

EADM

Environmental Analysis
and Decision Making

Regional Partner
Roundtables:

**National
Findings**

AND

**Leverage
Points**

May 2018



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ABSTRACT

The USDA Forest Service asked the National Forest Foundation to assist in hosting ten Regional Partner Roundtables focused on Environmental Analysis and Decision Making. These Roundtables were held across the country in each of the nine USFS regions and the Washington Office to collect diverse partner feedback on EADM processes at the local, regional and national scales. The Agency invited over 1,500 representatives of highly engaged non-governmental organizations, tribes, governmental entities and the business community to the Roundtables, and nearly 600 partners representing 400 unique organizations participated.

At every Roundtable, partners demonstrated that they are fiercely committed to National Forest System lands, and are sophisticated in their understanding of the challenges both internal and external to the Agency in managing and stewarding those lands. The major message from partner input is that transformational change for both the land and communities must begin with cultural change away from risk aversion and fear of litigation, and toward truly embracing partnerships and collaboration consistently across all levels of the Agency. The “culture of mobility” in which the USFS incentivizes frequent employee movement for career advancement interferes with EADM processes, relationships with community members, and understanding of local ecological and socioeconomic conditions. Partners expressed that these cultural changes must happen to ensure successful implementation of regulatory shifts aimed at increasing efficiency or effectiveness. The National Forest Foundation highlights nine topic areas that emerged from the Roundtables, and describes both perceptions of the challenges and leverage points for action. The nine topic areas are: A) Agency Culture, B) Resource Conflict, C) Personnel Policies and Staffing Decisions, D) Collaboration and Partnerships, E) Tribal, Governmental, and Interagency Consultation, F) Capacity and Resources, G) Analysis Documents and Specialist Reports, H) Scale Issues in Environmental Analysis and Decision Making, and I) Research and Science.



INTRODUCTION

What is the Environmental Analysis and Decision Making Change Effort?

The USDA Forest Service (USFS or Agency) has launched an Agency-wide effort to improve processes related to Environmental Analysis and Decision Making (EADM). The Agency uses environmental analysis to assess and track compliance with laws, including the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Endangered Species Act.

The goal of the EADM change effort is to increase the health, diversity, resilience, and productivity of National Forests and Grasslands by achieving more on-the-ground accomplishments with efficiency and reduced cost. As the USFS works with its partners to improve EADM, the Agency intends to improve the way it delivers high-quality, science-based environmental analysis to protect the environment and communities in accordance with existing laws and policies.

Internally, the USFS has identified a number of impediments to efficient and effective implementation of work on the ground, including: lengthy environmental analysis processes and unwieldy documents, gaps in skills and associated training, reduced budgets and increasing costs of fire response.

The USFS aims to decrease cost and increase the efficiency of EADM processes by 20% by 2019. In working toward this goal, potential actions the Agency has already identified include:

- Training Agency subject-matter experts on contemporary approaches to implementing NEPA and other environmental laws.
- Reforming compliance policies under NEPA and other laws by expanding use of categorical exclusions (CEs), capitalizing on process efficiencies, and enhancing coordination with other agencies.

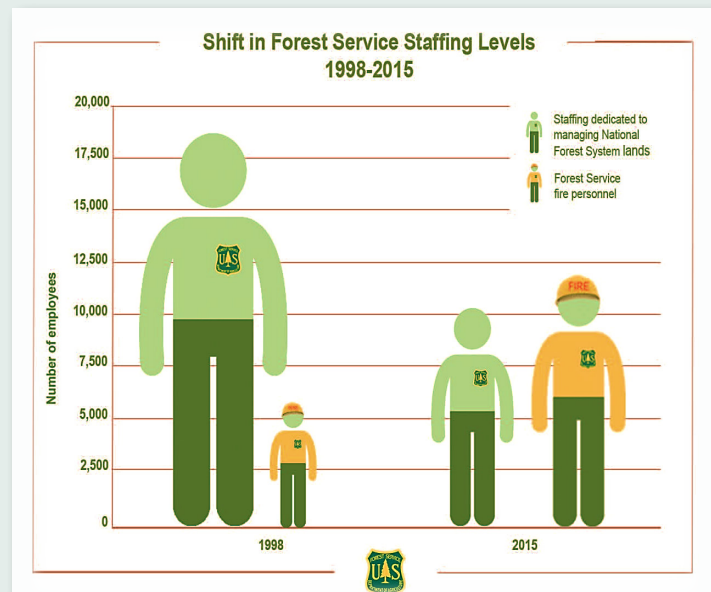
- Standardizing approaches and electronic templates for CEs, environmental assessments (EAs), and administrative records.

