A large, stylized sun with a bright yellow circular center and several long, tapered rays extending from it, set against a white background. The rays are in various shades of yellow and orange.

Linking Community Development with National Forest Planning and Management in the South

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Southern Rural Development Center The logo for the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC) features the acronym "SRDC" in a bold, sans-serif font. Below the text is a stylized graphic element consisting of a thick, curved line that forms a partial circle, with a small yellow triangle pointing upwards from the center of the curve.

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Contents

Introduction	3
The Challenge	3
Forest-Dependent Communities: Definition and Description	5
Disadvantages of Forest-Dependent Communities	10
Empirical Evidence of Disadvantages	11
The USDA Forest Service’s Evolving Relationship to Forest-Dependent Communities: Rural and Community Development Programs	12
Original Rural Development Responsibility	13
Development of a Rural Development Strategy in the 1990s	14
Economic Recovery Program	15
RCA Program Implementation	15
The Forest Planning Process and Public Involvement	16
The Emerging Role of Local Government in Forest Management: Strategies and Potential for Collaborative Planning	21
Conclusions	23
Some Key Dilemmas in the Development and Implementation of Collaborative, Community-Based Strategies	23
The Bane of Politics	23
The “National Interest” Question	23
The Dynamics of Planning in the USDA Forest Service	24
Centrifugal Forces in Projects, Communities and Bureaucracy	24
Recommendations	25
What Should the USDA Forest Service Do?	25
What Can Rural Development Councils and Other USDA Partners Do?	26
What Can Communities Do?	27
Appendix: List of the 40 Most Forest-Dependent Communities in the Southern Region Based Upon Percent of County Land in a National Forest (greater than 40 percent)	30
Endnotes	31
References	31

Introduction

The Forest Service, a branch of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, is charged with managing 191 million acres of public lands, 13 million of which are in the Southern region, region 8. This region includes the national forests in the 13 Southern states and Puerto Rico.

Based upon any of the measures one might use, the Southern region has a very large number of rural communities which, while they may not be wholly “dependent” upon forestry and the Forest Service, are at least affected by them. By some criteria, this includes as many as one-third of the 6,000 plus communities in the region with less than 10,000 people. There are 16 counties in the Southern region, including 40 incorporated places, in which 40 percent or more of the counties’ lands are in National Forests. These are, of course, major recipients of the \$219.5 million of National Forest receipts paid out to states, counties, and local schools in 1997. Of this total, \$14.9 million went to the Southern region, with Arkansas receiving the most, at \$3.4 million. (The state of Oregon, alone, received \$86 million.) While very few rural communities in the Southern region are as dependent upon forest resources and the actions of the USDA Forest Service as in the western region, many are heavily influenced and have close relationships with the National Forests and local Ranger Districts. Many more of these communities could benefit from strengthening these relationships as devolution occurs and more responsibility moves to the local community level, especially as the National Forests engage in long-range planning. What is needed is no less than the “Community Owned Government” of Osborne and Gaebler [16].

To effectively further the community-based strategy that is emerging, however, will require an aggressive approach coming from the USDA Forest Service, from affected local communities, and from other partners, such as sister agencies in USDA, the State Rural Development Councils, and many others. As the Committee of Scientists which Secretary Glickman organized to advise on the forest planning process pointed out, national forest planning and management neither can nor should any longer be the sole preserve of the Forest Service. They go on to say: “In order to bridge sources of knowledge and capabilities; to effectively educate and learn; to resolve disputes; to credibly problem-solve (sic); and, to foster and restore trust so that national forest management is a common endeavor rather than a battlefield; national forest planning needs to be structured in a manner that meaningfully and openly engages the American People” [2, p. 11].

The Challenge

Southern rural forest-dependent communities face an immediate and long term challenge. The immediate challenge is to work together to make upcoming forest plan revision work better than it has been in the past. More particularly, forest planning must be made to work better for forest managers; to contribute to planning for sustainability of forest-dependent communities; and to forge effective partnerships for future forest managers, while, at the same time, contributing to forest health and to achieving the goals that the American public has for its National Forests. The long-term challenge is to engage the communities more effectively in both long range forest planning and project planning while also achieving the nation’s multiple goals and objectives for the National Forest lands.

A number of important trends merge to create this challenge. These include, first of all, the fact that forest planning is eminent for many of the Southern National Forests. (In some it is already completed, or well on the way.)

Second, although final regulations have not yet been issued, it seems quite clear that in this phase of forest planning there will be a greater emphasis than in the past upon involving the public, especially local, forest-dependent communities, and trying to share with them some of the responsibility for the forest planning process.

Third, Ecosystem Management has emerged as the guiding philosophy of forest management, and a key aspect of Ecosystem Management is its “human dimension.” In the past, far too frequently, the impact of forest planning and management upon local forest-dependent communities—a central component of this human dimension—has been to convert them into the battleground for national interest groups, frequently destroying whatever sense of community might have existed. Ecosystem Management must develop the capacity not only to describe, but also to improve, the health of these most seriously affected human communities. Any credible ecosystem analysis must include an analysis of the relationships that prevail among the forest lands, the people in local, forest-dependent communities, and the Forest Service. Any credible planning must effectively engage those communities in the process.

Fourth, the USDA Forest Service has undertaken the task of promoting the concept and practice of sustainable community and rural development. There is no better time to do this than when long-range planning is being done, and it cannot be done without serious involvement of the people in those communities.

Fifth, the USDA Forest Service has developed an effective approach for working with rural communities. This approach, which is administered by the State and Private Forestry Branch, includes an explicit, community-based rural development strategy, some programmatic funding, a large number of community development practitioners both within and outside the agency, and, most of all, an impressive track record. It is usually referred to as the Rural Community Assistance (RCA) program. The effectiveness and excitement of the RCA program is reflected in both some of the exciting rural development efforts that have resulted, and in its biannual national Rural Community Assistance conference.

Finally, there is a wide range of partners in the wings who can, if effectively mobilized, assist the USDA Forest Service and forest-dependent communities to meet the challenge before them. These include sister USDA agencies (NRCS, CES, Rural Development, EZ-EC, etc.) and especially the state Rural Development Councils, which have the unique capacity to try to bring the rural development efforts of the various federal agencies together at the state level. These partners have frequently been quite willing and able to collaborate with the USDA Forest Service in implementing its Rural Development strategy, but they have been less forthcoming in the past in helping the Forest Service deal with its sometimes very contentious publics in forest planning.

Unfortunately, though, there is little relationship between community development and forest planning efforts, even those initiated, supported, and funded by the USDA Forest Service’s own RCA program, and long-range or project planning in the USDA Forest Service. There are even instances

where RCA has funded extensive strategic community planning efforts in the same communities where local ranger district planners attempt—often with very limited success—to involve the public in forest planning, with literally no relationship between the two efforts. It has been the unabashed objective of the authors to link community planning and development with forest planning and management, following the advice of Dee Ann Ducote, Director of Missouri’s Rural Development Council, when she said: “Community planning and national forest planning should be viewed as a system, with interdependencies AND linkages” [4]. The advantages of doing this would be (1) to more effectively engage local publics in the forest planning process, (2) to provide incentives for local forest-dependent communities to do their own strategic planning and support those efforts, and (3) to build partnerships between the USDA Forest Service and local communities, partnerships which could lead to smoother and more effective plan implementation.

Although the instances of any explicit connection between rural community planning and development and forest planning and management are rare, there are enough examples to make it clear that it is possible. The close partnership that exists between the Cherokee National Forest in Tennessee and the affected rural communities in the “Tennessee Overhill” area is one example in the southern region. The most extensive is the partnership that has been forged in the San Juan National Forest where, among other things, RCA program funds and personnel have been used for several years to carry out community-based “study groups” with the explicit objective of engaging simultaneously in community planning and in preparation for upcoming forest plan revision.

It must be recognized, though, that what is being advocated here has serious implications for the USDA Forest Service, especially for the role of the RCA program and the State and Private Forestry branch, for USDA, and for other partners of the Forest Service—even for the communities in question. For the Forest Service, it implies the need for the RCA program to be much more highly targeted upon facilitating between the National Forest System’s responsibility for managing the National Forest lands and the communities most directly affected by that management, rather than serving as the broad-based rural development program which it is at the present. It also implies that the planning process should be more flexible and open to community involvement. To USDA, it implies the need to begin to get serious about a community-based approach that truly crosses agencies and programs within agencies. Too often, devolution and community-based efforts simply mean that each and every program approaches the community separately in its own way, with its agenda, rather than stimulating and supporting genuine community-based planning of any kind. To forest-dependent communities, it means getting serious about strategic planning for themselves while also attempting to educate themselves about forest planning and management issues.

Forest-Dependent Communities: Definition and Description

What do we mean when we talk about “forest-dependent” communities? There are basically three things that must be considered, (1) the definition of community, (2) the nature of the “dependency,” and (3) the extent of the “dependency.”

