

Collaborative Restoration Workshop

National Forest Foundation | April 2016

Collaboration & Engagement | Stories from the Front Lines: Nurturing a Collaborative Effort

Key Topics: Cross-Boundary Partnership, Collaborative Process

Speakers

- **Darrin Kelly**, Partnership Coordinator, Monongahela National Forest, USFS
- **Gary Berti**, Director, Eastern Home Rivers Initiative, Trout Unlimited
- **Keith Fisher**, Director of Conservation Programs, West Virginia, The Nature Conservancy
- **Todd Miller**, Director of Aquatic Restoration, Canaan Valley Institute

Overview

This session covered the story of the West Virginia Restoration Venture (WVRV). Presenters shared their experience in the project, including how the stakeholders came together, important considerations made by members while launching and nurturing the effort, the decision-making structure, the role of the Forest Service, overcoming challenges, and thoughts on the group's future.

Origins of the Project

In 2014, three U.S. Forest Service leaders in the Northeast and Midwest along with the President of the Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters signed a statement of intent to collaborate across land ownership and organizational boundaries on conservation projects. That same year, the Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) began funding projects through the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership. The West Virginia Restoration Venture (WVRV) was one of the first projects funded through this initiative, and has successfully implemented a variety of land management activities across ownership boundaries.

The West Virginia Restoration Venture (WVRV) provided the opportunity for the Monongahela National Forest to expand ongoing collaborative work with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to leverage a strong network of existing partnerships to maximize landscape-scale restoration projects. NRCS and the Forest Service are working with Trout Unlimited (TU), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Canaan Valley Institute (CVI), the West Virginia Division of Forestry (DOF), and other organizations to expand their efforts to restore ecosystems. The partners are pursuing restoration activities that address habitat connectivity, soil health, climate resiliency, carbon sequestration, water quality, at-risk species habitat, early successional habitat, wetlands, aquatic habitat, and watersheds. The WVRV is working to build a stronger restoration economy, both by providing economic opportunities and engaging local communities in learning about all aspects of their local forests and the restoration goals.

This project has been a culmination of partnerships that have been building over the last 10 years. As each organization investigated landscape-scale ecological issues, especially the spread of invasive species and the restoration of watersheds, they began to see the need to coordinate restoration efforts across boundaries and jurisdictions. Their partnerships achieved new levels of cohesion and coordination as they focused on learning together through experimental management and supported each other with on-the-ground projects.



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Project Activity

Specific descriptions of project activities can be found in the resources below, especially in “WVRV Restoration Success Stories.” Many of the same initiatives are carried out throughout the forest, and often by different partner organizations. Projects include:

- Red Spruce planting throughout the forest to restore former red spruce ecosystems.
- Restoration of heavily timbered and coal-mined lands, including deep ripping of compacted soils, wetland creation, and native vegetation planting, especially red spruce.
- Rangeland Improvements, including fencing riparian areas to decrease erosion and reclaiming overgrown pasture land. Reclaimed pastures are managed to create a variety of early successional habitats that blend gradually into forested areas.
- Native tree and shrub planting along deforested riparian areas. Efforts focus on providing stream shading and stream bank stabilization, and restoring cold-water habitats for native brook trout.
- Adding large woody material (LWM) to streams and riparian areas to mimic ecosystem processes that naturally create and sustain healthy aquatic habitats.
- Restructuring road stream crossings to improve connectivity for aquatic organism passage.
- Road decommissioning and restoration of hillslope contours.

Lessons from Panel Discussion

- Successes have been a result of:
 - Planning toward clear landscape-scale goals, particularly for high-elevation spruce forests.
 - Incorporating science and stakeholders into ongoing decision-making.
 - A high level of trust and cooperation between partners.
 - The flexibility to work under agreements in which each partner carries out its organizational mission, rather than only partnering through individual project contracts.
 - Creative problem-solving through partnerships based on an understanding of strengths and weaknesses.
- The partners identify the WVRV as a landscape-scale partnership, not a collaborative restoration effort.
- Capacity of the partners has grown over time by hiring great staff, using sound science, and providing great service.

Resources

- [Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership Project, FY 2015 Progress Report](#)
- [WVRV Restoration Success Stories](#)
- [The Central Appalachian Spruce Restoration Initiative \(CASRI\), Year-End Review](#)
- [The Potomac Highlands Cooperative Weed and Pest Management Area \(CWPMA\), Year-End Review](#)



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