that ‘the bioregion includes the Klamath and Trinity River systems ... and the most diverse conifer forests in North America’.² Roughly 75.6 per cent of Trinity County’s 0.83 million hectares (Mha) are public lands managed by federal government agencies. About 0.60 Mha are managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). BLM manages about 29,846 ha. Approximately 10 per cent (105,000 ha) of the county’s land base are industrial timberlands,³ most owned and managed by Sierra Pacific Industries. Most of these properties were purchased from the Sierra Pacific Railroad and form a part of the ‘checkerboard’ pattern of land ownership, the legacy of the 19th-century federal land policy when much of America’s public domain lands were surveyed into square-mile ‘sections’ (260 ha), regardless of topography.⁴ To support construction of railroads, the federal government granted railway companies a 400-foot right-of-way and alternating 260 ha sections up to 20 miles back from the tracks on either side. The sections not granted to the railroad were retained by the government. A mix of non-industrial forestlands (i.e., all other privately held forestlands), agricultural lands, and residential areas make up the remainder of the land base.

Trinity County was created in 1850 at the founding of the State of California. It is sparsely populated: approximately 14,000 people are dispersed across the landscape (2010 U.S. Census). There are no incorporated towns or cities in the County. Incorporation means that there is a local government authority (municipality) which has elected officials and can levy taxes to pay for public services. Without incorporation, many public services are delivered by special districts; note that in this context a ‘special district’ means an agency or department created by a vote of the people to be included for specific services within a specific geographic area. Most were established to provide specific services to targeted geographic areas (e.g. Weaverville Community Services District providing potable water; Weaverville Fire Protection District providing fire protection, etc.). Each special district is overseen by its own board of directors, who are elected or appointed from within its jurisdictional boundaries. A set of State regulations govern special districts and are designed to provide transparency and open, public participation in local government.

Weaverville is Trinity County's largest community (approximately 3,500 in 2010), founded in 1848 with the discovery of gold in the County, as evidenced in the historic downtown district. Weaverville is located in a topographic basin – the Weaver Creek watershed. There are 7,145 ha of federally managed public land; 2,545 ha of private, industrial timberlands; and 3,178 ha that include non-industrial forestlands, rural and urban residential areas, and local government infrastructure (Figure 12.1).

The timber industry replaced gold mining as the primary economic driver, rising to prominence after World War II with the demand for building materials for California's growing population. There were over 40 lumber mills in Trinity County. By 1999, the only mill still operating was in Weaverville.

This chapter focuses on the evolution of a partnership that developed between the Trinity County Resource Conservation District⁵ (TCRCD), the federal land managers (USFS and BLM), and the community to manage the Weaverville Community Forest (WCF), consisting of 6,055 ha, or half the area of the basin.

The Klamath Bioregion is characterised as a mixed coniferous forest. Species composition is related to elevation, slope, and aspect. The elevation of the Weaverville Basin ranges from about 610 m to 914 m., the slopes surrounding the town in all directions. The climate is Mediterranean with a distinct winter rainy season and hot, dry summers.

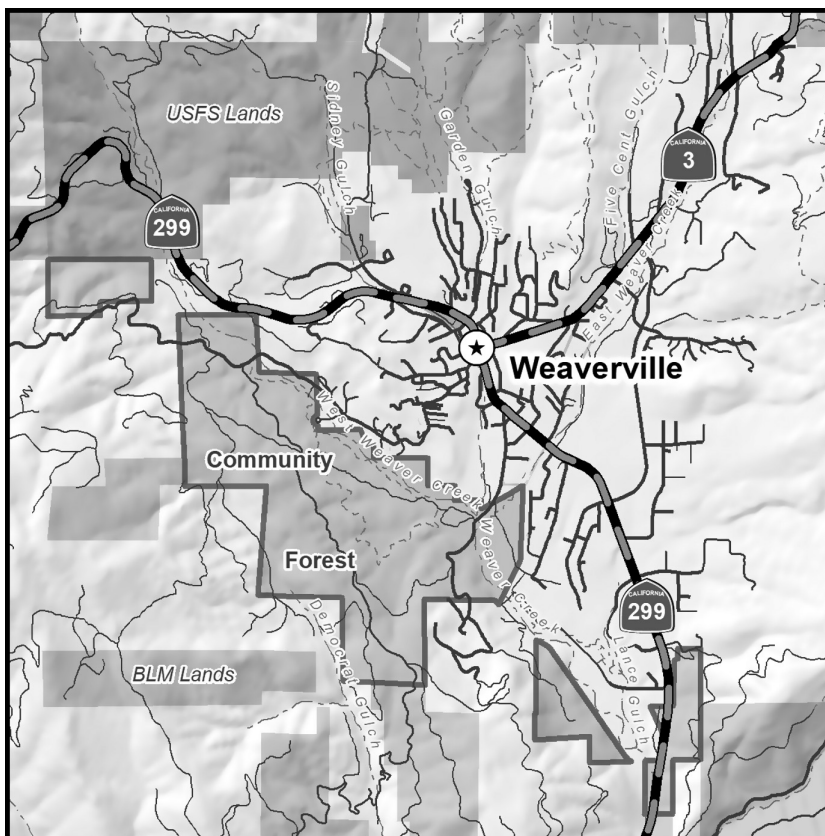


Figure 12.1 Map of WCF – BLM 1000.