Definition of Community—For our purposes, community means community of place—geographic community. However, beyond that, the definition is vague. That is, a community may be a neighborhood, or an incorporated place, or even an entire county. It does not have to be one or the other, since it is quite reasonable to think of communities as nested, one inside the other. For some things, the community in consideration might be the county; for others, the county seat and its trade area; for others, each of the incorporated places or unincorporated agglomerated settlements; and for others, neighborhoods.

Nature of Dependence—“Dependence” is a heavy word, and, in truth, few—if any—communities are really “dependent” upon any one thing. Still, it is clear that rural communities, especially smaller rural communities, have somewhat unique economic bases, being more dependent upon natural resources, including agriculture and forestry, as a key factor.

There are several conventional ways in which the relationship to forestry and the USDA Forest Service is defined in publicly available data for the entire southern region. They are (1) economic dependence upon forestry and natural resource employment, (2) dependence upon timber production per se for employment, (3) the amount or proportion of land in the area which is in National Forests, and, which is very closely related, (4) payments of Forest Service receipts to local governments.

Natural Resource-Related Employment—A measure of “wildland dependency” was created to represent, as closely as possible, congressional intent in the National Forest-Dependent Rural Communities Economic Diversification Act of the 1990 Farm Bill which authored the Economic Recovery program. These data are used for Table 1, which shows the number of counties which are eligible for RCA assistance according to the 15 percent wildland dependent criterion in all of the National Forest regions of the United States. Map 1 shows this information for the southern region, with levels of wildland dependency. All colored counties on Map 1 are “eligible.” The Southern region, having by far the largest number of counties (1,300), not surprisingly has the largest number of counties eligible (499) (Table 1). Table 2 shows the number of communities under 10,000 in population size in the southern region by state which are implicated in the eligibility criteria. These criteria are very liberal, including many areas quite remote from National Forests with little, if any, relationship to the Forest Service. However, they also exclude many areas containing significant national forest lands, apparently because of the nature of their economic base (Compare Map 1 with Maps 2 and 3, for example).

Timber industry employment—These data are presented in Map 2. This is obviously quite different from the distribution in the other maps. In the Southern region, lumber and paper mills are not necessarily in the most natural-resource dependent counties or in those with large amounts of forest land. And the wildland dependency criterion used in Map 1 includes a very wide range of economic activities, together with forestry.

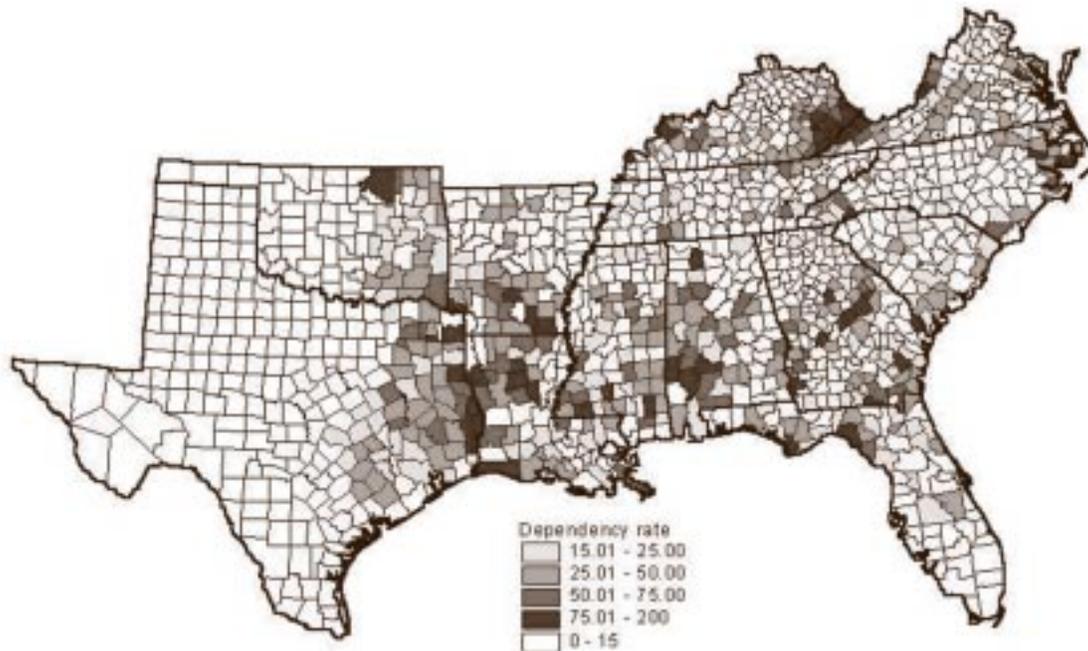
Proportion of county land in National Forest, and per capita payments to local governments—These data are presented in Maps 3 and 4, in Table 3, and in the Appendix. Payments to local governments are based upon the land in the National Forest, so the patterns observed in the two maps are necessarily the same. These criteria much more accurately reflect those areas in which the USDA National Forest carries out its operations, and where its planning and management have important

Table 1. Number of Forest-Dependent Counties by Forest Service Region: Dependency Based Upon Eligibility for RCA Assistance in Economic Recovery Program

Region	Total Number of Counties	Number of Counties Eligible for RCA
Region 1 Northern	122	85
Region 2 Rocky Mountain	345	110
Region 3 Southwestern	48	38
Region 4 Intermountain	88	73
Region 5 Pacific Southwest	63	22
Region 6 Pacific Northwest	75	62
Region 8 Southern	1,300	499
Region 9 Eastern	1,037	255
Region 10 Alaska	23	11
Total	3,101	1,158

Source: Stewart et al. [20]

Map 1: Wildland dependency rates for counties w/in 100 miles of a National Forest (All shaded counties are considered eligible for RCA program assistance.)

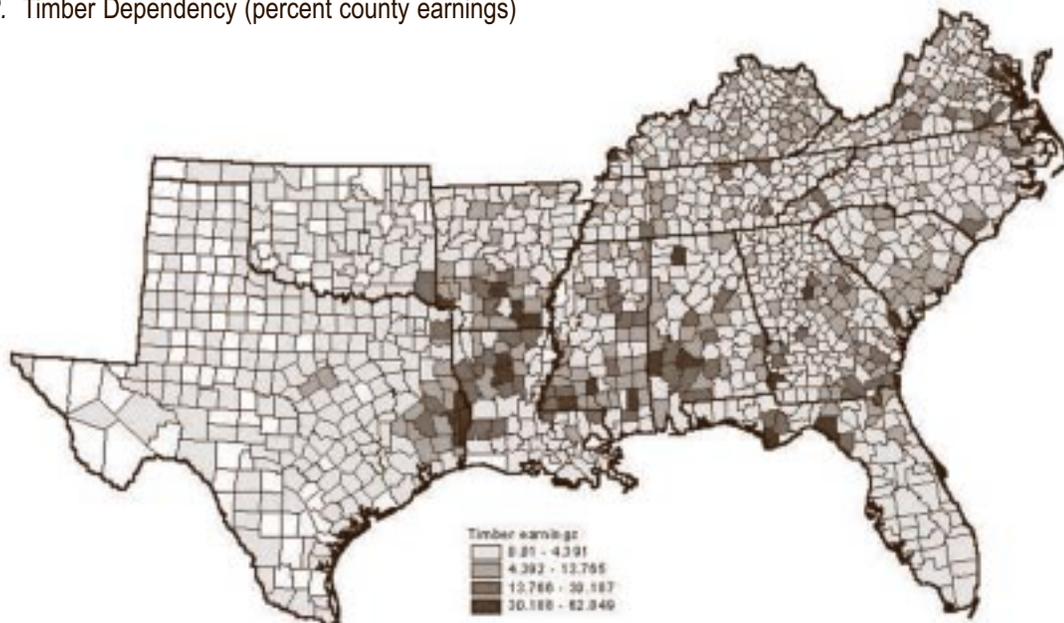


effects upon rural communities. Table 3 shows the respective numbers of counties and communities which would be considered “dependent” based upon different proportions of county land in National Forests. As is pointed out in the table, the criterion of having any National Forest land in the county, would result in the inclusion of 967 communities and 239 counties. In the Appendix, we have taken an arbitrary 40 percent of land in the National Forest and identified the counties and their included communities “most” dependent in the region.

