

Collaborative Restoration Workshop

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When summer fieldwork, monitoring, and project implementation on National Forest System (NFS) lands commence, partners and agency staff celebrate the final stages of restoration work. The path to on-the-ground accomplishments may have been a contentious, collaborative, or innovative one that stretched the boundaries of restoration. Yet as we witness years of planning and collaboration become reality on the ground and in waterways, the efforts are paying off.

Similarly, the National Forest Foundation (NFF) celebrates the path to the first national *Collaborative Restoration Workshop*. Collaboration defined the yearlong process to organize the *Workshop*. Over the last year, the NFF organized the *Workshop* in partnership with staff from the U.S. Forest Service. Nineteen advisory committee members from non-governmental organizations and Forest Service departments – people on the forefront of collaborative restoration – identified overarching objectives from a national vantage point. Nearly 60 people from diverse affiliations pooled knowledge to frame stimulating discussions around the themes of science and action, planning, implementation, monitoring, collaboration and engagement, and the future of collaborative stewardship. The committees received numerous proposals for concurrent session topics and speakers. Ultimately, 105 individuals presented on a panel or moderated discussions. Twenty-six shared research and project posters.

With the rich source of material from session notes and presentations, the NFF captured key themes, lessons, and resources resulting from this exciting few days of people coming together. We did not attempt to capture every detail. Our objective was to summarize, in an accessible, immediately useful format, the tremendous learning that flowed throughout the *Workshop*.

Themes and Highlights

Participants openly shared ideas about the best and worst of collaborative restoration during the *Collaborative Restoration Workshop*. In their respective keynote addresses, NFF President Bill Possiel, Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell, and USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Robert Bonnie challenged participants to learn, network, and improve their capacity to advance collaborative restoration. During smaller breakout sessions, participants dove into deep and relevant discussions about collaborative restoration strategies. We were thrilled to see everyone who attended bring the *Workshop* themes to life through question-and-answer time, hallway exchanges, and conversations over coffee.

Throughout the *Workshop*, participants identified barriers and captured restoration successes, lessons, best practices, and tools. Several overarching themes emerged:

Collaboration is the new norm. Through numerous examples, participants illustrated the successes and opportunities stemming from collaboration on NFS lands. The *Workshop* provided a snapshot of collaboration occurring on and around NFS lands, including more insight about the myriad of range, forest, watershed, and fire collaboratives operating across the country. During the *Workshop* participants strategized about resource-specific *Workshops*, data-sharing systems, and ways to connect collaborative efforts.

Who is collaborating? How can we diversify? As collaborative models replicate across the country, it's important to take a hard look at who is at the collaborative table. Participants pointed out that partners and agencies must find creative ways to engage youth, reach out to businesses, expand tribal partnerships, involve government representatives across jurisdictions, and sustain the participation of wood products industry representatives.



Capacity challenges require creativity. Participants called for more collaboration. Various dialogues demonstrated collaboration is a proven tool to address management challenges. At the same time, Forest Service staffing levels in non-fire program areas have shifted dramatically since the 1990s. The Forest Service sometimes struggles to meet expectations for collaborative participation. On the other side, nonprofit partners face similar capacity issues as the Forest Service. Collaborative groups need additional capacity to convene meetings, facilitate discussions, and engage in project planning, implementation, and monitoring. Collaboration needs systematic support from agencies, philanthropic partners, and the business community to continue pushing the envelope.

Restoration is not the song everyone sings. Participants challenged the concept of restoration as the guidepost for forest management. Speakers discussed other key guideposts such as resiliency, sustainable recreation, and watershed recovery, leading participants to think deeply about terminology and the implications.

Implementation requires a new skill set. As the practice of collaborative restoration advances, more projects are moving from planning and analysis into the implementation phase. At the *Workshop* we heard that partners and agency staff must bolster our collective knowledge about implementation. We must design innovative partnerships to accomplish implementation more efficiently. We must also encourage collaboration during implementation, not just in planning.

Data and information is not enough to drive collaborative restoration. Personal relationships are critical components of scientific partnerships. Collaborative restoration efforts have realized success by employing joint fact-finding, multiparty monitoring, agency-to-agency communication, and other methods to share information. *Workshop* participants frequently concluded sharing information and data are building-blocks for trust.

Radical transparency is a new goal. Through various examples – forest plan revision processes, mid-term prioritization efforts, open interdisciplinary team meetings, and more – we learned that Forest Service units who embrace transparency are moving closer to the ideal of collaborative problem solving. Examples show that transparency is breaking barriers and supporting efficiencies. When Forest Service units embrace transparency, collaborative groups get to know Forest Service staff as people. Citizens begin to understand the processes (and challenges) the Forest Service is working through.

Collaboration is a strategy, not a silver bullet. Collaboration is working. From the Blue Mountains of Oregon to the Blue Ridge of North Carolina, the movement is full of successful examples. At the same time, collaboration is not the right tool for every situation. Through discussions about ripeness, definitions of collaboration in the 2014 Farm Bill and 2012 Planning Rule, and conversations about cross-boundary partnerships, participants challenged the limitations and opportunities associated with formal collaborative groups, vigorous public engagement processes, and everything in between.

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The 2016 *Collaborative Restoration Workshop* was a forum for sharing innovative approaches to collaborative restoration and lessons about planning, implementing, and monitoring restoration efforts on and around NFS lands. Though we covered an enormous amount of ground during the *Workshop*, many of the discussions bore new ideas and challenges. To dive deeper into individual session summaries, please go to www.nationalforests.org/crw.

Now is the time to work together to harness the energy from the *Workshop* to improve the practice and impact of collaborative restoration across the country. We hope this accounting of the discussions at the *Workshop* provides tools and resources to help you jumpstart your next steps.

