



## Conservation District Undertakes Biomass Project continued from page S1

Development and the Wyoming Business Council. "Because of transportation costs, we need small, local business entities close to the source, 50 miles or less," he says.

Forest Service Ecologist Jim Ozenberger has worked closely with the district and other stakeholders in a search for solutions to reduce fuel loads and stimulate local economies.

"We've looked at all of this, and we know we have an economic infrastructure that needs to be developed," says Ozenberger, who works out of the Jackson Ranger District/Bridger Teton National Forest. "Biomass itself has a lot of bulk, little value and high haul cost, but final products can have high value. You're going to have demand in the end."

One local business that will benefit immediately from biomass work is Terra Firma, operated by Dane Buk. The district chose Buk's firm for the composting project. Buk recently acquired a horizontal wood grinder for the project and other biomass work. The district is working with other agencies to locate satellite stations for composting. One will be at the Forest Service's Blackhawk Ranger Station. It's but one example of cooperation among agencies, says Ozenberger. "We have a great working relationship," he says.

### Focusing on stewardship, biomass potential

The district has helped the Forest Service in efforts to set up the Blackhawk Hatchet Stewardship Contract in the Buffalo Ranger District. "It has hosted public meetings and disseminated information on the importance

of projects like this," Ozenberger says. The Forest Service hopes to have contracts available for bid on the project in a few months.

The district also organized and facilitated a regional biomass/stewardship contracting workshop last winter in Jackson.

Other partners have included Wyoming Department of Transportation, which will use mulch from the composting project for roadside reclamation on a nearby 37-mile highway project. The State Department of Forestry chipped in by providing a special use permit for a satellite compost site.

In addition to addressing fuel loads and biomass utilization, the composting project aims at solving another resource challenge - horse manure. It will serve a source of nitrogen for the compost. Recreational and outfitter horse operations are plentiful in the area, and horse manure from those operations will be blended with biomass. "We've had some water quality problems being caused by movement to water, so we're glad to see that recycled," he says.

Local partners will continue to address the complex challenges presented by an area of great beauty.

"Natural resources are so important in this area," says Ozenberger. "With the complex land use and ownership mix we have, people realize we need to cooperate. A lot of the resources we have share jurisdictional boundaries, including wildlife and scenic beauty."

There's plenty to be done. The Teton County Community Wildfire Protection Plan, facilitated by the county fire marshal, identified 31 areas for fuels reduction. The conservation district's contribution to those efforts will be the operation of the biomass

composting project. The district also received National Fire Plan funding for outreach and education.

In addition to wildland fire management and fuels reduction, the partners have other concerns. Noxious weed control efforts have united the Forest Service, National Park Service, the conservation district and other partners in a coordinated approach.

### Local commitment necessary, too

The Teton District believes that making a local commitment is necessary if conservation goals are to be achieved.

At its April meeting, the District Board of Supervisors approved a \$28,000 local contribution for cost-share funding that will go toward initial phases of Wildland Urban Interface fuel reduction and bark beetle kill treatments in the Indian Paintbrush, Crescent H, and Hidden Hills subdivisions in Jackson Hole. The district has authority to levy 1 mil on county taxes.

"The board has a tremendous amount of talent and depth," says Williams. Its members include ranchers, an attorney, biologists, a geologist and a representative of a local land trust. While the district has received state and federal funding, including Community Assistance funding under the National Fire Plan, the board also knows that there's as much value in expertise from other agencies. "Whatever dollars we get, we're grateful for, but we have to depend more and more on local resources, and the collaborative approach is the key."

**Contact Randy Williams at [rsq@wyoming.com](mailto:rsq@wyoming.com).**

## Collaboration/Stewardship continued from page S3

for local citizens, research opportunities, expansion of the local trail system, management of unstable slopes, retention of archeological values and providing a laboratory for local schools and universities.

At the suggestion of BLM Field Manager Steve Anderson at one of the follow-up meetings, the RCD worked with the federal Department of Interior agency to implement a Stewardship Contract for management of the 1000 acres of BLM land to meet community and resource management goals.

The local community has shown a strong interest in the lands, and local collaboration has been high. The community has been clear about how it would like BLM to man-

age and restore these lands.

That makes the stewardship contract a good fit, says Frost. "This vision now can be integrated into a multi-year stewardship agreement that will lay out a work plan with specific projects for the next couple of years and longer-term restoration and management goals. It's all about building a strong link between the people of Weaverville and the natural resources that brought them here in the first place," he says. "Ultimately, I see our school children participating in this land stewardship through our Conservation Legacy Program and creating a link to future generations of our community."

**Contact Pat Frost at [pfrost@tcrd.net](mailto:pfrost@tcrd.net).**

### Biomass Survey Reminder

In preparation for an August biomass conference in Georgia, NACD is supporting a needs assessment that will help guide conference planners.

