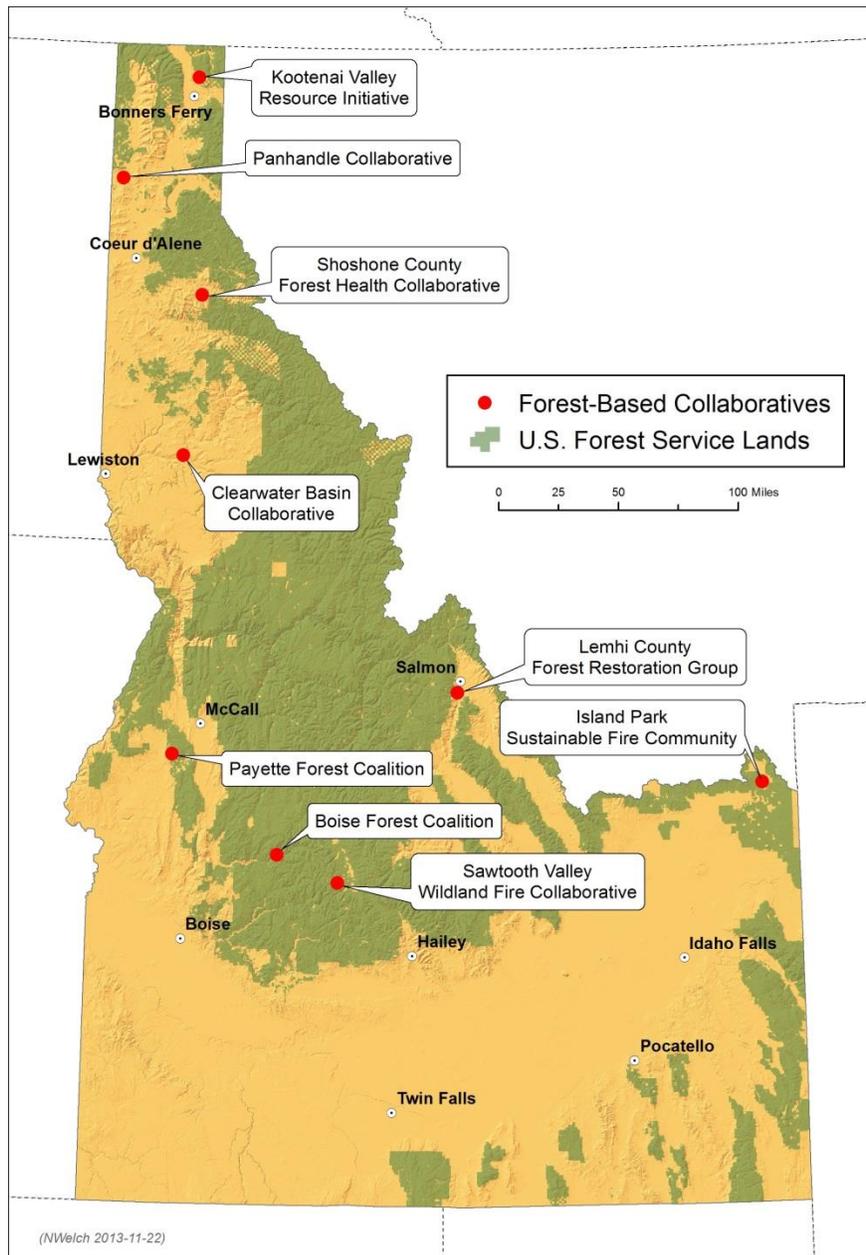




Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership

COLLABORATIVE FOREST RESTORATION IN IDAHO

November 25, 2013



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Introduction

Idaho's quality of life and economy are closely linked to the state's over 20 million acres of public forest lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. Public forests provide Idahoans clean water, abundant wildlife, diverse recreational opportunities, scenic beauty, and commodities that support rural economies.

Idahoans care deeply about their public forests but have been deeply divided on their management. Over the last few decades, conflicts over logging have often eroded public support for agency decisions and – coupled with legal, economic, and other issues – have led to sharply reduced timber harvests and hardship for many communities.

