

*News*

# BLM Lakeview District's Gerber Stew Stewardship—A "Stewpot" of Treatments

BY MIKE BECHDOLT

Imagine receiving new legislative authority to design a long-term contract with an objective to implement an array of ecosystem restoration treatments under a single contract. That's exactly what the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) districts have been successfully doing since the Consolidated Appropriations Resolution was signed in February 2003 giving the BLM and USDA Forest Service (USFS) the ability to enter into long-term stewardship contracts. Since receiving the authority, Oregon and Washington BLM has awarded a combined total of 24 stewardship contracting projects involving restoration treatments such as streamside habitat enhancement, fish habitat improvement, biomass utilization for energy production, precommercial thinning, fence construction, wildlife habitat improvement and hazard fuel reduction. One of the many successful BLM

stewardship contracts to date has been Gerber Stew, which was awarded in September of 2004.

The Gerber Stew project is located on the Lakeview District in the Klamath Falls Resource Area in southern Oregon. The vegetation in the resource area ranges from high elevation true fir above 6,000 feet on the westside to juniper/sagebrush high steppe desert on the eastside. The westside of the resource area consists primarily of mixed conifer Oregon/California (O&C) forestlands with primary emphasis on permanent forest production in conformity with the provision of sustained yield. The O&C act also emphasizes protecting watersheds, regulating stream flow, contributing to the economic stability of local communities and industries, and providing recreational facilities. The initial intent of the Gerber Stew contract was to experiment with potential utilization markets for western juniper. For a number of years, the

Lakeview District has been cutting and burning hundreds of acres of western juniper on lands where native understory vegetation is negatively impacted by encroaching western juniper. These efforts were undertaken in response to documented research showing that western juniper has significantly expanded its range in the last 130 years as a result of fire suppression. BLM became interested in utilization because local mills in Klamath Falls and in the surrounding areas were starting to use more western juniper for a variety of products, including mining timber posts, paneling, fencing, absorbent, flooring, hardboard and biomass. With increasing local demand for western juniper, the new authority to enter into stewardship contracts, and interested contractors willing to test an untested market, the Gerber Stew project was spawned.

The initial treatments, called task orders, were designed primarily to deal with the restoration and utilization of western juniper on eastside lands. With the Klamath Falls Resource Area cutting and burning 2,000 to 3,000 acres of juniper per year as part of the National Fire Plan and rangeland restoration work, there appeared to be a readily available supply of potential logs and biomass. The scope of treatments quickly expanded when the Klamath Falls Resource Area received funding to treat westside, small-diameter forested stands for forest health and hazard fuel



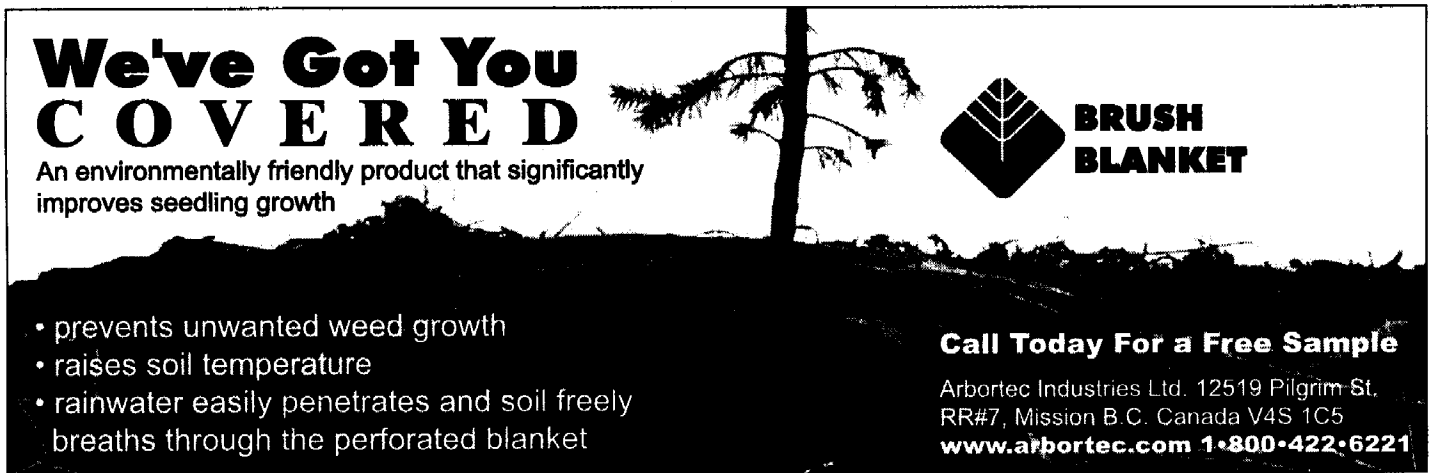
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reduction purposes. The contractor reviewed some of the proposed small-diameter thinning treatments and stated he was willing to test the chip markets not only for western juniper, but for small-diameter mixed conifer material (1"-9" DBH) that is typically left in the woods after a precommercial thinning. To date, not only has the contractor been able to find a market for western juniper, but has also successfully found a market for small-diameter material resulting in improved forest health and a reduction of hazardous fuels in some of the resource area's younger mixed conifer stands including young ponderosa pine plantations.

