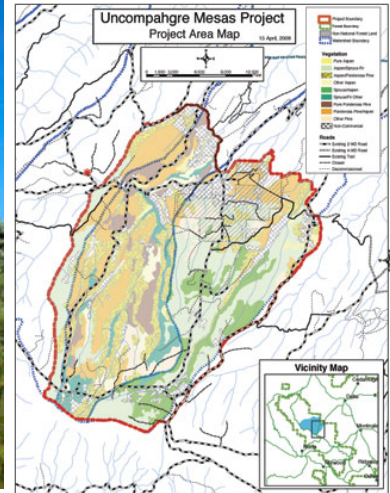


**A Case Study of Collaboration:
The Uncompahgre Plateau Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project**



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ABOUT THIS REPORT

Colorado is endowed with several place-based collaborative efforts focused on reducing wildfire risk to communities and restoring healthy forest conditions. Individuals from government agencies, local communities, business and non-governmental organizations of all stripes voluntarily participate in a process to achieve goals they could not achieve by working alone. This is hard work for which many participants receive no direct financial compensation; they are simply taking what they think is the best approach to solve immediate problems affecting surrounding forests and communities. As is often the case when people are busy figuring out what needs to be done, there is little time for reflection and learning on what they have accomplished and the road ahead.

The Colorado Forest Restoration Institute has conducted case studies of collaborative forest health efforts over the past four years to identify the achievements, challenges, and lessons learned from these efforts. The intent is to highlight these efforts for other collaborative groups to be able to glean ideas, insight and inspiration to apply to their situations.

This case study was composed of semi-structured interviews with 11 members of collaborative groups associated with the network of collaborative groups working on the Uncompahgre Plateau in southwestern Colorado. We used these interviews to develop a detailed assessment of their collaborative efforts and the impact of the groups' most recent project, the Uncompahgre Plateau Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project (UP-CFLRP). Interviews were conducted with members to assess the different collaborative groups' membership characteristics, the collaborative process and group structure, communication channels, implementation, and resource availability. The members interviewed represented a diversity of interests including local environmental organizations, wildlife interests, the timber industry, academics, US Forest Service and other federal management agencies, and local government officials. The interview data was transcribed and compiled, which allowed for a thorough qualitative analysis of the levels of collaboration associated with the development and implementation of the UP-CFLRP. This report builds on a 2010 Colorado Forest Restoration Institute collaboration case study of the Uncompahgre Mesas Forest Restoration Project.¹

¹ Available at: http://coloradoforestrestoration.org/CFRlpdfs/2010_CollaborationCaseStudy_UPMesas.pdf.

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

The communities surrounding the Uncompahgre Plateau have a long history of collaboration associated with natural resource management. A network of collaborative partnerships has developed over the past twenty years, culminating in the recently established Western Colorado Landscape Collaborative (WCLC). The roots of this collaboration can be traced back to the Public Lands Partnership (PLP). The PLP was formed in 1994 as a venue for local stakeholders to meet with federal and state agencies to discuss resource management concerns on nearby public land. This effort was spearheaded by local government officials in an effort to bring together diverse interests, including the timber industry and local environmental groups. As one member stated, “It provided a forum and opportunity for people to come together and talk about public land issues and how we might implement or influence decisions and management on public lands.” One of the initial focal points of the PLP was the revision of the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests’ (GMUG) forest plan – a document identifying strategic goals and objectives and standards and guidelines for managing GMUG national forest lands and resources over the next 10-15 years. Stakeholders were concerned about how the forest plan revision would address social, economic, and ecological concerns. Through the PLP forum they were able to make clear to the forest supervisor they wanted to be thoroughly involved in the planning process. This led to increased public involvement through a collaborative forest plan revision process in the early 2000’s and solidified the PLP as a venue for communication. As one member indicated, the PLP continues today as “a general collaborative forum to talk about issues and meet with the Forest Service. We have developed a ‘table of trust’ where people can get together and talk about issues.”

