

Region (Name/Number): Southwestern Region (R3)

A. Accomplishment Reporting – Performance

1. FY14 Accomplishments

Table 1 – IRR Performance Measures (These numbers will be pulled from PAS by the Washington Office)

Performance Measure	Unit of measure	Target ¹	Total Units Accomplished ²	Percent Accomplished
Acres treated annually to sustain or restore watershed function and resilience	Acres	245,000	434,309	180%
Number of watersheds moved to an improved condition class	Number	1	1	100%
Miles of road decommissioned	Miles	54	138.9	257%
Volume of timber sold	ccf	250,000	322,429	129%
Miles of stream habitat restored or enhanced	Miles	154	205.2	133%

2. Priority Watersheds and Watershed Action Plans

The Forests have identified 34 priority watersheds across the region. A wide variety of work is identified in the associated Watershed Restoration Action Plans (WRAPS), including over 497,000 acres and over 200 miles of aquatic habitat improvement, over 40,000 acres of fuels treatments (mechanical and prescribed burning), 72 acres of meadow restoration, 200 miles of road decommissioning, 204 miles of road maintenance or improvement, 2,774 acres of erosion control, 112 miles of trail maintenance or realignment, and 7,500 acres of non-native plant removal. The WRAPS, their status and other information about the watershed they represent can be viewed online at the following link: <http://www.fs.fed.us/publications/watershed/>.

In FY14, accomplishments in priority watersheds included over 8,905 acres of soil and water improvements, 3,422 acres of terrestrial habitat improvements, 2,290 acres of forest vegetation improvements, 6,199 acres of noxious weed treatments, 10.6 miles of roads decommissioned, and 866 acres of non-WUI fuels treatment.

Progress towards completing restoration activities in priority watersheds varies greatly across the region. On the high side, Upper Spring Valley Wash watershed on the Kaibab NF was improved from Impaired to Functioning at Risk with funding allocated through IRR. On the down side, other forests while making progress towards completing all essential projects identified in a WRAP, which will allow watersheds to be moved to improved condition classes, are challenged with making rapid progress at current IRR funding levels. If not for the support from partners, in some cases, progress would be even slower. For example, on the Gila several partnership opportunities were utilized to accomplish wildlife habitat improvement work, with integrated acres being counted for hazardous fuels and watershed improvement.

¹ Target should match the target recorded in the Databases of Record.

² Units accomplished should match the accomplishments recorded in the Databases of Record.

B. Accomplishment Reporting – Regional Summary

Narrative: Describe the decision-making process used to formulate priorities for FY14's program of work.

1. Why and Where on the Landscape –

No forest prioritized projects the same way. Most forests prioritized projects based on some set of criteria, based either on need for restoration, reduction of wildfire risk, the Watershed Condition Framework (WCF), partner funding, NEPA-readiness, ongoing commitment from a prior year, or some combination. Projects were then prioritized for implementation according to these criteria by the FLT, an IRR interdisciplinary team, or some combination.

Several forests adopted a more tactical approach, prioritizing projects based on a cost per acre ratio to ensure meeting their WTRSHD-RSTR-ANN target, while others prioritized projects based on the ability to leverage partner dollars for implementation. Some forests adopted a more strategic framework, designating priority watersheds on the forest and concentrating project work that met their criteria in those areas. One forest identified a priority area on each district and funded projects in those priority areas.

2. Priorities, Outcomes, and Outputs –

Most forests prioritized projects differently in FY14 compared to FY12; they established a set of criteria for evaluation forest-wide based on some restoration or resource need, as well as achievement of multiple benefits within the same project footprint. Most forests said that they were more integrated in FY14 than in FY12, and that they had processes in place or being developed that allowed the forest leadership and IRR teams to focus on specific criteria. However, two forests said there was little change from FY12. One forest continued to fund in a similar fashion as in FY12, although in order to meet targets projects were not necessarily allocated to each district. Another forest had a forest-wide priority system in place that identified the fire-adapted systems most in need of restoration, and had a multi-year project pipeline in place prior to the establishment of the NFRR pilot. In terms of base program funding, most forests allocated non-discretionary costs first and then distributed additional funds based on their priority system. Some forests had evaluated their NFRR program areas and were designing future organizations more in line with the goals of the IRR program.

