

**FOREST SERVICE IMPLEMENTATION DURING FY 2003 OF THE
STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTING AUTHORITY PROVIDED BY
SECTION 323 OF P.L. 108-7**

A Report to the Appropriations Committees of the U.S. House and Senate

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PREFACE

Section 323 of P.L. 108-7, the Consolidated Appropriations Resolution of FY 2003, grants the Forest Service (FS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) authority until September 30, 2013, to enter into stewardship contracting projects with private persons or public or private entities, by contract or agreement, to perform services to achieve land management goals for the national forests or public lands that meet local and rural community needs. This legislation expands stewardship contracting authority that Congress had previously provided, through passage of Section 347 of the Omnibus Consolidated and Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act, 1999 and subsequent amendments. One of the requirements of Section 323, contained in subsection (g), is that the FS and BLM must report annually to the Appropriations Committees of the U.S. House and Senate on: 1) the status of development, execution, and administration of agreements or contracts; 2) the specific accomplishments that have resulted; and 3) the role of local communities in development of agreements or contract plans. The purpose of this report is to satisfy this requirement for FY 2003.

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Background and Introduction

Section 323 of P.L. 108-7, the Consolidated Appropriations Resolution of FY 2003, grants the Forest Service (FS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) authority until September 30, 2013, to enter into stewardship contracting projects with private persons or public or private entities, by contract or agreement, to perform services to achieve land management goals for the national forests or public lands that meet local and rural community needs. While the statute doesn't explicitly define stewardship contracting, by implication the tool entails use of one or more of the special authorities provided for in the law. These special authorities include the ability to:

- Offset the value of goods (i.e., timber) for services.
- Retain and reinvest receipts in the same, or another, stewardship contracting project.
- Award contracts and agreements that involve harvest of commercial timber on a "best value" basis.
- Designate timber for cutting by description or prescription.
- Enter into multiyear contracts for services exceeding 5 years but not more than ten years duration.¹

Section 323 expands limited stewardship contracting authority that Congress had previously provided to only the FS.² The language of Section 323 is largely the same as the legislative language that authorized the stewardship contracting pilots except that the new law:

- Applies to the BLM as well as the FS.
- Extends authority through September 30, 2013.
- Does not limit the number of stewardship contracting projects that can be undertaken.
- Drops prior language suggesting a focus on the harvest of "noncommercial" timber.
- Allows the responsible Secretary to designate a contracting officer.
- Substitutes "programmatic" for "project-level" monitoring.

¹ There are two additional authorities that apply only to the USDA Forest Service. These authorities provide for:

- Non-USDA supervision of marking and harvesting of timber
- Does not require advertising of timber sale contracts valued at over \$10,000

² The specific pieces of legislation that provided the authority for the Forest Service's stewardship contracting pilots were:

- Section 347 of the Omnibus Consolidated and Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act, 1999 – i.e., P.L. 105-277. Authorized the FS to enter into up to 28 stewardship contracts.
- Section 341 of the FY 2000 Appropriations Act for Interior and Related Agencies – i.e., P.L. 106-113. Clarified certain provisions of Section 347.
- Section 338 of the FY 2001 Appropriations Act for Interior and Related Agencies – i.e., P.L. 106-291. Authorized an additional 28 stewardship contracting projects, bringing the total to 56.
- Section 332 of the FY 2002 Appropriations Act for Interior and Related Agencies – i.e., P.L. 107-63. Authorized an additional 28 stewardship contracting projects, bringing the total to 84.

While this report focuses on the activities and accomplishments of the FS in FY 2003, it also highlights strides made by the FS and BLM to work closely together in developing policy and direction in stewardship contracting under Section 323. While much of the past year was devoted to formulating and finalizing necessary policies and procedures, and providing appropriate direction to field units – both agencies did approve a number projects for implementation under Section 323 during FY 2003. The final section of this report identifies and provides information concerning the projects that were approved and the contracts that were awarded in FY 2003.

