



# SWOT Analysis of Forest-Based Collaborative Groups in Montana and Idaho

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## Executive Summary

Collaboration is increasing in its application to forest management processes and planning as an augmentation to more traditional public engagement processes. The process of collaboration aims to build durable and authentic relationships by focusing on inclusion, open communication, and trust building. In effect, collaboration fosters the development of social connections, thereby enabling collaborative members to share and discuss their interests, concerns and goals. Forest managers can use this local, experiential knowledge in partnership with scientific, technical, and traditional ecological knowledge to better inform project decisions.

In Montana and Idaho, the number of forest collaborative groups has increased over the past fifteen years so that now, the majority of national forests in these states have one or more collaborative groups associated with them. The more recent emphasis of state and federal land management agencies on cross-boundary and larger landscape approaches has increased the importance of collaborative groups as a focal point for communication, planning and building agreement around project design.

While collaboratives are an accepted and valued way for stakeholders in Montana and Idaho to engage in forest management, these groups have limited capacity and most lack sustainable funding and dedicated support. Most operate with volunteer memberships and very low budgets, often without coordination or facilitative support.

To generate a comprehensive examination of the internal and external factors currently influencing collaborative groups, the National Forest Foundation (NFF) conducted a SWOT (strengths, opportunities, threats, and weaknesses) analysis of forest-based collaborative groups in the two states. Upon identification of these influential factors, members of collaborative groups can use this analysis to develop strategic interventions for addressing challenges faced by their groups.

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## High-level Findings

We spoke with representatives from 23 forest-based collaboratives in Montana and Idaho and analyzed those interviews to identify themes in the four SWOT categories (Figure 1).

	Helpful	Harmful
<b>Internal</b>	<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Membership - 100%</li> <li>Agency representation in group - 59%</li> <li>Facilitator - 50%</li> <li>Process elements - (guiding charter - 36%, shared vision and purpose - 23%, leadership - 23%)</li> <li>Past successes - 27%</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Membership: Low diversity - 50%, low participation - 41%, variable knowledge - 32%, limited time - 27%, member burnout - 27%, opponents to the process - 27%</li> <li>Lack of funding - 32%</li> <li>Group functioning - 32%</li> <li>Lack of facilitation - 23%</li> <li>Response to COVID-19 - 23%</li> </ul>
<b>External</b>	<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitation - 64%</li> <li>Funding - 59%</li> <li>Shared learning - 45%</li> <li>Develop partnerships - 32%</li> <li>Expand work - 27%</li> <li>Agency participation - 23%</li> <li>Marketing and storytelling - 23%</li> <li>Support local economies - 14%</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opponents to collaboration - 41%</li> <li>Challenges working with the Forest Service: Lack of transparency and differing priorities - 36%, policies - 27%, high turnover - 27%, limited capacity - 27%)</li> <li>Community dynamics - 32%</li> <li>COVID-19 - 32%</li> <li>Litigation - 18%</li> <li>Implementing partners - 14%</li> <li>Economic hardships - 14%</li> </ul>

Figure 1. SWOT themes ranked according to their significance. We calculated values of significance by comparing an individual group response with the responses from all 22 groups interviewed (calculated as a percent value). For details see Results section.

We identified the top three most significant **strengths**: membership composition, representation from agencies and elected officials, as well as facilitative support. Significant **weaknesses** include low membership diversity, low member participation, and varying levels of membership knowledge. Additional weaknesses include a lack of funding and ineffective group process/functioning. The top three **opportunities** include facilitative support, funding, and shared learning. The top three **threats** are opponents to the collaborative process, the challenges presented by working with the U.S. Forest Service and, tied for third, both community dynamics and the COVID-19 pandemic.