More recently, there has been a notable shift in those old patterns. Across Idaho, several locally-driven collaborative groups are bringing together forest products industry, community organizations, local elected leaders, conservation groups, and other interests to resolve long-standing disagreements over land use on national forests.

Participants have very different viewpoints but are united by their support for actions that make forests more resilient to fire, climate stress, and invasive species. They also see restoration as a way to improve water quality, fish and wildlife, ecosystem health, and the timber supply.

This report describes forest-based collaborative groups and their “zone of agreement” on using active forest management to further ecological, social, and economic goals.

These collaborative groups 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 influencing many tens of thousands of acres. This work is described in more detail in the appendix to this report.

These accomplishments should be viewed in proper perspective. Collaborative groups focus on specific local areas and do not exert a pervasive impact on Idaho's national forest system. Moreover, collaboration is difficult and time consuming; not all groups will succeed. But, the long-term effectiveness of collaborative forest restoration does not depend on the fate of individual groups or projects. A better measure of the lasting value of collaborative groups is whether they can serve as the proving ground for restoration-based forest management that earns broad public support and can be applied at larger scales in the future.

Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership

IFRP formed in 2010 to connect, inform, and support collaborative groups working to restore the resilience of Idaho forests. IFRP's group members include:

Snake River Chapter, Society of American Foresters

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

Trout Unlimited

Idaho Conservation League

The Nature Conservancy

For information on IFRP, see <http://www.idahoforestpartners.org>

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 | Near completion |
| 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 | Twenty Mile Creek | Completed | Completed | |
| KVRI | Kreist Creek | Completed | In Process | |
| 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 |

Additional information in the appendix to this report

The information presented here is drawn largely from IFRP’s four winter conferences, which had broad participation from members of collaborative groups from across Idaho. IFRP also keeps a website that serves as a clearinghouse for Idaho collaborative groups and tracks their progress. This document is not an in-depth scientific discussion of forest management issues and does not attempt to address several legislative proposals currently pending at the state or federal level.



Clearwater Basin Collaborative Tour – Robyn Miller photo

The Collaborative Approach to Forest Restoration

There is no single template for forest restoration groups.¹ In Idaho, they focus primarily on national forests and most formed independently of the Forest Service based on needs and opportunities in their areas.² Some groups are work on specific watersheds while others have proposals that span much larger areas.

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:

1. Involve a broad range of interests using a collaborative approach;
2. Integrate ecological, economic, and social goals;
3. Help reduce wildfire management costs;
4. Show how various restoration techniques achieve ecological and watershed health objectives; and
5. Encourage utilization of forest restoration wood products to offset treatment costs, benefit local rural economies, and improve forest health.³

All of the groups participating in IFRP conferences use collaborative approaches to problem solving. The collaborative process focuses on sharing knowledge, building trust, and seeking consensus on ideas that genuinely advance the interests of a diverse membership. It is very different from traditional negotiation. While negotiation focuses on extracting concessions from the other side, collaboration searches for solutions that leave all parties better off than they could have been had they acted alone or used adversarial tactics.

Groups Participating in IFRP Conferences

Boise Forest Coalition
Boise National Forest

Clearwater Basin Collaborative
Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests

Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative
Panhandle National Forest

Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group
Salmon-Challis National Forest

Panhandle Forest Collaborative
Panhandle National Forest

Payette Forest Coalition
Payette National Forest

Shoshone County Forest Health Collaborative
Panhandle National Forest

¹ The groups listed in the sidebar have participated in IFRP's conferences. Two other groups are profiled in the appendix to this report: The Sawtooth Valley Wildland Fire Collaborative and the Island Park Sustainable Fire Community. Both groups formed in 2012.

² This report focuses on the national forests, which are the main concern of local collaborative groups. Many of the themes and opportunities discussed here also apply to the half-million acres of BLM-managed forests in Idaho.

³ This list of attributes is adapted from the definition of collaborative groups the Forest Service uses in awarding grants under the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program. <http://www.fs.fed.us/restoration/CFLRP/>

Collaboration works best when groups represent a wide range of members with distinct interests. The groups that have participated in the IFRP conferences have significant community, industry, and conservation representation. Other interests commonly participating in the groups include local elected officials, Tribal governments, recreation, outfitting, hunting, and local landowners. Effective collaboration does not depend on having every group with an asserted interest at the table, but it does require a genuine effort to integrate a wide range of viewpoints.

