Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition - 2017 Annual Meeting Summary

Overview: The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC) promotes practical, equitable solutions that integrate economic, community and environmental health in the rural West. These solutions are grounded in the experiences of our network of rural community innovators. Each year we gather in a working meeting to develop these solutions and most importantly, we gather to build our network.

We hosted our 13th Annual Meeting from January 10-12 in Troutdale, Oregon, attracting close to 100 participants from ten western states. Participants represented our broad network, with a mix of government staff, elected officials, community leaders, storytellers, practitioners, and academics. We facilitated peer to peer learning, transferring lessons among community based practitioners and building relationships. We asked provocative questions with an aim to identify success stories, policy barriers, and new solutions for working landscapes. We gathered to approach federal policy from the middle. And, we gathered to galvanize RVCC and our community’s work in the year to come.

We’ve consolidated the work from our annual meeting into key takeaways and next steps below.

Key Takeaways
- **Community** – We affirmed one of the primary benefits of the annual meeting is renewing and strengthening our commitment to each other and place. We need to ensure that there is a space and dialogue in the middle in this uncertain political climate.

- **Capacity** - We need to continue to invest dollars and training in the people and organizations that support land stewardship and community benefit.

- **Catalyzing Change** - We need to leverage our collective voice for practical policy solutions and good implementation outcomes. We must not get distracted, and stay focused on the places we can make change.

- **Communication** - We need to strengthen our communications presence, create a more collective story and better articulate our successes.

- **Collaboration** – We need collaboration and partnerships more than ever, especially efforts focused on implementation of collaboratively agreed upon work across all lands.

Next Steps
RVCC focuses on three core approaches - policy, stories, and learning - to advance our mission of healthy landscapes and vibrant rural communities across the American West. Our next steps are tied to those approaches. An overarching emphasis will be engaging more deliberately with RVCC ranching interests and establishing partnerships with ranch and rangelands advocacy groups.
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POLICY
- Establish a policy working group to share information and updates regarding natural resource stewardship, and develop policy priorities. The working group will meet biweekly and be open.
  - Early topics of consideration include: FY18 appropriations recommendations, a strategy for the 2018 Farm Bill (focusing on investing in capacity for rural CBOs & businesses), and the future of CFLR
- Develop new 2017 Issue Papers, possibly including:
  - FY18 Appropriations
  - Recommendations to increase and improve the use of prescribed fire and 'beneficial fire'
  - Case study examining the impacts of agency turnover at the local level
  - Update past Issue Papers on federal contracting and community benefit
- Organize a Western Week in DC in April or May, bringing rural community leaders to DC, focusing on:
  - Laying groundwork in a new administration and new congress, using transition recommendations
  - 2018 Farm Bill
  - FY18 Appropriations
  - Sharing rural stories of success

STORIES
- Identify success stories to support our policy goals
- Create a more collective voice with cohesive messaging
- Provide opportunities for RVCC network to learn more about new communications tools from social media to photo and video

LEARNING
- Host a regional learning exchange
  - Organize a regional learning exchange in Montana this spring, focused on use of Farm Bill authorities and strategies for working across all lands
- Create opportunities for innovators and community leaders to work together, transferring innovation and ideas

How to Get Involved
The RVCC leadership Team extends a big thank you to everyone who attended the Annual Meeting, even in the midst of a heavy snowstorm. Missed the meeting? Want to get involved in RVCC? We are always interested in new ideas, creative leaders and unifying solutions.

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