The PLP forum has resulted in the creation of several working groups to address specific natural resource issues on nearby public lands, such as coal mining, oil and gas leasing, invasive species, and wildlife habitat. In 2000, the Uncompahgre Plateau Project (UPP) was formed in 2000 to pursue activities addressing natural resource issues on the Uncompahgre Plateau. These activities include mule deer habitat restoration, invasive weed eradication, a native seed program, and forest management planning. One of the largest forest restoration efforts, the Uncompahgre Mesas Forest Restoration Project, began in 2007 and provided a strong foundation for subsequent collaborative landscape restoration efforts.

Collaborative forest restoration efforts on the UP received a boost in 2009 with the passage of the Federal Landscape Restoration Act and the subsequent creation of the Collaborative Forest

Landscape Restoration Program administered by the USDA Forest Service (USFS). The program operates as a competitive allocation of USFS appropriated funds to on-the-ground implementation of projects that have been developed collaboratively based on the best available science, demonstrate local economic development potential through utilization of forest restoration by-products, and include a multi-party monitoring plan. The UP-CFLRP proposal was one of the first ten in the U.S. to be selected in Fall 2010.

The goal of the UP-CFLRP is to “enhance the resiliency, diversity and productivity of the native ecosystem on the Uncompahgre Plateau using best available science and collaboration” across 572,000 acres of National Forest System lands. The forests on the Uncompahgre Plateau demonstrate a high level of ecological departure from historic forest characteristics, making them more susceptible to severe wildfires and insect and disease mortality. The objectives of the UP-CFLRP include: to move toward desired vegetation and fuels conditions, to sustain timber mills and create new biomass markets, reduce long-term fire suppression costs, improve wildlife habitat, decreasing the potential for catastrophic fires, and applying adaptive management to adjust to climate change. The UP-CFLRP is investing in adaptive management and collaborative approaches to accomplish these objectives.

This paper summarizes, and describes lessons learned from, experiences and perceptions of individuals involved in the various collaborative groups and processes centering around the UP. The paper specifically focuses on the associated achievements and challenges the various groups have faced since the UP-CFLRP came into being in Fall 2010. The intent is to highlight these efforts for other collaborative groups to be able to glean ideas, insight and inspiration to apply to their situations.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The network of collaborative groups associated with the Uncompahgre Plateau has benefitted from the UP-CFLRP in several ways. Their accomplishments include developing a project which fits well with their existing goals, a continuing commitment to work together, a clear process for decision-making, strong communication, and meeting implementation goals of the project. These accomplishments are outlined below.

The project carries out the Uncompahgre Collaborative Groups' goals

The UP-CFLR project builds upon the existing efforts of the collaborative network and therefore fits well with their goals. The majority of the members discussed how everything was in place for the UP- CFLRP. Many considered it a 'perfect fit' because the projects they were in the process of developing lined up well with the parameters outlined by the CFLR Program. Specifically, the

Quotes from the collaborative members:

"When you look at the CFLR program and you read what the intent of the program is and the components that would be important for the project we felt that we met all of the criteria. And so really as a group the whole collaborative agreed to go after the CFLR."

"And so we were sitting there with projects, treatments all ready to go. We had a strong collaboration already in place. We had a science-based approach, we had the community monitoring in place. We had the industry sitting here in this particular part of the state, and probably the best is we had the ideal mountain."

"The USFS really isn't in as good of a position to initiate (these discussions) and so that was the role of the UP to then really step in and be more of a facilitator of inviting everyone together, organizing the meetings, the field trips, taking notes, buying food and just leading the conversation on so that the FS at that point just truly became a participant of the collaborative rather than driving the collaborative. ... Our first step was to work through our restoration principles and identify the goals and objectives for the project, and the area that we wanted to work in."

"I don't really think it has (changed the goals or focus of the group). It just gave us the money to implement all of the stuff that we wanted to do. We were already there, we just needed money."

