

CHAPTER 6

THE LIFE AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF RESOURCE ADVISORY COMMITTEES: FINDINGS FROM THE CASES

This chapter is based primarily on findings from the 15 Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) case studies. It has three primary sections, the first of which reviews the ways RACs were established and the processes through which they were peopled, including an assessment of the adequacy with which the designated interest positions were filled. The ways in which RACs function – their institutional form and function – are taken up in the second section. This section includes discussion of decision-making processes within RACs, the role of leadership, and questions concerning how RACs compensate their chartering agency for overhead. The section concludes with a discussion of the factors that seem to contribute to effective RAC function. The third section discusses RAC project accomplishments. This entails analysis of RAC spending patterns by project category, both at the aggregate level of the 15 case study RACs and at the individual RAC level. Also discussed are issues concerning the extent to which RACs are recommending new and innovative projects or work that the Forest Service or BLM should be doing anyway, and the extent to which RACs partner with non-agency entities. We also address the issue of employment generation, both in terms of the limited ability of RACs to generate full-time family-wage employment, and their significant and positive contributions to conservation-oriented youth employment generation. The last part of the section considers monitoring of Title II, both in terms of the strengths of current monitoring efforts and the as-yet unfulfilled potential for rigorous effectiveness monitoring.

Establishing a Resource Advisory Committee

Establishing a RAC involves accomplishing a diverse array of tasks. These include determining the geographic area of the RAC's jurisdiction, peopling the RAC in a manner that comports with legislative intent, and providing guidance to the RAC members regarding their charter and mandate. The Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management worked closely with a variety of county officials and associations in the process of setting up RACs. Elected county officials, statewide county organizations, and organizations representing groups such as the forest products industry and environmental interests also played roles in different aspects of these tasks. For example, in Oregon, the Association of O&C Counties worked closely with the BLM to establish RACs. In Eastern Arizona, the RAC was formed when the Eastern Arizona Counties Organization – a loose coalition of five eastern Arizona counties – approached the then-supervisor of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest about creating a RAC. In some cases, county associations provided information and guidance to counties regarding the purpose of P.L. 106-393 and mechanisms for establishing and peopling RACs. Also, some interest group organizations provided informal training for their representatives on RAC decision-making processes and how to operate effectively as a RAC member. County officials, primarily supervisors and commissioners, were invariably involved in the process of determining who should be nominated to serve on the RAC. In most, but not all, cases this involvement was aimed at achieving the breadth of representation specified in the legislation.

Determinants of RAC Size

Forest supervisors and district managers working with county organizations determined the geographic scope of most RACs. RACs tend to be coterminous either with a national forest

or with a Forest Service or BLM district. Larger, multi-county RACs are coterminous with whole national forests while smaller, single-county RACs are generally associated with a single Forest Service or BLM district. Examples of multi-county RACs that allocate P.L. 106-393 funds across an entire national forest include the Forest Service Fremont-Winema and Medford RACs (Oregon), the Olympic Peninsula RAC (Washington), and the Idaho Panhandle RAC. RACs such as the BLM Roseburg and Coos Bay RACs in Oregon, and the Forest Service Del Norte RAC (California) focus on individual districts. In fact, all RACs in California (Region 5 of the Forest Service) are single county RACs – this reflects a decision made by the counties through their associations and at the region level to have only single county RACs within Region 5. Region 6 of the Forest Service, by contrast, chose a different strategy, one that involved the creation of multi-county RACs as evidenced by the large, multi-county Forest Service RACs in Oregon and Washington. In other regions of the country as well (e.g., Mississippi), the Forest Service chose to create multi-county RACs.

The decision regarding how large an area should be within a RAC's jurisdiction is a complex one that requires balancing the significant costs of setting up and running a RAC against the logistical and other challenges that a large multi-county RAC must contend with. RACs whose jurisdiction is coterminous with a larger land management unit such as one or more adjacent national forests may be better able to assess the overall project needs at a landscape scale than smaller RACs, whose jurisdiction is limited to one part of a larger management unit, e.g., a Forest Service or BLM district. However, larger, multi-county RACs often must contend with the challenge of negotiating acceptable levels of parity between individual county Title II contributions and the pattern of project allocations across county boundaries, thus potentially running counter to a more holistic view of the investment needs at the forest level.¹ The challenges of achieving parity between county Title II contributions and what the county receives in terms of RAC-funded projects are even more complicated for those RACs with counties that do not contribute any Title II funds, and especially for those RACs with counties that are not even receiving PL 106-393 funds at all.

Low population density and modest levels of P.L. 106-393 payments are other reasons for forming multi-county RACs. In sparsely populated regions such as Alaska, it may be difficult to populate single-county RACs. Counties with more modest P.L. 106-393 payments can sometimes generate the funding levels that would warrant the creation of a RAC only by pooling their Title II contributions. Because multi-county RACs are populated with people from a relatively large geographic area, it is less likely that RAC members themselves are involved in the same social networks or work together on issues of mutual interest outside the context of the RAC. In some cases, this can constitute a barrier to the development of the sorts of collaborative decision-making processes that P.L. 106-393 was intended to facilitate.

Peopling the RAC

Cognizant of the strong influence of a RAC's composition on its subsequent work and performance, a diverse group of players became involved in the process of peopling the three categories of RAC membership with individuals representing the diverse interests the legislation

¹ The desire for local autonomy and the interest in avoiding potential inter-county conflicts regarding the allocation of Title II funds was a primary factor behind the decision by leaders of Grays Harbor County on the Olympic Peninsula (Washington) to argue for their own RAC instead of being part of a larger, multi-county RAC.

specified.² In addition to the concerned federal agencies, these players included elected county leaders (primarily supervisors and commissioners), county administrators, state-level county associations and organizations, and organized interest groups. Almost without exception, the first step in this process entailed utilizing a variety of means to publicize P.L. 106-393 and to invite applications from members of the public interested in serving on a RAC. Notices were circulated in newspapers, on relevant internet sites, and through other electronic media about the existence of P.L. 106-393 and the availability of RAC positions. In most cases, the agency's project coordinator or public affairs officer was responsible for these fairly conventional forms of publicity. Agency staff responsible for RAC-related publicity also followed the Civil Rights Impact Analysis (CRIA) guidelines. In the case of the Homochitto National Forest in southwest Mississippi, this entailed sending mailings to schools and colleges that serve minority populations, minority-owned businesses, local churches, and the two federally recognized tribes in the state. It also included sending 1,200 letters to individuals asking if they would be interested in serving on the RAC or if they could recommend a suitable person. Although this exemplary effort to embrace the spirit and the letter of CRIA guidelines was not matched by other Forest Service and BLM units, the guidelines were generally followed.

In some instances, particular individuals or organizations were solicited and encouraged to apply to serve on a RAC. In most cases, the agency (Forest Service or BLM), elected county leaders, and state-level county associations were the entities that solicited individuals to serve on the RAC. At this juncture it was not uncommon for county officials who subsequently had no involvement with a particular RAC to actively influence the process of putting the RAC together.

The motivation behind county involvement in the peopling of RACs varied significantly among counties. It was commonly understood that at least part of the decision regarding whether or not to reauthorize the legislation hinged on the performance of the Title II portion of the legislation. Indeed, county officials in at least two case study RACs (Del Norte, California, and Roseburg, Oregon) explicitly stated their belief that reauthorization (and the continuation of their Title I payments) hinged directly on the success of the Title II programs. Thus, in most cases county leaders sought to people the RAC in a manner that comported with the legislation's intent by representing a diverse and balanced range of interests. However, in some cases the high priority accorded to putting together an array of people that could work together sometimes resulted in questionable actions, such as rejecting individual applications because the person or organization concerned was considered to be too radical or unable to engage productively in collaborative decision-making forums. There is a fine line between striving to assemble a diverse group of people to serve on the RAC and sacrificing inclusiveness in order to enhance the efficiency of RAC decision-making processes. What may look like a rational attempt to ensure a workable process, from another vantage point could be interpreted as exercising inappropriate pressure to selectively recruit RAC members.³ These cases of exclusion were, however, few, and interviews with RAC members suggested that groups were well-balanced. There was enough concern among many about just sitting in the room together, that efforts to ensure harmonious interaction did not over-reach efforts to ensure balance.

Occasionally a county's involvement in the process of peopling the RAC took a more self-serving turn. In at least one multi-county RAC (Olympic Peninsula, Washington), the

² For more information on the specific categories represented on the RAC and the voting process specified in P.L. 106-393, refer to the institutional analysis, Chapter 2, of this report.

³ It is interesting to note that those individuals or organizations excluded from participating on the RAC almost always represented environmental perspectives on natural resources management issues.

composition of the RAC reflected concerns on the part of the member counties that their interests be represented. Thus commissioners from each county served on the RAC and, in RAC deliberations, argued for their county's interest rather than for the interest position they (nominally) represented on the RAC. In yet another example (Coos Bay, Oregon), a county commissioner (and RAC chair) solicited persons from the county to serve on the RAC who shared similar utilitarian perspectives on the role of the RAC and the ways in which Title II funds should be used to directly benefit county interests. These actions, in part, reflect the continuing debate about the extent to which Title II funds are "county money." While it is true that counties do not control the allocation of Title II funds to projects, it is also clear that in a few cases counties have tried to maintain some degree of control over Title II funds by peopling the RAC either with elected county leaders or with individuals that share the view that Title II funds are "county money."

Once the applications of people interested in serving on the RAC were received, the concerned federal agency (usually the forest supervisor or, in the case of the BLM, the district manager) made the recommendations regarding which applications to select and forward to Washington, D.C. for final approval. While federal agency personnel did have final authority over which applications to forward and other aspects of the RAC chartering process, in more than one instance county supervisors and commissioners were substantively involved in the process of recommending applications. In more than one case, county elected leaders and agency staff had lists of the people they wanted to serve on the RAC and, through extensive consultations, these lists were merged into the final list of recommended applications. While it is clear that the Secretary of the Interior in the case of the BLM, or the Secretary of Agriculture in the case of the Forest Service, holds the final authority for approving individuals to serve on the RAC, the process of generating the list of recommended applications often involved significant negotiation between the federal agency and county interests. In most cases the agency obviously played a lead role in selecting RAC members, and ultimately the agencies made the final judgment at the secretarial or deputy secretary level. However, in at least one case, the county played a dominant role.