Wildfire is a natural component of the region, reflected in vegetative communities that are adapted to fire. Before European colonisation, the Indigenous Peoples used frequent, small-scale, low-intensity fires to stimulate the annual growth of forage grasses and hence populations of deer, as well as berry bushes, for food. The European colonists, being accustomed to more intensive and arable agriculture and not understanding the ecological principles used by the Indigenous Peoples, excluded fire from much of the landscape since early in the 1900s. The consequent natural build-up of wood fuel, from dead and dying trees and dense understory and changing species composition, have led to increasingly intense and devastating fires started by lightning strikes and human actions. The settlers' exclusion of fire also means that the understory is not very open, but contains dense thickets of conifer seedlings and the conversion of oak woodlands to mixed oak-conifer stands through the encroachment of conifers. Weaverville has been threatened by wildfires thrice in this century (2001, 2006, and 2014). Fire as a landscape management tool has only recently been reintroduced.

The WCF overstory includes Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) and ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*). There is an oak woodland component at lower elevations, primarily Oregon white oak (*Quercus garryana*). On hotter, drier slopes, the oak woodland includes grey pine (*Pinus sabiniana*), various 'California Lilac' (*Ceanothus* spp.), and manzanita (*Arctostaphylos* spp.). Elsewhere, ponderosa pine and Douglas fir are intermixed in the oak woodland. Moving up-slope from the oak woodlands, the forests are a mix of Douglas fir, ponderosa pine, and incense cedar (*Calocedrus decurrens*).

The Weaverville Basin has been altered greatly by humans. The landscape was occupied and managed long before the first European-Americans began to settle in the basin. Forests were harvested to the point of denuding the slopes during the mining era (1850–1930). Primary forests are now found only in very isolated and inaccessible pockets (Figure 12.2).

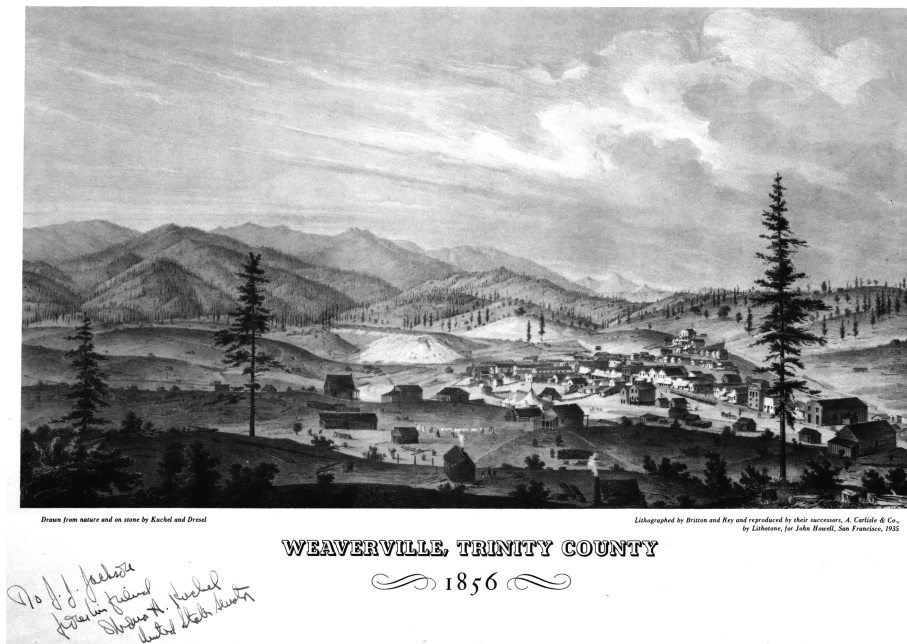


Figure 12.2 Lithograph of Weaverville Basin 1856 (courtesy of Jake Jackson Museum).

Forest management in northern California, especially on lands managed by the federal government, was greatly influenced by the listing of the northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) as an endangered species, and the subsequent development of the Northwest Forest Plan by the USFS. The region's 'timber wars'⁶ were exacerbated by the Northwest Forest Plan, which was seen as an overly bureaucratic set of policies and procedures that dictated management of federal forest lands in the range of the northern spotted owl, and centred around strategies that emphasised protection and restoration of late seral (old growth) forest types to the detriment of active timber harvests in the region, including Trinity County.

Evolution of the Weaverville Community Forest (WCF)

In 1999, Weaverville citizens raised concerns over a proposed land exchange. The BLM intended to trade 405 ha in the Weaverville Basin to Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI). These parcels, remnants of the 'railroad ownership checkerboard', were isolated from other BLM lands and difficult to manage. Simultaneously, BLM was acquiring lands along the Trinity River critical to the river's restoration, which began in the 1980s to restore salmon populations harmed by the Trinity and Lewiston dams on the Trinity River. BLM, while charged with acquiring riverfront lands that could be used in the river's restoration, was not given any funding from the US Congress. Instead, BLM relied on its ability to trade lands with private landowners. The intention was that SPI would acquire riverfront parcels and offer them in trade for BLM disposal parcels with equal monetary value.

The community was concerned with the visual effects that intensive logging (clear-cuts) by SPI would have on Weaverville's viewshed (the aesthetic appearance of the landscape of the Basin from the town of Weaverville) and the effects that would have on the community's quality of life and tourism, a main source of income. This came to a head when a small clear-cut block on SPI lands became visible from a restaurant at the south-eastern edge of town. Members of the community began to meet informally to discuss alternatives to the land trade. Before long, this loose-knit group of neighbours became the *Weaverville 1000* (representing the roughly 1,000 acres (405 hectares) of BLM lands involved in the trade), with a goal to prevent the trade and keep these lands in public ownership.

In 1999–2000, the County also was contemplating a road project that would divert traffic around downtown Weaverville. Local businesses and community members feared this road would have a negative effect on the local economy by shunting traffic away from the historic downtown businesses. The proposed roadway corridor under study crossed BLM disposal parcels. Opponents of the by-pass, believing that it would be more difficult for the county to obtain a road right-of-way from the BLM than from SPI, joined forces with the Weaverville 1000.

