



Partnerships on Every Forest Wayne National Forest Partnership Assessment

**Compiled by the National Forest Foundation and the U.S. Forest Service
National Partnership Office**

January 2024

Table of Contents

Executive Summary..... 3
 Wayne National Forest 5
Methods..... 5
 1. Application Process 6
 2. Focus Groups..... 6
 3. Semi-Structured Interviews and Snow-ball Sampling..... 6
 4. Qualitative Interview Coding 7
 5. Finalize Partnership Strategy 7
 6. Shared learning 7
Results..... 7
 Values..... 7
 Strengths..... 8
 Challenges..... 9
 Gaps 11
 Opportunities..... 13
Discussion..... 15
Conclusion..... 18
 Appendix A: Interview Methods 19
 Appendix B: Interview Questions..... 19
Appendix C: Interview Participants..... 20
 Appendix D: Coding methods 22
Works Cited..... 22

Executive Summary

This report presents the results of a Partnerships on Every Forest (PEF) assessment completed by staff at the National Forest Foundation and National Partnership Office with the Wayne National Forest from March to November 2023. The goal of this assessment was to help the Wayne National Forest understand the strengths, challenges, and opportunities of their partnership program and incorporate the input of their partners into a partnership strategy. To achieve this goal, PEF staff conducted interviews with 55 existing and potential partners to get firsthand knowledge of their experiences and investigate how the Forest Service can better incorporate their needs and values into the management of public lands. The 2023 Wayne National Forest assessment was compared to a similar assessment completed by the U.S. Forest Service Collaboration Cadre in 2015 to gain an understanding of how partnerships have changed on the Forest over the last eight years.

PEF staff used qualitative coding to draw out themes from interview notes. The results from this process were analyzed to create suggestions for the Wayne National Forest to respond to what their partners and staff shared. Participants noted many positive aspects of the Wayne National Forest partnership program including staff that are invested in partnerships, opportunities for engagement through regular meetings, and recreation partnerships such as those that made the Baileys Trail System a success. Participants also noted that, although there has been a drastic improvement to partnerships in recent years, there are challenges to maintaining and expanding partnerships with the Wayne National Forest. Challenges included capacity of the Wayne National Forest staff and partners to maintain current partnerships and build new partnerships, navigating Forest Service policy and bureaucracy, and staff turnover that makes maintaining relationships difficult and results in loss of institutional knowledge.

Participants also had many suggestions for ways the Wayne National Forest could improve partnerships including increasing communication and outreach, increasing collaboration, and engaging underrepresented and nontraditional groups. Engaging underrepresented groups included working with Tribes beyond the required consultation, preserving and amplifying the history of Indigenous communities and People of Color on the Forest, and creating workforce development opportunities for youth, local residents, Indigenous communities, People of Color, and other underrepresented populations.

When compared to the results of the Collaboration Cadres assessment, all interviewees said that the Wayne National Forest has made drastic improvements to their partnership program over the last eight years. Although some challenges persist, Forest Service staff are actively mitigating challenges through intentional community engagement and adding capacity to their partnership program. By outlining these key findings, this report offers valuable insights and recommendations for fostering mutually beneficial partnerships and adding capacity to the management of the Wayne National Forest.

Program Overview

Partnerships are an integral part of National Forest System management. They add capacity and integrate the needs, interests, and values of local communities into public land management. Within the Forest Service, partnerships are broadly defined as voluntary relationships with mutual benefits between people, organizations, agencies, and communities that work together and share interests. Partnerships may be formalized through an agreement or contract or may be informal. Partners may include community groups, nonprofit organizations, local governments, state and federal agencies, Tribes, local businesses, academic institutions, and recreation groups.

The [Partnerships on Every Forest \(PEF\)](#) program is jointly managed by the U.S. Forest Service National Partnership Office (NPO) and the National Forest Foundation (NFF). The NPO works to augment the Forest Service's relationships with citizens, communities, non-governmental organizations, and others to add capacity and engage the public in the management of National Forest System lands. These relationships are built through training and education, Forest-level stakeholder engagement, and agency-wide support for partnerships through the PEF program. PEF supports the growth of the agency's partnership program and provides insight and tools to improve and develop partner relationships at the Forest and agency levels.

The National Forest Foundation (NFF) is the USDA Forest Service's Congressionally chartered nonprofit partner. The NFF is an experienced convener of stakeholders and acts as a neutral entity that serves as a bridge between nonprofit and community partners and the Forest Service. The NPO and NFF are working in collaboration to build partnership strategies that increase land management and stewardship capacity. The PEF program identifies challenges and opportunities faced by partners, potential partners, and the Forests. The NPO and NFF will work with Forest Service units to address findings by developing partnership strategies that support the Forest's and partner's desired outcomes. The assessment process and findings will be documented to share insight into partnerships nationally and to create tools that can be used to assess and improve partnerships across different Forests and regions.

Wayne National Forest

The Wayne National Forest is Ohio’s only National Forest and covers almost a quarter million acres of Appalachian foothills in southeastern Ohio (Figure 1). The Forest is divided into three units managed out of two ranger districts and spans twelve counties. Within each unit, property ownership is fragmented with many private inholdings. This unique geospatial layout requires many stakeholders to work together across boundaries to effectively manage the area.

