

**Federal Land Agencies Working
to Create a Collaborative Management Environment**

Collaboration Action Team Progress Report

Prepared by the Collaboration Action Team
July 2008

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Federal Land Agencies Working to Create a Collaborative Management Environment

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Executive Summary

Collaboration has emerged in recent years as a significant and accepted method of identifying community-supported stewardship strategies for public lands. Successful collaboration among communities of interest and place and Federal land agencies can result in exceptional, lasting ecological results on the landscape as well as improved relationships and economic opportunity.

Public land management agencies have made progress toward overcoming barriers to collaboration, but much work remains. The purpose of this paper is to:

- Reemphasize the context for collaboration.
- Recognize recent accomplishments in “barrier busting” since the Collaboration Action Team issued its 2005 paper, “Getting Federal Land Management Agencies to the Collaborative Table: Barriers and Remedies”.
- Identify remaining opportunities to establish the institutional support for collaboration.
- Capitalize on the current window of opportunity for change.

We urge Federal land managers to actively and persistently continue to address the cross-cutting internal barriers to collaboration as identified in the 2008 General Accountability Office (GAO) audit on Collaborative Resource Management and in our 2005 paper, “Getting Federal Land Management Agencies to the Collaborative Table: Barriers and Remedies.”

Specifically, we recommend Federal land management agencies take the following actions:

Agency Culture and Leadership

- Formalize and document leadership transition strategies (i.e., use of “hand over” memo).
- Pool resources to coordinate collaborative training, coaching and mentoring opportunities for employees.
- Promote shared learning by developing and delivering experiential and place-based collaborative leadership training inclusive of all interested participants.
- Provide seamless delivery of collaborative tools, technical assistance, and accountability measures to agency staff and community members.

Collaborative Leadership Competencies

- Link collaborative leadership competencies directly to employee hiring, rewards and promotions.
- Integrate collaborative leadership competencies into Federal leadership training programs (i.e., Partnering, Influencing/Negotiating, Interpersonal Skills, Creativity and Innovation, External Awareness, Entrepreneurship, Problem Solving, and Conflict Management).¹
- Work with universities to integrate collaborative leadership competencies into resource, conservation, and land management degree programs to foster the next generation of professionals in the field.

Policy

- Invest in and track community capacity to collaborate on land management decisions.
- USDA and USDI develop joint guidelines that facilitate consistent interpretation of Federal employee participation on nongovernmental boards.
- Improve the ability of Federal land agencies to engage in collaborative stewardship through legislation that supports increased governmental coordination and support of community-based, collaborative stewardship.
- Expand and track the use of Service First authority, which enables agencies to co-locate and share employees, to deliver efficient customer service and reduce costs.

¹ Implementation of a Competency-Based Approach to Collaboration and Partnering in Response to Executive Order 13352 (E.O. #13352), “Facilitation of Cooperative Conservation.”

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Introduction

Collaboration has emerged in recent years as a significant and accepted method of working through conflict and identifying community-supported stewardship strategies for public lands. Yet, institutional barriers persist within governmental agencies that impede effective collaboration, continue the use of less successful approaches to public involvement, and get in the way of solving long-term problems.

In its 2005 paper, “Getting Federal Land Management Agencies to the Collaborative Table: Barriers and Remedies”² the Collaboration Action Team³ described commonly-recognized obstacles to collaboration that had been identified through multiple sources. These obstacles include differing and unclear definitions of collaboration, risk-averse leaders and agency culture, focus on hiring technical skills and job training programs that stress scientific expertise rather than relationship building, and restrictive laws, policies and budgets. While communities also find it difficult to work collaboratively to address their local land management issues, this paper will focus on challenges and recommendations for Federal agencies.

Public land management agencies have made progress toward overcoming barriers, but much work remains. The purpose of this paper is to:

- Reemphasize the context for collaboration;
- Recognize recent accomplishments in “barrier busting” since the Collaboration Action Team issued its 2005 paper;
- Identify remaining opportunities to establish the institutional support for collaboration; and
- Capitalize on the current window of opportunity.

² Whitney Tilt, “Getting Federal Land Management Agencies to the Collaborative Table: Barriers and Remedies”, Developed for the Collaborative Action Team (2005).

http://westcan.sonoran.org/index.php?option=com_remository&Itemid=4&func=select&id=11

³ The Collaboration Action Team (CAT) was created through consensus to serve as a consultative group on collaboration, operating strategically to influence issues of collaborative capacity across Federal agencies, non-governmental organizations and the communities they serve. CAT membership includes leadership from non-governmental organizations (Association of Partners for Public Lands, Center for Social Ecology and Public Policy, Consensus Building Institute, Ford Foundation, National Forest Foundation, National Network Forest Practitioners, Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition, and Sonoran Institute) and participation of agencies (Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service). By teaming up, these organizations create synergy in problem-solving, ultimately breaking barriers and cultivating collaborative solutions to sustainable natural resource management.

Collaboration is a process through which a broad array of interests, some of which may be in conflict, enter into civil dialogue to collectively consider possible recommendations and actions that improve natural resource management to benefit both the environment and surrounding communities. In contrast, a partnership is likely to engage a few interested parties in working together on a specific project. Collaboration and partnerships are used for different purposes. While both are important approaches to public land management, the focus of this paper is collaboration.

