

Oregon

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY

Generally speaking, it is often easier for large communities – with a population greater than 25,000 – to conceive, plan, fund, and implement green infrastructure (GI) projects than for small communities. This project examines the specific challenges that small communities face when implementing a complex project. Over the past three years, Oregon Department of Forestry collaborated with Oregon State University to observe the implementation process and to record challenges, solutions, and lessons learned. Using insights from this project, part of the grant funds are being used for creating a website and online training program to guide small communities in carrying out green infrastructure projects in the future.

This project, funded through a 2014 USDA Forest Service Landscape Scale Restoration grant is a partnership between the Oregon Department of Forestry and Oregon State University which focuses on two communities' processes while implementing green infrastructure projects. This project analyzes the obstacles and pitfalls that these two cities encounter; and uses the information to create both a small community-focused GI website and an online GI training program. This project addresses the disconnect between urban-centric GI guidance documents and the realities facing small communities tasked with implementing an emerging or innovative technology.

Upon observing the implementation of GI projects in small communities, the Oregon Department of Forestry had three overall findings:

1. The professional is often personal. In small towns, while local professionals may have the required knowledge/ desirable background to bring to a project, they are also members of the community so they may also have personal connection to the town. A personal history or local reputation can be an asset, proving traditional ecological knowledge to the table; however, innovation is often met with resistance, often complicating project implementation.
2. Small towns often rely on a small group of dedicated volunteers. Volunteers work best when an organized, engaging leader can coordinate the project effectively. Sometimes volunteers and their leaders do not have the scope of authority to make key decisions about a project.



Completed green infrastructure project at Coos History Museum, Coos Bay, Oregon.
Photo: Alexa Carlton, Coos Watershed Association

3. Online resources that are designed for small communities can increase competency or technical knowledge of project leaders, enabling them to prioritize best management practices that are appropriate for their sites while also achieving multiple project goals.

Small communities face challenges that are different from those of larger cities when implementing green infrastructure projects. Green infrastructure projects in small towns work best when the city staff, project leaders, and volunteers are brought into the project early and help with the creation of the project. Engagement is increased when complex concepts are communicated clearly to all participants with nontechnical language. This understanding of how small communities succeed best in implementing green infrastructure projects will allow the Oregon Department of Forestry to increase the overall number of green infrastructure projects throughout the state.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Oregon Department of Forestry
Urban and Community Forestry Assistance Program
<http://www.oregon.gov/ODF/ForestBenefits/Pages/UrbanForests.aspx>