

The Nevada Pinyon-Juniper Partnership

The purpose of the Nevada Pinyon-Juniper Partnership (Partnership) is to identify strategies to address aging and expanding pinyon-juniper (PJ) woodlands through innovation and public-private cooperation. The effort is being directed by a Steering Committee composed of experts and interests from federal, state, and local governments and agencies as well as a wide suite of non-government organizations and the private sector (see attached list).

Background

Eighty-seven percent of Nevada is federal land, with approximately nine million acres of PJ woodland under the management responsibility of the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service. The risks presented by PJ woodlands in their current expanding and overstocked condition, along with the concomitant impacts on ecosystem resilience and biodiversity, wildlife habitat, water quantity and quality, and soils are cause for major concern. Restoration on a landscape level is an environmental protection imperative. At the same time, opportunity exists to utilize the biomass generated from treatments for commercial purposes, thus adding offset revenues back into the restoration cycle while creating rural industries and jobs in counties whose private economies are in need of a boost.

Working Towards a Demonstration Project

Clearly, these objectives cannot be reached without an unprecedented level of interagency and public-private cooperation, utilizing the best in science, technology, and land management practices. To facilitate and support this dynamic model, Senator Harry Reid has called for the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture to establish an interagency demonstration project. Such a project would designate a landscape-scale area with a high proportion of PJ woodland in rural Nevada. Identification of the area will be based upon stakeholder input in order to identify areas that are accessible, in need of treatment to benefit a maximum number of resource values, and supported by local interests. The project area would be managed under a long-term cycle of inventory, environmental planning (NEPA), restoration treatments, and biomass utilization. Treatments will be site-specific, guided by restoration needs, and closely monitored, adapted and tailored to achieve desired ecological outcomes.

Federal agencies are critical partners and action agents to this demonstration project, and include BLM, USFW, USFS, NRCS, Rural Development, ARS, and the Department of Energy. State of Nevada partners include the Department of Wildlife, Division of Forestry, and State Energy Office. Local governments, Native American tribes, and nongovernmental organizations representing environmental, conservation, and cultural preservation interests are also critical to the process. The collective expertise, wisdom, and resources of these partners will serve to create focus and momentum for accomplishment, as well as to build in mechanisms for scientific monitoring, self-correction, and accountability.

Need and Benefits

At present there are approximately 9 million acres of PJ woodlands in Nevada and nearly 50 million acres throughout the west. As a result of aggressive fire suppression, land management strategies, and climatic changes, woodlands have rapidly expanded over the past 150 years. In the absence of fire or other disturbances, woodlands tend to expand and establish in surrounding

habitats (Phase I). Woodlands become much more prone to catastrophic wildfire as fuel loads increase once trees become co-dominant (Phase II) and then dominant (Phase III). Phase III woodlands tend to have little or no understory of native grasses and brush, resulting in ecosystems that are less resilient to fire, more prone to erosion, and at higher risk of invasion of insects, noxious weeds, or other undesirable vegetation. Experts estimate that 100,000 acres of woodland changes from Phase II to Phase III each year in Nevada.

As a result, both scientists and land management professionals agree that the majority of those acres are in need of treatment that, when conducted properly, provides a multitude of benefits including:

- **Increased Biodiversity** for both flora and fauna.
- **Improved Watershed Health** increasing both quantity and quality of water.
- **Enhanced Wildlife Habitat** for sagebrush obligate species like sage grouse and mule deer.
- **Reduced Risk of Catastrophic Wildfire** by serving as a fire surrogate and reducing high fuel loads.
- **Elevated Woodland Health** by reducing the potential for beetle-kill and protection of old-growth forest from risk of wildfire.

Pinyon-Juniper Summit

The Partnership has aggregated adequate resources to accomplish a detailed analysis of land status maps in order to identify 100,000 – 500,000 acres for the demonstration project. At the same time, partners are identifying opportunities that will maximize the win-win potential for treatment and restoration. The acreage to be placed in the demonstration project, as well as the parameters of the project in terms of use of resources, agency authorities, and other tools needed to support the project, will be presented to national agency leaders at the Pinyon-Juniper Summit to be held in Las Vegas on December 8 and 9, 2010 (date tentative).

The goal of the demonstration project is to identify, deploy, and document best practices that result in restoration, on a landscape scale, to achieve the positive outcomes listed above in combination with responsible commercial utilization. The results will assist in determining what tools and authorities should be given to land managers throughout the five western states containing PJ woodlands. Participation by all parties will be critical to the project's success, and it is continuously invited.

Key Events and Anticipated Timeline of Nevada Pinyon-Juniper Partnership

April 2010:	Initial statement of need for partnership.
May 13, 2010:	Scoping meeting, steering committee formation, solicit members and donations.
July 22, 2010:	Utilization teleconference.
August 2010:	Hire contractor to collect agencies' plans and data, identify potential demonstration areas and develop key tools.
Oct. 14, 2010:	Held environmental and cultural stakeholder teleconference.
Dec. 2010:	Host the inaugural Pinyon-Juniper Summit to present contractor findings and identify action items.
2011:	Implement action items and develop needed tools to begin demonstration.
2012:	Initiate resource inventory and establish pre-treatment monitoring for demonstration project. Begin NEPA process; bring demonstration project authorities to projects within area that are already in agencies' pipeline.
2013:	Establish cycle of completing NEPA and implementing treatments on large-scale units of land within demonstration areas.
2013 – 2033:	Conduct treatments under an Adaptive Management Strategy based on monitoring results.
2035:	Close out implementation of project and wrap up post treatment monitoring.