

CFLRP collaborative governance assessment: Summary of findings for the Zuni Mountains Collaborative and CFLRP

The Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI) developed a collaborative governance assessment as part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (Forest Service) Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) Common Monitoring Strategy.¹ The collaborative governance assessment was designed to evaluate collaborative health, function, resilience, and perceived outcomes of collaborative work. The SWERI administered an online questionnaire to members of the Zuni Mountains Collaborative, the official collaborative of the Zuni Mountains CFLRP, in the winter of 2022–2023. We received 15 usable responses (17% response rate). Figure 1 illustrates what groups were represented in the questionnaire. The purpose of this brief is to:

- Summarize high-level findings from the collaborative governance assessment; and
- Document participants’ recommendations to improve collaborative performance and progress.

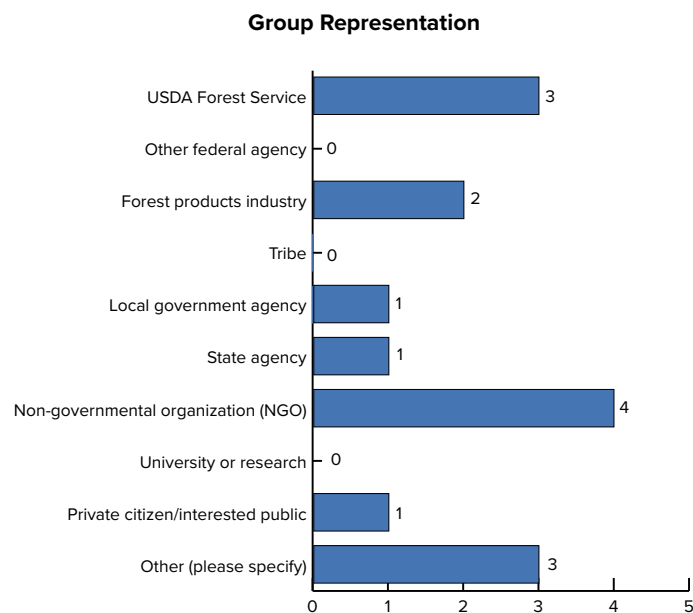


Figure 1: Respondents’ self-identified representation with associated organizations (n=15).

Findings

What is working well for the Zuni Mountains CFLRP?

Overall, a strong majority of respondents agreed on almost every indicator that the Collaborative members worked well

together and accomplished their goals. Most respondents thought their expectations were met in collaborating with the Forest Service and that the agency was responsive to input (Figure 2). Respondents also overwhelmingly agreed that the collaborative process helped build trust and relationships. A strong majority perceived of leadership positively and agreed that there were opportunities to co-generate knowledge, work toward adaptive management, and be flexible in the face of landscape or collaborative personnel changes. Respondents felt that the Collaborative had adequate technical expertise, facilitation skills, and funds, yet a smaller majority thought there was adequate time. There was also strong agreement that collaborative participants were held accountable and protocols were fair, equitable and used appropriately, even if they were relatively informal. Smaller majorities agreed that collaborative protocols were clearly understood and that Forest Service decision making was clear (Figure 2).

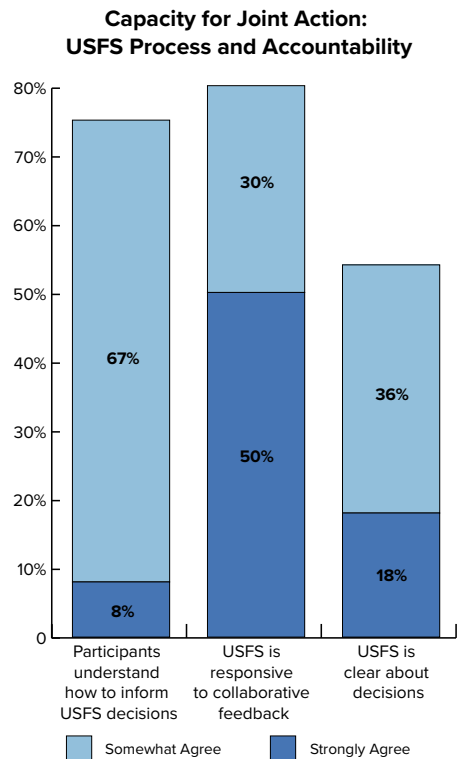


Figure 2: Percentage of respondents who either “Somewhat Agree” or “Strongly Agree” that they understand how to inform Forest Service decisions, the Forest Service is responsive to feedback, and the Forest Service is clear about decisions.

¹USDA Forest Service Common Monitoring Strategy - <https://www.fs.usda.gov/restoration/documents/cflrp/CMS-Fact-Sheet-final-20221013.pdf>

What disruptions and challenges have affected collaborative progress and performance?