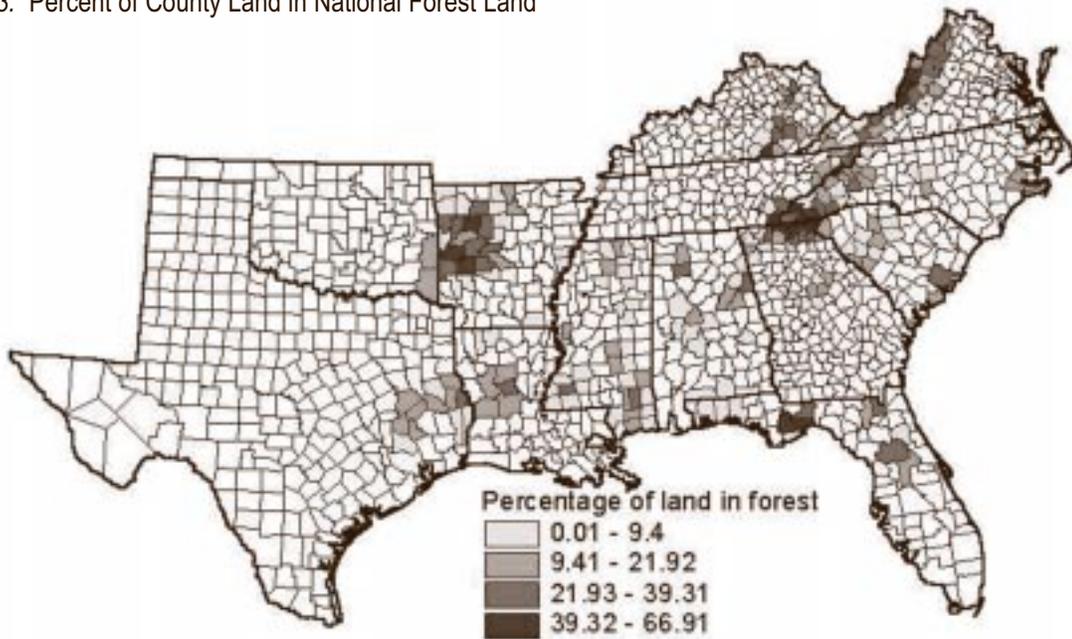
Table 2. Number of Counties and Communities Eligible for RCA Program Assistance (USFS criteria) by State for the Southern Region

State	Eligible by Wildlands Depend. (15%+) & w/in 100 m.			Total eligible communities	Total communities under 10,000
	Non-Metro Counties	Communities in Metro	Communities in non-Metro		
Alabama	33	37	132	169	421
Arkansas	29	6	134	140	472
Florida	27	61	53	114	453
Georgia	63	17	178	195	532
Kentucky	58	3	144	147	424
Louisiana	37	35	164	199	344
Mississippi	42	0	135	135	288
N. Carolina	29	8	124	132	533
Oklahoma	27	44	154	198	559
S. Carolina	16	14	90	104	301
Tennessee	26	11	68	79	330
Texas	58	93	211	304	1,081
Virginia	43	17	79	96	263
Totals	488	346	1,666	2,012	6,001

Map 2. Timber Dependency (percent county earnings)



Map 3. Percent of County Land in National Forest Land



Map 4. Per Capita Payments to Counties for Schools and Roads (1997)

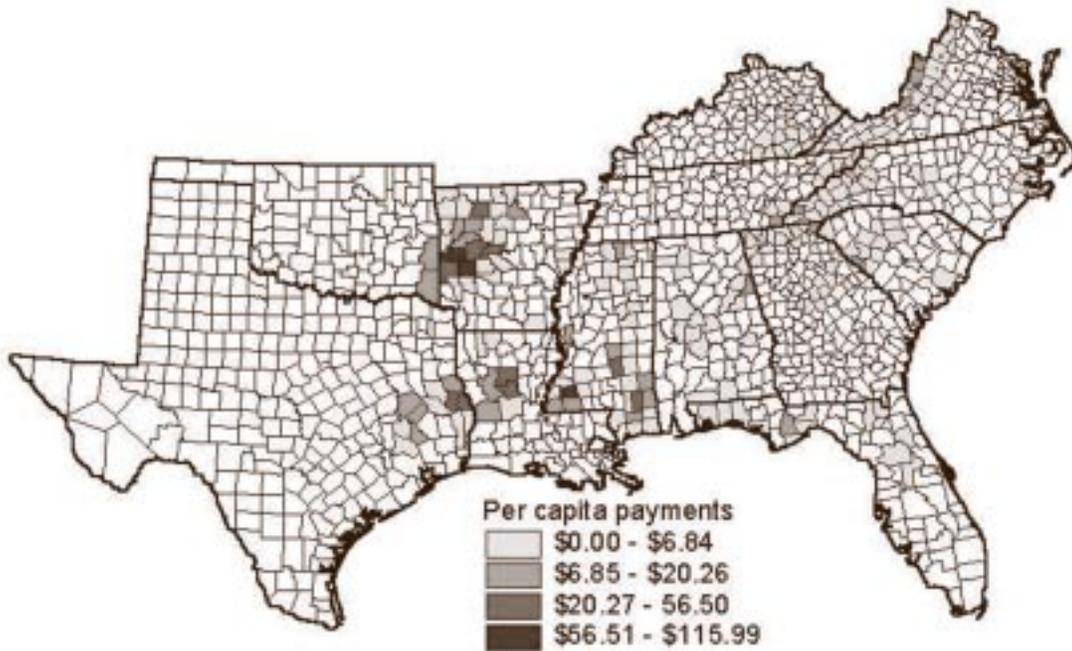


Table 3. Numbers of Counties and Communities less than 10,000 by Percent of County Land in the National Forests (States for the Southern Region)

State		None	>0.0-9.4%	9.5-21.9%	22.0-39.3%	39.4-67.0%	Totals
Alabama	Counties	50	11	4	2	0	67
	Communities	337	57	18	9	0	421
Arkansas	Counties	46	14	4	8	3	75
	Communities	300	91	25	46	10	472
Florida	Counties	55	5	2	3	2	67
	Communities	395	23	24	8	3	453
Georgia	Counties	133	12	6	4	4	159
	Communities	451	40	17	12	12	532
Kentucky	Counties	97	11	6	5	1	120
	Communities	371	33	10	7	3	424
Louisiana	Counties	57	2	4	1	0	64
	Communities	295	15	29	5	0	344
Mississippi	Counties	49	22	9	2	0	82
	Communities	191	66	25	6	0	288
North Carolina	Counties	75	7	11	4	3	100
	Communities	430	36	51	11	5	533
Oklahoma	Counties	75	0	2	0	0	77
	Communities	535	0	24	0	0	559
South Carolina	Counties	33	6	6	1	0	46
	Communities	232	31	34	4	0	301
Tennessee	Counties	85	2	3	3	2	95
	Communities	297	8	10	10	5	330
Texas	Counties	242	4	7	1	0	254
	Communities	1,026	27	25	3	0	1,081
Virginia	Counties	106	12	8	7	3	136
	Communities	174	27	23	37	2	263
Totals	Counties	1,103	108	72	41	18	1,342
	Communities	5,034	454	315	158	40	6,001

Note: Using the criterion of the presence of any National Forest Land in the county, which seems reasonable but is still very liberal, results in 967 communities and 239 counties being considered forest-dependent in the Southern region.

► Disadvantages of Forest-Dependent Communities

Natural resource-dependent communities in general and forest-dependent communities in particular are considered, by many, to suffer from special disadvantage. Theoretically, the reasons for this are fourfold, and are referred to as rational underinvestment, bureaucratic dominance, economic restructuring, and moral exclusion [7, 8, 9, 10].

Rational Underinvestment—Forest-dependent communities may be disadvantaged because of a propensity, on the part of individuals, families, and the communities themselves, to make low investment in their human capital. This behavior is said to be rational for them because of the peculiar circumstances of these communities: employment dominated by low-wage and low skill jobs with few opportunities [11]; domination by single industries with incentives to keep the tax base low and whose managers

are frequently not tied to the communities; large proportions of land in the public domain and off the tax roles, etc. Relatively low levels of education in many natural resource dependent communities is frequently given as evidence of this propensity.

Bureaucratic Domination—Forest-dependent communities are also said to be disadvantaged because they tend to be dominated by large-scale bureaucracies—large, international timber companies on the one hand and the federal bureaucracy of the USDA Forest Service, as well as, in many cases, other public lands agencies on the other. As such, their fate is, to a large extent, determined by external economic and cultural factors, and decisions made outside the community—frequently without considering the specific impacts upon the communities in question.

Moral Exclusion—The cultural values of the people in forest-dependent communities (and the legitimacy of their claims to the use and management of natural resources so as to maintain their livelihood) have been put into question by other interests and ideologies, especially those of the environmental movement. Forest-dependent community people are characterized as ignorant, greedy, short-sighted, and selfish. Though the messages are seldom as blunt as this statement, forest-dependent communities frequently express frustration, anger, and hurt at how they are characterized in the media and in “feasibility studies” done to justify land and environmental preservation and conservation.

Economic Restructuring—As the economy is more profoundly affected by global forces, all natural resource dependent communities increasingly find themselves at the periphery of economic action and decision-making, unable to affect the prices of their products or their labor. Theories about center-periphery relationships also focus upon the segmentation of labor markets, with those at the periphery increasingly becoming unstable, low-wage, and lacking the most basic benefits.