The expected outcomes were varied, but most forests expected to meet targets, maintain existing partnerships, and maintain the out-year planning for future projects. A few of the more integrated forests also expected to increase efficiencies by implementing projects that achieved multiple resource benefits, by taking advantage of the streamlining of the implementation process inherent in the reduction in BLIs, or both. Several forests set an expectation of increasing reported accomplishments, either through improved efficiency or through an improved understanding of the IRR reporting rules that would allow them to get credit for all the work that was accomplished.

Most forests had mixed results in meeting their expectations (generally the assigned targets). Among these forests, the reasons for not realizing the expected outcomes were varied, ranging from not being sure the complex reporting requirements and multiple databases allowed them to capture all of the work accomplished, to staff vacancies and implementation problems based on the weather. On some forests, program areas were still not fully integrated into the IRR framework, though this was improving with time. Among the forests that said they were fully successful, the consensus was that they were becoming more integrated with time.

Most forests reported some degree of realized efficiency, generally because project prioritization and hence funding decisions were more easily accomplished. This simplification was a result of prior selection of projects based on set criteria, but also due to simplified budget planning through reduction in BLIs. At least one forest

noted that greater efficiency was also realized by the consideration of multiple resource benefits in prioritization.

A few forests had mixed results in terms of realizing efficiencies. Several pointed out that the effectiveness of the IRR in accomplishing resource benefits varied by resource, with timber and fuels programs generally feeling that efficiencies were gained while watershed and wildlife programs generally felt that they were less effective in terms of meeting their resource objectives. One forest felt that the complex reporting systems and requirements negated any efficiencies gained because it potentially precluded the ability to get credit for all of the work actually accomplished.

Almost all forests met or exceeded their assigned targets and outputs. The most common assigned outputs not met were timber volume sold. The timber target wasn't achieved because of market conditions (no one to bid on the sale) or staffing vacancies. Several forests also reported that they achieved the acres treated, but not all of the acres they treated rolled up into IRR because of the reporting rules.

Some forests reported that not all priority programs were fully implemented. Some reported that objectives for wildlife, watershed, water rights and fisheries programs were not fully met due to those accomplishments being met as secondary considerations within project prioritization.

Most forests in the region felt that the projects funded in FY2014 would have been funded without the IRR authority, and several stated that the some projects were not funded in FY2014 because of the IRR authority. These forests felt that the emphasis on multiple benefits at the expense of single benefit projects did not fully consider the importance of the benefit.

The forests that did state that they funded projects that they would not have funded said this was because the focus on more integrated, multiple benefit projects allowed them to consider larger projects than would have otherwise been considered. One forest also stated that they were better able to leverage partner funds due to the efficiencies gained in funding projects.

3. Flexibility, Advantages, and Disadvantages

- a) Did the IRR Authority increase or decrease flexibility in developing integrated projects? In what way?

Most forests reported an increase in flexibility due to the single restoration budget line item. Forest priority projects tend to be funded fully, with all personnel and equipment needs being met. Working relationships between program managers and partners appears to be more relaxed and focused on common goals. Strengthening of partnerships and relationships with sister agencies have allowed blurring of land ownerships to treat prioritized watersheds with multiple fund sources (EQIP, HSP) and leveraging of available funds. NFRR increases flexibility in developing integrated targets because the overall landscape is considered as to where a project might be a best fit. The IRR authority has also increased flexibility in shifting funds to projects or resource areas that may suddenly become a top priority without having to burden several BLIs with raising the necessary dollars. Various resource programs across the Forest were able to integrate and share personnel for project implementation which added to increased funding flexibility and increased Forest efficiency.