## Top 3 Most Significant Responses

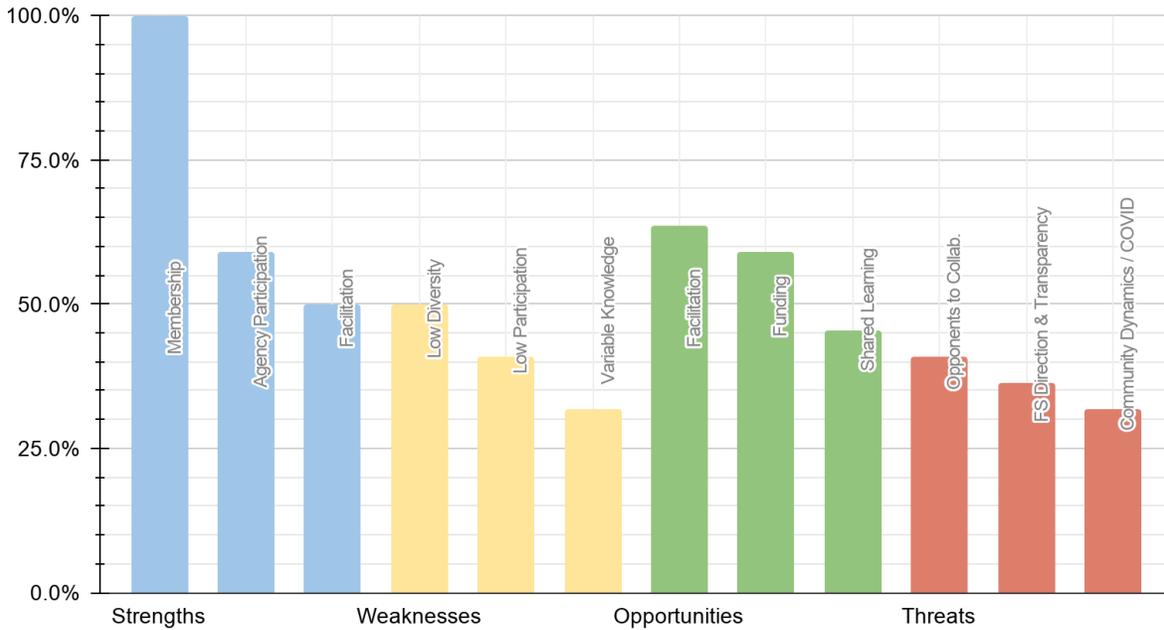


Figure 2. The top three most significant interview responses (highest percentage values), organized by SWOT category. For details see Discussion and Conclusion section.

### Next Steps

Our hope is that this SWOT Analysis provides a foundation for identifying strategies to strengthen the capacity of forest collaborative groups and enhance their ability to achieve desired outcomes. The NFF will utilize these SWOT analysis findings as a platform for discussion with the Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership (IFRP) and the Montana Forest Collaboration Network (MFCN), as well as federal and state agencies.

Our goal is to clearly communicate the weaknesses and threats to forest collaborative groups and to facilitate conversations with collaborative practitioners around the resources that need cultivation, predominantly around funding. The goal is to collectively develop recommendations and identify resources to offer forest-based collaborative groups to address their identified needs.



## Introduction

Forest management on public lands is inherently complex due to multiple resource objectives coupled with diverse, and at times competing, stakeholder interests. One approach to effectively address these challenges is to incorporate forest-based collaborative groups into forest planning and management efforts. Since forest management operates across multiple land ownerships, jurisdictions, and ecosystems, collaboration has become critically important since “no single party possesses the knowledge, authority, resources, and capabilities to manage such issues alone” (Wondolleck, 2010, p. 324). As such, collaborative groups convene diverse stakeholders – ranchers, conservationists, wood products industry, miners, forest managers, hunters, anglers, motorized and non-motorized recreationists, among others – to explore common ground solutions to natural resource issues.

The process of collaboration aims to build durable and authentic relationships by focusing on inclusion, open communication, and trust building. In effect, collaboration fosters the development of social connections, thereby enabling collaborative members to share and discuss their interests, concerns and goals. Forest managers can use this local, experiential knowledge in partnership with scientific, technical, and traditional ecological knowledge to better inform project decisions.



5B Restoration Coalition on the Sawtooth National Forest in Idaho

In general, collaborative processes focus on inclusive participation, good-faith communication, shared commitments, and an overall transparent and fair process (Panel on Public Participation, 2008 and *Building Collaborative Relationships*, National Forest Foundation). When facilitated effectively, collaboration promotes mutual gain outcomes and compromise so that members are able to achieve more together than they would while defending their own independent, and often conflicting, positions.

Consequently, “collaborative processes often result in greater satisfaction with outcomes and broader public support” (Kemmis, 2013, p. 119), due to the integration of local perspectives and



goals, as well as the ability to achieve shared gains. Further, stakeholders are more likely to commit to a collaborative process where they have the opportunity to influence forest projects. As a result, collaborative recommendations add capacity to federal and state forest management agencies by shedding light on local values, needs and interests, thereby providing essential decision-making information regarding forest management.

Due to the above benefits, collaborative and community-based approaches to natural resource management are being widely promoted across the United States (Conley and Moote, 2001). More precisely, the American West is seeing similar occurrences such that “local collaborative efforts are growing too fast now to be catalogued ... [and are] beginning to add up to a matter of genuinely historical proportions” (Kemmis, 2013, p. 118).

Contributing to the growth of this movement, both Idaho and Montana stakeholders actively utilize collaborative approaches to natural resource management. Idaho, as with many other states across the West, has experienced an increase in wildfire severity and prevalence, coupled with the damaging impacts of insects and diseases. Consequently, these factors have degraded Idaho’s natural forests and disrupted its natural ecosystem processes, while also threatening local livelihoods and property. In response, local collaborative groups have partnered with land management agencies to address these issues while also trying to achieve multiple forest objectives.



Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group in Montana

More specifically, collaborative groups have turned to forest restoration “as a tool to improve water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, ecosystem health, community safety, recreation and jobs” (*Collaborative Forest Restoration in Idaho*, 2017, p. 1). Together, these groups ensure that local knowledge and values are recognized and integrated into forest management plans. Due to these efforts, “the pace of collaborative restoration in Idaho is accelerating” (*Collaborative Forest Restoration in Idaho*, 2017, p. 2), illustrated by a 53% increase in collaborative restoration efforts between 2013 and 2017. Currently, the Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership (IFRP) supports eleven different collaborative groups in Idaho, bringing together diverse stakeholders representing the



forest industry, conservation, outdoor recreation, and local government (*Shared Stewardship Survey, 2020, p. 1*).