The Weaverville 1000 petitioned the County Board of Supervisors — the only local government with decision-making authority over land use issues — to intervene. The board asked BLM to put the trade on hold while the community explored its options. BLM agreed to a two-year hold through 2002 on the land trade. BLM proposed a path for the community to pursue: acquisition of the lands from BLM through a mechanism similar to the one proposed with SPI. The Weaverville 1000 moved forward with this option, developing a three-pronged approach:

- Build support locally and regionally through a targeted outreach campaign.
- Investigate the financing of a purchase of the 405 ha parcel from BLM.
- Find a public entity with the authority to own and manage land, with the added condition that the public entity needed to be trusted by the community over sensitive issues important to the community — viewshed and sustainability in particular.

Key community leaders in the Weaverville 1000 kept the issue in front of the public. The outreach efforts embraced the benefits of public ownership, and expanded upon the original issue of viewshed protection, including the following:

- The development of 80 kilometres (km) of recreational trails on the public lands. *Weaverville Basin Trail System – A Trail Through Time* highlighted the historic nature of the trails.
- The use of public forestlands to provide a source of saw logs to the only local mill through sustainable harvesting.
- The use of the area by the local elementary school as an outdoor classroom to learn about natural history and cultural resources, including an annual Pioneer Wagon Train trip.
- Reducing the risk from catastrophic wildfire through sustainable forest management by a public entity. The ‘Oregon Fire’, an 809-ha wind-driven wildfire in August 2001, had burned from the western rim of the basin into the town. Several homes in Weaverville were destroyed and the approaching fire caused the evacuation of neighbourhoods, the local hospital, and the county jail.

The Weaverville 1000 was committed to active forest management in the context of the values listed here. They knew that the cost of the BLM parcels would need to be paid for in part by some level of commercial harvesting. They turned to the Trinity Resource Conservation and Development Council (now the Northwest California Resource Conservation and Development Council,⁷ not to be confused with the Trinity County Resource Conservation District, described later), a local non-profit group. The Council secured a small grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), to hire local consulting foresters to conduct a forest inventory, to estimate the sustained yield that could be expected through active management at levels supported by the community on the 405 ha, and to determine if those harvests would be adequate to finance the acquisition. The firm of Baldwin, Blomstrom, Wilkinson and Associates (BBWA) conducted the inventory and identified the likely constraints on management, including:

a. Community perceptions

BBWA knew the desire to keep the land in public ownership was due, in part, to the community’s negative perception of commercial timber harvesting. The BLM parcels were scattered around the Weaverville Basin, abutting residential neighbourhoods. Additionally, there was the heavily used recreational trail network. What level of commercial harvesting would be acceptable?

b. Regulatory framework

The transfer of the land from federal ownership to non-federal, but public, ownership eliminated the need to adhere to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).⁸ There still would be significant regulatory oversight of forest management, including:

- The northern spotted owl recovery programmes.
- The protection of streams and the associated habitat for species of salmon (*Oncorhynchus* spp.) that were listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA),⁹ or that were under consideration.

- The protection of significant cultural resources, primarily from the gold mining era. A portion of the BLM parcels had been listed in the National Register of Historic Places as the ‘West Weaver Creek Mining District’.
- The California Forest Practices Act,¹⁰ which is functionally equivalent to the California Environmental Quality Act¹¹ for projects involving forest management, especially where forest products are sold.

BBWA concluded that the small size (405 ha), combined with the constraints, would make the acquisition financially dubious without outside funding.

c. Government framework and land tenure

Trinity County’s rural nature, predominance of federal lands, and sparse population are reflected in a minimalist approach to government. The Weaverville 1000 struggled in its search for a public entity willing and capable to take ownership of and manage the 405 ha of forestland. The County had no interest and made that clear in 1999.

Trinity County Resource Conservation District (TCRCD)

The TCRCD¹² is a special district (already defined here) established in 1956 under Division 9 of the California Public Resources Code (PRC).¹³ The PRC authorises conservation districts to own land (fee simple tenure or conservation easements) when it supports the mission of the district. The Weaverville 1000 approached the TCRCD Board of Directors and the Board agreed to participate, if the community could acquire the property and if there was public support.

The original intent of the TCRCD was to act as a bridge between federal agencies and local landowners to improve conservation practices on private land. TCRCD used its Division 9 authority to expand its role to include working with federal land and resource management agencies in *government-to-government* co-operative agreements. TCRCD had developed a strong relationship with BLM in the mid-1980s with the restoration of the Trinity River. TCRCD developed a skilled, professional, in-house workforce specialising in natural resources planning and management, leading to the establishment of long-term co-operative agreements with BLM, the Bureau of Reclamation (U.S. Department of the Interior), USFS, and NRCS (U.S. Department of Agriculture). TCRCD served as a local arm of the federal agencies for on-the-ground management on federal lands. TCRCD developed a sophisticated grants management department skilled at using federal funds to secure counterpart state and local funds to augment work on federal land. TCRCD’s areas of operation include watershed restoration, forestry practices, and environmental education. Forestry projects were designed to reduce fire spread and intensity through felling smaller, sub-canopy trees and cutting shrubs.

Governance

Stewardship contracting framework

The cost of lands that would be considered by the BLM in a land trade was about US\$2 million in 2004. The community’s vision of sustainable harvests could not earn enough income to support such a purchase. The Weaverville 1000 investigated models such as the Arcata Community Forest in adjacent Humboldt County in California and the City of Ashland in Oregon, just to the north of Trinity County (during 2002–2004).

Stewardship contracting and agreements were being applied by the federal land management agencies and were gaining in popularity. A congressionally mandated Stewardship Contracting Pilot Program had evolved into a regular contracting tool for the USFS and BLM (Section 323, P.L. 108-07).¹⁴ This programme authorised federal agencies to enter into contracts or agreements with many entities that combined the sale of harvestable material (e.g., sawlogs from public lands) with work that usually cost the federal agency money to implement (erosion control work, invasive weed removal, forest fuel reduction, watershed restoration). The receipts received from the harvests are used to pay for the service work within the management unit, providing an added incentive to agency staff to use these agreements. Stewardship authorities emphasise that the primary purpose of projects must focus on maintaining or improving the natural resources, not maximising timber yield.

