

Collaborative Restoration Workshop

National Forest Foundation | April 2016

Planning | Planning & NEPA at the Project Level

Speakers

- **Liz Johnson-Gebhardt**, Executive Director, Priest Community Forest Connection
- **Ryan Foote**, Deputy District Ranger, Idaho Panhandle National Forest, U.S. Forest Service
- **Rebecca Bartol**, Environmental Coordinator, Superior National Forest, U.S. Forest Service
- **Russ Vaagen**, Vice President, Vaagen Brother's Lumber

Overview

Speakers in this session described innovative National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) projects with collaborative components, including the Mill Creek A to Z Stewardship Project on the Colville National Forest, Bottom Canyon on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest, and the North Shore Restoration Project on the Superior National Forest.

Ryan Foote and Liz Johnson-Gebhardt – Bottom Canyon Project, Idaho Panhandle National Forest

The Bottom Canyon project is an 11,000-acre restoration project on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest (IPNF) aimed at improving resiliency, contributing to socioeconomic sustainability, and improving watershed health. The project is one of the first in the country developed using authorities from the 2012 Farm Bill. IPNF staff developed the project with the Panhandle Forest Collaborative (PFC), with facilitation assistance from the National Forest Foundation. Through successful collaboration, the PFC developed an alternative to the original proposal, in which they recommended that the IPNF expand the treatment area from approximately 1,400 to 3,830 acres. During the process, the District Ranger held the PFC accountable to come prepared to meetings and adhere to the timeline, which increased the PFC's ownership in the project and increased public access to the project development process.

Rebecca Bartol – North Shore Restoration Project, Superior National Forest

The Superior National Forest (SNF) developed the North Shore Restoration Project through a collaborative effort with the North Shore Forest Collaborative (NSFC). To address challenges related to management across public land jurisdictions and private lands, collaborative members came from organizations that have management, assessment, or regulatory functions in the project area, or own land within or near the North Shore collaborative area on the Superior National Forest. The NSFC wanted to address the need for greater diversity on the landscape. The SNF used an adaptive management framework, focusing on innovative “if, then” statements and including more monitoring than usual. The SNF's interdisciplinary team streamlined development of the proposed action, and as a result was able to treat 2-3 times more acres than originally considered.

Russ Vaagen – Mill Creek A-Z Project, Colville National Forest

Through *experimental* stewardship contracting on the Colville National Forest (CNF), the Mill Creek A-Z Project represents a new way of thinking. The Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition developed the project, along with the CNF, as a way to expand the capacity of the CNF by treating more acres – within the existing legal framework – without larger budgets and additional pressure on Forest Service staff. In 2013 the CNF located the project area, created an RFP for NEPA analysis, and selected Vaagen



Brothers Lumber's proposal as the best value. Vaagen Brothers contacted with Kramer Fish Science as a 3rd party contractor to complete the NEPA analysis and sale prep work on 54,000 acres. The CNF recently signed the decision notice. There were some objections; objectors hoped for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) instead of an Environmental Assessment (EA). Vaagen Brother's Lumber is still optimistic that work will start in the summer of 2016, and believes that Kramer Fish Science has been held to a very high standard.

Lessons

- Through mutual accountability, clear communication, and strong trust, leadership from the IPNF and PFC successfully collaborated on one the first 2012 Farm Bill projects in the county.
- A joint fact-finding panel helped the PFC discuss through science-based concerns and ultimately recommend a larger treatment area than originally proposed.
- The PFC designed one point of contact from the group and one from the Forest Service to allow for clear and effective communication.
- Frequent field trips helped the PFC and IPNF build relationships.
- Patience and persistence is important when navigating the relationship between two agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- The North Shore Restoration Project was litigated because of a lack of specificity about the adaptive management monitoring measures (specifically the trigger points) in the NEPA analysis. However, monitoring information was included in the implementation guide. The lesson is to include all of the necessary detail in the NEPA documentation – the information that the litigators wanted had already been developed.
- It is important to stay knowledgeable of the National Forest's priorities and potential future direction when designing projects.
- Collaboration is not always the best tool; not every project needs collaboration. However, collaboration does have the potential to expedite the NEPA process.

Resources

- [Climate Change Adaptation Workbook – Short Form](#) (From the North Shore Restoration Project)
- [Adaptive Management and Monitoring – Appendix E with trigger points](#) (From the North Shore Restoration Project)
- [Climate Change Response Framework](#) (From the North Shore Restoration Project)
- [North Shore Forest Collaborative](#)
- [Panhandle Forest Collaborative](#)
- [Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition](#)

