

Nomination Received by Council on Environmental Quality, Executive Office of the President
For the CEQ NEPA Pilot Project Program
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ceq/initiatives/nepa/nepa-pilot-project-nominations>

PART I. NOMINATOR

First Name:	Johnny
Last Name:	Sundstrom
Organization:	The Siuslaw Institute
Project Title:	Fivemile-Bell Landscape Management Project
Submitted by:	Member of the Public
Date Received:	06/15/2011

PART II. SHORT ANSWERS

I. What Federal agency or agencies will be involved in this pilot project?

USDA-Forest Service, Siuslaw National Forest

II. What is the Federal action to which this NEPA pilot project applies?

It applies to a Federal watershed restoration project on the Siuslaw National Forest, known as the Fivemile-Bell Landscape Management Project. It includes upland treatments, in-stream restoration, stream channel restoration and re-meandering, and valley bottom management. The project will address ecosystem diversity and productivity with its focus on habitat enhancement for endangered or threatened coho salmon, northern spotted owls and marbled murrelets, and for other important wildlife and vegetative species. Additionally, the project will enhance the economic, timber and recreation opportunities offered by a sustainably managed landscape; provide opportunities for small-scale sustainable agricultural use; and provide for the development of watershed education, training and research opportunities. The targeted area for restoration is formed by Fivemile and Bell Creeks, and lies upstream from Takhenitch Lake on Oregon’s mid-coast. The Lake’s outlet passes through large dunes to the ocean and is a prime access point for returning salmon. The total project area includes approximately 7,000 acres, of which 5,000 are managed by USFS, 300 by BLM, with the remaining 1700 in private or tribal ownership. The project area consists mostly of low-gradient stream and aquatic habitat, flood plain bottomland, and forested uplands. USFS recently acquired a 640-acre portion of the project area primarily for the restoration of habitat for coho.

III. How will this pilot project reduce the costs and time needed to complete the NEPA process?

It achieves these goals by leveraging local, collaborative capacity for on-the-ground data collection and analysis, fundraising and outreach necessary to meet project goals in a timely manner. USFS currently lacks capacity to carry out this large project on its own. Therefore, it issued an RFP soliciting assistance with long-term management of the restoration project and subsequent developments regarding the newly acquired property and adjacent upland forested area. Ecotrust responded and was accepted as partner in this effort. The Siuslaw Basin Partnership (Siuslaw Watershed Council, Siuslaw Soil & Water Conservation District and the Siuslaw Institute) joined the USFS in this effort early on. USFS, Ecotrust and the Partnership

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worked together throughout the scoping and analysis phase of the Project, increasing the efficiency of the NEPA process. They are cooperating in the preparation of its NEPA document in unprecedented ways, as well as developing designs and outreach documents to be used in securing funding and support for this 10-year effort. An interdisciplinary USFS team guided and shared in the work of the partners at the assessment and data collection stages.

The Siuslaw Institute trained and utilized local expertise to gather data, historical references, and on-the-ground surveys required for the project's NEPA and design processes. The purpose is three-fold: to assist the USFS in getting this Project approved and implemented in a timely manner, to create and sustain local workforce capacity able to assist the USFS in similar future efforts and to reduce costs and time needed for this activity. Local contractors provided significant technical assistance, including the performance of stand exams and botanical, aquatic and hydrologic surveys necessary for the overall assessment. Outreach, communications and publication development, as well as the public comment phase of the NEPA, are being managed by the Institute and Ecotrust. Another innovation of this project is the use of a \$10,000 contribution from the Partnership. This amount is held in a revolving account that allows for prompt payment of all contractors (within one week of submitting invoices). The fund is replenished by re-imbursements to Ecotrust from Whole Watershed Restoration Initiative, a process which can be lengthy as requests are routed through regional and a national payment centers. This procedure is beneficial for contractors and the Institute in managing the payments.

IV. How will this pilot project ensure rigorous environmental protection?

This Project ensures rigorous environmental protection at the local, state and federal level by complying with existing regulations and consulting regulators and environmental experts throughout the decision-making, project implementation and monitoring phases of the project. This Project is governed by the regulatory frameworks of the Northwest Forest Plan, the Endangered Species Act, and Oregon State's water resources statutes. Not only does it fall under these frameworks, the work itself is designed to fulfill these mandates. Consultation is also occurring with NOAA Fisheries, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the NRCS. All of this guidance has been brought together to determine both the conceptual design of the Project, as well as the technical and technological approaches to its implementation. The experience of the Siuslaw National Forest and its partners is such that for over 12 years there has been no litigation aimed at federal forest practices, restoration activities, or construction work performed on the Forest. Environmental groups, wildlife interests, and industry are all included on advisory panels such as the four Stewardship Contracting Groups on the Forest, the Coast Range Province Advisory Council and numerous stakeholder and interest groups convened by the local resources management entities, and by the Forest Service itself. The inclusive and open nature of these initiatives assures that communication concerning practices, projects and actions takes place well in advance of the decisions to proceed, as well as ensuring that oversight and input from citizens and their representatives is considered in a timely and ongoing manner. While this endeavor is not subject to usual County and State permitting procedures, due to its occurrence on Federal lands, the participation of those responsible agencies is being sought out and considered along with the public's interests in the design, implementation, and monitoring of the Project.

