

Working on Both Sides of the Fence: The Good Neighbor Authority

The Good Neighbor concept was developed in 1998 by the U.S. Forest Service Region Two, State and Private Forestry and the Colorado State Forest Service. Both entities realized forest management activities could have a greater influence on forest health if work occurred on both sides of the fence in a given area. For example, the fuel break could follow the topography, insects and disease could be managed more comprehensively. In 2000, the concept became a pilot project in Colorado to determine the program's usefulness as a cross-boundary forest management tool. Since that time, authorization for the Good Neighbor Authority has been extended several times and a similar program was initiated with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Without congressional intervention, however, the programs will expire Sept. 30, 2013.

Key Elements for Good Neighbor Projects:

- The local U.S. Forest Service Ranger District/Bureau of Land Management office and Colorado State Forest Service district have a good working relationship or are willing to try a different way of doing business.
- The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process has been completed on the federal land.
- Private property owners adjacent to proposed federal project areas are willing to participate in the forest management activity or have already completed a similar project.
- Private property owners will allow a forest product contractor to access federal land from their private road.

Good Neighbor projects are advantageous when the USFS or BLM have a potential project, but access on system roads is either very poor or non-existent. In this instance, if the adjacent private landowners are also willing to do forest management work, the federal land manager can ask the CSFS to facilitate a Good Neighbor, cross-boundary project.

At the district level, federal and state personnel determine which office is responsible for which pieces of the project. The USFS/BLM may decide to set up the project on the federal land while the CSFS helps the private landowners determine the size and scope of the project on private land. The CSFS generally secures the access agreement with the road owner, advertises the projects simultaneously, awards the projects to a contractor, and makes sure contract specifications are met on both sides of the fence.

The USFS/BLM district allocates a portion of their budget to pay for CSFS time spent on the federal project. Currently, finding a funding source may be an issue for the federal agencies, particularly if near the end of a federal fiscal year there are no unspent dollars that can be reallocated to Good Neighbor. (Federal fiscal year ends Sept. 30.) Private landowners would also pay the CSFS for agreed upon services.

Although the program requires plenty of "t" crossing and "i" dotting, there is flexibility in how district offices implement the program. The USFS/BLM is able to complete a project that may otherwise not get done because of access gained, and the private landowners often get a better project price because contractors can address larger tracts of forest. Together, their efforts have a greater impact and the ability to meet shared objectives.