Adequacy of Category Selections

The degree of fit within the case study RACs between their actual composition and that specified in the legislation varies among RACs and across interest group categories. Almost without exception, the industry, environmental organization, and recreation (both dispersed and developed) designated categories were filled by people who were qualified to represent those interests, and represented them in RAC deliberations. This is not at all surprising given that the conflicts surrounding public lands management decisions almost always involve the timber industry, environmental, and, to a lesser extent, recreation interests. It is precisely these interest groups that the framers of P.L. 106-393 sought to bring together through the Title II program. Furthermore, these interest groups tend to be well organized, capable, and able and willing to devote time to the sorts of civic engagements that RAC membership entails. In short, these are core positions that, with only a few exceptions, all RACs were able to fill without difficulty. The few exceptions concern situations in which the dearth of local environmental organizations lead to the allocation of those seats on the RAC to local organizations that, in some cases, were more utilitarian in orientation than is usually associated with an environmental organization.

Some of the other designated categories proved more challenging to fill appropriately. This was particularly true of categories such as the archeological and historical interest, wild

horse and burro interest, organized labor, and Native American representatives. While these categories were often challenging to fill, the reasons why they were challenging varied. For example, in many situations there simply were no representatives of wild horse and burro groups. The clear western states' bias of the wild horse and burro category preordained its lack of fit in other regions of the country. In many cases it was also difficult to find qualified individuals who had expertise in archeological and historical issues, and could bring that expertise to bear on RAC funding deliberations. In some cases, RAC members and the Designated Federal Official and project coordinator collectively decided to proportionately increase the number of RAC members who represented industry, environmental, and recreation interests in lieu of trying to shoehorn individuals into slots, such as the wild horse and burro interest, that they were not qualified to represent.

The organized labor and Native American group slots on the RAC also proved challenging to fill appropriately, but for different reasons than those described in the preceding paragraph. To begin with, neither organized labor nor Native American groups have been central players in the relatively recent wave of community-based, collaborative decision-making processes for public lands resource management issues, despite their self-evident interests in these issues. This reflects the bias towards notions of community that favor Anglo interests concerning the timber industry, environmental values, and recreation. Put simply, locally-driven groups (and RACs are, to a large extent, locally driven) are difficult arenas within which to advance the sorts of social justice issues associated with organized labor and Native American interests. This bias, not surprisingly, is reproduced in RACs, which, in many regions of the country represent the most recent iteration of place- and community-based public lands decision-making processes.⁴

The difficulty of filling these slots stems from a complex of historical, institutional, political, social, and economic factors.⁵ Historically, neither organized labor nor Native American groups have associated with the Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management to the extent that other interest groups have. Thus while relations of conflict or cooperation often exist between these federal agencies and industry, environmental, or recreation groups, an absence of relationship is more characteristic of agency relations with organized labor and/or Native American groups. Developing relations in what verges on a vacuum requires more than specifying that representatives from these groups be included on a RAC. There are other issues at play, too. For example, unions and Native Americans are already working on a variety of important fronts that are a high-priority and of critical importance to them. Given the financial and personnel resource constraints that at least some of these groups contend with, they may be reluctant to invest scarce resources in the work of RAC membership if they do not immediately perceive the benefits or relevance of doing so. The inability of RACs to generate the sorts of full-time, family-wage jobs that most unions advocate for, and the somewhat peripheral significance of RACs for tribes, lends support to this observation.

Paired with these obstacles to union and Native American participation on RACs are the ways in which RACs themselves have generally not proactively sought to engage unions and tribes. For example, in two RACs, when the organized labor (and union representative) left the RAC, they were replaced by replacement members that did not have any experience or history

⁴ See Chapter 6 of Baker and Kusel (2003) for an extended discussion of the challenges associated with supporting social justice objectives through local, community-driven resource management initiatives.

⁵ This demonstrates that, by itself, the Civil Rights Impact Analysis is inadequate to ensure representation of under-represented groups and communities.

with organized labor. In neither case did anybody suggest that the RAC should seek a more qualified person to fill that slot. When researchers raised this as a potential concern in one of these RACs, the alternate in the labor slot (who was a livestock-oriented extension agent) said that they didn't have someone with labor expertise on the RAC "because it wasn't a concern," and accused the researchers of inserting their own biases into the case study by suggesting that it was a concern. It may be true that for many RACs and RAC members, labor-related issues are not a concern and this is reflected in the poor track record of RACs with regard to filling this slot. Whether or not labor-related issues should be a concern is a different issue, and one that P.L. 106-393 is clearly not silent about.

RACs have also been challenged to reach out to the Native American groups within the area of the RACs' jurisdiction. While RACs such as the Olympic Peninsula (Washington), and the Coos Bay (Oregon) RACs have engaged substantively with some of the area's tribes, other RACs have not, or have done so in a manner that does not seem commensurate with the extent of Native American presence in the region. Examples of RACs in this latter category include the Wrangell-Petersburg (Alaska), Siskiyou (California), Tuolumne (California), Eastern Arizona Counties, and Medford (Oregon) RACs. As the discussion in the case studies of these RACs illustrates, the obstacles that impede a robust and meaningful engagement with tribal groups are significant. However, in at least some of these RACs, progress has been made in terms of taking the necessary steps towards engaging with Native American tribes.

Issues related to RAC replacements can also challenge the ability of RACs to achieve the diverse representation intended by the legislation. Because there are fewer replacements than there are designated categories, there is little assurance that when a RAC member resigns, s/he will be replaced by a replacement member who can represent the same interest group. This is what happened in the two RACs referred to above; when the members in the organized labor slots resigned from the RAC, there were no other organized labor replacement members to take their positions. Instead, they were replaced by a livestock-oriented extension agent and a semi-retired middle school administrator, respectively. The result was a shift in the composition of the RAC. Ironically, by following the procedures outlined in the P.L. 106-393 for replacing RAC members, the RAC make-up can shift in a manner inconsistent with what the legislation specifies it should be.

In addition to changes in RAC composition related to the replacement process, there are other ways in which RAC composition can become skewed. Occasionally, RAC members, while qualified to occupy their designated position on the RAC, actually represent different interest positions when deliberating over proposed projects. Related to this is the issue of members shifting from one designated position to another, especially during the re-chartering process – often, it seems, in order to remain on the RAC. When taken to an extreme, it appears that in some cases the objective is to keep certain people on the RAC instead of selecting the individuals most qualified and able to represent the designated interest categories. Lastly, the criteria for which groups qualify as interest group organizations are not consistent across all RACs. For example, in some areas Trout Unlimited is considered an environmental organization but in other areas its "environmental" credentials are thought to be inadequate for it to be accepted as an environmental organization. While these issues are certainly not systemic, they are common enough to warrant consideration of how to ensure that the RAC member selection process continues to comport with that specified in P.L. 106-393.

RAC Functioning and Voting

This section investigates and describes the internal workings of RACs. We discuss the diverse modes of decision-making within RACs, the various leadership roles that RAC members and agency staff play, the variety of ways in which RACs have chosen to structure their annual cycle of meetings and field trips, and the diverse approaches to compensating the Forest Service and the BLM for their administrative overhead. We conclude this section with a discussion of the criteria that emerged from the case studies concerning the elements necessary for a RAC to function effectively.

Decision-making

The primary work RACs do is to evaluate, prioritize, and recommend for funding the project applications they receive. A plurality of decision-making processes have evolved within RACs to accomplish these tasks. In some RACs, members have developed formal criteria for evaluating proposals and quantitative methods for ranking proposals. Other RACs have not developed either evaluation criteria or ranking methods. In some RACs with formal ranking methods, the individual rankings of RAC members for each project are tallied to provide a grand total rank number. In other RACs, each subgroup ranks the proposals numerically. The Roseburg, Oregon BLM RAC, Fremont-Winema, Oregon Forest Service RAC and the Tuolumne, California Forest Service RAC are examples of RACs in which individuals rank project proposals numerically, while the Siskiyou, California and Eastern Arizona Forest Service RACs are examples of RACs in which each sub-group ranks the proposals. Shared evaluation criteria and a numeric ranking process, whether at the level of the whole group or the three sub-groups, provide an explicit and transparent method for prioritizing projects. The resulting list of ranked projects constitutes a solid starting point from which to launch discussions and eventually vote on which projects to recommend for funding. The process of developing common evaluation criteria, the focus on transparent, numeric ranking methods, and the open discussion of projects that ensues, seem to encourage the development of a shared sense of what kinds of projects the RAC, as a whole, would like to support. Rather than individual members of the three sub-groups advancing their respective slate of favorites (along with the inevitable horse trading associated with that approach), the RAC as a whole seems to be able to articulate a common vision of what projects it would like to support – especially when the ranking exercise is carried out by each individual RAC member instead of by the three sub-groups.

The Roseburg BLM RAC is a good example of the ways in which formally structured evaluation and ranking methods can promote the emergence of a collective and shared vision of the types of projects the RAC should support. This RAC has some of the most developed evaluation criteria and ranking methods of any RAC encountered in this study. Partly as a result of this and partly due to the related efforts of the professional facilitators with whom the RAC has engaged, the RAC is able to make all decisions about which projects to recommend for funding on a consensus basis. Not once since the RACs inception has there been a dissenting vote with respect to either approving or denying a group's Title II proposal. Other RACs with explicit ranking procedures, especially when the individual member rather than the sub-group ranks the application, also show signs of developing a shared understanding of what types of projects to collectively support instead of resorting to a strategy of "I'll support your project if you support my project." In such cases, of which the Northern Panhandle RAC in Idaho is one, the salience of which sub-group a member belongs to declines, in some instances to the point where members are no longer sure which group they belong to.