A Convergence of Forces Leading to Collaboration

Many historic, social, legal, economic, environmental, and political forces are converging to support the growing use of collaboration to manage Federal land. Federal laws and policies in the 1980s created new natural resource rights and responsibilities, which people have used to pursue or protect their interests and concerns about grazing, timber harvests, water quality, endangered species, and changes in rural lifestyles. In many communities, these changes in laws and policies coincided with changes in land use patterns and local economies. Competing interests and concerns coupled with new rights created more disputes and litigation. Many communities have been extremely polarized over land management issues and controversy led to legal and political gridlock.

Environmental conflict resolution began to evolve at the same time. In the last 25 years, more and more groups and communities have turned to different ways to work with Federal agencies on land management issues. Collaborative groups began to form at the community level, and gradually Federal agencies began to support these groups and processes.

In August 2005, a White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation brought together hundreds of people representing government and private interests to discuss how to advance cooperative conservation. At that meeting, participants stressed that Federal government organizational culture needed to change. They emphasized the importance of building institutional support for collaboration. Conference participants specifically called for Federal agency staff to be “facilitative leaders and problem solvers”.⁴ Current literature supports this emerging role for government. Goldsmith and Eggers write:

Government needs people with new network skills—collaborative skills are neither sought nor valued by government. Building such a capacity requires not only far-reaching training and recruitment strategies, but also a full-blown cultural transformation: it requires changing the definition of “public employee”.⁵

The next section of the paper briefly highlights the context which is driving collaboration on public lands stewardship.

⁴ Juliana Birkhoff, October 23, 2006, Implementing Executive Order 13352 Through a Competency-Based Approach to Collaboration and Partnering: External Review of Agency Plans, p. 1.

⁵ S. Goldsmith and William D. Eggers, *Governing by Network* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute) 178. See also National Heritage Area reports, cited above at <http://www.nps.gov/csi/>.

Context for Collaboration

Many communities, landowners, and other groups are tired of the often-intense polarization among environmental, local development and industrial stakeholders. They are interested in solving long-standing, complex resource problems rooted in social and economic cleavages. Communities and agencies alike are recognizing that natural resource management connects to social, public health, economic and political issues in their communities at the local and national level.

Shifting Economies

As energy costs continue to rise and climate change awareness grows, rural communities face the challenge of moving from economics based on extracting resources to more diversified, sustainable sources of jobs and community wealth. The significant overlap between persistent poverty in counties with substantial public land and the dramatic reduction in economic benefits from these lands for local communities necessitates new approaches to address rural economic restoration. Focusing on local and regional economic development compels land management agencies to consider how their activities affect jobs, schools, health care, and transportation.

Changing Land Use Patterns

Home construction in the wildland-urban interface has dramatically increased in recent years as land use patterns shift from ranching and timber to subdivisions. Public lands are even more in the “backyard” of communities than in the past. Increasing wildfire along urban and rural interfaces not only causes larger property damage, but also raises the interest of new groups of people in affecting stewardship decisions.

Changing Approaches to Management and Policy

Resource management and policies have shifted in an effort to maintain the interaction between all species in an area and to recognize that natural systems span political boundaries. Ecosystem management approaches tend to include more collaboration as a way to integrate science with community and economic values across land ownership boundaries.

New Knowledge Sharing Technologies

The government used to be the primary source of scientific information about public lands. In the last 25 years, accessible and reliable information about public lands from nongovernmental sectors has expanded. Knowledge from more places and people supplements government-supplied knowledge and creates a more open information sharing environment. Wondolleck and Yaffee call this trend the “democratization of expertise”.⁶

Within this changing political and social climate, traditional methods of public participation are not meeting the need to incorporate many diverse views into the discussion.

⁶ J.M. Wondolleck and Steven L. Yaffee, *Making Collaboration Work: Lessons from Innovation in Natural Resource Management* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2000) 25.

Changes in Agency Finances and Resources

While resource agency budgets and staff expanded after World War II, budgets are now shrinking, prompting an even greater need to leverage staff, funds and community participation.

Changing Expectations and New Models for Participation

In the past, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) emphasized resource extraction and commodity production in their management. Public expectations of the nation's lands have changed, however, and people representing an expanded number of interests want to provide their ideas about the many services provided by National Forests and BLM lands, such as recreation, biodiversity, and clean air and water.

Within this changing political and social climate, public hearings and written comments do not meet people's desires to be involved in discussions and have their interests reflected in decisions. Agencies have increasingly found themselves caught between a growing number of interests, pleasing few and facing difficult enforcement challenges because of lack of community involvement in decisions.

Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to study natural resource collaboration. The report, "Natural Resource Management: Opportunities Exist to Enhance Federal Participation in Collaborative Efforts to Reduce Conflicts and Improve Natural Resource Conditions" (February 2008), recognizes that government policies and actions have made progress in addressing challenges to collaborative resource management. It also notes additional opportunities for Federal agencies to improve their collaborative capacity.

Current Directions and Authorities Supporting Collaboration

In response to these trends, national policy-makers have recognized the need to change how they engage citizens in natural resource stewardship. Legislation since 2000 clearly and broadly directs public policy and Federal agencies to collaborate with community interests. New policy language in laws and executive orders also specifically cite collaboration as the preferred way of doing business.⁷ Below are some of the more important policies and laws that can support collaboration.

