

ACHIEVING OUTCOMES THROUGH COLLABORATION

CURRENT SITUATION

For decades, federal lands management has been characterized by public controversy, which adversely impacted the health and vitality of our national forests, rangelands, and communities. Over the past two decades, there has been a significant shift in land stewardship, where collaboration among diverse stakeholders is now the expected form of engagement with federal land management agencies. Rural communities across the West are proactively engaging in these collaborative processes to restore and steward forests and rangelands while creating local and regional economic benefit.

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC) sees great value in using collaborative approaches to resolve natural resource management issues and believes collaboration is essential to accomplishing effective and widely supported on-the-ground efforts in planning, implementation, and monitoring of natural resource management projects.

RVCC believes that it is of primary importance that collaborative processes reflect local social and ecological conditions. Any proposals or programs that seek to define collaboration should ensure that collaboration can be locally adapted. In addition, definitions should be consistent with the following:

Collaboration is a process through which multiple stakeholders work together to solve a common problem or achieve a common objective (Moote and Lowe, 2005).

BEST PRACTICES FOR COLLABORATION

RVCC believes that collaboration is not something that can be prescribed. Collaboration takes many different forms and can occur at local, regional, and national levels. Although these efforts vary from place to place, best practices suggest collaborative groups should strive to:

- Involve diverse participants and facilitate an open, transparent, and equitable process;

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The inclusion of a collaborative process should not be the sole justification for streamlined NEPA authorities.
- Neither Congress nor the agencies should prescribe how individual collaborative groups or processes be organized or function.
- Reinvest a portion of retained receipts from stewardship contracting into collaborative efforts, such as technical assistance and facilitation.
- Create landscape-level strategic plans for collaboration that set priorities, focus resources, and clarify desired outcomes.
- Adopt the use of a “Handover Memo” as recommended by the Planning Rule Federal Advisory Committee to help line officers learn quickly about existing collaborative processes.
- Include regulatory agencies in the collaborative process as landscape scale projects are developed and proposed.
- Share information and values to encourage innovation and mutual learning;
- Seek to reduce conflict, resolve disputes by focusing on mutual benefit rather than areas of disagreement, and improve relationships;
- Strengthen the participation of local citizens and organizations, with special attention to groups that have been underserved and under-represented in traditional decision making processes;
- Recognize local value and utilize traditional knowledge;
- Combine technical, organizational, and financial resources in new ways; and
- Integrate social, economic, and environmental goals.

OUTCOMES OF COLLABORATION

Collaboration grew out of a shared interest in overcoming controversy, fostering innovation, and getting more done together by working on areas of mutual benefit. RVCC members have participated in countless collaborative processes focused on the restoration of public and private lands in a manner that also benefits rural communities. We have seen effective collaboration:

- Lead to more effective ecological and economic outcomes through improved on-the-ground projects that are broadly supported.
- Build social capital by reducing conflict, developing greater trust among participants, pooling resources, and undertaking collective projects.
- Foster information exchange and mutual learning, often leading to better understanding of issues and constraints, as well as creating greater potential for innovative responses.
- Increase civil dialogue, make decisions more transparent and accountable, and increase trust in agency decision makers.
- Expand opportunities for exploration and integration of diverse forms of knowledge, including scientific and traditional ecological knowledge.
- Encourage cross-boundary solutions that take a landscape or ecosystem-level approach to natural resource management.
- Increase use and development of private funding and in-kind contributions to supplement federal and state funds.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With the proliferation of collaboration as a strategy for achieving community and ecological benefits from land stewardship, federal policies have more clearly included its importance and benefit as well as basic direction to agencies and their partners to collaborate. Policies and programs such as the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, the 2012 Planning Rule, the 2014 Farm Bill, and stewardship contracting include specific language that reflects the purpose and benefits of collaboration.

Yet, collaboration is not a panacea for the interwoven economic, ecological, and social

challenges facing rural communities. Working with partners and communities to develop agreement is merely one step in the process of improving community and ecological health. The collaborative process in and of itself is not sufficient to implement landscape-scale restoration projects that improve the land and create local jobs. Based on the experiences of our participants working at the community scale, RVCC recommends both administrative and legislative actions to advance more consistent and widespread use of effective collaboration within the federal land management agencies.