This does not mean that collaboration is always the right approach or that it always works. Collaboration demands a great deal of commitment and time of its participants. Not all issues require that level of effort or are even capable of being resolved by consensus. Moreover, not all interest groups embrace collaborative approaches. While collaboration can reduce the risk of conflict and litigation, it does not eliminate it.

When collaboration succeeds, its benefits justify the time and effort it demands. Parties that once fought each other can become powerful advocates for balanced, positive action. This type of public support is essential to the long-term success of pro-active forest management.



Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group – Hughes Creek Project – USFS photo

Factors Driving the Growth of Collaboration

Current Challenges Open the Door to Collaboration. The challenges facing public land managers across the West are many and complex. The legacy of a century of fire suppression, past management actions, and current inaction has left many forest stands less resilient to fire, insect infestations, and invasive species. As the size of fires has increased, so has the cost of fighting fires in the West. Fire suppression now dominates the Forest Service budget – taking resources away from land stewardship, recreation, and the fuels reduction that could reduce suppression costs. Recent Forest Service initiatives⁴ intend to accelerate the pace of hazardous fuels reduction and forest restoration, but these efforts often face public controversy.

There is a widely held perception that conservation groups and the forest products industry are locked in an endless fight over logging on public lands. Fortunately, reality is both more nuanced and more positive. To an increasing extent, the former adversaries in the “timber wars” of the 1980s and early 1990s are now working together towards common objectives.

There are several reasons for this trend. At the most fundamental level, none of the contending parties was fully satisfied by the pattern of gridlock in forest management that emerged in the 1990s. The concerns of forest products industry and timber-dependent communities were clear: declining federal timber sales often hurt business and local economies. Conservation interests were often frustrated by slow progress in aquatic and terrestrial wildlife habitat restoration, use of natural fire as a management tool, and permanent designations for wilderness and wild and scenic rivers. And, all sides have come to more clearly understand the growing threats to forests from uncharacteristic fire behavior, invasive species, climate change, and subdivision development in fire-prone forests.

Changes in both forest policy and management practices make it easier for the different sides to bridge their differences. On the conservation side, most organizations recognize that forestry practices have evolved in recent decades, and they have an increased degree of confidence that appropriately designed active management projects can avoid impairing – and are capable of improving – the ecological health of certain forest types. They also see significant opportunities for active watershed restoration efforts such as upgrading culverts, relocating roads out of sensitive areas and restoring roads no longer needed for access. This does not mean that all conservation groups are of one mind. Some groups readily embrace collaborative approaches while others may pursue administrative appeals and litigation.

On the forest products industry side, companies are actively participating in restoration-based forest management projects and strategies. The past focus on securing relatively large volumes of

⁴ The U.S. Forest Service’s approach for speeding up action to restore the health of national forest lands and waters is set forth in a February 2012 publication, [Increasing the Pace of Restoration and Job Creation on Our National Forests](http://www.fs.fed.us/publications/restoration/restoration.pdf), <http://www.fs.fed.us/publications/restoration/restoration.pdf>.

federal timber has shifted to a focus on securing somewhat lower but more predictable supplies of forest products from federal lands.

Congress and the Forest Service have adopted a series of laws and initiatives that helped the growth of collaborative groups and provided some of the key tools they use. Examples include:

- The Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program adopted in 2010, which funds restoration plans, including three in Idaho (Clearwater, Payette, and Kootenai Valley);
- The broad-based Forest Resource Advisory Committees (RACs) created by the Secure Rural Schools Act, which trained many members in collaborative groups;
- Community Wildfire Protection Plans under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, which helped build an understanding of active management in mitigating fire risks; and
- Stewardship contracting authority established in 2003, which provided new tools and incentives for integrating logging and other vegetation treatments with ecological restoration.

In sum, the challenges facing the Forest Service, the desire for change from all sides, new agency policies, and modern forestry practices all create conditions that foster collaboration.