- ***National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)*** NEPA sets forth a process to protect health and environmental quality, sustainability and general welfare, social responsibility, intergenerational welfare, sustainability and stewardship. The Environmental Review process is a problem-solving tool if interested parties are appropriately involved.⁸
- ***FACA Federal Advisory Committee Act:*** The Federal Advisory Committee Act (1972) governs the behavior of advisory committees and creates an orderly and transparent procedure by which Federal agencies may seek advice and help from citizens and experts. FACA is intended to "limit the role of unbalanced influence of special interests on public policy-making."⁹

⁷ Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition, "Collaboration Issue Paper" (April 2007).

⁸ Final Report, National Environmental Conflict Resolution Advisory Committee (April 2005).

⁹ Long, R. & Beirle, T., (January 1999). *The Federal Advisory Committee Act and public participation in environmental policy*. Discussion Paper 99-17, Resources for the Future. Washington, D.C.

- ***Healthy Forests Restoration Act:*** HFRA calls for “meaningful public participation during the preparation of . . . projects” and calls for “collaboration among state and local governments and Indian tribes, and participation of interested persons . . . in a manner consistent with the Implementation Plan”.
- ***Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000:*** This Act requires Resource Advisory Committees to “provide frequent opportunities for citizens, organizations, tribes, land management agencies and other interested parties to participate openly and meaningfully, beginning at the early stage of project development”. This legislation suggests that a purpose of the Resource Advisory Committees is “to improve collaborative relationships”.
- ***Community Forest Restoration Act of 2000:*** The CFRA, a program in New Mexico, calls for the participation of a “diverse and balanced group of stakeholders . . . as well as appropriate Federal, Tribal, State, County, and Municipal government representatives in the design, implementation, and monitoring of the project.” This legislation identifies several benefits of collaboration, including cost-effective restoration activities; empowerment of diverse organizations to carry out activities that value local and traditional knowledge; ownership and civic pride; and, healthy, diverse, and productive forests and watersheds.
- ***Stewardship Contracting:*** These authorities suggest that collaboration can “improve forest health and promote local consensus in determining outcomes”.
- ***Executive Order on Cooperative Conservation:*** This Executive Order emphasizes the “appropriate inclusion of local participation in Federal decision-making” and identifies “collaborative activity among Federal, State, local, and tribal governments, private for-profit and nonprofit institutions, other nongovernmental entities and individuals”.¹⁰
- ***A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wild Land Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment: A 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy and Implementation Plan (August 2001):*** The legislative language authorizing the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy calls on the Federal agencies “to work closely with affected states, including Governors, county officials and other citizens” and suggests “key decisions should be made at local levels.” The Strategy presents an expectation that collaboration “will be the most efficient and effective way of implementing a long-term program.”

The public recognizes that the technical fixes of environmental laws from the 1980s, new ecosystem and social information, and the policy support from these executive orders and policies is not enough to solve complex resource problems. These problems are rooted in social and economic cleavages as well as different value systems about land and ways of knowing and solving problems. Agencies have been seeking new ways to work with the public that respect these values and tackle problems in a holistic way. The next section details some successes to build on and the important barriers which are left.

¹⁰ RVCC Collaboration Paper, April 2007.

Busting Barriers: 2004-2008 and Moving Forward

When it began meeting in 2004, the Collaboration Action Team identified the following major barriers to collaboration between Federal agencies and communities on resource issues.

- Agency culture and leadership
- Competencies of agency employees and performance measures
- Laws, policies, and budgets

Despite clear and broad statutes and policies directing the agencies to work collaboratively, barriers continue to interfere with establishment of a collaborative, government culture. Agencies have been given the policy direction to encourage collaboration through policy and statute. Institutional structures, employee expectations, and the “way we do business”, however, create obstacles that interfere with achieving the vision of a collaborative government.

Despite clear and broad statutes and policies directing the agencies to work collaboratively, barriers continue to interfere with establishment of a collaborative, government culture.

Adopting a new public lands management paradigm is a challenging process. The Collaboration Action Team acknowledges those challenges as we discuss the agencies’ accomplishments toward overcoming barriers. Specifically, we examine positive strides at the interagency, departmental and agency levels in: fostering and rewarding collaborative leadership; hiring and training staff with collaboration skills; establishing new performance measures; proposed laws, improved policies, and new approaches to enable more flexible management of funding to support collaborative spending priorities.

Transitional Beginnings: Agency culture and leadership

Inter-Departmental Teams Work across Agency Lines

In 2001, the Department of Interior initiated the “Four C’s Team” (Consultation, Communication, Cooperation, and Conservation) to address partnership and collaboration barriers, challenges, and opportunities within government. This team expanded to include other environmental and resource agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, Environmental Protection Agency, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Department of Defense. In 2004, the expanded Four C’s Team was renamed the Interagency Cooperative Conservation Team (ICCT).

Under the guidance of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and top leadership from the Federal land management agencies, various working groups acted to implement the Joint Policy Memorandum on Environmental Conflict Resolution, improve guidance for the Federal Advisory Committee Act, and compile legal authorities for cooperative conservation. The public outreach and communication working groups updated case studies, funding information, and ways for the public to engage in cooperative conservation. They also posted and organized

extensive information on the Cooperative Conservation Website, including tools, resources, and networks.