NACD has agreed to provide the leadership for the conference, co-sponsored with a number of other organizations and agencies. It will be at the Continuing Education Center at the University of Georgia, Aug. 29-31. The confidential survey should take 10 to 15 minutes to complete. To complete the survey, go to <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=27036829143>

**Information on the conference is at <http://nacdnet.org/meetings/biomass.htm>.**



### The Amazing Story of a 16-mile Shaded Fuel Break

A 16-mile long, 1,500-foot-wide shaded fuel break project in Nevada County, California, is an example of how a good idea and dedicated people sometimes know no bounds.

The project is spearheaded by the Nevada County Resource Conservation District in California. Work is already under way, little more than a year after the plan was hatched.

“It’s moving along at a rapid pace, more rapid than expected,” David Vertin, district board member. “The timeline was 5 to 10 years, but it’s going to be less than that.” Indeed, District Manager Lesa Osterholm says the project may be completed within three years. Local, state and federal cooperation is strong. The district worked hard to address local concerns and build consensus for the project, and that led the way to success.

#### Forestry committee got the ball rolling

At Vertin’s suggestion, the district established a forestry committee in February 2004. As a member of NACD’s Forest

Resources Committee, Vertin is familiar with the partnerships and programs that are helping to accomplish forest health and fuels reduction work.

Robert Ingram, a professional forester and board member, was named to chair the committee, and Vertin serves as the second board representative. “From there, we invited every agency we could think of to participate,” says Vertin, who operates an environmentally sensitive logging company. Partners include the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Bureau of Land Management, USDA Forest Service, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, the Fire Safe Council of Nevada County and Nevada Irrigation District.

With that kind of expertise, it didn’t take long to identify the fuel break. “All the experts at the table thought it would be a good idea,” Vertin says. Nevada County was still working to establish a fire safe plan at the time the committee was formed. “We thought, ‘If the fire plan was in place, what would they be doing?’ One of the things would be to build a shaded fuel break, at least where firefighters could go to in a wind-driven event, where they could set up their lines and have a good chance of slowing the fire down,” he says.

This Special Report looks at how conservation districts, resource conservation and development councils are getting together with local state and federal partners in these and other areas:

- Stewardship Contracting
- Chipping for biomass
- Community fuels breaks
- Statewide restoration plans
- Outreach and education

For much more information on forest health, fuels reduction and biomass utilization, visit NACD’s Forest Resources Web pages at <http://forestry.nacdnet.org/>.

“Whatever we discussed about forestry, fuel load reductions came up. We identified funding sources and set education as a major goal,” adds Osterholm.

The communities of Nevada City and Grass Valley would be protected, along with a wildland-urban interface area to the east. Three watersheds - the Yuba and Bear rivers and Deer Creek - will also be protected.

“Once we developed the project area, we

*Continued on Page S2*

### Teton Conservation District Undertakes Major Biomass Project

Great beauty and daunting resource challenges paint the interactions of local, state and federal stakeholders in Teton County, Wyoming.

The Green Knoll Fire of 2003 burned

4,500 acres, cost \$15 million to suppress and riveted attention on reducing fuel loads and using biomass from late seral forests and rangelands that dominate the area.

Efforts to address these challenges have

produced a growing partnership of resource and development forces. Among the partners is the Teton Conservation District. The district embarks this month on a county-wide composting project that will blend woody biomass, domestic stock manure and other components to create specialized mulches, compost berms and other products.

Much of the biomass will come from fuels reduction projects on both public and private lands in a county that includes Grand Teton National Park, Bridger-Teton National Forest and other publicly owned lands. Lawn and leaf litter, construction debris and other waste products will also go into the mix.

Interagency cooperation has been essential, says Randy Williams, executive director at the district. “We have learned that this entire biomass utilization concept requires cooperation on a regional level. It involves trucking, financing, capitalization and many other issues,” he says. Partners on biomass business development efforts include the Western Wyoming RC&D, USDA Rural

*Continued on Page S4*



Conversion of biomass to compost in Teton County, Wyoming, is a big job. Dane Buk, owner of the local company Terra Firma, has been awarded the contract for county biomass work overseen by the Teton Conservation District. He recently acquired this Morbark 3600 horizontal grinder on tracks. It is operated by remote control and is capable of whole tree grinding. It can grind 30 to 60 tons per hour, depending on material and the size of screen used. Shown here are (from left) Travis Eva of Trees-R-US, Dane Buk of Terra Firma and Randy Williams, executive director of the Teton Conservation District.