For one Forest, IRR authority increased flexibility in two key ways. First, it provided flexibility for key specialists to opportunistically shift from work in one of the integrated program areas to another without the need to reprogram time in another BLI. Secondly, NFRR project savings could be shifted to support other integrated restoration projects that may not have been directly related to the primary purpose of the project from which the savings were realized. Another forest reports, the biggest change

under the IRR authority is that different resource managers work more closely to develop projects than they did under unique BLIs.

Not all forests agreed IRR offered improved flexibility. One noted there was no change in flexibility from previous integration methods. Another noted all project activities implemented in FY14 could have been funded under the separate BLIs.

- b) Describe the advantages and disadvantages of a single, consolidated BLI (NFRR). Has this resulted in efficiencies? If so, please describe.

Most forests agree that having one job code to charge to instead of four creates simplicity in charging fleet, personnel, and other associated costs. They feel there are savings in project design and NEPA-related costs versus having multiple small projects across the forest. High priority projects are funded first, ensuring they have every opportunity to be successful. They note more discussions seem to be occurring in an effort to identify and resolve potential conflicts between range, wildlife, watershed, fuels, and timber program objectives. Resource concerns and data collection efforts are combined, thus providing more efficiency in the planning process. Partners that share mutual goals and objectives can also pool their dollars to fund the same projects that are being funded by NFRR.

Disadvantages to implementing IRR were also noted by most forests. Most mentioned was difficulty to track project spending. A significant disadvantage noted by several forests is the fact that combining funds into one shared job code masks the decline in overall budgets and diminishes funding opportunities for specific small program areas like air quality, water rights, legacy roads and trails (CMLG), NFN3 long-term fire restoration, and fine-scale wildlife work. The amount decreases by a 5 – 10% every year, but the loss in overall funding to the combined resource areas since 2011 is approaching 30%. This is hidden in the “it’s all in there” philosophy of IRR.

- c) Did you find cost savings under IRR? If so, where and how would you quantify them?

All the forests as well as the Region found it difficult to actually quantify a cost comparison to individual BLIs. Most forests sense cost savings are taking place or are predicted to occur in the future as projects develop.

Several forests predict that there will be significant savings at least in project design and NEPA, as compared to individual resource treatment plans. More resource concerns are brought to the table, allowing for more opportunities and ideas for resolving problems. Data collection and specialist input savings are much more efficient when looking at areas together vs. individually. Partners with mutual goals can be brought to the table to speed up restoration of high priority areas. Efficiencies were gained in planning, by grouping projects with partners, saving travel time, and leveraging dollars with partners, neighbors, and sister agencies.

Cost savings are anticipated to be primarily associated with increased efficiency and cross function coordination for project implementation, i.e. fuels employees implementing wildlife habitat improvement and soils projects. There appears to be cost savings due to an economy of scale (a tangential result of the IRR authority) — by focusing our efforts on fewer, larger landscapes, we are improving efficiency. One forest simply believes the greatest savings occurred in program and project management related to having a single BLI to track and balance, rather than four.

It should be noted that at least three forests noted they didn't have any apparent cost savings. Of these, one noted they were just able to focus resources and money better.

- d) For outcomes that are not well reflected by traditional output targets, was meaningful progress made? If so, how was this determined?

The forest personnel carry out a wide variety of activities to protect the lands they manage and that support activities that get reported as targets, but the outputs of these activities themselves do not get reported as traditional targets. Of note are thousands of acres treated (seeding, mulching, etc.) following large fires in New Mexico and Arizona, treatment of acres to reduce risk of catastrophic wildfire, monitoring activities associated with management of water rights, mandatory monitoring results from biological opinions, and the time and funding that comes from partnerships. In many cases forests would be able to implement their programs without these valuable inputs.

- e) Under IRR, what advantages and disadvantages did your forest find when working internally and/or with partners? How have partners responded to IRR funding authority? To the emphasis on more integrated planning? To more focus on landscape scale restoration? Did the IRR approach increase or decrease collaborative understanding with existing/new partners?

