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EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

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ABSTRACT: A key objective of the professional forestry program in the School of Forestry at Northern Arizona University (NAU) has been to prepare students to become practicing land managers. But in a state where the vast majority of the commercial forestland ownership rests with the federal government or in tribal holdings, providing NAU students with exposure to private forestland management practices is difficult.

To help address this issue, the authors began to develop a partnership with among School of Forestry, VESTRA Resources, Inc., and Louisiana-Pacific Corporation (L-P). This effort was initially supported by a grant obtained from NAU's Office of Instructional Development and by funds provided by the Chair of the School of Forestry. The original intent of the grant proposal was to acquire forest inventory data to use to create a case study in ecosystem management as part of the junior year professional forestry curriculum. Initially, the goal of this case study was to combine two already inter-related components of the forestry curriculum: Stand and forest level management.

This effort has generated benefits for all parties involved. For the NAU forestry program, the strong links with VESTRA Resources have allowed us to further the development and application of forest ecosystem management decision support systems. Relationship with one of their clients, Louisiana-Pacific Corporation, has provided us with an opportunity to acquire "real world" case study materials to use in the curriculum. We have also extended the discussion into other avenues to develop these partnership relationships.

For VESTRA Resources, the partnership provides a unique opportunity for development and validation of new or improved approaches to forest ecosystem management planning and decision support. VESTRA has received valuable feedback on the effectiveness of analysis methodology in their decision support software, and how the software tools and interfaces can be changed to improve their usability. The partnership has also helped to incorporate some of the latest concepts and approaches into the system. The real advantage of the partnership is that it provides a more rapid and complete advancement of the science and technology needed for managing natural resources in the information age.

Louisiana-Pacific seeks to partner with Northern Arizona University around the issue of decision support tools for several reasons. L-P does not have the expertise to internalize the continuing development of such tools to advance the utility of the analytical process. L-P wants and needs to find future resource professionals who have a working knowledge of the processes and tools needed to create sophisticated planning documents. And L-P would very much like to share its experience in developing decision support systems and documents with resource-based university programs to meet its social as well as regulatory obligations. L-P believes that Northern Arizona University has positioned itself to meet the needs of forest resource companies and can provide the theoretical as well as practical skills through its faculty, staff, and students that will help meet the needs of companies seeking to use advanced forest management planning tools.