Two unique aspects of the stewardship contracts are that the legislation authorizes: (1) the value of vegetative material to be applied as an offset against the cost of services received; and (2) multi-year contract authority greater than five years, but not to exceed 10 years.

Neither of these authorities is available under standard BLM timber sale or service contracts. Under Gerber Stew, the BLM is using the value of the material (i.e., logs, chips and biomass) to help offset the cost of restoration and service work. Where the value of the material will often not pay for implementing the full array of restoration treatments, the BLM is securing the additional funds to pay for the service work.

Gerber Stew is an IDIQ (Indefinite Delivery, Indefinite Quantity) contract, which allows use of task orders to regulate work requested based upon available funding and priority of treatments. Funding for the task orders comes from a variety of sources depending upon the restoration treatment. For example, if fuel reduction is the primary goal, funding may come from National Fire Plan accounts. If spring restoration

work is being done, one-time appropriated dollars may come through water restoration accounts.

The Gerber Stew project is designed to implement a "stewpot" of work. Individual treatments to date have varied from cutting, yarding and removal of the juniper, manual cutting and piling western juniper around sensitive spring sites, road resurfacing, fencing, seeding, removal of residual landing slash for biomass, and slashbusting. Not all the work involves product removal. Table 1 describes the service work that has been tasked out.

In contrast, table 2 shows estimates of products that have been scheduled for removal to date.

(1"-9" DBH) is involved, the product value rarely pays for the cutting, yarding and hauling.

Bidding on these types of contracts is challenging for the contractors. Imagine trying to bid on a 5-10 year contract with multiple bid items on treatments that you have typically not implemented before and speculating on annual cost increases. Imagine trying to develop a market for a product (western juniper) that is rarely marketed, is economically and ecologically difficult to remove, and is historically left alone or cut and burned. Imagine trying to work with the local infrastructure to see if they will expand their product line or develop a market

**Table 1. Gerber Stew—Service Work Tasked to Date and Costs.**

Treatments Tasked To Date	Units	Cost Range Per Unit
Manual Cut, Pile & Cover (Western Juniper)	346 Acres	\$370-\$680
Mechanical Cut & Pile (Western Juniper)	240 Acres	\$120-\$230
Mechanical Cut (Western Juniper & Mixed Conifer)	1,220 Acres	\$115-\$265
Mechanical Yarding (Western Juniper & Mixed Conifer)	1,220 Acres	\$50-\$134
Seeding	944 Acres	\$15.00
Road Maintenance	960 Stations (1 Station = 100 ft.)	\$8.00
Road Obliteration	75 Stations	\$9.00
Road Blocking	3	\$165.00
Spot Rocking (Includes hauling and processing rock)	356 Stations	\$25-\$40/ton of rock \$40-\$50/station
Fencing	3,500 Feet	\$0.75-0.90
Slashbusting/Mastication	300 Acres	\$200-\$360