Leaders at all levels of the USFS are fully engaged in this effort and challenging USFS employees to be creative, design new ways to advance the USFS mission and embrace change while maintaining science-based, high-quality analysis that reflects USFS land management responsibilities. To this end, employees were recruited from all USFS levels to form EADM Cadres that are tasked with developing and implementing change efforts in each local USFS unit; within USFS regions, stations, and areas; and at USFS headquarters. The Agency is creating multiple collective learning opportunities to tap into the Cadres' knowledge, expertise, innovative ideas, and networks in support of these changes.

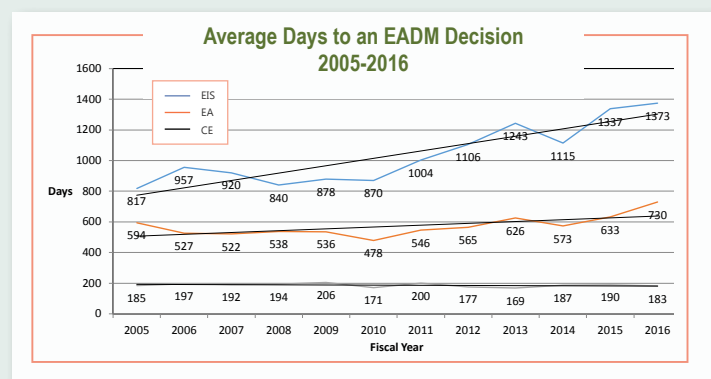
Why Now?

The USFS has explored opportunities to improve EADM for over thirty years, and there are compelling reasons to act now:

- An estimated 6,000-plus special use permits await completion nation-wide, a backlog that impacts more than 7,000 businesses and 120,000 jobs.
- Over 80 million acres of National Forest System lands need cost-effective fire and disease risk mitigation.
- The non-fire workforce is at its lowest capacity in years.
- A steady increase in timelines for conducting environmental analysis, with an average of two years for an environmental assessment (EA) and four years for an environmental impact statement (EIS).



Source: USDA Forest Service National EADM Roundtable Presentation





REGIONAL EADM PARTNER ROUNDTABLES

Within the EADM change effort, USFS leadership recognized that partners and the public can offer perspectives and lessons that complement the Agency’s internal experiences—leading to greater creativity, cost-savings and capture of talent/capacity. To support this recognition, the USFS asked the National Forest Foundation to assist in hosting ten Regional EADM Partner Roundtables¹ across the country in February and March 2018. The objective of these Roundtables was to collect diverse partner feedback on EADM processes at the local, regional and national scales. The National Forest Foundation and USFS worked closely together to plan, coordinate, facilitate and report on these Roundtables.

Meeting Design

All Roundtables included the following key components:

- A national EADM overview presentation delivered by USFS Washington Office Leadership.
- Region-wide perspectives on EADM from the Regional Forester or designee.
- Small and large group discussions on issues/opportunities with partners and Regional EADM Cadre members.
- Documentation of discussion points for reporting purposes.
- Organizational support and neutral facilitation by the National Forest Foundation.

¹ Please note that Roundtables were convened in all nine USFS regions and in Washington, D.C. In this report we refer to them all as the Regional EADM Partner Roundtables.

Participation

at Regional EADM Partner Roundtables

- Over 1,500 partners were invited to the Roundtables; nearly 600 partners participated
- Close to 400 unique organizations participated
- The number of partners participating per Roundtable ranged from 26 to 208, an average of 35 partners per Roundtable.
- Of the 1,500 invited, close to 60 commented on the Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking regarding NEPA (25 of these attended a Roundtable).