These theoretical descriptions of forest-dependent communities seem to have considerable face validity. What about the reality? The empirical evidence is mixed. Vasquez, et al [28] in a study of all school districts in Arkansas, could not find evidence that forest-dependent communities had a lower propensity to invest in their human capital. Although their tax base was somewhat lower, receipt of federal payments appeared to compensate for the shortage, and the people had not voted lower millages for education in forest-dependent communities. On the other hand, there is some evidence at the county level that the rates of poverty are somewhat higher in forest-dependent counties [3]. Freudenberg and Gramling have argued, from case study data in the South, that, rather than contribute to lower wage employment, the highly capitalized timber industry now actually brings in a considerable amount of high wage employment [7], at least into those communities in which large lumber mills and/or paper mills are located. These are not, of course, necessarily the counties where the trees are grown.

Empirical Evidence of Disadvantages

A regression and correlation analysis was performed on county data for the southern region with the poverty rate as the dependent variables and several of the key forest-dependency indicators and several control variables (nonmetropolitan status; percent of population nonwhite). Table 4 presents the results. Attention is directed to both the original, two-variable correlation's (0-order) and the partial correlations. The latter, of course, control for the effects of the other variables in the table.

Table 4. Regression and Correlation Analysis of Poverty Rate, Forest-Dependency and Control Variables for the Counties of the Southern Region

Variables	Standardized Coefficients			Correlations	
	Beta	t	Sig.	0-order	Partial
(Constant)		17.865	.000		
Non-Metro (compare w/ Metro)	.356	15.151	.000	.408	.383
Percent land in NF	.041	1.818	.069	-.002	.050
Wildland dependency rate	.098	4.215	.000	.196	.115
Within 100 miles of NF	-.076	-3.393	.001	-.086	-.092
Percent minority population	.411	18.075	.000	.429	.443

The percent of county land in the National Forest has no correlation with the poverty rate. The economic criterion, wildland dependency, which is used as the initial basis for eligibility for Economic Recovery grant funds, has a low correlation, explaining a net of about 10 percent of the variation in the poverty rate. Whether the county is within 100 miles of a National Forest actually has a negative relationship to the poverty rate, though the value is very low (-.076). The variables which are most highly related to poverty, not surprisingly, are nonmetro status (Rural counties all have higher rates of poverty in general, whether they are forest-dependent or not.) and the percent of the population that is minority.

Even though they may not be distinguished clearly from other rural communities by their level of poverty, many aspects of the four theoretical perspectives do apply to forest-dependent communities, and must be considered in working with them. Perhaps most important are the domination of decision-making by outside bureaucracies and, at the cultural level, the sense of moral exclusion frequently directed at and felt by members of forest-dependent communities.

 **The USDA Forest Service’s Evolving Relationship to Forest-Dependent Communities: Rural and Community Development Programs**

Several distinct emphases can be identified in the USDA Forest Service’s relationship to the communities of place and rural areas most affected by it. Initially, since one of the purposes of the Forest Service was to protect forest lands from exploitation, local communities were seen as real or potential predators upon these lands, from whom the lands were to be protected. A subsequent emphasis was the need for the USDA Forest Service to contribute to economic stability of these communities through an even flow of timber products. More recently, this responsibility has changed to a broad one which focuses upon rural community development and economic diversification applicable to a wide range of natural resource-dependent rural communities. Together with the changing focus, responsibility within the USDA Forest Service has also changed. The State and Private Forestry Branch is now responsible for rural and community development activities of the Forest Service. [a] Still, ongoing forest management, which is the responsibility of the National Forest System, necessarily still has profound affects upon

forest-dependent communities. It involves a variety of forms of partnership with local communities, and, perhaps most importantly, includes the Forest Service's responsibility for forest planning, participation of publics in planning, implementation of ecosystem management, etc. [17].

The formal recognition of the need for a different approach in its relationship to forest-dependent rural communities emerged gradually and achieved its expression primarily under the authority granted by the Rural Development provisions of the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act (Public Law 95-313) 1978. Clear definition of the need for and the nature of this responsibility did not occur, however, until 1990 when, as the result of intensive effort within USDA and the USDA Forest Service, a strategy for rural development was developed [22, 23, 24, 25, 26], and the Economic Recovery Program was funded as part of the 1990 "Farm Bill." This effort now includes the Rural Development Program, the Economic Recovery Program, and the Rural Development Strategy and is administered by the State and Private Forestry Branch of the USDA Forest Service under the umbrella of the Rural Community Assistance program. Authorities for the core programs are in the Cooperative Forestry Act of 1978, as amended in 1990, and in the National Forest-Dependent Rural Communities Economic Diversification Act of 1990 [14].

Original Rural Development Responsibility

The Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-313), [b] which focuses primarily upon a partnership between the USDA Forest Service and the State Foresters and is designed primarily to support their activities, was interpreted to grant authority to the Forest Service for rural development. This Rural Development Program is now described as an ongoing effort of the Forest Service to, "strengthen rural communities, and enhance their social, economic and natural environments." [24] The program aims to alleviate persistent problems of low income, unemployment, and poverty in rural areas through a more diverse use of forest products. Priority is given to areas which have a significant interest in forest land resources, but natural resource dependence or having some kind of relationship with the USDA Forest Service are required for eligibility. The program aims to link up rural development efforts, support local sustainable development, and increase the well-being of the target communities [13, p.135; 24].

Several key principles drive the USDA Forest Service's Rural Development Strategy:

- ▲ Focus on community-led, community-based, and community-wide efforts;
- ▲ Be part of a comprehensive approach and work cooperatively;
- ▲ Take strategic action addressing local needs;
- ▲ Act for the long term, sustainable solutions vs. quick-fix;
- ▲ Accomplish objectives through partnerships;
- ▲ Help communities capitalize on their natural resource-based potential and assets;
- ▲ Strengthen communities through economic diversification;
- ▲ Improve the integration of environmental and economic concerns; and
- ▲ Remember that broad-based planning is an important prerequisite to action [21].

Since this program is administered through the State Foresters and since regions have considerable autonomy in how it is administered, its actual application to rural and community development varies

greatly from state to state and region to region. State Forestry Commissions seldom are considered to have significant rural community development responsibility. In some states, especially in the southern region, they are inclined to use these resources primarily for forest industry support and development rather than for rural community development.

Development of a Rural Development Strategy in the 1990s

The agricultural and rural crisis of the 1980s led to extensive activity focused upon rural development, activity which culminated in several key rural development initiatives at the end of the decade. These include formation of the state Rural Development Councils and a wide range of rural development programs included in the 1990 Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act (the “Farm Bill”). The USDA Forest Service emerged as a key player in rural development with a carefully honed rural development strategy, expanded responsibility, a funding mechanism now specifically dedicated to rural development, and a somewhat clearer definition of the targets of its rural community development efforts.

The rural development strategy that has been pursued since 1990 is described by USDA in its Strategic Plan [22]. It is considered a “unified plan for helping rural America.” And is “. . . an ‘umbrella’ strategy that focuses our efforts on greater internal coordination, greater cooperation with other public and private entities, and greater emphasis on being part of community-based activities” [22, p, 1]. The USDA Forest Service commits itself as follows:

“The Forest Service will provide leadership in working with rural people and communities on developing natural resource-based opportunities and enterprises that contribute to the economic and social vitality of rural communities. The Forest Service can make lasting improvements in rural America by helping people solve their local problems in ways that enhance the quality of the environment in accordance with our existing authorities.” [22, p. 5].

Six goals and associated strategies are identified:

1. Communicate to all Forest Service employees and the public that rural development is part of the agency’s mission since rural resources—land and people—are key to local and national development.
2. Include rural development considerations in agency resource decisions to assist rural communities and the Nation achieve long-term economic development and improved quality of life.
3. Actively participate in planning and implementing community-based rural development activities.
4. Understand and integrate the needs of culturally, geographically and economically diverse communities in Forest Service activities.
5. Strengthen Forest Service participation in cooperative USDA efforts at the local level.
6. Develop and provide timely and current research and resource information on rural development opportunities. [22, pp. 6-11]

As far as target definition is concerned, the communities which the 1990 Act was intended to serve are those which are economically dependent upon forest resources or private sector land management practices. This Act, thus, challenged the Forest Service’s prior strategy of dealing with rural communi-

ties, in which was first to manage National Forest lands and resources and thus assume that rural development occurs—if it does—solely because of the sale of commodities or the provision of amenities. The strategy intended to direct forest-wide efforts to provide direct financial and technical assistance for rural community development across various ownerships and with numerous partners. The existence of a particular relationship with or proximity to the USDA Forest Service was not the sole determinant of eligibility. [c] This new rural development strategy was also innovative in that it was community-based [15]. As such, it closely paralleled the early Community Resource Development programs of the Cooperative Extension Services of the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, USDA and HUD's EZ-EC program, and even the 1960s War on Poverty.

Economic Recovery Program

A core component of RCA, then, is the Economic Recovery Program, which emerged from the 1990 Farm Bill as the National Forest-Dependent Communities Economic Diversification Act of 1990, and has been the one funding authority which the USDA Forest Service itself administers. [d] This program's main initiative is to help rural communities dependent on forest resources in diversifying their local economies. Communities and counties are eligible for this program if they lie within 100 miles of a National Forest boundary and meet specific economic dependence requirements as discussed above. This program is based on the premise that local citizens in communities dependent on forest resources can plan successfully for their own economic revitalization. Economic Recovery is intended to fund community-based planning strategies and requires the Forest Service to seek input from State Rural Development Councils, governors and state level agencies in implementing the program [23]. Current information about this program in the Southern region is available on the world wide web at: <http://www.r8web.com/spf/grants.htm>.