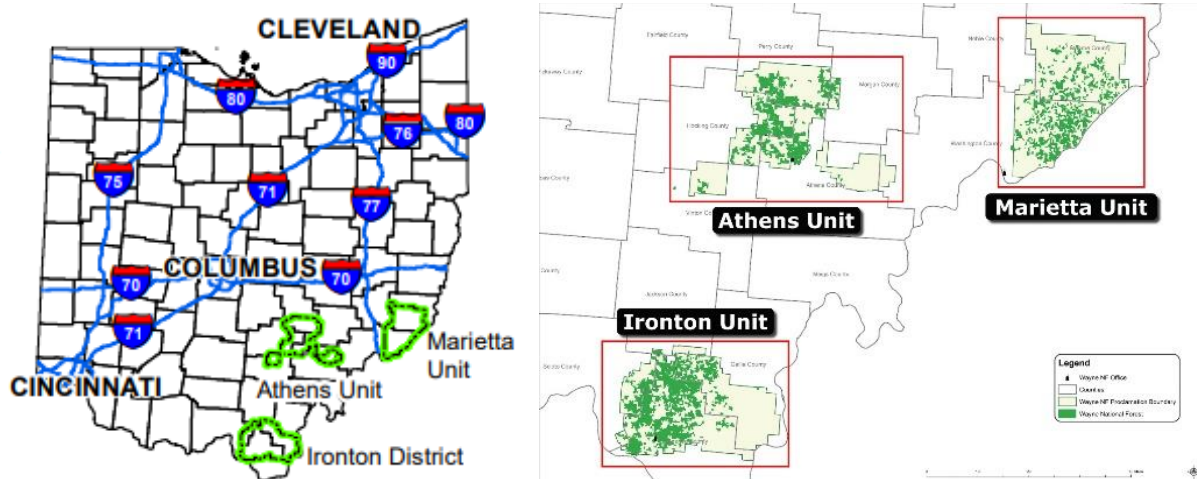


Figure 1. Map of the Wayne National Forest. The Forest is divided into three units managed out of two ranger districts. The Forest covers almost a quarter million acres of Appalachian foothills in southeastern Ohio. Maps from USFS.

NFF staff began meeting with Wayne National Forest staff in March 2023 to identify priorities regarding partnerships and to develop the interview process. Priorities included comparing a similar assessment done by the USFS Collaboration Cadre in 2015 to measure impacts of efforts over the last eight years to address concerns and grow the partnership program. Wayne National Forest, NFF, and NPO staff worked together to review outcomes of the interviews and develop a partnership strategy based on the results. The NFF and the NPO will have additional report-out conversations with Forest Service staff and facilitate partner conversations to review the findings and create a space for conversation and shared learning.

Methods

A partnership assessment is a qualitative approach to identifying and understanding the perspectives of individuals and organizations that have a vested interest in a Forest. The methodology used in these assessments is similar to that of a stakeholder analysis as described in the literature (Bendtsen et al., 2021). Authentically including partners in public lands management supports the Forest Service in achieving their mission and ensures accountability, transparency, and inclusion (Reed, 2008 and Quick & Bryson, 2016). See Appendix A for more background on our methodology.

Partnership assessments are conducted using the following methods:

1. Application process
2. Focus group conversations to identify desired outcomes and clarify expectations
3. Semi-structured interviews and snowball sampling
4. Qualitative interview coding
5. Finalize partnership strategy
6. Shared learning

1. Application Process

Any Forest Service unit in the country can apply to participate in the PEF program. The NPO and the NFF conduct outreach to ensure that all units are aware of the program with sufficient time to apply. Criteria that make a Forest a strong candidate for PEF include established partnership staff with the capacity to engage in the planning and execution of the assessment, clear goals and desired outcomes, support from their Forest Leadership Team, and a commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. PEF assessments are best suited for Forests that have specific goals and ideas for how they would like to expand their partnership program.

2. Focus Groups

After a forest is selected, PEF staff meet with the Forest Leadership Team (FLT) and partnership staff to identify specific goals of the assessment and develop interview questions. Together, they develop a work plan which identifies the project tasks, timeline, and capacity needs. This process includes the development of interview questions, which are specific to each unit. The questions used for the Wayne National Forest assessment can be found in Appendix B.

3. Semi-Structured Interviews and Snowball Sampling

The Forest provides an initial list of internal staff and external partners to be interviewed. This list is expanded as PEF staff ask each interview participant who else should be included, known as snowball sampling. PEF staff conduct interviews and meet with Forest staff ~bi-weekly to check in regarding interview and assessment progress. All interview responses are confidential and there is no attribution of specific responses to an individual. This report includes broad themes that were heard in interviews, not individual answers. Names of participants and the organizations they represent are listed upon individual approval. The list for the Wayne National Forest can be found in Appendix C.

The goal of PEF assessments is to be inclusive of all interests that exist within a Forest Service unit. This includes, but is not limited to, ecological, recreational, social, cultural, and economic interests. However, certain groups may be intentionally included or excluded to meet the individual goals of each PEF assessment. Snowball sampling and focus groups are approaches to identify these interests and individuals that can represent them. However, there are limitations in this work that result in the exclusion of some perspectives.

4. Qualitative Interview Coding

After the interview process is complete, PEF staff code interview notes to provide structure to the observations and allow for interpretation and organization. PEF staff used the ATLAS.ti coding software to systematically categorize excerpts from interviews and identify themes and patterns. The coding process makes analysis more objective by accurately representing participants, increasing validity, and decreasing bias. There are many different tools and approaches for coding qualitative data; further details regarding the coding process can be found in Appendix D.

5. Finalize Partnership Strategy

PEF staff share the results of the interviews with Forest Service staff and discuss how to incorporate them into the partnership strategy. This includes facilitating conversations about the results with relevant Forest Service staff and working together to identify approaches to strengthen their partnership program.

6. Shared Learning

PEF staff facilitate meetings with all partners involved with the assessment to share results, ensure that voices were accurately captured, and communicate the work accomplished. This will be an opportunity for continued discussion between partners and Forest staff.