Uncompahgre Mesas Project – or “Unc Mesas” – was initiated in 2007 with the intent of building the foundation for landscape-scale forest restoration. The required environmental analysis pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act had already been completed and the project was already slated for implementation before the national CFLR program was even established. The Ouray District Ranger, Tammy Randall-Parker was credited by many as having a vision for the landscape-scale restoration.

The UP-CFLRP proposal was written by a sub-group of the collaborative network, including the grant writer from the Uncompahgre Plateau Project (UPP), leaders from several of the collaborative groups, and USFS staff members, with regular input from other collaborative group members.

A continued commitment to work together

Many members agreed there was a good representation of interests involved with the UP-CFLRP, although nearly everyone agreed there could be more involvement from some interest groups. Most of the people interviewed believed the UP-CFLRP has not impacted the relations among members of the collaborative groups involved. Since the collaborative network has been in place for such a long time they were able to easily build upon the existing relationships and collaboratively developed projects. Even with staff turnover in agencies and stakeholder groups, many members found that these new members provided improved opportunities for the collaborative which outweighed the associated challenges. Everyone agreed there was a relatively high level of trust across the different stakeholders involved in the collaborative network and that all members were willing to work toward agreement on important decisions related to the project. These high levels of commitment and trust may be attributed to the solid venues for communication that the collaborative network has established across stakeholders.

Quotes from the members:

“The collaboration was in place and so I don’t think it necessarily affected the group’s ability to collaborate. ... the collaboration was still pretty strong before and after the CFLR money came and we haven’t lost members or gained members because of the money.”

“... within the collaborative group I feel like everyone is just so happy and thankful for the funding. I think it has helped to gain political support, both locally and nationally.”

“I think it has built on what we had going and if we use a large table of trust idea it has expanded the table.”

“With the exception of maybe getting commissioners there more often, and political people, like the governor, congressional reps ... that otherwise the rest of the people are pretty much consistent.”

“There’s a pretty high level of trust. I mean we’ve got history that is really helpful in that regard.”

“I think (all the interests are involved). I think we could always have more and deeper. But I think we’ve got a pretty broad cross-section, including the hunters, the ATV groups, the mountain biking enthusiasts, so we’ve got a pretty broad representation.”

“I’ve been surprised at how much agreement there is between people who historically have divergent interests or opinions on that type of stuff -like the PLP, Colorado Wild, contractors and timber industry. ...I’m not sure that’s so much the CFLR project as it is so much the fact that we have actually been on the ground seeing stuff happen.”

In addition some members discussed how the UP-CFLRP may have improved relations across the three ranger districts on the UP. As one member stated, “I think it is better (because the districts are) functioning more as a team.... So I would say internally it has made (the collaborative) stronger.” Overall, the members interviewed made it clear that both the agency and non-agency members of the collaborative had a high level of commitment to the UP-CFLRP.

Improved external relations

A majority of the members interviewed identified how the UP-CFLRP has improved relations between the collaborative network and external organizations. Many people attributed this to accomplishing goals and completing work on the ground. The use of field trips and other interactive outreach mechanisms were also identified as ways new stakeholders have become involved with the

collaborative network and the UP-CFLRP, as well as keeping the existing membership engaged and energetic about their efforts.

Quotes from the members:

“You know finally the county commissioners, they’ve been kind of watching us like yeah, whatever, but now once we received the grant they’ve really paid attention to the project. They say, “Wow this is really neat you guys are doing this.” They see the ties to the local community and then at a statewide level you know, our congressman and senators can say ‘Uncompahgre’ now.”

“We had a field trip a few weeks ago and 56 people showed up! And if anything (the project) just seems to be helping the partnership grow stronger. ... I think part of what has to happen to keep collaborative groups together is you have to do something. If you just talk eventually people get bored and go away. But I think its making us stronger because people are seeing things get done on the ground.”

