

STREAM RESTORATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A WATER RESOURCE SPECIALIST WITHIN THE U.S. FOREST SERVICE^{AFS}

Traci Sylte
Lolo National Forest
Bldg. 24, Fort Missoula, Missoula, MT 59804
tsylte@fs.fed.us

The Forest Service is engaged in many types of stream restoration and rehabilitation projects. With healthy watersheds as the ultimate objective, stream activities primarily focus on individual stream reaches, aquatic species passage at road crossings, road decommissioning, mining and grazing, and habitat enhancement. People educated in stream restoration are in short supply. Academia must begin providing specialized degrees in application-based fluvial geomorphology and environmental river mechanics. Agencies need to develop programs to assure employees are trained and remain current. Despite a huge work backlog and an increase in stream health awareness and past policy initiatives, restoration budgets have dwindled. Most restoration occurs as a byproduct of timber management or partnerships. Although congressional funding to the agency has increased, most money is allocated to currently popular initiatives or to fire or timber related programs. Moreover, a traditional timber and fire-focused philosophy combined with only verbal restoration support have many publics suspicious of National Forest work. Many restoration projects are tied up by timber related law suits. Sound restoration relies on our ability to work with the public, and

together as agencies, to be as credible, knowledgeable, and efficient as possible. The future of restoration, and arguably the Forest Service, depends on a turn in philosophy with restoration as the primary emphasis, with timber as the by-product, and with an urban strategic, ecologically based fire suppression program. Leadership must look beyond short-sighted, politically driven objectives and manage the agency for which it was created – "...assuring favorable conditions of flow."