The Thing about Good Ideas…

- **Problems** seek creative solutions and leadership involves finding and executing them
- Not all good (sometimes GREAT) ideas land in a supportive political environment
- Sometimes leaders can significantly change that political environment, sometimes not
- Sometimes it is best to leave the idea alone for a while, not keep pushing it.
- The execution of the idea is as critical as finding the idea itself, and much harder
Discuss each of the Two Ideas:

• How was the idea conceived?
• What problems did it address?
• Was it successful (why and how do we know?)
• or
• Why did it flounder (and why?)

And a final Postscript
IDEA ONE

Seminars on Global Forestry for Forest Service Leadership

- 2003-2008 USFS held 5 seminars on Global Forestry in Oaxaca, Mexico
- Nearly all 65 Senior Executives in the USFS attended
- Topics: Trends in global trade; emergence of non-market forces: certification, payments for ecosystem services, business sustainability principles; community forestry, regulatory reforms around world
Idea One: Global Seminars for USFS Leaders

What problem was it designed to solve?

- Forestry was changing quickly around the world, leadership in USFS was unaware of much of it, yet was affecting it and affected by it (without knowing it)
- Goal: Deepening the understanding of how the US forestry fits in the global forestry world: who are we selling to, buying from; what ideas are we exporting? What aren’t we learning?
Was it successful? Yes.

- Influenced many of our long-term strategies: ecosystem services, planning rule, climate policy, certification...
- Gave context and provided understanding to the changing US timber market and the role played by both public and private lands
- Provided time for top leaders to reflect, away from the pressures of daily life...essential to great leadership
- Expanded to include senior leaders in agriculture
Why Successful?

• Had political support (Chief, Under Secretary) and no major political detractors
• Took people outside the US—Oaxaca, Mexico. A different culture reinforced the theme and was essential to the program’s success
• Built rigorous metrics to support the program
Would it be successful today? Probably not.

- Would have many detractors (congress/press)
- Agency leadership would not have the support of the political leadership—too much risk and exposure
IDEA TWO

USDA Office of Environmental Markets

• Established in 2008 to promote private markets for water quality, carbon, and biodiversity
• Goal to provide additional income for private landowners in the US for conserving resources critical to society and restore key ecosystem services
How was it conceived?

- In Oaxaca Seminars, to changes in law (Farm Bill 2008)

What problem was it designed to solve?

- We are losing valuable ecosystem services to development, in part because values like clean water, clean air, and wildlife habitat have no “market value”.
- By developing these new markets, a “market signal” or value could be established, better enabling these key resources to compete with other land uses, like agriculture.
- Small markets for air, water, and biodiversity exist, but they are scattered across government agencies, inconsistently applied, and very difficult and confusing for land owners to participate in.
Idea Two: USDA Office of Environmental Markets, cont.

Was it successful? Yes and No

• We gained great support and credibility in our first year, by doing strategically focused, quality work, efficiently delivered.
• We had incredible external support from collaborators, which gave us tremendous political capital.
• Still continues 3 years after establishment although changed
• Has not provided the promise hoped for, yet.
  • Lack of political support, lack of budget
  • In a holding pattern
• Requires a new and bold interagency governance model to take these markets to scale/realize results.
What did I learn?

I underestimated the magnitude of two issues:

1. **The political transition in 2009**—new political appointees viewed the office as a product of the last administration (not as a GREAT idea!). I was a career professional, not a political appointee, but was viewed as one by some.

2. **The difficulty of standing up a new office** (get a budget, hire staff, find office space, buy computers, set up protocols...) and do the work (meet with landowner groups, congressional staff, market designers, other agencies; give presentations; develop work products, etc..)
Conclusions

• Lots of problems persist for
  • lack of creative ideas to solve them
  • or lack of political will
  • or ill-conceived plans for execution
• We usually “stumble on” creative ideas accidently. But you can create conditions into which they emerge...
• Implementing new ideas requires a very thoughtful, strategic approach
• Forest agencies around the world are heavily influenced by politics, so leaders must learn these lessons well
• External groups can help – provide “political cover”, lobby for you for resources, carry-out some of the work, provide ideas and support
• Relationships bring opportunities we can’t imagine at the time
Balance is critical to being successful in both a professional and personal life.
Family and friends sustain you...
Relationships provide opportunities we cannot imagine at the time...