Region 5 Roundtable

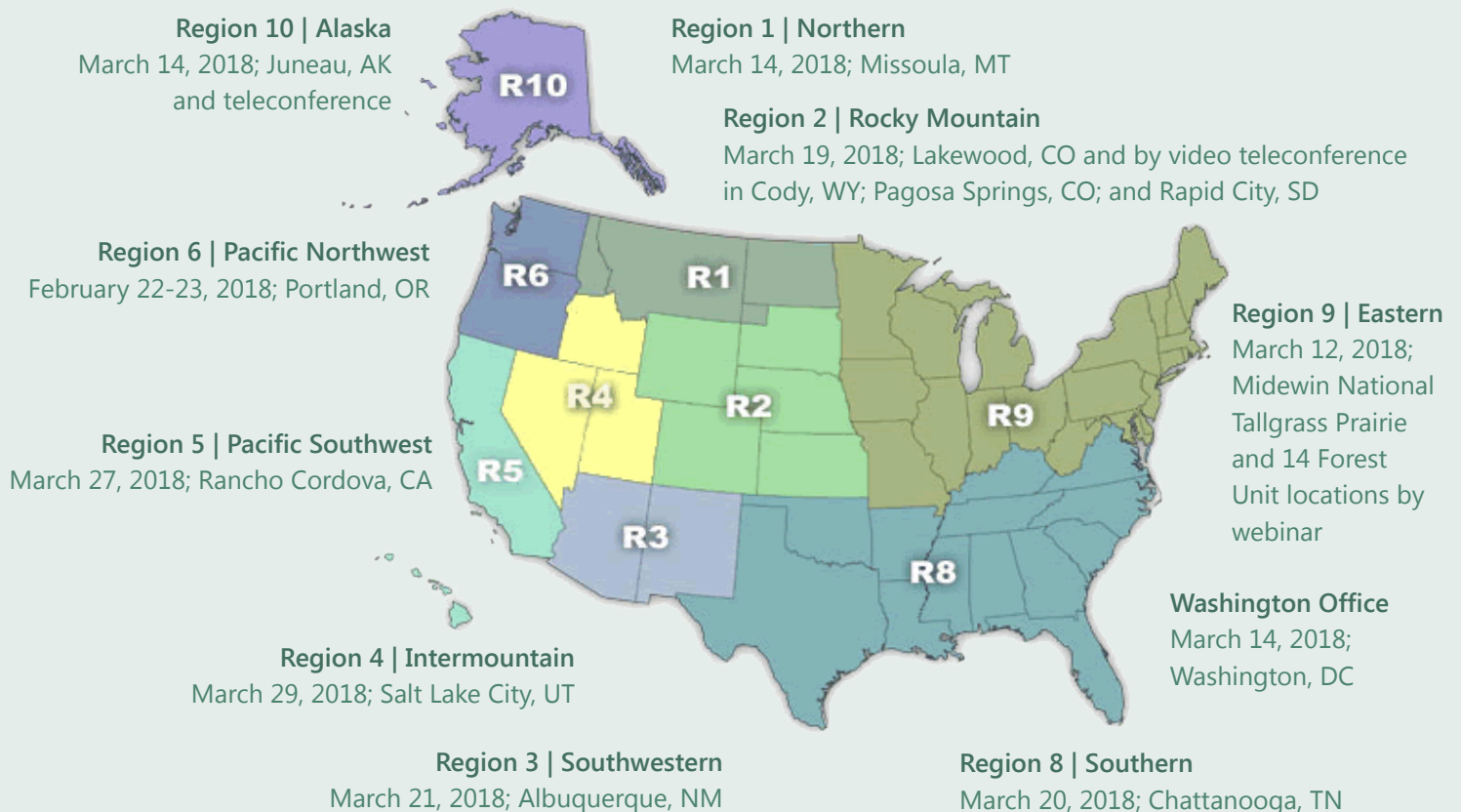


Region 3 Roundtable



Dates and Locations

of Regional EADM Partner Roundtables



Region 9 Roundtable



Region 10 Roundtable



Purposes of the Regional EADM Partner Roundtables:

- Share why changes are important for achieving the USDA Forest Service's mission
- Identify, discuss, and capture partner perceptions on barriers and solutions
- Explore what roles partners can play moving forward
- Support dialogue to strengthen relationships between partners and the USDA Forest Service
- Explain how partner inputs will be incorporated from the Roundtables and from participation in the formal rulemaking process

The messages delivered by USFS leadership offered an honest look at the challenges the USFS has identified in its workforce, funding, systems, and regulations – and issues inherent in meeting its unique multiple-use mission. The same key presentation points were shared at all of the Roundtables, and were important in setting the context early in the day to support partner and Agency discussion about challenges and potential solutions.

Teams consisting of National Forest Foundation staff and USFS staff from both the regions and the Washington Office customized the design of each of the ten Roundtables, but all sought to meet the same, nationally-identified purposes. Each region innovated to respond to its unique EADM concerns and mix of use and resource challenges in an effort to effectively engage partners.

Roundtable Outreach Strategies

The Roundtables were a major piece of USFS strategy to integrate the public and partners into its EADM effort. The Agency invited representatives of highly engaged non-governmental organizations, tribes, governmental entities and the business community to participate in the Roundtables. USFS also requested formal comments from all members of the public in response to an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR) in January 2018 regarding the National Environmental Policy Act, and is working toward issuing a proposed rule in the summer of 2018 for additional comment. The USFS may decide to initiate additional rulemakings or policy revisions as part of the EADM change effort.

These Roundtables helped effectively reach a different assembly of partners on the EADM change effort than those reached more traditionally through outreach and comment opportunities associated with the ANPR. In addition, these Roundtables supported important dialogue and feedback on broader issues and opportunities related to EADM—stimulating integrated discussion, candid dialogue, and bolstering

relationships across the country.

