

# Region 1 IRR Report, 2015

## Northern Region (R1) Overview

**Reporting Instructions:** This is the Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR) Pilot Program report template for fiscal year (FY) 2015 (FY15). This template will be used to compile information for the final FY15 IRR Report to be posted to the Forest Service’s Restoration Website. Regional responses are **due to the Washington Office by November 13, 2015**.

*If you have any questions about the template, please contact Jessica Robertson at 202-205-1626 or [jessicarobertson@fs.fed.us](mailto:jessicarobertson@fs.fed.us).*

*The Secretary of Agriculture’s vision recognizes the role of healthy forests in enhancing water resources and maintaining resiliency within a changing climate. The Forest Service is aligning the budget structure to focus landscape scale restoration across deputy areas to support and accelerate the pace of a wide spectrum of restoration and resiliency enhancing activities. This emphasis merges programs previously separated out as forest products; vegetation and watershed management; fish and wildlife habitat management; non-WUI hazardous fuels; post-fire restoration and rehabilitation; and legacy roads and trails (including road decommissioning). Regions 1, 3, and 4 were selected as part of an Agency pilot program to demonstrate the advantages of merging multiple budget line items (BLIs) into one–National Forest Resource Restoration (NFRR).*

*The regions participating in the IRR Pilot (Regions 1, 3, and 4) will report on program achievements at the end of each FY. The FY15 reports will include overall perspectives on pilot implementation of IRR to date as well as annual accomplishments.*

## **A. Accomplishment Reporting – Performance**

### **1. FY15 Accomplishments**

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

Performance Measure	Unit of measure	Target <sup>1</sup>	Total Units Accomplished <sup>2</sup>	Percent Accomplished
Acres treated annually to sustain or restore watershed function and resilience	Acres	260,000	318,000	122%
Number of watersheds moved to an improved condition class	Number	4 <sup>3</sup>	5	125%
Miles of road decommissioned	Miles	322	330	102%
Volume of timber sold	ccf	580,000	623,900	108%
Miles of stream habitat restored or enhanced	Miles	400	475	119%

**2. Priority Watersheds and Watershed Action Plans**

**a) How many priority watersheds have been identified in the Region as of FY15?**

Region 1 originally identified 26 priority watersheds in 2011, and in FY14, 13 more priority watersheds were added for a total of 39 priority watersheds. As of FY15, we have completed work in 14 of those watersheds, and no new priority watersheds were added in FY15. Region 1 still has 25 priority watersheds active with on-going work.

**b) List the FY15 accomplishments for restoration activities identified in the Watershed Restoration Action Plans. (i.e. acres/miles of aquatic habitat improvement, acres of fuel treatments (thinning), acres of fuel treatments (prescribed burning), acres of meadow restoration, miles of road maintenance, miles of road improvement, acres of erosion control, miles of trail maintenance or realignment, acres of non-native plant removal.)**

In FY15, Region 1 completed a wide variety of restoration activities identified in Watershed Restoration Action Plans. The highest priority restoration work was identified as essential projects, and the essential projects completed in FY15 improved 5,574 acres of soil & water and 40 miles of stream habitat within Region 1. These essential projects included:

- 36 miles of road decommissioning for the benefit of 18 miles of stream and 170 soil & water acres,
- 14 miles of road storage for the benefit of 1 mile of stream and 64 soil & water acres,

<sup>1</sup> Target should match the target recorded in the Databases of Record.

<sup>2</sup> Units accomplished should match the accomplishments recorded in the Databases of Record.

<sup>3</sup> Reflects corrected target. Target originally listed as 6, but Region was told target of 4.

- 3 miles of road maintenance for the benefit of 0.8 mile of stream,
- 8 culverts replaced with larger structures and 1 culvert permanently removed to reconnect 16.3 miles of fish habitat previously blocked by road-crossing structures,
- 5 acres of floodplain restoration for the benefit of 3 miles of stream,
- 1 mile of riparian planting along streams,
- 2,407 acres of non-native plant removal,
- 7 wells drilled and developed to improve livestock distribution on 3,727 acres of grazing allotments,
- 3 artesian wells were plugged to stop saline water from flowing out onto surrounding soils,
- 0.7 miles of fence installation and 1.8 miles of fence removal for reconfiguration of 1,045 acres of grazing allotments for better livestock management,
- 141 acres of grassland was thinned to control the encroachment of aspen and improve vegetation composition,
- 2 stock water dugouts were restored to establish a more natural contour and allow for more control on livestock distribution,
- 0.1 mile of streambank stabilization.