Landscape in the area covered by the Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative – Kennon McClintock photo

The Zone of Agreement on Forest Restoration in Idaho

Highlights:

- ❖ Collaborative groups focus on restoring forest resilience in light of historic forest conditions.
- ❖ There is broad agreement on restoration in dry forests and hazardous fuels reduction in the wildland-urban interface.
- ❖ There is emerging agreement on restoration objectives in moist and cold forests with mixed severity fire regimes.
- ❖ Roadless area protections help groups avoid past controversies and focus on active management in the roaded front country.
- ❖ The forest products industry infrastructure is essential to restoring forests.
- ❖ Multi-faceted restoration projects also enhance water quality, wildlife habitat, and recreation.

Collaborative Groups Focus on Restoring Forest Resilience in Light of Historic Forest Conditions. Collaborative groups bring together people with very different perspectives on the role of logging in national forests. These groups have been able to overcome many of their differences by focusing on their shared recognition that many of Idaho’s forests have undergone major changes in their structure and composition from their historic or “natural” conditions (often referred to as the “historic range of variability”). These changes make the forests more vulnerable to altered fire patterns, insect infestations, climate change, and invasive species. The participants in these groups tend to share a core goal of moving Idaho forests closer to their historic conditions and resiliency.

At the 2011 and 2012 IFRP conferences, University of Idaho professor Dr. Penny Morgan and Dr. Russell Graham of the USFS Rocky Mountain Research Station led the participants through a discussion of the meaning of forest restoration and found widespread acceptance for certain key principles. Their starting point was that Idaho forests are, and have always been, dynamic systems with a range of variability in their age, species composition, and fire regime.

Dr. Morgan explained that stand composition and fire regimes in dry, moist, and cold forests have changed over the last century due to fire suppression, logging, and other factors. Although each forest type was always subject to disturbance and change, many forest landscapes have departed markedly from their historical range of variability. This is evidenced most dramatically by larger and more severe fires in dry forests, while moist and cold forests have changed

somewhat less from historical conditions. As forests move further from historical conditions, they tend to be less resilient, with less capacity to recover from disturbance.

Dr. Morgan proposed, and the collaborative group participants concurred, that the term “restoration” should encompass much more than fuels management. It should also encompass broader considerations of ecological function and incorporate the following principles:

- Restoration is an intentional activity that initiates or accelerates the recovery of an ecosystem with respect to its health, integrity and sustainability;
- Treatments help recover resilience and adaptive capacity of ecosystems (forested and aquatic) that have been degraded, damaged or destroyed; and
- Resilience depends on resistance to stressors such as drought and fire as well as recovery from them.

The historical range of variability provides important clues about what a resilient forest looks like for a particular site. However, restoring the historical condition is not necessarily the “goal” of collaborative forest restoration. Instead, many groups focus on restoring future resilience as opposed to merely replicating a past forest composition and structure that was altered many decades earlier. Some collaborative groups develop their approach by examining historical information and landscape analyses that consider watershed function and aquatic ecosystems, roads, wildlife habitat needs, economic development and jobs, potential unintended consequences, and ability of both human and natural systems to adapt to changing conditions such as climate change. All of these factors can play a role in helping collaborative groups envision the desired future condition for a forested landscape. In some instances, moving forest landscapes back toward the historic range is a goal that has been adopted in the forest plan.

Many groups recognize that it is difficult or impossible to simply reintroduce fire in a significant percentage of national forests lands due to increased development, natural resource concerns, and more severe fire behavior. Therefore, mechanical treatments may be needed to meet restoration objectives or, in some instances, to reduce fuels before fire can be used as a management tool.

A shared understanding of how Idaho forests have changed over time does not by itself resolve all disputes over forest management. Even groups that share a commitment to enhancing forest resilience may still differ on how intensively forests should be managed, how much timber commodity production should influence management, the role of natural and prescribed fire, and how other values such as water quality, recreation, and wilderness should be weighed in land use decisions. Nevertheless, most collaborative groups have found a significant “zone of agreement” about how to move forests toward their desired future condition. Key points of agreement are summarized below.