In the absence of explicit criteria and procedures for evaluating and ranking project proposals, the decision to recommend or not recommend a project is driven primarily by the legislative requirement that at least three of the five members in each sub-group support a project before it can be recommended for funding. This supermajority voting rule is designed to ensure that a project is supported by a diverse array of interests represented on the RAC. By balancing the influence of the three groups, this rule has generally functioned as the legislation intended. However, by itself it does not necessarily promote collaboration among RAC members, nor contribute towards the emergence of a common vision of what sorts of projects the RAC should be supporting. Furthermore, on occasions when the supermajority voting rule governs the projection selection process, “horse trading” practices sometimes emerge in which members of one group will offer to support a project favored by one of the other groups in return for at least three votes in support of “their” project.⁶

Occasionally RAC meetings lack the required voting quorums in each of the three sub-groups. The supermajority rule requires that three from each sub-group support a project before the RAC can recommend it. Therefore, if less than three members of any sub-group are present at a RAC meeting, then the RAC’s project-recommending business must stop. This has been an issue in some RACs. Related to this issue is the situation in which two of the five sub-group members are absent; in this situation the remaining three members of the sub-group possess an inordinate amount of voting power because a “no” vote from any of them would prevent the RAC from recommending a project for funding. These issues are indirectly tied to the limited role of replacement RAC members. It was common during the fieldwork to hear dissatisfaction expressed about the lack of voting rights of replacement members, even when the sub-group they belong to lacked a quorum or was missing one or two members at a RAC meeting. This lack of enfranchisement is a big disincentive to the active engagement of what some termed as “alternates” on the RAC, but as outlined in the legislation, are replacements.⁷ In some RACs, replacements are expected to review project proposals, attend meetings, and contribute to discussions, yet they are not allowed to vote on RAC proposals.⁸ This asymmetry should be addressed in the reauthorization process.

In multi-county RACs there is almost always some attention paid to geographic parity, by which we mean the correspondence between the amount of funding a county contributes towards the RAC’s budget and the dollar value of the projects approved for implementation within that county. The concern that geographic parity be achieved, at least in a general sense, is common among RACs. However, this issue rarely becomes a driving force with respect to RAC deliberations.

The five-county Idaho Panhandle Forest Service RAC represents an unusual case in which the regional focus of the RAC, rather than concerns about geographical parity, drives

⁶ While “horse trading” does occasionally take place, the supermajority rule renders the emergence of a unified voting block within any one sub-group quite rare. This only occurred in one case study (the Coos Bay, Oregon RAC). In this example, the pro-county voting block that emerged was more reflective of the RAC member recruitment and selection process than of the nature of the supermajority voting rule.

⁷ As outlined in the legislation and agency guidelines for RAC composition, replacements can vote only when a current RAC member has permanently resigned from the RAC, and has been replaced by a new member. Some RACs have been confused, or would like to see the legislation changed, so that *replacements* could function as *alternates*. That is, they could step in and vote if a member of their subgroup is absent from the meeting.

⁸ In the Tuolumne RAC, replacements were allowed to participate in the initial round of proposal prioritization, the dot ranking method. Although this is contrary to the language of the legislation, it does them give a type of voting power.

RAC deliberations. In this multi-county RAC, members work collectively as a group to evaluate and prioritize project proposals, without regard to which county the project falls within. While the RAC has not yet recommended funding region-wide projects, nor do they use regional, landscape-scale information to evaluate proposals, they are nevertheless establishing the groundwork necessary for eventually working more explicitly at the regional scale. The ability of RACs to work at landscape and regional scales, without regard to agency jurisdiction or landownership boundary, offers the exciting possibility of coordinating both agency and private management initiatives in ways hitherto unrealized.

The six-county Olympic Peninsula Forest Service RAC represents a contrasting example in which concerns about achieving geographic parity seem to drive much of the RAC's deliberations. During the RAC's annual meeting, members break into caucuses of each county represented on the RAC (at least one commissioner from each county serves on the RAC). While in caucus, representatives of each county determine which group of projects to support within their own county, using the funds that their county has contributed to the RAC budget. When the RAC reconvenes as one group near the end of the meeting, each caucus presents their slate of preferred projects, which the RAC as a whole then votes on. This method does not comport with the intent of the legislation in terms of creating a diverse and representative decision-making body comprised of three sub-groups and requiring that all projects must be approved by a supermajority before being recommended for funding. Any situation in which a RAC member does not evaluate all project proposals either from the perspective of the interest group they are designated to represent, or from the perspective of an emerging collective sense of what the RAC should support, is one that compromises the integrity of the decision-making process, obscures what should be a transparent process, and may begin to undermine the legitimacy of the decision-making body.

Of the 15 RACs examined in this study, only two had professional facilitation of their decision-making process. The Roseburg, Oregon BLM RAC chose to pay for on-going professional facilitation services and the Tuolumne, California Forest Service RAC had the benefit of a Forest Service facilitator for the first year of its operation. In both cases the facilitators helped the RAC devise an explicit project evaluation and ranking process – one that both RACs continue to use with success and efficiency. The on-going facilitation of the Roseburg BLM RAC by a private sector facilitation team has been instrumental in helping that RAC shift away from position-based to interest-based deliberation process, build trust among RAC members, and develop (iteratively with sequential improvements) a decision-making protocol that works well and engenders consensus; in short, professional facilitation has helped this RAC to become the award-winning RAC that it is. In addition to these professionally facilitated RACs, the project coordinator for the Fremont-Winema RAC has also had training in facilitation techniques and workshop management. These skills have been useful in helping that RAC develop an effective collaborative decision-making process. While it is certainly true that not all RACs can afford the relative luxury of professional facilitation, it is clear that good facilitation is important for imparting to RACs the decision-making skills necessary for making the sorts of transparent decisions that preserve and strengthen the RACs accountability and legitimacy.

Leadership

In addition to good facilitation, effective leadership is critical to RAC success. Leadership can come from the RAC chair, the Designated Federal Official, and the Project

Coordinator. Ideally, the DFO and the project coordinator play a facilitative role, while the RAC chair (and in some cases, vice-chair) need to be able to run meetings smoothly, move through the agenda, and employ good facilitation and communication skills. The RAC chair needs to be neither too weak nor too powerful. If the chair is too strong, a particular agenda may be favored, one that can include conflict with the federal agency. In the case of the Coos Bay, Oregon BLM RAC, the county has used the Title II program to advance county interests in a manner unmatched by any other case study RAC. Unresolved and at times fractious conflict has also characterized the relationship between this RAC, in particular the chair (and county commissioner), and the Designated Federal Official. Much of this conflict has revolved around differing interpretations of the purpose of P.L. 106-393 and the extent to which Title II funds are “county money.”

Conversely, if the chair is weak, then opportunity is created for the agency to play an overly-dominant role. When rules specify that the RAC chair must rotate amongst counties within multi-county RACs, e.g. the Fremont-Winema, Oregon Forest Service RAC, this helps mitigate against undue influence from any one county. Chair elections on a regular basis are important to avoid undue concentrations of power in one individual, but if the position of chair rotates too often the position becomes too weak, as occurred in the Del Norte, Forest Service RAC in California.

Effective agency leadership consists of supportive coordination and back-up from both the designated federal official and the project coordinator. In most cases, this has been the norm. Within most RACs, the concerned federal agency has prioritized working with the RAC in constructive ways and has dedicated as much staff support as the RAC requests. Often, the project coordinator for these RACs has been able to prioritize his or her RAC responsibilities within their own job description. These responsibilities include the work of soliciting project applications, organizing and distributing the binders of applications, helping to arrange RAC meetings and field trips, and generally playing a supportive role for the RAC. In the Roseburg, Oregon BLM RAC, the project coordinator, Jake Winn, has responded to RAC members’ requests for information concerning the “spending habits” of the RAC. Each year, Mr. Winn prepares detailed spreadsheets, graphs, and pie charts that depict the overall pattern of RAC spending for that year as well as all previous years. Information such as RAC spending by category, the ratio of funded to unfunded project applications by category, and the ratio of BLM to non-BLM project funding by category is presented annually to the RAC. This comprehensive quantitative record of what the RAC has chosen to do with its annual budget has proven useful for RAC members as they assess what they have accomplished to date and determine what, if any, adjustments they would like to make in subsequent years.

There are some study RACs in which the agency may be playing an overly dominant role. This tends to be the case when the RAC itself is relatively weak, for example if the chair is unable to provide strong leadership and/or if the RAC members have been unable to craft the culture of collaboration envisioned in the legislation. Under such circumstances the power vacuum left by these weaknesses is sometimes occupied by the federal agency. For example, within the Del Norte, California, Forest Service RAC the absence of both a RAC chair who exercises effective leadership and a strong culture of collaboration within the RAC created opportunities for the Forest Service to play a leadership role during RAC meetings and to use RAC funding to complete Forest Service infrastructure and road maintenance projects. While the same projects may or may not have been recommended had the RAC itself been more institutionally stable, if the RAC itself had been stronger the role of the Forest Service would

have necessarily diminished. Similarly, in the southwest Mississippi Forest Service RAC and the Medford, Oregon Forest Service RAC concerns were noted about the degree to which the Forest Service controls decisions over the way Title II funds may be allocated. While not pervasive, it is apparent that under some circumstances the federal agency may play an overly dominant role in the business of the RACs.

