

Collaborative Restoration Workshop

National Forest Foundation | April 2016

Monitoring | Adaptive Management: Thinking Outside the Box

Key Topics: Adaptive Management

Speakers

- **Ayn Shlisky**, Eastside Restoration Team Lead, Umatilla National Forest, USFS
- **John Stanturf**, Senior Scientist, Southern Research Station, USFS
- **McRee Anderson**, Fire Restoration Program Director, The Nature Conservancy
- **Gregg Simonds**, Consultant and Ranch Manager, Open Range Consulting

Overview

The panel explored the benefits and barriers of Adaptive Management (AM). At its best, AM is a management process that can effectively change methods and schedules in response to conditions encountered during implementation. This level of flexibility in management requires a great deal of preparation, including a process of problem-framing, documentation and monitoring procedures, and assessment and evaluation processes. Below is a summary of common points made by the panel.

What is Adaptive Management?

- Not a single strategy – AM is about embracing learning. It is not a matter of applying one specific implementation strategy. Rather, adaptive management is about including robust monitoring and implementation flexibility into every strategy.
- Experimental – Effective AM treats each new management strategy as an experiment. This means designing the implementation process with very clear goals, measurable objectives, and relevant monitoring practices built-in throughout. However, AM is often more flexible than a strict research project. AM is about quickly responding to good feedback, not simply documenting it for research.

Collaboration in Adaptive Management

- Better monitoring through collaboration – In practice, AM is largely based on agency-specific monitoring systems and reporting required by policy, law, regulation, or funding availability (e.g., CFLRP monitoring). However, using facilitated, multi-party learning networks that go beyond requirements to focus on key ecological and social assumptions underlying project decisions can greatly improve adaptive management.
- Fostering Collaborative Monitoring – Robust monitoring will often require partnerships in order to increase monitoring capacity. To build these partnerships and create community buy-in for the monitoring process, it is important to show how monitoring results will be incorporated into management decisions. The more managers can show that decisions will be adaptive in response to monitoring, the more likely it will be for partners and the larger community to support the process. Field trips to project areas and quantified reports are great tools for communicating the AM process to partners.
- Better Relationships – In addition to a better monitoring process, engaging the community and partners in the learning process also brings stakeholders together in a shared understanding and shared purpose. This can help resolve planning issues and build trust.



Barriers to Adaptive Management

- Lack of resources or will to go beyond monitoring required by policy, law, or regulation
- Resistance to change or risk aversion
- Poor communication in the agency and with partners
- Lack of accountability for learning
- The size, budgeting processes, and culture of the agency makes it difficult to be flexible – change takes time, effort, and sometimes pushing back on agency norms.

General Advice brought up in the Discussion

- **Be Inclusive** – Bring in diverse perspectives from everyone who cares about the project. Many issues are around social conflict, miscommunication, and misperception. The more AM becomes a public discussion, the more likely common ground will be found.
- **Be Clear** – The AM process must define clear goals, measurable objectives, and research protocols. More effort should go into defining goals and objectives and getting commitment on the front end of the collaborative process. One promising approach is *systematic review* of management techniques. There are very explicit methods already in place for conducting systematic reviews.
- **Be Precise** – How well you measure determines how well you manage. Moreover, it determines how well you are able to communicate effectiveness and adaptability to partners.