Similarly, Montana has seen an increase in wildfire behavior that threatens multiple ecosystem values. Land managers aim to integrate the best available science, adaptive management, and transparent public engagement processes in order to develop well-informed and durable management plans (*2020 Montana Statewide Assessment of Forest Conditions, p. 15*). As a critical component to this process, community participation integrates local voices into the development of forest projects, thereby ensuring that resource plans match the unique needs of the community and the landscape.

Recognizing these values, Montana has a long history of utilizing cooperative management approaches regarding drought, watersheds, weeds, wildlife, and forests. In recent years, collaborative groups have expanded in the state due to the support and leadership of the Montana



Panhandle Forest Collaborative in Idaho

Forest Collaboration Network (MFCN), the National Forest Foundation (NFF), and the University of Montana's Natural Resources Conflict Resolution Program, among others. Additionally, there has been a shared interest between the Forest Service and community members to improve working relationships and management outcomes.

The State of Montana is taking a strong role in supporting cross-boundary, collaborative management of forested lands. Additionally, as interested stakeholders witnessed the successful development of "mutually agreed upon approaches to managing public lands," they took steps to replicate collaborative stewardship in their own geographies (*Draft 2020 Montana Forest Action Plan, p. 15-16*).

To examine collaborative work more closely and to understand what is or is not working well, the NFF, through its Conservation Connect program, decided to conduct a SWOT analysis of forest-based collaborative groups in Montana and Idaho. The NFF is a neutral organization that facilitates, engages, supports collaborative groups and processes across the country, and has close working relationships with many collaboratives making us well positioned to conduct such an analysis.

This kind of analysis facilitates a comprehensive examination of both the internal and external factors that influence a group or organization, precisely identifying its strengths, weaknesses,



opportunities, and threats (SWOT). A SWOT analysis can provide a set of baseline metrics by addressing the following questions: *where are we and where can we go?* More precisely, a SWOT analysis identifies specific needs within a group or organization, thereby highlighting areas where additional support or resources would be of benefit. In application, a SWOT analysis can guide effective decision-making and the development of strategic plans (Speth and Probert, 2015).

## Methods

We utilized a Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis approach in order to gain an understanding of the successes and barriers faced by forest collaborative groups. This analysis uniquely examines both the internal and external factors that influence a group or organization, as described in Figure 3.

	Helpful	Harmful
Internal	<p><b>Strengths</b> Internal factors that positively influence a group, its processes and its ability to achieve desired outcomes (ex: skilled and knowledgeable members)</p>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b> Internal factors that have a negative impact on the group, its process, and its ability to achieve desired outcomes (ex: lack of facilitation)</p>
External	<p><b>Opportunities</b> External factors, outside of the groups direct control or influence, which have the ability to positively influence the group (ex: funding)</p>	<p><b>Threats</b> External factors, outside of the groups direct control or influence, which have the ability to negatively influence the group, also referred to as barriers (ex: COVID-19)</p>

Figure 3: Explanation of SWOT components used to guide the development of SWOT interview questions.

As we designed our analysis, we created a question, or a set of questions, for each of the four SWOT categories. In this way, our data collection follows a straightforward framework, resulting in clear and focused results (Speth and Probert, 2015).

### Establishing the Process

In order to develop a data collection strategy and identify participants, the NFF team created a SWOT Advisory Committee. This committee involved 12 members, each offering expert guidance and knowledge regarding collaborative work in Montana and Idaho (Appendix: Document 1). We asked members to provide feedback on the overall approach to the project, including the kind of information we should collect, how we should collect it, whom we should interview, and the project timeline.



The Committee agreed that we should aim to sample as many collaborative groups as possible. This would provide a representative sample of groups at varying levels of capacity and organizational structure. The Committee also agreed to a data collection strategy that focused on qualitative peer-to-peer interviews. This approach enabled us to ask targeted questions, while promoting a more fluid and engaging conversation. Additionally, interviewing promotes more in-depth and comprehensive conversations, which further enhances the quality of data collected.

### **Identifying Potential Candidates**

The SWOT Advisory Committee, in collaboration with NFF staff, were able to identify and agree upon a list of potential candidates. We identified the collaborative groups with the assistance of state forest-based collaborative networks, precisely the Montana Forest Collaboration Network (MFCN) and the Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership (IFRP). Each organization engages and supports various collaborative groups in their state, and therefore had a list of collaborative groups readily available, as well as their points of contact. Where needed, we conducted additional online research to find current points of contact. Using these lists, we removed a few groups that were no longer actively meeting, or because their work did not focus on forest-based collaborative work with diverse stakeholders. We identified 27 groups as potential candidates (Appendix: Document 2).