In other RACs, the agency seems to be playing a “backseat” role with respect to its obligations and responsibilities concerning implementation of Title II. This tends to be the case when RACs adopt a pro-county perspective and the federal agency fails to exert a countervailing force that might otherwise balance the RAC’s pro-county agenda. Two examples of this are the decision-making dynamics within the Coos Bay, Oregon BLM RAC and the Olympic Peninsula, Washington Forest Service RAC. Within the former RAC, funding recommendations have been made by the RAC and approved by the BLM that push the envelope in terms of assuring accountability and transparency. In one instance, the RAC recommended letting the county decide how to spend a lump sum of \$558,348 to pave and replace culverts on whichever of three proposed roads it chose. The RAC has also recommended (and had approved by the BLM) what are essentially block grants to the county for its noxious weed management program. These grants are not tied to specific weed control projects; the RAC left the specifics of those decisions to the county and the Coos County Noxious Weed Advisory Board. In the case of the Olympic Peninsula RAC, by allowing the RAC to break into what are essentially county caucuses to determine how to allocate county contributions to the RACs budget, the Forest Service is essentially undermining the legislation’s intent that a balanced and diverse group of people on the RAC collectively determine which projects to recommend for funding.

Meeting frequency

The frequency with which RACs meet varies tremendously, from only once per year to as many as nine or ten times per year. Neither extreme of this range appears to be particularly optimal. It is difficult to conduct all the RAC’s yearly business in one meeting, even if it lasts for many hours. This is exemplified by the Coos Bay, Oregon BLM RAC and the Olympic Peninsula Forest Service RAC in Washington. In these RACs – which meet or used to meet only once per year - meetings are sometimes rushed and there is occasionally inadequate time to fully deliberate all of the project proposals. In order to streamline meetings, the Coos Bay RAC has voted to not allow presentations by project proponents – thus depriving the RAC members of useful information that in other RACs facilitates general deliberations and the project ranking process. In the Olympic Peninsula RAC, there just isn’t enough time to thoroughly discuss all of the proposals that the RAC receives. On the other hand, meeting as often as nine or ten times per year, as is done in the Southwest Idaho Forest Service RAC and some others, stretches the ability of volunteer RAC members to set aside this amount of time. This is an especially onerous burden for those in the private sector who have to take time off from work to perform their RAC duties. The optimal meeting frequency is probably directly related to the physical size of the RAC’s jurisdiction and budget and inversely related to the strength of collaborative relations among RAC members. Some RACs have reduced their meeting frequency as collaborative relations within the RAC take root. It is for this reason that the Eastern Arizona Forest Service RAC reduced their meeting frequency from three to five times a year to only once a year.

Administrative Overhead

Federal agencies incur a variety of costs associated with supporting the RAC and administering, supervising, and implementing RAC-approved projects. Despite some agency attempts to cover these costs from appropriated funds, it is clear that they are unable to do so. So while the Forest Service and the BLM must recoup at least some of their RAC-related expenses from Title II funds, there remains some uncertainty about how this is to be accomplished. The Chief of the Forest Service provided regional offices with some direction about this issue in a January, 2002 memo, which stated that expenditures associated with the “direct costs of RAC management” such as facilitation, travel and per diem for RAC members, could be charged against Title II funds, but the salaries of agency employees who support the RAC, e.g. the project coordinator, should not be reimbursed from RAC funds.⁹ The memo also noted that individual forests are responsible for negotiating indirect cost rates for managing the implementation of RAC-recommended projects, rather than charging their regular overhead rate. The BLM also recommended that newly-formed RACs should set rates for compensating the agency for overhead costs, but the agency did not specify what rates or fixed amounts to charge. Partly because decisions regarding how to charge for RAC-related expenses and project overhead were left up to individual forests and districts, there has developed a striking lack of consistency across RACs with respect to how agencies charge for these costs. Even within RACs, agency requests for compensation from the RAC for administrative and project overhead have not been consistent over the life of the RAC.

In a review of RAC administrative and project overhead costs among 40 RACs, the Sierra Institute found a wide diversity of approaches. In five RACs, the agency did not initially charge any overhead, but in three of these RACs the agency subsequently began charging overhead. In 28 RACs, the agency charges a percentage rate per RAC-recommended project, and, in some RACs, the rate varies if the project is an agency or non-agency project. Overhead rates tend to be higher for agency projects than non-agency projects, with rates for both varying between 4% and 12%. Some RACs, for the sake of simplicity, have decided to charge the same rate for agency and non-agency projects; most of these flat rates are between 8% and 12%, although some are as low as 4%. Sometimes the agency charges a fixed amount, rather than a percentage, to cover its expenses; in some cases an additional percentage fee is also levied on a per project basis. Non-agency project proponents benefit from these rate schedules because both flat rates and rates charged to non-agency projects are invariably less than the national Forest Service overhead rate of approximately 19%.

Evidence from the 15 case study RACs supports the conclusion that overhead rates vary considerably among and within RACs. For example, the Forest Service charges no administrative overhead against projects that the Idaho Panhandle and Colville (Washington) RACs recommend. When the Del Norte (California), Fremont-Winema (Oregon), and Tuolumne (California) RACs were initiated, the Forest Service initially charged no overhead, but later this changed. Now the Del Norte RAC is charged 10% for in-house projects and 5% for non-Forest Service projects; the Fremont-Winema RAC is charged 3.8% for all projects; and the Tuolumne RAC is charged \$1,000 per project (this rate is subject to revision in 2006). In the case of the Del Norte and Tuolumne RACs, RAC members resisted the change in policy concerning overhead charges and rates. In the case of the Fremont-Winema RAC, the Designated Federal Officer

⁹ January 14, 2002 Memo to Regional Foresters from the USFS Washington Office (FS_Chief_Memo.doc).

initially refused to accept the RACs offer to pay for administrative overhead and it was only after the RAC members insisted that the 3.8% rate was established.

Other RACs display yet other reimbursement rates. For example, the Coos Bay (Oregon) BLM RAC was charged 8% overhead by the agency; this was later changed to a fixed annual payment of \$120,000. The Siskiyou RAC pays the Forest Service a 10% administrative overhead fee. While the Wrangell-Petersburg RAC pays the Forest Service overhead fees using the agency's own rate schedule, the Forest Service also subsidizes many of the RACs organizational expenses such as expensive, long distance travel for RAC members to attend RAC meetings and the salaries of the Forest Service staff involved in facilitating and supporting the RAC.

In addition to the diversity of rates for recovering overhead, the Forest Service has different organizational approaches to the administration of grants and agreements with project entities. This is a huge issue for RACs with many projects. In Oregon, the agency centralizes this process, while in California it is delegated to local levels. While the local knowledge of forest-based staff can facilitate project administration when it is kept local, problems can arise. In some instances, experience and capacity constraints at the local level have led to significant delays in establishing contracts and paying groups for their work. Centralizing grant administration at the region does bureaucratize the process, but it can also remove local level idiosyncrasies. Whatever the cause, extended delays in processing contracts and making payments to non-agency project recipients and contractors has threatened projects and challenged the ability of small organizations to carry expenses over unreasonable periods of time. This has eroded some of the goodwill and relations built through RAC processes.

Criteria for Effective RAC Functioning

Several points emerge from the preceding paragraphs regarding what seem to be characteristics that support effective RAC function. By effective RAC function we mean RACs that achieve the legislation's intent in improving collaborative relationships among interest groups and between them and federal public lands agencies, and that recommend projects that enhance ecological conditions and contribute to local and regional socioeconomic well-being. In order to fulfill these objectives, RACs must be able to function as independent decision-making bodies that support collaborative processes, and they must have a positive working relationship with the federal agency that charters them.

One of the most important factors in enabling RACs to support collaborative decision-making among interest groups that have often opposed each other is the presence of a budget with which to accomplish mutually agreed-upon, on-the-ground projects. Time and time again interviewees noted that the factor that most distinguished the RAC from other citizen-based advisory groups was the fact that, for the first time, members of the public actually had an operating budget with which to support stewardship-related projects. This dramatically changed the nature of discussions among interest groups. Now stakeholders no longer stood to gain by staking out positions or bluffing their opponents. The presence of the proverbial pot of money on the table brought previously polarized parties into the room and provided adequate incentive for them to identify arenas of action over which, in most cases, consensus could emerge. In fact, consensus—or some level of voting agreement—had to emerge if projects were to be funded, and every RAC member knew this. The importance of this point is hard to overemphasize.

A second factor concerns the internal dynamics of RACs. For a RAC to be able to support collaborative processes and maintain a positive relationship with its chartering agency, it needs to foster constructive group process as well as be independent of undue outside influence

from entities such as counties and the federal agency. A variety of elements provide RACs with these desirable internal dynamics. They include a membership that truly reflects the diversity of interest groups specified in the legislation. At least as a starting point, the process of peopling a RAC must be consistent with the legislation's intent to obtain a diverse cross-section of perspectives concerning public lands management issues. Both the accountability and the long-term legitimacy of a RAC are undermined when these principles of RAC membership and participation are not followed. A related point concerns the decision-making process itself. We have seen that RACs with the most constructive decision-making culture, one that encourages the emergence of a middle ground of mutually supported values and projects, usually employ explicit evaluation and ranking methods that operate at the level of the individual RAC member rather than at the sub-group level. While resorting to voting at the sub-group level may be an effective fallback option when consensus is elusive, the effort to achieve consensus through these and other collective decision-making tools and methods fosters the sorts of collaborative relationships the legislation envisioned. Key to these collective group processes is effective leadership and facilitation within the RAC. RAC chairs and, where they are used, facilitators, are important elements of an effective RAC. RAC chairs need to be able to be strong enough to help the RAC collectively create their own vision of what they would like to do and accomplish, while remaining sensitive to the processual requirements of successful participatory processes. RACs that have solid internal leadership and have developed a culture of collaboration will be able to operate as effective bodies that are not vulnerable to undue external influence.

In addition to the budget and internal dynamics of RAC function described above, a constructive and supportive engagement by the agencies with the RACs they have chartered also accounts for the general success of RACs. Almost without exception, the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management have mobilized the staff and financial resources necessary to effectively facilitate and support RACs. Rather than playing an overly-dominant role, most DFOs and project coordinators have used their skills and resources to help the RACs function as effective, independent decision-making entities. The trust and enhanced communication that have evolved as a result of this constructive engagement is abundantly evident in most RACs. As one county commissioner involved with the Olympic Peninsula (Washington) RAC noted, the "RAC brought us together again and we're getting to know some of the folks at headquarters." A county commissioner involved with the Fremont-Winema (Oregon) Forest Service RAC echoed this statement when she said that the "RAC further cemented the good relationship between the Forest Service and the community." Agency staff have been committed, both professionally and personally, to the success of the RACs they are involved with. As one Forest Service DFO remarked, working with the RAC has been "the highlight of my career."