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V. How will this pilot project improve the quality and transparency of agency decisionmaking?

The Fivemile-Bell Landscape Management Project improves the quality and transparency of agency decision-making by encouraging and providing opportunities for open communication between the agency, local collaborative groups, and the public. For the past 20+ years, collaboration and cooperation between the agencies and entities involved in the Siuslaw Basin Partnership has been a tradition. In 1989, a Coordinated Resource Management Plan was first developed for one of the sub-basins of the watershed. Federal, State, and local governments, private landowners and industry, and advocacy groups facilitated the process of developing projects and inter-group communication about upcoming needs, plans and funding. Over the years the day-to-day work, especially restoration, of all of these parties has been based on expanded consultation and shared expertise and funding. Currently, a technical team of specialists from multiple natural resources oriented parties and agencies meets monthly to propose, assess, contribute to and approve projects that fit under the Basin's Whole Watershed Restoration strategy. The Fivemile-Bell Landscape Management Project utilizes this standard of operations, and takes it to a higher level with the cooperative development of its NEPA utilizing local organizational and workforce capacity, as well as being able to ensure regular and effective exchanges of information and progress among the parties. This extensive and transparent communication continues to significantly improve the relationships between the parties and the Forest Service, and contributes to a much smoother and more efficient process of implementation, funding and monitoring over the life of these Projects. Public and contractor involvement in developing the work-plans and reporting procedures for the NEPA data collection, assessment and dissemination brings everyone's decision-making out into the open and provides much greater opportunity for mutual consideration and evaluation of concerns and contributions.

VI. Will this pilot project develop best practices that can be replicated by other agencies or applied to other Federal actions or programs? Please describe?

Yes, the Fivemile-Bell Landscape Management Project will result in replicable best practices that can be applied to many Federal actions and programs. This pilot project shows the way forward for Federal agencies in a future characterized by shrinking budgets and workforce, and increasing costs and workloads. Federal overhead budgets are notoriously expensive and we can show how significant reductions in these expenditures have been made using our model. At the same time, local and rural community capacity has been improved for work of this type in the future on both public and private landscapes. The timeframes we have worked within have shown real efficiency in the work done by contractors under agency specialist supervision, and if there have been slow-downs in the process they have been due to factors within the Agency and not on the contractor side. One key element in the slowing of the NEPA process for this Project has been turnover within the agency as Inter-Disciplinary Team members have either retired or been re-assigned. While personnel changes do occur in the private and local government sectors, those vacancies are more likely to be filled quickly and the local entities demonstrate a more resilient and stable character in maintaining their workforce and fulfilling their commitments.

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PART III. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

(See attachment on following page.)

Project Narrative

The inventory, assessment and design aspects of the Fivemile-Bell Landscape Management Project are nearly complete and the *draft* NEPA document is now being prepared by the Forest Service. This pilot project is submitted by The Siuslaw Institute Inc., a third party that has been heavily involved in the Project since its initiation. As a contractor, the Siuslaw Institute has trained and provided local personnel for the collection of information that includes forest unit stand exams, botanical census of both native and invasive vegetation, historic and current hydrologic profiles, current and legacy road conditions, historical land uses as depicted in aerial photos spanning 70 years, wildlife habitat use and salmonid population surveys. These sub-contractors have also contributed their knowledge and experience to the inter-disciplinary and design forum held by the Forest Service task force on a regular basis. It is anticipated that the full project design and the NEPA document will be made available to the public for comment by the end of July 2011. Throughout the planning and data collection phase, contact has been established with those parties who seem most likely to have substantive comments to make on the process and Project plan. It is anticipated that this ongoing communication with these parties will alleviate potential controversy and litigation delays.

Also included in this contract is a joint effort by Ecotrust and the Institute to provide outreach for the NEPA comment period, and to create two documents for use in communicating the nature and the scope of the Project to interested public, potential funders, and collaborating entity constituencies. The primary outreach document will be a 30-40 page booklet providing a comprehensive history of the entire site and its adjacent lands, a Project design for its restoration, profiles of the partnering groups, agencies and other entities, and a description of roles and responsibilities. Since this is a long-term effort (10-years) this document will be used to attract funding and to build public involvement and trust over time. There will also be a brief 3-fold brochure overview extracted from this larger document for use at partner offices, meetings, mailings and in other elements of the communication strategy for this Project.

Over the life of the Project there will be many opportunities for volunteer and public engagement in the actual work (particularly in re-vegetation activities), and for study, monitoring and outreach. There is a real potential for tying this aspect of the endeavor into the American's Great Outdoors program, enlisting youth, seniors and other participants in building their own awareness of this type of restoration, as well as giving them the understanding for explaining it to their own connections and acquaintances. Needless to say, this kind of activity contributes positively to the personal fitness of the participants.