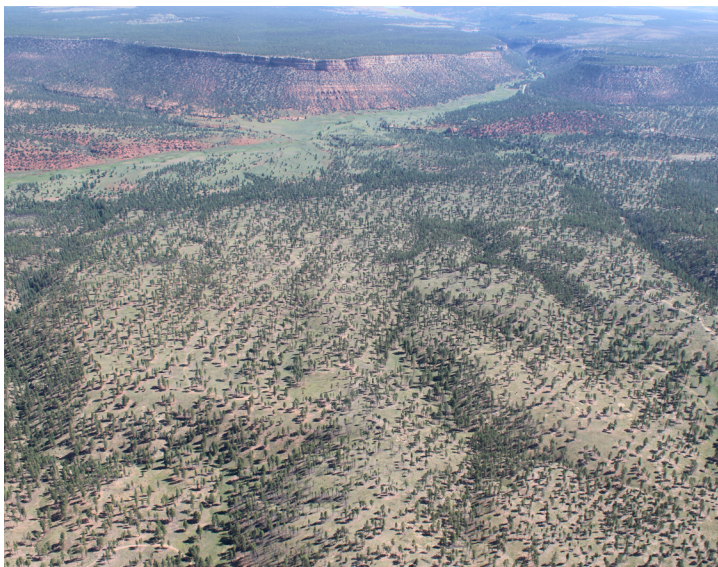
The collaborative has dealt with several disruptions, with most respondents indicating that frequent turnover, biophysical disruptions such as wildfire, limited agency capacity, and limited wood products industry capacity were the most significant challenges. Qualitative comments also indicated that forest closures due to the Mexican spotted owl injunction and fire restrictions, inadequate workforce, and variable weather conditions also posed challenges. The Collaborative was already displaying strong adaptive capacity through the flexibility of arrangements and operations, namely utilizing new state-wide legislation and Collaborative partnerships to pivot to forest restoration work on non-federal lands during forest closures.

Progress toward desired process, socio-economic, and ecological outcomes

A strong majority of respondents indicated that the CFLRP project was moving toward achieving a variety of desired collaborative process (Figure 3), ecological, and socio-economic goals, including but not limited to:

- Enhancing communication and including diverse perspectives.
- Improving or maintaining watershed function and the pace and scale of restoration and reducing fuel hazard.
- Reducing community wildfire risk and supporting local employment or training opportunities.

Several factors were identified as facilitating this forward movement, such as the involvement of key people, open communication, and strong coordination between the Forest Service and wood products industry.



Zuni Mountains landscape (Source: John Formby, USFS Forest Health Protection.).

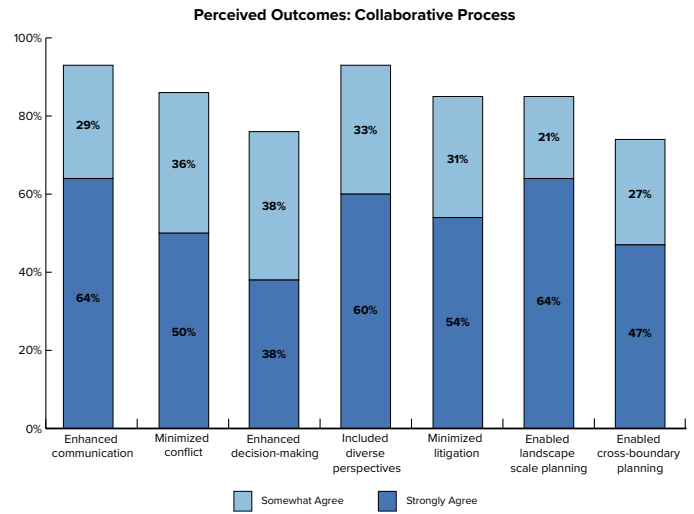


Figure 3: Percent of respondents who either “Somewhat Agree” or “Strongly Agree” that the collaborative process has impacted the function and capacity of the collaborative.

Recommendations to improve the collaborative process and performance

Respondents provided a number of recommendations to improve the collaborative process and performance, including:

- Increase stakeholder participation, engagement, and outreach, especially with local residents. The questionnaire had a low overall response rate, with a lack of participation by key players; the Collaborative is already expanding their efforts to include more participants.
- Enhance understanding of restoration work including increasing transparency in Forest Service decision making and hosting informative field trips.
- Increase collaborative personnel capacity as personnel turnover was a documented disruption, and action was limited by time constraints and agency and wood products industry capacity. Commenters recommended the development of young staffers’ leadership skills and the addition of botanical expertise.
- Continue to support flexible approaches, building on successful collaborative pivoting to maintain mill supply during the Mexican spotted owl injunction and fire restrictions.

Next steps

Results from this questionnaire provided a baseline assessment of collaborative governance among the Zuni Mountains CFLRP. The SWERI will continue to engage in assessing collaborative health and performance of CFLRP projects, the goal of which is to identify where capacities lie and areas for improvement to target investments and activities that support resilient and durable collaboration.