Advantages to IRR include clear direction and focus for work on integrated resource restoration within priority landscapes, priority watersheds, and priority fine scale projects. The completion of 5-Year Plans in January 2013 has allowed Forests to streamline their prioritization process, allowing projects that meet more of the IRR objectives to rise to the top. Forests used the IRR authority, the 5-Year Plan and partnership opportunities to determine ahead of time where discretionary funding could be best spent in FY2014. This process enabled them to work with our external partners to coordinate activities at the landscape level that best fit restoration goals. While still in its infancy, the process helped Forests organize and focus priorities and identify opportunities much more efficiently into the future.

For the most part, IRR has enhanced the Forests' ability to collaborate both internally and externally. Using a more integrated approach than in the past, several program areas have found mutual benefits in integrated planning across multiple resource areas. Fuels specialists are gaining a better understanding of wildlife habitat needs, as wildlife specialists are of the fuels program. More discussions seem to be occurring in an effort to identify and resolve potential conflicts between range, wildlife, watershed, fuels and timber program objectives. Externally, the IRR approach has enhanced the Forest's ability to increase collaborative understanding with multiple new and existing partners.

The lack of "protected" funding for specific resources or activities, namely NFTM, NFVW, NFWF, NFN3 and CMLG continued to cause some consternation and mistrust internally. One specialist observed that the wildlife program is becoming more regulatory in nature, primarily existing to write biological assessments and evaluations rather than actively manage a program. From this point of view, it appears that projects that integrate restoration accomplishments will always rank higher than a project solely designed for wildlife. At issue is whether or not vegetation management projects align with high-priority wildlife (or watershed) projects. Where they do not, it is less likely that the wildlife priority will be funded.

From another point of view, because the accomplishments for NFRR are lumped together, the perception is that there is little incentive on the part of individual programs to initiate and carry out

projects. “When the program belongs to everyone, it belongs to no one,” was one comment made. The majority of wildlife and watershed accomplishments in FY 2014 were ancillary to fuels reduction projects where prescribed fire or thinning was the principal tool. IRR authority and the emphasis on working in priority watersheds do not coincide. IRR emphasizes working across landscapes to accomplish objectives that line up with hazardous fuel reductions, terrestrial habitat improvement, watershed restoration, and timber management activities. Target allocations seem to emphasize timber projects and prescribed burning projects with large acre accomplishments. The Watershed Condition Framework focuses more on water quality improvement, aquatic habitat improvement, road reductions and some vegetation improvement. This type of work is often at a fine-scale and does not result in large acre accomplishments. The essential projects within the two priority watersheds identified for the Gila NF do not include timber management projects, and very little vegetation management projects. Vegetation plays a small role in the calculation of watershed impairment using the Watershed Condition Framework Implementation Guide, thus it plays a minor part during the recommendation of projects to improve watershed condition. This leads to a conflict during the allocation of NFRR dollars as to whether to fund essential watershed projects with little associated acreages to meet target, or to fund vegetation treatments with large acreages that will meet target.

Disadvantages continue to be associated with not prioritizing initial watersheds for restoration through a process that incorporated public and community values and involvement. Future priority landscapes for planning, and prioritized watersheds for restoration, on the Forest will involve broader consideration for community and public values and economics in the decision making process.

In the past, partners have traditionally been focused on one resource or one program area such as wildlife habitat or forest health improvement. Integration of multiple resources under one BLI has not kept pace with our external dialogue with communities. It will take time to communicate the change in the way the agency prioritizes and implements project work and how to effectively incorporate community interest in outcomes which maintain resiliency or improve resource functionality.

- f) Describe any reasons that the FY14 IRR report does not reflect planned accomplishments or the work plan. Were there any challenges that caused actual accomplishments to differ from those previously outlined in the work plan?