There Is Broad Agreement on Restoration in Dry Forests and Hazardous Fuels Reduction in the Wildland-Urban Interface. There is a relatively broad zone of agreement for two types of forest management projects: restoration in dry forests and reduction of hazardous fuels in the wildland-urban interface (WUI). Dry forests are typically located at lower elevations and are often dominated by ponderosa pine. The term WUI is used to describe areas where homes or other structures are built in undeveloped wildlands that are susceptible to fire.

Dry forests, such as stands of ponderosa pine, evolved with relatively frequent, low intensity fires that removed fine fuels and suppressed smaller trees and shrubs – leaving relatively large, fire resistant trees that were widely spaced. More than a century of fire exclusion, logging of the large trees and other changes have left many dry forests heavily stocked with smaller trees that feed more intense fires. These more severe fires are uncharacteristic of the historic fire pattern in dry forests and can kill older trees that historically withstood fire. These forests are most commonly close to WUI development, making fires increasingly difficult and expensive to fight.

Priority restoration actions in these forests are to retain and enhance the older, open canopy early seral species stands and accelerate the transition of younger forest stands to a more mature condition (larger trees, more open canopy). Treatments often involve thinning small diameter trees and reintroducing low intensity fire through prescribed burns. Reducing the fuel in this ecosystem produces conditions that are more resistant and resilient to fire.⁵

The WUI is not a specific ecosystem or forest type. Rather it describes a set of conditions that place human life and property at risk – typically where houses or communities have been built in areas prone to wildfire. Again, there is a broad level of agreement on the need to reduce hazardous fuels in the WUI and to advance community-based wildfire protection plans.

The broad acceptance of restoration techniques in these areas is important. However, dry forests and the WUI make up a relatively small percentage of national forest lands in Idaho. Most collaborative groups are working in landscapes that include moist and cold forests with relatively little human development.

There Is Emerging Agreement on Restoration Objectives in Moist and Cold Forests with Mixed Severity Fire Regimes. Moist and cold forest types make up about three-quarters of the national forest lands in Idaho, particularly those north of the Salmon River. These forest types historically had less frequent fire than the dry forests. When fires did occur, they were typically in the form of moderate-to-severe burns that killed some, but not all, trees of varying ages and left a diverse pattern of landscape conditions in the affected areas. Cold, higher elevation lodgepole and subalpine fir forests historically experienced stand-replacing fires where a high

⁵ Two efforts enhanced support for ponderosa forest restoration in Idaho: (1) the Wildlife Conservation Strategy adopted by the Sawtooth, Boise, and Payette national forests with stakeholder involvement and (2) an assessment commissioned by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, *Preserving and Restoring the Ponderosa Pine Ecosystem in Idaho*, <http://www.emri.org/PDF%20Docs/Adobe%20files/Final%20Report%20WCRP.pdf>.

percentage of trees were killed, but the life cycle of these species may be adapted to more intense fires. The 3-million-acre firestorm of 1910 is a reminder that large-landscape fire is not a new, or necessarily human-driven, phenomenon in the mixed conifer forests of Idaho.

Although moist and cold forest types have not undergone the same degree of departure from their historic range of variability as dry forests, they have experienced significant ecological changes as a result of fire suppression, the loss of western white pine from disease, and the effects of past logging. They are now often dominated by middle-aged trees (mid-seral stands) with fewer open areas and old growth stands than occurred historically. The reduction in the diversity of age classes in these forest types reduces their resiliency to disturbance, as well as wildlife habitat quality.

Even though there is not yet broad consensus whether they need to be restored or on the type of management needed to enhance the resilience of moist and cold forests, there is emerging agreement that active management can be used to further certain specific objectives, including:

1. Emulating natural disturbance patterns on the landscape through careful design and application of prescribed fire and mechanical treatments;
2. Reducing fuels in order to minimize the risk of high severity fire, especially in the wildland urban interface areas;
3. Meeting species-specific objectives such as restoration of western white pine;
4. Promoting variable aged stands, including re-establishing early seral species, across the landscape to improve forest resilience to insects, disease and wildfire, and enhancing diversity of wildlife habitat; and
5. Maintaining or promoting forest structure that will enhance or protect old growth conditions, sensitive or other rare species.⁶

The silvicultural techniques needed to meet these restoration objectives may differ markedly from commodity-driven forest management, but they can produce a significant volume of commercial wood products while pursuing ecological objectives.