RCA Program Implementation

Eligibility requires that a community be economically disadvantaged, within 100 miles of a National Forest, and that at least 15 percent of its "total primary and secondary labor and proprietor income is derived from forestry, wood products, and forest-related industries such as recreation and tourism" (104, Stat. Section 2374). To obtain funding eligible communities submit proposals to the respective Forest Supervisors offices, working closely with a person assigned to manage the Rural Community Assistance program. Proposals are reviewed in the Supervisor's office, which makes recommendations for awards to the Regional Forester's office, which determines the funding levels for that year [22, 25]. Funded communities are usually required to establish a local "Action Team," which is supposed to be representative of major segments of the community, but which may also include Forest Service officials or members of other government entities, rural service providers, or civic groups [23]. The team is responsible for the development of an Action Plan for the community. Funds may be provided for a strategic planning process itself, or for individual projects resulting from such a plan [23].

As a result of this program, which has operated with very limited funding, a community-based process has emerged that, under optimum conditions, engages rural community people in extensive strategic planning, leadership development and training, and community-wide project development and implementation. In 1993, the RCA program provided assistance to 485 communities nationwide, about

one-fourth of which involved “process” assistance—assistance in planning and organizing for community development. One outstanding example in the Southern region is the Tennessee Overhill.

A key feature of the State and Private Forestry Branch’s pursuit of its rural development strategy has been the biannual, national Rural Development or Rural Community Assistance Conferences. These conferences bring together USDA Forest Service personnel, community leaders, and other rural and community development professionals to share experiences and learn about how rural community development can be pursued effectively.

The Forest Planning Process and Public Involvement

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA, 16 USC section 1600-1614) of 1976, with the objective of reducing the amount of conflict which had arisen concerning the management of National Forest Lands, outlined an elaborate long-range, forest planning process. These plans are to be revised every 10 to 15 years. The initial plans were completed during the period from about 1985 to 1990, and are now being revised, have just been revised, or will be revised in the very near future. For those which had not yet initiated the revision process, forest planning has been held up in Congress for more than a year. Thus, there is now, or will very soon be, a large amount of forest planning occurring in the southern region.

Two levels of planning

Actually, the National Forests plan at two levels. Their long-range plans (**Forest Plan**) are made every 10 to 15 years and lay out the general direction for forest management during that period. There is also another **Project Planning** process for day-to-day management of the National Forests. This involves such things as the building of facilities, trails, planning for timber sales, etc. This also provides opportunity for input from citizens and local communities. It is happening almost all the time.

It is the judgment of many that the planning process, as it was carried out in the first phase, did not succeed in reducing conflict. In fact, the planning process has become so contentious that many community people and USDA Forest Service people dread doing it again. Project planning also is frequently very contentious. What has emerged, in the opinion of many, is the use of local communities as the battle ground of major national interest groups, creating a gridlock. There is at least some reason to believe that local people have not only the urgent need, but also the capacity to deal with these issues effectively at the local level. And, recent developments in Ecosystem Management, and especially the sharp critique of the planning process by the Committee of Scientists, suggest the need for greater involvement of local, forest-dependent communities in the planning process in the future [2].

Forest planning follows an elaborate process, which is guided both by NFMA and by the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA, 40 CFR 1506.2) of 1976. In addition to long range planning, the USDA Forest Service follows a similar process, also governed by both NFMA and NEPA, in its on-going process of managing National Forest lands. This is often referred to as “project planning.” Project planning is going on virtually all the time.

So what is a Forest Plan? A Forest Plan describes what the National Forest should be like in 10 years, what uses can be accommodated, what conditions should be maintained or restored. The plan also outlines means and ways for achieving these objectives. National laws, regulations, and policies provide general guidelines. Forest Plans describe how these laws and policies are to be fulfilled on a particular National Forest. Among other things, the plan (1) sets the goals and objectives for the various uses of the forest, (2) sets various forest-wide standards and guidelines, (3) defines the way the forest land will be divided up into areas for management purposes, (4) estimates the maximum sustainable timber harvest that is possible, (5) and outlines the monitoring and evaluation that will be required.

The Forest Plan provides broad guidance; it does not make decisions about particular sites, stands, roads, trails, etc. Those decisions are made later in a project planning process in compliance with the goals, guidelines, and standards of the established plan. As in the Forest Plan revision process, citizens are given opportunities to influence the project decision process too, but more about that later.

Primary responsibility for developing or revising the plan rests with an Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) of USDA Forest Service professionals, usually including foresters, wildlife biologists, recreation planners, soil scientists and other specialists. The team works closely with other agencies and consults with interested citizens throughout the process. This team is supposed to use the best available information and expertise to identify the most important issues and develop various management alternatives in response to those issues. Although by law the ID Team is made up of USDA Forest Service professionals and other Federal employees, citizens can have input, even at this early stage. Several laws require public input during various stages of plan development and novel public involvement processes are encouraged and are being used by some of the National Forests to allow citizens to play a role in the work of the ID Teams.

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) spells out six questions to be answered in the Forest Plan, as follows:

▲ ***What are to be the goals of forest management?***—Federal law requires that our National Forest be managed for multiple uses. These uses are outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, wildlife and fish (Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960). The plan defines the goals with respect to these different uses for the particular National Forest by management area.

▲ ***What standards and guidelines are to be followed in managing the forest?***—The plan identifies and defines both forest-wide and management area-specific standards and guidelines that will be used in the future in actual, site-specific forest management actions. For example, most plans include specific standards for protecting streams and lakes from excess sediment and pollution.

▲ ***How will the forest be divided into management areas?***—The Plan identifies how the Forest will be divided geographically into management areas, what types of management areas will be identified, and how the respective areas will be managed.

▲ ***What areas are suitable for timber production?***—The plan identifies which areas and how many acres are suitable for timber production. Suitability is based on criteria such as slope, productivity, and availability. (Wilderness is not “available” and therefore is “unsuitable.”)

▲ ***What is the maximum amount of timber that could be produced sustainably?***—The plan identifies the maximum amount of timber that could be harvested from the entire forest on a sustained basis. (This is called the Allowable Sale Quantity, or ASQ.)

▲ ***What about roadless area?***—The plan must address what roadless areas, if any, should be recommended to Congress for wilderness designation. (Congress alone can designate Federal Wilderness.) It must also address the proposed uses for roadless areas which are not recommended for wilderness designation

Table 5 summarizes the planning process for both long-range and project planning. The process can also be described as in the triangle in Figure 1, where a distinction is made between the left side, where existing conditions and management opportunities are identified and defined less formally, generally allowing for considerable citizen input, and the right side, where the somewhat rigid procedures of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) dominate the process, and, although opportunities for citizen input still exist, the USDA Forest Service has less flexibility in how it involves the public. Table 6 summarizes opportunities for public input in the Forest Planning process.

An Example: The Ouachita National Forest's Forest Plan

The current plan for the Ouachita National Forest was adopted in 1986, but immediately went through a major amendment, which was completed in 1990. The result is a document of more than 350 pages with maps (Amended Land and Resource Management Plan: Ouachita National Forest, Vol. I), supported by its Final Environmental Impact Statement (Vol. II), more than 400 pages, Comment Letters and Responses to the Final Impact Statement (Vol. III) of about 350 pages, and, finally, a summary of the Final Impact Statement (Summary, Final Supplement to the Final Environmental Impact Statement), of about 21 pages.

This plan “provides two levels of direction: general Forest-wide management direction and specific direction for each management area. Management area direction is described in terms of the management goals and objectives, desired future condition, Forest standards and guidelines and management area direction. The Forest Plan also specifies monitoring and evaluation.”

The planning process in the Ouachita National Forest has been very dynamic since 1990. There have been 26 additional amendments since the 1990 amendment.

Hence, community folks who want to learn about specific aspects of the plan currently in effect must be sure that they have not only the original, amended, planning document, but also all of the amendments.