Working in natural environments proposed accomplishments in workplans are at best guess work. That said the region was able to fulfill assigned targets as a whole if not precisely as planned. Reasons why some programs may not have achieved planned accomplishments and others exceeded are varied. For example, on one forest there was uncertainty for much of FY 14 as to whether task orders would be issued under the Phase 1 4FRI Stewardship Contract due to the contractor’s difficulty in implementing their business plan (funding their forest products plant). Due to this uncertainty, planned accomplishments and associated targets were kept at a lower level in order to avoid setting potentially unrealistic expectations. With the contract negotiation agreement and improved prospects for the new contractor’s business plan the task orders were issued late in the FY, resulting in exceeding our restoration targets. On another forest, planned burns were not able to be accomplished due to a lack of burn windows.

Issues have arisen in the IRR rollup when multiple districts are entering accomplishments into multiple databases. In particular, some range improvement work rolled up into the WTRSHD-RSTR-ANN that was not anticipated by program managers. With many fingers in the pot, it is challenging to oversee what is being reported at the last minute. It would be helpful for Regional Program managers to develop a

checklist (with examples) of what can and cannot be counted as rollup acres that can be shared to all personnel with reporting responsibilities. Even in the third year of the IRR authority, rollup accounting is still very confusing to Forest and District program managers. It continues to be a challenge with the IRR rollup calculator in that it is not transparent which projects are contributing to the rollup acres. A single reporting system is highly encouraged that provides traceability to all reported acres.

4. Addressing Challenges Associated with IRR Implementation

- a) Were there any new or continuing issues or difficulties in tracking funds and reporting accomplishments?

Forests continue to learn the ins and outs of the IRR tracking and report systems. Feedback from forests shows that it requires a good deal of collaboration on their end, as the following example illustrates:

“FY2014 funding continued to be easier to track expenditures with only one BLI. The reporting of accomplishments using many different systems continues to remain a challenge for personnel to remember what to report where. It was identified which accomplishment codes roll up into the calculator in FY2014, but it is still unclear how the IRR calculator determines which acres are the same. The Forest developed a tracking spreadsheet in FY2014 to try to eliminate some of the confusion related to reporting accomplishments. This has helped keep track of what to report where, but takes all program managers working together several times a year, with all of the databases open to make sure it is done correctly. Even with this process in place, it became apparent this year that some targets are still being incorrectly reported by others with reporting access/responsibilities. Internally, the Forest will have to continue to work at all levels to correct this.

Another difficulty that exists is that most of the Forest personnel are increasingly being funded out of NFRR. Regardless of careful tracking over the year, once fire season hits and costs savings run rampant across the Forest, it becomes more difficult to see or know where the savings are. In FY2014, it became somewhat of a best-guess scenario as to how much money was left in NFRR by August and September.”

- b) What cultural shifts are happening and what further changes should be considered to bring units in more alignment with IRR concepts?

Forests realize that a cultural shift in how we operate is needed to be more aligned with IRR concepts. Following are examples of how they see this happening:

Forest A – *Our forest, “has taken an integrated approach to project planning and implementation for years. The IRR concepts have not resulted in any new cultural dynamics.”*

Forest B – *“Traditional ways of running individual programs with current budget trends is not feasible, culturally we must come to terms with the fact we cannot do all the needed work, or provide the same level of service we once did. We must be able to explain this to our partners and somehow still develop mutually beneficial projects within the prioritized areas.”*

Forest C – *“The biggest cultural shift is the loss of independence as single program entities to a collaborative process of planning and treating priority watersheds. A cultural shift that should be considered is how to better integrate and coordinate with non-IRR programs such as recreation,*

minerals, and grazing management in the planning and implementation of activities that enhance overall watershed conditions.”

- c) How are units ensuring that priorities drive accomplishments while simultaneously meeting traditional outputs? Please give examples of successful programs.

