

FOREST SERVICE COMMENTS ON THE PHASE 2 MONITORING REPORT
FOR THE
INTEGRATED RESOURCE RESTORATION PILOT AUTHORITY

BACKGROUND

Under the Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR) pilot authority, the Forest Service can combine funding from the budget line items (BLIs) for Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat Management, Vegetation and Watershed Management, Forest Products, Legacy Roads and Trails, and Hazardous Fuels outside of the wildland-urban interface (WUI) into a consolidated budget in three Forest Service Regions (Region 1, Region 3, and Region 4). The recently released Phase 2 report (Ecosystem Workforce Program Working Paper Number 51) evaluates the impact of this new budget authority.

FOREST SERVICE COMMENTS ON THE PHASE 2 REPORT

- The recent third-party monitoring report for the Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR) pilot program, produced by Colorado State University and the Ecosystem Workforce Program at the University of Oregon, provides valuable information to Forest Service leadership on both the successes and challenges of the IRR pilot program.
- As with any pilot program in its fourth year, we are still in a learning mode with IRR and we have encountered things that are working well and things that need improvement.
- It is important to note that the Phase 2 report is about employee perception of IRR and therefore must be put in proper context.
 - When the report says “in general, no group of respondents felt that IRR was increasing efficiency” that means that on average, the employees surveyed didn’t think there had been a clear improvement in efficiency under IRR.
 - This survey result does not mean that we have an objective measure either way of changes in efficiency. Phase 2 is about employee opinion of IRR, not quantitative performance measures.
- The Phase 2 report provides important data on Forest Service employee experience implementing the IRR pilot.
 - It shows us employee perception of IRR ranges from very positive to very negative and varies depending on which part of the organization you are asking.
 - The majority of line officers see a benefit to IRR because it enables them to pool resources and focus on priority projects.
 - Some individual program managers feel that other, important programs aren’t getting the attention they deserve under IRR because more attention is now focused on priority targets.

- The Phase 2 report also highlights that we are not implementing the IRR pilot in a vacuum.
 - There are many factors affecting the Forest Service ability to complete restoration work, and some of these factors make it difficult to tease out exactly what impact IRR is having.
 - A major confounding variable is declining budgets. IRR has been implemented at the same times as sequestration and at the same time that many forests are having more trouble covering their baseline costs.
- Even with all these challenges, many Forest Service employees report that IRR is increasing flexibility, complementing other authorities and improving prioritization and integration in our restoration work.
- The Forest Service will publish a comprehensive three-year report on the results of IRR in March 2015. This report will use performance data from the three pilot regions for FY 2012 to FY 2014, along with the results of the third-party monitoring reports.