Interagency working groups assessed and developed ideas to improve the collaboration skills of Federal agency staff. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and CEQ asked the five agencies to develop plans to assess and increase staff competency to collaborate. Each agency submitted plans in 2006 and 2007. Several agencies have developed new training classes to address collaboration and partnership competencies (see www.partnershipresourcecenter.org for examples).

In a separate effort, in September 2003 over 1,000 agency and partnership representatives met in Los Angeles for a “Joint Ventures-Partners in Stewardship Conference”. The conference focused on partnership and collaboration barriers, challenges, and best practices. One important outgrowth of that conference was a roundtable of seven Federal land management agency directors. Staffed by partnership personnel from each agency, the roundtable meets regularly to address issues of common interests to all agencies, such as Service First and connecting children to nature.

Commitment of People and Resources

DOI Takes Steps toward Culture Change

The Department of Interior established a new office of Conservation, Partnerships, and Management Policy position within the Office of the Secretary in August, 2006. The Office works with an intradepartmental team to strengthen capacity for collaboration, mediation and partnering. Team members include a mix of headquarters and field representatives from bureaus and offices with program, budget, training, human resources, and policy, legal and administrative expertise. To date the Team has revised Departmental policies, developed and awarded Cooperative Conservation Awards, developed Government Performance Results Act measures, and helped bureaus and departments implement projects.

Beginning in 2001, the DOI implemented significant steps to align budgets, administrative tools, and policies to strengthen the Department’s capacity to encourage and support collaboration and partnership work. The Department is currently developing an over-arching departmental management policy to strengthen collaboration and partnership building and integrate the values into Department and Bureau missions.

The Forest Service National Partnership Office

In 2002, the Forest Service formed a Partnership Authorities Workgroup in response to a request from two members of Congress. The Forest Service Chief, in 2001, was asked “to improve the agency’s ability to work in partnership with the public”.¹¹

Collaboration in Action

In an effort to address fuels issues across all Federal, state, municipal and private ownership boundaries, leaders from all of the land and fire management agencies joined with local Fire Safe Councils and formed the California Fire Alliance. Through the Alliance, issues are collaboratively resolved, priorities are identified, and numerous projects are jointly being accomplished. The Federal agencies have also consistently funded projects on private lands for over five million dollars a year through the Fire Safe Councils.

¹¹ USDA (2002). Partnership authorities workgroup report. Washington, D.C.: USDA, Forest Service.

After the Workgroup conducted an assessment of agency partnership authorities, policies and business practices, they identified “...more than ninety separate issues about the Forest Service’s inability to work effectively in partnership with outside entities”.¹² Most of these issues were identified as administrative, relating to agency culture, internal policies, staffing, training, budgeting, and reporting systems.

The Workgroup recommended the agency undertake a “...national partnership re-engineering effort...” to be completed by a small, full-time, interdisciplinary team consisting of “four or five employees with a mix of program and business operations backgrounds” (USDA, 2002, p. 18). The team’s charge was to focus on enhancing the agency’s effectiveness in partnership and collaboration including “...affirmative policy, simplifying processes, tools, financing, training, and communication”.¹³ In 2003, the National Leadership Team created the Forest Service National Partnership Office (NPO).

Using the recommendations of the Partnership Authorities Workgroup as a starting point, the NPO has: rolled out training programs to improve the agency’s collaborative capacity; improved national coordination with other agencies and non-governmental organizations; and developed collaborative competencies and performance standards.

Maintaining Collaborative Relationships through Agency Staff Transitions

At its inception, CAT members responded to the commonly cited barrier of agency staff rotations through field assignments. Changing personnel impedes collaboration because the trust necessary to find agreement among conflicting interests takes time and is built on personal relationships.

Collaboration in Action

What started out three years ago as a vision to restore degraded landscapes has grown into a flourishing partnership of government agencies, landowners, conservation groups, and energy industry leaders. Under the flagship program, *Restore New Mexico*, the BLM and its partners are restoring woodlands, grasslands, and riparian areas across New Mexico to a healthy and productive condition. This partnership-powered initiative restored just over 250,000 acres of Federal lands plus 15,000 acres of state and private land within targeted watersheds in Fiscal Year 2007.

The Collaboration Action Team’s first action was development of a transition tool called the “handover memo”. The Handover Memo provides a mechanism for an outgoing agency leader to document information about key collaborative relationships and the status of ongoing or pending projects important to both the agency and communities of interest and place. It also supports open communication and introduces the new employee to community representatives.

The US Forest Service adopted the handover memo in 2006 (see www.partnershipresourcecenter.org/resources/tools/index.php), though it is not yet widely used or regarded as a “must do” before leaving a position. In early 2008, the Bureau of Land Management developed an internal memo and template based on the Forest Service model, and is under review for signature.

¹² USDA, p. 3.

¹³ USDA, p. 18.

The Northeastern Region of the National Park Service has used a transition process (called the Northeast Region Leadership Excellence Program, or NERLEP) since the mid 1990s for superintendents and regional managers. The process takes a team approach to preparing for the departure of a leader and hire of a new one. The team's goal is to get big-picture information about the park's mission, major projects, issues, concerns, and external partners and then to convey this information to the Regional Director and the incoming superintendent/manager. The team's report also helps the Regional Director identify critical competencies needed when recruiting and selecting for the position. A notable feature of NERLEP is pairing the new leader with a mentor. The NERLEP process has not yet spread throughout the National Park Service.