In addition to supportive engagement with their chartering agency, another positive influence on the success of RACs is prior experience with collaborative decision-making processes. Especially in the western United States, there has been a move towards collaborative processes as a tool for transcending the gridlock and polarization that have dominated the regional natural resources management landscape for almost two decades. RACs that operate in areas with experience in collaborative approaches to conflict resolution have an advantage over RACs in other areas because of the social and institutional capacities that collaboration builds over time. In more than one case study, the prior history of collaborative decision-making in the area (sometimes involving the same individuals that populated the RAC) provided a jump-start in terms of the RACs ability to fulfill its legislatively derived mandate. Examples of this include 1) the ways in which the work of the Lakeview Stewardship Unit in Lake County, Oregon

contributed to the success of the Fremont-Winema Forest Service RAC, 2) the manner in which collaboration among the five county Idaho panhandle region and the five county Eastern Arizona County Coalition directly informed and facilitated the work of the two RACs in those areas.

Title II Project Accomplishments

Almost without exception, Title II dollars have been allocated for projects that meet the intent of the legislation and that are designed to achieve important, worthwhile ecological and socioeconomic objectives. As a rule, there are generally more proposals than can be funded. For example, between 2001 and 2005 the Roseburg, Oregon BLM RAC received 164 project proposals but only recommended 95 for funding. Similarly, the Eastern Arizona Counties Forest Service RAC received 59 proposals between 2003 and 2005, of which they recommended 31 for funding. Perhaps the Siskiyou, California Forest Service RAC has the highest proposals to funded project rate; only one out of every five proposals are funded on their first submission to the RAC. While the Siskiyou applicants may be the most frustrated group, the high number of proposals means that RAC members are able to support only those projects that they feel best fit the legislation's intent and the RAC's own project priorities. This helps guarantee that funded projects are good ones.

Table 1. Title II Expenditures, by category, for the 15 case study RACs.¹⁰

Title II Expenditures	Dollars	Percentage
Roads	\$14,624,623	26.2%
Habitat	\$9,409,972	16.8%
Watershed	\$4,931,909	8.8%
Forest Health	\$7,188,491	12.9%
Fuels	\$5,149,377	9.2%
Soils	\$70,858	0.1%
Weed Control	\$4,495,013	8.0%
Native Species	\$787,313	1.4%
Recreation	\$3,018,530	5.4%
History	\$61,350	0.1%
Other	\$6,138,577	11.0%
Grand Total	\$55,876,013	□

Table 1 shows the Title II expenditures for the 15 RACs examined in this study (Pennsylvania has not established a RAC). As the table shows, the largest category of spending is roads, representing just over \$14.6 million or 26.2% of total RAC expenditures. This aggregate category includes road upgrades such as grading and surfacing, as well as culvert replacements to solve problems associated with impending culvert failures. Some RACs have prioritized roads-related projects while others have not. For example, the Olympic Peninsula, Washington RAC allocated 59% (\$2,076,608) of their total expenditure for roads work while the Siskiyou RAC allocated only 9% (\$158,352) for roads projects, and most of these dollars were not for standard road improvement and maintenance because of a reluctance on the RAC to fund these projects. The Medford, Oregon Forest Service RAC allocated the largest dollar amount

¹⁰ The project categories in this table were developed to match as well as possible both the P.L. 106-393 categories and the actual projects recommended for funding by the RACs. Many projects can easily fall under more than one category as they provide multiple types of benefits.

(\$2,456,214) to roads projects, but five other RACs also allocated between \$1 million and \$2 million for projects in this category.¹¹

The majority of road projects addressed the widespread challenges associated with maintaining the aging road infrastructure on national forest and BLM lands. With the decline in timber harvesting, and the associated revenues, paying for road construction and maintenance has become an increasingly widespread and publicized problem, and one that the legislation explicitly recognized. While the investments needed to comprehensively address the backlog of road maintenance issues far surpass what RACs can do, RAC projects have addressed a portion of the most egregious road issues in those areas where RACs are active. Very few road projects included decommissioning.

The second largest category of RAC expenditure is for projects that restore, maintain, or improve wildlife and fish habitat. This category represents \$9.4 million or just under 17% of RAC expenditures. Projects in this category include efforts to improve in-stream and riparian habitat for aquatic species. Replacing culverts that impede or prevent fish passage constitutes one of the larger expenditure items in this category. Projects also include a variety of upslope habitat restoration, maintenance, and improvement efforts such as meadow restoration and vegetation management for wildlife purposes. By spending almost \$4.9 million (48% of its total expenditure) on projects in this category, the Roseburg, Oregon BLM RAC significantly outspent the other case study RACs; this amount accounts for more than half the amount allocated by the 15 case study RACs for this project category. The Medford, Oregon BLM RAC spent the next largest amount (\$2.4 million) on habitat projects. The other 14 case study RACs allocated less than 20% of their budget to habitat improvement projects.

The case study RACs allocated a total of \$4.9 million for watershed restoration and maintenance-related projects such as upslope stabilization efforts, downslope sediment reduction projects, and estuary-related projects, such as fish-friendly tidegates. The combined allocations among the case study RACs for roads, habitat improvement, and watersheds come close to 52% of the total amount allocated, and thus meet the legislative requirement that 50% of RAC dollars support projects “primarily dedicated to road maintenance, decommissioning, or obliteration or to restoration of streams and watersheds” (Sec 204(f) of the legislation).

Forest health-related projects constitute the third largest expenditure category. Forest ecosystem health projects tend to be pre-commercial thinning projects.¹² Three Oregon RACs (Fremont Winema Forest Service RAC and the Medford and Roseburg BLM RACs) together account for almost all RAC allocations in this expenditure category. These three RACs together allocated \$6,807,691, or 95% of the \$7,188,491 that all 15 case study RACs allocated in this project category. Most RACs have tended to veer away from forest health projects that involve extraction of merchantable timber or that may pave the way for such extraction. Many RAC members remarked that the avoidance of merchantable material-oriented projects stems from a desire on the part of the RAC to not tackle projects that might go to the heart of deep-seated differences among RAC members, especially between traditional industry and environmental

¹¹ The Wrangell-Petersburg, Alaska RAC adapted the notion of ‘roads’ to their own transport situation. Since there are very few miles of road on the two islands where Wrangell and Petersburg are located, the RAC interpreted ‘roads’ to include water transport routes, breakwaters, and landings – an interpretation that, given local conditions, stays well within the spirit of the law.

¹² Some environmental organization representatives on RACs prefer to call these projects “density management” projects.

positions, as this might overly stress the collaborative culture that is emerging in many RACs.¹³ In the future, avoiding this class of projects may prove increasingly difficult because in some RACs there are relatively few remaining restoration and other projects around which broad support is easily obtained; this may push these RACs into more challenging classes of projects.

Some RACs have already developed the strength of collaboration that seems to be needed to address forest health projects, as evidenced by the large number of forest health projects recommended by the above mentioned three RACs. When the Roseburg BLM RAC decided to unanimously recommend the forest thinning project, one of the environmental organization representatives noted that had someone told her when the RAC was formed that one day she would support this kind of a project she would have told them they were crazy. This illustrates in a nutshell the kind of “radical middle” that some RACs have successfully cultivated. It is also of interest to note that the recognition of the need to actively manage forests in order to conserve them even extends, in some situations, to old growth stands – traditionally thought of as places to practice “hands off” conservation. An example of this is an old growth thinning project recommended by the Fremont-Winema, Oregon Forest Service RAC.

Fuels reduction projects represent the fourth largest expenditure category. That fuels reduction would be an area of concern for RACs, especially those in the western United States, is not a surprise given the widespread accumulation of fuels and fuel ladders and the links with wildfire, especially in the wildland urban interface zone. Given the pervasiveness of the issue, it is perhaps surprising that only one RAC, the Fremont-Winema, Oregon Forest Service RAC, accounts for 56% of the total expenditure in this project category. This RAC allocated \$2,888,327 of the \$5,149,377 that all the RACs together put towards fuels reduction projects. The balance of the fuels projects allocations came from six other RACs, four of whom allocated approximately \$.5 million and two that allocated approximately \$150,000 and \$50,000, respectively. The remaining eight RACs allocated no funding towards fuels reduction projects.

Fuels reduction projects are noteworthy because, like many other RAC-supported projects, they exemplify the creative ways in which RAC members and agency staff have sought to dovetail RAC project funds with other program funds. In this case, it is not unusual for National Fire Plan or Title III funding to support the necessary planning work that precedes the implementation of fuels reduction projects. Similarly, in cases where Title III support was used for fire planning purposes, including planning for fuels reduction efforts, support from the Healthy Forests legislation was often used to implement fuels reduction efforts. Thus, in this project category we can see the creative ways in which RACs and their partner agencies and organizations have dovetailed Titles II and III from P.L. 106-393 with the National Fire Plan and the Healthy Forests initiative.