Clarify Expectations

The shift to an era of collaborative restoration and management was driven by an interest in working together to find common ground, provide mutual benefit, and improve project outcomes. Collaborating with the sole intent to reduce or eliminate objections or litigation during the NEPA process sets unfair and unreasonable expectations on participants, and undermines the power of building relationships and finding common ground. Collaboration must focus on the objectives stakeholders are trying to achieve on the ground as opposed to merely enhancing public involvement and agency communication during a project's planning stage.

1. The inclusion of a collaborative process should not be the sole justification for Categorical Exclusions or other streamlined NEPA authorities, nor should collaboration supersede the NEPA process.
2. Neither Congress nor the agencies should prescribe how individual collaborative groups or processes be organized or function.
3. The deciding agency or agencies and a collaborative group must be clear regarding their respective roles; identifying mutual benefit and the expectations of participants is important.

Invest in Community Capacity to Collaborate

Collaboration requires a high level of involvement by community-based organizations and other stakeholders in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of management activities on public and private lands. Building and maintaining the institutional and social capacity

COLLABORATION SUCCESS STORY: BLUE MOUNTAINS FOREST PARTNERS

The Blue Mountains Forest Partners (BMFP)¹, a longstanding forest collaborative in Grant County, Oregon, works closely with the Forest Service to develop scientifically sound and socially supported forest management recommendations for the Malheur National Forest. Together, members have developed science-based zones of agreement for forest restoration, resulting in increased resiliency for thousands of acres of national forest and increased work for the 7,300 residents of Grant County².

In 2012, Malheur Lumber Company announced it was closing its sawmill due to a lack of log supply. However, in an almost unprecedented case of collaboration, Sustainable Northwest, the BMFP, Forest Service staff, Malheur Lumber leadership, the Oregon congressional delegation, and conservation groups developed a coordinated strategy to secure a sustainable supply of logs to keep the mill open and operating. This accomplishment is testament to diverse stakeholder agreement, an emerging culture of collaboration, and willingness to achieve restoration and economic development.



Photo credit to Blue Mountains Forest Partners.

The president of Ochoco Lumber, Malheur Lumber's parent company, Bruce Daucsavage has said that, "The Blue Mountain collaborative work in general has given us a new lease on life with our John Day sawmill. I cannot tell you how important it was for us to have all these people work on these projects that were so interested and committed to our communities. We could not, under any circumstances, do this on our own³." With the support of the collaborative group, the Malheur NF has tripled its timber production, increased the size of restoration treatments that reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire and improve forest health, and increased local economic impact, all without litigation in the past four years.

1 Success Stories: Blue Mountains Forest Partners, Sustainable Northwest, Accessed May 17, 2016 (<http://www.sustainablenorthwest.org/what-we-do/success-stories/blue-mountain-forest-partners>)

2 Mission and History, Blue Mountains Forest Partners, Accessed May 17, 2016 (<http://bluemountainsforestpartners.org/about/>)

3 Local Collaborative Awarded 4 Million in Federal Forest Restoration Funding, Blue Mountains Forest Partners, April 7, 2016 (<http://bluemountainsforestpartners.org/2016/04/local-collaborative-awarded-4-million-in-federal-forest-restoration-funding/>)

of communities, interest groups, and federal and state land management agencies to participate in collaborative processes is necessary for collaboration to work well into the future.

Collaboration as a strategy to improve community health and land stewardship is here to stay. Therefore, we must increase and sustain investments in the process and with the partners

leading the efforts.

1. Reinvest a portion of retained receipts from stewardship contracting into collaborative efforts, whether through technical assistance, facilitation, or field trips.
2. Prioritize funding to programs and activities that strengthen community-based and regional organizations (e.g. the Community Capacity

and Land Stewardship Program).

3. Improve criteria for grants, loans, agreements, and cost-share programs to reward and support collaboration and capacity building, including technical assistance.

Improve Agency Ability to Collaborate

A lack of clear guidance and incentives for agency personnel to engage in collaboration, in combination with varying levels of support for collaboration across agency levels and offices, results in inconsistent implementation on-the-ground. Slow replacement of key staff who do understand and participate in collaborative processes and groups is a substantial obstacle, leading to delays in project development, implementation, and frayed relationships.

Collaboration is a shift from traditional administrative and decision-making processes. As such, internal federal agency systems need to be realigned, including performance measures and targets, budget allocation systems, and personnel rewards and advancement.