Implementation of Legislation

Activities that the FS was engaged in during FY 2003 pursuant to implementing Section 323 were directed towards attainment of essentially two ends. These ends were: 1) to formulate, finalize, and communicate essential policy direction to field units; and 2) to determine the most effective way to comply with the statutory requirement for “programmatic” multiparty monitoring and evaluation. Important activities carried-out towards attainment of each of these ends are highlighted below.

Response to Initial External Stakeholder Concerns

On February 24, 2003 Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman and Secretary of Interior Gale Norton sent a joint letter to the members of the Western Governors Association.³ In this letter the two Secretaries stressed the following points:

- Collaboration with the states and local communities is an integral part of stewardship contracting
- Stewardship contracting would be a valuable tool to help achieve the objectives of the Healthy Forests Initiative and National Fire Plan
- Stewardship contracting would help the FS and BLM work with local communities to create jobs and develop new businesses to boost struggling rural economies
- States, counties, local communities and interested stakeholders would be involved in a public process to provide input on how to implement stewardship contracting.

Shortly after issuance of the Secretaries’ letter, the FS and BLM jointly issued a press release describing the agencies’ vision and principles for stewardship contracting.⁴ Major points in the press release of April 3, 2003 included the following:

³ The Secretaries’ letter is available at the following URL – http://www.fs.fed.us/forestmanagement/ftp/documents/stewardship-new-authority/sec_letters_PL108_7.pdf.

⁴ The joint press release is available at the following URL – http://www.fs.fed.us/forestmanagement/ftp/documents/stewardship-new-authority/stewardship_contracting_talking_points.pdf

- All applicable environmental laws – e.g., Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, and Clean Air Act – would be adhered to during project implementation
- All projects would be consistent with the direction in applicable agency land use plans
- All projects would follow management policies relating to existing special designations – e.g., Wilderness and Inventoried Roadless Areas
- All projects would be subject to agency appeal and dispute resolution procedures
- The agency would approve project design and maintain project control
- The sale of by-products and other materials would be secondary to attaining the restoration goals of the area.

The two agencies subsequently contracted with the Pinchot Institute for Conservation to conduct a “National Outreach Forum” to gather comments from interested parties on implementing Section 323, and promote a clearer understanding of stewardship contracting. The ideas that surfaced at this Forum – which was held in Washington, DC on April 15, 2003 – were reviewed by the agencies to help draft “Interim Guidelines” for the implementation of stewardship contracting. These guidelines and related developments are discussed in the next subsection.

Guidelines Developed

The FS and BLM jointly published “Interim Guidelines” for the implementation of Section 323 in the *Federal Register* on June 27, 2003.⁵ These guidelines reaffirmed many of the principles that the agencies articulated in their prior “Vision” and “Principles” statement – e.g., that deriving revenue from the sale of by-products and other materials was a secondary objective to the restoration goals; that an open, collaborative process was to be used in implementing stewardship contracting projects; that projects would comply with applicable environmental laws and regulations; and that the agencies were to maintain oversight and control of operations – but a number of additional points of a somewhat more technical nature were also addressed. To illustrate, the “Interim Guidelines” indicated that:

- Both agencies could use existing contract or assistance instruments to implement Section 323 projects, or develop new contracting mechanisms
- When awarding contracts on a “best value” basis, in addition to cost or price – both agencies could consider such criteria as a contractor’s past performance, work quality, and experience, and the potential benefits to local and rural community needs

⁵ The *Federal Register* Notice is available at the following URL – <http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/14mar20010800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2003/pdf/03-16348.pdf>

- Both agencies could require contractors to post performance and payment bonds to protect the government's interests
- The project managers were to separately track the value of any goods being sold and the value of any services being received for Section 323 projects
- Excess offsets or residual receipts were to be used for on-the-ground project implementation, not for such things as overhead, administrative, or indirect costs
- Full and open competition was to remain the "standard operating procedure" for both agencies and anything less than full and open competition was to be documented and submitted to the Regional Forester.

The June 27, 2003 *Federal Register* Notice gave interested parties until July 28, 2003 to submit comments on the "Interim Guidelines." The 62 comments that were received were analyzed and a content analysis report was prepared. The 62 comments can be downloaded from the agency's website at:

http://www.fs.fed.us/forestmanagement/projects/stewardship/new-authority/docs/stewardship_letters_processed.pdf.