Building consensus for a community forest

In May 2004, the TCRCD invited the community to a day-long meeting on the concept behind a community forest. The term *community forest* was used for the first time at this meeting. TCRCD used an outside facilitator to reduce any perception of bias. The meeting was held in a neutral space – the Congregational Church. Over 50 people, representing a wide range of interests and views, attended (Figure 12.3). The meeting concluded with three outcomes:

- Development of the Community Vision for the WCF: (a) protect Weaverville's viewshed, (b) promote a more fire-resilient forest, (c) deliver sustainable timber harvests for the local mill, (d) maintain and improve the recreational trail system, and (e) use the landscape as an outdoor classroom.
- Designation of the TCRCD as local managers of the WCF.



Figure 12.3 Community Visioning Meeting 2004.

- Use the framework of Stewardship Contracting Authorities. There was a clear alignment of the community vision for the land with stewardship authorities. BLM offered its stewardship authorities as an alternative to community acquisition of exchangeable lands. As presented, the BLM retained ownership of the land and its resources, while the land management decisions would fall under the TCRCD through a stewardship agreement. The TCRCD would seek regular input from the community.

Negotiating an agreement

The community authorised the TCRCD to negotiate a stewardship agreement with BLM. Three individuals were appointed to negotiate: the TCRCD Manager, a TCRCD board member, and a community member associated with recreation. The direction from the community meeting was for a ten-year stewardship agreement under the Stewardship Contracting Authorities. The draft agreement had to be approved by BLM's Washington Office because the agreement with the TCRCD was between the federal government and a local government, not a contract with a private timber purchaser. The agreement did not identify specific projects to be implemented or a project schedule. Instead, it set up a process by which the TCRCD would seek community input to guide the timing, location, and design of projects, including timber harvests. A broad goal was to implement harvests on approximately 81 ha every other year. The money earned would fund conservation projects during alternating years. One of TCRCD's tasks was to leverage those retained receipts with grants from other sources.

Setting the boundaries

The initial meeting with the BLM defined the boundaries of the WCF. The criteria were:

- Include the parcels that were originally the subject of the land trade to protect the community's viewshed.
- Include parcels adjacent to residential neighbourhoods to enhance protection from wildfire.
- Protect the recreational trail system.
- Select parcels that needed restoration after the 2001 wildfire.

The volume of merchantable timber was secondary to these objectives, but the community's negotiation team was aware that it would take the sale of sawlogs to fund the community's projects.

BLM had its own objectives:

- Include parcels that were isolated from other BLM lands, making them difficult to manage.
- Include parcels adjacent to neighbourhoods.
- Exclude parcels adjacent to industrial timberlands to reserve them for future trade considerations.

Agreement on the boundaries of the WCF was completed in one meeting and included the original 'exchange' parcels, totalling approximately 405 ha.

Building the case for a stewardship contract

The next step was to develop a justification for a stewardship agreement between BLM and TCRCD. The BLM's Stewardship Project Review Checklist identified seven stewardship objec-

tives. The BLM State Forester and TCRCD Manager compared the objectives to the community vision. Three objectives were supported in WCF's vision:

- Promote healthy forest stands and reduce fire hazards through certain vegetation removal.
- Promote water quality improvements through road and trail maintenance. The TCRCD had an existing watershed improvement programme with a focus on reducing erosion from roads into streams.
- Protect and improve soil productivity, habitat for wildlife, and fisheries. Active forest management and fuel load reduction would generally benefit the forest and stream ecosystems and would specifically address endangered species (the northern spotted owl and Coho salmon [*Oncorhynchus kisutch*]).

The other four stewardship objectives were reviewed jointly, and the required evaluation of their relevance to the WCF was deferred into the future.

- Use prescribed fire to promote healthy forest stands and to reduce fire risk. The current conditions of the forests did not make them candidates for prescribed fire until understory vegetation was removed. Additionally, BLM had been involved in a prescribed fire in a nearby community in 1999. That fire escaped control and destroyed over 20 homes, leaving the community suspicious of BLM's use of fire as a management tool.
- Direct watershed restoration (in-stream work). Not a high priority in the community vision.
- Restore wildlife and fisheries habitat.
- Control noxious (invasive) weeds. There were only minor infestations.

Two other objectives were assessed, and it was determined that they supported the stewardship agreement.

- The overall vision of the WCF would result in the restoration and maintenance of ecological processes.
- There would be explicit recognition that the collaboration was supported by a local organisation (TCRCD) that had the rural community's needs at the centre of its mission.

The Stewardship Checklist was completed by January 2005 and submitted to the BLM State Director and then the BLM Washington Office for review and approval in the summer of 2005. The national office of the BLM was concerned about the proposed ten-year duration, the maximum allowed under the law. The State Forester prevailed, emphasising that forest management is a long-term proposition, while timber prices can fluctuate greatly from year to year. The success of this agreement would hinge on enough retained receipts to cover the other stewardship work.

Execution of a stewardship agreement

The BLM State Forester and TCRCD Manager signed the stewardship agreement in September 2005. TCRCD assigned a project manager to oversee the management plan to be developed between TCRCD and BLM with community input. The plan would include broad concepts for the ten-year timeframe but would identify specific projects for the first two years. TCRCD would lead the design and layout of the first timber harvest plan on 81 ha adjacent to a residential neighbourhood. The BLM would provide initial money to develop the harvest plan and

complete the pre-operations environmental assessment under the NEPA. The TCRCD would implement the harvest and also start the agreed conservation projects, after obtaining outside funds to match the retained receipts generated from the timber harvest.