National Park Service Collaboration and Partnership Strategy

In 2002, the National Parks Service (NPS) created a Partnership Council to develop a shared vision and strategy for collaboration and partnership work within the agency. The Council's purpose is to provide leadership throughout the National Park Service in expanding the Service's capacity to foster, manage, and sustain partnerships and collaborative practices. The Council is a forum to develop recommendations to resolve issues and concerns, and suggest, test, and promote innovative concepts for a broad range of partnerships and collaborative activities.

Transitional Beginnings: Improving the Collaboration Competencies of Agency Employees and Establishing Performance Measures

Inter-Departmental Effort to Develop Key Competencies

In 2006, several Federal resource agencies began working with OPM to develop a set of key competencies essential to building human resource capacity in collaboration and partnership building. Collaboration skills have also been integrated into expectations for Senior Executive Service employees.

Giving Employees the Tools They Need

New Guidance for Adaptive Management

In 2007, the DOI developed the *Adaptive Management Technical Guide* and a training program on adaptive management to help employees better address complex resource management problems in a collaborative setting. The Guide can be found online at:

<http://www.doi.gov/initiatives/AdaptiveManagement/index.html>.

Incorporating Collaboration into Performance Measures

The DOI incorporated collaborative measures in its Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) strategic plan as well as specific collaboration and partnership goals and performance measures in individual employee performance plans.

BLM Assesses Collaborative Competency Needs

The BLM recently conducted a partnership and collaboration competency training needs assessment. In addition, the Bureau is developing a Collaboration Competency Strategy to help build the skills within their workforce.

Forest Service Measures and Rewards Partnership and Collaborative Outcomes

Beginning in Fiscal year 2007, the Forest Service implemented a new performance appraisal system with updated performance elements for all personnel. One of the new performance elements addresses teamwork and partnership. This new system re-establishes the link between pay and performance and provides both incentives to employees and accountability measures for partnership and collaboration objectives.

Western Collaboration Assistance Network

The Western Collaboration Assistance Network (WestCAN)¹⁴ was publicly launched in December of 2006 as a resource for both agency employees and community stakeholders to help them navigate through the challenges of collaboration. WestCAN provides “nuts and bolts” technical assistance and documents best practices and lessons learned. It works to raise the general knowledge and skills of collaborative stewardship practitioners, prevent repetition of common mistakes, and advance the field of place-based, collaborative stewardship.

WestCAN provides:

- Coaching over the phone (toll-free line), and information and referral by the WestCAN Program Manager.
- Access to a network of peers who are working on collaborative stewardship on the National Forests and Grasslands.
- Mentoring (one year commitment), matching leaders from higher-capacity organizations to leaders of emerging collaboratives.
- Networking opportunities, such as peer learning teleconferences that bring people together around central topics of interest.
- Referral and provision of short-term consultations with skilled experts who can assist groups in a variety of ways (for example: working through topics on which the group can't find agreement; developing a marketing, communications or strategic plan; forest restoration principles and implementation; measuring on the ground results and impact; or successfully structuring and launching a collaborative process).
- Documentation of tools and lessons learned in short, “bite-sized” format.
- An online library (www.WestCANhelp.org) stocked with resources and reports on collaboration.

WestCAN is continually adding to its network of coaches, mentors, and specialists. Since the program was launched, the National Forest Foundation (NFF) has responded to over 100 requests for assistance through WestCAN, and connected ten pairs of community leaders in mentoring partnerships. The NFF is working with the Forest Service's NPO to test a mentoring program for Forest Service employees.

¹⁴ WestCAN is a program of the National Forest Foundation, implemented in partnership with the Sonoran Institute, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management. Funding thus far has enabled the NFF to provide services to community groups working on stewardship issues around National Forests and Grasslands and Forest Service employees.

Transitional Beginnings: Laws, policies, and budgets

Proposed Legislation

In June 2007, the Departments of Interior (DOI) and Agriculture (DOA) proposed legislation to enhance their abilities to collaborate. The legislation was designed to clarify jurisdictions, strengthen the authority to fund partnerships, codify Service First and other cooperative grant programs, and remove tax and grant barriers to cooperative agreements.

The proposed legislation includes a “Working Landscape” section that would authorize the use of grant funds to support the collaborative process for landscape-scale conservation projects. This funding will help address “the overall problem of facilitating collaborative partnership projects...in terms of interest, cost share, and other administrative matters” that is identified in the February 2008 GAO Report.¹⁵ The proposed legislation would also permanently authorize the Service First program through which Interior agencies and the U. S. Forest Service are able to co-locate offices, share administrative services, and provide more integrated programs and services to the public. Co-location significantly enhances prospects for collaborative conservation across agencies and landscapes and with outside groups. The legislation was introduced into Congress in June 2007, but has not moved forward.