Results

In total, 55 interviews were conducted including ten representatives from the Wayne National Forest, eight from environmental groups, seven from local government, six from local universities, six from federal agencies outside of the Wayne National Forest, six from recreation groups, five from state agencies, four from community groups, and one law enforcement agency. See Appendix C for a full list of interview participants.

Through qualitative coding, PEF staff categorized results from the interviews into values, strengths, challenges, gaps, and opportunities. The results are described below by category with the most common answers being listed first.

Values

Understanding the values that partners and Forest Service staff associate with the Wayne National Forest helps PEF staff understand what is important about the Forest to those that live and work in the area. Values can be personal or professional and help demonstrate what the Forest means to people included in PEF assessments. Asking about values can help people think creatively about what the Forest means to them.

Conservation and restoration. Fifty participants said that they value conservation and restoration including restoring the land from historic and ongoing oil, gas, and mining impacts, oak regeneration and reforestation, active forest management, landscape connectivity, wildlife habitat, biodiversity, scenic value, and the ecosystem services that the Forest provides including carbon storage, clean air, and clean water.

Public land access. Forty-two participants mentioned that the Wayne National Forest is the only National Forest in Ohio and one of the only publicly accessible large land holdings. They valued

having this asset in their community and noted that it was a place to experience solitude, peace, connection to nature, and escape.

Asset for impoverished area. Twenty-five participants said that many communities surrounding the Wayne National Forest experience poverty and that they value the Forest as a free public resource to be enjoyed by everyone. The Forest improves the quality of life and health of local communities that do not have access to other outlets. Participants also noted that the Wayne National Forest supports economic development in the area through industries including timber, tourism, mining, and oil and gas extraction.

Wayne National Forest staff. Twenty-one participants, including both partners and Wayne National Forest staff, noted that they value their colleagues at the Wayne National Forest. Staff and partners described Wayne National Forest staff as innovative, inclusive, visionary, strategic, and ambitious. They said staff have a strong work ethic, do a phenomenal job of working with a large group of stakeholders, and are highly competent.

Shared stewardship. Eighteen partners said that they value shared stewardship with the Wayne National Forest including contributing to partnerships and collaboration, cross boundary work, maintaining relationships with private landowners and other agencies, listening to the community, being a good neighbor, and participating in the Interagency Forestry Team.

Public engagement. Thirteen partners and Wayne National Forest staff said that they value interacting with the public and visitors to help ensure positive experiences in the Forest. Partners also mentioned that they appreciate the Forest's social media presence.

Community/family. Four participants said they value the Wayne National Forest as a place to spend time with their family and that it is a welcoming community.

Education. Two partners said that the Wayne National Forest is a valuable resource to educate the public about conservation, restoration, and active forest management.

Diversity of projects. One participant said that they value the diversity of projects they get to work on with the Wayne National Forest.

Diverse political perspectives. One participant said they value the diverse political perspectives that are balanced in management of the Wayne National Forest.

Strengths

Strengths show what the Forest Service staff is doing well and provide positive feedback and reinforcement from partners.

Wayne National Forest staff. Thirty partners said that Wayne National Forest staff contribute to strong partnerships because they are invested in communities, determined, innovative, passionate, intentional, positive, and that they pull resources together to get the job done.

Partners said there has been an improvement with staffing in recent years and appreciated that staff are direct and clear in communication and take time to educate partners.

Opportunities for engagement. Twenty-eight partners said that conversations with Wayne National Forest staff are going well and appreciated that the Forest is conducting community outreach. Partners mentioned they appreciate regular meetings such as through the Interagency Forestry Team and the Southern Wayne Advocacy Council (SWAC). Partners also appreciated regular communication through email updates and public meetings.

Recreation partnerships. Fourteen people mentioned recreation partnerships, particularly those associated with the Baileys Trail System, as a strength of the Wayne National Forest partnership program. Partners appreciated having increased funding and opportunities for recreation projects.

Cross boundary management and collaboration. Fourteen partners said that a strength of working with the Wayne National Forest was their contribution to cross boundary management and collaboration. Specifically, partners appreciated the Forest's role in cross boundary wildfire management and prescribed fire.

Positive shift in recent years. Nine partners said that their relationship with the Wayne National Forest has improved in recent years. Although many partners still experienced challenges, they noted the improvement in their relationship over the past decade.

Increased capacity. Four partners and Wayne National Forest staff mentioned that partnerships increase capacity and lead to more on-the-ground work getting accomplished.

Sharing technical expertise. Three participants noted that partnerships lead to a mutual sharing of expertise and information including training employees in technical skills and sharing research and knowledge.

Partnership administration. Three partners said that partnership administration is going well, including streamlined NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) processes on several projects that made implementation easier. Partners and Wayne National Forest staff also appreciated having dedicated partnership staff to help with administrative duties.

Funding availability for projects. Two participants said that partnerships can lead to more funding availability for projects when funding opportunities are shared between networks.

Challenges

Challenges can highlight barriers to partnering with the Wayne National Forest and help Forest staff understand how to create stronger relationships with their partners.

Capacity. Forty-seven participants, including partners and Wayne National Forest staff, noted that there is a staff shortage at the Forest that makes it difficult to manage existing partnerships and

build new partnerships. Partners also noted that they lacked capacity to contribute to reciprocal relationships. Lack of capacity can lead to lengthy timelines for projects and make it difficult to create partner networks to drive larger efforts.