Management

Overview

The stewardship agreement allows the BLM to negotiate the price of the standing timber directly with the TCRCD as the purchaser. The funds collected from timber harvests are kept in a WCF Stewardship Account to be drawn upon through an annual work plan. BLM retains the responsibility for completing NEPA requirements, but the TCRCD provides technical assistance for the design and layout of projects (including prescriptions for timber harvests) and the acquisition of non-federal permits, when needed. TCRCD implements the felling and extraction of the felled logs using third-party contractors, with some supplemental TCRCD staff assistance.

Leveraging funds

TCRCD actively seeks additional funds from non-federal sources to augment the stewardship account to complete service projects. The agreement also authorizes the BLM to use money collected from the timber sales to pay the TCRCD to design and implement stewardship projects, like invasive weed control and trail maintenance, as long as they are consistent with the annual operating plan (AOP) and the stewardship authorities. Most of the funding is from California State agencies that require matching monies from non-state sources, like the retained receipts in the WCF Stewardship Account.

Oversight

The WCF is managed under the Stewardship Agreement and the policies of the TCRCD. TCRCD has long-standing financial policies and procedures for contracting, purchasing, fiscal management, and general oversight required of special districts in California. TCRCD holds monthly governing board meetings. The agendas are published ahead of time and the meetings are open to the public. The board of directors added the community forest as a standing report. The operations of the community forest are generally overseen by the manager of the TCRCD with input from the Weaverville Community Forest Steering Committee, with the approval of the USFS and BLM.

Community input to management

The WCF Steering Committee is an inclusive group; any member of the public can attend, participate, and have an equal voice. About eight individuals have been the core members, led by a member of the TCRCD board of directors and the TCRCD manager. The Steering Committee has regularly included representatives of local environmental groups, the timber industry, the county office of education, the County Board of Supervisors, a registered professional forester, recreation interests, local landowners, and federal agency staff. Decisions are made by consensus, including the development of the long-range strategic plan and the AOP. The AOP identifies projects with notes on the funding sources, the timeline for completion, and the

responsible parties. It is signed by the USFS Ranger for Weaverville, the BLM Area Manager, and the TCRCD.

Project development is a product of collaborative deliberations and annual community meetings. The community meetings are widely advertised and usually draw 25–30 persons. Each meeting includes reports on the status of ongoing projects and then wide-ranging discussions on issues, ideas or concerns. Community field trips and educational tours are scheduled throughout the year to look at completed, ongoing and future projects.

The following illustrates the willingness of the BLM and TCRCD partnership to respond to the community's project ideas: the community, deeply steeped in the historical context of Weaverville, wanted to see a timber harvest implemented with horses instead of mechanised equipment. TCRCD and BLM entered into a negotiated sale that required draft horses to move forest materials. Tours to watch the operation were conducted throughout the project. The community learned that draft horses are not as gentle on the land as one might think,¹⁵ and that the project was as expensive, if not more so, than a mechanised timber harvest (Figure 12.4).

Initial results and the evolution of the WCF

The 2005 Stewardship Agreement with the BLM was authorised through September 2015. Four significant outcomes have resulted from this novel approach to stewardship contracting and community forestry.

Expansion of community forest onto USFS lands

1. The WCF was expanded onto lands managed by the USFS, following the initial success of stewardship authorities with BLM. A ten-year stewardship agreement for 4,856 ha was



Figure 12.4 Horse logging in WCF.

implemented by the TCRCD and the Shasta-Trinity National Forest in December 2008, expanding the WCF to 5,261 ha, or about 90 per cent of the federal land within the Weaverville Basin. That agreement was reauthorised for another ten years in January 2019.

2. The WCF Steering Committee assisted the USFS in finalising the environmental document (Record of Decision), a conditional operating permit for a multi-phased timber harvest project called the 'Browns Timber Sale'. This project had languished within the USFS bureaucracy for several years, being analysed and reanalysed to try to avoid litigation by environmental NGOs trying to protect natural forest ecosystems as in the aforementioned Northwest Forest Plan. The WCF Steering Committee added recommendations they felt would avoid litigation. Members of the Steering Committee representing local environmental interests brought an extra level of trust to the negotiating table. Key provisions of the draft Record of Decision (ROD) included the following:
 - Retention of 70 per cent canopy closure.
 - Protection of hardwoods against felling.
 - No construction of new roads.
 - That TCRCD would review and provide written justification for harvesting trees 63.5 cm (25 in) diameter at breast height (dbh) or greater.

There was no legal challenge to the Record of Decision by the environmental community, but the timber industry did file a challenge. The industry argued that the 70 per cent canopy closure would not alter fire behaviour enough to help protect the community of Weaverville and suggested 40 per cent canopy closure. WCF Steering Committee members joined the USFS in a meeting with the industry representatives to defend the Record of Decision, offering that this project was the first step towards more active management and was needed to build social licence for more live tree harvests. In the end, litigation was avoided and the USFS had the basis for the first live tree timber harvest in the Weaverville Basin in many years.