#### Getting together in Teton, Wyoming



## The Amazing story of a 16-mile Shaded Fuel Break continued from page S1

talked about type of prescriptions needed, and we came up with a flexible, optional plan,” Osterholm says. Osterholm made a presentation to the County Board of Supervisors, who granted approval and support. “Then the supervisors themselves held town meetings with their constituents. We attended those as well,” Osterholm says. “We were kind of out there in force, all the agency people knew what other agencies were doing. We had a wealth of information about what landowners needed. Everybody has different needs, and we were armed with tremendous programs. What people needed, we had programs for them.” There was some early opposition, but those concerns were addressed, and community support grew. “By October, we had things rolling,” says Vertin. More than 20 percent of the project had been completed by the end of 2004, and work steaming along.

Funding has come from several sources, ranging from residents who covered their own costs to NRCS’ Environmental Quality Incentives Program and state Department of Forestry funds. The BLM and Forest Service have provided funds for work on private property adjacent to public lands.

EQIP funds totaling of at least \$300,000 have been provided to landowners for cost sharing on forest stand improvement and forest health priorities. Fuels reduction work qualifies under those priorities. EQIP cost-sharing is typically a 50 percent match, but some landowners qualify for up to 75 percent.

The California Forest Improvement Program will provide an estimated \$1 million for 90 percent cost sharing. There’s a 20-acre minimum and a requirement that a professional forester provide a work plan, but landowners of smaller parcels can combine to meet the minimum acreage.

Federal and state cost-sharing have boosted work on private lands. The BLM had already treated many of its land in the checkerboard ownership pattern of the county. It’s hoped that work will also extend to the Tahoe National Forest.

On another front, the local Fire Safe Council has been active in promoting creating defensible spaces around homes. Grants have helped the council to do that work for free for senior citizens, disabled or low-income residents.

### Lessons learned, challenges ahead

The fuel break project took off rapidly, but lessons learned will endure, district offi-



**Leaders of the Nevada County Resource Conservation District are (left to right) Board President David Vertin, Forestry Committee Chair Robert Ingram and District Manager Lesa Osterholm.**

cial say. “We have learned that collaboration is really important,” Vertin says. “People sometimes blame inaction on lack of money. Well, no matter how much money you have or don’t have, collaboration is the way to go. What we forget is that a lot of times these folks in the agencies would like to be doing a lot more, and when they come to a committee meeting and we say we need a fire break, they’re listening.”

His advice for districts is to complete a plan and not worry about money details. Once the fuel break plan was in place in Nevada County, things took off. “We have some residents who heard about it, embraced it and went ahead and did it without cost-share.” The district wasn’t aware that state funding would be available, but when the state upped its contribution for fuels reduction in the wake of last year’s major fires in California, Nevada County benefited because it had a plan in place.

### NACD booklet was the first step

As a member of NACD’s Forest Resource Committee, David Vertin helped direct NACD staff to produce a booklet that would encourage conservation districts to establish or broaden forestry activities. Then he took the booklet home to the Nevada County Resource Conservation District in California and went to work.

“Trees Are the Answer, a Template for Conservation District Forestry Programs,” was published in December 2003 and distributed to conservation districts around the country. Financial support was provided by the USDA Forest Service State and Private Forestry. Among the booklet’s suggestions is to establish a district forestry committee.

“I got ahold of five copies of those booklets and gave them to all our board members,” says Vertin, president of the district board. “We reviewed it and decided to start

“Definitely start a forestry committee,” Osterholm advises other conservation districts. “When you develop your projects, get out front and let people know, and when adversity comes, go visit with them,” she says, adding that Vertin deserves credit for his outreach and promotional efforts.

Looking ahead, both Vertin and Osterholm know that maintenance will be a challenge.

Funding won’t be available for maintenance. Some areas will need more attention than others, but any future thinning will be easier now after the initial treatments.

“The last phase of this is coming up with information to give landowners that offers alternatives for maintenance.” That can include everything from mastication to grazing with goats.

**Contact David Vertin at 530-265-5348.  
Contact Lesa Osterholm at  
Lesa.Osterholm@ca.nacdnet.net.**

a forestry committee.” That was in February 2004. Within a few months, the committee and district had spearheaded the 16-mile fuel break featured in this special report.

“That booklet got things going,” says Vertin. Actually, Vertin got things going, says District Manager Lesa Osterholm. “Dave deserves credit for helping to broaden our work in forestry. He’s been the force behind gaining public support,” she says.

Vertin is a big believer in conservation district forestry potential. Demand for “Trees are the Answer” was high, and demand exceeded printed copies. Vertin is so committed to the cause that he is personally working to line up funding for a second printing. Until then, the booklet is available on NACD’s Web site at <http://forestry.nacdnet.org/TreesAnswer.htm>.



### How Collaboration Led to a Stewardship Contract

A California resource conservation district known for leading the way on forest health activities has received Bureau of Land Management approval for a 1,000-acre stewardship contract.

