



Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership

COLLABORATIVE FOREST RESTORATION IN IDAHO EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

November 25, 2013

Introduction: Across Idaho, several locally-driven collaborative groups are bringing together timber industry, community, local elected leaders, conservation groups, and other interests to support the use of active management to restore national forests lands. The Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership's report describes these groups, their projects, and their "zone of agreement" on forest restoration.

IFRP formed in 2010 to connect, inform, and support collaborative groups working to restore the resilience of Idaho national forests. The information in the report came largely from IFRP's four winter conferences attended by Idaho-based collaborative groups. IFRP's website is online at: <http://www.idahoforestpartners.org/main.html>.

The nine collaborative groups profiled in the report have achieved significant, tangible results. Projects developed by the Forest Service with collaborative group engagement include well over 130 million board feet of timber harvested, sold, or planned as well as restoration actions affecting tens of thousands of acres.

Collaborative groups operate in local areas and do not exert a pervasive influence on the national forest system in Idaho. But, the benefits of their efforts can extend beyond the boundaries of their projects. The lasting value of collaborative groups may ultimately be determined by whether they can serve as a proving ground for restoration-based forest management that earns broad public support and can be applied at larger scales in the future.

The Collaborative Approach to Forest Restoration: Although the collaborative groups working in Idaho are remarkably diverse in their membership and objectives, they do have much in common. These groups seek to:

- Involve a broad range of interests using a collaborative approach to decision making;

Collaborative Groups Profiled in IFRP Report

Boise Forest Coalition

Clearwater Basin Collaborative

Island Park Sustainable Fire
Community

Kootenai Valley Resource
Initiative

Lemhi County Forest Restoration
Group

Panhandle Forest Collaborative

Payette Forest Coalition

Sawtooth Valley Wildland Fire
Collaborative

Shoshone County Forest Health
Collaborative

- Integrate ecological, economic, and social goals;
- Help reduce wildfire management costs;
- Ecological and watershed health objectives; and
- Encourage use of forest restoration wood products to offset treatment costs, benefit local rural economies, and improve forest health.

Collaborative groups fulfill a vital function by building public support for agency actions that restore and protect public forests. While their work strengthens the federal public involvement process, it does not substitute for the agencies' environmental review and comment procedures.

The Zone of Agreement on Forest Restoration: Collaborative groups have helped develop a broad range of proposed actions on national forest lands. Several common themes have emerged from their discussions that define a general “zone of agreement” among their memberships.

- *Collaborative groups focus on restoring forest resilience in light of historic forest conditions.* The groups have a shared understanding that many of Idaho's forests have undergone major changes from their historic or “natural” conditions. These changes make the forests more vulnerable to altered fire patterns, insect infestations, climate change, and invasive species. The participants in these groups generally agree on the goal of moving Idaho forests closer to their historic conditions and resiliency.
- *There is broad agreement on restoration in dry forests and hazardous fuels reduction in the wildland-urban interface.* In dry forests, often historically dominated by ponderosa pine, agreed-upon restoration actions involve retaining large trees in open canopy stands, removing smaller diameter fuels, and reintroducing low intensity fire through prescribed burns. In the wildland-urban interface, the priority actions focus on protecting structures and communities through thinning and hazardous fuels removal.
- *There is emerging agreement on restoration objectives in moist and cold forests with mixed severity fire regimes.* There is not yet broad consensus on whether or how to restore moist and cold forest types that make up about three-quarters of the national forest lands in Idaho. These forest communities historically had less frequent but more intense fires than the dry forests. However, some collaborative groups have developed projects with objectives to: emulate natural disturbance patterns, reduce fuels, enhance wildlife habitat, re-establish specific species such as western white pine, protect old growth, and promote diversity in age classes and species mix at the landscape level.
- *The Idaho Roadless Rule helps groups avoid past controversies.* The rule provides clear management objectives and focuses most active management in the roaded front country.

- *Forest products industry infrastructure is essential to restoring forests.* Forest restoration often involves mechanical treatments such as thinning, removing hazardous fuels, or cutting larger trees to restore diversity in tree stand structure or composition. This makes Idaho’s forest products industry an important ally in forest restoration.
- *Multi-faceted restoration projects also enhance water quality, wildlife habitat, and recreation.* Most collaborative groups design projects that integrate vegetation treatment and timber harvest with efforts to remove fish barriers, reduce sediment reaching streams, deal with aging road networks, control invasive species, enhance elk habitat, rehabilitate trails, or expand recreation opportunities. This approach to designing restoration projects serves a wide range of interests and thus helps maintain the zone of agreement.

Recommendations: The following recommendations represent concrete and achievable steps that can be taken within the framework of existing laws to accelerate the pace of collaborative forest restoration: (1) fully fund the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program; (2) sustain funding for hazardous fuels reduction; (3) permanently reauthorize stewardship contracting; (4) cover fire suppression costs without raiding operating budgets; (5) foster collaboration through agency practices; (6) improve efficiency in project implementation; (7) maintain best practices for collaboration; and (8) expand financial support to groups.

Selected Projects Developed or Supported by Collaborative Groups in Idaho

Collaborative Group	Project Name	Assessment & Design	Environmental Review	Implementation
Boise Forest Coalition	Clear Creek Integrated	Completed	Decision issued	
BFC	Emmett District/Squaw Cr.	In process		
Clearwater Basin Collaborative	Clear Creek Integrated Restoration	Completed	DEIS issued	
CBC	Interface Fuels	Completed	Completed	Contract awarded
CBC	Lodgepole Point	Completed	Completed	Contract awarded
CBC	Iron Mountain	Completed	Decision affirmed	
Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative	Hellroaring	In process		
KVRI	East Fork Stewardship	Completed	Completed	Sold, on-going
KVRI	Meadow Creek	Completed	Completed	Sold, on-going
KVRI	Idaho Buckhorn	Completed	Completed	
KVRI	Kreist Creek	Completed	In process	
KVRI	Twenty Mile Creek	Completed	Completed	
Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group	Hughes Creek	Completed	Completed	Completed
LCFRG	Jesse Creek	In process		
LCFRG	Upper North Fk Restoration	In process	In process	
Payette Forest Coalition	Mill Creek-Council Mountain	Completed	Completed	Contracts awarded
PFC	Lost Creek-Boulder Creek	Completed	DEIS issued	
PFC	Middle Fork Weiser River	In process		
Shoshone County Forest Health Collab.	Mullan Forest Health Collaborative Project	Completed	Completed	Completed