Collaboration in Action

In an effort to address concerns from the California Indian Basket weavers Association, the Pacific Southwest Region of the Forest Service and the California State Office of the Bureau of Land Management developed a traditional gathering policy to sustain American Indian traditions and meet cultural needs over the 35 million acres of lands administered by the two agencies. The policy emerged from six listening sessions with tribal communities, agency field input, and formal tribal consultation, and will help maintain consistent policies between the Forest Service and the BLM. It also will help strengthen relationships with the Tribes and will enhance the management of culturally important plants. Current implementation is underway and the success of the collaborative effort is being monitored and reported by the two agencies as well as the Tribes.

A Grand Experiment: Collaborative Forest Budgeting Through the New Business Model

The Forest Service’s current model of planning, budgeting, project initiation, design, and implementation, and related systems of monitoring and adaptive management, are not suited to the current work of the Forest Service. These outmoded systems and processes make it difficult for the private sector and local communities to work with the agency.

To overcome these challenges, the Forest Service developed the “New Business Model” to test ways in which the Forest Service can restructure its existing business processes to meet emerging management objectives. The purpose of the new model is to provide efficient and effective ways to do restoration work that supports communities and businesses. Three Proof of Concept Areas (PCA) have been identified as part of this initiative, including the Colville, Shasta-Trinity, and Allegheny National Forests. Specifically, the Proof of Concept Areas will focus on:

¹⁵ GAO. *Opportunities Exist to Enhance Federal Participation in Collaborative Efforts to Reduce Conflicts and Improve Natural Resource Conditions*. GAO-08-262. Washington, D.C.: February 12, 2008.

- Implementation at the landscape scale;
- Maximizing budget flexibility in providing for integrated projects;
- Developing performance evaluation for long-term outcomes rather than short-term outputs;
- Providing for budget stability over the long-term;
- Multi-year contracting;
- Practicing integrated treatments;
- Increasing the level of collaboration with partners;
- Identifying policies that inhibit the objectives of this new business model;
- Providing a structure for monitoring;
- Accessing and using the capacity within the local communities through partnerships; and
- Demonstrating the contribution of stable, predictable budgets to agency efficiency.

Formalizing the Voice of Communities of Place and Interest in Stewardship: Forest Service Resource Advisory Committees

The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-393) was authorized by Congress to address the impact of a precipitous decline in the 1908 Receipt Act payments made to counties beginning in the late 1980s. The Act established Resource Advisory Committees (RACs) for the Forest Service, a new collaborative model designed to provide an increased role for community interests in Federal land projects and decisions. It also provided mechanisms for communities to invest funding for projects in or adjacent to National Forests, and set aside funds for other specific community needs related to Federal land. Importantly, all RACs fully complied with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), the General Services Administration (GSA) regulations implementing FACA, and the USDA regulations.

While the original term of the legislation expired in 2006, a one-year extension allowed RACs to work through the end of September 2007. Forest Service RACs are widely viewed as successful for several reasons, including: committee access to funds and an ability to make recommendations on the expenditure of those funds; improved levels of trust among often divisive interests; and the opportunity for community members to share information and resources through a structured, transparent process. RACs reflected the cultural values and local knowledge of the area in which committee members live, and provided the opportunity to affect the health and stability of their local forests and communities. Over the course of seven years, RACs had access to over 200 million dollars and approved the implementation of over 4,400 on-the-ground projects in 14 states. All of these projects were implemented without appeal.¹⁶

New Clarifying Policies at the National Park Service

In 2006, the National Park Service revised their management policies to promote partnerships and collaboration as an important means of carrying out the mission and mandates of the Service. In addition, the NPS Director issued an Order on Civic Engagement and Public Involvement (DO 75A). This defining document expands the vision and expectations for how the Service and its employees engage the American people in carrying out the work of the organization.

¹⁶ Whitall, D.R. (2007). Network analysis of a shared governance system. UMI number 3273631. Ann Arbor, MI: Dissertation Abstracts International, Humanities and Social Science.

In addition, in spring 2007, DOI established a Partnership Facilitation Review Team, chaired by the Deputy Secretary. The specific charge to this team was to evaluate current policies and their effects on fostering collaboration, partnerships, and cooperative conservation.

The team, working with the Office of Conservation Partnerships and Management Policy, revised its donation policies, as well as its policies about use of cooperative agreements. These policies facilitate cross-boundary management and clarify circumstances when grants, procurement contracts, and cooperative agreements should be used. They also clarify the circumstances in which competition and single-source cooperative agreements are appropriate, respectively.

A Call to Action: Next Steps and Opportunities

The Collaborative Action Team is concerned that the gains made to date could easily be lost if momentum is not maintained and increased. We encourage Departmental, agency and bureau leaders to prioritize collaboration and carry through on the initial efforts made. Federal employees need support, tools and recognition to help them do the tough work of collaborating with communities of interest and place.

Recommendations: Agency Culture and Leadership

During the last several years, many individuals and governmental units embraced the need for collaboration and began working toward a new approach to public land stewardship . However, changing the culture and the leadership of the Federal land management agencies requires more than hard work and sheer determination. Shifting organizational culture requires a systematic effort that addresses values, structure, work processes and practices, and personnel and reward systems. Comprehensive cultural change does not occur without commitment and consistent leadership.

- Formalize and document leadership transition strategies (i.e., use of “hand over” memo).
 - Forest Service: Institutionalize use of the handover memo process, and make it standard procedure for Regional Foresters, Forest Supervisors and District Rangers to complete a handover memo prior to vacating a position.
 - National Park Service: Expand use of the Northeast Region Leadership Excellence Program transition process nationwide.
 - BLM and USFWS: Adopt the handover memo or other transition process, and institutionalize its use.

