

# Report Summary: Stewardship Contracting Assessment Study

## Introduction

The Social Research Laboratory (SRL) at Northern Arizona University conducted an assessment of the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Stewardship Contracting process. The assessment rated various aspects of the Stewardship contracting program as well as exploring a range of issues in an effort to continue current positive aspects and identify areas for improvement.

## Methodology

Telephone surveys were utilized to obtain qualitative and quantitative data from Stewardship Contract Participants and BLM Stewardship Contract Managers. Both groups rated various items (1 to 5 scale, with 1 as the lowest and 5 as the highest) relating to the Stewardship contracting process for a total of 79 completed in-depth interviews. Several open-ended questions gathered feedback regarding positive aspects of the contracting process as well as ways to improve the Stewardship program.

## Findings: Evaluating Stewardship Contracting Process

In general, on a scale of 1 to 5, Stewardship Participants rate the contracting process very positively with a mean score of 4.43, while BLM Contract Managers rate the contracting process more moderately with a mean score of 3.23. The following is a list of strengths and weakness of the Stewardship contracting process highlighted by Stewardship Participants and BLM Contract Managers.

### General Aspects of Stewardship Contracting that Work the Best

Stewardship Participants:

- BLM personnel; ground technicians; and inspectors
- Site Visits in general
- Performance based but flexible program where negotiations and cooperation are employed to achieve results

BLM Contract Managers:

- Efficiency of land treatment
- Trading of goods for services; reducing cost; and creating capital
- Encouraging local involvement in projects

### General Aspects of Stewardship Contracting Needing Improvement

Stewardship Participants:

- Contract accessibility
- Notices from the BLM to alert of new contracts
- Clarity in paperwork
- Expedition of process and payment time frames
- More realistic estimated product purchasing arrangements

BLM Contract Managers:

- Contracting processes (similar to Stewardship Participants above)
- Local involvement
- Product price reductions
- Better cost estimation

## **Site Visitations**

The site visitation process of Stewardship contracting was an area of the program that received an array of perspectives from both Stewardship Participants and BLM Contract Managers. Respectively, Stewardship Participants rate the site visitation process with an average score of 4.15, while BLM Contract Managers rate the project visitation process with a mean score of 3.69. Among Stewardship Participants the explanation of the site, the interaction with the BLM, the touring of the site, and the maps/mapping are all areas that received positive feedback. Similarly, BLM Contract Managers positively mentioned the viewing of the land, the communication with the potential contractor, contract clarification, and contractor involvement as the best aspects of the site visitation process. To improve the site visitation process, Stewardship Participants mentioned better explanation of the project, more available data, more time for proposals, better assessment of byproduct values, better informed guides, and more funding. BLM Contract Managers mentioned the need for more contractor interest, better workmanship and speed, extended time frames, and prerequisite site visits before contracts.

## **Communication**

Both Stewardship Participants and BLM Contract Managers rate communication between each other very positively, with ratings of 4.43 and 4.48 respectively. Although communication is highly approved of by Stewardship Participants some suggestions include better radio contact in remote areas, and availability of BLM representatives after office hours and on holidays. For BLM Contract Managers, communication could be improved with better understanding of contract processes, the program, and general duties on the part of awardees. Similar to awardees, BLM Contract Managers also suggest better phone and cell phone coverage.

## **Timber Harvesting and Wood Products Production**

The combination of timber harvesting and wood products was an area of the Stewardship contracting process that has positive approval ratings as well as areas for improvement. Among Stewardship Participants, timber harvesting and wood products production is perceived as a positive way to maximize removal and utilize wood byproducts. They also indicate that it creates jobs and boosts the economy while diminishing costs to the contractors and returning capital to government agencies. On the other hand, some respondents expressed difficulty finding a market for their wood products (such as fine wood), or finding available processing facilities. BLM Contract Managers also refer to the significance of combining the two to insure success and capital return. As far as improving timber harvesting and wood products production, BLM Contract Managers suggest a more comprehensive awareness of the interrelationship between product markets, the size and remoteness of the project, and existing infrastructural limitations.

## **Byproduct Marketability**

Both Stewardship awardees and BLM Contract Managers rate the marketability of products from Stewardship contracts more moderately with ratings of 3.21 and 2.71 respectively. Among Stewardship awardees and BLM Contract Managers, favorable marketability ratings are associated with high demand for their products in the areas of extraction. On the other hand, un-favorable ratings are associated with high transport costs, distance from buyers, and limited biomass processing facilities.

## Average Ratings of Stewardship Assessment Items\*

	Stewardship Participant Average Rating	BLM Contract Manager Average Rating
How would you rate the BLM Stewardship site visitation process?	<b>4.15</b>	<b>3.69</b>
How effective is the BLM Stewardship bidding and proposal process?	<b>3.55</b>	<b>2.52</b>
How would you rate the level of communication between the BLM and yourself (reversed for BLM Contract Managers)?	<b>4.43</b>	<b>4.48</b>
How involved are the stakeholders?	<b>3.29</b>	<b>3.44</b>
How would you rate the current regulations for BLM Stewardship contracts?	<b>4.00</b>	<b>3.03</b>
How important has bonding been to the BLM Stewardship contract?	<b>3.18</b>	<b>3.97</b>
How easily was bonding obtained for the BLM Stewardship contract?	<b>3.18</b>	<b>2.88</b>
How would you rate the way BLM determines costs for Stewardship contracts?	<b>3.13</b>	<b>3.52</b>
How would you rate the combination of timber harvesting and wood products production?	<b>4.06</b>	<b>3.79</b>
How marketable are the products from Stewardship contracts?	<b>3.21</b>	<b>2.71</b>
How would you rate the Stewardship contracting process?	<b>4.43</b>	<b>3.23</b>
How effective are Stewardship contracts at meeting stated goals?	<b>4.17</b>	<b>3.67</b>

\*Ratings are based on a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest.