

*Toby Martínez became the sixth State Forester for New Mexico in June 1995. Since then he has spearheaded several initiatives in New Mexico, the Four Corners area, and the Nation. These initiatives include the creation of the first Inmate Work Camp focused on forest health issues; the creation of the Four Corners Sustainable Forests Initiative that has brought \$3.5 million in economic development grants to the Four Corners states; and the Twenty Community Strategy providing the basis for channeling personnel and funding resources to the communities in New Mexico considered most at risk. Currently, the Forest Legacy Program is in its final approval stage, a program that allows willing landowners to preserve conservation easements on their property. From 1969 to 1995, Toby worked for the U.S. Forest Service and had six different assignments in New Mexico on three separate forests. He also served as Forest Supervisor on Fishlake National Forest in Utah before retiring and starting as State Forester for New Mexico. Toby, a native of Taos,*



*was raised in a sheep ranching family. He received a B.S. degree in range management from NMSU in 1969.*

## **NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY WATERSHED MANAGEMENT**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The New Mexico State Forestry Division of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department has invested significant resources into a living strategic plan resulting in valuable benefits to the health of New Mexico forests. Following the 1996 fire season, the Division declared improving the health of New Mexico's forests as its primary purpose. Scientific information began to emerge about the increasing problem of too many small diameter trees in increasingly brush-choked watersheds. This understanding began the process of converting the organization from top to bottom to a unified strategic effort.

Originally, the Division began to evaluate which watershed and which community would be on a top 10 list of locations needing technical support. The vulnerability of community water supplies to catastrophic wildfires rose as a dominant theme. The suite of existing programs was evaluated to see if we had the needed skills, resources and services. Missing was a cohesive effort to help communities create an industrial approach to wood fiber utilization. To address this gap, the Division created the Four Corners Forest Industries Partnership. The Division also recognized the potential of utilizing minimum-security inmates for forest restoration projects. This would create on-the-ground benefits and demonstrate the concept of fuel removal in forests.

The disastrous spring and summer of 2000 provided a strange blessing to the Division. Unprecedented efforts from the entire organization, supported by significant portions of the national fire suppression community helped us survive the fire season. The Division expanded the top 10 lists to a more cohesive 20 Community Initiative. The thought was that we could work with five communities a year over a period of four years to make significant progress in preparing the citizens to deal with wildfires.

Funding provided by the national fire plan, partnerships with federal agencies and unexpectedly strong support from community leaders resulted in local teams who are fully implementing an integrated, forest-by-forest approach. Unfunded projects outnumber funded projects by 3 to 1 meaning communities are designing projects that will be pursued later. All 20 Communities are getting support with 12 funded for assessments, and 10 actually thinning trees. Many areas are beefing up their fire response equipment and teams.

The preliminary results are exciting, challenging and creating changes in relationships throughout the state. Projects will be completed, we will evaluate the results and modify approaches as information and opportunities dictate. We look forward to continuing our pursuit of smart small diameter industries through the Four Corners Partnership. This year we will establish the second inmate work camp. We will initiate the use of the Forest Legacy program to help slow the spread of suburban sprawl into certain forest areas. We have new, smarter forest harvesting regulations. Through all of this, we anticipate the truly collaborative approach in New Mexico may survive. It may even be possible that this can serve as a model for other western states and the nation.

### What has New Mexico done to address watershed/forest health?



New strategic plan put in place after the 1996 fire season to focus on:

- Protecting communities
- Improving watershed/forest health
- Revitalizing forest dependent communities

### 46<sup>th</sup> Annual New Mexico Water Conference



Presentation by Toby Martinez  
New Mexico State Forester  
November 6, 2011

### Three key components/tools created to address these priorities.

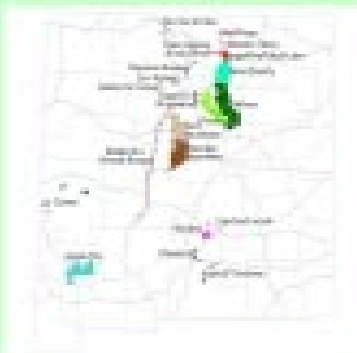
- 20 Community Strategy
- Inmate Work Camp Program
- Four Corners Partnership



## 20 Community Strategy

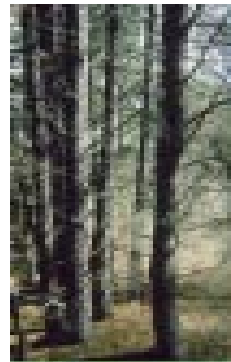
- Implementation of strategic approach for communities
- Identified sites that needed treatment
- Required cooperation among agencies and locals
- Established community-based teams
- Focused on community leadership
- Assessed suppression infrastructure
- Developed information and education programs

## Why is it working? Our Strategic Approach



- Identify and prioritize which communities are most at risk to fire.