**Table 2. Gerber Stew—Estimates of Products Scheduled for Removal to Date.**

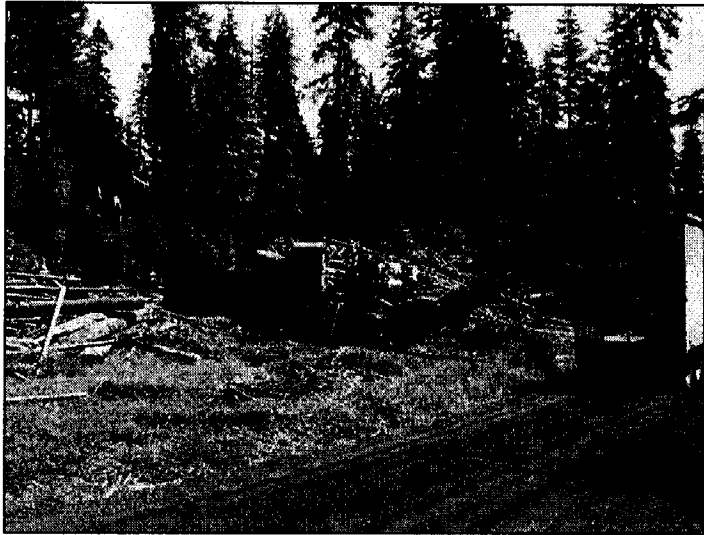
Product Removal	Units	Approximate Value
Western Juniper – Clean Chips For Hardboard Processing	4,962 Tons	\$0.25/ton
Sawlogs	753 MBF	\$15.00-\$50.00/MBF
Biomass for Energy Production	5,240 Tons	\$0.10/ton
Ponderosa Pine – Clean Chips For Hardboard Processing	4,050 Tons	\$0.20/ton

The cost of the service work far exceeds the value of the product removed. To date, approximately \$800,000 of service work has been tasked out with a product return value of about \$16,000 on Gerber Stew. However, this varies by contract, and some stewardship contracts return a much higher product value depending upon the amount of sawlog material sold and how much service work is involved. It is no secret that whenever biomass and small-diameter thinning

and infrastructure locally to utilize material typically ignored (i.e., small trees ranging in size from 1"-9" DBH that contribute to elevated fire risks and fuel loadings). Yet, despite these challenges, and after two years of implementation, the contractor working both externally with private industry and the local BLM office has managed to implement the contract.

In 2005, the stewardship contractor delivered approximately 2,000 tons of juniper chips to the local hardboard

*Duration?*



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIKE BECHDOLT

**In 2006, a biomass utilization example involved grinding of residual timber sale landing piles.**

plant. In addition, 450 acres of a ponderosa pine plantation was thinned down to 2" DBH. The material is scheduled for chipping and utilization

at the local hardboard plant in 2006 after it dries out. In forested small-diameter stands, where the BLM typically precommercially thinned, trees

that were normally left on site are now being yarded and utilized. The inherent risks associated with stewardship contracts are discussed at the pre-bid meetings prior to issuing a solicitation of a stewardship contract. Contractors ask questions to obtain as much detail as possible. Field tours are given of potential treatment sites. However, because some of these contracts are designed long term (10 years), there are more unseen items in regard to future treatments than seen on the field trips.

Are stewardship contracts working as intended? For the Gerber Stew stewardship contract, the treatments are meeting many of the objectives. For instance, approximately \$100,000 of road resurfacing was completed last fall on a section of road that needed immediate attention. The work was tasked out and completed within a month. A local rock and gravel company was subcontracted to provide and haul the rock. In 2005, two rangeland spring sites that were completely encroached with western juniper were treated by hand (cut and piled) due to their resource sensitivity. This spring, the Klamath Falls Resource Area identified over 150 residual timber sale landings scheduled for burning. In lieu of burning, the resource area tasked out the grinding and removal of the landing slash to the stewardship contractor. The material is being sent to the closest biomass facility in Medford for power generation.

These task orders are accomplishing the very objective of stewardship contracting by providing employment to