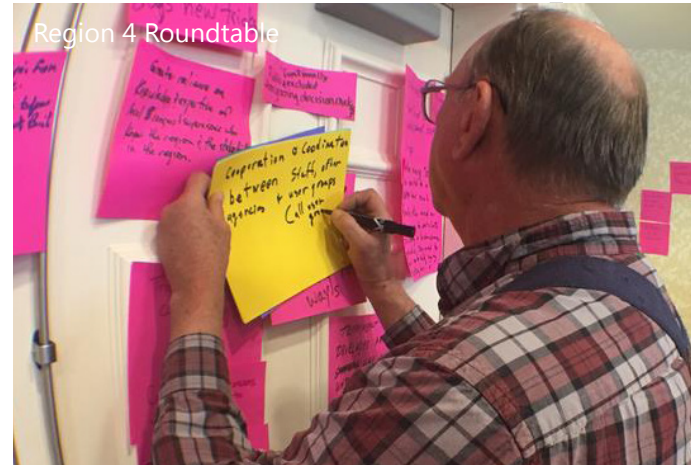
While the National Forest Foundation provided lead facilitation for each of the Roundtables, USFS staff played critical roles in facilitating small group discussion, note-taking and reviews of summary reports. The National Forest Foundation prepared a summary report for each Roundtable as well as this national report that synthesizes themes emerging from partner input at all of the Roundtables. The regional reports are rich in content due to the depth of interactive USFS-partner discussion at the Roundtables, and characterize partner-identified challenges and barriers, desired outcomes, and strategies, solutions and tools for making EADM processes more effective and efficient. The reports, national presentations and agendas are posted at www.nationalforests.org/EADM.

Regional Customizations

The **Pacific Northwest Region** held the first Roundtable and provided valuable lessons to inform the planning for the rest of the Roundtables, including having USFS leaders and EADM Cadre members engage in active listening and dialogue with partners. The Pacific Northwest Regional EADM Partner Roundtable chose a day and half meeting model and focused more time to generate ideas for how the Agency can continue to engage partners, and how the partners can assist by leveraging their networks and helping to expand understanding of the EADM change effort.

The design of the **Southwestern Region** EADM Partner Roundtable intended to build on an EADM dialogue with partners held in November 2017. In their presentation of regional perspectives, USFS leaders shared partner concerns heard previously and established a foundation to advance small group discussions at the Roundtable.

Both the **Rocky Mountain** and **Pacific Southwest Regions** focused small group discussions on forest and grassland resources, with topics like vegetation, water, wildlife, and recreation as the context for identifying EADM challenges and solutions. This evoked the use of more specific examples where the USFS is challenged to meet its multiple-use mission by resolving conflict among user groups.



Rather than pre-determining topics for discussion, the **Northern Region** engaged partners in a series of small group exercises that enabled them to identify the priority challenges around which to build and vet potential strategies.

The **Intermountain Region** engaged partners in generating challenges and strategies for EADM improvement through a wall activity that got people up and moving to visually share their ideas (photos, page 9). Once ideas were up on the walls, participants prioritized key strategies to build on in table discussions.

The **Washington Office** chose to feature a speaker panel composed of partners with perspectives on EADM concerning ski areas, timber, and wildlife. Participants predominately represented national organizations that have a presence in Washington, DC.

The **Eastern Region** spans 20 states. Rather than holding their Roundtable in one location, they opted to convene partners at 15 different locations, using Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie as a base. Through a combination of remote communications technology and local in-person gatherings, the Eastern Region was able to facilitate accessibility of national messages and enable interactions with the local USFS leadership in group discussion across their whole region. The **Rocky Mountain** and **Alaska Regions** also took advantage of technology to offer video connections and/or teleconference options to partners unable to travel to the central Roundtable location.

Rather than defaulting to Atlanta, GA where their regional office is located, the **Southern Region** hosted their Roundtable in Chattanooga, TN, which is more central to their partner-base.





FINDINGS AND LEVERAGE POINTS

At every Roundtable, partners demonstrated that they are fiercely committed to National Forest System lands, and are sophisticated in their understanding of the challenges both internal and external to the Agency in managing and stewarding those lands. Partners engaged in wide-ranging and deep dialogue about where substantive change is needed. Participants also expressed an emphatic appreciation for the candid nature of the presentations delivered by USFS leadership, and the associated openness during question and answer periods and general discussion.

At many of the Roundtables, partners were asked to share their hopes and fears regarding the EADM change effort. The most commonly expressed fears were that “nothing will happen,” and that streamlining EADM processes is a proxy for increasing speed of analysis at the expense of quality. While partners recognized examples of excellent practice, leadership, and strengths within the USFS, in the Roundtable format they were asked to focus on challenges and correlating solutions.

In synthesizing the input received at the Roundtables, the National Forest Foundation identified nine major cross-cutting themes in which partners perceive challenges and associated leverage points:

- A. Agency Culture
- B. Resource Conflict
- C. Personnel Policies and Staffing Decisions
- D. Collaboration and Partnerships

- E. Tribal, Governmental, and Interagency Consultation
- F. Capacity and Resources
- G. Analysis Documents and Specialist Reports
- H. Scale Issues in Environmental Analysis and Decision Making
- I. Research and Science

These themes are interrelated, and all are important. The cumulative message from partner input at all of the Roundtables is that transformational change for both the land and communities must begin with a shift away from risk aversion and toward truly embracing partnerships and collaboration consistently across all levels of the Agency. Other systemic changes can follow.