Forest Service policy and bureaucracy. Eighteen partners said that it can be difficult to comply with federal regulations and that NEPA and public processes are complicated and have lengthy timelines. Specific examples that were mentioned are that cross agency communication is challenging due to the organizational hierarchy of the Forest Service, that recreation regulations and permits are outdated, and that the Forest Services' concern with their public image limits on-the-ground work. One partner also noted that their internal bureaucratic system made it challenging to partner with the Forest Service.

Staff turnover. Twenty-five partners said that staff turnover makes it challenging to maintain relationships with Forest Service staff, and that relationships are critical to carry partnerships forward. Staff turnover is a common challenge faced by all Forest Service units in their partnership work. Staff turnover can make it difficult to maintain relationships, build trust, and have a shared long-term plan. Turnover at the Forest Supervisor and leadership level was especially noted for the Wayne National Forest. Partners felt like this resulted in lack of transparency and lack of a shared vision.

Political and cultural conflict. Twenty-five partners noted that there is historical and ongoing political and cultural conflict including the conflict between ecological protection and natural resource extraction, challenging relationships with Tribes, urban/rural divides, distrust of the federal government, conflicting missions between agencies, and politics in forest planning. Some partners said that the Forest itself is a source of controversy, that National Forests are founded in conflict, and that Forests are often managed for political goals.

Land fragmentation. Twelve participants said that the fragmented landscape and ownership pattern of the Wayne National Forest requires many stakeholders and partners to work together. This creates communication challenges, especially when there is physical and cultural disconnect between the units. Many partners would like to see the Forest Service acquire more land to work towards landscape connectivity, but acquisition is difficult and contested. Some partners said that they do not have staff in the area, and it is difficult for them to get to the Wayne National Forest, which can create barriers to partnership.

Long-term planning. Twelve partners felt that they are not included in the planning process and are unaware of long-term forest plans. They said there is a lack of transparency in forest planning, that there is a shifting focus, that plans are not always implemented as written, and that there is a lack of follow through on projects.

Funding. Eleven partners and Wayne National Forest staff noted that it is difficult to complete projects with a lack of funding.

Difficult to contact Forest Service staff. Ten partners said that they do not have a point of contact at the Wayne National Forest and that it is hard to know who to contact, and to find contact

information. They said that the website is difficult to navigate and does not provide adequate contact information. Especially with high turnover rates, partners do not know who to contact. *Historic and ongoing natural resources extraction.* Nine participants noted that historic and ongoing oil and gas exploration, mining, and acid mine drainage have left the Wayne National Forest in need of significant restoration and reclamation. This degradation makes the landscape difficult to manage, especially managing prescribed and active burns with existing gas wells and coal piles. One partner said that they are hesitant to participate in restoration efforts because there is no assurance that project areas will be protected from future impacts. Partners said that there is a history of environmental injustice in the area, and it is difficult to shift the economy and culture away from extraction.

Lack of community support for active forest management. Eight partners and Wayne National Forest staff said that there is a lack of community support and education surrounding active forest management including prescribed burning and timber harvesting practices. Partners said that it can also be difficult to gain community support for restoration projects that have short term impacts, but long-term benefits. Partners noted that messaging such as Smokey Bear is complicating public perception of active forest management.

Lack of internal partnership management processes: Seven Wayne National Forest staff said that they lack a strategy for managing partnerships and that there is a lack of consensus over how partnerships should be managed.

Poverty. Seven partners and Wayne National Forest staff mentioned poverty as a challenge to building and maintaining effective partnerships. When communities are experiencing poverty, it is challenging for them to support public lands management and volunteer their time as stewards.

Lack of tax revenue. Five partners noted that having extensive public lands in their counties limits potential for growth, development, and tax revenue. They said that programs such as Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT) are not sufficient to compensate for their potential lost revenue, and that school districts are suffering.

Administrative duties for nonprofits. Four partners with nonprofit organizations said that it can be challenging for them to comply with Forest Service regulations such as volunteer reporting, agreements, timelines, and other Forest Service processes. This can be a barrier to some small nonprofits that lack administrative capacity.

Existing groups are not inclusive. Three partners said that existing groups that contribute to forest management and planning are not inclusive of all interests and that these groups should be reevaluated.

Gaps

Asking about gaps provides a critical analysis of who is not included in the management and stewardship of the Wayne National Forest. This can help identify groups that would benefit from more targeted engagement. Many participants said they did not know of gaps in partnership due to

being unaware of who else the Wayne National Forest is partnering with. The responses below suggest groups that would benefit from more targeted outreach and engagement.

Historically underrepresented groups. Fifteen participants said that the Wayne National Forest could more effectively engage historically underrepresented groups. This includes Tribes, People of Color, LGBTQIA+, urban communities, and other underserved, marginalized, and historically excluded populations. Forest Service staff noted that there are ongoing efforts to engage with Tribes that have ancestral ties to the Wayne National Forest, but due to displacement these Tribes are now located in other states which creates barriers to engagement. Forest staff said it can be challenging to identify and make connections with groups already working with historically underrepresented groups.

Conservation community. Nine partners said that conservation focused organizations including national non-governmental organizations, organizations that focus on wildlife, land acquisition, water quality, restoration, and partnerships that promote ecological knowledge were lacking engagement.

Universities. Eight partners said that local universities could be engaged more effectively including sharing research and leveraging students to help with monitoring and stewardship projects.

Youth. Seven participants, including Wayne National Forest staff and partners, said that youth engagement was a gap and that they would like to see more partnerships with school groups, youth corps, and summer employment opportunities for youth.

Community groups. Four partners said that community groups including Chambers of Commerce, Visitors Bureaus, arts groups, Lyons Clubs, Rotaries, and hospitals could benefit from more engagement.