Training

Federal agencies have surveyed their training programs, integrated the competencies into some training, and shared details with each other about training programs. Several agencies have prioritized training needs for their staffs. However, very few staff have had enough training to significantly change agency culture to increase collaborative land management. Further, there has not been any progress on experiential training, learning labs, or practicums. Organizational

culture change cannot occur without significantly increasing the number of staff who have internalized collaborative values and skills and learned how to apply them in collaborative projects.

- Pool resources to coordinate collaborative training, coaching and mentoring opportunities for employees.
- Promote shared learning by developing and delivering experiential and place-based collaborative leadership training inclusive of all interested participants.

Institutional Transformation

As Federal land agencies face budget cutbacks and the need to reduce staffing levels, they seek ways to increase their efficiencies by reorganizing internal agency structure. As initiators of change, these transformations are excellent opportunities to reorient the configuration of the workforce to support collaboration.

In leading the Forest Service transformation efforts, the national leadership team spent a significant amount of time forming key messages to explain why a transformation is necessary. Several of these points pivot around the desire to become a more collaborative organization that is better able to deliver its mission and position itself for an increasingly complex future. They include:

- Improved and more efficient processes that help the agency better serve customers and partners.
- Strong integration to skillfully address the most important current and emerging issues facing the Forest Service today and in the future.
- Expanded use of shared services, within and beyond the agency.

Expanding on the Forest Service example of transformation, the Collaboration Action Team offers the following recommendation on creating a vibrant, efficient process and organizational structure for embedding partnership and collaboration into the Federal land management agencies.

We believe it takes two distinct processes to establish a tradition of partnership and collaboration: the first is strategic and the second is operational. Operational processes include business operations such as grants and agreements, performance accountability, and ethics. Strategic processes include capacity initiatives such as the implementation of collaborative approaches, using and understanding informal networks, creating development expertise, and leveraging opportunities.

- Provide seamless delivery of collaborative tools, technical assistance, and accountability measures to agency staff and community members.

The Collaboration Action Team recommends consideration of using Service First Authority to create an Interagency Center for Collaboration. The purpose of this Center would be to improve the collaborative capacity of field-level employees across public land management agencies.

Through shared leadership, the Center would promote collaborative approaches, informal networks, leveraged opportunities, and sharing of knowledge. The Center would develop interagency training programs, tools, and technical assistance.

Recommendations: Improving the Collaboration Competencies of Agency Employees and Establishing Performance Measures

Performance Measures and Accountability

Executive Core Competencies were updated more than a year ago to include collaboration. Although several Federal agencies have begun integrating these collaboration competencies into performance plans and training programs, without interagency collaboration and leadership there is unnecessary duplication of effort and wasted time and resources. Furthermore, until the core competencies are validated by the Office of Personnel Management, they cannot be used to hire new employees.

Significant departmental and agency leadership is required to incorporate collaboration skills into the different human capital systems in each agency. We urge the Office of Personnel Management to define collaborative leadership skills and include them in relevant job descriptions, performance evaluation measures and systems. We urge Federal land agencies to develop performance and accountability measures for collaborative activities and include them in appropriate agency plans and systems.

- Link collaborative leadership competencies directly to employee hiring, rewards and promotions.
- Systematically increase the collaborative leadership capacity of relevant staff by providing resources to coordinate training, coaching, and mentoring for employees who work with the public. Integrate collaborative leadership competencies into Federal leadership training programs (i.e., Partnering, Influencing/Negotiating, Interpersonal Skills, Creativity and Innovation, External Awareness, Entrepreneurship, Problem Solving, and Conflict Management).¹⁷

The Next Generation of Collaborative Agency Leaders

Further, we urge the Federal land agencies to coordinate with universities to integrate collaboration competencies into resource, conservation, and land management degree programs. It is critical that all new hires to public land management agencies come to their new positions with both conceptual and practical collaboration knowledge, skills, and values.

- Work with universities to integrate collaborative leadership competencies into resource, conservation, and land management degree programs to foster the next generation of professionals in the field.

¹⁷ Implementation of a Competency-Based Approach to Collaboration and Partnering in Response to Executive Order 13352 (E.O. #13352), “Facilitation of Cooperative Conservation.”

Recommendations: Laws, Policies and Budgets

We urge Federal agencies to invest funding in community capacity building and support of collaborative processes. The lack of funding for collaborative processes is well-documented, and is an obstacle to further progress in collaborative stewardship.

- Invest in and track community capacity to collaborate on land management decisions.

Attention and flexibility must be instituted in the application of existing laws such as the Paperwork Reduction Act, as strict interpretation of this and other laws such as FACA prohibit the effective use of collaboration.

- USDA and USDI develop joint guidelines that facilitate consistent interpretation of Federal employee participation on nongovernmental boards.

In June 2007, the Departments of Interior and Agriculture proposed legislation to enhance their abilities to collaborate. The legislation was designed to clarify jurisdictions, strengthen the authority to fund partnerships, codify Service First and other cooperative grant programs, and remove tax and grant barriers to cooperative agreements. The non-Federal members of the Collaboration Action Team urge thorough consideration and passage of legislation to support DOI and USDA collaboration at the community level.

