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## Collaboration and Partnerships Engage Forest Stakeholders

BY EMILY JANE DAVIS

Increasingly, we hear terms like “collaboration,” “collaborative,” and “partnerships” applied to forest management. What do these mean?



Broadly speaking, they refer to how multiple landowners, agencies, and other partners are working together to achieve shared goals. Why and how this happens depends on the place and the people. This issue of the *Western Forester* examines several forms of collaboration in forestry, and the value that foresters can bring to these efforts.

### Common types of collaboration

If you live or work near national forest land, you may have heard about “forest collaborative” groups. These voluntary stakeholder bodies host dialogue and provide input to the U.S. Forest Service on a given area of public land that can range from a smaller watershed up to the ranger district or even the entire national forest scale. Collaboratives often have participants from different sectors including local government, the forest industry, environmental organizations, and other state and federal agencies. Facilitators or coordinators usually help lead a discussion of everyone’s values and interests, and keep these groups organized. There are often ground rules, policies, and other procedures to guide the con-

versation.

Collaborative groups typically meet regularly, review information from the Forest Service about planned actions, take field tours, and review relevant scientific information. They may develop written or verbal “zones of agreement” that articulate the kinds of future

management activities that the group supports. Collaboratives do not have any formal decision-making authority or jurisdiction on federal lands, so it is ultimately the Forest Service’s choice how to utilize this input. These groups may also engage in other activities such as community outreach and monitoring.

There are over 40 forest collaboratives active in Oregon, Washington, and Alaska, with the largest number in Oregon. The Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative and Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project, both featured in this issue, are examples of this type of collaboration.

Another form of collaboration is all-lands partnerships. These forest management projects involve multiple organizations and landowners planning and/or implementing coordinated actions across ownership bound-



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**Stakeholders participate in a coring exercise to compare assumed versus actual tree age and growth rate over time.**

aries. Adjacent landowners may plan together to decide where, when, and how to manage the forest. These landowners might be state or federal agencies, private industrial, private nonindustrial, Tribal, or other interests. These projects also often involve a range of partners for activities like mapping, inventory, landowner cost share, outreach, and other technical assistance. It is common to see the Extension Service, soil and water conservation districts, state and federal agencies, or nonprofit organizations contributing services to make all-lands projects function. All-lands efforts can look very different in different places.

For example, numerous private family forestland owners might cooperate across their fence lines to collectively access resources or programs, as

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 2)

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the Ritter Land Management Team has done in Grant County, Oregon. A federal agency might seek to coordinate with the other landowners along its boundaries to reduce the shared transmission of wildfire risk.

## Benefits and challenges of collaboration

There has been a good deal of research about natural resource collaboration. Generally, it suggests that collaborative efforts can potentially produce land management decisions that reflect diverse perspectives and current science. Many also hope that collaborating will result in better ecological outcomes, and more economic activity and social wellbeing from forest management and wood products processing. For private landowners and foresters, participation in a forest collaborative or all-lands project could have additional benefits such as new opportunities to pursue land management goals, provide input on the larger



PHOTO COURTESY OF EMILY JANE DAVIS

## Stakeholders in the Wallowa-Whitman Forest Collaborative discuss planned forest health restoration treatments during a field tour.

landscape, learn more about what different agencies and organizations are doing, and to meet other landowners and partners.

However, collaboration can also be challenging. Working closely with others who hold diverse values can pose frustrations. Some personality types may find it easier to collaborate than others. Collaboration also requires time investment. Not everyone has the time or flexibility to attend collabora-

tive meetings or otherwise participate in these processes. For those who are results-oriented, it may seem that desired outcomes do not come soon enough. Some environmental and timber stakeholders in the West have expressed concerns about the efficacy of forest collaborative groups on national forests and have also raised questions about the ability of these groups to fully represent their perspectives. For all-lands projects, it can be difficult to find and align multiple partners and sources of funding to work across boundaries in a coordinated way.

Contributing factors for functional collaboration may include how the effort itself is organized. For example, neutral facilitation, adequate capacity and resources, and accomplishing “small wins” to demonstrate outcomes can help. In addition, trust among participants and in the process is thought to be essential. If groups or projects



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**Next Issue: Recreation**

involve government land managers, the role of these entities is particularly important. Their willingness to truly work with others and try new things can be pivotal to what is possible, particularly when they are a major landowner in the area.

All-lands projects also may benefit from the assistance of “intermediary” organizations or people who can help navigate and combine the different rules, funding, and landowner needs found across ownerships. This has been essential to the all-lands work of the Klamath-Lake Forest Health Partnership, which readers may remember from the April/May/June 2018 issue of this publication.

### Roles for foresters in collaboration

As resource professionals with established standards for education, ethical conduct, and experience, trained foresters may offer valuable contributions to forest collaboration efforts. This may not always be feasible for the consulting forester or others who do not have latitude to participate given their job or other commitments.

Depending on their specializations, foresters may bring knowledge of local forest types, operator and mill capacities, and viability of planned activities. This technical information may aid a collaborative group or all-lands partners in developing more feasible and economical projects. Foresters also may be familiar with multiple area landowners and their goals, and could be uniquely aware of potential opportunities for

### To Learn More

For more information on collaboration, try the following resources:

A directory of forest collaboratives in the Pacific Northwest:

[https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/fseprd567241.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd567241.pdf)

Collaboration resources from the National Forest Foundation:

<https://www.nationalforests.org/collaboration-resources>

Pinchot Institute article about all-lands projects:

<http://www.pinchot.org/doc/611>

working across boundaries. Further, projects involving private landowners may require data collection, inventory, and mapping that foresters are often well-suited to provide.

The stories in this issue help show in detail what collaborative forest management can look like on the ground. ♦

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