An informal process and structure

There was overwhelming agreement the collaborative network uses an informal process for decision-making and discussions. Of course the UP-CFLRP is within the administrative oversight of the USFS which provides formal processes for public input, but the venues for discussing options and conducting outreach across the collaborative network has remained fairly informal. Members described several mechanisms the collaborative network has developed over the years. This includes the discussion venue the PLP provides. This is an open forum for the USFS, and other members, to outline projects and obtain feedback from a variety of stakeholders on a regular basis. The UP adds to this with official meetings in the winter time and informal field trips and forestry forensics workshops during the warmer months. The new WCLC provides an umbrella structure for the longer-term collaborative groups, as it incorporates the PLP, UP, and UncCom collaborative groups with additional stakeholder groups and federal and state agencies across the area. This newer WCLC group includes a board of directors with members from each of the collaborative groups. It is currently in the process of determining how to further integrate across the collaborative network.

Collaborative Implementation

The members interviewed were confident the UP-CFLRP implementation goals were being met or that sufficient progress was being made toward meeting those goals. They often referred to the long history of collaboration in the Uncompahgre Plateau area as an important component for the successful development and implementation of the UP-CFLRP. Many members stated how the CFLRP has energized the collaborative group because they are able to implement projects they had been working toward for several years.

Quotes from the members:

“And so we’re getting to the point where we have some experience under our belt in implementation and some feedback and we’re talking about planning some additional projects and ...we’re getting to the point where we have to collaborate on our opinions on what’s happened.”

“So I don’t know the specifics about the projects but I can just say in general that it is incredibly impressive. The acres that have been treated for a variety of different things ... And they’ve created jobs in the community and I think they’ve very well met those objectives of the CFLRP.”

(do you think the collaboration from that planning process built some of those foundations?)

“Absolutely. They did a full landscape assessment of the plateau during their forest plan revision and we updated parts of it. That’s the basis of the CFLR grant. So I hope that people see that all of that work that was done ten years ago is still being used today and without that work that we wouldn’t be where we are.”

“...without the collaborative groups’ involvement UncMesas wouldn’t exist and the GMUG never would have gone after a CFLR grant and then they never would have had the treatment dollars. And I can tell you they would not be doing UncMesas right now without those treatment dollars. And without the collaborative support. So yes, there’s no way that those projects would have been going on w/out the collaborative having been involved from step one...”

CHALLENGES

Although the UP collaborative network has achieved many accomplishments through the UP-CFLRP, they have also faced some challenges. The concerns members identified are: the project does not address some of their previously developed goals; some stakeholder interests are missing from the process; it has been difficult to maintain consistent communication; declining resources for implementation; and a changing group structure.

Some pre-CFLRP goals are not being addressed

A few of the collaborative group members felt that the broader goals the collaborative had developed together before the UP-CFLRP have been abandoned. This was because some of the projects the collaborative had previously identified were not or could not be included in the CFLRP work proposal. A few members also felt the process had become more agency-driven rather than stakeholder-driven. This is primarily due to the restriction of the CFLRP to national forest lands. Others felt that while the project has changed the focus of the collaborative efforts it has not changed their overall goals or mission.

Quotes from the members:

"I think most definitely (it has changed the focus of the work being done). You know members of the PLP and the UncCom board have made the observation recently that when we started a decade ago, it was very stakeholder driven. We started by selecting watersheds and prioritizing watersheds to work in. And we moved away from that process considerably. ... Now it's kind of agency driven....we've kind of gone full circle back to the issues that the PLP was first formed to address. And so that's very interesting."

"It has changed the focus but not the goals and the mission. Again that comes back to following the money. (We have) always been very adept to when there are opportunities. ... it's just where there's a need and an opportunity. So yeah, it shifted the focus but it has not shifted the overall goals."

"I think (it has changed the focus) to some degree because (before CFLRP) one of the cornerstones of the process was to look at landscape scale treatments that cross jurisdictional boundaries, to leverage resources, and to kind of work around bureaucratic hold ups. And also there was a focus on let's work in this watershed and it made a lot of sense in that approach. The CFLRP, you pick a watershed but it's a much different thing than it was before. I don't know if that's good or bad."