In addition, the Forest Service sent the draft copy of the Interim Directive for implementing stewardship contracting to the field offices for comment on October 3, 2003. The agency reviewed the lessons learned from the pilot program, the listening sessions, and the comments from the field, other agencies, and the public before issuing the interim directive guidance.

On January 15, 2004 the FS and BLM publicly announced that they were distributing more detailed guidance materials to their respective field units. In addition to the initial press release, the FS and the BLM each published a Notice in the *Federal Register* on January 28, 2004, that advised readers that each agency had issued guidance on stewardship contracting.⁶ The notices explained how interested parties could obtain a copy of the guidance. The Forest Service's Interim Directive was distributed to field units as an amendment to the agency's Renewable Resources Handbook (FSH 2409.19). The amendment takes the form of a new chapter – i.e., Chapter 60, Stewardship Contracting.⁷ The Interim Directive provides administrative direction to guide FS employees on planning, implementing, and monitoring stewardship contracting projects.

⁶ The *Federal Register* Notice of issuance of the Forest Service's interim directive is available at the following URL –

<http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/14mar20010800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2004/pdf/04-1791.pdf>

⁷ The Forest Service's Interim Directive is available at the following URL –

http://www.fs.fed.us/im/directives/fsh/2409.19/id_2409.19-2004-1.doc

Personnel Training

The agency conducted national training on implementing stewardship contracting under the new authority on June 24-26, 2003 in Spokane, Washington, and on July 8-10, 2003 in Charleston, South Carolina. The purpose was to provide training to regional stewardship coordinators and staff who would subsequently train personnel implementing stewardship contracting on the national forests. The training covered the agency's policy and contracting mechanisms for implementing stewardship contracting, and included a field trip to an active project. At both training sessions, the agency invited Carol Daly, the facilitator for the Inland Northwest Regional Team to share her experiences with the pilot program on effective collaboration and stewardship contracting. Also participating in the training were personnel from the Small Business Administration, Government Accountability Office, and Bureau of Land Management.

Subsequently, the regions have provided training to the forests on how to implement stewardship contracting. Regions 1, 2 and 10 were the first to offer training in FY 2003 with other regions following suit in FY 2004.

Multiparty Monitoring

As previously noted, one of the important differences between Section 323 of P.L. 108-7 and the legislation that authorized the Forest Service's stewardship contracting pilots is that Section 323 requires "programmatic," not "project-level," multiparty monitoring and evaluation. This legislative change created a need to develop and implement a monitoring process that, while meeting the intent of Congress, would be efficient and effective. The FS and BLM worked together in deciding how best to comply with this legislative requirement.

One of the challenges for the FS was to interface monitoring and evaluation of its stewardship pilots with monitoring and evaluation of the stewardship contracting projects initiated under the new authority in Section 323. The Forest Service has determined it would make the transition as follows:

- Projects that had completed NEPA were required to remain under the process created for the stewardship pilots – i.e., project-level monitoring.
- Projects that had not progressed to the point of beginning NEPA were required to be rolled into the process created to comply with Section 323 – i.e., programmatic monitoring.
- Projects that had begun but not completed NEPA, could continue project-level monitoring or could be rolled into programmatic monitoring, at the Regional Offices' discretion.

A number of factors influenced the agency's decision to pursue the preceding policy. One key factor was that the public listening sessions held shortly after enactment of Section 323 indicated considerable external support for continued project-level monitoring. Another important consideration was that the agency did not want to "break faith" with the various external stakeholder groups who had invested themselves in the "project-level" monitoring process being used in connection with the pilots. Finally, a third factor of some significance was the agency's belief that there were still important lessons to be learned from project-level monitoring of the pilots – and that these lessons, through an adaptive management process, could potentially prove useful in its implementation of Section 323. Although some projects initiated under the pilot program will be moved to programmatic monitoring in FY 2004, those projects are included in the FY 2003 Pinchot Institute report to Congress.