At this point in the pilot's activities, approximately \$58,000 have been spent with a remaining allocation of about \$15,000 for the outreach, publications, and final NEPA draft and public comment phase. There is another \$10,000 from the Siuslaw Basin Partnership dedicated to the initial stage of implementation along with over \$400,000 in committed funding for Phase I on-the-ground activities from state and federal sources.

Collaboration between the Project's active parties has been ongoing for several years and will continue into the implementation and monitoring stages of this large-scale restoration program. All in all, this has been a remarkably successful partnership of disparate, but interlocking public, private, academic and commercial interests working together to bring improved habitat conditions and economic enhancement to this area of Oregon's Coastal zone.



June 15, 2011

Katie M. Scharf
Deputy General Counsel
Council on Environmental Quality
736 Jackson Place, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Ms. Scharf,

I am writing to express my support for the inclusion of the Fivemile-Bell Landscape Management Project in the CEQ NEPA Pilot Program. This project is innovative in its extensive use of local capacity to perform research, analysis and outreach required by the NEPA process. Additionally, Fivemile-Bell is a powerful example of the potential of the Forest Service to work closely with community organizations and local workers to achieve desired outcomes while supporting the local economy and building lasting relationships.

At Sustainable Northwest, we have a long history of working to bridge rural and urban interests, encourage entrepreneurship, and build trust in sustainable natural resource management and utilization in the West. Through our advocacy network - the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition - we are able to highlight projects such as Fivemile-Bell, which can be replicated throughout the West to create healthier landscapes and economies.

The NEPA process at work in the Fivemile-Bell Project is the result of meaningful cooperation between the Forest Service, conservation groups, and the local community in decisionmaking on the Siuslaw National Forest. The Siuslaw Basin Partnership, which includes the Siuslaw Soil and Water Conservation District, the Siuslaw Institute, the Siuslaw Watershed Council, Ecotrust and the Siuslaw National Forest, has worked closely with the Forest Service on a variety of restoration projects on the Siuslaw since 1992. Through collaboration, the Partnership has been able to identify ecological and economic needs and mobilize local people and resources to meet those needs. In the case of Fivemile-Bell, the Partnership has offered a solution to the challenge of performing a timely NEPA analysis in a difficult financial climate. The constraints on Forest Service budget and staff mean that the Agency would not have been able to complete the NEPA process required for the Fivemile-Bell Project on its own. By collaborating with the Partnership, the Forest Service has been able to move forward on this large-scale project through utilization of local contractors, local knowledge, and local support.

The Five-mile Bell Landscape Management Project is a prime example of a innovative and replicable approach to NEPA. Thank you for considering its inclusion in the CEQ NEPA Pilot Program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maia J. Enzer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Maia" being the most prominent.

Maia Enzer
Policy Program Director

Katie M. Scharf
Deputy General Counsel
Council on Environmental Quality
736 Jackson Place, NW
Washington, DC 20503

June 13, 2011

Dear Ms Scharf;

I am writing to express my strong support for the inclusion of the Siuslaw Basin Partnership's Fivemile-Bell Landscape Management Project in the Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA Pilot Program. This landscape-scale restoration project is innovative in its use of community-based, collaborative organizations to more efficiently and thoroughly prepare NEPA documents, conduct research and analysis, and administer outreach. At present, the Fivemile-Bell Project is under analysis, with the production of an Environmental Assessment expected in July 2011. The public comment period is expected to begin in July 2011.

This project is unique in its use of a local collaborative group – the Siuslaw Basin Partnership – to collect data and conduct analyses required by NEPA, to source local contractors thereby supporting the local economy, and to assist in NEPA-related outreach. The Siuslaw Basin Partnership is comprised of the Siuslaw Soil and Water Conservation District, the Siuslaw Institute, the Siuslaw Watershed Council, Ecotrust, and the Siuslaw National Forest, representing a diverse group of government and conservation interests with a broad range of natural resource management experience. Ecotrust, a non-profit organization with a mission of inspiring fresh thinking that creates economic opportunity, social equity and environmental well-being, has a long-standing partnership with the Siuslaw Basin Partnership to help increase the capacity and resilience of local communities on the Central Oregon Coast. Through its work with the Partnership, the Forest Service has been able to leverage local intellectual, natural resource and funding capital in the furtherance of national conservation goals of habitat restoration and watershed protection.

Additionally, by establishing a working relationship with The Siuslaw Basin Partnership, the Forest Service was able to move forward on a significant landscape-scale restoration project that would not have been feasible otherwise due to shortfalls in staff and funding availability. As they continue to integrate common goals, the Forest Service and the Partnership will be able to overcome obstacles that delay the NEPA process and allow land management to progress towards desired social, economic and ecological goals.

Thank you for your consideration of the Fivemile-Bell Landscape Management Project in the CEQ NEPA Pilot Project program. It is an excellent example of an innovative approach to the NEPA process, which could serve as a compelling working model for other public land collaboratives that aspire to improve the resilience of their communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brent Davies".

Brent Davies
Vice President, Forests and Ecosystem Services