The Trinity Resource Conservation

**Getting together in Trinity, California**

District received approval for the Weaverville

Community Forest Stewardship Project this year. The district is working with the BLM state office to set out a work plan for this year. "The goal is a cooperative agreement between the RCD and BLM this spring, and then implementing work this summer," says Pat Frost, district manager.

Receipts generated by stewardship contracts are reserved for future stewardship work, notes BLM State Forester Glenn Lahti. "We think there will be merchantable timber, and receipts would come back into a contributed account that we can use for future projects." Identified projects in the Weaverville area would be priorities, with nearby watersheds another choice. When stewardship contracts generate receipts, "We

can be doing restoration work in future years that would have ended up costing money," Lahti says.

A local sawmill will be called upon to handle the saw logs, and that will support local businesses.

The conservation district in northwestern California will use its own forest fuels reduction crew and private contractors to accomplish the work. It has been active in on-the-ground fuels reduction work and also technical assistance, outreach and education about hazardous fuels and protecting private lands. The district also led efforts to establish a community wildfire protection plan for Trinity County. It works closely with other community groups, including the Trinity Resource Conservation and Development Council.

#### Community's voice heard in process

So-named for the nearby community of Weaverville, the project will achieve multiple resource goals identified during a com-

munity meeting in May 2004 and two others held in November.

The Trinity RC&D hosted the meetings. The May session was attended by citizens, county supervisors and planning staff, representatives of the resource conservation district and two BLM staff members, including Assistant Field Manager Francis Berg. Professional facilitator Ray Ledgerwood of Spokane, Washington, helped the group to establish goals, identify issues and conflicts and evaluate possible ownership and management options.

On the resource front, there was consensus on pursuing community-based management of the forest lands, including viewshed protection, fuels reduction, timber management, wildlife habitat improvement (including fisheries), firewood collection, and enhancing recreational and educational opportunities.

Other potential benefits identified at the community meeting included providing saw logs to a local mill and otherwise providing economic benefits to the community, jobs

*Continued on Page S4*

### Partnerships Will Drive New Mexico State Plan

A first of its kind statewide forest and watershed restoration plan in New Mexico will stress collaboration from an array of local, state and national partners, says State Forester Butch Blazer.

The plan -- the result of a year of discussions among federal, state and tribal officials, environmental groups, local soil and water conservation districts and other interests -- aims to improve coordination among various governmental agencies and provide greater support for projects designed to thin thousands of acres of dense stands of small-diameter trees.

The New Mexico Forest and Watershed Health Plan also stresses restoring the watersheds, including riparian areas and grasslands. That integration of wildfire reduction and watershed health makes New Mexico's plan a leader in the nation.

"I'm very excited about this plan and working with the governor's office to create a new agency to make it work," says Blazer. "We spent a lot of time and effort in working with the planning committee. It was an extremely diverse committee."

The planning committee was challenged by Gov. Bill Richardson to develop a plan that addresses concerns on all forests in the state, regardless of jurisdiction. "One of the reasons we were successful in our planning

effort is that we were able to gain support of other executive land managers in state, primarily federal agencies and tribal entities. It also had support from the state Legislature."

Implementing the plan will require continued cooperation at all levels, Blazer says. Much of the work starts at the local level. He sees a big role for county commissioners in developing community wildfire protection and watershed plans. "They're the ones accountable to the people," Blazer says.

He also sees an expanded role for soil and water conservation districts. "My hope in this plan will create even greater opportunities for soil and water conservation districts and more resources for them to do their work," he says. Resource conservation and development councils will also be part of the mix, he adds.

Blazer has the lead role in developing a new state office to coordinate interagency fuel treatment and watershed restoration efforts and help funnel available resources to on-the-ground projects.

The plan also establishes an oversight committee and encourages the expansion of the biomass industry and other wood product businesses to increase demand for small-diameter trees.

Input from about 400 experts and the public led to the plan's 20 action items,

including increasing coordination among agencies and enhancing state support of project efforts.

Sherry Barrow runs a small business in Ruidoso, New Mexico, that uses

**Getting together in New Mexico**

small diameter trees to make wood shavings for animal bedding and to generate heat to run the operation. She says the plan will help bridge the gap between supply and demand. Currently, contracts for removing small-diameter trees are "sporadic, small and intermittent," she says. With greater coordination among agencies, multiple projects can be focused in a particular area, providing longer-term contracts and a more reliable supply of wood. That will help encourage more people to start businesses that use small-diameter trees, says Barrow, a member of the planning committee.

Still undetermined is how local, state and federal funding will fit together to support the plan. That doesn't deter Blazer. "I deal with this every day," he says. "Looking at proposed reductions in federal funding, the only way we're going to address this massive challenge of forest health is through partnerships. There's no other way to do it."

For a copy of the plan, go to <http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us/forestry/>.