Additional restoration work was also completed in priority watersheds beyond these essential projects, but these projects are not currently identified in Watershed Restoration Action Plans or highlighted during year-end accomplishment reporting efforts.

**c) What kind of progress has your Region made in completing restoration activities leading to improved watershed conditions since IRR pilot authority was initiated in 2012? Did IRR contribute to these improvements or the process? If so, please give examples.**

IRR funding contributes to watershed restoration in high priority areas, i.e. priority watersheds. To date, Region 1 has improved watershed condition in 14 priority watersheds by completing restoration work outlined in Watershed Restoration Action Plans. In FY15, IRR funding contributed \$580,000 towards essential work in 5 priority watersheds located on the Custer-Gallatin NF, Bitterroot NF, Lolo NF, Idaho Panhandle NF, and Nez Clearwater NF. Examples of this restoration work includes decommissioning 66 miles of road, storing 60 miles of road, and re-routing ATV trail in the Upper Sleeping Child Creek watershed where the FS had recently acquired old private timber lands.

IRR is a critical piece of the financial portfolio used to complete restoration activities in Region 1.

FY15 restoration activities were completed using a combination of NFRR funding, other internal funding sources, and external partner funding. The \$580,000 of NFRR funding used in Region 1 only provided 33 percent of the total funding needed to complete these essential projects. Partners contributed an additional \$450,000 towards these essential projects, and NFRR funding was often used to match partner funds. Completing restoration work this year proved difficult in at least two cases in Region 1 where insufficient NFRR funds were available for partnership match. Loss in NFRR funding from fire transfer was the reason in one of those cases.

A few other financial tools and programs were also used to complete Region 1's essential projects, including stewardship contracting (\$400,000) and the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (\$223,000). Finally, the ability to complete restoration activities using IRR funding often depends on the forest's decisions on how to focus funding.

## **B. Accomplishment Reporting – Regional Summary**

*The intent of consolidating multiple BLIs into NFFR is to provide the Agency the flexibility to focus maintenance, enhancement, and restoration activities on priority watersheds and/or other priority locations using a more efficient, integrated approach. Regions 1, 3, and 4 were selected to participate in the IRR Pilot Program to test this hypothesis. The focus on integrating various programs complements other ongoing efforts such as the Planning Rule revision, Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration projects, travel management, and the Watershed Condition Framework, which are similarly anticipated to promote integration of various resource activities. The other regions were not authorized to consolidate BLIs but will continue to integrate programs within the existing limits of authority.*

*The following questions are designed to help evaluate whether the Pilot Regions gained flexibility, efficiencies, enhanced outcomes, and increased internal and external collaboration; and to highlight and understand any potential consequences or adverse impacts.*

**Narrative:** Describe the decision-making process used to formulate priorities for FY15's program of work.

### **1. Why and Where on the Landscape –**

- a) How did your forests prioritize funding and work under IRR in FY15?

Regionally, priorities were established by the regional forester that was consistent with the agency's strategic plan framework. Emphasis was placed on a suite of activities that were important for each Forest Supervisor to plan for and attain. Supervisors were expected to

contribute their share of the high priority work as established in work plans. Forests use a combination of previous developed tools/information sources such as watershed condition class, bull trout priority watersheds, fire regime condition class, R-1 Integrated Resource protection strategy, and program specific out-year plans. Normally, these information sources are melded at the forest level to provide an integrated program of work.

- b) Any changes in your approach from previous years?

2015 direction on establishing priority work was essentially unchanged from 2014 from the Regional office. Individual forests continue to integrated natural resource information sources to develop an integrated program of work emphasizing priority areas as possible.

## 2. Priorities, Outcomes, and Outputs –

- a) How have priorities for on-the-ground work changed since IRR pilots were initiated in 2012?