Some interests are missing

The majority of the members interviewed thought that all interests were either involved or invited, but many members thought there could be more consistent participation of some stakeholder groups, while other identified the possibility for a wider range of interests to be involved. The missing interests that were identified include representatives from state and local government, timber industry, sportsmen groups, regional and national environmental organizations, and recreation interests. A minority believed the collaborative members had less influence on identifying projects and locations for the UP-CFLRP because it was agency driven and must be completed on National Forest Lands.

Quotes from the members:

“I think we could always have more and deeper (stakeholder involvement). But I think we’ve got a pretty broad cross-section.”

“I don’t think you can ever say everybody. ...Everybody is a big word. There’s no doubt we’re not reaching everybody.”

“...But from a true collaborative perspective, stakeholder perspective, are these the right acres? I think the collaborative has had a limited role in implementation. ...It’s still a very collaborative, cooperative environment but I think over time it will change. (in what way?) Fundamentally, are you working on projects that the stakeholders are interested on? Or are you working on projects that the agency is interested in? And I think under CFLRP you’re working on projects that the agency is interested in.”

“It would be nice if we could get more of our elected officials, state and federal, actually out on the ground. We get a good reception when we go to Washington but I wish we could get them out on the plateau with us.”

Difficulty maintaining consistent communication

Communication has been difficult to maintain consistently across members of all of the groups involved in the collaborative network. Some members attributed this to the recent development of the WCLC umbrella organization, which had not yet identified a communication plan across the membership. Other members have witnessed challenges in communicating the history of the collaborative to newcomers. As one member stated, “I think there’s open communication but I don’t know that there is (always) active listening or understanding. ...it wasn’t malicious, it wasn’t confrontational. It was just truly they didn’t understand, not having the historical perspective and having lived it. They couldn’t understand how we reached the objectives. So I wouldn’t call that successful communication because the concept was not understood by the listener.” Some members identified

turnover in staff and group membership as one of the primary reasons for these communication challenges.

Additional quotes from the members:

“I think we’ve probably gone downhill a little bit there (in communication) in the last six months.”

“The frequency might not be to the extent that would be optimal but I think there are so many things that have to happen that the collaborative side of things inevitably gets limited, to some degree, because of all the other things that have to happen.”

“... That’s been one of the challenges with the evolution of PLP to UncCom, to Uncompahgre Partnership and WCLC, communication and knowing that you’re talking to one member that might be on one or more of the groups, if you’re covering the whole group or what, so I think there’s been more than one occasion where communication has not been as thorough.”

Limited resources for implementation

Three limitations affecting the implementation of the UP-CFLRP were identified by the members interviewed. One of the primary concerns was the effects of the declining Forest Service budget on the future implementation of the project. The budget constraints limit the GMUG’s ability to implement projects. They also have a negative impact on internal USFS relations as the UP-CFLRP is considered a priority over other management areas on the forest. A few members of the collaborative mentioned how the forest had received less money than expected from the USFS Regional Office which put an immediate constraint on the project and the forest overall.

Quotes from the members:

“Resources, well depending on what the forest service budget looks like next year if they cut us a deal I think it’s going to create strain on the forest in terms of restoration needs and the other two thirds of the actively managed forest.”

“You know, this is the one place where I am concerned. Because (the forest) was supposed to get some additional money to assist with this project and they haven’t gotten it. So they’re pulling from other projects on the forest and some of the other districts haven’t been able to fill positions and stuff... and I think all three districts that have this (CFLRP) commitment are worried about burning their staff out. ...They’re doing a bunch more work with no more staffing and not more money like the region had promised.”