Roadless Area Protections Help Groups Avoid Past Controversies and Focus on Active Management in the Roaded Front Country. Many of the most pitched battles during the “timber wars” of the 1980s and 1990s focused on Forest Service proposals for logging in inventoried roadless area on national forests. Those controversies have largely subsided, in large part because of rules limiting development in roadless areas put in place near the end of the

⁶ These objectives are adapted from the Clearwater Basin Collaborative’s Selway-Middle Fork Clearwater CFLRP project proposal discussed in greater detail in the appendix to this report.

Clinton Administration, later supplanted by the Idaho Roadless Rule championed by Idaho governors Dirk Kempthorne and Jim Risch.⁷

Although debates over specific areas and implementation details arise from time-to-time, the national forest collaborative groups generally recognize that natural processes will shape the future of roadless areas and that any significant active management will occur primarily in areas with or near an existing road network.

The Forest Products Industry Infrastructure Is Essential to Restoring Forests. Forest restoration often involves mechanical treatments such as thinning small diameter trees, removing hazardous fuels, or cutting larger trees to restore diversity in tree stand structure or composition. The forest products produced by these practices can help finance restoration costs, boost rural timber dependent economies, and create jobs. This means that the infrastructure of Idaho's forest products industry – ranging from small logging contractors to large sawmills – is an important ally to implement forest restoration projects. Markets for logs and biomass are a concern because there are large quantities produced during restoration treatment and markets can help offset the cost of forest restoration. In addition, skilled workers and large equipment are often necessary for watershed restoration projects such as upgrading culverts and obliterating roads no longer needed for access.

In a time of limited budgets, the cost of forest restoration projects at any meaningful scale cannot be borne solely by federal appropriations. For this reason, collaborative groups tend to see to common – rather than divergent – interests among conservation, forest products industry and local economic development. The groups participating in the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program monitor and report not just the number of acres they are treating but also the number of jobs created or maintained.

The volume of wood products produced by forest restoration will vary widely depending on the forest types and the specific restoration objectives involved. Not all projects will generate commercial volumes. However, it is already clear that some collaboratively developed projects can produce significant economic activity. The proposed Clear Creek Project developed with input from the Clearwater Basin Collaborative envisions timber sales that could produce 62 to 85 million board feet.

The current zone of agreement encompasses ecologically-driven forest restoration that enhances forest resiliency and minimizes environmental impacts, while still creating jobs and stimulating

⁷ Information on the Idaho Roadless Rule is found at:

http://www.fs.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsinternet!/ut/p/c4/04_SB8K8xLLM9MSSzPy8xBz9CP0os3gDfxMDT8MwRydLA1cj72BTFzMTAwjQL8h2VAQAJp-nEg!!/?ss=119930&navtype=BROWSEBYSUBJECT&cid=null&navid=10100000000000&pnavid=null&position=BROWSEBYSUBJECT&ttype=roadmain&pname=Roadless-%2520Idaho%2520Roadless%2520Rule

the economy of rural communities. It does not extend to commodity-driven forest management with extensive new road networks or a tree farm approach to forestry.

Multi-Faceted Restoration Projects Also Enhance Water Quality, Wildlife Habitat, and Recreation. The discussion to this point has addressed forest restoration mostly in terms of tree stand composition, structure, and distribution across the landscape. Most collaborative groups approach restoration with broader goals and design projects that may include efforts to remove barriers to fish migration, reduce sediment reaching streams, modernize aging road networks, control invasive species, enhance elk habitat, rehabilitate trails, or expand recreation opportunities.

Designing landscape-scale forest restoration projects offers collaborative groups and the Forest Service opportunities to address a range of ecological restoration needs in the project area. This broader, integrated approach to restoration project design serves the interest of a wide range of stakeholders and helps maintain a wider zone of agreement for forest restoration. These larger projects will also provide a more predictable and less volatile supply of forest products to local industries.