### **Outreach Strategy**

Each of the 27 groups received an outreach letter via email in early July. We asked each main point of contact to select one or more representatives of their collaborative group or to invite members to self-select based upon interest and/or availability. We scheduled interviews for an hour and participants had the option of participating on Zoom or by phone call.

We sent a second outreach letter during the third week of July, and a third email in early August, coupled with a phone call attempt. We were able to make contact with every group; however, due to time constraints or conflicts, we were unable to schedule four groups within our project timeline. One group declined to participate.

### **Participants**

We interviewed 23 collaborative groups: 14 from Montana and 9 from Idaho (Appendix: Document 3). Of those, we conducted 21 interviews via Zoom, one as a phone interview, and one group provided written responses to our questions. Participation from groups ranged from 1 – 3 collaborative members, and each had the opportunity to follow up independently with additional remarks.

### **Interview Questions**

We developed the SWOT analysis interview questions collaboratively with the SWOT Advisory Committee (Appendix: Document 4). Our questioning technique focuses on open-ended questions



to enable groups to respond in a self-directed manner. As such, answers were unprompted (i.e. interviewees did not select a response from a pre-determined list). Due to this self-reporting nature, it is not assumed that if a group did not mention a particular factor then that means they inherently disagree with its identification and/or significance. Instead, this study highlights the voice of the collaborative members and their self-reported perspectives.

The interview included 13 questions, five of which were SWOT specific. We asked the non-SWOT specific questions to collect supplementary information regarding the collaborative groups structure and function, how it defines and evaluates success, how it prioritizes work, and how it reaches agreement.

To provide an opportunity for additional remarks and to collect supplemental information, we distributed an **optional post-interview survey** (Appendix: Document 5). This online survey included nine questions, such as:

- How long has the group been convening regularly?
- What interests does the collaborative represent?
- What issues does the collaborative address?

We asked one member from each group to complete this survey after their SWOT interview and achieved a 52% response rate.

## **Data Collection**

We conducted interviews during July and August of 2020. We documented the majority of the interviews as typed notes and recorded the first few interviews for accuracy purposes. We informed the Interviewees that we would report their group and individual responses in an anonymous manner. Due to a technical failure, we were unable to save one interview and so we are basing this analysis and its associated findings on 22 interviews.

## **Thematic Analysis**

We examined each interview and pulled out any information pertaining to the four SWOT categories and categorized it accordingly, resulting in a substantive amount of detailed and interviewee-specific information. Starting from this comprehensive, categorized list, we identified similar comments and grouped them together, generating broad themes (Bull et al., 2016).

In this way, the process follows a funneling technique, where a large amount of specific data narrows down to more general, overarching themes. For example, a theme of “funding” can include specific needs such as funding for facilitation, supplies, printing, project work, etc. While a collaborative group may have different reasons for needing funding, the most effective way to support the collaborative groups as a whole would be to address the common need for funding.



# Results

The following is a breakdown of interview responses for each SWOT category. We calculated measures of significance based upon 22 groups and evaluated the responses by comparing an individual group response with the responses from all 22 groups (calculated as a percent value). For example: Eleven groups out of the total twenty-two groups viewed facilitation as an internal strength, resulting in a 50% response rate.

## Strengths (Internal)

Our thematic analysis identified five themes relating to internal strengths (Table 1). The most commonly identified strength, reported by 100% of collaborative groups, was the make-up of its membership. This was the only theme throughout the entire SWOT analysis that was identified by every single group. Additionally, interviewees noted that strong participation from, and close-working relationships with, agency and elected officials was a strength (59%), as well as having facilitative support and paid members (50%). Interviewees also identified effective process elements, such as utilizing a charter or following by-laws, as well as meeting regularly as a strength (36%), while having a shared vision (23%) and strong leadership (23%) were helpful in uniting and focusing the groups. Lastly, groups find motivation to continue engaging in collaborative work due to past successes and in celebrating those successes (27%).

<b>Table 1:</b> Explanation of Identified Themes – Strengths	<b>Response Rate</b>
<b>Membership:</b> Committed, long-term members; relationships and trust; members that are experts/skilled; diverse interests are represented; ability to reach consensus; members that are decision makers of their organization.	100%
<b>Agency Participation:</b> Participation from, and good working relationships with, the Forest Service and other agencies, as well as from elected officials.	59%
<b>Facilitation:</b> Facilitative support; someone focused on fundraising and grants; some or all members are paid to be there.	50%
<b>Process Elements:</b> (1) Guiding charter and/or bylaws; group meets monthly; willing to go slow; inclusive; effective structure (utilize committees). (2) Shared vision; purpose; focused on core mission. (3) Leadership.	36% 23% 23%
<b>Past Success:</b> History of success; celebrating successes; good reputation.	27%



## Weaknesses (Internal)

Our thematic analysis identified five themes relating to internal weaknesses (Table 2). The most commonly identified theme was group membership, and specifically low membership diversity (50%), low/varying degrees of member participation (41%), variable levels of membership knowledge (32%), limited time availability (27%), member burnout and/or frustration with the collaborative process (27%) and lastly, members that acted as opponents to the collaborative process (27%). Other key themes include funding (32%), group functioning (32%), the lack of facilitative support (23%) and the internal challenges brought about by COVID-19 pandemic (23%).