A second concern was the level of administrative requirements for both the GMUG and the collaborative groups, including increased levels of reporting and the leveraging of matching funds. The increased levels of reporting have placed a strain on both the Forest Service and the collaborative groups because it is a new process for them and funding for the associated increase in staff time and coordination is very limited. Many members also acknowledged the difficulty of identifying and administering the required matching funds over a ten-year period. Some recognized the ability to leverage funds has been difficult in recent years and fear the ability to bring in additional funds over the term of the project will be increasingly difficult.

Quotes from the members:

"I think one side of it is dealing with the administrative requirements of that money. There's a lot of strings attached to the CFLR and its sort of uncharted territory as to what can be used as matching funds, what can't be used, when things have to be reported. You'd be amazed at how much time that that takes to do aside from the actual implementation. And then there's the implementation side where all of a sudden now you have hundreds of thousands of dollars each year to get things done that you didn't necessarily have money to do prior to having that money. And so there's some pressure on the implementation side and then there's a pretty steep learning curve initially in terms of how to report that."

"You know leveraging funding has been tougher every year for the last five years."

"This match thing is just a nightmare. I can understand the need and desire for it but when you do a landscape you need to throw a lot of money at it. Which they realize and which they're doing but when you attach a large match to those sums of money it becomes difficult. And I think they have struggled ...It becomes donor fatigue on a 10 year project. So I would love it if they would maybe try giving the forest this money without a lot of strings attached to it as far as the management of it."

The third limitation to implementing the UP-CFLRP has been the inability to use prescribed fire treatments because of fire restrictions and budget limitations. Many saw the prescribed fire treatments as a key component of the overall landscape restoration and were hopeful these treatments could occur in the next few years.

Quotes from the members:

“Certain components don’t work really well with the CFLR project. And one of those is fire - because you can’t burn every year. The reasons why go anything from natural, climatic, weather related things to fires burning in other parts of the country that take resources away from your local unit to do prescribed fire, to politics. So having a certain amount of money to accomplish contract work is one thing, but having a certain amount of money to accomplish prescribed fire every year is another separate matter.”

“That’s with all federal efforts behind schedule. I think we’re doing pretty good in terms of on the ground accomplishment. I think one of the biggest hurdles we had was getting the prescribed fire done because we had very ambitious objectives in terms of getting fire back on the ground. And of course pretty much having prescribed fire banned in place and the political situation and what’s going on in other states. So we’re going to be behind schedule in a big way as far as getting broadcast burning done.”

A changing group structure

The CFLRP legislation required the formalization of the collaborative groups under the WCLC umbrella organization so the financial, outreach, and programmatic components would be overseen by one organization, rather than three or more collaborative groups, through a formal agreement. The WCLC board of directors consists of several members belonging to individual collaborative groups. Some members believe has created communication challenges, including the distribution of information across all collaborative groups and members having a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the UP-CFLRP process. This formalization also caused the UncCom group to lose some of its financial oversight authority and strained some relationships across the membership as a result. Some members also spoke about difficult discussions the PLP group has been having about whether to continue and if so, how to best integrate with the larger umbrella organization. Overall, members were positive about the new WCLC organization and the new possibilities it brought with it. Most saw the challenges associated with the WCLC as being common across new organizations and did not believe it would change the collaborative network’s ability to accomplish their objectives.

Quotes from the members:

“There’s frustration because there are more strings attached and it’s more bureaucratic. It’s not as easy to, you don’t have the flexibility with the funds that you used to have. So that makes it harder to get things done.”

“I think (the members sense of their roles and responsibilities) may be a little fuzzy ... we don’t have a clear leader with a very clear map of where it is we’re going to go and how we get there. I don’t mean somebody who’s going to tell us where we’re going to go and how do we get there. I think we’re kind of doing it as we go along and that is working well but I think if we had just a little more central conceptualization of the story then people’s roles that might be a little bit sharper.”