Extension and expansion of BLM Stewardship Agreement

3. The WCF Stewardship Agreement with BLM was reauthorised for an additional ten years (2015–2025), and additional lands managed by BLM were added to the WCF. Almost 809 ha were added to the WCF, because BLM was pleased with the management relationship with TCRCD and the community, and considered that an overarching stewardship objective of improving watershed health could be met for the Weaver Creek watershed if more of the federally managed lands were to be included in the WCF (see Figure 12.5 – expansion of WCF).
4. The County of Trinity Board of Supervisors was approached in the spring of 2012 with a request to 'scale up' the WCF model of co-operative management of federal lands. There had been no timber harvests on the USFS-managed lands in the previous year – a concern rooted in an economy in rapid decline and ever-increasing threat of catastrophic wildfire. The Board of Supervisors approved the establishment of a countywide collaborative group built on the WCF model. The need for action was heard as far away as Washington D.C. Tom Vilsack, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, visited Weaverville, held a community listening session (attendance estimated to have been 250), and met in a round-table discussion with community leaders. He tasked his federal Departmental leadership to help the county. In early 2013, the Trinity County Collaborative Group (TCCG) was formed to work with the USFS, and by extension with BLM, to increase the pace and scale of the WCF success. The TCRCD and another local natural resources organisation,

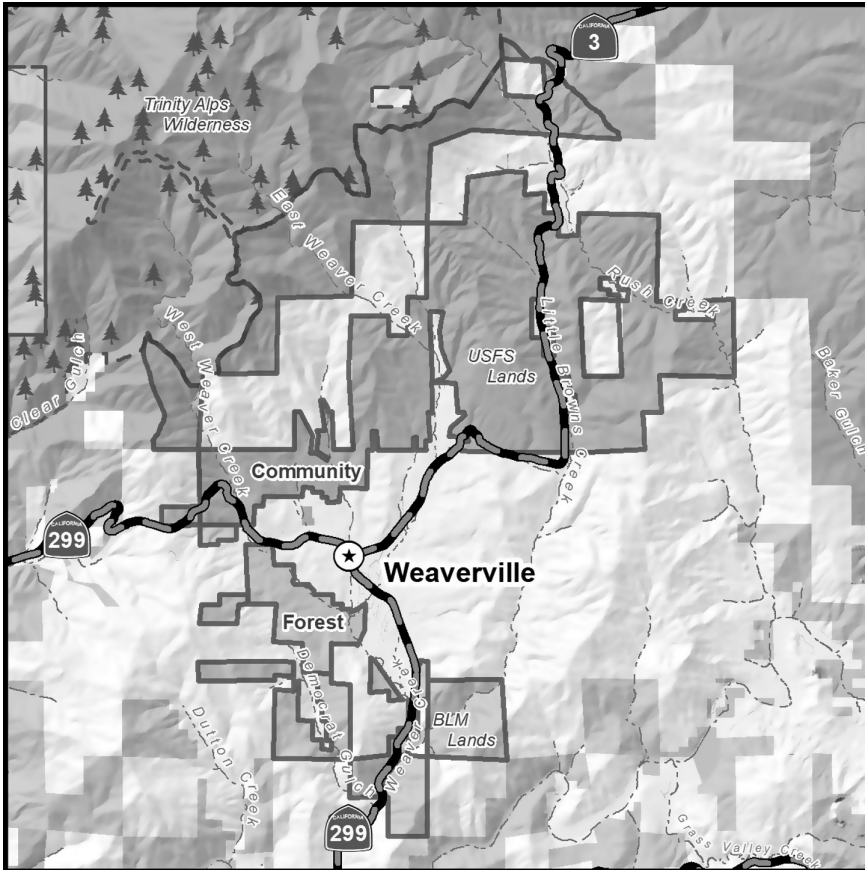


Figure 12.5 Map of WCF expansion.

the Watershed Research and Training Center, have facilitated the TCCG, which includes two national forests (Shasta-Trinity and Six Rivers), BLM, and NRCS as federal partners – many of the same interest groups represented on the WCF and local landowners and interested citizens from throughout the county.

The TCCG has had some successes implementing forestry projects and in securing funding from special federal sources. The TCCG applied successfully to a special funding programme called the Joint Chiefs Initiative (JCI), a nationwide competition for multi-year funding that is awarded by the heads of the USFS and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). JCI awarded the TCCG US\$3.7 million in 2016 and US\$3.8 million in 2019. In addition, TCCG received US\$1.2 million in 2017 and US\$3.2 million in 2019 from the State of California (California Climate Initiative). Erin Kelly, Humboldt State University, noted in 2018 that

Participants in the WCF are working to change how the nearby federal forest is managed but also to reconstitute the beneficial relationship between the forest and its community, from one of timber dependence to a more nuanced relationship based on repairing human relationships and restoring the forest.¹⁶

There are different ways to measure the outcomes of the WCF. One way is to look at measurable accomplishments and outputs (areas treated, money earned and spent, the volume of logs sent to the mill). Four timber harvests have been completed between 2005 and 2012. Three of these were located on BLM and one on USFS land (Browns Phase I), resulting in 6,372 m³ (2,700 MBF) of wood sold to the local mill. These harvests resulted in treating 260 ha of the forest to make them more fire resilient. About US\$150,000 in retained receipts were leveraged by the TCRCD that secured 6 dollars for every stewardship dollar to complete projects in every category of service work identified in the WCF Strategic Plan. Every year requests for proposals (RFP) are published from a wide range of granting institutions, including federal and state agencies and private foundations. TCRCD applies to these RFPs and uses the retained receipts as matching funds. The WCF became a priority area for the BLM and the USFS to allocate their own appropriated funds to implement WCF projects as well. After 2012, a second harvest of regenerating forest was completed on USFS-managed lands (Browns Phase II), which generated over US\$233,000 of stewardship funds for the WCF. The AOP guides the use of stewardship funds to identify matching funds from other sources and to track project progress (<https://tcrcd.net/wcf/documents.htm>). The AOP identifies projects that are in the planning/design stage, the environmental permitting stage, and the implementation phase. It also categorises projects by type: forest thinning, brush management, prescribed fire, recreation, invasive weed control, watershed/stream restoration, and community education. The third and final phase of the Browns Project was scheduled to begin in August 2020 but was delayed due to the severe wildfire season.