Figure 1. Forest Plan Implementation



Table 5. Steps of the USDA Forest Service Planning Process for Both Forest Plans and Project Plans

Long Range Planning (Forest Plan)	Project Planning
<p>Regional Assessment (Optional) Organizing phase Data acquisition, compilation, analysis and interpretation Assessment report preparation and dissemination</p>	<p>Pre-proposal Stage Identification of area of interest Inventories and information collection Comparison of existing and desired conditions Identification of project opportunities to achieve desired conditions</p>
<p>Identification of need for change in Forest Plan Identification of purpose and need Preparation of planning criteria Inventory data and information collection Analysis of the management situation</p>	<p>Listing of practices that can be used to achieve the identified desired conditions Proposing Action(s)</p>
<p>NFMA Process ↑ NEPA Process ↓ (See Figure 1)</p>	
<p>Scoping Notification of intent to prepare Forest Plan and EIS Public notification of proposed Forest Plan, Plan revision, or Plan Amendment Identification of significant issues</p>	<p>Scoping Public notification of proposed action(s) Identification of significant issues</p>
<p>Development of alternatives and analysis of effects Formulation of alternatives Estimating effects of alternatives Evaluation of alternatives</p>	<p>Development of alternatives and analysis of Effects Formulation of alternatives Estimating effects of alternatives Evaluation of alternatives Determination of significant effects</p>
<p>Decision, implementation and monitoring Preferred Alternative Recommendation Draft Plan provided for public review w/ draft EIS Plan approval in Record of Decision (ROD) Monitoring and evaluation</p>	<p>Decision, implementation and monitoring Draft Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement Final Decision Implementation Feedback and Monitoring</p>
<p>Public Involvement is supposed to occur throughout the entire process for both the Forest Plan and Project Plans</p>	

Table 6. Opportunities for Public Involvement in the Forest Planning Process

Long Range Planning (Forest Plan)	Project Planning
<p>Regional Assessment (Optional) Forest Service compiles an information base on social, economic, biological and physical conditions of one or multiple National Forest(s) to help citizens, planners and scientists evaluate what changes need to be made to forest plans. Forest Service reviews the results of public involvement efforts and new laws and regulations to determine a “need for change.” A public announcement is mailed to all interested citizens and groups, and subsequent public discussions are held. A draft public involvement plan is developed for public review. Following this, a formal notice of the assessment is published in the Federal Register, and a summary of comments on the draft public involvement plan is sent out, including Forest Service responses to the comments.</p>	<p>Pre-proposal Stage Forest Service identifies possible projects by comparing existing forest conditions with goals and objectives specified by the forest plan. The public is not required to be involved at this stage, but can submit comments and feedback at any time.</p>
<p>Preparation and Publication of Citizen Participation Plan</p>	<p>Preparation and Publication of Citizen Participation Plan</p>
<p>Scoping Forest Service provides the public with a notice of intent to conduct the forest plan revision or amendment and formulates a public involvement plan. Forest Service identifies changes needed based upon input from the public, other federal agencies, and State and local governments. Forest Service provides proposed new Plan to public for comment. Significant issues related to proposed Plan are identified from public input.</p>	<p>Scoping At least every three months the Forest Service sends out a list of proposed projects to people who have expressed interest in Forest Service activities. Detailed scoping notices about specific project are sent to people who are known to have an interest. From the response received to these scoping notices, significant issues are identified.</p>
<p>Decision Process Forest Service analyzes public comments on the draft EIS. Forest Supervisor recommends the final Forest Plan to the Regional Forester. The Regional Forester approves the Plan and EIS in a Record of Decision (ROD). The ROD can be appealed by anyone within 90 days of its approval by the Regional Forester. Further challenge to the Forest Plan can be pursued through the courts</p>	<p>Decision Process The Forest Service issues a decision statement to the public and keeps the public informed of progress on the project. At this point the public can contest the decisions through the administrative appeals process. A notice of decision subject to appeal is published in local newspapers. After the period for appeals has ended, the public can pursue legal issues through the courts.</p>
<p>Implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Plan</p>	<p>Implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project</p>

Forest plans are frequently amended so as to accommodate changing conditions, land acquisitions, etc., which occur during the period that a plan is in effect. Some National Forests amend more frequently than others. The Ouachita National Forest in Arkansas and Oklahoma, for example, already has a major revision done in 1990 and 26 amendments. Citizens who seek to learn about and work with the National Forests must be aware of this, otherwise they may spend a lot of time trying to understand features of a plan which are no longer in effect.

What is the actual practice of public involvement in forest planning? Research performed in the Ouachita National Forest in Arkansas and Oklahoma resulted in two major conclusions [6]. First, the most widely used forms of public participation, which are mail-outs, outreach programs, partnerships, field trips and informal contacts, focus primarily upon informing and educating the public, and are not very effective for obtaining input from the public. And, the lists to which information is mailed are frequently quite small, ranging from 8 to 30 individuals per Ranger District.

Second, and even more important, is the fact that the overwhelming preference of the public for how it would like to be involved with the National Forest was some form of Advisory Committee, and some form of public “open” meeting. It is generally felt that the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) prevents the use of Advisory Committees, so we have a dilemma. (See the important article by Reike [19] for a more liberal interpretation.)

The Emerging Role of Local Government in Forest Management: Strategies and Potential for Collaborative Planning

The most radical form of devolution which has been proposed for the National Forests is efforts to turn management of public lands over to local and state governments. A series of legal decisions have made it clear, though, that the federal government, in the form of the USDA Forest Service, does, in fact, have primary authority over the public lands entrusted to it. Still, county governments in many states are being asked to assert a more active role in the planning and management of public lands within their jurisdictions. In many places, this is being done through the passage of county land use plans or interim county land use plans. The original objectives of these land use plans were to assert control over public lands by county government or at least to require that federal agencies coordinate with county government before making any management decisions about public lands within these counties [30, p.1]. Apparently this movement arose because of the perceived absence of a logical mechanism for local communities to have input into the forest planning and management process, partly as the result of extreme frustration occasioned by the devastation of local economies by forest management decisions, and partly because of the emergence of property rights and other activists intent upon asserting local control. The passage of county land use plans as a means of gaining more local influence over the management of public lands began in Catron County, N.M., in response to severe economic adversity imposed upon the community as the result of several endangered species lawsuits. These lawsuits caused cessation of logging on National Forest lands, resulted in closure of the sawmill, virtually the sole private sector employer in the county. (A brief version of the Catron County story is presented Voth, et al. [27],

the companion document of which this is a summary.) Out of frustration, the county passed a number of resolutions hostile to the USDA Forest Service and initiated its own land use plan.

This was followed by similar ordinances in Montana, Wyoming, Nebraska, and California [30, p.1], and has now spread to the Ozark-Ouachita Highlands region. Twelve of the 75 Arkansas counties have by now adopted such “plans.” The passage of interim county land use plans is now being widely promoted by property rights and other groups who seek to strengthen local control and, in many cases, to develop a mechanism to resist what they see to be the hegemony of environmentalists over public lands policy. [e] The sequence appears to be the initial passage of interim land use plans, in which goals, objectives, and proposed actions are defined. These are then followed by actual, more detailed land use plans. And, in some cases, a Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) which outlines the respective roles and responsibilities of the USDA Forest Service and the local government has been forged as a way to resolve the tension and formalize the relationship.

These land use plans invoke two sets of Federal Legislation in their claim to legitimacy. One is the National Forest Management Act of 1976 which directs the Forest Service “to give the Federal, State, and local governments and the public an opportunity to comment upon the formulation of standards, criteria, and guidelines applicable to Forest Service Programs” (16 USC 1612). NFMA further requires that the Forest Service to seek input from and coordinate its planning efforts with local governments at the beginning of the Forest Planning process (36 CFR 219.7). The other is the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) which directs the Federal Government to “maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony” and to “preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage” (42 USC 4331) [5, p.663-64; 18, p.550]. By some interpretations, the above NEPA clause is said to provide insurance that local customs and culture must be considered, protected, and preserved [12]. For example, ordinances in both Newton County, Ark., and Boundary County, Idaho, list policies to protect agricultural production: “[o]pportunities for grazing livestock on federal . . . lands should be continued at levels consistent with custom and culture.” [5, p.667; 36].

In addition to the requirement that the Forest Service seek input from and coordinate with local governments, and the argument that insurance must be provided for the protection of “local customs and culture,” local governments, as clarified in the Unfunded Mandate Reform Act of 1995 (Title II, Section 204), are not constrained by the restrictions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) which, as indicated above, is widely interpreted to mean that Forest Service planners may not organize or use local Advisory Committees. Thus, local governments can, if they will, take the initiative to represent their communities in the forest planning and management process. Although the history of this movement so far has frequently been characterized by hostility and an advocacy stance—usually reacting to what is perceived to be excessive environmentalism—the pattern that is emerging in the West, with the development of Memoranda of Understanding being forged between Forests, Ranger Districts, and local governments appears to have considerable promise to help the Forest Service truly share its planning responsibility locally.

Conclusions

Some Key Dilemmas in the Development and Implementation of Collaborative, Community-Based Strategies

It would seem that, as devolution proceeds, and more responsibility is given to and taken by lower levels of government, as “community government” [16] proceeds, and as the “Human Dimension” of Ecosystem Management is more fully recognized and addressed, that the expanded role for local, forest-dependent communities in both long-range forest planning and day-to-day forest management envisaged in the recommendations above would develop naturally. As logical as moving toward a genuinely community-based strategy seems, there is little evidence that it is happening outside of a few instances, and there are numerous reasons why it does not happen, or will not happen easily. These are the barriers which must be overcome. A discussion of several of these follows.