Overall regional Priorities for a program of work are established by the regional forester and communicated to forest supervisors...this includes emphasis of individual IRR performance measures that were critical to the Regional Forester. This directive approach on the “most important of the important restoration priorities” is a change from 2012, when more equal treatment of all work was directed towards the suite of IRR performance measures. Using the approach that was established in 2014, the region met all 5 individual IRR performance measures (note: **number of watersheds moved to an improved condition class** target was established in error; 4 watersheds to be improved was the target that was communicated; 5 watersheds were actually accomplished in FY 15)

- b) What were the expected outcomes (accomplishments) for FY15?

- i. Were these outcomes achieved? To what extent?

As discussed in other sections of this report – outcomes were achieved simultaneously with targeted outputs through integrated planning at the forest scale. Whereas some forests are more successful than others...all use a mechanism to produce outcomes while simultaneously accomplishing their program of work (outputs by performance measures), which include identified targets established by the region.

- ii. In terms of outcomes vs. outputs, were efficiencies realized and activities effective?

Yes, through successful annual planning, the forests program of work has contributed to efficiencies where integrated projects are planned and implemented on targeted landscapes. Some projects that may have less integration of outcomes/outputs, are still planned and implemented as part of an overall integrated program of work at the forest scale.

Work activities are monitored during implementation and most activities are effective as planned. Modifications of projects occur where needed to maximize effectiveness to meet desired outcomes. Funding through NFRR is an efficient way of completing this as identified in the program-of-work.

- iii. Were the priority programs and/or priority work (targets/outputs) achieved? If not, why?

Yes, the Region was very successful in meeting IRR targets (**note the discrepancy discussion under Question 2 above**)

- iv. Were there projects that were completed in FY15 that would not have been funded without the IRR authority?

Yes, one example is on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest of the Moose Drool Watershed Improvement project, which included 35 miles of soil and water improvement, 1 mile of stream habitat enhanced, and 22 miles of road decommissioning.

Other forests informed us that the efficiencies gained by a collapsed BLI permitted them to complete more work than if they did not have NFRR available. Forests did not have to spend time trying to barter for the correct color of money to accomplish restoration work with NFRR available.

### 3. Flexibility, Advantages, and Disadvantages

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

Similar to our response in previous years, having the IRR funding increased flexibility and integration because it avoids time spent reprogramming funds from one code to another to accommodate changing priorities. As was noted in the FY12 Summary with respect to our Roads

management, the Authority supported the latitude of decision makers to apply funding and resources to increase the magnitude of the beneficial outcomes of management activities. This approach is increasingly being used by Forests in other resource areas where appropriate (unchanged from last year's response).

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

See response to question 3a above for one recognized advantage.

One disadvantage that has been communicated by certain program managers is a trend of diminishing accomplishments of certain activities, particularly those that have relatively high unit costs and have lost a certain amount of identity through the consolidated IRR acres of watershed restored performance measure. The concern is that quality may be sacrificed for quantity gains for target attainment purposes (outputs rather than outcomes). However, there is concurrent recognition that the Forest Supervisor is establishing priorities within an overall regional framework to meet the Regional Foresters expectations.

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

The Region has not collected any quantifiable data that demonstrates cost savings solely to the IRR authority. However, considering the unified targets that include NFRR funded projects, and other mechanisms such as stewardship contracting and service contracts that are funded through retained receipts, we believe that measurable targets are attained with less appropriated funding. This would lead one to believe that the integration through the IRR authority can reduce unit costs (unchanged from last year's response)

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

The number of watersheds moved to an improved condition class reflects an outcome that has only recently been tracked through the IRR authority. This is an important accomplishment that occurs at a landscape scale that supports improved function, structure and composition of ecosystem process.

- 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?

As mentioned, IRR has increased integration of both program-of-work and individuals projects. While our stakeholders and partners expect integrated projects, they do not usually concern themselves with the actual authority, but the results that occur because of the NFRR authority. So in that respect there is an increased emphasis on integrated planning.

Internally, the relationship of the IRR authority and outcome of increased integrated projects is better understood each succeeding year. Forest Plan revision will assist in an integrated program as well.