Putting community into the community forest

The WCF model of co-operative management did not change the land's ownership; it changed the relationship between the federal land managers and the community. It also presented an opportunity to better define 'community'. TCRCD widened the bridge of its relationships with BLM and USFS to add space for different perspectives to be included in management decisions. It set up a mechanism to honour minority opinions and built success around a consensus process. Any member of the steering committee that disagreed with a prevailing recommendation could write a minority opinion that would be sent to the federal agency along with the committee's prevailing recommendation. An example of this occurred during the marking of the Brown's Phase I timber harvest on USFS lands. The environmental document required a review and written justification by TCRCD of the harvesting of any tree with a dbh of 65.3 cm or greater. A steering committee member disagreed with the recommendation on some of the trees, and his minority opinion was forwarded to the Forest Supervisor, along with the TCRCD recommendation. Success builds on success. Despite the litigiousness that grew out of the Northwest Forest Plan in defence of unlogged forest as habitat for the northern spotted owl, no project developed through the WCF consensus model has been litigated. Success has also built a framework for trust in part due to the willingness of steering committee members, the agencies, and the larger public to accept harvest designs that are compromises. In the past, the environmental community would not accept any harvesting, while the industry would advocate for intensive harvests.

The community, or more correctly constituency groups, have an opportunity to engage in the management and use of the WCF with a sense of ownership and pride. The WCF has become more than a forest and trees to be managed and harvested. More and more interest has been given to the WCF, and it is seen as an amenity; for example:

- Soon after the first harvest on the original BLM 1,000, a real estate advertisement touted the benefits of a home that 'backs up on Community Forest'.

- A local non-profit (NGO) dedicated to improving the Weaverville public swimming pool collected Douglas fir branches from the WCF to make Christmas wreaths to sell as a fundraiser.
- TCRCD used the waste timber logs from the harvests on BLM lands to produce firewood for community members to purchase. The funds raised went into the following year's community firewood project (Figure 12.6).
- The WCF received national recognition in 2009, being selected for a Partners in Conservation Award¹⁷ from Ken Salazar, Secretary of the federal U.S. Department of the Interior.
- A syndicated Public Television Series, 'Road Trip with Huell Howser', aired a segment on Weaverville featuring the WCF in 2010, which gave the WCF statewide exposure.¹⁸
- The World Endurance Mountain Bike Organization (WEMBO)¹⁹ held their international competition in the WCF in 2015. The race attracted about 150 contestants and 500 visitors and brought about US\$100,000 into the community. Eighty community members volunteered to help put on the race and formed the Trinity Trail Alliance, which is now active in the WCF Steering Committee. They lead recreational trail work days and host an annual mountain biking race, the La Grange Classic, in concert with the USFS.
- TCRCD formed a partnership with the USFS and the Shasta College Foundation to lead wildflower hikes every spring. A group of 60 or more people join the USFS botanist and Shasta College Natural History Instructor on these hikes (Figure 12.7). In 2020, with the restrictions of the COVID pandemic, the partnership developed a virtual nature hike (<https://youtu.be/plxHRykxR5Q>).
- Prescribed fire (= controlled burns) was reintroduced in the WCF around 2008. The Five Cent Gulch Prescribed Fire (2014) became a control point for firefighters, helping to keep the Oregon fire from reaching residential neighbourhoods on the edge of the WCF. TCRCD partnered with the Watershed Research and Training Center²⁰ to apply for funding to support prescribed fire on private lands adjacent to the WCF, and by 2017, cross-



Figure 12.6 Community firewood day.



Figure 12.7 Annual wildflower hike in WCF.

boundary prescribed fires had been implemented with total funding of US\$232,900 from outside sources.

- The success of prescribed fire on WCF led the Trinity County Collaborative Group to prioritise projects that continue to reduce the standing forest biomass, thereby reducing the risk of wildfires. These projects can be implemented with the federal funding awarded from a three-year JCI (USFS/NRCS) proposal. The federal funding includes US\$181,000 for TCRCD to implement non-harvest stewardship work.

Challenges

The successes and challenges facing the WCF are based on the following:

- The WCF remaining under federal ownership.
- Federal Law (stewardship authorities) and the regulations adopted by federal agencies to implement the law.
- Agency personnel with the time and interest in the WCF as a management model.
- Community members willing to invest their time in the WCF Steering Committee.
- Projects developed by TCRCD with the agencies having a much lower risk of being the targets of litigation.
- TCRCD willingness to be the bridge between the community and the federal agencies.
- TCRCD success at securing matching outside funding.
- General community perceptions about the need to actively manage surrounding forests.

However, federal ownership means that all projects must be approved through the time-consuming and costly environmental NEPA review process. This often means that opportunities,

like favourable log prices, are missed. The same law that created the opportunity for the WCF (stewardship authorities) resulted in two different regulatory frameworks – one for BLM and the other for USFS. While BLM allows retained receipts to be used to monitor the forest and plan future projects, the USFS does not. This means that progress can be slower on USFS lands, and the burden of securing planning funds falls on other agencies, like TCRCD.

Federal agency personnel were key to the WCF's successes. However, institutional memory is lost when federal employees are transferred if there is no process for information retention. TCRCD and the Steering Committee continuously provide guidance to new agency staff and deal with long periods of position vacancies. It can be difficult to get federal staff enthusiastic about the WCF as a model when they may only be in Weaverville for a short time. On the other hand, some agency staff develop deeper working relationships with the WCF.

The WCF Steering Committee has been quite stable, with key members like the TCRCD board member participating since the beginning. New members have joined (recreational trails). However, it can be difficult to sustain interest, and the Steering Committee is ageing with no clear succession planning.

The WCF has avoided any litigation on its projects, but that fear continues to drive USFS and BLM to make solid, defensible arguments in their environmental documentation, inevitably slowing the pace and scale of implementation.