The Bane of Politics

It has frequently been observed that community development efforts, to be effective, cannot afford to be tainted by “politics.” “Politics” are divisive and focus upon competition, conflict, advocacy, and upon creating disagreement where it may not even exist. To be effective, community development must unite and work toward the development of consensus. Forest planning and management and environmental decision-making have become highly political, both because of the fundamental disagreements which exist in society about these issues, and also because the dynamic of advocacy, competition, and conflict is important in building strong interest-groups and organizations. Unfortunately, fighting against a clearly defined adversary has always been an effective way to mobilize people.

The ultimate goal of linking community development efforts and forest planning and management means bringing conflict and advocacy into community development, something that many community development practitioners find destructive and frightening. Of course, one of the reasons for seeking to do so is to bring a measure of rationality, a measure of the capacity to listen, to hear, and, perhaps even, to compromise into the forest planning and management process. However, to those struggling mightily to keep community development activities moving, this is likely to impose a far higher cost on their process than that process can bear.

The “National Interest” Question

For public lands management, one of the most important impediments to the development of a community-based strategy is the “national interest” question. “How can you reconcile the national interest in public lands management with a greater role for local, forest-dependent communities?” is the form that the question usually takes. We must not jeopardize real national interests in such things as environmental management or endangered species, nor must we limit the right of input by non-local citizens. However, community-based strategies are being proposed precisely to form a decision-making and implementation process that can both achieve national objectives and avoid the gridlock that has resulted from the uncompromising positions and strategic behavior which so frequently characterizes national interest groups’ behavior. Furthermore, many would argue that local people have the capacity

to represent both national and local concerns and interests, plus have the advantage of intimate, local knowledge which they can apply if given the opportunity to participate and to educate themselves about land management issues.

The Dynamics of Planning in the USDA Forest Service

Another impediment to making a community-based agenda central to its core responsibility for long-range planning within the USDA Forest Service is compartmentalization within Forest Service bureaucracy. Long-range planning is a forest-level responsibility, and district staff play very minor roles in it, if any. On the other hand, day to day contact with local communities occurs at the Ranger District level. Planning and project management occur in the National Forest System bureaucracy, and the Rural Development Strategy, RCA, and most community responsibility is part of the State and Private Forestry branch. The target clientele for the latter is broad and, in particular, does not necessarily include those communities most important in forest planning and management. In fact, there are some working with the RCA program who clearly prefer that it not have anything to do with forest planning and management, since these processes tend to be so controversial.

Centrifugal Forces in Projects, Communities and Bureaucracy

Compartmentalization in the Forest Service bureaucracy inhibits integration. There are two other centrifugal forces which further inhibit it, the dynamic of projects and the dynamic of community leadership and decision-making. In a review of 80 projects selected because they showed at least some potential for the integration of community-based efforts with forest planning and management, a clear pattern emerged with three kinds of projects.

There are projects which focus principally upon economic and community development. These engage community organizations and leaders whose interest is in these areas. Then there are projects which focus upon specific resources or resource issues. Again, these engage community organizations and leaders who specialize in these issues. Finally, there are a few which are, in one way or another, linked to forest policy and planning issues. Again, these engage community organizations, people, and leaders who specialize in forest issues. There appears to be little crossover among these three types. Effectively linking forest planning with community development and planning and efforts necessarily requires bridging across what might appear to be extremely different groups within the community.

This project process directly reflects what is already well known about community leadership, which is that, except for a few exceptions and for the very smallest communities, leadership, decision-making, and participation tend to be highly segmented. Some people specialize in health and welfare issues, other in recreation, others in economic development, others in environmental issues. Federal and state agencies, as well as the private sector, reinforce this segmentation, each coming to the community with its own “community-based” agenda. Community development necessarily tries to bridge these gaps, and that is what is required in any serious effort effectively to engage communities in forest planning by linking with broader community planning efforts.

Recommendations

What Should the USDA Forest Service Do?

Coherent USDA Forest Service Strategy for Communities and the RCA Program—Continued support for the USDA Forest Service’s rural development program is implied by these recommendations, of course. Unfortunately, it has been severely cut in the most recent budget process. However, when one considers how it is described and presented in the budget, these cuts are not surprising. There is no clear, persuasive logic for why the USDA Forest Service, as distinct from other USDA agencies, should have responsibility for these programs. State and Private Forestry’s Rural Development Strategy does include consideration of these linkages, at least at the margins. However, such a linkage is certainly not widely recognized within the rest of the USDA Forest Service or among community leaders. And, indeed, the case will be difficult to make as long as large proportions of rural development funding and technical assistance resources go to communities which have no relationship to or proximity to National Forest lands.

Thus, it is our opinion that a coherent logic which integrates the rural development program into the Service’s broader responsibility is desperately needed. To illustrate, at the minimum Rural Community Assistance coordinators might be advised to at least suggest to the Action Teams that, when forest planning is eminent, input for upcoming forest planning would be appreciated as the Action Teams prepare their Action Plans. Or, the potential for obtaining such input from broad-based community groups during the action planning process might be considered an important criterion in making grants. Or, the existence of an ecosystem analysis at the respective district level which included at least some consideration of the Forest Service’s relationship to the respective communities, or including an assessment of the communities’ “viability,” or status of “social capital” might be suggested at the regional level, if not required.

But, more importantly, what is required is a straightforward policy statement which makes the relationship of the USDA Forest Service with those rural communities most dependent upon it and the most affected by it a central element, not only for the rural community development program of State and Private Forestry but of the National Forest System as well.

Revised Planning Process—A review of the complexity and formal rigidity of the planning process as it is presented above, plus the recent assessment of the Committee of Scientists, make it clear that the planning process needs to be revised. For it to be comprehensible by and accessible to local community people, and more manageable by forest managers, a number of things could be done. Local Ranger Districts need to be given a clearly defined and positive role in not only project planning, but also in long-range planning. They need to be empowered so that when the local community engages in comprehensive planning and development of its own, setting its own goals and priorities, that results of these processes can be captured and have legitimacy in any upcoming forest plan revision or amendment processes, probably even in project planning processes. In addition to redefining the role of Ranger Districts, procedures need to be developed so what is described above can actually happen. This could be

as simple as the development of standard information formats that local communities could use when they are performing strategic planning, forms in which they would summarize the community's issues, preferences, and Desired Future Condition for ultimate use in the forest planning process.

Revision of the RCA Program and of Ecosystem Management—In a period of declining resources and increased responsibility, the USDA Forest Service's rural development program should be substantially revised to target its efforts upon a much smaller audience of rural communities. These should be those which are most important to the USDA Forest Service in carrying out its responsibility for managing the National Forest Lands. Preference should be given to grantees and to processes which explicitly link community development and planning efforts with forest planning and management in some way, preferably using the community process as part of the broader effort to identify Desired Future Conditions for the National Forest, etc. Ecosystem management should build upon the excellent work of the Human Dimensions Framework Steering Group [1]. As soon as possible, ecosystem analyses at both the Forest and Ranger District levels ought to include analyses of the relationship to these communities, and assessment of the viability of these communities. These assessments should play a major role in targeting RCA program activities and funds.

Collaborate with Local Governments—The USDA Forest Service must take a positive approach toward locally-initiated efforts to involve county governments in the planning process, following the pattern that has emerged in Catron County, New Mexico, where extreme conflict ultimately led to the development of a Memorandum of Understanding outlining the respective roles of the USDA Forest Service and the County. At the same time, it will be necessary for local leaders to be willing to take the responsibility to share some responsibility for decision-making, recognizing that to do so may be quite conflicted.

State rural development councils can:

- ▲ Aggressively promote a community-based approach among all agencies with responsibility for forest-dependent communities, using upcoming forest planning as an opportunity.
- ▲ Assist forest-dependent communities to become involved effectively in forest planning.
- ▲ Become proactive in helping forest-dependent communities and the Forest Service deal with conflict—build “common ground.”

What Can Rural Development Councils and Other USDA Partners Do?

Concentrated Effort by USDA and Other Agencies to Share Responsibility

—The first recommendation is that now, when forest planning is eminent or already happening, the US Department of Agriculture and other agencies, such as State Rural Development Councils concentrate whatever resources they can mobilize upon a special, targeted program for highly forest-dependent communities. Indeed, to us it absolutely defies logic that this has not already happened. This collaboration should include, at the very least, the Extension Services, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, the Rural Development Administration, the State Rural Development

Councils, State Foresters, and the USDA Forest Service, and should focus upon mobilizing local support staff to partner closely with the USDA Forest Service and local communities in an effort to exploit the upcoming forest plan revision process as an opportunity to stimulate community-based leadership development, strategic planning, and natural resource assessment and planning efforts.

Assist and Support Forest-Dependent Communities to Become Involved—There are many rural and community development efforts out there, many of which include some form of community visioning and/or strategic planning. State Rural Development Councils are particularly well situated to encourage both the various agencies which support such local efforts, as well as the forest-dependent communities themselves, to include consideration of their natural resource base, their long-term sustainability, and especially their relationship to the National Forests when they engage in these planning processes.

