



# Ecosystem Workforce Program

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## A MIDTERM REPORT ON THE STATE OF THE DRY FOREST ZONE AND ITS COMMUNITIES

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**T**he Dry Forest Zone (DFZ) project is a five-year collaborative effort to foster an integrated approach to forest stewardship and economic development in eastern Oregon and northern California. The DFZ project invests in capacities for community-based natural resource management at multiple scales, creating enabling conditions for transformative change. We conducted a mid-term assessment to document the impacts of the DFZ project to date.

### Approach

The DFZ project includes an annual monitoring component to document trends, assess the impacts of team investments, and allow for adaptive learning. We obtained information on team progress towards annual targets, mapped socioeconomic conditions and federal agency investments, and interviewed 30 partners and key stakeholders to obtain perspectives on the impacts of DFZ work to date.

### Results

**Investments in organizational and community capacity can result in improved land stewardship and ecological outcomes.** Where DFZ leaders and partners have deliberately built capacity, diverse stakeholders have more robust abilities to find agreement on land management at larger scales for multiple ecological, community and economic benefits.

**Accelerating woody biomass utilization benefits from simultaneous work on a diversity of project applications at different scales.** By helping ther-

mal energy conversions and integrated utilization projects come to fruition on the ground, the DFZ project provides knowledge and evidence that are improving political and financial conditions for investment.

**Investing in core organizational capacities and strong community and regional networks is crucial to the future resilience of DFZ communities.** By providing programs and forums for community-based organizations to build stronger organizations and address common challenges, the DFZ project creates enduring community capacity for land management and economic development.

**Land managers increasingly understand the need for policies that support integrated restoration and community economic development.** With the assistance of rural partners, federal land agencies are seeking programs and budget structures that break down institutional divisions and may enable aggregate impacts across watersheds, larger landscapes, and landownerships.



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**Collaborative groups and partnerships are often providing the base support for progress on land stewardship, organizational capacity building and community and economic development issues, thus multiplying the impacts of investments in local organizations and collaboration.** By working at the nexus of land management, economic development and community building, collaboratives are efficiently building integrated strategies that grow stronger institutions and systems.

### Challenges

The DFZ project faces challenges associated with building and maturing necessary networks. For land management, this may mean fostering all-lands stewardship through new relationships with federal agencies beyond the Forest Service, private landowners, and others. For biomass utilization, this may require networking for concerted investment in multiple sectors to create clusters of biomass energy producers and users; and articulating the “anatomy” of thermal energy projects to highlight the need for combined public and private

investments. Although DFZ capacity-building program activities have built stronger networks between community-based organizations, it is not yet clear how these entities may sustain their links in the future. Finally, despite political and funding uncertainties, the DFZ team can continue to help decision makers see the need for investment in the interrelated dimensions of forest-based economic development.

### Conclusion

At its halfway point, the DFZ project is investing in land management and economic development opportunities at multiple scales. As DFZ leaders build capacity at the local level, they also foster broader networks that create shared voices around common policy challenges.

### More information

The complete study can be found in the EWP report, “Economic development and sustainable forest stewardship in the Dry Forest Zone: a mid-term report” which is available on the web at [ewp.uoregon.edu/research/dfz](http://ewp.uoregon.edu/research/dfz).

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