Table 2: Explanation of Identified Themes – Weaknesses	Response Rate
<p><b>Membership:</b></p> <p>(1) <b>Low Diversity:</b> Want more diverse and inclusive membership; limited success with outreach efforts.</p> <p>(2) <b>Low Participation:</b> Low/varying degrees of participation.</p> <p>(3) <b>Variable Knowledge:</b> Varying levels of knowledge and understanding about issues, terminology, government processes, etc.</p> <p>(4) <b>Limited Time:</b> Limited time availability - members work other jobs; challenge to complete collaborative work in-between meetings, etc.</p> <p>(5) <b>Member Burnout:</b> Member burnout; frustration with the process.</p> <p>(6) <b>Opponents:</b> Opponents to collaborative processes; uninformed; unwilling to compromise.</p>	<p>50%</p> <p>41%</p> <p>32%</p> <p>27%</p> <p>27%</p> <p>27%</p>
<p><b>Funding:</b> Lack of funding; unpaid members.</p>	<p>32%</p>
<p><b>Group Functioning:</b> Can be a slow process; want to be more proactive, focused, and relevant.</p>	<p>32%</p>
<p><b>Lack of Facilitation:</b> Need to improve/increase facilitative support.</p>	<p>23%</p>
<p><b>Response to COVID-19:</b> No longer meeting face-to-face; technological limitations; lack of reliable internet.</p>	<p>23%</p>



## Opportunities (External)

Our thematic analysis identified ten themes relating to external opportunities, (Table 3), which was the most diverse answer set out of the four SWOT categories. The greatest opportunity identified was to increase facilitative support for collaborative groups (64%), followed by the opportunity to increase funding for a variety of needs (59%). Other themes included an interest in promoting shared learning (45%), increasing community outreach to promote a more diverse and inclusive membership (41%), engaging in strategic planning (36%), developing and/or strengthening partnerships (32%), expanding work (27%), improving participation and commitment from agency personnel (23%), improving accessibility for member participation (23%), improving marketing and storytelling (23%), and lastly, capitalizing on the opportunity to support local economies (14%).

<b>Table 3:</b> Explanation of Identified Themes – Opportunities	<b>Response Rate</b>
<b>Facilitation:</b> Would like to have/increase facilitative support.	64%
<b>Funding:</b> Need for sustained funding; funding for projects, collaborative work, facilitation.	59%
<b>Shared Learning:</b> More trainings, webinars, peer-to-peer learning sessions.	45%
<b>Membership:</b> (1) <b>Diversity &amp; Inclusion:</b> Need to improve community outreach; increase participation; become more inclusive and diverse. (2): <b>Accessibility:</b> Offer technical assistance, travel stipends, etc.	41%
<b>Strategic Planning:</b> Develop strategic future plan; become more proactive; integrate sustainability.	36%
<b>Develop Partnerships:</b> Develop/strengthen partnerships; partner with universities, institutes, citizen scientists; cross-boundary partners, etc.	32%
<b>Expand Work:</b> Include/increase work focused on recreation, trails, restoration work and/or monitoring.	27%
<b>Agency Participation:</b> Regular, committed attendance from agency personnel; "Agency Liaison."	23%
<b>Marketing and Storytelling:</b> Would like to develop own website; establish/enhance social media presence; more effective storytelling.	23%
<b>Support Local Economies:</b> Focus on economic stability in local communities; rural development; businesses.	14%



## Threats (External)

Our thematic analysis identified seven themes relating to external threats or barriers (Table 3). Opponents to the collaborative process (41%) was the main identified threat. Following closely behind was working with the Forest Service, and specifically the direction and transparency of the Forest Service (36%), Forest Service regulatory policies and processes (27%), high turnover rates (27%) and limited personnel, time and/or budgets (27%). Receiving equal responses rates, at 32% each, was community dynamics and the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by litigation (18%), decreasing/lack of participation from implementing partners (14%) and economic hardships (14%).

Table 3: Explanation of Identified Themes – Threats	Response Rate
<b>Opponents:</b> Opponents to collaborative processes; don't understand the value of collaboration; resistant to change; difficult personalities.	41%
<b>Forest Service:</b> (1) <b>Direction and Transparency:</b> Differing views, values, and priorities; lack of transparency (especially regarding why and how decisions are made). (2) <b>Policies:</b> Regulatory policies and procedures (slow NEPA process; difficult to understand). (3) <b>High Turnover:</b> High turnover rates; loss of established relationships. (4) <b>Limited Capacity:</b> Limited capacity (personnel, time, budget); lacking full participation in collaborative work.	36%  27%  27%  27%
<b>Community Dynamics:</b> Changing community structure, demographics, and values (ex: second home buyers, out-of-state); social and political tensions.	32%
<b>COVID-19:</b> Remote work; not meeting as regularly; miss in-person meetings and field trips.	32%
<b>Litigation:</b> Actual, or threat of, litigation.	18%
<b>Implementing Partners:</b> Decreasing/lack of engagement from (some or all) FS, BLM, FWP, DNRC, etc.	14%
<b>Economic Hardships:</b> Loss of jobs; struggling local economy.	14%



## Discussion and Conclusion

Each of the four SWOT categories identify the factors that influence the forest-based collaborative groups interviewed, and we ranked these according to significance (Figure 5) to identify the most common responses.

