CHAPTER 9.
Implementation

This chapter provides guidance for implementing forest health restoration treatment on private land. Refer to Appendix J (page 95) for an implementation checklist.

Meet with property owners

The first step in planning a grant-funded restoration project is to meet with each private landowner individually to discuss the scope and objectives of the project that will be implemented on their private land, based on their land management plan. The land management plan is a necessary starting point and continues to be an essential reference document throughout the implementation process. It is important to discuss the grant agreement and criteria required for each funding organization. Most restoration grants outline who is involved, what will take place, a timeline for the project, and who is responsible for each task. Let landowners know how much the grant is worth and whether there is a cost share or required in-kind contribution. Some grants require a percentage of match fund, which can often come in the form of cash or labor.

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After you have established how the granting process works, develop a clear understanding of how the property owner's land will be used and what their objectives are for their land. Again, refer to the land management plan to understand their short- and long-term goals and objectives, as well as concerns for special places on their property. Most property owners know what improvements they would like to see and may have target areas of importance in their plan. Discuss forest health issues that the landowner is aware of, such as species composition or insect and disease outbreaks. Note other land management objectives, such as timber production, wildlife habitat, forest health, aspen restoration, livestock use, and aesthetics. Consult the summary of assessment information collected in the map folder for each stand and the additional information summarized for their property. This information will provide a baseline to work with. This information can indicate nontimber vegetation types, soil compositions, springs and stream/water locations, and general timber stand composition and densities. This information identifies priority areas based on vegetation stand type and stocking. These topics are included in a comprehensive land management plan for each landowner.

Tools for success: From planning to implementation

1. Grant funding is acquired based on the needs and priorities identified from the risk assessment.
2. Assistance with land management plans reflects the diagnosis, recommended prescriptions, and priorities.
3. Land management plans are modified to meet landowner goals and objectives.
4. Landowners have the chance to learn about and discuss consequences of management alternatives.
5. Landowners decide to participate based on their goals and objectives.

Establish potential treatment methods with the landowner. Their plan will have recommended prescriptions and a diagnostic summary of treatment recommendations. Landowners may have modified these to meet their unique goals and objectives. For example, treatments may consist of commercial thinning, noncommercial thinning, juniper removal, or a combination of each. Property owners often have preferences for the type of treatment they want on their land, for instance, hand felling versus mechanical felling. Slash treatment methods (such as piling and burning, mastication, broadcast burning, or a combination of methods) can also be established. Refer to the land management plan for clarity and direction on these subjects. A solid land management plan will put everyone on the same page moving forward.

Field assessment – boots on the ground

Once the landowner and project partners reach an understanding of the project and the project objectives, it is time to get boots on the ground. Using the plan information and maps as a reference, walk the property to assess overall forest health or observe forest health issues within a specific area that the landowner would like to restore first. The scope of this process will depend on the funds available and the landowner's objectives for the project as stated in their land management plan.

Establish contracts and other required documents

After thorough observation of the project area, the next step is to conduct a follow-up meeting with the property owner to discuss observations and develop a final recommendation for treatment. Discuss the cost of treatment types, which will translate into the total number of acres that can be treated. It is important that the property owner understands their role during the whole process. Typically, landowners assist with project planning, checking on implementation progress, and possibly helping with clean up or post-project burning. It is also important to have the landowner involved with final project inspections so that everyone is comfortable with the final result.

Once a follow-up meeting has been carried out between the agency and landowner, both parties should come to agreement on treatments and unit locations. The next step is to create and sign the contract or agreement between the granting agency and landowner for the restoration work. Each agency and grant may have different contract protocols, so the landowner may need assistance working through this aspect of the process. Each element should be discussed and agreed on.

"Many properties are multigenerational ranches. Consider the needs of the different generations that will be using the information and maps. Older generations may need printed materials, while younger generations might prefer digital information. Although more literature is now available through the internet than in the form of pamphlets, flyers, and newsletters, many people still do not use electronic information."

Gene Rogers, Wildland Fire Technologies, Inc.

Project layout

During the layout phase of the grant implementation, it may be helpful to paint or flag part of the unit based on the silvicultural prescription for implementation written in the landowner's land management plan. This will help the landowner visualize what will be removed and what will be retained, along with skid road layout and slash pile location. During this part of the process, it is also good to flag off the areas identified for post-treatment monitoring.

Secure project contractor

After the project and unit boundaries have been laid out, the landowner may need help finding an operator for the project. Many landowners are unfamiliar with forestry equipment and do not know which local operators to contact. Each contractor will have something unique to offer. For instance, some have a hired crew and others work alone; some have commercial logging capabilities and others complete a treatment by hand. Having a list of operators, with a summary of the equipment they use and the limitations of the equipment, will help landowners decide which operator to choose. For an example of an operator list, see the KLFHP website (https://www.klfhp.org/professional-contacts/). Depending on the grant or agency administering the grant, it may be necessary to have a bid process for hiring an operator. Depending on which granting organization the property owner is working with, contracts with the operator may be between the landowner and the operator or between the third-party grant recipient, such as a Watershed Council, and the operator. This is specific to each funder.

Concept: Learning network

Education and learning are constant throughout the process. The learning network strengthens as partners examine the results of their efforts, share experience and knowledge, develop new skills, and identify what is needed to manage the next project better.

Photos: Marci Schreder

Pre-treatment (left) and post-treatment (right) unit on private land in the North Warner Project

Implementation oversight

Project and implementation administration is necessary to validate that the prescriptions, landowner objectives, and agency objectives are being met. This oversight is also important if the operator or landowner misinterpreted the prescriptions. It also provides an opportunity to change the prescriptions or clarify any issues that arise during implementation.

Post-treatment monitoring

Once the project is complete, monitoring of the restoration treatments will help illustrate the work that was carried out. A predetermined monitoring schedule is important to document change over time. Note any changes in vegetation cover, shrub response, tree growth, water presence, or whichever natural resource issues are the objectives of the granting agency. Monitoring typically occurs for 3 to 5 years after the project is complete.

It is likely that post-cut treatment options will occur immediately or 12 to 24 months after the project is complete. These may include using slash for firewood or fence posts or chipping the slash material. There will always be material remaining (in the form of slash piles or slash scatter throughout the units). There are various methods for removing this material, such as burning slash piles, conducting prescribed broadcast burning, or converting slash to biochar. Encourage property owners to work with their local fire agencies to burn at the right time or find other assistance.

The quality of the communication among the conservation partners will determine the effectiveness of the relationships between partners and the landowners. Expectations need to be understood and well-defined among the technical providers, the landowners, and the contractors doing the work. When conservation partners are willing to share each other's workload to increase the capacity to implement a project, it creates an atmosphere that program funders, landowners, and contractors appreciate and want to participate in.

Tips for success: Develop a single vision among the agency staff and conservation partners

The key to implementing a successful conservation program is to develop a single vision among the agency staff and the other conservation partners involved. When there is a well-developed vision, the conservation message to landowners and their involvement are more effective and result in the successful implementation of forest practices. Expectations also need to be aligned up front with conservation partners so that the landowners implementing practices are informed and knowledgeable about the process from start to finish.