Community members' interests change with time, and as threats to the community fade from memory, they can become complacent and less engaged in the WCF. There is a general feeling that 'someone else is taking care of it'. The formation of the Trinity County Collaborative Group siphoned off some energy and funding from WCF to the bigger countywide efforts.

TCRCD has been the hub around which WCF activities rotate, but the agency has always been under-funded for the administrative services it provides to the WCF, with staff oftentimes donating time to the WCF. This is risky and unsustainable.

Final thoughts

It seems that the biggest threat to the long-term viability of the WCF is tied to the lack of succession planning – how to get a new generation to invest their time and energy in the WCF. TCRCD's strength is its reach into the community and hiring a younger generation of professionals. The Steering Committee needs to tap TCRCD's relationships with the youth and young adults to strengthen their appreciation of what the WCF has to offer. It takes time and energy to maintain the public's interest. It is likely that this model of community forestry will always require cultivating community involvement – that a healthier forest means a healthier community and changing the paradigm from 'not in my backyard' to 'in my backyard, please'.

Notes

- 1 A bioregion is 'a region whose limits are naturally defined by topographic and biological features, such as mountain ranges and ecosystems' (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bioregion>).
- 2 Skinner, C. N., Taylor, A. H., & Agee, J. K. (2006). Klamath mountains bioregion. In N. G. Sugihara, J. W. Van Wagendonk, J. Fites-Kaufman, K. E. Shaffer, & A. E. Thode (Eds.), *Fire in California's ecosystems* (pp. 170–194). University of California Press.
- 3 Industrial timberlands are commercially viable forestlands owned by forest industry companies.
- 4 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Checkerboarding_\(land\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Checkerboarding_(land))
- 5 Trinity County Resource Conservation District (TCRCD) is a special district created by a vote of the local people in 1955. It is a local government organisation dedicated to natural resources conservation and management, independent of the County of Trinity.

- 6 The so-called ‘Timber Wars’ of the 1980s and early 1990s pitted environmentalists wielding lawsuits and civil disobedience against federal officials and timber firms. Efforts to protect the northern spotted owl, an old-growth denizen, became a centerpiece of the conservation campaign, and the shy owl its mascot. <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/10/>
- 7 Northwest California Resource Conservation & Development Council <http://www.northwestcarcdc.org/about-us.html>
- 8 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA): The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (Pub. L. 91-190, 42 U.S.C. 4321–4347, January 1, 1970, as amended by Pub. L. 94-52, July 3, 1975, Pub. L. 94-83, August 9, 1975, and Pub. L. 97-258, § 4(b), Sept. 13, 1982). The law went into effect on January 1, 1970. The purpose of NEPA is to ensure that environmental factors are weighted equally when compared to other factors in the decision-making process undertaken by federal agencies, and to establish a national environmental policy.
- 9 The Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 (Public Law 93-205, 16USC-1973) is a key legislation for both domestic and international conservation. The act aims to provide a framework to conserve and protect endangered and threatened species and their habitats.
- 10 California Forest Practices Act (California Code Public Resources Code Division 4 – Forests, forestry and range and forage lands Part 2 – protection of forest, range and forage lands chapter 8 – Z’berg-Nejedly Forest Practice Act of 1973). The law declares that the policy of California is to encourage prudent and responsible forest resource management calculated to serve the public’s need for timber and other forest products, while giving consideration to the public’s need for watershed protection, fisheries and wildlife, sequestration of carbon dioxide, and recreational opportunities alike in this and future generations.
- 11 California Environmental Quality Act (California Public Resources Code, Sections 21000–21178, and Title 14 CCR, Section 753, and Chapter 3, Sections 15000–15387) is a statute passed in 1970 and signed in to law shortly after the United States federal government passed the (NEPA) to institute a statewide policy of environmental protection. CEQA does not directly regulate land uses, but instead requires state and local agencies within California to follow a protocol of analysis and public disclosure of environmental impacts of proposed projects and, in a departure from NEPA, to adopt all feasible measures to mitigate those impacts. CEQA makes environmental protection a mandatory part of every California state and local (public) agency’s decision-making process. It has also become the basis for numerous lawsuits concerning public and private projects.
- 12 Trinity County Resource Conservation District (<http://www.trcred.net>)
- 13 Division 9 of the California Public Resources Code provides the authority to form conservation districts and provides parameters for what conservation districts have authority over within their district boundaries. <https://law.justia.com/codes/california/2016/code-prc/division-9/>
- 14 Stewardship Contracting Authorities grants the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management permanent authority to enter into stewardship contracts or agreements to achieve land management goals for the National Forests or public lands that meet local and rural community needs. Section 8205 supersedes the temporary authority granted to the Forest Service in section 347 of Public Law 105-277, the Omnibus Consolidated and Emergency Appropriations Act, 1999. Section 604 (16 USC 6591c) of Public Law 108-148 as amended by Section 8205 of Public Law 113-79, the Agricultural Act of 2014.
- 15 The photograph shows ground dragging of the logs and consequent rutting instead of using a sully or wheeled hitch, as is normal in Scandinavia and the United Kingdom. Sulkies hitched to single or pairs of draft horses have almost zero negative environmental impact and permit faster and cheaper extraction. Oxen are used with sulkies in southern and south-central Africa because they are less affected by tsetse flies. WCF later switched to a forwarding arch that had less impact on the ground surface.
- 16 Kelly, E. (2018). The role of the local community on federal lands: The Weaverville Community Forest. *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, 40, 137–151.
- 17 No cash prize but bragging rights.
- 18 ‘Road trip’ is a Huell Howser Production ©2010. #154 Weaverville (www.calgold.com)
- 19 World Endurance Mountain Bike Race 2015: www.weaverville24.us
- 20 Watershed Research & Training Center: <http://www.thewatershedcenter.com/>