From this comparative analysis, it is evident that collaborative group membership has the greatest ability to positively or negatively influence the effectiveness of collaborative group functioning and resulting outcomes. Specifically, interviewees pointed to membership as the greatest internal strength, while also existing as the greatest potential weakness.

Interviewees also noted active and committed participation of agency personnel and elected officials, and their strong relationships with these staff members, as a prominent internal strength, which matches the external opportunity of improving these relationships and expanding partnerships more broadly. Interviewees also identified facilitative support as a key strength, which matches the perceived opportunity of offering and/or expanding facilitative services to more groups.

### Top 3 Most Significant Responses

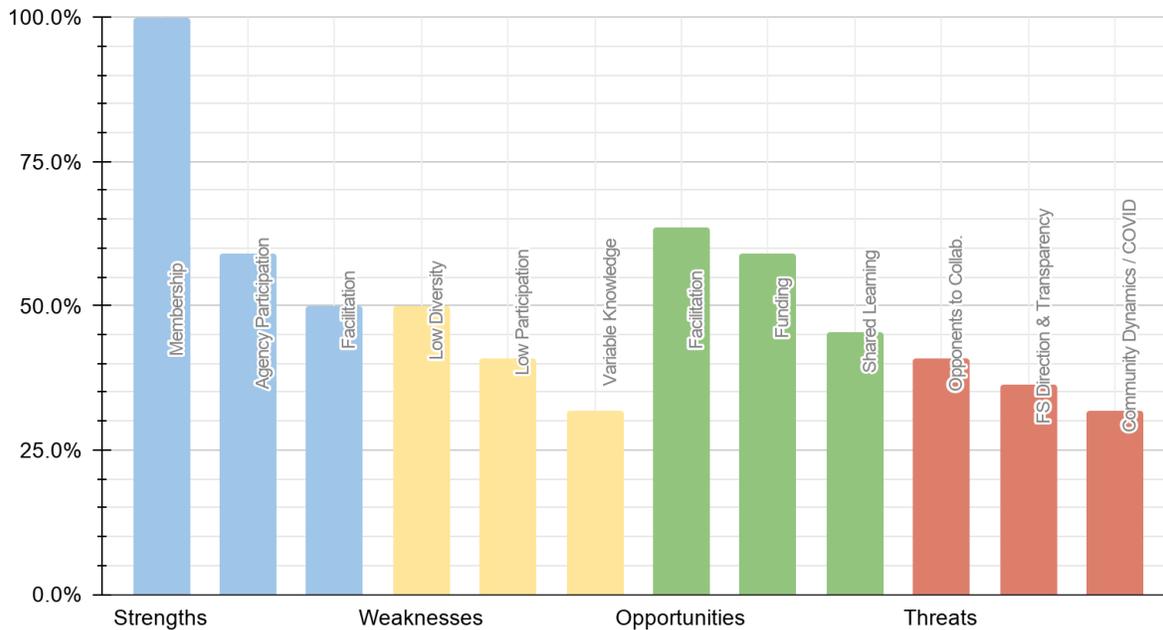


Figure 5. The top three most significant interview responses (highest percentage values), organized by SWOT category.

The most prevalent internal weakness, as previously stated, was membership, and more precisely, a lack of membership diversity. This parallels the perceived challenge of changing community



dynamics, upon which it will be essential to improve outreach strategies in order to more accurately represent local communities. To aid in community outreach and engagement, interviewees identified a need for marketing and storytelling.

Identified as an additional weakness were the varying levels of knowledge and understanding that collaborative members have about natural resource issues, terminology, government processes, etc. This internal weakness pairs with the opportunity of improving shared learning about a variety of topics involving forest-based collaborative groups.

Interviewees identified a lack of funding as a common weakness. Interviewees noted the need to build a dedicated, sustained funding source for collaborative groups and pointed to the NFF (who has had capacity funding in the past, but not currently), the Forest Service, and state agencies as a source for this funding. A few interviewees suggested they are open to a competitive grant application process. Interviewees that had a dedicated facilitator commented on the important fundraising role that the facilitator can play by finding opportunities and managing the application process.

A common thread, identified as a challenge both internally and externally, are opponents to the collaborative process. This is especially challenging when opponents reside outside of the collaborative group, thereby acting as obstructionists without an incentive to compromise. Lastly, COVID-19 has become a common obstacle faced by many collaborative groups. As an external factor that is outside of a group's control, COVID continues to alter and/or sidetrack the work of collaborative groups.