The drivers operating and management styles of the forests in the region are reflected in their feedback provided below:

Forest A – *Our forest, “has an integrated program of work that is driven by a clearly communicated set of priorities set by forest leadership. The accomplishments reflect the priorities and also provide traditional outputs.”*

Forest B – *“The Forest priorities contributed to accomplishments and traditional outputs, however the focus was not on treating the most acres. The priority projects focused on treating the right acres (most susceptible to losing key ecosystem components). Forest priorities include projects such as Forest Plan Revision and Travel Management. Funding levels in NFRR severely curtailed the amount of traditional outputs the forest was able to produce.”*

Forest C – *“The Forest Leadership Team prioritizes projects based on their occurrence in priority landscapes or watersheds. Please give examples of successful programs. Two WRAPs nearly completed and one started since 2012.”*

Forest D – *“The Forest has identified and agreed on priority watersheds. Data collection and NEPA planning are on-going to identify needed restoration actions while still providing traditional forest products. There has been flexibility in changing the order of planning and implementation of restoration projects and priority watersheds. In addition to the watershed scale planning and implementation, critical fine scale projects are an integral part of our annual program of work to ensure our public needs and expectations are met. Examples of traditional needs met in 2014 are: stream habitat enhanced for native fisheries, acequia infrastructure NEPA, community fuel wood and small products, and livestock grazing during drought through permit administration. These products and outputs are able to be met because they are allowed for in the critical fine scale aspects of our five year restoration plans.”*

5. Other Measurable Activities Contributing to IRR

Some very important parts of the broader restoration activity that are not captured in the NFRR reporting items are road and trail maintenance and improvement, pest treatments (both native and invasive), stream crossings modified to allow for aquatic organism passage, and threatened and endangered species conservation activities. Also, the accomplishments that roll up to create the Watershed Acres Restored item only includes part of that work. The remaining work is critical to getting a full picture of the amount of restoration being done in the year. This is work funded by stewardship credits, CWKV, RTRT, Secure Rural Schools Title II grants, managed fire, prescribed fire in the WUI, and other sources. Most of the Region’s reforestation work is accomplished with Reforestation Trust Fund dollars (RTRT) which do not roll-up. Most fuels reduction work within WUI’s have restoration principles integrated into the prescriptions yet do not count as IRR.

Table 2 – Additional Activities Contributing to IRR with trackable measures.

Performance Measure	Unit of Measure	Total Units Accomplished ¹
Miles of high clearance system roads improved	Miles	159
Miles of high clearance system roads maintained	Miles	1,880
Miles of passenger car system roads improved	Miles	256
Miles of passenger car system roads maintained	Miles	3,121
Miles of system trail improved to standard	Miles	264
Miles of system trail maintained to standard	Miles	1,896
Stream crossings constructed or reconstructed for aquatic organism passage	Each	1
Acres of lake habitat restored/enhanced (unified accomplishment)	Acres	124
Acres of water/soil resources protected/maintained/improved (unified accomplishment)	Acres	201,435
Acres of terrestrial habitat restored/enhanced (unified accomplishment)	Acres	220,001
Acres of forest vegetation improved (unified accomplishment)	Acres	34,136
Acres of forestland vegetation established (unified accomplishment)	Acres	4,502
Acres of range vegetation improved (unified accomplishment)	Acres	157,505
Acres treated for noxious weeds/invasive plants on NFS lands (unified accomplishment)	Acres	17,632
Acres of hazardous fuels outside the WUI to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildland fire (unified accomplishment)	Acres	98,550
Acres of hazardous fuels within the WUI to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildland fire	Acres	99,536
T&E species for which recovery actions accomplished	Each	0
Priority acres treated for invasive species on Federal lands	Acres	0
Priority acres treated for invasive species on Coop lands	Acres	1,550
Priority acres treated for native species on Federal lands	Acres	8,572
Priority acres treated for native species on Coop lands	Acres	543

In addition to the items that we track, there are numerous activities which occur within a restoration program, funded by NFRR or by other BLIs, that contribute to the overall restoration program. The Region has actively been monitoring instream flow in order to obtain instream flow water rights. In the Southwest, water is often a limiting factor in species distribution and health. Ensuring that we maintain a minimum flow in our streams helps protect many listed fish and aquatic species, as well as protecting our riparian areas.

