Collaborative Restoration Workshop
National Forest Foundation | April 2016

Future of Collaborative Stewardship | Understanding and Addressing Critiques of Collaboration

Key Topics: Collaborative Process

Speakers
- **Melissa Freeman**, Harvard Negotiation & Mediation Clinical Program
- **Heather Kulp**, Harvard Negotiation & Mediation Clinical Program

Overview
In 2016, the National Forest Foundation was a client of the Harvard Negotiation & Mediation Clinical Program (HNMCP). As part of the NFF project, a HNMCP student team studied recent critiques of collaboration across the United States through interviews and other analysis. During the workshop, the HNMCP team shared their findings, touching on themes related to the following questions: What are stakeholders' concerns with the current use of collaboration in the stewardship of national forests? How can the NFF address those concerns, including when NFF is directly involved and when it is not directly involved with a collaborative group? What are strategies and best practices that collaborative groups can use to make collaboration more effective and bring more parties to the table?

Summary
The HNMCP team conducted 42 interviews with many different forest stakeholders, including those who do and do not participate in collaborative groups. The team also studied group governance documents, statutes, academic articles, media articles, and blog posts. The team identified common themes and developed recommendations to address each. Findings focused on group procedures, group learning, agency communication, consensus, and stakeholder input. The following findings were presented to workshop participants:

- There is an inconsistent employment of procedural best practices in and across collaborative groups.
- Some interviewees found that meetings are often inefficient and unproductive.
- Some interviewees perceived facilitators as biased or ineffective.
- Disputes over substantive issues are a significant source of tension.
- Many groups do not have a fact-finding process, which often perpetuates disagreements around scientific information.
- Some stakeholders believe scientific viewpoints are only presented to promote certain interests over others.
- The U.S. Forest Service does not always effective engage with collaborative groups.
- The Forest Service sometimes does not strike the right balance of involvement to empower group progress (and there are concerns both when the agency is over-involved <u>and</u> under-involved).
- The Forest Service sometimes does not effectively communicate helpful information to the group.
- Groups often disagree over decision making procedures.

- Stakeholders disagree over whether requiring consensus is positive or negative, and if a group uses consensus, they don't have clear procedures about when consensus should be reached.
- Some groups will change decision rules mid-way to exclude certain stakeholders.
- The collaborative process can result in certain voices not being heard.
- Some collaborative groups fail to represent a broad range of interests.
- Stakeholders disagree between the local interests and national interests.
- There is a concern that collaboration circumvents or weakens the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, or may do so in the future.

Lessons from Discussion

Following the presentation, workshop participants engaged in small-table discussions to answer the following questions:
- What ideas do you have for collaborative groups and their facilitators to better balance group ownership with effective management of group process?
- What ideas do you have for collaborative groups and their facilitators to better balance inclusiveness of the group with efficiency of group work?

A sample of the responses are below, categorized by theme.

Structure
- Use third party facilitator with no bias
- Rotate facilitator every month when can't afford a paid one
- Build capacity of facilitators or people who can help gently lead the group
- Make training and/or funding for group facilitators available
- Use a respected local facilitator rather than a consultant from an urban center
- Use a steering committee made up of group-selected members
- Working groups should make recommendations to larger group to decide
- Use social network tools to increase participation and decrease costs
- Revisit and rewrite goals/objectives as needed
- Clearly identify sideboards and expectations from partners and the Forest Service up front (what are constraints, what is decision space, what are partner expectations and commitments)
- Agree on basic goals at the outset, then define membership

Membership
- The group should determine who needs to be at the table and who is missing
- Membership should come with a commitment
- Understand that diversity adds strength to collaboration
- Adjust timeline to involve many stakeholders
- Continually evaluate group diversity
- Minimize exclusion to manage inclusiveness
- Revise and update contact list regularly
- Build one-on-one personal relationships as much as possible
- Must replace an interest if someone leaves the group

Decision Rules & Outcomes
- Have a transparent decision-making process
- Revisit decision making frameworks
- Set mile markers or points where arbitration is then an option for non-participants

- Define "consensus" very early and use it consistently
- Procedural rules for when decisions can or cannot be obstructed
- Evaluate the process at key points along the way, then conduct a full evaluation at the end
- Allow for "consensus with concern"

Agendas
- Collaboratively set the agenda, or at least allow input
- Have a good agenda with clear objectives and times
- Clearly identify decision points in the agenda, and desired outcomes, then review at the end
- Be clear in the agenda about which decisions are being made
- If more time is needed, take the time but don't forget that deadlines are still important

Resources
- HNMCP Workshop Presentation
- Peer Learning Session Recording – Understanding and Addressing Critiques of Collaboration