

Western Coordinating Committee (1003) Annual Meeting

**Project/Activity Number:** WCC 1003

**Project/Activity Title:** Western Coordinating Committee of Extension Foresters

**Period Covered:** January – December 2022

**Date of This Report:** January 2023

**Annual Meeting Date(s):** October 17-19, 2022

**Annual Meeting Participants:**

- Chris Jones, University of Arizona, Chair
- Doug Cram, New Mexico State University, Chair-Elect
- Holly Ober, Oregon State University, Administrative Advisor
- Darren McAvoy, Utah State University
- Andy Perleberg, Washington State University
- Diomy Zamora, USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture
- Chris Schnepf, University of Idaho (Zoom participation only)

**Summary of Minutes of Annual Meeting and Associated Activities:**

The 3-day meeting of the committee was organized and hosted by Chair-Elect Doug Cram, NMSU Extension Forestry Specialist. The meeting began in Silver City, NM, and included sites in and speakers from the Gila National Forest and private forest products entrepreneurs in adjacent communities.

After a welcome from Doug, participants engaged in a round robin of state activities and accomplishments. Common themes included: Interest in biochar, agroforestry, NIFA funding opportunities, wildfire preparedness (Firewise) and recovery, and prescribed fire. *\*Details of the round-robin are provided at the end of the report.*

Doug Cram, Extension Forestry and Fire Specialist, New Mexico State University, advanced to WCC Chair. No chair-elect was elected at the time. The next WCC 1003 meeting is expected to be held at Sandpoint, Idaho in August 2023.

At the end of the indoor portion of the meeting, invited speaker Gabriel Partido, Fuels and Vegetation Program Manager for the Gila National Forest, provided an overview of the Gila National Forest, which encompasses 3.3 million acres. We discussed low value timber and limited milling capacity, although there is an emerging market from blue-stained ponderosa pine. Another critical issue is watershed management and wildfire impacts, most recently from the 2022 Black Fire, which burned 325,136 acres (New Mexico's second largest recorded wildfire). Long-term drought in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has caused rapidly changing forest conditions over the last decade, and Ips bark beetle infestations are epidemic.

Over the course of the following two days, Doug guided a field tour of the Gila National Forest, Black Fire and surrounding area, where we heard from three individuals on a variety of topics:

- Biochar Entrepreneur Gordon West: Mr. West's business uses forest biomass to make biochar and compost. He's active with the community and seeking grants for innovative biomass

solutions. His inventions include using pecan shells to make a heater/stove, and a composting system to reduce school cafeteria food waste into compost (Figure 1, left panel).

- Gila Forest Supervisor Michael Hutchins met with WCC participants at two locations on the forest. We discussed forest management challenges, including wildland fire, fuel reduction, T&E species, timber sales, grazing, watershed, and ensuring multiple use (Figure 1, right panel).
- Forest products entrepreneur Randy Lack: Mr. Lack has a small mill operation where he uses blue-stained timber to cut 1x8 boards which are finished to make decorative paneling. He demonstrated the equipment and showed the finished product at a church and his home. He says demand is good but sometimes it is difficult to get logs from the forest.



Figure 1. Annual meeting participants learned about biochar (left) and issues facing federal land managers (right).

### **Accomplishments Relative to Expected Outcomes and Impacts of WCC 1003**

The annual meeting gave the participants opportunities to discuss common themes and identify areas where we could increase our collective impact by collaborating in the future. Below is list of areas of interest to be explored in 2023:

#### **1. Enhanced regional and sub-regional opportunities for increased integration.**

- The majority of the formal, indoor annual meeting was spent discussing issues in each state, in an effort to identify common concerns.
- Topics of mutual interest that surfaced included biochar, maple syrup production, forest carbon, wildfire risk reduction, increasing awareness of the Extension career pathway, and climate change/assisted migration.
- A cross-boundary effort currently underway is a publication on forest carbon markets for private landowners (involving ID, OR, and WA).

#### **2. Greater regional awareness of common issues and trends.**

- The group discussed recent/future efforts, challenges, and opportunities in our respective states, in an effort to identify commonalities.

#### **3. Development of innovations in program design and implementation.**

- The group recognized that during the pandemic we adopted remote programming techniques, which enabled us to reach larger audiences than ever before. However, it's not yet known if individuals who attend remote events increase knowledge and skills and adopt new practices at similar rates as attendees at in-person trainings. Additional investigation on this topic is warranted.

#### **4. Deeper penetration into common clientele groups and new audiences.**

- The group discussed programming for Native American audiences.
  - There was discussion of the NEXTGEN funding opportunity to enhance the diversity of students who consider careers in natural resources.
- 5. Increase effectiveness of relevant natural resource disciplines into program design and delivery.**
- There was recognition of the growing importance of climate change and water scarcity on all aspects of natural resource management.
- 6. Improved effectiveness and accountability of existing programs.**
- Diomy hinted that there will be changes to RREA funding expectations in the near future.