Local governments. Three partners that represented local government entities including county commissioners and townships noted that they were interested in more engagement with the Wayne National Forest.

Industry. Three participants said that industries including oil and gas, timber, and private hunting groups were lacking engagement.

Other forestry efforts. Two participants said the Wayne National Forest could do a better job of engaging other forestry efforts including private forestry and other agencies engaged in forestry.

Do not invite new groups in. Two participants said that they felt the Wayne National Forest could do a better job at inviting new groups in, and that groups had to initiate the relationship if they wanted to engage.

Trails groups. Two participants said that the Wayne National Forest could better leverage trails groups to help with stewardship and maintenance.

Opportunities

Opportunities are suggestions for how the Wayne National Forest can address challenges and improve their partnership program.

Wayne National Forest can increase communication and outreach to local communities. Twenty-four participants said that the number one way the Wayne National Forest could improve their partnerships is to increase communication and outreach to the community. This includes consistent messaging about Forest priorities, holding meetings to share information with the public, attending public events to make Forest Service personnel more available, having a point of contact for each unit or county, leveraging partner communication networks to share information, having a welcome center in each unit to share resources and information, engaging more volunteers, and using storytelling to help people engage with the Forest. The Forest can achieve some of these goals and reach a broad audience through creating a regular communication outlet, such as a newsletter, that shares current and future projects and opportunities for engagement.

Wayne National Forest can collaborate with partners to develop a long-term plan and coordinate projects to clarify expectations and create transparency. Seventeen participants suggested that the Wayne National Forest could invest in collaboration by bringing partners in to co-develop a long-term plan, coordinate projects with other agencies, continue cross boundary work, expand to regional and national partnerships, and communicate Wayne National Forest needs to partners and to the community.

Wayne National Forest can engage and empower underrepresented and nontraditional groups and amplify their place in the Forest. Seventeen participants suggested that the Wayne National Forest could strengthen their relationships with Tribes by engaging with them beyond required consultation and inviting them to lead and participate in projects on the Forest. In addition, the Wayne National Forest can preserve the history of underrepresented groups in the Forest including Tribal history and that of the Underground Railroad. The Forest could also create workforce development opportunities for youth and local communities, engage urban communities, create more volunteer opportunities, and engage with school groups and local universities.

Agency wide partnerships reform: Sixteen participants acknowledged that many challenges partners faced when working with the Wayne National Forest are due to how the Forest Service operates as an agency. The Forest Service could address these shared challenges by providing more funding for partnership and engagement staff, helping with transition planning to reduce burdens of staff turnover, creating metrics to measure partnership impacts, providing training for all staff on agreements, and increasing staff retention through internal promotions. Another way that the Forest Service could promote partnerships and community engagement is to reform hiring practices. Current hiring practices create significant barriers to bringing in local staff and those from underrepresented communities.

Wayne National Forest can support economic development through recreation. Fourteen participants noted that many communities surrounding the Wayne National Forest experience

poverty and historically have relied on natural resource extraction to support their economies. To support the economy and shift away from extractive industries some groups are interested in promoting tourism and recreation as economic drivers. The Baileys Trail System is one example of how the Wayne National Forest has partnered with communities and other organizations to support this economic shift and bring other assets to local communities. Partners also expressed a desire to see more infrastructure such as accommodations for guests and tourists, housing for staff, creation of income producing projects such as zip-lines or fees for recreation, and hiring more recreation staff to implement on-the-ground projects. This was especially noted in the Ironton District, where partners felt that they were not receiving equitable resources to support their recreation infrastructure.

Wayne National Forest can contribute to mutually beneficial partnerships. Nine participants said that the Wayne National Forest could promote mutually beneficial partnerships by inviting partners to join in on projects and finding common ground.

Wayne National Forest can expand active forest management. Six participants expressed a desire to partner on prescribed fire, watershed restoration, oak regeneration, and educating the public on the benefits and practice of active forest management.

Wayne National Forest can provide housing for Forest Service staff and visitors. Five participants said that providing housing for Forest staff, residents, and guests would help address staff shortages and bring more visitors to the Forest and surrounding communities.

Wayne National Forest can expand programs to all districts. Five participants felt that, due to the geographic distribution of the three units, there was not an equitable distribution of resources to all units. This was especially true in the Ironton Unit, which is geographically and culturally distinct from the Supervisor's Office in the Athens Unit.

Wayne National Forest Leadership can empower local staff. Four participants felt that, due to the vertical hierarchy of the Forest Service, local staff were not empowered to make decisions and engage with the public. Partners felt that this was a missed opportunity.

Wayne National Forest Leadership can leverage federal funding. Three participants felt the Wayne National Forest could better leverage federal funding opportunities like the Inflation Reduction Act.

Wayne National Forest can pursue land acquisition opportunities. Two participants felt that the Wayne National Forest could pursue more opportunities for land acquisition to work towards landscape connectivity.

Discussion

Partnerships on Every Forest staff used the results outlined above, as well as personal observations made while visiting the Wayne National Forest and having discussions with Forest staff and partners, to identify the following strategies to strengthen and build partnerships for mutual benefit on the Wayne National Forest.

Comparison to the 2015 Collaboration Cadre Report

At the start of the assessment, the Forest Leadership Team and partnership staff identified a desired outcome to compare it to a similar assessment completed in 2015 by the USFS Collaboration Cadre. In the Collaboration Cadre's assessment, 32 people were interviewed by the Collaboration Cadre, including Wayne National Forest employees and members of the public that interact with the Wayne National Forest. The Collaboration Cadre's report had some similar themes to the Partnerships on Every Forest assessment including challenges surrounding disjointed landownership, poverty, frequent turnover in Forest Leadership, difficulty in contacting Forest Service staff, lack of capacity, and conflicting missions. Other challenges noted in the Collaboration Cadre's report were illegal off highway vehicle (OHV) use, illegal dumping, and internal staff conflict. Every person that was included in both assessments noted that although there are still challenges, the Wayne National Forest has made drastic improvements to address these challenges.