Fuels reduction projects also exemplify the potentially troubling issue of RAC projects that create unfunded mandates for the Forest Service and the BLM. Unfunded mandates refer to the future investment obligations that an agency incurs by supporting the implementation of a project. For example, with respect to fuels reduction projects, once an area’s fuels have been removed, some sort of fuels maintenance regime needs to be implemented in order to prevent fast growing species from once again occupying the site. Other RAC projects also create

¹³ One additional reason for the dearth of forest health projects was proffered by the DFO of a BLM RAC. He noted that he has had more success in encouraging his staff to submit restoration-oriented culvert replacements and road upgrades and less success with getting the district’s terrestrial biologists to submit forest health-related projects. The reason for this, he thought, was that the terrestrial biologists have alternative programs and sources of funding through which to fund these sorts of projects, while the restoration-oriented staff do not.

unfunded mandates for the agency. For example, the installation of toilets or the renovation/reconstruction of campground facilities creates obligations for the Forest Service or BLM to continue to maintain these facilities. Unlike culvert replacement projects which one should be able to walk away from after completion, these and other sorts of RAC-funded projects cannot be walked away from – instead the agency must maintain a continuous, if generally low-level, investment to maintain the benefit of the initial project investment. The question of the extent to which the concerned agency is willing and able to shoulder these on-going costs is rarely explicitly addressed to the degree that it probably should be.

The control of noxious, invasive weeds represents another significant area of RAC support. At almost \$4.5 million, this project category received the fifth largest amount of RAC funding. Perhaps more than any other category of RAC expenditure, support for noxious weed-related projects was spread relatively evenly across all of the case study RACs. No one RAC's allocation for weed control accounts for a disproportionately large percentage of the total allocation across all the RACs and only four RACs allocated less than .1% of their budget for weed projects. The remaining 11 RACs allocated between 4% and 26% of their budget for projects in this category. RAC support for noxious weed management has been important in many areas for building the institutional capacity necessary for maintaining on-going weed control efforts. Many county Weed Advisory Boards have been revitalized through RAC support; in some instances the weed control components of other county-level organizations, such as Soil and Water Conservation Districts, have been strengthened through RAC support. Title II support for implementing weed control projects has been complemented, in many areas, by Title III support for education and outreach programs related to publicizing the extent of the problem and educating landowners and the public regarding methods for slowing the spread of noxious weeds as well as their eradication.

Five RACs recommended funding projects related to the reestablishment of native species. Although the total amount invested in this project category is relatively small (\$787,313), the projects that have been authorized are important because they involve establishing native plant propagation programs. The native species that these programs produce are important because they supply ecologically desirable plants for revegetating areas through the implementation of RAC-funded projects such as fish passage enhancement, riparian improvement, roads work, and other vegetation management efforts. As such, they complement other RAC-supported work and help to reduce the spread of noxious or invasive weeds that are sometimes found in the hay and straw used to finish a variety of restoration-related projects.

Recreation-related projects were supported by all but three of the case study RACs. Comprising approximately 5% of the total amount allocated by the RACs, recreation projects consist primarily of trails, campground, and other recreation-oriented infrastructure repair, maintenance, and in some cases construction. Much of the trails work was accomplished with youth employment organizations such as the Northwest Youth Corps, the Oregon Conservation Corps, and the California Conservation Corps. The employment generation and job training aspects of this work are discussed below. Although most RACs that supported recreation projects allocated a relatively small percentage (14% or less) for recreation projects, four RACs chose to prioritize projects in this category. The Wrangell-Petersburg, Alaska RAC, the Del Norte, California RAC, the Idaho Panhandle RAC, and the Lincoln County, Montana RAC allocated 31%, 28%, 24%, and 20% of their total budgets for recreation-oriented projects. In the case of the Del Norte RAC, much of the RAC's support for recreation projects was dedicated to the reconstruction of a historic wagon trail that used to connect the coast with the interior valley in

northwest California. This was a high priority project that the RAC considered its “legacy” project. In other RACs, at least some members expressed a desire to fund more recreation projects. However, RAC members and often the involved agency personnel more often preferred to fund on-the-ground projects that enhanced or improved environmental conditions, rather than projects that enhanced human use of the public lands.

With only \$70,858 and \$61,350 allocated by all the case study RACs for soils and history-related projects, respectively, it is clear that these are the two lowest priority project categories. Only two RACs (Siskiyou, California and Tuolumne, California) recommended projects that could be categorized exclusively in the soils category, while the Tuolumne and one other RAC (Lincoln, Montana) recommended history-related projects. Of the two soils projects, one involved capturing feral horses to halt the erosion they caused, while the other entailed range productivity improvement. The history projects involved the preservation and repair of historic structures.

The project category “other” represents a significant proportion (11%) of the RAC’s total recommended funding. All RACs have recommended funding projects in this category. While most RACs allocated less than 10% of their total budget to budgets in this category, a few allocated more. For example, the Del Norte, California, Medford, Oregon, and Eastern Arizona RACs allocated 21%, 19%, and 17% of their budgets to projects in this category while the Southwest Mississippi RAC allocated a full 69% of their budget to a project in this category. Examples of “other” projects include forest interpretation and education programs, support for Fire Safe Councils, management plan development, and enhancing agency GIS capabilities. The Mississippi RAC’s large allocation of funds in this category is to support the planning and preparatory work for the design of a wastewater treatment and disposal system of the Okhissa Lake watershed in the RAC’s area of jurisdiction.¹⁴ This is one component of a lake and recreation-oriented development package that county officials and economic development planners in the region believe will become an important source of future revenue and employment generation.

While this section has provided a snapshot of RAC spending patterns, it is also illuminating to examine changes in RAC spending patterns over time. We do this using the example of the Roseburg, Oregon BLM RAC. The project categories for which this RAC has recommended the most funding are fish passage enhancement, road improvement, stream improvement, and youth crews. The RAC has recommended \$3.6 million for fish passage enhancement, \$1.7 million for road improvements, \$1.3 million for stream improvement, and \$1.1 million for youth crews. When funding patterns are viewed over the first five years, a strong trend towards supporting more diverse projects is clearly visible. During the second, third, fourth, and fifth years, RAC members chose to reduce funding levels for high-priority project categories, such as road improvements and fish passage enhancement, in order to support the increasing diversity of project proposals. For example, RAC support has grown for projects in the infrastructure maintenance, restoration project development, education, and information management categories. During this same time period, the RAC received an increasing number of project applications from non-agency project proponents. For example, the number of non-agency proposals increased annually from 8 in 2001 to 20 in 2005 and the number of non-agency

¹⁴ This project was categorized as “other” because it fit in no single category well. This classification should not raise questions about the appropriateness of the project; rather it reflects more on the challenge of categorizing a project that confers private and federal watershed benefits, along with identifying appropriate contracting methods for the project, which was the source of questions in the first place.

projects recommended for funding also increased from 6 in 2001 to a high of 14 in 2004. This increase in the diversity of projects the RAC now supports reflects both shifts in the types of project applications that are submitted and a maturing process within the RAC as members broaden their own understanding of the RAC's role and the types of benefits it can provide.

Innovative Projects, or Projects the Agencies Should Be Doing Anyway?

The issue of whether RAC-supported projects entail work that the agencies should or would be doing without Title II support, or whether RAC projects are advancing new, creative, and innovative ways of securing both environmental and socioeconomic benefits, is relevant and, at least in some RACs, is debated by RAC members at recurring intervals. Some RAC members feel that the agencies are using RAC funds to carry out work that should be funded from other sources within the agency's budget. For example, when RAC support constitutes the bulk of a district's roads budget, some RAC members, especially those representing environmental organizations, understandably question whether or not this is an effective way of utilizing scarce RAC dollars. The criticism is valid, for it is unlikely that the framers of the legislation intended RAC dollars to be used for completing basic infrastructure maintenance work that should happen anyway. However, given the extensive budget cuts that both the Forest Service and BLM have been experiencing, it is entirely to be expected that agency staff would look to the RAC to secure funding for essential management tasks that are not getting funded within the organization. This dynamic is heightened by the precipitous drops in timber harvesting activity, which had hitherto provided funding for road system and related infrastructure maintenance and for restoration work. RAC dollars are playing a crucial "bridging" role in enabling agencies to continue their work in these arenas, albeit at reduced levels of investment. Furthermore, if this work was not accomplished, there would be serious negative consequences, both in terms of the environmental costs of "doing nothing," and, in some instances, the elimination of important ecosystem management infrastructure. Although the use of RAC funds in a bridging capacity is understandable, it also severely restricts the ability of RACs to support the innovative, creative projects that the legislation is designed to support. While the installation of sweet smelling toilets in high use areas of a national recreation area, as was supported by the Del Norte, California RAC, is understandable given public health issues, it is perhaps regrettable that tapping into RAC dollars was the only way to pay for such a basic piece of infrastructure.

Despite concerns that RAC dollars are supporting work that should be done anyway, there are also numerous examples of RACs that are funding innovative projects that entail multi-agency partnerships, links with grassroots organizations in rural areas, and a diverse variety of funding sources and related programs. These projects often revolve around restoration, weeds, or youth. They entail creative partnerships with community-based organizations, and they embody the best qualities associated with leveraging dollars, meshing related programs and funding sources, community engagement and participation, and innovative approaches to cross-jurisdiction landscape-scale ecosystem management. We have already discussed the innovative ways in which some counties and RACs have used Title III and Title II support for fire planning work and then secured funding through the Healthy Forests initiative and the National Fire Plan to implement the projects identified in the planning process. This is a common phenomenon found throughout most of the western states RACs. Below we highlight a few of the many outstanding RAC-supported projects.

The Tuolumne, California, Forest Service RAC has embarked upon an extensive and innovative effort to reduce and manage the dangerous build-up of fuels in the area of its

jurisdiction (located on the western slope of the southern Sierra Nevada range). High profile fuels reduction projects that build on years of prior discussion involve diverse partners such as the Stanislaus National Forest, California Department of Forestry, California Conservation Corps, Tuolumne County Fire Department, local Fire Safe Councils, and the University of California Alumni Association. Some fuels reduction projects, implemented along highly visible travel corridors, have triggered an “awareness wave” among local residents regarding the importance of creating defensible space around residences, especially those located in the wildland urban interface. This suite of projects also includes special provisions for helping seniors and disabled residents meet state defensible space laws. These projects are significant (and award winning) because of the creative ways in which they combine extensive community partnerships, leverage in-kind and hard cash contributions, integrate education and outreach with fuels reduction projects, and have created a ripple effect of fuels reduction efforts in the region.