### **Cross-boundary accomplishments made possible due to communications from past meetings**

- Following up on the Biochar Opportunities in the Southwest: Extension Workshop in April 2021, Chris Jones had two 4'x4'x2' biochar demonstration kilns built. He hosted USU Forest Products Extension Specialist Darren McAvoy for a 2-day workshop Globe, AZ in March 2022 (<https://extension.arizona.edu/biochar-workshop-kiln-demonstration>). Roughly 40 participants learned about biochar from Darren and UA soil scientist Rivka Fidel in a hybrid workshop. Darren led two kiln demonstrations attended by 30 participants, several from the AZ Dept of Forestry and Fire Management. Chris continued to host biochar kiln demonstrations in Arizona: Pine-Strawberry (April; 25 participants); Pinetop-Lakeside (July; 10 participants); and San Carlos (September; 30 participants). Chris presented about the kiln twice: Pinetop-Lakeside (July; 50 participants) and NACAA AM/PIC in Florida (July; 40 participants). The kiln has also fostered a partnership with Dr Han Sup-Han, NAU professor and ERI forest ops & biomass utilization director. Dr Han and Jones submitted an unsuccessful grant proposal but will continue to collaborate on biochar research and outreach in 2023.
- Darren McAvoy from Utah State University collaborates with Tony Cheng from Colorado State University to help lead the Southern Rockies Fire Science Network (SRFSN) which helped to fund some of the biochar production activities in and around Utah in 2022.
- Individuals from ID, OR, and WA are collaborating on a PNW publication that explains carbon markets to small woodland owners. Core sections of the document have been drafted and a contract will soon be developed to enlist assistance from a graphic designer.
- Extension Forestry Field Days (large > 200 landowners, and small <50 landowners) were led by WSU, UI, and OSU. Geographies included the Selkirk Mountains in north Idaho and NE Washington, and SW Washington and Northeast Oregon Blue Mountains region.
- Collaboration in the Northwest Fire Science Consortium increased by OR & WA establishing work plan expectations for 2024 outreach & engagement.

### **\*Member reports (round robin):**

Darren (representing Utah): He recently submitted a grant proposal to enable comparison of biochar techniques (e.g., big box, curtain, ring of fire). He's working on a maple syrup grant (USDA funding).

Andy (representing Washington): New hires for WA include an Extension forester in NE WA and a new tenure track faculty with expertise in forest entomology. They've recently received several

offers of forested property donations they may accept with the intent to use for Extension trainings. Online classes during the pandemic allowed for large numbers of people attending remotely, but it's challenging to measure true impact through this learning format. He's engaged with a collaboration with OSU to work on first foods (agroforestry). Statewide chainsaw safety & maintenance trainings for 10 northwest tribes (five in E WA & five in W WA) is underway. A new WSU school farm engaged the Spokane Tribe in demonstration development for land uses relevant to the community and the tribe, including Rxfire, silvopasture, riparian restoration, and aspen regeneration.

Diomy (representing NIFA): After serving as an Extension Forester in MN for 16 years, he's now National Program Leader within NIFA and has been asked to describe pressing issues facing western Extension Foresters so NIFA can allocate relevant grant funding through a request for proposal (RFP). NIFA doesn't yet know FY23 budget. More than half of their budget goes to capacity funding; the two forestry funding mechanisms within NIFA are McIntire-Stennis and RREA. The American Rescue Plan Act will make \$ available through NEXTGEN funding with the intent to train and recruit students for the next generation of food, agriculture, natural resources and human sciences workforce. A request for application (RFA) on fuel management will emerge soon through the Infrastructure Investment and Inflation Reduction Act. We should expect an overhaul of RREA soon; NIFA wants to see impacts rather than outcomes. A new RREA strategic plan is being developed. The RREA rfa for competitive RREA funding will appear in Nov or Dec 2022. Diomy suggested inviting David Cassidy to join our next meeting to better understand our perspective, or have him come to ANREP or SAF meetings.

Holly (representing Oregon): The OSU Forestry & Natural Resources Extension team gathers annually to identify pressing issues across the state that could be tackled collaboratively. Topics identified in 2021 were forest carbon (understanding markets, offsets), management of early seral forest stands (what steps to take to provide benefits to wildlife, to inform reforestation practices), wildfire preparedness (addressing risks in the Home Ignition Zone), growing redwoods (we're not advocating for this, just gathering information so advice can be provided when requested), and expanding the Extension career pipeline. Topics identified in 2022 were recovery/reforestation after wildfires/forest disturbance, communicating about wildfire risk, Emerald ash borer, climate change/assisted migration, workforce equity for forest workers, seed/seedling availability, prescribed fire, and curriculum for professional loggers.

Chris Schnepf (representing Idaho): He and colleagues are working on standing programs such as Women Owning Networks and Master Forest Stewards, and new efforts such as assisted migration field day, possible upcoming biochar field day, "participatory action research", and habitat typing. A multi-state product he's working on is a PNW publication with colleagues from OSU on carbon markets. He suggested we consider a potential WCC publication on biochar curriculum. He offered to host the next WCC meeting in Sand Point, ID, likely in August 2023.

Chris Jones (representing Arizona): Chris promotes biochar as described in the cross-boundary accomplishments section. He worked closely with the Globe community which was impacted by the Telegraph fire to submit grants for greater support to address Firewise education and activities. He is a member of the Arizona Fire Adapted Communities learning network.

Doug Cram (representing New Mexico): Ironically, Doug continues to engage in prescribed fire Extension programming across New Mexico (despite the destructive Hermits Peak/Calf Canyon wildfire that started when two prescribed burn events, one a broadcast fire and the other a re-ignited winter

pile burn, merged to burn over 300,000 acres and destroy 800+ structures/homes). This Extension programming consists of “Learn and Burn” events for private landowners, contributions toward a new Prescribed Burn Act for the state of NM, and development of a 10-element on-line prescribed burn curriculum required by the state to achieve a “prescribed burn manager certification.” Doug also serves as a Co-PI for the Southwest Fire Science Consortium.