- Improve the ability of Federal land agencies to engage in collaborative stewardship through legislation that supports increased governmental coordination and support of community-based, collaborative stewardship.
- Expand and track the use of Service First authority, which enables agencies to co-locate and share employees to deliver efficient customer service and reduce costs.

Appendix 1: Annotated Resources for Further Reading

Brunner, Ronald D., Christine H. Colburn, Christina M. Cromely, Roberta A. Klein, and Elizabeth A. Olson. (2002). *Finding Common Ground, Governance and Natural Resources in the American West*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. Community-based responses to natural resource problems in the American West have demonstrated the potential for local initiatives both for finding common ground on divisive issues and for advancing the common interest.

Clarke, J.N. & McCool, D.C. (1996). *Staking out the terrain: Power and performance among natural resource agencies*. 2nd Ed. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. This book offers a wealth of historical detail on Federal land management agencies as well as an analysis of current policy conflicts over natural resources management.

Copping, Suzanne E., Phillip B. Huffman, Daniel N. Laven, Nora J. Mitchell, and Jacquelyn L. Tuxill (2006). *Connecting Stories, Landscapes, and People: Exploring the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor Partnership A Technical Assistance Project for the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor Commission and the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, Inc.* Woodstock, VT: Conservation Study Institute. See Executive Summary and Full Report at http://www.nps.gov/csi/pub_resources/pub.htm

This evaluation report documents accomplishments and leverage, and identifies strengths and challenges of the partnership system of the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor. Critical ingredients for sustaining a vibrant and engaged network of partners that collaborate to accomplish shared goals are identified.

Cross, R.L. & Parker, A. (2004). *The hidden power of social networks: Understanding how work really gets done in organizations*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation.

This book shows managers how to find, assess, and support the networks most crucial to competitive success. Based on their in-depth study of more than 60 informal networks within organizations around the world, the authors show how managers can implement a wide range of specific and inexpensive actions to enhance the powerful impact networks can have on performance and innovation.

GAO. (February 2008) *Natural resource management: Opportunities exist to enhance federal participation in collaborative efforts to reduce conflicts and improve natural resource conditions*. GAO 08-262. Washington, D.C.:United States Government Accountability Office.

The GAO was asked to document expert views on collaboration, describe how several collaborative efforts have addressed conflicts and improved resources, and highlight challenges that Federal land management agencies face as they participate in such efforts.

Goldsmith, S. & Eggers, W.D. (2004). *Governing by network: The new shape of the public sector*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institute.

This book examines the Federal government's transformation from centralized control over public programs to facilitating services through networks of nongovernmental entities, as seen through the experience of dozens of public innovators.

Koontz, Tomas M., Toddi A. Steelman, JoAnn Carmin, Katrina Smith Korfmacher, Cassandra Moseley, Craig W. Thomas. (2004). *Collaborative Environmental Management, What Roles for Government?* Washington, D.C.: Resources for the Future.

This book analyzes a series of case studies to understand how collaborative processes work and whether government can be an equal partner since government often formally controls decision-making and is held accountable. Looking at examples where government has led, encouraged, or followed in collaboration, the authors develop a new framework and identify choices and challenges faced by government when trying to realize the potential of collaborative environmental management.

Linden, Russell M. (2002) *Working Across Boundaries, making Collaboration Work in Government and Nonprofit Organizations*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.

Linden explores the interpersonal and organizational forces that often inhibit collaboration and offers leaders the tools to combat those forces. This book shows leaders how they can create a collaborative culture in their own agencies and work across boundaries with other to deal with today's complex challenges.

Tuxill, Jacquelyn L., Nora J. Mitchell, and Jessica Brown, eds. (2004). *Collaboration and Conservation: Lessons Learned from National Park Service Partnership Areas in the Western United States*. Woodstock, VT: Conservation Study Institute. see

http://www.nps.gov/csi/pub_resources/pub.htm

This workshop report distills partnership lessons learned and key components of successful partnership areas from a diversity of Federal and private practitioners and examination of a series of case studies. The participants also identify a set of strategic recommendations for creating a sustainable environment for partnerships.

USDA. (2002). *Partnership Authorities Workgroup report*. Washington, DC: USDA, Forest Service.

USDA, Forest Service. (April, 2007). *Discussion draft: Integrating mission accomplishment with safety at the U.S. Forest Service*. Washington, D.C.: Dialogos Diagnostic Memo.

The Agency asked Dialogos International to educate Forest Service Leadership on ways to understand and transform its safety culture. To that end, between January and April of 2007 Dialogos conducted a series of group sessions and individual interviews with over 400 Forest Service personnel. They sought to engage a diverse sample of people, both to inquire into and identify underlying core dynamics that may be causing challenges around safety.

Wallace, G. & Haufler, J. (2007). *Factors that influence successful collaborations between the forest products industry and environmental organizations*. Washington, D.C.: American Forest & Paper Association. Electronic copies can be directly obtained from http://www.afandpa.org/content/NavigationMenu/News_Room/Whitepapers/CollaborationStudy_Final.pdf.

The American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA) and the National Council for Air and Stream Improvement (NCASI) initiated this study to explore factors involved in producing successful collaborations between the forest products industry and environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS).

Appendix 2: Collaboration Action Team Membership

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