Within each theme, the National Forest Foundation offers a synthesis of how partners at the Roundtables perceived problem areas, followed by leverage points for change.



A. AGENCY CULTURE

Perception of the Problem

A Fear of Risk Promotes a Focus on Process, not Outcomes

Partners feel the Agency defines project success as whether or not it is litigated. Although a very small percentage of decisions are successfully litigated nationwide (higher in some regions than others), partners observed that USFS staff are fearful of making decisions based on imperfect information. Minimal litigation or objection is viewed as a positive outcome in terms of a project moving to implementation, but the negative costs of defensive over-analysis, unwieldy documentation, and narrowing the scope of projects in order to “fly under the radar” of litigants are usually not considered. Partners pointed to the significant ecological, economic, and social impacts that can result from delayed action or inaction.

Many expressed a need for the Agency to define success by the degree of desired outcome achieved in restoration, forest health, wildlife habitat, or recreation. Partners described frustration with uneven communication from the Agency regarding decisions, and a desire to see innovation, risk-taking and effective risk management rewarded and encouraged.

Lack of Consistency

Both USFS leadership and partners spoke to an inconsistency in how policies are interpreted, applied, and implemented at units across the country due to the cultural norms that guide how the Agency operates and how it relates to its public. The history of remote ranger stations has led to persistent autonomy at the district and forest levels, despite changes in technology and current national directives.

Leverage Points

- **Engage with partners and collaborative groups early and at multiple levels to: A) Build joint USFS and community investment and shared risk in project outcomes, B) Enlarge zones of agreement, C) Generate support for integrated objectives, and D) Create social license for USFS management strategies.**
- **Model transparency in communications, project direction, and process considerations from the top of the USFS leadership through to the district level.**
- **Incorporate lessons learned from both successes and failures into tools, trainings, workshops, and peer-to-peer coaching.**
- **Encourage risk-taking, experimentation and transparency by instituting rewards for employees who seek to actively learn from failures or obstacles.**

B. RESOURCE CONFLICT

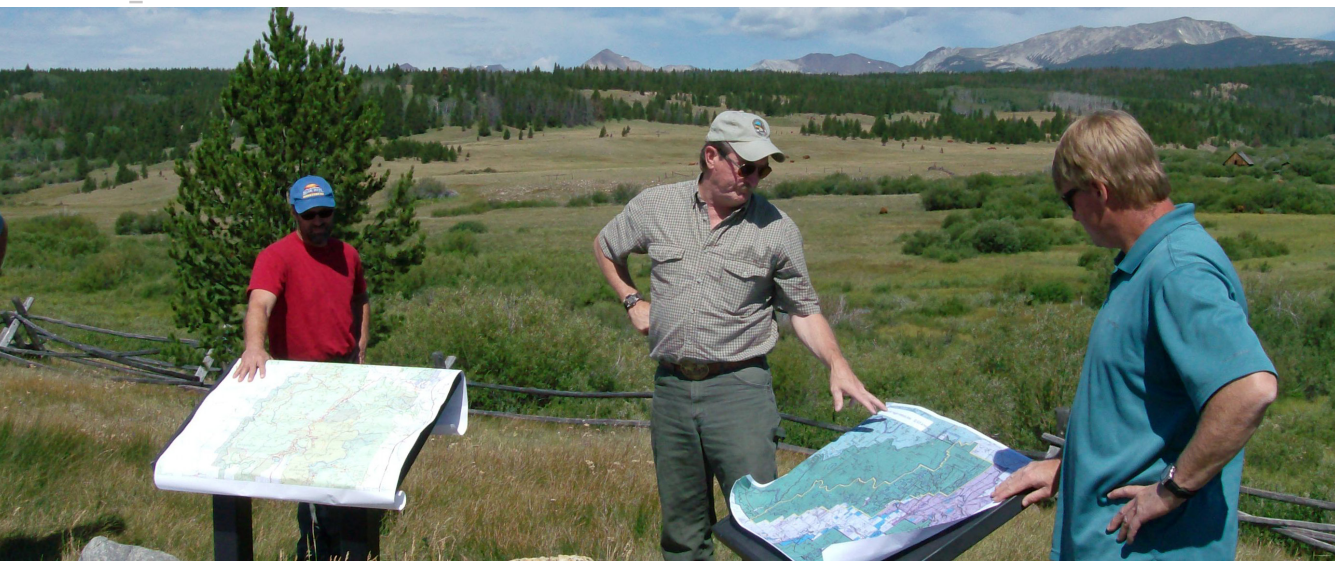
Perception of the Problem

Partners understand that the National Forest System is managed for multiple uses and benefits, meaning that the USFS is charged with determining how to best achieve “the greatest good” while making trade-offs between different resources and uses. With this attention to multiple-use, conflicts can arise among stakeholders and resource user groups. This tension further complicates associated EADM processes as the Agency attempts to balance interests.