The Roseburg, Oregon BLM RAC’s work on fish passage enhancement deserves mentioning here. This award-winning RAC strongly supported fish passage projects. At approximately \$3.6 million, fish passage projects represent about 37% of the Roseburg RAC’s total outlay. Each year, significantly more fish passage projects are proposed than are funded, thus allowing the RAC to select top priority projects. Between 2001 and 2005 the RAC recommended funding projects to replace 24 aging culverts that constituted barriers to fish passage. Their subsequent replacement opened up approximately 47 miles of previously unavailable stream habitat for salmonid and other aquatic species. The state-of-the-art culverts are designed to last 50 to 100 years. They constitute a significant investment in the region’s public lands’ road infrastructure and, because of the checkerboard pattern of public/private land ownership, adjacent industrial and nonindustrial landholders alike benefit from these investments. Of the 23 fish passage projects, five were proposed and implemented by non-BLM entities such as watershed councils and the Douglas Soil and Water Conservation District. This demonstrates the extensive partnerships between the BLM and other organizations that the RAC has helped to forge.

The Roseburg BLM RAC has also worked to address issues and challenges that cross landownership boundaries, and to partner with adjacent landowners and other key agencies and organizations to advance restoration objectives both on BLM-managed lands and on adjacent privately-owned forestland. Two grants to the Douglas Soil and Water Conservation District in support of the district’s fish passage inventory initiative reflect these goals and objectives. The grants support a multi-party collaborative effort called the Umpqua Basin Fish Access Team (UBFAT) that involves the Oregon Departments of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Department of Forestry, Umpqua Basin Watershed Council, Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, timber companies, and non-industrial landowners in the Umpqua basin. The purpose of this project is to do the outreach necessary to private landowners in the basin in order to obtain permission to conduct surveys on private property regarding stream crossings and barriers to fish passage.

Projects such as fish passage inventories and databases of past restoration projects combined with habitat surveys at restoration project sites are providing the Roseburg BLM RAC (and indeed the whole restoration community) with important landscape-scale tools and layers of information. These tools and information layers are essential for effective site evaluation and strategic investment of limited restoration funds. They are beginning to enable the RAC to adopt a landscape-scale perspective when it comes to determining how they can most effectively

support restoration-oriented projects. The Roseburg BLM RAC is one of the few RACs that has begun the tasks necessary to organize its work and activities at the landscape scale.

RACs have also developed impressive track records with respect to their ability to leverage other forms of support, both in terms of in-kind and hard cash matches/donations. While virtually all RACs do leverage additional support and funds, a few examples illustrate the extent of leveraging they can accomplish. A local nonprofit organization that has received support from the Del Norte, California RAC has used two RAC grants to leverage more than 2,727 hours of volunteer labor for noxious weed, litter, dumpsite, and unofficial shooting range clean up. The Olympic Peninsula, Washington RAC essentially doubled its effective budget by using its \$3.5 million cumulative budget for fiscal years 2002-2005 to leverage another \$3.5 million from Forest Service funds and other sources to implement on-the-ground project work. Similarly the Tuolumne, California RAC doubled its effective budget by leveraging \$1 million in matching funds from the Forest Service and elsewhere during the same time period.

RAC Ability to Partner with Non-Agency Entities

The great majority of RAC grants go directly to the Forest Service or BLM. This is not surprising given the requirement that RAC-funded projects benefit public lands. However, there is also an emphasis on community participation within the legislation, which specifies that P.L. 106-393 funds may be used to enter into agreements with “Federal agencies, state and local governments, private and nonprofit entities, and landowners” (Sec. 202.). This provision clearly signals that non-agency entities are eligible to receive funds from RACs. Some RACs have clearly prioritized working with non-agency entities and have approved a significant number of non-agency projects for funding. These RACs have gradually approved more and more non-agency projects as non-agency entities learn about the Title II program and develop or refine their capacities to successfully develop proposals for the RAC to consider. RACs that have prioritized community partnerships for project implementation include the Colville, Washington RAC, the Siskiyou and Tuolumne, California RACs, the Wrangell-Petersburg, Alaska RAC, and the Roseburg, Oregon RAC.

Supporting the work of non-agency entities with RAC dollars is important because it helps to build community partnerships and collaborative relations around public lands resource management, as intended by the legislation. However, there are significant barriers to entry for non-agency groups. These include the capacity to plan, design, develop, write proposals for, and implement complex projects that comport with the list of approved Title II project areas. These are not insignificant barriers and only organizations with a successful track record of this type of work can successfully compete against a federal agency for RAC support.

However, those entities that can successfully bid for RAC dollars offer the federal agency a unique opportunity to develop meaningful community partnerships and to implement projects that may be off of (but usually adjacent to) federal lands. Examples of using RAC funds to strengthen community partnerships include the grants recommended by the Siskiyou, California Forest Service RAC to the Shasta Valley Resource Conservation District for riparian restoration and exclusionary fencing on a privately-owned ranch located between the Klamath and Shasta-Trinity National Forests. The project is designed to improve spawning habitat for anadromous fish species and will benefit adjacent and hydrologically connected private and public lands. Projects such as these embody a landscape-scale perspective on ecosystem management, one that is able to transcend property boundaries in the interest of working on an ecologically meaningful scale.

In those cases where RACs have successfully supported the efforts of non-agency entities, they have done so because non-agency entities, e.g. watershed councils, weed advisory boards, soil and water conservation districts, and youth-oriented conservation work organizations, already possessed the requisite capacities to engage with the process. RACs have not built local capacity for this kind of work. Indeed, many have devoted minimal resources to outreach efforts to enlarge the group of organizations that receive RAC funding. This means that groups that were previously not involved in decision-making forums for public lands continue to be disengaged. Examples of these groups include Latino and Native American groups, and non-timber forest products collectors and harvesters. By not reaching out to these stakeholder groups, RACs limit the social scale and scope of their efforts and foreclose opportunities to partner with the full range of people interested in and knowledgeable about public lands natural resources. While reaching out to historically underrepresented groups and crafting innovative ways to help them develop the capacity to effectively engage with the RAC process is certainly not an easy task, there are many success stories of involving these groups in collaborative public lands decision-making processes. These examples offer insights regarding how RACs could expand the range of groups they partner with. This is unlikely to occur, however, unless the involved federal agencies take a lead role in encouraging RACs to move in this direction. This would be an appropriate role for the agencies to play, and one that is certainly consistent with the legislation, which acknowledges the need for P.L. 106-393 to “build new, and strengthen existing relationships and to improve management of public lands and waters” (Sec. 2(a)(15)).

Employment Generation – Permanent Jobs

RACs support local employment generation primarily by specifying that contractors who work on RAC-funded projects be from a relatively short distance away. This can make a difference for local contractors, especially when combined in a synergistic manner with similar locally-oriented efforts to make other public lands-related work contracts available for local contractors. However, by themselves, RAC-supported projects are not able to generate full-time, family-wage jobs. This is because RACs have neither the budget, the decision-making authority, the planning horizon, nor the institutional capability necessary to create full-time jobs. Promising job creation through this program is disingenuous if by “job creation” we mean full-time, permanent work at family wage levels.¹⁵

That said, most RACs are concerned about sustaining and indeed increasing local, natural resource-based employment. While specifying that contracts be awarded to local contractors whenever possible is one way of supporting this goal, some RACs have proactively addressed this issue in other ways as well. Examples of two such RACs are the Fremont-Winema, Oregon RAC and the Siskiyou, California RAC. For members of the Fremont-Winema RAC in remote Lake and Klamath Counties in southern Oregon, finding creative ways to sustain the dwindling forest management and restoration workforce and infrastructure has been an abiding concern that predates the passage of P.L. 106-393. Fortunately, the Fremont-Winema National Forest staff have also been interested in working with local leaders on ways to address this issue, as have the State of Oregon’s Department of Employment, the Portland, Oregon-based nonprofit

¹⁵ A Sierra Institute study of the natural resources restoration sector in Humboldt County, California determined that the approximately \$14 million investment in restoration in 2002 supported 210 FTEs (Full Time Equivalents) of employment distributed among approximately 300 jobs in the private and public sectors and within tribal government (Baker, 2005). This provides a rough rubric for assessing the magnitude of investment required for creating full-time employment in this sector.

organization Sustainable Northwest, and a local group called the Lakeview Stewardship Group. Working together, these entities have managed to reauthorize the historic Lakeview Sustained Yield Unit and refocus its orientation towards sustainable forest management, restoration, and local employment generation. They have also created a local nonprofit, Lake County Resources Initiative, located in Lakeview, the county seat, whose purpose is to secure sustainable, living wage jobs in natural resources management, and to enhance forest health on the sustained yield unit. Together, these entities have worked assiduously to, among other things, build local contractor capacity to successfully bid on Forest Service contracts and to modify the size and related specifications of those contracts to make them more amenable to local contractor capacities. Many members of the Fremont-Winema RAC have also been involved in these entities and activities and so they bring to the RAC a heightened awareness of both the challenges and opportunities related to generating local natural resources-related employment. The RAC builds upon and advances the work of these entities. It recommends funding for the kinds of jobs local contractors can effectively bid on, e.g., small to medium size equipment intensive projects, and works with Forest Service contracting officers to ensure that contracts, to the extent possible, are developed in ways that enable local contractors to bid on them. Clearly, this RAC not only is situated within a high capacity institutional environment vis a vis employment generation, but it has also, through its own efforts, significantly contributed towards the goal of generating local employment opportunities.

Members of the Siskiyou, California RAC are also concerned about local employment generation. While there may be fewer civic organizations addressing these issues in Siskiyou than in the Fremont Winema RAC counties, they have nevertheless thought long and hard about how to help create full-time employment opportunities through the Title II program. Having grown dissatisfied with the inability of smaller projects to provide permanent, fulltime employment, the Siskiyou RAC is now discussing the idea of promoting fewer, larger projects that actually have the potential to generate permanent jobs, and that contribute to the expansion and diversification of the local economy. One such project is a roundwood utilization center involving a large number of local partners. The proposed project would expand an already existing gallery into a much larger regional arts center. The building would utilize roundwood, a wood chip and clay mixture, and other materials from area fuel reduction projects. The project would involve training people in the new building techniques and it would serve as a spring board to establishing a prefab industry for similar roundwood structures and building supplies from forest products.