Both reports also noted positive aspects of the Wayne National Forest including improving external communications and more responsiveness to community needs. Both reports also noted the desire to expand recreation infrastructure. Participants in both assessments also appreciated Forest Service employees that are resourceful and find ways to get things done within their authorities and with limited resources.

In the Collaboration Cadre's report, suggestions were made to address the concerns of the participants. Many of these still ring true, including:

- Utilize social media to highlight projects.
- Use public relations to demonstrate successes and give partners the spotlight.
- Empower staff to go beyond the safe zone, be more entrepreneurial, and take advantage of their full decision space.
- Establish means of keeping contacts from falling through the cracks.
- Assist with NEPA compliance.
- Be a good neighbor, show up to community events, and lend a hand to demonstrate investment in the community.
- Educate the public on projects and forest management activities.
- Create transition plans to reduce burdens of turnover.
- Support all types of recreation equitably.

Public Engagement

The most common suggestion for how to strengthen partnerships on the Wayne National Forest was to increase outreach and communication. Partners were interested in having more opportunities for public meetings, seeing Wayne National Forest staff at more community events,

and receiving regular updates via email, social media, and the Wayne National Forest website. Partners also said that the Wayne National Forest staff could do more public education around active forest management, specifically prescribed burning and timber harvest, to increase public support. Public engagement could also be effective in developing support for and catalyzing recreation-based development on all units, like what was done with the Baileys Trail System in the Athens Unit.

Staffing

Partners and Wayne National Forest staff recommended hiring more partnership and engagement staff to add partnership capacity. Another suggestion to help with staffing was to create transition plans for staff that are leaving or going on detail. Transition plans can help ensure that relationships are maintained when a point of contact leaves, and that the partner knows who their new point of contact is. They can also help transfer institutional knowledge about the partnership. Several resources surrounding staff transitions can be found on [page 17 of the NFF's Partnership Resource Guide](#) and in the [USFS's Handover Memo](#).

Partnership Strategy

Based on feedback from staff and partners, the Wayne National Forest would benefit from creating a partnership strategy that includes a vision and priorities for the program and clarifies internal partnership roles. A partnership strategy could also include creating inclusive and representative partner networks to advise the Forest Service and coordinate partner efforts. Lastly, this strategy could incorporate a plan for identifying underrepresented groups and inviting them in as partners.

Baileys Trail System

The Baileys Trail System was frequently mentioned as a strength in the Wayne National Forest partnership work. The Baileys Trail System brought many partners together to create a positive resource for the surrounding communities. It increased quality of life for local communities through improved recreation infrastructure and access and will support economic development through increased tourism. The Wayne National Forest cannot complete these large-scale projects on their own—partnerships and community engagement are integral.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

Staff at the Wayne National Forest are committed to integrating diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) into their partnership work. They have created an internal Equity Action Plan that outlines strategies to engage with Tribes, underserved communities, urban communities, LBGTQIA+ communities, and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) communities. Several specific suggestions arose from this assessment related to DEIB partnerships.

Be mindful of historical context

Stewardship and conservation are loaded terms with a complicated history. Limited conceptualizations of conservation and the outdoors has historically excluded BIPOC, LBGTQIA+, urban communities, and other underserved communities and can deter underrepresented groups from engaging. Centering the voices of underrepresented communities (e.g., co-create

collaborative project goals) is critical not only for engagement, but also shifting what conservation and land stewardship look like.

Preserve and amplify the history of Black and Indigenous communities

The area that the Wayne National Forest currently covers has a rich history of Indigenous and Black communities. Indigenous communities inhabited and stewarded the area as far back as 12,000 years ago. These people were forcibly removed from this area and today there are no federally recognized Tribes in Ohio. The Wayne National Forest is working to reconnect Indigenous people with their ancestral land on what is now the Wayne National Forest. The Forest can acknowledge this history and how public land continues to impact Indigenous people through public education and increased Tribal outreach. One suggestion was to provide opportunities for Tribal youth to visit the Forest and participate in management activities, and to provide paid opportunities for Indigenous people to engage with the Forest.

In more recent history enslaved African Americans traveled through parts of the Wayne National Forest as they moved north along the Underground Railroad. This history coincides with that of the Iron Furnaces, in that many of the Iron Masters were abolitionists and helped African Americans move north in secrecy.

Preserving and amplifying the history of these groups can be achieved through partnerships that provide opportunities for Indigenous and Black communities to engage with the Forest in mutually beneficial ways. This could include providing employment and education opportunities, especially for youth, to connect with their histories including partnering with Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Tribal youth. Wayne National Forest could actively seek out organizations that already have connections to these communities and pursue partnerships that support the existing work that is being done.

Another aspect of DEIB partnerships is to engage in partnerships that increase accessibility to the Wayne National Forest. Areas that are accessible to people with disabilities, such as the boardwalk along Lake Vesuvius, should be maintained to standards that allow the enjoyment of all people. Additionally, including information about the location of restrooms and benches along trails, uploading updated photos of trail conditions, and including information about trail surface, width, and grade on the Forest website will allow the public to get a better sense of trail accessibility.