Partners raised concerns that cross-boundary issues like climate change, invasive species, and wildlife habitat are not well managed or planned for. With the heavy demand of staff time and funding toward fire response, other resource areas experience funding and staffing shortages.

Leverage Points

- Be willing to share ownership of the challenges associated with the Agency’s multiple-use mission, and invite partners into collaborative dialogue about trade-offs in resource management.
- Recognize the value of and invest in neutral third-party facilitators, collaborative processes and community-based collaborative groups to build understanding amongst partners and between the USFS and partners, enhance project creativity, and establish social license.
- Invest in improving management strategies, research, and partner networks around all lands restoration approaches.



C. PERSONNEL POLICIES AND STAFFING DECISIONS

Perception of the Problem

Partners commented on the USFS' practice of incentivizing employees to change positions and move frequently to gain breadth and depth of experience, and to gain responsibility. From the Agency perspective, this "culture of mobility" helps to: adequately prepare USFS employees to advance professionally; ensure employees are able to make unbiased and professional decisions in managing public lands; and builds consistency and shared culture across the agency. While moving employees to different units can support a transfer of good practices and new ideas, partner criticisms include that it also means that staff are on a frequent and steep learning curve to understand the relevant forest conditions, ecological systems, community interests and dynamics, as well as the USFS staff environment they are joining. Turnover, detail assignments and fire response often reduce productivity due to interruptions in project momentum and changes in project direction.

Turnover in USFS staff has significant impacts on partners. Local relationships become fractured and have to be rebuilt, taking time and efficiency from EADM processes and frustrating local partners.

Leverage Points

- Reduce the frequency of employee position changes, whether short- or long-term.
- Establish and require rigorous transition management for details and changes in position (turnover). Develop, train staff in using, and require on-boarding and off-boarding tools that support short- and long-term changes in staffing, as well as for transitions that occur when there is a permanent personnel change. The "handover memo" is one such tool, but is not enough on its own to effectively support smooth transitions.
- Use succession planning strategies or change hiring approaches to ensure overlap between incoming and outgoing staff. Communicate with partners about an impending change in staffing and develop a plan for maintaining project and relationship momentum.
- Institute opportunities for advancement in place at the local unit, including merit-based promotions.

D. COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Perception of the Problem

In the last ten to fifteen years, the USFS has recognized the opportunities offered by the rise of collaborative groups and collaborative processes in addressing resource management conflicts and building agreement in project design. Not all units, however, welcome collaboration, and there are many different perceptions of the characteristics of an effective collaborative process or collaborative group.

Partners expressed frustration that they are brought into discussions about projects after EADM has been initiated. Collaborative groups and other types of partners want to be involved before scoping begins, particularly during the project design phase. Even when collaborative groups have prioritized and developed agreement around potential projects at the district level, they often feel disenfranchised when those projects are not incorporated into planned programs of work and associated EADM.

Participants commented they experience inconsistencies across units in USFS transparency, willingness to accept external assistance, and communications with partners. They stated that external scientific and traditional ecological knowledge is not typically accepted in EADM or broadly used by the Agency.

Leverage Points

- **Commit fully to prioritizing, investing in, and valuing partnerships in EADM processes throughout the Agency.**
- **Invest in the organizational capacity of collaborative and community-based organizations, as well as those entities that support collaborative groups. Invest in neutral third-party facilitation to support rigorous, open and fair collaborative process, group balance across a diversity of interests, and group productivity.**
- **Invest in training in collaborative processes (for partners as well as Agency employees).**
- **Encourage development of contemporary communication and engagement methods with partners at all levels of the Agency (e.g. electronic partner contact lists, social media alerts, mobile applications for citizen science, and monitoring) about opportunities to engage in EADM.**

E. TRIBAL, GOVERNMENTAL, AND INTERAGENCY CONSULTATION

Perception of the Problem

Federal laws require multiple agencies to consult with each other about how the fish, wildlife and cultural resources on National Forests and Grasslands may be affected by an action. The USFS also consults and coordinates with federally-recognized tribes in government-to-government relationships.

Yet, the lack of adequate staffing, complexity of the issues, inconsistent approaches and late coordination has led to lengthy consultation processes. The USFS and its agency partners have not realized the potential for sharing interagency resources.

States perceive they are treated like ordinary partners and are underutilized despite the Good Neighbor Authority. County governments often feel their government knowledge and expertise is left untapped, and the coordination process is not understood or respected.

