

WHITE PAPER: MOVING TO A SINGLE IDAHO LANDS RESOURCE COORDINATING COUNCIL STRUCTURE

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Issue Overview

The last few years have brought about a considerable change in state funding and program direction for Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) private forestry and fire bureau programs. State general fund reductions of 25% have required IDL to reduce bureau staffing levels, and to revisit how program assistance is delivered throughout Idaho. The 2008 Farm Bill formalized a shift in direction for USDA Forest Service (FS) State & Private Forestry (S&PF) programs (Forest Stewardship, Forest Legacy, Urban Forestry, Forest Health, State Fire Assistance and Volunteer Fire Assistance) that IDL delivers in partnership with the FS. Every state has been directed to prepare a State Assessment of Forest Resources and Statewide Forest Resource Strategy, collectively referred to as the state Forest Action Plan (FAP), with an emphasis on combining local, state and federal program resources to address forestry concerns collaboratively in identified Priority Landscape Areas. The Idaho FAP will help landowners and managers better recognize and support opportunities where working together and leveraging limited resources can address multiple critical issues of statewide importance. It is an objective of the FAP to serve as a springboard toward a more strategic, comprehensive and coordinated approach to forest management that addresses critical forest issues.

To address the strategic opportunities identified in the FAP, and in light of fiscal and programmatic changes, the Director of IDL asked agency staff to review their program delivery methods and consider opportunities to integrate resources and optimize program outcomes. Coordination of three separate advisory councils requires considerable staff time and fiscal resources, so IDL staff was tasked with investigating a more efficient and collaborative model for seeking input from partners. An IDL Oversight Group, consisting of representatives from each of the three advisory councils and IDL staff, was assembled to address the Director's request. To ensure federal program requirements are being addressed, IDL has discussed this effort with regional and national level FS S&PF managers.

Current Advisory Council Structure in Idaho

Historically, S&PF programs have operated independently, with specific program staff hired to oversee each, and program-specific advisory councils for Forest Stewardship (Idaho Forest Stewardship Advisory Committee), Fire-National Fire Plan (Idaho Fire Plan Working Group) and Urban Forestry (Idaho Community Forestry Advisory Council). The advisory councils are in a transition between focusing on what the original program direction mandated and the new direction as discussed above. The primary focus, past and present, of the three IDL advisory councils in supporting IDL program efforts follows:

Idaho State Fire Plan Working Group (ISFPWG)

Formed in 2002, this group's primary focus to date has been hazard fuels reduction across all ownerships statewide. There has been an evolution from working with individual landowners to working with county government to coordinate county-wide activities. IFPWG efforts have included extensive time working with counties to develop Community Wildfire

Protection Plans. IFPWG currently focuses on coordinating different state and federal agency funding for hazardous fuels treatment (HFT) work. The group works with all lands that have potential for wildfire, not just forestlands. Communication and coordination amongst various local, state and federal agencies and organizations are key focus areas for this group.

Idaho Forest Stewardship Advisory Committee (IFSAC)

Formed in the early 1990s, this group's primary focus was providing advice to IDL regarding cost-share program priorities. In recent years, program cost-share has shifted from Forest Service (FS) funded programs initiated through IDL to Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) funded programs with IDL involvement being primarily as a Technical Service Provider. Currently, this group's primary focus is information sharing within the committee, and outreach to non-industrial forest landowners, encouraging active management of private forestlands. They also provide project review and funding recommendations for the Idaho Forest Legacy Program.

Idaho Community Forestry Advisory Council (ICFAC)

Formed in the early 1990s, this group's primary focus was outreach to cities of all sizes and included providing advice to IDL regarding cost-share programs that were available to cities statewide. These cost-share programs have been eliminated due to reduced federal program funding. Currently, this group's primary focus is communication and information sharing within the committee, Arbor Day and Tree City USA promotion and recognition for cities statewide, and encouraging projects that demonstrate and promote the value of urban trees.

Recommended Changes: Idaho Lands Resource Coordinating Council

An IDL Oversight Group consisting of representatives from each of the three advisory councils and IDL staff was assembled to review how these groups currently operate and provide recommendations for how the groups might work more cooperatively to address FAP priorities. After reviewing the purpose of each existing advisory council and discussing the new direction of S&PF program delivery mandated through S&PF Redesign, the Oversight Group determined that the focus points of these three groups have a great amount of overlap and that there is great potential to achieve effective statewide program outcomes more strategically through consolidation into a single Coordinating Council. All three groups place a high priority on communication and information sharing, and this can continue to be achieved through including representation from each group in the single Coordinating Council structure. This concept closely follows the strategy identified in the FAP.

Coordinating Council Representation

The Oversight Group recognizes the importance of being strategic about the number of Coordinating Council members that can function efficiently and effectively. The following representation from the existing advisory councils is recommended with the understanding that additional interest groups may be represented through appointment to subcommittees.

USDA Forest Service – S&PF, USDI Bureau of Land Management, USDA National Forest Systems (fire staff), Natural Resources Conservation Service, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho Fire Chiefs, State Fire Marshal, Bureau of Homeland Security, University of

Idaho Extension Forestry, University or College - urban planning or arborist program, Idaho Association of Counties, Association of Idaho Cities, Idaho Chapter – American Planning Association, Tribes, private forest landowners (Idaho Forest Owners Association), Idaho Tree Farm Committee, Idaho Coalition of Land Trusts or a conservation organization, Association of Consulting Foresters – Inland Empire Chapter, City forester, Idaho Nursery and Landscape Association or green industry, and a utility company representative.

Coordinating Council Operating Protocol

- Council Leadership. A “Co-Leader” concept is recommended, consisting of an IDL staff member and a Council member. The Council member serves as Chairperson and leads meetings. The IDL staffer coordinates agendas, meeting arrangements, etc.
- Subcommittees will be appointed as needed, but will not be “standing.” Forest Legacy applications and grants review (Competitive and Western Fire grants) may be handled by the full Council.
- IDL staff (program managers and bureau chief) will participate in meetings but will not serve as voting members.
- A simple charter outlining Council purpose and operating procedures will be developed by the Coordinating Council membership.
- IDL will follow the current nomination process used for advisory councils to appoint members from identified interests.
- 6-12 months after formation, IDL will review the effectiveness of the Coordinating Council to assure program needs are being addressed.

Specifically, the Oversight Group identified the following focus areas to be addressed:

- ✦ Assist the State Forester with multi-objective strategic planning through prioritization and implementation of the FAP. This includes developing annual and long-term statewide action plans focusing on priority resource issues rather than individual programs, monitoring and reviewing accomplishments, refining and prioritizing actions, informing and involving stakeholders, and incorporating new information and filling data gaps. Overarching focus should be “Healthy Forests for all Idahoans.”
- ✦ Facilitate sound land management across all land ownerships through enhanced interaction between communities, private landowners, and local, state and federal agencies and related interest groups. Clarify roles of partners and collaborative groups.
- ✦ Assist the State Forester in reviewing policy issues. Develop position papers in collaboration with relevant constituencies and interest groups.
- ✦ Identify and coordinate funding opportunities to strategically address FAP objectives. Coordinate competitive grants, National Fire Plan grants, Forest Health grants, and other non-S&PF funding opportunities. Include partner/stakeholder involvement and leverage.
- ✦ Advise the State Forester on use of non-grant base level program funds. Provide oversight for Idaho Forest Legacy Program.