- f) Describe any reasons that the FY15 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?

The program development process discussed above, contributes to a robust work-plan that clearly defines expectations and provides a road-map for accomplishments. Challenges frequently arise between program-of-work and implementation, but these are not necessarily intrinsic to IRR and frequently reflect Unit capacity issues. In fact, the combined BLI does have a relationship to meeting the defined work plan more efficiently, when good oversight and accountability occur.

The recent 2015 fire transfer did reduce the amount of restoration work that would have otherwise been accomplished.

#### **4. Addressing Challenges Associated with IRR Implementation**

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

No new issues were experienced in FY 2015.

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



The region has reached a “comfort level” with the IRR concept and it is now how we do business. Expectation’s requiring its use is established by the Regional Forester and re-enforced throughout regional leadership.

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

Extensive forest-wide program of work planning facilitates the accountability of meeting high priority work while meeting traditional targets. Flathead work chunk process and IPNF National Forests Integrated forest level planning are two leaders in the region of meeting both traditional targets and outcomes.

**5. Other Measurable Activities Contributing to IRR**

It is important to emphasize programs that are outside of the current IRR performance measures, but are funded through NFRR. In a short narrative, please highlight those activities that do not currently fall under an IRR performance measure, but whose performance is tracked by the Agency. Has accomplishment of these activities been affected, either positively or negatively, by IRR? If so, how?

Certain activities have experienced a decrease in accomplishment since the inception of IRR. These include programs that traditionally have a higher unit costs that other activities funded by NFRR. This includes Acres of forestland vegetation improved and established; and acres of hazardous fuels outside the WUI.

In addition to the narrative, please list those activities and their FY 15 accomplishments. Below is a list of suggested activities. Add rows to the table below, as necessary, to accommodate all activities.

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

Performance Measure	Unit of Measure	Total Units Accomplished <sup>1</sup>
Miles of high clearance system roads improved	Miles	257.7
Miles of high clearance system roads maintained	Miles	1068.7
Miles of passenger car system roads improved	Miles	181.6
Miles of passenger car system roads maintained	Miles	3915.7
Miles of system trail improved to standard	Miles	413.4
Miles of system trail maintained to standard	Miles	11882.5

<sup>1</sup> Units accomplished should match the accomplishments recorded in the Databases of Record.

Performance Measure	Unit of Measure	Total Units Accomplished <sup>1</sup>
Stream crossings constructed or reconstructed for aquatic organism passage	Each	22
Acres of lake habitat restored/enhanced (unified accomplishment)	Acres	3633.9
Acres of water/soil resources protected/maintained/improved (unified accomplishment)	Acres	29186.1
Acres of terrestrial habitat restored/enhanced (unified accomplishment)	Acres	134771.5
Acres of forest vegetation improved (unified accomplishment)	Acres	13804.5
Acres of forestland vegetation established (unified accomplishment)	Acres	23046
Acres of range vegetation improved (unified accomplishment)	Acres	121060.6
Acres treated for noxious weeds/invasive plants on NFS lands (unified accomplishment)	Acres	67988
Acres of hazardous fuels outside the WUI to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildland fire (unified accomplishment)	Acres	155785

In a short narrative, please highlight those activities that do not currently fall under an IRR performance measure, and whose performance is **not tracked** by the Agency (i.e. water rights acquisition, Instream flows, air quality monitoring, water yield monitoring, pre-NEPA survey work to support Range NEPA grazing decisions, implementation of Best Management Practices, T&E occurrences, vegetation conditions, biological diversity, etc.) Has accomplishment of these activities been affected, either positively or negatively, by IRR? If so, how?

Activities that are not tracked through IRR performance measure are accomplished through (1) funding-off-the-top (water rights, certain aspects of the genetics program are examples), (2) funded as needed at the forest level to complete activities that will be included in IRR performance measures at a later date (this would include the various work needed to support NEPA decisions and necessary monitoring of project or larger-scale forest plan Monitoring activities). Region/Forests must account for these activities during the planning and development of work; in many cases this has not changed with the implementation of IRR since many of the activities were not tracked before the implementation of IRR in 2012. Therefore, in most cases, IRR implementation has had a neutral effect on activities that are not being tracked in IRR.