Leverage Points

- **Invest money and staff time to ensure that relationships with tribes, local and state governments, and other federal consulting agencies have the best potential to leverage what each entity can offer and that roles are clear.**
- **Reduce consultation time when projects are in their final stages by consistently involving the appropriate government colleagues in project design at the front end.**



F. CAPACITY AND RESOURCES

Perception of the Problem

Partners commented that training in project and personnel management, resource specializations, and EADM itself remains an unaddressed need throughout the USFS. Budget shortfalls and statutory mandates on funding for fire response, combined with a shortage of trained employees in areas other than fire and/or a frequent diversion of staff to emergency response or shifting priorities, hamper the ability of the Agency to make progress on other important forest and grassland resource management efforts. Moreover, the complexity of landscape-scale (e.g., climate, fuels, insects and disease) demands a high level of expertise and a deep knowledge of forest conditions at multiple levels of the Agency.

Partners shared that delays in EADM processes sometimes result in an inefficient use of partner funding and resources.

Partners recognize that USFS staffing levels are not adequate to meet the current demand for EADM. One example of this is the large backlog of special-use permits and long timeframe for processing. EADM timelines are often lengthened due to the need for hiring or on-boarding additional staff, including “holes” in interdisciplinary team specialist representation. The USFS also dedicates minimal human and funding resources to monitoring.

Small EADM projects seem to be managed similarly to larger ones, and partners commented that staff capacity does not appear to be deployed for efficiency.



Leverage Points

- Add capacity to forest-level staff through committed and specialized regional and national teams according to the need. Use contractors to fill gaps in specialist areas, or enter into partnerships where the agency and partners share mutual interests and mutual benefits.
- Develop systems to enable more universal acceptance of partner resources, for example explore expanded leverage of state capacity through use of the Good Neighbor Authority, or nonprofit partners through data collection and sharing.
- Integrate staff across forest, regional and Washington Office levels to inform policies and practice with real time information. Increase learning and reduce “reinventing the wheel.”

G. ANALYSIS DOCUMENTS AND SPECIALIST REPORTS

Perception of the Problem

Longer Documents Do Not Necessarily Equal Better Decisions

Federal environmental laws require analysis of the physical, biological, social and economic effects of an action. Risk aversion and a history of legal challenges to USFS decisions have led to the “bullet-proofing” of environmental analysis documents and specialist reports. EADM documents tend to be extremely long and hard to read – impacting public confidence in the eventual decision and how the analysis supports that decision (the number of pages does not always correlate with better decisions). Partners feel the complexity and size of analysis is often inconsistent with the complexity and size of the project. In addition,

partners perceive that data collection and analysis efforts are often duplicative of work previously done by the Agency or completed within the private sector. Partners also raised the concern that specialists address topics outside the scope of a particular project when conducting their analysis and writing reports.

Because EADM documents are often long and difficult to understand, the public has difficulty in effectively or efficiently responding to them within designated comment periods. NEPA is often blamed for these problems, when really it is not the law itself but the Agency’s process that is the cause.



Partners expressed a desire for more and better analysis so that they can trust proposed actions. While this reaction seems contradictory to the frustration with lengthy documents, it stems from the perception that the USFS is not focused on the right analysis. It also is a reaction to the bias of existing EADM processes toward the Agency operating in a closed and insular manner, rather than being open and transparent. Units rarely share “current thinking,” and instead prefer to release fully developed documents.

EADM Processes Hard for the Public to Track

Partners are challenged in tracking the progress of a project through EADM processes, due to complex steps, multiple actors, internal review processes, and inconsistency of information on the USFS website.

Backlog of Smaller EADM Processes

Partners feel the backlog in special-use permits (SUPs) is halting opportunities for the public to use public lands. There is a perception that all SUPs are handled in the same way, rather than managing small-impact decisions quickly and efficiently and putting more time and resources into SUPs with the potential for heavier impact.

While many partners are interested in an assessment of where categorical exclusion authorities could be expanded as a strategy to increase efficiency, others are concerned about an abuse of CEs.

Leverage Points

- Develop a framework to guide consistent selection of the appropriate NEPA instrument to best match the project or action, with thresholds of acres, outputs, or objectives. Develop templates for environmental impact statements, environmental assessments, and categorical exclusions. Hold trainings Agency-wide so staff know how to appropriately use the templates.
- Train and empower line officers in setting clear expectations to their interdisciplinary teams for timelines, focus areas, and sideboards in analysis documents. Communicate these timelines clearly with the public.
- Establish employee accountability for achieving EADM milestones with performance measures and evaluation, including progress, completion, and effectiveness.
- Work with contractors and partners who have skills in clear and concise writing of technical material to increase the accessibility of analysis documents and specialist reports to public audiences.
- Consider categorical exclusions for work that is predictable and is understood by the public, or on developed land (e.g. rights of ways or ski area structures). Dedicate a cadre of staff to process SUPs and clear the backlog. Use past historic preservation surveys and determinations to inform project development.
- Develop a clear system that could be shared online so that project management and the EADM project implementation, and monitoring processes are easily visible to the public.