The Region did not track the work that was accomplished under Burned Area Emergency Response in any of our reporting databases. While some of the work may not be specifically considered restoration, it often stabilizes an area so that long term restoration work (which often would be funded by NFRR) can occur. Since this

¹ Units accomplished should match the accomplishments recorded in the Databases of Record.

provides some very important restoration benefits, it will be important to include those accomplishments, as long as they do not affect the region's target.

Monitoring work on all projects is not tracked but is an integral part of our restoration program as management is adaptive. In order to efficiently implement future restoration projects, we must monitor the effectiveness of the current ones. In addition to the implementation and effectiveness monitoring of projects, monitoring of T&E species is critical to our implementation of restoration projects, including restoration and protection of listed species. This work is not tracked in any of our databases.

6. Feedback from Partners – What, if any feedback did you receive from partners?

Feedback from partners has been nonexistent to suspicious. Several forests indicated that their partners were unaware of IRR. Positive observations from partners have indicated that IRR principles and philosophies align well with objectives of watershed restoration that grants and funding programs aspire to fund. In the middle, local representatives of The Nature Conservancy, Sky Island Alliance and the University of Arizona support IRR in concept, but are frustrated with funding levels for forests. They perceive a bias in funding in favor of timber programs and large landscape scale restoration projects elsewhere in the region. And on the not so sure about it side, a contact via a forest engineer, indicated the IRR approach decreased collaborative understanding and opportunities with existing partners with regards to CMLG. In the past CMLG project implementation allowed us to work with road maintenance partners, specifically counties and trail maintenance partners and volunteers to increase the amount of work accomplished on the ground.

Partners have increasingly asked for comprehensive listing of cleared restoration projects to consider for funding in 2014 and beyond. RO and WO levels of the agency are now involved in partnership opportunities (Coca Cola, NM Partner Opportunity Map, NM Game and Fish) to consider for investments of hundreds of thousands of dollars for planning and implementation. Some Partnerships may struggle to continue as funding streams for grant monies and other funding sources become increasingly more competitive.

C. Lessons Learned

Narrative: Each pilot region is expected to draw on experiences to date to describe lessons learned since beginning the IRR Pilot Program in 2012. Please provide narrative responses to the following questions and include specific examples:

Based on their experiences with IRR, the forests provided a broad spectrum of lessons learned. Highlights from their collective experiences are listed below.

1. Describe how IRR has affected project planning. Include information on internal and external collaboration and public engagement. Did the activities have greater impact on resource outcomes?

IRR funding has made prioritizing projects a clearer and more collaborative process. For example, HSP (Sikes Act), being such an internal and external collaborative process, identifies watershed needs in which IRR funding is able to contribute to planning and implementation.

Example 1: IRR funding allowed the Mailbox A Project (Phase 2A-Pinyon-Juniper – Grassland Restoration) (1,108 acres) on Guadalupe Ranger District - \$72,071 to be implemented in FY 2014 when HSP funding via reimbursement was not available. The IRR funding allowed for a more complete implementation in a shorter time frame across the landscape. Without the funding, the project would have taken place over a number of years.

Example 2: The addition of IRR funding for the Grindstone Mesa Wetland Restoration – Smokey Bear Ranger District resulted in a significant and highly visible project. NM Department of Game and Fish provided funds for project planning and implementation. The Forest Service NFRR funds covered all the overhead and administrative costs in order to comply with federal regulations (NEPA, ESA, and NHPA).

2. How has the way activities/projects were selected for funding changed since the IRR pilot was established?

IRR has changed the way funds are allocated on a number of forests. Examples from several different forests follow:

- Forest – A *“IRR authority changed the way activities we selected through focus on a priority watershed and treatment areas most in need of attention. An interdisciplinary approach to planning has resulted in approved projects for implementation, designed to improve watershed health. Partners can consider to fund or contribute to cleared projects. Projects with partners tend to be selected over projects without.”*
- Forest – B *“The Forest has now gone almost completely to selecting projects that can roll up into the overall Watershed Restoration target in NFRR. This includes developing a 5-year plan that precalculates which projects can roll up into the most acres. Smaller projects that cannot be counted towards multiple targets lack little chance of becoming a forest priority, or being funded unless partnership dollars are available.”*
- Forest - C *“Because the forest has been integrating watershed, vegetation, timber, fuels and wildlife treatments for several years now, the on-the-ground work priorities were formulated in a similar way as past several years.”*

3. Has the use of consolidated BLIs under IRR enabled projects to be completed more efficiently or effectively to meet the desired resource goal(s)? If so, how?

