



USDA Forest Service Briefing Paper

Date 9/30/05

Topic: Forest Service Partnership Enhancement Act of 2005

The Partnership Enhancement Act would improve the Forest Service's ability to work with a wide variety of cooperators by expanding, clarifying, and simplifying legal authority to enter into mutual benefit agreements. HR 3818, introduced with bipartisan support, is based on a proposal sent to Congress by the Administration, which strongly recommends that the bill be enacted.

- The Forest Service has a long history of working with others to achieve the agency's mission. Partnerships build positive relationships, leverage funds and services, and enable landscape scale management of natural resources.
- The Forest Service has accumulated authorities for working cooperatively over a 100 year period, and at times the complex patchwork of existing authorities has resulted in inconsistent interpretation and time-consuming processes. The draft bill gives Congress an opportunity to provide clarification and update authorities to reflect new kinds of cooperative work relationships in the 21st century.
- The bill would:
 - Expand, clarify, and simplify legal authority for the Forest Service to enter into mutual benefit agreements--some of which are currently authorized only through appropriations bills--with cooperators.
 - Enhance authority for cooperative interpretive and educational programs, services, and products to enhance visitor awareness of natural resources and cultural heritage, including: joint production of materials; distribution and sales of items (including health and safety convenience products); providing educational programs and services; construction, maintenance, and operations of facilities; and collecting funds on behalf of cooperators.
 - Provide permanent authority for watershed restoration and enhancement agreements to protect, restore, and enhance resources on watersheds on and near National Forest System lands.
 - Allow advancement of funds by the Forest Service to a cooperator under specified conditions.
 - Require regulations to implement.

Contact: Teri Cleeland, WO Legislative Affairs, (202) 205-1036