The mechanical treatments can accelerate forest restoration in two ways. First, appropriately designed projects can improve forest conditions and provide multiple ecosystem benefits (e.g., resilience and diversity). Second, the revenue generated by timber sales can contribute financially to other restoration activities. Forest Service policies, such as stewardship contracting, allow the receipts of timber sales to be directed to ecological and habitat restoration in the project area.



Moose near McArthur Lake – Jared France photo

Challenges to Successful Collaborative Forest Restoration

Collaborative forest restoration groups have scored significant achievements on the Panhandle, Nez Perce-Clearwater, Payette, Boise, and Salmon-Challis national forests. Their positive vision and commitment to practical problem-solving may hold a key to accelerating the pace of forest restoration. However, anyone who has participated in these groups quickly becomes familiar with the challenges they face. The nature of these challenges differs widely from group-to-group, depending on their make-up, scope, and goals. Nevertheless, several common themes regarding the constraints on collaboration and the pace of forest restoration have emerged at the IFRP winter conferences:

Collaboration Takes a Great Deal of Time and Effort. The value of collaborative groups is their ability to bring divergent interests around a table and develop shared proposals that meets their member s needs. The process of building trust, addressing disputes, and reaching common ground is time consuming and particularly difficult for volunteers. To be successful, groups will have to avoid volunteer fatigue by ensuring that their meetings and other activities are efficient, productive and inclusive.

Groups Struggle to Find the Funding to Sustain Themselves. Collaborative groups take more time than they do money. Nevertheless, successful groups often need resources for meeting rooms, travel, websites, facilitation, managing information and basic administration. There is no easily accessible funding source for this work.

Participants Can Get Discouraged by the Long Time between Initial Planning and Project Implementation. The Forest Service's process for moving a project from initial conception to final implementation can take years. Collaborative groups help build support for projects and may reduce the conflict and litigation. But, they do not replace the Forest Service's legal requirements to conduct environmental analyses and public involvement procedures.

Groups are addressing this challenge in a couple of different ways. First, they are encouraging the Forest Service to undertake project planning at very large scales and to move forward with multi-year projects at a scale that justifies the up-front investment of time. For instance, the Mill Creek-Council Mountain Project developed through the Payette Forest Coalition is one of the largest landscape scale restoration project in that national forest's history. The project will be implemented as a series of contracts to carry out restoration work in phases over a 7-8 year period. Different contracts will address stewardship, public works (road system improvements), and individual timber sale contracts directed to small businesses.

Second, at least one group, the Clearwater Basin Collaborative, has developed a process that involves its members in early review and informal dispute resolution on selected proposed national forest timber sales and projects. Thus far, several Forest Service projects have

undergone this process. If successful, their strategy will increase efficiency and accelerate forest restoration on the ground.

Issues Cannot Always Be Resolved Through Consensus. Nearly all collaborative groups have adopted some form of consensus decision making. For the most part, their commitment to consensus has served them well. Some groups have been unable to reach final consensus agreement on all the issues involved in their projects.

The Forest Service Doesn't Always Accept Collaborative Groups' Recommendations. The Forest Service is adapting quickly to working with broad-based and inclusive local collaborative groups. But the recommendations of collaborative groups are just that – recommendations. The Forest Service is required to exercise its independent judgment and comply with its own procedures, including those for public involvement external to the collaborative group, before carrying out management actions.

Occasional differences between citizen-driven collaborative groups and the Forest Service are to be expected given their different roles. Working through these differences requires a commitment to open communication and transparency on the part of the Forest Service and respect for the standards and procedures governing the agency's actions on the part of citizen participants.



North Idaho timber harvest -- Tim Christie photo

Recommendations

The following recommendations represent concrete and achievable steps that can be taken within the framework of existing laws to maintain and accelerate the pace of collaborative forest restoration. These action items are not intended as a comprehensive response to the challenges facing public forests in Idaho and do not take a position on several pending legislative proposals related to national forest management and ownership.

