



PRESS RELEASE

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Pinyon-Juniper Restoration and Utilization Summit Receives Support from National Offices of USDA and BLM

By: Kelly Clark, Special Projects Coordinator, USDA Rural Development

Nearly 175 people attended the Pinyon-Juniper Restoration and Utilization Summit Dec. 8-9, in North Las Vegas, where they engaged in creating a proposal for a Demonstration Project for Pinyon-Juniper Treatment in eastern Nevada.

USDA Under Secretary for Rural Development Dallas Tonsager, USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and the Environment Harris Sherman, and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) National Director Bob Abbey, commended conference participants for innovative thinking in regard to land stewardship and energy independence.

“I commend each one of you for your commitment to ensuring good stewardship of our lands and for helping to bring greater energy independence to our nation,” said Tonsager. “Your conference has parallel goals to our efforts at USDA- being good stewards of our lands and expanding the production and consumption of renewable energy.”

Conference participants heard first-hand stories from Assemblyman Pete Goicoechea, and Lincoln County Commissioner Ronda Hornbeck about the problems that come when Pinyon-Juniper woodlands become overstocked and expand into adjacent sagebrush habitat. Hornbeck told how her family had first settled the lands in 1865, and has seen Pinyon and Juniper expanding, over entire areas where her family used to watch mule deer migrate. Now the pinyon and juniper has become too thick to see the deer and much of the brush habitat is gone.

“This is our environment,” Hornbeck said. “As individuals we need to be stewards of our lands- it is the responsibility of each individual.”

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Goicoechea, who ranches out of Newark Valley, reminisced about the changes he has seen across the landscape. “Nowadays, you cannot see Ward Charcoal Oven for the trees, and if you lose a cow up in those thick trees, if you do find her, she might come back with a calf. We’re losing it out there.” Goicoechea went on to suggest that reallocation of limited land management resources should be considered in order to appropriately treat woodlands using current technologies before fire destroys them first.

Assemblyman David Bobzien of Reno stood in for Senator Harry Reid as luncheon speaker at the conference. He applauded the collaborative process and said that even though the state is facing difficult economic times, additional consideration for biomass as part of the state’s energy portfolio is important. “There is unprecedented pressure for renewable energy,” he said.

The conference was organized and hosted by the steering committee of the Nevada Pinyon-Juniper Partnership, with USDA Rural Development State Director Sarah Adler, as co-chair, along with co-chair Doug Martin, Executive Director of the Nevada Tahoe Conservation District. The P-J Partnership is a collaborative effort of 250 members, as diverse as research scientists, county commissioners, economic development staff, ranchers, federal and state biologists, tribal members, federal land managers, representatives of conservation groups, and private biomass industry representatives and resource consultants.

Conference participants learned that in the most dense P-J woodlands (termed Phase III), pinyon-juniper trees monopolize key resources such as light, water and nutrients, reducing the productivity of the land, negatively impacting watersheds, forest health, and wildlife diversity while dramatically increasing the fuel load for wildfire. Each year in Nevada approximately 100,000 acres of P-J woodland converts from Phase II to Phase III density.

Conference participants were very interested in the proposed landscape-scale Demonstration Area in Eastern Nevada that is in need of pinyon-juniper restoration for a multitude of reasons. The area includes two potential utilization hubs, one near Ely, the other near Pioche where biomass produced from restoration activities could possibly be utilized. The treatment actions will be designed to respond to specific resource needs, with the resulting woody biomass being made available for alternative energy and biofuels.

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Jeremy Drew, with Resource Concepts Inc., presented the Demonstration Area and identified the key values that went into selecting the area, identified based upon stakeholder input for areas that are accessible, in need of P-J treatment to benefit a maximum number of resource values, and supported by key stakeholders. He told participants that this is just the initial phase of developing a project, and encouraged attendees to communicate their desires regarding changes in the landscape to the P-J Partnership.

Within the Demonstration Area, the Bureau of Land Management, US Forest Service, Nevada Department of Wildlife and the Nevada Division of Forestry had already identified P-J restoration projects as necessary to enhance watershed and rangeland health and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires.

Under Secretary Dallas Tonsager called for increased focus on both land stewardship and energy independence. "Find ways to better utilize and restore forest resources," he said. USDA Rural Development has business financing tools that may be part of the solution to creating a restoration/utilization cycle within the Demonstration Area.

Under Secretary Harris Sherman echoed that sentiment, recounting his trip through Northern Nevada in October, where he saw pinyon and juniper woodlands so thick that both forests and homes are imperiled. "Concerted action has to be taken," he said. The U.S. Forest Service is contributing expertise in both restoration practices and woody biomass utilization to the P-J Partnership.

Sherman mentioned that under the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's National Sage Grouse Initiative, \$6.5 million is available to support habitat conservation work for greater sage-grouse across the west. P-J treatment is one of many habitat restoration activities that could help support this sensitive species for the long term.

Bob Abbey, former BLM State Director for Nevada, and now national BLM Director, encouraged conference participants to focus on common goals, involve a diverse public and to focus on pro-active action that will leave a positive legacy. "The people in this room are the ones who can make a difference," he said. "Together we have this opportunity to do amazing things."

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