### *Next steps*

The results of this SWOT analysis offer a collective picture of the challenges faced by forest-based collaboratives in Montana and Idaho, as well as a look into the possible resources to help overcome these challenges. Interviewees identified a number of resources that they have utilized, or that they would like to see developed, in an effort to increase the efficacy and capacity of their collaboratives. As the next step in this process, the NFF plans to coordinate with the Montana Forest Collaborative Network (MFCN) and the Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership (IFRP) to identify strategies to respond to the needs and opportunities identified in this report. We plan to collaborate with these groups to identify concrete next steps for developing sustainable funding mechanisms, shared learning opportunities, and other significant opportunities.

### *Study Limitations and Further Work*

We limited the scope of this research to Montana and Idaho. Due to our project timeframe, non-responses, and one group declining to participate, we interviewed 23 out of the total 27 possible groups. Additionally, we lost one set of interview data due to a technical failure. In the future, we suggest recording each interview to allow for review and affirmation of the accuracy of data, while also serving as a backup mechanism.



Although the SWOT-specific questions used within the interviews satisfy the goals of this report, it would be beneficial to critically analyze the responses to the eight non-SWOT specific questions used within the interview, as well as the optional post-interview survey results. Analysis of these results could answer questions such as:

- What are the different structural models of forest-based collaborative groups in Montana and Idaho?
- How do they evaluate their process and results?
- How do they prioritize their work?

Extending this research further, we could complete a comparative study to evaluate the opportunities and barriers experienced by younger collaborative groups in an attempt to offer lessons learned from older, more experienced groups. Such a comparative study could seek to address the following questions:

- How does the age of a collaborative group affect its ability to function effectively?
- What common barriers or challenges exist within newly formed collaborative groups?
- How can more experienced groups offer their support and knowledge to overcome existing barriers?

Lastly, it would be beneficial to examine whether or not the identified strengths within this SWOT analysis truly contribute to a more successful collaborative group, and if so, how influential they are. Understanding how strengths contribute to success would enable collaborative groups to effectively create strategic plans aimed at increasing their own capacity and ability to achieve desired outcomes.

## Acknowledgements

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## Appendix

### Document 1: SWOT Advisory Committee Members

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Representing</b>
<b>1</b>	Joe Ashor	Bureau of Land Management
<b>2</b>	Andy Brunelle	U.S. Forest Service
<b>3</b>	Angela Harrington	U.S. Forest Service
<b>4</b>	Bill Higgins	Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership
<b>5</b>	Liz Johnson-Gebhardt	Priest Community Forest Connection; Panhandle Forest Collaborative
<b>6</b>	Steve Kimball	Montana Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation
<b>7</b>	Tim Love	Montana Forest Collaboration Network
<b>8</b>	Chelsea McIver	University of Idaho
<b>9</b>	Meghan Oswald	U.S. Forest Service
<b>10</b>	Peg Polichio / Ara Andrea	State of Idaho, Dept. of Lands
<b>11</b>	John Robison	Idaho Conservation League; Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership
<b>12</b>	Gordy Sanders	Pyramid Lumber; Montana Forest Collaboration Network



## Document 2: List of Interviewees

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### Montana Collaborative Groups

1. Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group
2. Bitterroot Forest Collaborative
3. Big Elk Divide Restoration Committee
4. Blackfoot Challenge
5. Custer-Gallatin Working Group
6. Elkhorn Working Group
7. High Divide Collaborative
8. Kootenai Forest Stakeholder Coalition
9. Lincoln Restoration Committee
10. Mineral County Resource Coalition
11. Ravalli County Collaborative
12. Sanders County Collaborative
13. Southwestern Crown Collaborative
14. Ten Mile/South Helena Collaborative Committee

### Idaho Collaborative Groups

1. 5B Restoration Coalition
2. Boise Forest Coalition
3. Caribou Forest Initiative
4. Clearwater Basin Collaborative
5. Kootenai Valley Resources Initiative
6. Panhandle Forest Collaborative
7. Sawtooth Valley Wildfire Collaborative
8. Shoshone-Benewah Forest Collaborative
9. Targhee Forest Collaborative



## Document 3: Outreach Letter

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Hello (Collaborative group members),

My name is Shauni Seccombe and I am a National Forest Foundation (NFF) Fellow that will be conducting a **SWOT analysis** of collaborative groups this summer. This analysis will look specifically at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats faced by collaborative groups in Idaho and Montana.

The primary goals of this project include:

- Identify and assess the SWOT elements experienced by collaborative groups in MT and ID
- Identify themes of common collaborative needs
- Offer recommendations to address identified needs

**In order to gain these insights, we are looking to hold interviews with current members of forest collaborative groups.** As members of the [Name of Collaborative], we'd like to invite you and your organization to participate.

Your involvement within this process would consist of:

1. Selecting one or more representatives from your collaborative to participate in a one-on-one or small group interview.
2. Participation in a 60-minute interview, to be held over zoom or phone call.
3. *If needed:* Have a follow-up conversation to clarify interview responses, or to engage with a few follow-up questions.

If you are interested, please **respond to this email confirming your collaborative's participation** and then **select an interview day and time** using the following Doodle Poll:

<https://doodle.com/poll/6snceq6snbefc7mt>

### Timeline

The interviews will be scheduled between now and August, with a draft report planned for October. To aid in your organization's preparations, we will send out the list of interview questions ahead of time.