Subsection (g) of Section 323 provides agency direction to implement programmatic multiparty monitoring and evaluation. This same subsection also describes the types of information that both agencies are responsible for reporting to Congress each year. Specifically, the legislative language stipulates that the agencies will report annually on: 1) the status of development, execution, and administration of agreements or contracts; 2) the specific accomplishments that have resulted; and 3) the role of local communities in development of agreements or contract plans. The FS, in planning how it might best meet these responsibilities, and building upon the knowledge it has gained through monitoring of the stewardship pilots, concluded that the most effective approach would entail performing tasks 1 and 2 internally while simultaneously having task 3 performed externally by a contractor. The BLM agreed with this approach. As a result of the above developments, a number of activities have been taking place. The two agencies are working to ensure that they will track and report to Congress similar sorts of information. Details concerning the specific guidance that each agency has provided to its field units can be found in their respective directives.

The two agencies have also developed a Request for Proposal (RFP) to solicit bids from potential contractors interested in carrying out monitoring of task 3, the role of local communities in development of agreement or contract plans. We anticipate that multiparty programmatic monitoring under Section 323 will be operational for the FY 2005 Report to Congress. Multiparty project level monitoring did occur in the pilot projects and is documented in the FY 2003 Pinchot Institute for Conservation report to Congress.

Projects Approved by Regional Foresters in FY 2003

During FY 2003, the Regional Foresters approved nine stewardship contracting projects for implementation under the authority provided by Section 323 of P.L. 108-7. These projects were submitted by the Forest Supervisors. The subsections that follow provide information pertaining to: 1) the name and location of these projects; 2) the resource management objectives; 3) the size of the treatment areas and nature of treatments being applied; and 4) the probable involvement of collaborators and cooperators.

Name and Location of Approved Projects

Table (1) identifies the nine projects approved for implementation under Section 323 in FY 2003 and describes where they are located; the table also indicates the date each project was approved.

Table (1): Listing of stewardship contracting projects approved for implementation under Section 323 of P.L. 108-7 in FY 2003.

Project Name	Region	State	Forest	Ranger District	Date Approved
Spring Crk/Dry Crk Landscape Improvement	02	Colorado	GMUG	Ouray	09/03/03
Chadron Creek Hazardous Fuels	02	Nebraska	Nebraska	Pine Ridge	09/03/03
Switchback	02	Wyoming	Bighorn	Tongue	09/03/03
Woodrock	02	Wyoming	Bighorn	Tongue	09/03/03
Bench	02	Wyoming	Bighorn	Paintrock	09/03/03
Balm of Gilead	02	Wyoming	Black Hills	Bearlodge	09/03/03
Sugarloaf Fuel Reduction	02	Colorado	Arapaho-Roosevelt	Boulder	09/23/03
Jemez Campgrounds Forest Health	03	New Mexico	Santa Fe	Jemez	08/27/03
Alpine WUI-1	03	Arizona	Apache-Sitgreaves	Alpine	08/29/03

As Table (1) indicates, only two Regions approved Section 323 projects before September 30, 2003. The Rocky Mountain Region (R2) approved a total of seven projects involving four national forests. The Southwestern Region (R3) approved a total of two projects involving two national forests. Since October 1, 2003 other projects have been approved within these as well as other Regions, but information concerning these additional projects will be provided in the FY 2004 report to Congress.

Objectives of Approved Projects

The nine Section 323 projects that were approved in FY 2003 are intended to address a fairly wide array of resource management objectives. Without losing much specificity, these objectives may be lumped into the following groupings:

- 1) Reduce hazardous fuels within “wildland urban interface” (WUI) areas
- 2) Reduce hazardous fuels outside of WUI areas
- 3) Reduce insect and disease risks
- 4) Improve wildlife habitat, including habitat for threatened, endangered and sensitive species
- 5) Control invasive weeds

6) Other.⁸

Using the groupings established above, Table (2) describes the resource management objectives of the Section 323 projects approved in FY 2003. In general, the basic objective of almost all of these projects is to improve ecosystem/watershed health and functioning. Under this broader edict of ecosystem management, fuels reduction is often the key objective behind many of these projects – with the need to treat areas in the “wildland urban interface” oftentimes being given top priority. Efforts to improve wildlife habitat or control invasive weeds are also being stressed.