1. Increase training and assistance to agency managers and their partners to enable them to be effective participants and leaders in collaborative efforts.
2. Include collaboration as part of the required Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities of position descriptions and in future performance evaluations.
3. Create landscape-level strategic plans for collaboration that set priorities, make choices, focus resources, and clarify desired outcomes and roles and responsibilities of staff.
4. Adopt the use of a “Handover Memo” as recommended by the Planning Rule Federal Advisory Committee, which would increase the likelihood of a smooth transition by informing incoming personnel of key relationships, collaborative projects underway, and commitments made.

Accelerate Implementation of Collaborative Agreements

Collaborative processes can lead to improved trust, effective project implementation, and efficiencies in working together. Yet, many communities and collaborative groups are still struggling to see timely accomplishment of the work agreed upon and the achievement of mutual benefits. Common challenges include: lengthy and overly complex environmental planning processes; delays in consultation; objections and litigation (by collaborative members or not); and lack of follow through on implementation of all components of collaborative agreements due to lack of funding or other barriers. Furthermore, community benefit objectives such as utilizing local workforce are often put aside in favor of traditional contracting methods.

Efficiencies and timeliness must be addressed and lead to the implementation of a consistent and predictable program of work.

1. To reduce difficulties with consultation, include regulatory agencies (i.e. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the US Fish and Wildlife Service) at the collaborative table as landscape scale projects are developed and proposed.
2. Ensure NEPA planning teams and line officers adopt the 2012 CEQ recommendations¹ on NEPA efficiencies, including those to integrate NEPA early in planning and develop concise documents.
3. Participants in a formal collaborative group should be allowed a participatory role in objections resolution processes undertaken on collaborative projects.

¹ Final Guidance on NEPA Efficiencies, Center for Environmental Quality, March 6, 2012 (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ceq/initiatives/nepa/efficiencies-guidance>)

Alaska

Sitka Conservation Society
Sustainable Southeast Partnership*

Arizona

Gary Paul Nabhan, Center for Regional Food Studies,
University of Arizona Tucson

California

Calaveras Healthy Impact product Solutions
Dr. Erin Kelly, Humboldt State University
Jim & Lynn Jungwirth, Woodworks
Mid Klamath Watershed Council
Sierra Business Council
Watershed Research & Training Center*

Colorado

Black Forest Together
Coalition for the Upper South Platte
Colorado Springs Utilities
Dolores Watershed & Resilient Forest Collaborative
FireWise of Southwest Colorado
Grand County Wildfire Council
Jefferson Conservation District
Markit! Forestry Management
Vegetation Management West, LLC
West Metro Fire Rescue
West Range Forest Products
West Range Reclamation, LLC

Idaho

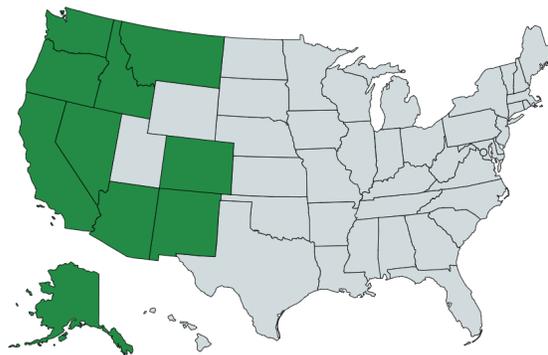
Framing Our Community, Inc.
Idaho Conservation League
Salmon Valley Stewardship*

Montana

Blackfoot Challenge*
Flathead Economic Policy Center

Nevada

Stewardship Alliance of Northeast Elko



New Mexico

Edgewood Soil & Water Conservation District
Forest Stewards Guild*

Oregon

Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council
Blue Mountains Forest Partners
Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council
Ecosystem Workforce Program*
Integrated Biomass Resources, LLC
Project Wildfire Oregon
Siuslaw Institute*
Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative
Sustainable Northwest*
Wallowa County
Wallowa Resources*

Washington

Mt. Adams Resource Stewards*

National

National Association of Forest Service Retirees

**Denotes an RVCC Leadership Team member.*

ABOUT RVCC

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC) promotes new approaches to the ecological and economic problems facing the rural West. We are committed to developing practical solutions through collaborative, place-based work that recognizes the inextricable link between the long-term health of the land and the well-being of communities. RVCC focuses on practical, equitable and sustainable solutions that are grounded in the experiences of rural community members, workers, and businesses. We work together to improve issues that affect rural communities, public and private land management, and the continuation of a natural resource-based economy in the West, advocating for the inclusion of comprehensive community interests.

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