With any questions, please feel free to reach out to me directly, or to Leah Zamesnik, NFF Partnership Coordinator, at [lzamesnik@nationalforests.org](mailto:lzamesnik@nationalforests.org), as she will also be assisting with these interviews.

Thank you,  
Shauni

### **Shauni Seccombe**

Conservation Connect Fellow - National Forest Foundation  
[sseccombe@nationalforests.org](mailto:sseccombe@nationalforests.org)



## Document 4: SWOT Interview Questions

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### SWOT Analysis of Collaborative Groups - Interview National Forest Foundation

Thank you for participating in this SWOT analysis interview. This analysis will look specifically at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats faced by collaborative groups in Idaho and Montana. As representatives of a collaborative group, each of your responses will be confidential, as our report will document common themes of needs within the collaborative groups in an anonymous manner.

We will be asking one interviewee from each collaborative group to fill out a brief post-interview survey. This survey will help us capture some supplementary information while providing a clear avenue for additional thoughts or feedback from the group. Thank you for your participation!

#### Organizational Questions

1. Could you describe the purpose of your collaborative group? Goals?
2. Do you have any way of measuring how you make progress towards those goals? (Forms of assessment, evaluation tools, etc.)
3. Could you explain your collaborative process?
  - a. How do you reach agreement?
4. How do you prioritize your work?
5. Can you describe your collaborative's implementation capacity?
6. What have been the main products or results of the collaborative's efforts?
7. How does your collaborative define success?

#### SWOT

8. What internal strengths have led to your collaborative's success?
9. What internal barriers are experienced by your collaborative currently, and what barriers does it anticipate in the future?
10. What external challenges have hindered your collaborative process?
11. What resources have you found to be helpful in addressing challenges in the past? What resources would be helpful?

#### Concluding

12. Can you identify any interests or project work that your collaborative group would like to include given additional capacity?
13. Is there anything else you would like to add?



## Document 5: Optional Post-Interview Survey

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### Post-Interview Survey

Thank you for participating in the SWOT analysis interview. As a way to help us capture some supplementary information while providing a clear avenue for additional thoughts or feedback from the group, we'd like to ask you to please complete this survey.

As a representative of a collaborative group, each of your responses will be confidential, as our report will document common themes of needs within the collaborative groups in an anonymous manner.

With any questions, feel free to reach out to Shauni Seccombe ([sseccombe@nationalforest.org](mailto:sseccombe@nationalforest.org)) or Leah Zamesnik ([lzamesnik@nationalforests.org](mailto:lzamesnik@nationalforests.org)). Thank you for your participation!

#### 1) What is the name of your collaborative group?

#### 2) How long has the group been convening regularly?

- A. Less than two years
- B. 2 to 5 years
- C. 5 to 10 years
- D. 10 to 15 years
- E. 15 to 20 years
- F. More than 20 years

#### 3) How many members does the collaborative currently have?

#### 4) What interests are represented among the participants in the collaborative?

- A. Private Landowners
- B. Federal Agency
- C. State Agency
- D. Tribal Government
- E. Tribal Non-Governmental Organization
- F. County Government
- G. Local Government
- H. Local Non-Government Organization
- I. Non-governmental Conservation Organization



- J. Local Business Interests
- K. Academic
- L. Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

**5) What issues or challenges are being addressed by the collaboration or have been addressed in the past? (please circle all that apply)**

- A. Forest Health
- B. Rural Economy/Jobs
- C. Invasive Species or Weeds
- D. Wildlife Conservation
- E. Fish Conservation
- F. Wildfire
- G. Infrastructure (e.g. dams, culverts, fences, road crossings, etc.)
- H. Rangeland Health/Productivity
- I. Water Quality
- J. Water Quantity
- K. Recreational Access
- L. Protection of Cultural Resources
- M. Incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge
- N. Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

**6) Who or how is the collaboration coordinated or facilitated? (please circle the best answer)**

- A. Stand-alone organization - paid or volunteer member
- B. Coordinator/facilitator employed by soil and water conservation district
- C. Coordinator/facilitator employed by government agency (other than conservation district)
- D. Coordinator/facilitator works for non-governmental organization
- E. Coordinator/facilitator is contracted to private firm or individual
- F. Coordination or facilitation role rotates among partners
- G. Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

**7) How is the collaborative effort organized or governed? (please circle the best answer)**

- A. Stand-alone organization governed by board
- B. Written rules/regulation from local/state/federal program, entity or legislation
- C. Informal steering committee no written document or MOU/MOA
- D. Formal steering committee with written document or MOU/MOA
- E. No formalizing document or steering committee



F. Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

**8) Rank the overall ability of your collaborative to reach agreements based on shared interests**

- A. Always
- B. Most of the time
- C. Sometimes
- D. Rarely
- E. Never

**9) Please share any other thoughts on your collaborative's process or needs, as well as any resources that you'd like to share.**

Thank you for your participation!