Employment Generation – Seasonal Jobs for Young Adults

While RACs are challenged to create permanent, fulltime, family-wage jobs, through partnerships with organizations such as the Northwest Youth Corps, California Conservation Corps, and the Oregon Youth Conservation Corps, they have successfully created thousands of seasonal employment opportunities for young adults. RAC support has enabled youth work crews from these organizations to implement projects related to trail and campground maintenance, noxious weed removal, tree pruning, tree planting, and native seed collection and propagation. In addition to accomplishing natural resources management objectives, the programs these organizations have developed also prioritize education, job training, skills development, and confidence-building objectives. Many RACs and agency staff value both sets of objectives. For example, one Designated Federal Official noted that these programs are important because of the ways in which they enable the BLM to do something “for the good of

the community.” He acknowledged that, for BLM staff, embracing the importance of these social outcomes “has been an interesting education,” especially when working with youth crews means sometimes getting fewer acres treated. Indeed, some RAC members have struggled to accept that it is sometimes worth accomplishing a little less on-the-ground work in exchange for making a difference in a youth’s life when it comes to allocating scarce RAC dollars. Despite such reservations, many RACs consistently support projects involving youth employment. This indicates that RAC members believe their work includes a social mission, one that involves supporting projects that are designed, at least in part, to exert a positive influence on youth – in addition to accomplishing important on-the-ground outcomes. As one member of the Roseburg, Oregon BLM RAC noted, “We love the Northwest Youth Corps and the Oregon Youth Conservation Corps.”

The Northwest Youth Corps is a good example of a nonprofit organization with whom RACs in the western United States have successfully partnered. Since 1983, the Northwest Youth Corps has been providing education, employment, and job-training programs for youth, especially in the area of natural resources conservation. Between 2002 and 2004, the Northwest Youth Corps used Title II and Title III support to provide summer employment opportunities to over 1,400 young adults in the Pacific Northwest. In addition to participating in the organization’s job training and educational programs, these youth have earned money while completing forest health, recreation, habitat improvement, and wildfire prevention projects.¹⁶

For some young adults, the importance of participating in RAC-funded youth employment and conservation projects transcends a summer job that integrates skill development and job training. These programs also represent life transforming experiences for people whom society would otherwise categorize as “losers,” “high risk,” and socioeconomic dropouts. The students enrolled in the Phoenix School in Roseburg, Oregon who participate in RAC-funded natural resources conservation projects are a good example of the ways in which such programs can help transform young adults from being potential societal dropouts into productive, contributing members of society. The Phoenix School used the standards, training and curriculum materials, and financial support from Oregon’s Youth Conservation Corps program as the starting point for developing part of its innovative and award winning educational and employment package for at-risk youth in Douglas County. The program enjoys widely acknowledged and celebrated success, and has helped transform the lives of its participants. As Executive Director Ron Breyne notes, the “group that was least likely to be employable now graduates and has 98% employment at living wage jobs.” These examples illustrate the point that, while RACs may be limited in their ability to generate permanent, family-wage jobs, it is difficult to underestimate their potential to positively affect the lives of young adults and to increase the likelihood that some day they will be able to secure permanent, family-wage employment.

¹⁶ As described in the Northwest Youth Corps’ 2004 Progress Report, 1,450 young adults logged 17,475 worker days between 2002 and 2004. During this time they accomplished many goals, such as constructing 8.5 miles of new trail, reconstructing 474 miles of old trail, building more than 1,000 trail drainage structures and 2,700 feet of retaining wall, pruning 352 acres of conifers, removing noxious weeds from 470 acres, planting 15,500 trees, seeding 31 acres with grass, removing 5,060 of unwanted range fencing and building 3.25 miles of new fencing.

Title II Monitoring

P.L. 106-393 clearly calls for monitoring of RAC-recommended projects. However, many RACs only partially satisfy the legislative requirement that they include a detailed monitoring plan for each project that they recommend for funding. Furthermore, where monitoring plans are included as part of a project description, it is often unclear who is responsible for collecting, reporting, and analyzing the financial, socioeconomic, and ecological monitoring information that the plan specifies. It is also unclear how the monitoring data is to be used, for what purpose, and by whom. Given the considerable vagueness surrounding the issue of monitoring, and the fact that even the most basic monitoring requires an expenditure of funds and energy, it is perhaps not surprising that there is a rather uneven track record with respect to monitoring of Title II projects, especially given the high priority most RACs place on getting the dollars “on the ground.”

Currently, systematic monitoring occurs at the level of financial accounting and verification of project implementation. Undertaken primarily by the contracting divisions of the Forest Service and BLM (but often with the involvement of the project coordinator), this type of monitoring ensures that contractors on RAC-recommended projects implement work plans according to the required design specifications. With agency personnel conducting on-site visits to verify compliance with project descriptions, this form of monitoring enables the RAC to ensure that projects are actually implemented per the project application description. Within some RACs, the project coordinator periodically reports back to the RAC regarding the progress that has been made on implementing previously-recommended projects. While this information assures the RAC and the federal agency that projects are implemented as planned, it does not provide information on the socioeconomic impacts of the project, nor does it generate information regarding the extent to which the project produced the desired ecological outcomes.¹⁷ These latter categories of information are generated through effectiveness monitoring protocols.

While a few RACs do engage in various types of effectiveness monitoring, most do not. RACs that do not engage in effectiveness monitoring constrain their own ability to engage in adaptive management – in short, to learn from what they have done and to adjust the repertoire of projects they support based on the successes and challenges of prior rounds of projects. RACs that do not engage in effectiveness monitoring also miss opportunities to assess the socioeconomic effects of the projects they approve, particularly within the arena of local employment generation. By not evaluating the employment generating effects of different kinds of projects, such RACs are hard pressed to know which projects to support in order to maximize local socioeconomic benefit. If RACs were able to develop and implement effectiveness monitoring protocols, RAC members would be able to more accurately assess the likely socioeconomic and ecological effects of proposed projects.

Some RACs have worked towards developing a more robust monitoring program. For example, several case study RACs incorporate field trips into their annual calendar of meetings. Field trips can provide important opportunities for RAC members to see first hand what some of the RAC-recommended projects have accomplished. While this does not provide a

¹⁷ In many cases this level of monitoring does provide information, often quantitative, regarding project accomplishments, e.g. number of culvert replacements, acres of noxious weeds treated, miles of road upgraded, and jobs created. However, the lack of clearly defined criteria for assessing outcomes (for example how is a “job” defined) has occasionally rendered some of the reported outcomes unreliable and points to the inherent difficulties of self-reported accomplishments.

comprehensive view of accomplishments, many RAC members commented on how useful it was to be able to see some project outcomes. Even this level of information has proven useful to RAC members in deciding whether or not to support projects similar to those the RAC had previously recommended.

A few RACs have taken the initiative to actually develop effectiveness monitoring protocols that generate comprehensive and reliable information. For example, the Tuolumne, California Forest Service RAC has developed a one page “Title II Project Accomplishments Tracking Form” that grant recipients complete annually until their projects are completed. The form requests information regarding accomplishments to date and photographs documenting the various stages of the project. This form provides RAC members information similar to that obtained on field trips, but for all RAC-recommended projects.

The Fremont-Winema RAC is an example of a RAC that has addressed outcome and effectiveness monitoring in several ways. Because of this RACs concern about and interest in local employment generation, the DFO and RAC members have created a detailed form for contractors to complete regarding the number of person days and type of work that are actually generated when fulfilling contracts on RAC-recommended projects. This information is compiled by the Forest Service and used by the RAC to help track the employment generation effects of projects. By tracking employment information at this level, the RAC has produced credible, concrete evidence of socioeconomic outcomes. This information has enabled the RAC to tailor its support for projects that generate more, rather than less, local employment, and to work with the Forest Service on packaging contracts in ways that facilitate local employment generation.

The Fremont-Winema RAC and other RACs, such as the Roseburg, Oregon BLM RAC, have also addressed monitoring issues by recommending monitoring-related projects. The Chewaucan Monitoring Project is a “poster-child” project of the Fremont-Winema RAC because of the ways in which it involves local youth in the development of scientifically innovative protocols for monitoring ecosystem parameters within one of the area’s key watersheds. Like other RAC-funded monitoring projects, this effort focuses on monitoring restoration-related parameters. It is also well known because of the ways in which it demonstrates principles related to community-based, third party monitoring. The Roseburg RAC has also funded several monitoring-related projects. These projects have supported the development of a watershed monitoring program in the Umpqua River basin, the training of volunteers to monitor watershed health, the establishment of a central database for all of the restoration projects in the Umpqua River basin, and efforts to provide technical support to landowners in the basin regarding stewardship, restoration, and monitoring.

These sorts of monitoring projects are indicators of organizational maturation within RACs. They begin the difficult task of effectiveness monitoring because they investigate, for example, the effects on watershed health of restoration projects. They also constitute important tools and layers of information that enable the RAC to adopt a landscape-scale perspective with respect to project proposal evaluation and strategic investment of limited restoration funds. However, these intensive monitoring projects significantly differ from program-level monitoring, both at the level of individual RACs, and at the state or national level. An effectiveness monitoring program covering the full suite of RAC-recommended projects does not yet exist for any RAC. Information from such a program could be aggregated at the state and the national level. When combined with the programmatic monitoring undertaken within a study of this type, it would provide a comprehensive understanding of the socioeconomic, ecological, and

institutional effects of P.L. 106-393, and would constitute a solid foundation for advancing other resource management approaches that seek to accomplish desirable socioeconomic and ecological stewardship objectives.