H. SCALE ISSUES IN ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS AND DECISION MAKING

Perception of the Problem

Participants identified a number of issues related to the scale of project analysis, the various levels decisions are made, and how local information is or is not reflected in decisions. Participants:

- Raised questions about how land management plans and the required forest-scale analyses relate to project-level decisions.
- Expressed that land management plans could be more useful tools if they truly serve as a roadmap for implementing landscape-scale restoration.
- Projects appear piecemeal, without connection to a larger vision, and partners are often uncertain where or when the agency plans to work next.
- Commented that the scale EADM processes (project size) often do not effectively address the challenges of climate change and other cross-boundary issues, or the complexity of natural resource issues.
- Shared that they do not feel that land management plans give local units enough direction to prioritize resource objectives at the project level, leading to redundancy of discussions about trade-offs and adding to collaborative fatigue.

Leverage Points

- **Develop a clear framework for USFS employees and partners describing the interrelationship between regional strategies, land management plans, five-year plans, landscape plans, programmatic NEPA, and project-level NEPA. Create a tool or flow chart to identify triggers to drive when different tools are best employed, for use by USFS employees and the public.**
- **Tie large landscape and/or watershed assessments to programs of work over a period of years, similar to the Bureau of Land Management's ten-year assessment and project planning process.**
- **Develop tools to help forests generate clear connections between land management plan components, and priorities for project implementation.**



I. RESEARCH AND SCIENCE

Perception of the Problem

Participants discussed the important role of science and data in EADM processes, and the relationship between research, monitoring and discussion of scientific issues with partners as being critical to decision making. They observed:

- Line officers and interdisciplinary teams are uncomfortable making decisions without thorough best available scientific information for a specific project location.
- Monitoring is considered expendable, and there is a lack of data upon which to base adaptive management decisions or to influence future project design.
- The USFS lacks common measurements or metrics across forests and projects to assess change.
- Agency reluctance to use partner-collected data or share databases.

Leverage Points

- **Invest money and assign staff to work in meaningful partnerships with universities and non-governmental organizations to leverage non-Agency contributions to monitoring data and best available scientific information.**
- **Monitor achievement of project outcomes linked to targets using measurable indicators, including ecological, economic and community impacts. Use results for adjusting project design in the future.**





CONCLUSION

Participants in the Regional Partner Roundtables expressed their appreciation to the USFS for undertaking this effort, and for being invited to explore solutions to EADM challenges with the Agency. The USFS is committed to its partners and to considering the input received during the Roundtables. USFS leadership at multiple levels – district, forest, region and Washington Office – intend to use the information in this national report and the ten regional summary reports to refine business practices, improve information sharing, policy reform, partnership practice and development, and direction toward improved efficiencies.

As the agency continues to address EADM and identify solutions, updated information will be posted at these websites:

- USDA Forest Service EADM webpage: www.fs.fed.us/managing-land/EADM
- National Forest Foundation EADM webpage: www.nationalforests.org/EADM



Categorical Exclusion¹

Categorical exclusion means a category of actions which do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment and which have been found to have no such effect in procedures adopted by a Federal agency in implementation of these regulations (§1507.3) and for which, therefore, neither an environmental assessment nor an environmental impact statement is required. An agency may decide in its procedures or otherwise, to prepare environmental assessments for the reasons stated in §1508.9 even though it is not required to do so. Any procedures under this section shall provide for extraordinary circumstances in which a normally excluded action may have a significant environmental effect.

Environmental Assessment²

Environmental assessment:

(a) Means a concise public document for which a Federal agency is responsible that serves to:

- (1) Briefly provide sufficient evidence and analysis for determining whether to prepare an environmental impact statement or a finding of no significant impact.
- (2) Aid an agency's compliance with the Act when no environmental impact statement is necessary.
- (3) Facilitate preparation of a statement when one is necessary.

(b) Shall include brief discussions of the need for the proposal, of alternatives as required by section 102(2)(E), of the environmental impacts of the proposed action and alternatives, and a listing of agencies and persons consulted.

Environmental Impact Statement³

Sec. 102 [42 USC § 4332]. The Congress authorizes and directs that, to the fullest extent possible: (1) the policies, regulations, and public laws of the United States shall be interpreted and administered in accordance with the policies set forth in this Act, and (2) all agencies of the Federal Government shall --

(C) include in every recommendation or report on proposals for legislation and other major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, a detailed statement by the responsible official on -- (i) the environmental impact of the proposed action, (ii) any adverse environmental effects which cannot be avoided should the proposal be implemented, (iii) alternatives to the proposed action, (iv) the relationship between local short-term uses of man's environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity, and (v) any irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources which would be involved in the proposed action should it be implemented.

¹ *Code of Federal Regulations §1508.4.*

² *Code of Federal Regulations §1508.9.*

³ *The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended.*



Acknowledgements

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