Reform hiring practices

A barrier to effectively engaging and empowering underrepresented communities is Forest Service hiring practices. Many people from underrepresented communities, including those that currently live near the Wayne National Forest in communities that are experiencing poverty, do not have access to career development opportunities that would allow them to qualify for Forest Service jobs. If individuals from these communities were eligible for direct hire it would create more opportunities for them to engage with the Wayne National Forest and help the Forest work towards a more equitable, inclusive, and representative workforce.

Develop a Clear Vision and Plan for the Partnership Program

Having a clear vision for the Wayne National Forest partnership program that can be shared with staff and partners will create shared expectations and transparency. Partners expressed a desire to be included in long-term planning, which is challenged by frequent turnover at the leadership level. Co-creating a vision and plan with partners can help create consistency with staff turnover by empowering new staff to come in with an understanding of the ongoing work and future trajectory. A plan should identify near term and long-term priorities of partnership work, have a vision statement, and outline achievable and measurable goals. This plan should be revisited at regular intervals to ensure that milestones are being met and to adapt as needed.

Conclusion

The interviews conducted in this assessment shed light on the experiences of Wayne National Forest staff, partners, and others in the community within the Wayne National Forest partnership program. The results demonstrated that staff at the Wayne National Forest are committed to engaging with their community and continue to strive to improve relationships and integrate the diverse values of the surrounding communities. Given its unique and complex land ownership pattern, partners felt that the Wayne National Forest was achieving cross boundary management and collaborating with other agencies and landowners. As with most Forest Service units, the Wayne National Forest is challenged by staff capacity, bureaucracy, and staff turnover. These challenges are systemic and need to be addressed at the agency level. One challenge that is unique to the Wayne National Forest is a deepened sense of political and cultural conflict and divide. Through interviews, this sentiment arose from the conflict between conservation and economic development, rural-urban divides, and a history of contentious relationships and mistrust in the Forest Service as an agency. As the Wayne National Forest staff continue to expand their partnership program and invest in community engagement, collaboration, and relationship building, these challenges can be mitigated. Due to the nature of National Forest System lands being managed under a multiple use mandate, some conflict will persist.

As the Wayne National Forest looks forward and develops a vision and plan for their partnership program, this assessment can help inform their strategy. By acting on their existing internal Equity Action Plan and incorporating recommendations from this assessment to empower underrepresented and marginalized groups, the Forest can more authentically incorporate diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging into their partnership program.

PEF staff recommend creating metrics to measure impacts of partnerships and having a clear plan to share with partners and Forest staff. This report can be revisited in six months and one year to reflect on how the results and suggestions have been incorporated.

If you have any questions about this report, or the Partnerships on Every Forest program, please contact:

Emily Jochem, ejochem@nationalforests.org
Partnership Coordinator
National Forest Foundation

Maya Bhadury, maya.bhadury@usda.gov
National Partnership Coordinator
National Partnership Office

Appendix A: Interview Methods

For more background information on different interview methods, please refer to Reed et al., 2009, which identifies the rational typology, and nine methods for stakeholder analysis in the natural resource management realm. One of the primary aims of these partnership assessments is to identify partners, so we focus on Reed's first typology, identifying stakeholders, which is achieved through focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and snowball sampling.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Questions for external partners:

1. To start, can you share your position title and your role with your organization?
2. When you think of the Wayne National Forest, what are some values that come to mind?
3. What is your favorite thing about the Wayne National Forest?
4. What types of partnership work are you involved with on the Wayne National Forest? What kinds of projects or agreements do you participate in?
5. In your partnership with the Wayne National Forest, what is working well?
6. What challenges do you face in your partnership with the Wayne National Forest? Is there anything you are particularly concerned about?
7. What are barriers to partnering with the Wayne National Forest?
8. Do you feel that there are opportunities to improve your partnership with the Wayne National Forest?
9. Are there any gaps in who the Wayne National Forest is partnering with? Any groups or stakeholders that you feel should be included that are not currently? If so, who?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share about the Wayne National Forest and partnerships, either your own relationship or that of other groups/stakeholders?
11. We are trying to speak with as many existing and potential partners as possible. Can you recommend other individuals or groups we should speak with about partnerships on the Wayne National Forest?
12. Are you comfortable with me sharing your name and/or organization on a list of interview participants? Your identifying information will not be tied to anything in the report other than listing you as a participant.
13. Do you have any questions for me?
14. Clarifying follow up: we will hold a meeting around [date] with all participants to share results and ensure that we accurately captured your voice. Following that we will work with the Wayne National Forest to strategically build partnership capacity and address challenges in their partnership program. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you think of any further questions or comments.

Questions for WNF staff:

1. To start, can you share your position title and your role with the Wayne National Forest?
2. When you think of the Wayne National Forest, what are some values that come to mind?
3. What is your favorite thing about the Wayne National Forest?
4. What is your role in creating and maintaining partnerships on the Wayne National Forest?
5. What kinds of projects or agreements do you participate in?
6. Do you consider partnerships to be important in your program area?
7. In your partnership work, what is going well?

8. What challenges do you face in your partnership work? Is there anything you are particularly concerned about?
9. How can the partnership program at the Wayne National Forest be improved?
10. What do you see as barriers for creating new partnerships on the Wayne National Forest?
11. Are there any groups or stakeholders that are not currently engaged with the Forest that you feel should be included?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share about partnership work on the Wayne National Forest?
13. We are trying to speak with as many existing and potential partners as possible. Can you recommend other individuals or groups we should speak with about partnerships on the Wayne National Forest?
14. Are you comfortable with me sharing your name and/or organization on a list of interview participants? Your identifying information will not be tied to anything in the report other than listing you as a participant.
15. Do you have any questions for me?
16. Clarifying follow up: we will hold a meeting around [date] with all participants to share results and ensure that we accurately captured your voice. Following that we will work with the Wayne National Forest to strategically build partnership capacity and address challenges in their partnership program. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you think of any further questions or comments.