Conflict--Its Resolution and Management—Forest planning and management have become very controversial. It is absolutely essential that all interests—including, of course, broad, national interests—be considered in the forest planning and management process. So, in many cases, there will be no way to simply avoid disagreement and conflict. It is for this reason, of course, community people want nothing to do with forest planning. Thus, it is extremely important that forest-dependent communities have access to support and assistance in dealing with conflict as they play a larger role in forest planning and management. Of course, many other natural resource-related conflicts are emerging in the same communities, conflicts concerning water quality, animal waste, etc., with which USDA agency personnel are being confronted. So there are other reasons why managing and resolving conflict ought to be a high priority in work with rural communities.

What Can Communities Do?

In spite of prominent commitments to involving the public extensively and at all possible points in the long range and project planning process (36 CFR 219.6), both the complexity and rigidity of the Forest planning process makes it almost incomprehensible to local community people. This has the unfortunate effect that only those who can afford highly concentrated effort by professionals—or by citizens who have made themselves into professionals—are able to have an influence. It also makes it almost impossible to see how existing community plans, planning processes, and community concerns and preferences could be incorporated into the forest planning process, in spite of requirements that this be done.

Local community people can:

- ▲ Obtain Citizen Participation Plans, even get involved in developing them with the Forest Service.
- ▲ Become involved as early as possible in the forest planning process.
- ▲ Support innovative forest managers' efforts to involve the public.
- ▲ Engage local government if possible.
- ▲ Insist upon an open, inclusive process—seek to build “common ground.”
- ▲ Empower a local leadership group.
- ▲ Organize study group, or “sustainable community” effort.

The ambiguity of the public involvement mandate in the USDA Forest Service planning process is both an advantage and a disadvantage. Because of it, innovative and creative forest managers can involve citizens extensively, whereas insecure and fearful ones might do almost nothing. Citizens and community groups which understand this can have a very important impact by working closely with their forest managers, giving positive support to creativity when it occurs. Rural, forest-dependent communities should consider the following:

Citizen Involvement Plans—The USDA Forest Service is required to prepare and publish a “Citizen Involvement” plan for all of its planning processes. Community groups should obtain these plans as early as possible. They should be prepared to comment upon the plans and try to persuade those

responsible to amend them to provide greater opportunity for input if necessary. Indeed, they might even offer to assist the forest managers in designing the citizen involvement plans themselves. Perhaps some formal responsibility ought to be allocated specifically for this purpose in the community (See below).

Seek Public Involvement Early—Communities should be prepared to make full use of the public involvement opportunities accorded by the NEPA process as outlined in Tables 5 and 6. Although law does not require it, it seems clear that they are more likely to be successful if they become involved early in the process rather than later. Unfortunately, the formal process tends to stimulate involvement later rather than earlier, in review of draft documents and in appeals.

Support Innovative Forest Managers—It is in the best interests of community groups to take the initiative to develop their own sets of issues, priorities, and Desired Future Condition (DFC) and to support Forest Managers who are willing to try innovative methods of public involvement. [f] The offer, by local community groups, to share at least some responsibility for public involvement, may be the determining factor for a Forest Manager. Then, when opportunity for public input presents itself, the community will be prepared to do so in a consistent manner based upon at least some community support, if not consensus. Hence, forest-dependent communities ought to do some strategic planning now in anticipation of upcoming forest plan revision.

Engage Local Governments—Local governments are also supposed to be involved in the forest planning process. The regulations for implementing the National Forest Management Act of 1976 state that the Forest Service “shall coordinate regional and national forest planning with the equivalent and related planning efforts of other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and Indian tribes” (36 CFR 219). Although local governments have not, in the past, played much of a role, they are emerging in many communities as an instrument for articulating the concerns, interests, and priorities of local community people in both long-range and project planning. Sometimes this occurs out of desperation on the part of local citizens.

Local governments are not constrained by FACA in presenting recommendations to the USDA Forest Service in the planning process. A fundamental weakness of the NFMA planning process under participatory administration is that it turns forest managers into the makers of public policy and the sole mediators of conflict. As such, it forces them to be the ones to take the lead in resolving and mediating conflict. This is not an appropriate function for the bureaucracy. Or, at the least, bureaucrats who are required to make policy decisions and resolve policy conflict should have some guidelines and an appropriate structure—e.g., elected “council,” “advisory committee,” or, as in the case of the War on Poverty, Community Action Agency with clearly specified representation—to take the heat in this process. Lacking this, local governments may play the role of representing their communities’ concerns and interests, if they have the will and the capacity to do so.

Open and Inclusive Processes, Even if it Means Conflict—Community-based involvement efforts must be open and inclusive, as undesirable and uncomfortable as this may seem at first. Building common ground is difficult work, but there is almost always some common ground to be found. Communities in which contending factions each attempt to influence the Forest Service in the direction of their own, unique priorities—priorities which are frequently actually set by outside ideological or

political forces—literally force Forest Service decision-makers to make key decisions on their own, and create situations in which everyone loses, everyone is angry, and the advantage that might have been gained from emphasizing what is common is jeopardized.

Identify and Empower a Responsible Leadership Group—Just as in the case of programs like “Certified Cities,” etc., it is to the advantage of communities to have a small group of their own local experts who can articulate the goals and objectives of the community in the forest planning process. To be effective, though, such a group absolutely must be able to represent all of the major views and opinions in the community, hence their links must result from an open, inclusive process. Otherwise it will simply be impossible for the USDA Forest Service to take them seriously.

Organize Study Groups and/or “Sustainable Community” Efforts—Some innovative forest managers are linking with outside partners well in advance of forest planning and supporting the organization and management of intensive study groups of local community citizens and leaders. These groups can help citizens become better informed about natural resource and forest management issues, but, most importantly, they can provide carefully considered input into the forest planning process.

Appendix

Forty Most Forest-Dependent Communities in the Southern Region based upon Percent of County Land in a National Forest (greater than 40 percent)

Community	County	State	Pct county in forest
Clarksville city	Johnson	AR	42.81
Coal Hill city	Johnson	AR	42.81
Hartman city	Johnson	AR	42.81
Knoxville city	Johnson	AR	42.81
Lamar city	Johnson	AR	42.81
Waldron city	Scott	AR	64.50
Black Springs town	Montgomery	AR	66.91
Mount Ida city	Montgomery	AR	66.91
Norman town	Montgomery	AR	66.91
Oden town	Montgomery	AR	66.91
St. Marks city	Wakulla	FL	44.26
Sopchoppy city	Wakulla	FL	44.26
Bristol city	Liberty	FL	50.54
Blue Ridge city	Fannin	GA	42.98
McCaysville city	Fannin	GA	42.98
Mineral Bluff town	Fannin	GA	42.98
Morganton town	Fannin	GA	42.98
Blairsville city	Union	GA	47.38
Hiawassee town	Towns	GA	53.99
Young Harris city	Towns	GA	53.99
Clayton city	Rabun	GA	62.66
Dillard town	Rabun	GA	62.66
Mountain City town	Rabun	GA	62.66
Sky Valley city	Rabun	GA	62.66
Tiger town	Rabun	GA	62.66
Pine Knot CDP	McCreary	KY	51.53
Stearns CDP	McCreary	KY	51.53
Whitley City CDP	McCreary	KY	51.53
Franklin town	Macon	NC	46.17
Highlands town	Macon	NC	46.17
Hayesville town	Clay	NC	47.82
Robbinsville town	Graham	NC	60.58
Santeetlah town	Graham	NC	60.58
Banner Hill CDP	Unicoi	TN	47.44
Erwin city	Unicoi	TN	47.44
Benton town	Polk	TN	54.38
Copperhill city	Polk	TN	54.38
Ducktown city	Polk	TN	54.38
Iron Gate town	Alleghany	VA	49.73
New Castle town	Craig	VA	54.96

Note: The 40 percent criterion used here is, of course, completely arbitrary. Depending upon the purposes for which it is used any level could be applied. See Table 4 for an indication of what different criteria would mean in terms of numbers of communities.

Endnotes

[a] An excellent statement of State and Private Forestry's strategy, authority, and justification for working with forest-dependent communities, is found in McWilliams and Patton [14].

[b] As amended by Title XII of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 and codified in 16 U.S.C. 2101 et seq.

[c] This section depends heavily upon O'Dell [15].

[d] 1990 Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act, Title 23, Subtitle G, Chapter 2, as codified in 7 USC sections 6601-6617. Prior to the 1990 Farm Bill, community assistance was authorized under the 1972 Rural Development Act and the 1978 Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act (16 USC sections 2101 et seq.).

[e] It seems ironic that county land use planning is now being promoted aggressively in the Arkansas and Missouri Ozarks, a region in which, until now, any form of land use planning has been vigorously opposed. However, the planning now being proposed has as its objective asserting control over public lands, not over private lands.

[f] The Desired Future Condition (DFC), in forest planning and management refers to the situation sought in a Forest Plan and in subsequent forest management. Originally it was used as a summary, largely visual, description of what could be expected when a Plan was accomplished. Under Ecosystem Management, however, it is frequently used as a way to set goals for planning and management in consultation with the public.

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