



NEVADA PINYON-JUNIPER PARTNERSHIP



The purpose of the Nevada Pinyon-Juniper Partnership (Partnership) is to identify strategies to address the ecological problems associated with expanding, aging and overstocked pinyon-juniper (PJ) woodlands through innovation and public-private cooperation. The goal is for the ecological risks to be addressed by landscape level restoration, with utilization of the resulting biomass as an additional beneficial outcome. The effort is being directed by a Steering Committee composed of experts and interests from federal, state, and local governments and agencies as well as a wide suite of non-government organizations and the private sector.

BACKGROUND

Eighty-seven per cent of Nevada is federally managed land, with approximately 9 million acres of PJ woodland under the management responsibility of the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service. The risks presented by expanding and overstocked PJ woodlands and the associated impacts on ecosystem resilience and biodiversity, wildlife habitat, water quantity and quality, and soils are cause for major concern.

Overstocked PJ stands are highly susceptible to catastrophic fire that often results in unacceptable ecological conditions. Proactive management can provide positive use of PJ fuels while reducing introduction of invasive species like cheat grass that are detrimental to the ecosystem; as well, it can greatly reduce fire suppression and restoration costs.

Restoration on a landscape level is both an environmental protection imperative and a cost-saving measure. At the same time, opportunity exists to utilize the biomass generated from treatments for commercial purposes. Doing so will add offset revenues back into the restoration cycle while it creates rural industries and jobs in counties whose private sector economies are affected by the dominant presence of federal lands.

WORKING TOWARD A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

Clearly, these objectives cannot be reached without an unprecedented level of interagency and public-private cooperation, utilizing the best in science, technology, and land management practices.

To facilitate and support this dynamic model, Senator Harry Reid has called for the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture to establish an interagency demonstration project. Such a project would designate a landscape-scale area of PJ woodland in rural Nevada. Identification of the acreage will be based upon stakeholder input in order to identify areas that are accessible, in need of treatment to benefit a maximum number of resource values, and supported by key stakeholders. The project area would be managed under a long-term process of inventory, environmental planning (NEPA), restoration treatments, and biomass utilization. Treatments will be site specific, guided by restoration needs, and carefully designed, closely monitored, and adapted as needed to achieve desired ecological outcomes.

Federal agencies are critical partners and action agents to this demonstration project including several from the Departments of Interior (BLM, USFW, BIA), USDA (Forest Service, NRCS, Rural Development, ARS, FSA), and Energy. State of Nevada partners include the Department of Wildlife, Division of Forestry, University of Nevada, Reno, and the State Energy Office. County governments, Native American tribes, conservation districts and nongovernmental organizations representing environmental, conservation, and cultural preservation interests are also essential to the process.

The collective expertise, wisdom, and resources of these partners will serve to create focus and momentum for accomplishment, as well as to build in mechanisms for scientific monitoring, self-correction, and accountability.

NEED AND BENEFITS

At present there are approximately 9 million acres of PJ woodlands in Nevada and nearly 50 million acres across the West. Early in the process of PJ expansion into sagebrush ecosystems it tends to be subdominant to sagebrush or other existing vegetation (Phase I). Woodlands become much more prone to catastrophic wildfire as fuel loads increase once trees become co-dominant (Phase II) and then dominant (Phase III). Phase III woodlands tend to have little or no understory of native grasses and forbes resulting in ecosystems that are less resilient to fire, more prone to erosion, provide poorer habitat for wildlife, and are at higher risk of invasion of insects, noxious weeds, or other undesirable vegetation. ***Experts estimate that 100,000 acres of woodland go from Phase II to III each year in Nevada.***

As a result, both scientists and land management professionals agree that the majority of those acres are in need of treatment. By designing the treatment through the Nevada PJ Partnership and the range of expertise it represents, multiple benefits will result, including:

- **Increased Biodiversity** for both flora and fauna
- **Improved Watershed Health** increasing both quantity and quality of water
- **Enhanced Wildlife Habitat** for sagebrush obligate species like Sage-grouse & Mule Deer
- **Reduced Risk of Catastrophic Wildfire** by serving as a fire surrogate and reducing high fuel loads
- **Improved Woodland Health** by reducing the potential for beetle-kill and protection of old-growth forest from risk of wildfire

PINYON-JUNIPER SUMMIT

The Partnership has aggregated adequate resources to accomplish a detailed analysis of land status maps in order to identify 100,000 – 500,000 acres for the demonstration project. At the same time, partners are identifying opportunities that will maximize the win-win potential for treatment and restoration. The acreage to be placed in the demonstration project, as well as the parameters of the project in terms of use of resources, agency authorities, and other tools needed to support the project, will be presented to federal and state agency leaders at the Pinyon-Juniper Summit, to be held in Las Vegas on December 8 and 9, 2010.

The results of this demonstration project will assist in determining what tools and authorities should be given to land managers throughout the five western states containing PJ woodlands. Participation by all parties is continuously invited, and will be critical to the project's success.

KEY EVENTS & ANTICIPATED TIMELINE **NEVADA PINYON-JUNIPER PARTNERSHIP**

- April 2010:** Initial Statement of Need for Partnership
- May 13, 2010:** Scoping Meeting, Steering Committee Formation, Solicit Members and Donations
- July 22, 2010:** Utilization Teleconference
- August 2010:** Solicited and Selected Contractor to Collect Agencies' Plans and Data, Identify Potential Demonstration Areas & Develop Key Tools
- Oct. 14, 2010:** Environmental and Cultural Stakeholder Teleconference
- Dec. 8 & 9 2010:** Host the Inaugural Pinyon-Juniper Summit to Present Contractor Findings and Identify Action Items (Aliante Hotel, Las Vegas; contact Jenifer.taylor@nv.usda.gov)
- 2011:** Implement Action Items and Develop Needed Tools to Begin Demonstration
- 2012:** Initiate Resource Inventory and Establish Pre-Treatment Monitoring for Demonstration Project. Begin NEPA Process; Bring Demonstration Project Authorities to Projects within Areas that are already in Agencies' Pipeline
- 2013:** Establish cycle of Completing NEPA and Implementing Treatments on large scale units of land within demonstration areas
- 2013 – 2033:** Conduct Treatments under an Adaptive Management Strategy Based on Monitoring Results
- 2035:** Close out Implementation of Project and Wrap-up Post Treatment Monitoring

NEVADA PJ PARTNERSHIP STEERING COMMITTEE

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