Appendix C: Interview Participants

Thank you to all interview participants for their time, insight, and dedication to their communities.

| Name | Organization |
|-----------------|---|
| Amanda Duren | Appalachian Mountain Joint Venture |
| Amy Holtshouse | The Nature Conservancy |
| Amy Renner | Chauncey Mayor |
| Andrew Bashaw | Buckeye Trail Association |
| Eric Estill | Ohio Horseman's Council |
| Ben McCament | Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Minerals |
| Bill Dingus | Lawrence County Economic Development Corporation |
| Brian Blair | Arc of Appalachia Land Trust and Athens Conservancy |
| Chad Wilberger | Wayne National Forest Recreation Program Manager |
| Collin Shepherd | USFS Eastern Region State, Private, and Tribal Forestry |
| Dan Balser | Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry |
| Dave Apsley | Ohio State University Extension |
| Dawn McCarthy | Wayne National Forest Operations Staff Officer |
| Deana Clark | Marietta-Washington County Convention & Visitors Bureau |
| Debbie Philips | Rural Action |
| Eric Schwab | Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) |
| Glenn Matlack | Ohio University |
| Greg Guess | Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry |
| Jack Haessly | Frontier Local Economic Development Association |
| Jarel Bartig | Ohio Interagency Liaison |
| Jasmine Facun | Wayne National Forest Partnership Coordinator |

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Jason Bew | Wayne National Forest Zone Assistant Fire Management Officer |
| Jason Reed | Wayne National Forest Athens District Ranger |
| Jen Bowman | Ohio University |
| Jenna Reece | Ohio Forestry Association |
| Jessie Powers | Outdoor Recreation Council of Appalachia |
| Jill McCleese | Southern Wayne Advocacy Council |
| Judy Dumke | Southern Wayne Advocacy Council |
| Juli Stephens | Field Representative US House of Representatives |
| Kaabe Shaw | Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Minerals |
| Kevin Ritter | Washington County Commissioner |
| Lee Stewart | Wayne National Forest Supervisor |
| Leslie Horner | Central State University Extension |
| Marjorie Tweedale | USFS Grants and Agreements Specialist |
| Mark Warden and Brian Rhodes | Washington County Sheriff's Office |
| Marty Conley | Lawrence County Convention Visitors Bureau |
| Mary Nally | Ohio University |
| Mike Reynolds | Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Wildlife |
| Molly Jo Stanley | Ohio Environmental Council |
| Nick Mossbarger | Ironton Ranger District Recreation Program Manager |
| Ralph Kline | Ironton-Lawrence Community Action Organization |
| Rob Napier | Wayne National Forest Partnership Coordinator, Ironton District |
| Roger Wright | Washington County Engineer |
| Ryan Boyer | National Wild Turkey Federation |
| Ryan Smith | River Valley Mountain Bike Association |
| Ryan Sundberg | Wayne National Forest Fire Management Officer |
| Sarah Simmons | Ohio University Southern |
| Scott Linnenburger | Kay-Linn Enterprises |
| Seth Brown | Quantified Ventures |
| Steve Patterson | Athens Mayor |
| Ta Trecia Davis | Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) |
| Tim Dickens | Southern Wayne Advocacy Council |
| Todd Hutchinson | USFS Northern Research Station |
| Will Dienst | Wayne National Forest Natural Resources Staff Officer |
| Will Drabold | Sunday Creek Horizons |

Appendix D: Coding methods

The coding methods for this assessment are adapted from Saldana, 2009; Given, 2008; and Braun, 2013. These webpages summarize these methods and are readily accessible: [“The Essential Guide to Coding Qualitative Data”](#), [“Themes Don’t Just Emerge – Coding the Qualitative Data”](#), and [“Qualitative Data Coding 101”](#).

These methods were evaluated and adopted to meet the goals of this PEF assessment.

1. Develop an initial code set
 - a. Read through interview notes to develop an idea of what the overall data looks like.
 - b. Make comments/notes on themes and repeated words to develop a codebook, a reference guide that is created and continuously updated through the coding process. Each assessment will have its own codebook to avoid categorizing responses into predefined categories, which could lead to missing a unique theme or conclusion.
 - i. Continue to add new codes, creating and re-organize categories, as needed.
2. Line-By-Line Coding
 - c. Look through interview notes with a close eye, coding each interview statement in detail.
3. Categorization
 - d. Line-by-line coding will produce a large collection of codes. Group similar codes into the same categories that best reflect the analysis.
 - ii. Categorizing codes will reveal consistent and overarching themes.
 - iii. Quantitative results can be pulled from the codes (e.g. 80% of interviewees identified communication as a strength).
4. Identify strengths and barriers.
 - e. Sort overarching themes into strengths and barriers.
 - iv. Begin to write, applying categories, codes, and strengths and barriers to the assessment.

Works Cited

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. 2013. [Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners](#). London, England: Sage.

Given, L.M. 2008. [The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods](#). Swinburne University, Australia, Charles Sturt University, Australia: Sage.

Reed M.S., Graves A., Dandy N., Posthumus H., Hubacek K., Morris J., Prell C., Quinn C.H., Stringer L.C. 2009. “Who's in and why? A typology of stakeholder analysis methods for natural resource management.” *Journal of Environmental Management*. 90(5):1933-49.
doi:[10.1016/j.jenvman.2009.01.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2009.01.001)

Saldana, J. (2009). [The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers](#). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.