

By USDA Rural Development Nevada State Director Sarah Adler with Assistance from Kelly Clark

We have a resource issue across the West, and here in Nevada in particular, that is crossing a number of boundaries in terms of its effects on rural economies, wildlife diversity and forest health. That issue is pinyon-juniper encroachment; which is the rapid growth of pinyon and juniper trees to the extent that risks of disease, insects and catastrophic fire intensify, and diversity of forage and wildlife are threatened. Extensive forest canopy blocks all of the light and plant life below, reducing the productivity of the land for both man and beast. Each year in Nevada, another 100,000 acres of P-J woodland converts to the highest density Pinyon-Juniper forest.

Recently at the [Pinyon-Juniper Restoration and Utilization Summit](#) in North Las Vegas, 175 people convened to learn how P-J encroachment is affecting this states' forest health, wildlife diversity, watersheds and rural economies. And they heard about a proposed landscape scale Demonstration Project in Eastern Nevada, identified based upon stakeholder input in order to identify areas that are accessible, in need of P-J treatment to benefit a maximum number of resource values, and supported by key stakeholders.

The goal is to restore healthy forests and watersheds, reduce the potential for catastrophic fire, and enhance plant and wildlife diversity by removing P-J in a targeted way, and to utilize the biomass as alternative energy, biofuels, or other wood products. The money paid by the utilization industries for the feedstock, the harvested P-J, will be used to offset treatment costs and support rural economies. 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 goals. While this is not a quick fix, one-off project, it does fit squarely with the objectives of the USDA [Wood to Energy](#) initiative recently announced by Deputy Under Secretary Jay Jensen.

I sincerely appreciate USDA [Rural Development](#) Undersecretary Dallas Tonsager, Undersecretary for [Natural Resources](#) Harris Sherman, and [Bureau of Land Management](#) Director Bob Abbey making time to speak and to participate in the conference. I was especially pleased that they embraced the Pinyon-Juniper Partnership approach for a Demonstration Project, encouraged the collaborative effort, and saw that it truly meets national policy goals for rural development, sustainable and resilient forests, and landscape-scale conservation.

Undersecretary Tonsager called for increased focus on both land stewardship and energy independence. "Find ways to better utilize and restore forest resources," he said, noting the potential for woody biomass to be converted into biofuels. Undersecretary Sherman echoed that sentiment, recounting his trip through Northern Nevada in October, where he saw Pinyon and Juniper forest so thick that both forests and homes are imperiled. "Concerted action has to be taken," he said.

Sherman mentioned how the USDA recently announced that \$6.5 million is available to support habitat conservation through the [National Sage Grouse Initiative](#) for improving sage-grouse

habitat 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, a former Nevada BLM State Director, and now national BLM Director encouraged conference participants to focus on common goals, involve a diversity of publics 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.”

I couldn't agree more.