Congressional Actions

Fully Fund the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program: CFLRP has proven to be an effective tool for developing landscape-scale forest restoration projects with ecological and economic benefits. Three Idaho collaborative groups have helped secure funding through CLFRP, including the Clearwater Basin Collaborative, Payette Forest Coalition, and the Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative. Nationwide, the 20 CFLRP projects and three high priority projects have to date improved 537,000 acres of wildlife habitat while generating 1.1 billion board feet of timber sold and 1.2 million green tons of biomass for generating energy and other uses.⁸ CFLRP is authorized at \$40 million annually.

Sustain Funding for Hazardous Fuels Reduction: Strategic hazardous fuels reduction projects that remove overgrown brush and trees are an effective way to make forests more resilient to fire and other stresses and protect communities. We support at least maintaining the current level of funding for hazardous fuels reduction.

Permanently Reauthorize Stewardship Contracting: Stewardship contracting allows integrated contracts that combine vegetation treatment, ecological restoration, and other actions to achieve forest objectives. Receipts from the sale of wood products can be retained in the local area to fund a wide range of forest enhancement actions. The stewardship contracting authority has become a critical tool for driving forest restoration and is now responsible for 25% of the timber sourced from Forest Service lands. The current authorization expired in 2013.

Ensure that FLAME Funds Are Sufficient to Cover Fire Suppression Costs: The FLAME Act of 2009 established two funds to pay for emergency fire suppression costs and end the practice of raiding non-fire agency programs to cover firefighting expenses. Unfortunately, the FLAME Funds are not sufficient to cover costs in severe fire years. In 2013, the Forest Service again faced the prospect of being forced to transfer funds from important forest management, restoration, and public service programs to pay for emergency fire suppression. Congress should

⁸ UDA Forest Service, FY 14 Budget Justification (April 2013) at 13. See <http://www.fs.fed.us/aboutus/budget/2014/FY2014ForestServiceBudgetOverview041613.pdf>

adequately fund the FLAME funds, prevent it from being raided for other purposes, and address 2013 firefighting costs through the appropriations process.

Agency Actions

Foster Collaboration through Agency Policies and Practices: The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management have already gone a long way toward embracing collaborative approaches to forest restoration. The agency can increase the effectiveness of collaborative groups by: (1) developing training materials and best practices for agency leaders on working with collaborative groups; (2) ensuring that appropriate funding and agency attention are directed to landscapes where effective collaborative groups provide a base of public support for agency projects; (3) maintaining active and transparent communications with collaborative groups; and (4) explaining current and desired ecological conditions, agency standards, and processes.

Improve Efficiency of Project Development and Implementation Process: Federal environmental review and public involvement procedures are crucial to designing sound forest restoration projects. However, new strategies for improving the efficiency of these procedures are needed if the Forest Service is to accomplish its goal of accelerating forest restoration. Specific steps include: (1) interact with functioning collaborative groups early in the project development process to identify key issues and alternatives for the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process; (2) increase the use of landscape-scale (50,000 acres or larger) NEPA processes that allow the agency and public to assess how restoration actions will affect forest health and resilience at larger, more ecologically relevant scales; and (3) tier environmental reviews of site-specific actions to landscape-scale NEPA documents to speed up the administrative process.

Collaborative Group and Funder Actions

Maintain Best Practices for Effective Collaboration: Each collaborative group active in Idaho has a unique history, membership, and approach to getting its work done. This diversity is an asset. However, certain fundamental best practices help maintain the legitimacy of collaborative efforts. First and foremost among these practices is recruiting members with differing viewpoints so that the group does not become simply a mechanism for endorsing one interest group's position. The power of collaboration comes from finding solutions that work for multiple stakeholders who may not agree at the outset. Other key norms include: (1) be open and inclusive; (2) focus on projects and solutions; (3) respect each other's views; (4) ensure that meetings are efficient and meaningful; and (5) seek decisions by consensus.

Expand Financial and Other Support for Collaborative Groups: Many collaborative groups struggle to find the minimum financial resources needed to cover the costs of meetings, note taking, websites, and other basic administrative functions. Yet, these groups are making a critical contribution to the success of forest restoration efforts across millions of acres. Broad-based and effective collaborative groups are a worthy investment for private and public funders that have a stake in the future of public forests in Idaho.