“It’s interesting because prior to CFLR when it was just the UncMesas group that met for a year and a half or more, we didn’t have to have any thumbs up or thumbs down. It was just a group talking. And there were disagreements for sure, but it was much more organic. And that is one thing that changed b/c I know when we did get the CFLR grant the UP stopped facilitating and Jessica started coming in and facilitating and there was a lot more structure to the process. And I don’t know if they’ll continue that. It wasn’t very structured before that but that’s okay. I think now that it’s a larger group they have kept the voting and split into small groups. ... and within this next restoration effort I don’t know how they will do it.”

LESSONS LEARNED

Many of the accomplishments and challenges identified by the UP-CFLRP members interviewed are common across natural resource collaborative groups. The members were also asked to share the lessons they learned from these accomplishments and challenges. These lessons learned provide useful recommendations for other collaborative groups to consider.

Keep the momentum going

Maintaining the energy and motivation of the collaborative has been one of the key lessons learned. Members raised the importance of having projects implemented and going out into the field together over and over again. As one member stated, "I think you've just got to keep the energy up because collaboratives can go by the wayside. So you have to keep reinvigorating them with new challenges and new projects. If things don't get done, if there weren't things to go see that were tangible and new projects to monitor it could die in a heartbeat." Another agreed, "To me that's probably the most important thing in my experience with natural resource related issues that you're not sitting in an office and talking about hypotheticals but you go out on the ground and talk about the variability and the actual environment that you might have an opinion on. It makes things a little bit hard to be on one side of the fence or the other. So going on the ground and seeing this stuff first hand, people have a harder time building up a wall for one opinion. The natural world is just too messy to really have a solid opinion either way."

By keeping their momentum the Uncompahgre collaborative network was able to build the foundation necessary to obtain the CFLRP funding. The UP-CFLRP has increased this momentum by providing the opportunity to achieve objectives the collaborative had established over the many years they have worked together. One member emphasized this by saying, "They did have a very collaborative community already. And it (the CFLRP) facilitated and fostered that continuing on. The biggest thing (the UP-CFLRP) did was make people realize that the dreams we'd been talking about really could become reality. And that's not always an easy thing to accomplish. And so it reinforced the idea that collaboration can lead to the kinds of outcomes that we were all hoping for."

A history of collaboration is important

The UP-CFLRP builds on a long history of collaboration in the Uncompahgre Plateau region. As one member put it, "We have demonstrated great collaborative efforts on the western slope so we're a good candidate because we're ready. We're mature enough as a community to take on something like this." Members underscored the importance of establishing collaborative relationships prior to applying

for CFLRP funding. Most discussed how the relationships that had been built over the past two decades not only made the UP-CFLRP proposal very competitive, it provided them with pre-established project objectives. These pre-existing relationships and objectives prepared them for many of the challenges associated with commencing a large long-term project with new processes and commitments. Because of this, several members suggested for CFLRP groups to take the time to establish collaborative relationships during the initial years if they have not been fully established prior to receiving the CFLRP grant. One member summarized this by saying, “Just trying to build those collaboratives is very difficult. I think that if the Forest Service is serious about not just building these but maintaining them they need to be patient. You give them time to pull these together, you give them time to build trust, and you give them time to do the planning. And to me, probably the first two years of these grants ought to be, if you don’t have a collaborative to start with that you can build on you need to give the local forest time to make those. Because otherwise I think they’re going to be very dysfunctional.”

The CFLRP has increased levels of collaboration

The implementation and associated processes of the UP-CFLRP have increased the levels of collaboration associated with the Uncompahgre network, both internally and externally. Many members attributed this to the implementation of projects they had been working towards during the past few years. As one member said, “I think seeing stuff implemented and having a number of folks come out and be happy with it, or at least be able to criticize it in a constructive way, I think that definitely makes the different interests feel valued and it allows them to talk about things that maybe prior to actually seeing something getting implemented they might have some concerns about whether or not it is actually going to happen the way that it was supposed to.” Another member had the same opinion, stating “Things have started to happen and projects that had been proposed had a motor behind them because they have some money to make them happen. So I think it provided some examples about what works and what doesn’t work and it stimulated that type of conversation. The next step is going to be to evaluate the projects together and then tie that back into new projects.”