However, since the IRR authority was designed to improve and increase the amount of integrated restoration projects, the increased attention of desired outcomes (forest resiliency is one example) has improved since 2012.

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

Previous years the region has reported skepticism among various and diverse stake holders. Most partners do not bother to become familiar with the IRR authority...they expect results including well-integrated projects. Therefore, the feedback is mostly around degree that stakeholders believe a project is well integrated and meets desired outcomes.

**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:***

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 provides incentives for integration, including the ability to plan, prepare and complete projects with a single BLI that can produce multiple outcomes as well as planned outputs. The integration of multiple program areas to produce desired outcomes requires a higher degree of internal communication among forest staff to be the most successful. Frequent conversation with local stakeholders provides additional information and emphasis for integration. This is recognized as a necessary “front-end loading” investment that would be an additional cost and time commitment had we not used collaborative efforts.

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

Projects that provide multiple outcomes to meet high priority restoration objectives are normally the leaders of an individual forest program. Where IRR is most successful, the planning of the program of work can be intensive and require investment from multiple forest staff resources to achieve the desired integrated program forest program. It is also recognized that not all high priority projects are necessarily well integrated for identified reasons (some fire salvage projects as an example).

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?

Same as we have previously responded in other questions, the combined BLI permits (1) more efficient development of program of work to meet forest/Regional priorities and (2) reduce administrative needs for bartering of different BLI's to complete priority work.

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

Last year we reported the difficulty experienced in the separation of the fuels program between NFRR and WFHF BLI's; this concern remains and is repeated below:

*The separation of the fuels program between NFRR and WFHF should be examined. This includes program direction on where NFRR and WFHF can be used, and the inclusion of Fuels – non-WUI in the Watershed Acres Restored Annually. Managing the fuels program between two different BL's, and two hard target measures (WUI-Fuels and FP-Fuels –ALL) is challenging when the Non-WUI portion is in the Watershed Restored performance measure.*

Additionally, the melding of legacy roads BLI has reduced the effectiveness of accomplishing high priority restoration work that was previously associated with this BLI.

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?

The region still experiences differences of opinion and understanding of the effectiveness of IRR to the degree that it enhances integration. However, this has diminished since the 2012 inception. Also, the loss of CMLG is held up as an example of a powerful restoration BLI that has had reduced effectiveness under IRR.

6. What are the greatest benefits you have seen associated with IRR authority?

Benefits include an integrated program-of-work, supported by well planned projects that can be articulated successfully in providing the desired outcomes while meeting the targeted outputs.

7. What have been the biggest challenges in implementing IRR?

Commitment of staff time to develop project and program integration that address both priority landscapes and smaller-scale priorities appears to be a consistent challenge to the Forests – same as FY 14.

8. What guidance would you offer non-IRR regions in moving toward integrated resource restoration with or without IRR?

When confronted with the potential loss of the IRR pilot authority, our Regional Forester has continued to emphasize that there is “no turning back” and that the region/forests would operate the same if we went back to the multiple BLI’s that formed NFRR. The main idea is that the region will continue to look at ways to optimize integration should we lose authority.

**D. Planning Future Accomplishments – FY16 Accomplishments and Future NFRR Program Emphasis**

**1. FY16 Planned Accomplishments**

**Table 3 –FY16 IRR Planned Performance**

Performance Measure	Unit of measure	Total Units Planned <sup>1</sup>
Total acres treated annually to sustain or restore watershed function and resilience	Acres	358,095
Number of watersheds move to an improved condition class	Number	2
Miles of road decommissioned	Miles	274
Volume of timber sold	ccf	611,140
Miles of stream habitat restored or enhanced	Miles	427

**2. Based on FY15 Experiences, how would you anticipate IRR affecting FY16 planning and accomplishments?**

Our responses throughout this report is reflective on how we do business in the Region, in that the IRR concept is thoroughly ingrained in our Program of Work, and is continually re-enforced at regional leadership meetings on how we conduct work as a region to develop and complete high priority restoration work.

<sup>1</sup> Units planned should match the planned accomplishments recorded in the Databases of Record.