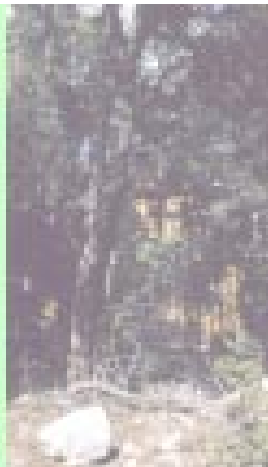
## •WE ARE KEEPING IT ALIVE



- We have a bi-weekly conference call between Santa Fe staff and Districts.



- Objective system used to rate communities:
- Proximity of vegetation to homes
- Availability to water
- Ease of evacuation
- Topography
- Type of fuels
- Number and size of previous fires
- Direction of prevailing winds
- Ability to protect homes



- Of the \$80 million in extra National Fire Plan funds that came to New Mexico, at least \$3.5 million flowed through EMNRD .



- Match rates are 70/30 , 80/20 and 90/10 depending on the grant.

- Plan to treat 10,000 acres of state, municipal, and private land in 2001 and 2002



**IT'S PEOPLE**  
• At all levels

**THERE'S MORE:**



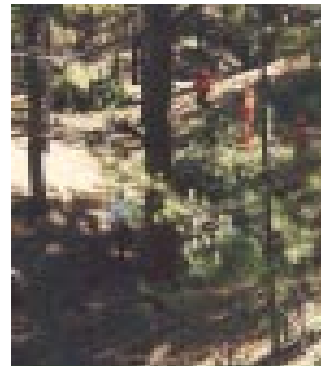
- At least 8 community-based teams already formed to plan projects and set priorities. More are getting organized.

**Inmate Work Camp Program**

- Established by statute in 1997 as part of the New Mexico Forestry Division
- Was developed through combined efforts of EMNRD-Forestry Division and NM Corrections Department
- Specifically funded for work on forest health projects



- Federal agencies are planning 52 projects in the vicinity of the 20 communities to be completed this year.



- Conducts projects from two field locations; Los Lunas and a new unit in Grants, New Mexico

- Employs eleven full-time employees to manage eight, minimum security inmate crews

New Mexico Department of Forestry  
Watershed Management


- Since the establishment of the program, IWC crews have:



Conducted 164 natural resource projects for twenty-four different cooperators



- Improved 7,945 acres of wildlife habitat



- Created 367,038 feet (69.5 miles) of fuel breaks near homes located in the forest

- Reduced tree overcrowding through thinning on 8,152 acres



- This includes improving the health of our watersheds

- Responded to 42 wildfires



- Conducted 10 wildfire rehabilitation projects  
1,707 acres





- Provided support on prescribed fire projects 3,298 acres

### Four Corners Partnership Concept

Restoring Forest Health through a Forest-Based Economic Assistance Program  
Emphasizing rural development, utilization of small diameter forest products and technology sharing



- Planted 17,245 trees
- Assisted in improving 27,559 acres of land in New Mexico

### Four Corners Partnership Model



IWC Program can perform projects only on public lands.



- EMNRD-Forestry Division maintains 11 Joint Powers Agreements with:
- Federal and State agencies
  - Counties and cities

Project examples of Three-Legged Stool Model:

- Los Humanas Land Grant-business for vigas, latillas, pole and firewood



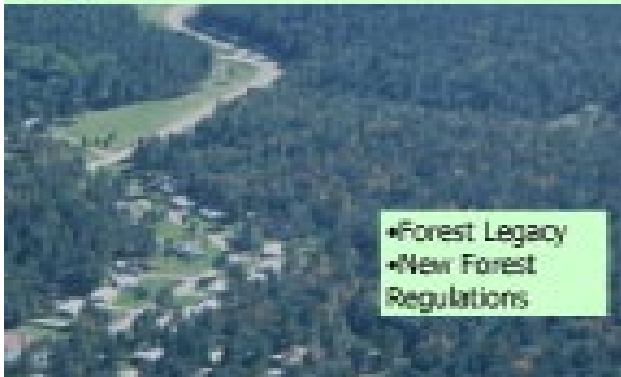
- Catron County Citizens Group-joined together and developed forest restoration plan, economic development plan and business plan

## The Future of



- 20 Community Strategy
- Inmate Work Camp Program
- Four Corners Partnership

Where does Forestry Division go from here?



- Forest Legacy
- New Forest Regulations