Some members also mentioned the collaborative relationships that had been strengthened because of the UP-CFLRP, specifically the involvement of the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI). They felt the involvement from external organizations solidified the increased levels of collaboration. As a member stated, “One thing (we’ve learned) would be the (benefit of) outside support, like CFRI. CFRI had really been helping us with this project prior to CFLR, but I think the CFLR

really solidifies that relationship and that understanding that we want to continue to work with CFRI in the future. And that's huge for western Colorado to have that academic support."

Improved relations with the Forest Service

Other members indicated the UP-CFLRP had strengthened the levels of collaboration between environmental organizations and the USFS because it provided an opportunity for the implementation of projects they had discussed together and agreed upon. One member said, "It has been really successful. I think it's improved the relationship between the Forest Service and the environmental community enormously." One Forest Service person said, "From what we hear on the field trips and public statements from stakeholders they seem to be real happy with the way this thing is going. I think it has built and improved our collaborative relationships." Another member put it frankly, "So I think one of the things a lot of the folks who have been in the agency say, is that the way to avoid problems down the road is to do what you said you were going to do." Some thought the CFLRP benefitted the collaborative relationships because it provided a distinct opportunity for the collaborative group to assist the agency. One member said, "If the collaborative is not helping an agency address some need the relationship is going to wither and die because at that point you're just making work for the agency. But if you can go to the agency and say we'll help you do your CFLRP then it is a benefit to everyone."

Communication is essential

Members agreed communication is a core component of implementing a successful CFLRP. One member declared, "Have we learned anything? Well, that it does help to talk!" Even with a long history of collaboration and relationships built across different interests, many members identified the importance of increased communication. The CFLRP has brought new interests to the table and has potentially shifted the focus of the collaborative network away from previously identified projects so it is important to maintain communication across all stakeholders and collaborative network members. Another member said, "The more you can communicate and put real effort in communication and valuing that communication the more likely we're going to succeed because a little bit of information communicated in a timely manner can solve or prevent a lot of the real awkward or contentious moments."

Strong leadership

Members often mentioned the importance of having strong leaders, from both the Forest Service and the community, involved as an important component for success in the CFLRP. This was

emphasized by one member stating, “You really need strong leadership in your line officer to make it happen. They can’t be just sort of ho hum about it because if you’re going to keep people engaged you’ve got to keep the process in motion.” The importance of leadership within the local collaborative organizations was highlighted by another member who said, “The other challenge for collaborative groups is sustainability. This usually involves a coordinator or somebody to keep everything going and lead the collaborative. This is difficult because they’re all concerned about funding because everyone’s resources are tighter. But that is also why strong leadership is necessary.”

Keep it simple and concise

Lastly, some members emphasized the importance of maintaining simplicity when collaborative groups are developing their CFLRP proposals and monitoring programs. They spoke about having thought they understood how the project implementation would meet the collaborative objectives when the project began but then realizing the complexity of the issues. As one member put it, “I think with any effort you’re going to start off thinking you know what you’re doing and then you’re going to learn some stuff and, at a certain point, look back at what you started with and think wow, we should have done this a little differently. And I think that’s what is happening is that we’re figuring out new and better ways to do things. We’re working on setting clear objectives in our monitoring and so that’s going to be something that’s going to come out of the evaluation part of that cycle. I think we’re learning from our previous experience which is really the way it should happen.” Others spoke about the need to define the project objectives more succinctly. As one member stated, “I think our collaboration and involvement by so many stakeholders, and community involvement in the actual data collection was really strong. But if there’s anything that was weak was that our ability to maybe set priorities and to limit our objectives. And so I think that’s something that we’re learning right now is that in going on we need to be simple and concise in our objectives and our methods to address those objectives. If we try to look at everything we’re not going to accomplish anything very well.”



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