Table (2): Objectives of stewardship contracting projects approved for implementation under Section 323 of P.L. 108-7 in FY 2003.

Project Name	Key Resource Management Objectives
Spring Crk/Dry Crk Landscape Improvement	1, 3, 4 & 6
Chadron Creek Hazardous Fuels	1
Switchback	2 & 3
Woodrock	2, 3, 4, 5 & 6
Bench	1, 2, 3, 4 & 6
Balm of Gilead	2, 4 & 6
Sugarloaf Fuel Reduction	1
Jemez Campgrounds Forest Health	6
Alpine WUI-1	1, 3 & 4

Size and Proposed Treatments for Approved Projects

The Section 323 projects that were approved in FY 2003 vary in size and will result in applying a number of different land management treatments on the ground. Sometimes a sequence of treatments will be applied to a given area – e.g., commercial thinning followed by prescribed (i.e., broadcast) burning. Without losing much specificity, the treatments that will be applied in connection with the approved projects may be lumped into the following groupings:

- 1) Precommercial thinning
- 2) Commercial thinning
- 3) Salvage harvesting
- 4) Prescribed (broadcast) burning
- 5) Noxious weed control
- 6) Native plant seeding.

⁸ Includes objectives such as the following: salvage existing mortality; reconstruct and/or decommission existing roads; re-treat areas where prior treatments were ineffective; and/or improve recreation resources and infrastructure.

7) Other.⁹

Table (3) provides some baseline data about the size of the nine Section 323 projects approved in FY 2003, and also identifies the treatments that are to be carried-out in connection with each project.

Table (3): Size and nature of treatments to be applied in connection with stewardship contracting projects approved for implementation under Section 323 of P.L. 108-7 in FY 2003.

Project Name	Treatment Area (acres)	Planned Treatments
Spring Crk/Dry Crk Landscape Improvement	51,140	1, 2, 4, 5, 6 & 7
Chadron Creek Hazardous Fuels	2,831	1, 2 & 4
Switchback	125	1, 2, 3, 4 & 5
Woodrock	1,800	1, 2, 4, 5 & 7
Bench	1,000	1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 7
Balm of Gilead	409	1, 2 & 7
Sugarloaf Fuel Reduction	5,400	1, 2 & 4
Jemez Campgrounds Forest Health	380	1, 2 & 7
Alpine WUI-1	523	1, 3 & 7

As Table (3) indicates, the largest of the approved projects has the potential to treat 51,140 acres and the smallest 125 acres. Regarding the largest project, current plans are to proceed with implementation in stages. Initially, only 911 acres are to be treated. If this limited application of stewardship contracting is judged to be successful, the scope of the project will be expanded.

Regarding the treatments that are to be applied in connection with the approved projects, as shown in Table (3) precommercial thinning, commercial thinning, and prescribed (i.e., broadcast) burning will be the most commonly employed practices. Fuels reduction is a key objective for most of the approved projects.

Collaborator/Cooperator Involvement in Approved Projects

Since early concept inception, an important dimension of stewardship contracting has been a heightened emphasis on collaboration and cooperation. Collaborators and cooperators may include other federal agencies, state agencies, tribal governments, industry and trade association groups, environmental and conservation groups, other NGOs, and interested community members. These various collaborators and cooperators

⁹ Includes treatments/practices such as roller chopping, hydro-axing and brush mowing; installing watershed improvement structures; creating ponds for wildlife and/or livestock; and reconstructing or decommissioning roads.

can be involved in stewardship contracting projects in a variety of different capacities. These include:

- 1) Help identify high-priority project (i.e., treatment) areas
- 2) Help define treatments to be applied
- 3) Help analyze potential effects of project implementation
- 4) Help coordinate treatments on adjacent lands
- 5) Contribute labor and/or materials towards project implementation
- 6) Help educate public as to the need for proposed treatments.

