Firewood permitting **vision** | Activity summary

11/27/19

Executive summary

As part of 18F's ongoing support of the Forest Service's work to improve timber sales processes, 18F conducted a series of activities to help the Forest Service clarify the product vision for an option to purchase firewood permit online

We worked with stakeholders to brainstorm and explore users, problems the product might address as well as success scenarios. We used this information to craft the following product vision statement.

Vision statement

We are building a convenient, interactive online service to give the public the information they need to plan safe trips to harvest firewood and get enforceable firewood permits without having to travel to a district office.

Activities

Participants wrote down responds to four prompts and then the group prioritized what we came up with.

Prompt 1: Who has the problem / needs our help? Whose needs should we serve first?

First priorities
- Frontliners
- Permit purchasers
  - People who infrequently visit forests/struggle to make it into a district office

Second priority
- Forest Service administrators who
  - reconcile money
  - rely on TIM to build forest product plans

Third priority
- LEOs

Not immediate priorities:
- Forest Service biologists who need to track forest inventory/sustainability
- FR personnel who need to perform accounting tasks/money collected
- Other flavors of permit purchasers:
  - People in rural households
  - People who rely on firewood to heat their homes
  - People who rely on "easy pickings"
  - Cabin owners who only occasionally come up which is usually weekends and the office is closed

Prompt 2: What is the problem we're solving? Given who we're hoping to help first, what problems should be our starting focus?

First priorities
- There is only one way to get a permit, and it requires coming to an office during work hours
  - Permit purchasers often need to go far out of their way to get permits
  - Customers are unable to get permits at the exact time they decide the permit is needed

- - Even if a potential firewood permit purchasers regularly travels near a district office, stopping during office hours can still be inconvenient and cause a loss of income from work.
    - District offices are closing, making trips to get permits even longer for some.
  - Permit purchasers need to know about active timber sales, and sometimes that means they need to get a woodsheet from an office
  - LEOs can't validate a tag while driving behind a loaded vehicle
  - It's hard for LEOs to know where someone got their wood and whether it was from an allowed location.

Second priorities
- Locating where to harvest fuelwood is difficult and changes often, making the process more cumbersome.
- It's hard to get a fast, up to date answer on "can I cut here" - it depends on many factors
- Going out to cut wood often requires multiple trips by a district office - once to get the permit and then another each harvesting trip to pick up the current info sheet.
- The forest service doesn't get feedback on when and where people actually "spend" their permits, which makes it easier for people to game the system / reuse permits

Not immediate priorities
- If permit purchasers loses their permits, they can't get a replacement
- Limits to households are difficult to track/enforce
- Current permits require two original signatures-FS and permittee
- TIM often slows down frontliners who are moving fast
- Frontliners have to duplicate work often with manual permits and navigating two systems (TIM and POSS)
- Software updates cause system outages double the work for frontliners and sometimes mean that people may travel to get a permit and then be turned away.
- Manual permitting processes are stressfull, time consuming and error prone
- Frontliners are anxious about holding property (load tags & manual permits) that is personally accountable to them

Prompt: Success scenarios - What does the future look like? Which success scenarios must our product enable in order to address the problems we've prioritized?

First priority
- A member of the public decides they'd like to try getting firewood from their backyard forest for the first time. They're able to get the information and the permit they need to safely and legally get wood without leaving their home.

- A member of the public decides they want to bring home some firewood that they see while they're out hunting. They use their phone to go online, determine that the wood they want is legal to harvest, purchase a permit, and generate something that shows law enforcement that they're removing the wood legally in case they're stopped.
- An LEO is driving behind a vehicle that has a full bed of firewood. The officer knows where and when the load was harvested and does not have to pull the vehicle over.
- A forest service administrator is asked to put together a report on timber sales in their region. They're able to easily pull data on online sales as well as sales processed via TIM into a single report.

Second priority
- A permit holder is getting ready to go on a wood harvesting trip, but they don't know if fire or sale conditions have changed in the area they have in mind. They're able to check the most recent "wood sheet" notification from their forest to understand current conditions.
- A member of the public doesn't not know how much wood they'll be able to find on their trip. They're able to purchase a minimum amount before they go and easily re-up // pay for additional wood from their phone at the time they need it (while they are out in the forest).
- A permit purchaser is in the forest getting wood and wants to use one of their tags. They use an offline-enabled app to get a code and mark their GPS location, and use that info to fill out a tag.

Not immediate priorities
- A person wants to cut firewood for his grandmother's use but doesn't want it to count against his own annual limit. she is able to look up online information and purchase the correct permit that allows them to legally get the grandmother's firewood purchased.
- A district/forest successfully passes an accountability audit of their permit program.
- A forest administrator wants to prevent fraud. They are able to see which permitees haven't submitted a harvest report, and flag that user.
- An LEO is able to pull a report to see who permit holders are to assist them following up on chronic violators

Prompt: How do we want people to describe the product?

- Refreshingly easy to use
- Fast
- Informative
- Reliable
- Accurate
- Friendly

- Welcoming
- Helps me in the moment
- "Just-in-time"
- Makes me confident I'm doing it right