The impact the consolidated BLIs has had on forests has varied, from no impacts at all, to it being a game changer in how things get done on the forest. For example, one forest noted the consolidation of the BLIs has primarily changed which projects are getting funded. The larger, landscape scale projects have raised to the top and the smaller fine-scale projects are left to find their own supporters and benefactors. Another forest noted there is great potential to meet resource goals under the IRR authority, provided the needed internal and external communication, planning, and monitoring occur. There are tradeoffs for accomplishments that need to be considered from an interdisciplinary approach that need to be negotiated regularly. An example of this might be the money used for completion of a range vegetation improved (sagebrush chemical treatment) vs. investing money into archeological survey completion in an IDIQ contract for implementation before to fuels treatment.

4. Based on your experience, how could use of IRR authority be improved?

Most forests did not respond to this question. However for those that did, the general feeling was that IRR should be:

- More fully integrating the range management program into the IRR program
- More fully integrating the fuels program into the IRR program; i.e. WUI based fuels treatments could be included into watershed accomplishments.

5. Illustrate the pros/cons of the IRR pilot from different team member perspectives. Are perceptions different for Regional Office program managers, staff officers on the forests, or technical staff on the districts?

From a team member perspective, some of the pros include an increase in focus and direction, a greater prioritization of work, and an increase in partnerships. Cons include the impression that priority watershed projects may take away from other important work. Also, there is a thought that if

budgetary declines continue, that the same frustrations of lack of dollars for individual programs could become a reality.

6. What are the greatest benefits you have seen associated with IRR authority?
- a) Increased focus on integrated projects, reducing “Shot Gun” approach to projects, targeting areas that give us the biggest bang for the buck
 - b) Collaboration and communication among all levels of the organization and partners.
 - c) Having one BLI to track funding and accomplishments is another benefit.
 - d) Partners and potential partners see that there are minimal boundaries between programs and are more likely to want to work with us.
7. What have been the biggest challenges in implementing IRR?
- a) The integration of restoration program areas to improve National Forest lands at the priority watershed/landscape level with the added benefit of critical fine scale projects for non-landscape projects.
8. What guidance would you offer non-IRR regions in moving toward integrated resource restoration with or without IRR?

Several suggestions from the forests include:

- We have to embrace well-aligned partnerships in order to accomplish the needed magnitude of watershed restoration that needs to be done.
- Everyone has a stake in the end point and outcome; have deliberate conversations at all levels of the organization about what it means and how we can all contribute.
- Spend more time and energy making it work than fighting the change or complaining about it.

D. Planning Future Accomplishments – FY15 Accomplishments and Future NFRR Program Emphasis

1. FY15 Planned Accomplishments

Table 3 –FY15 IRR Planned Performance

Performance Measure	Unit of measure	Total Units Planned ¹
Total acres treated annually to sustain or restore watershed function and resilience	Acres	300,000
Number of watersheds move to an improved condition class	Number	1
Miles of road decommissioned	Miles	54
Volume of timber sold	ccf	250,000
Miles of stream habitat restored or enhanced	Miles	154

¹ Units planned should match the planned accomplishments recorded in the Databases of Record.

2. Based on FY14 Experiences, how would you anticipate IRR affecting FY15 planning and accomplishments?

The forests are continuing to implement integrated projects. There will not be a major difference in the amount or type of projects completed in FY15. A substantial increase in funding would result in slightly increased outputs in FY15 but most of the increase would occur in FY16 as the current year program of work is pretty well set. It is very difficult to see a large increase in one year.