For each of the Section 323 projects approved in FY 2003, Table (4) identifies confirmed and/or probable collaborators/cooperators – and where possible, indicates how they are expected to contribute to the implementation of each project.

Table (4): Collaboration/cooperation anticipated in connection with the stewardship contracting projects approved for implementation under Section 323 of P.L. 108-7 in FY 2003.

Project Name	Confirmed or Probable Collaborators/Cooperators	Likely Roles
Spring Crk/Dry Crk Landscape Improvement	BLM, CO Div. Of Wildlife & Public Lands Partnership.	1, 2 & 3
Chadron Creek Hazardous Fuels	Chadron State Park, NE State For. Serv. & private landowners.	2 & 4
Switchback	WY Department of Transportation & local fire department	1, 2, 3 & 6
Woodrock	WY Dept. of Parks & Cultural Resources & local ATV clubs.	5 & 6
Bench	WY Dept. of Parks & Cultural Resources, WY Fish & Game.	1, 2 & 6
Balm of Gilead	Crook County RAC & Willow Springs Allotment permittees.	2 & 5
Sugarloaf Fuel Reduction	CO For. Serv., Boulder County & Mountain Meadow HOA.	6
Jemez Campgrounds Forest Health	Jemez Pueblo, Wallatowa Woodlands, & interested locals.	3 & 6
Alpine WUI-1	Alpine Action Alliance, Chapache Homeowners Association, & other adjacent private landowners, Eastern AZ Counties RAC.	2, 4, & 6

As Table (4) indicates, for the nine Section 323 projects approved in FY 2003, most efforts relating to collaboration and/or cooperation have been focused on various state and local organizations, or towards adjacent private landowners to help define the treatments to be applied on project areas and to help educate as to the need for proposed treatments. However, in some instances collaborators/cooperators will be more actively involved – either helping to coordinate treatments across mixed ownerships, or contributing labor and/or materials for project implementation.

Stewardship Contracts Awarded in FY 2003

During FY 2003, a total of fifty stewardship contracts and agreements were awarded to contractors treating 14,119 acres. Thirteen contracts and agreements were awarded under the pilot legislation prior to passage of Section 323 on February 20, 2003. Thirty six of the contracts and agreements were projects initiated as pilots but awarded under Section 323. Contract and agreement information on the projects initiated as pilots is found in the FY 2003 Pinchot Institute report to Congress. One contract was awarded under Section 323 that was not initiated as a pilot.

An example of a current contract awarded under Section 323 is the Alpine WUI-1 project awarded in September 2003. Information is provided on this project to show the type of activity conducted under the new authority. The Alpine WUI-1 stewardship project is located on the Alpine Ranger District, Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests in east-central Arizona. The primary resource objective for the Alpine WUI-1 contract is to reduce the amount of standing live and dead fuels in the wildland urban interface adjacent to the town of Alpine, Arizona (Table 2). A total of 30 private land parcels directly adjoin this project, with an additional 99 private parcels indirectly protected on the west side of Alpine, including one residential subdivision.

The project was designed to significantly reduce ladder fuels and break up the main forest canopy to prevent the spread of wildfire. The contract is set up to create a more fire-defensible space by treating standing live and dead conifer trees from 3 feet tall to 20.9 inches in diameter. Another key resource objective addressed by this project is protection of the Mexican Spotted Owl. Indirect benefits from reduction of overcrowded trees include improved forest health to better withstand drought and bark beetle attacks, and improved riparian habitat along six streams and seven springs.

The environmental analysis was completed in May 2002. The field layout and contract preparation was completed in June 2003, and the performance-based service contract was awarded as a small business set-aside on September 12, 2003 to a new contractor from Pinetop, Arizona, White Mountain Forestry Company. The contract was awarded competitively on a "best value" basis. In this case, the sawtimber removed is helping to offset the cost of treating the smaller diameter material, thereby accomplishing a complete thinning in one entry. Completing the thinning in one entry also minimizes undesirable resource impacts such as soil compaction and equipment damage to standing trees.

