

Advancing Rural Prosperity and Equity Through the New Forest Economy

Overview

Some communities in the U.S. West have developed a new forest economy based on restoring forest health and reducing wildfire risk. However, prosperity through this economy has not emerged everywhere and for all people. Forest management policies often require labor-intensive activities, administered through contracting regulations and practices that typically reward the lowest bidders. Much forest restoration therefore relies on a Latinx workforce that faces low wages, unsafe working conditions, and high rates of poverty. Demand for this workforce is also growing as wildfire impacts and investment in wildfire risk reduction increase across the West Coast.

Our project seeks to foster equitable employment and entrepreneurship for more prosperous rural communities and Latinx populations.

Objectives

1. **Research:** *Identify the community, social, and policy factors that drive or inhibit equitable labor and entrepreneurship in the new forest economy:* We will study federal land management and contracting policies, and community and regional competitiveness of minority-owned businesses in California, Oregon, and Washington. We will also conduct case studies of forest worker and business conditions within California and Oregon.
2. **Education:** *Design and implement educational programming to support equitable forest-based employment:* We will enhance and expand established programs for rights-based education for forest workers and supervisor and business owner training. These will be delivered in California, Oregon, and Washington. Each training will teach personal and business skills for building entrepreneurship capacity and accessing economic opportunities in ecological restoration work.
3. **Extension:** *Develop briefings, infographics, webinars, and other outreach that offer strategies for supporting equitable forest work:* We will design resources to help land managers, economic development practitioners, Extension personnel, and social service providers engage with research results. These will be delivered in a variety of formats to audiences in all three states.

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