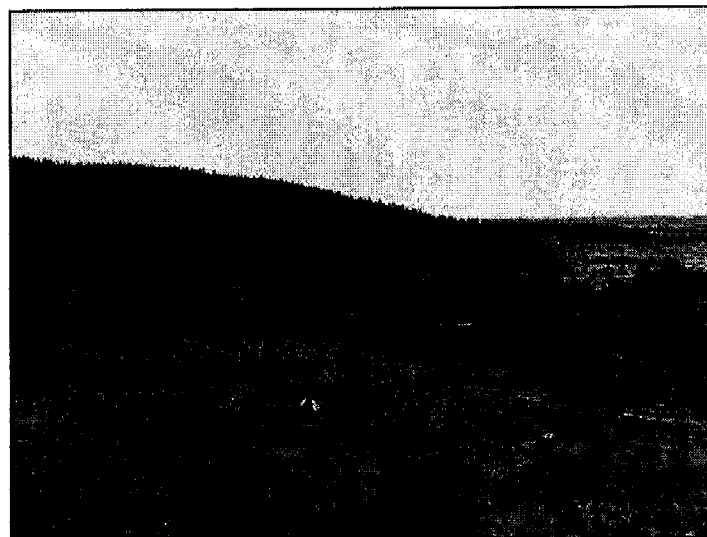
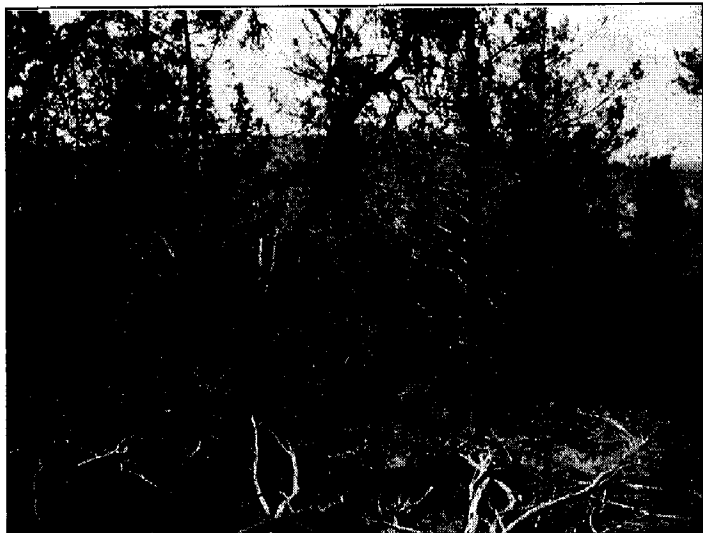
### **BLM's Stewardship Contracting Guidelines**

Under Section 323 of Public Law 108.7, February 28, 2003, the USDA Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have authority until September 30, 2013, to enter into stewardship projects with private persons or public or private entities, by contract or by agreement, to perform services to achieve land management objectives for the national forests or public lands that meet local and rural community needs.

1. Stewardship Contracting is not a replacement for the established timber sale program. Forest management projects designed primarily to enhance volume are not suitable for stewardship contracting.
2. Stewardship projects shall comply with applicable environmental laws and regulations, including the appropriate level of environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and are consistent with the applicable land use plans.
3. Any vegetative material removal must be a by-product of meeting the stewardship contracting project goals. Removal of these products must be consistent with the objectives developed through the collaborative process and the applicable land use plan objectives.
4. When designing stewardship contracting projects, consider projects involving treatments and techniques available to make forests, woodlands and rangelands more resilient to natural disturbances such as fire, insects, disease, wind and flood.
5. For contacts exceeding five years in duration, field managers should consider such factors as the scope of the project, the type of the material to be treated, the availability of local capacity to process and use the material removed from the land, and the potential development of new markets for small-diameter material, as well as operational factors such as local weather patterns, sensitive wildlife species habitat use cycles and seasonal restrictions for wildfire prevention.

#### **Stewardship restoration treatment objectives include:**

- road and trail maintenance or obliteration for improved water quality;
- soil productivity, habitat for wildlife and fisheries, or other resource values;
- setting prescribed fires to improve composition, structure, condition, and health of stands or to improve wildlife habitat;
- removing vegetation or other activities to promote healthy forest stands, reduce fire hazards or achieve other land management objectives;
- watershed restoration and maintenance;
- restoration and maintenance of wildlife and fish habitat; and
- control of noxious and exotic weeds and reestablishing native plant species.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIKE BECHDOLT

**In this 2005 juniper utilization treatment, Norcross Springs Western juniper was cut, yarded, chipped and delivered to a local plant for hardboard processing. The objective was to release the understory vegetation (sage brush, bitter brush and bunch grasses).**

rural communities, meeting restoration goals, building utilization markets and reducing wildfire risk. So, yes, the stewardship contract is working as envisioned. The key to successful implementation has been flexibility on the part of both the contractor and the government to meet the overall objectives and to work through the challenges of a new contracting mechanism. Would any of these treatments have happened without having the ability to use stewardship contracts? The answer is yes, but stewardship contracts encourage long-term commitments and stability between the government, the contractors and the community. Contractors and the BLM are learning to adapt as each treatment is implemented and new stewardship contracts are awarded. It is the agency desire that the early "seeds" of stewardship contracting grow into a larger and stable market for utilization of the by-products of ecologically sound land management restoration activities. ♦

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