The contractor has completed thinning operations to date on 177 of the 523 acres. Service work performed by this contract includes: tree thinning, salvage removal and slash cleanup; careful protection of save trees and streams/springs/soils from logging damage; removal of dead trees posing fire and safety hazards next to private lands and key fire-fighting roads; and minor road improvements to accommodate larger vehicles for slash hauling and fire-fighting. To help supplement USFS appropriations, the Forest Supervisor applied for and was awarded \$50,000 in June 2003 from the Eastern Arizona Counties and Regional Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) who found this project

worthy of funding. This committee is comprised of local and county municipal leaders, business/industry, and members of environmental groups.

At public meetings, the Alpine District Ranger invited landowners to work with the Forest Service in designating cut-versus-save trees to accomplish project objectives on the National Forest land immediately adjacent to their private properties. Numerous property owners expressed interest, so a district forester spent several weekdays and weekends teaching them about wildfire hazards and tree health, as well as natural resource protections and urban utility line protections included in the contract. This experience left those citizens better able to understand what must be done to create a fire-defensible space next to town. As a direct result, nine landowners next to this project have contracted with local companies to perform fuel-reduction thinning on their lots, with more choosing to follow this lead.

Additionally, all affected landowners are kept informed with regular update letters telling them about project progress, most current contract operations, noise and disturbances to expect, areas to avoid for safety, etc. Presentations made to annual homeowners association meetings keep the entire subdivision informed as well. Such collaboration is helping the Alpine District regain the public trust, where tree thinning and logging practices are concerned. Completed portions of this contract area are already serving as a guided demonstration area for interested political leaders, environmentalists, and local citizens. Most responses from visitors to the area thus far have been positive.

The same collaborative efforts are underway for eight additional project areas in the Alpine WUI that will be treated as portions of the proposed White Mountain Stewardship Contract.¹⁰

Summary

Since legislation was enacted in February 2003, the FS and BLM jointly 1) issued a press release on April 3, 2003 describing the agencies' vision and principles for stewardship contracting; 2) contracted with the Pinchot Institute for Conservation to hold a "National Outreach Forum" on April 15, 2003 to gather comments on how best to implement Section 323; 3) published "Interim Guidelines" for implementation of Section 323 in the Federal Register on June 27, 2003, and requested public comments on the guidelines; and 4) issued a press release on January 15, 2004 announcing that the agencies were releasing guidelines to implement stewardship contracting.

The FS reviewed the lessons learned from the pilot program, the listening sessions, and comments from the field, other agencies, and the public before issuing the agency's

¹⁰ The Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests currently maintain a website on the White Mountain Stewardship Project at:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/asnf/stewardship/>.

A power point presentation on the project is also available at the following URL:

http://www.fs.fed.us/forestmanagement/projects/stewardship/new-authority/docs/WhiteMountainStewardshipSW2004_web.pdf

interim directive guidance. A notice that the FS had issued the interim directive to provide guidance on stewardship contracting was published in the Federal Register on January 28, 2004.

The FS held two national training courses on implementing stewardship contracting in June and July 2003 and invited participation from the Small Business Administration, Government Accountability Office, and the Bureau of Land Management. The FS and BLM have jointly developed a Request for Proposal to solicit bids from a contractor to implement a programmatic multiparty process for gathering information on the role of local communities under Section 323 in FY 2005. The FS will continue to work with the BLM in order to implement stewardship contracting in a similar fashion.

The Regional Foresters approved nine projects for implementation under Section 323 in FY 2003. In addition, the FS awarded 50 contracts and agreements in FY 2003 of which 13 were initiated and awarded under the pilot authority, 36 were initiated as pilots but awarded after passage of Section 323, and 1 contract which was initiated and awarded under Section 323. The agency anticipates that many new projects will be initiated using stewardship contracting.

Congress has provided an important tool for the agency to accomplish forest restoration. Additionally, more land base is being treated because of the efficiencies and new authorities granted under this authorization. Stewardship contracting is improving our efficiency by allowing the agency to bundle contracts and treat vegetation at a landscape scale. We are finding that successful stewardship projects are the direct result of good community collaboration. Successes are being shared on our national website and at regional training sessions on stewardship contracting.