

CFLRP collaborative governance assessment: Summary of findings for the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project 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 Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project, the official collaborative of the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project CFLRP, in the winter of 2022-2023. We received 38 usable responses (45% 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.

Group representation

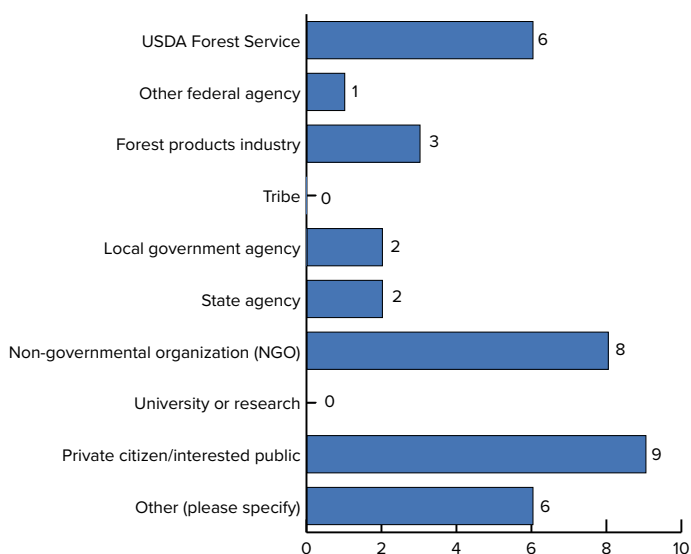


Figure 1: Respondents' self-identified representation with associated organizations (n=15).

Findings

What has worked well for the Deschutes CFLRP?

Overall, there was strong agreement on most indicators that the collaborative process was working well and

accomplishing goals, although open-ended responses indicated some disagreement. There was strong agreement that a representative cross-section of individuals who had a stake in the issues were involved in the Collaborative, although both tribal representatives and researchers were not represented in the survey responses (Figure 1). Most respondents thought their expectations were met in collaborating with the Forest Service through planning and implementation, although not in monitoring (Figure 2), and that the agency was responsive to input. Respondents strongly agreed that the collaborative process has helped build trust and relationships. A strong majority of respondents perceived of leadership positively and agreed that there were opportunities to co-generate knowledge, work toward adaptive management, and be flexible when there were personnel changes. Respondents felt that the Collaborative had adequate technical expertise, facilitation skills, and funds, but lacked adequate time. A strong majority of respondents perceived that collaborative participants were held accountable and protocols are fair, used appropriately, and clearly understood. Respondents were split on their perceptions of agreement on shared strategies to solve identified problems on the landscape or that there was adequate flexibility in the face of landscape changes like wildfire.



Photo credit: Sarah Edwards, DCFP's Outreach Coordinator

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

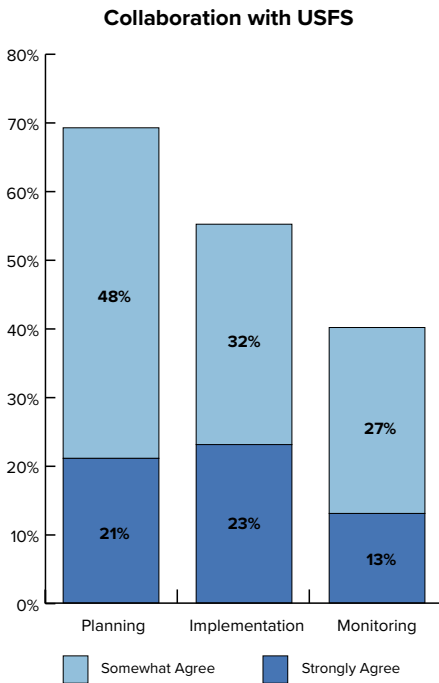


Figure 2: Percentage of respondents who either “Somewhat Agree” or “Strongly Agree” that they understand how to inform Forest Service decisions, the Forest Service is responsive to feedback, and the Forest Service is clear about decisions.

What disruptions and challenges have affected collaborative progress and performance?

The Collaborative has had to deal with several disruptions, particularly frequent turnover, conflict among participants, a limited wood products industry capacity, and the challenge of moving from direction-setting or planning to implementation. Commenters also noted the challenges of loss of trust, the COVID-19 pandemic, changes in leadership in the Collaborative, and inadequate Forest Service staffing. In response to these challenges, the Collaborative and Forest Service have improved staffing, pursued additional funding, and increased engagement with key stakeholders.

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 (Figure 3), ecological, and socio-economic goals, including but not limited to:

- Enhancing communication and decision-making and including diverse perspectives.
- Improving wildfire use, reducing fuel hazards, and improving or maintaining the pace and scale of restoration.
- Reducing community wildfire risk.

A strong majority, however, largely did not see accomplishment of more work on adjacent non-federal lands. Several factors were identified as facilitating achieving goals, such as partner commitment to working together in good faith, strong leadership, and involvement from the right personnel, including a professional facilitator and coordinator.

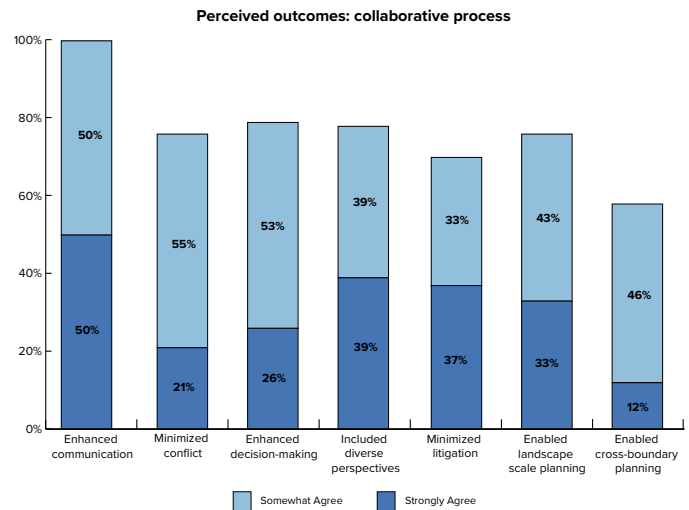


Figure 3: Percent of respondents who either “Somewhat Agree” or “Strongly Agree” that the collaborative process has impacted the function and capacity of the collaborative.

Recommendations to improve the collaborative process and performance

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

- Increase the Forest Service’s capacity for engagement in the collaborative process through mitigating the effects of high turnover, streamlining input processes, and increasing capacity, particularly through hiring positions related to wildfire and NEPA.
- Embrace a diversity of participating interests and reinforce collaborative protocols to reduce conflict and move collaboration forward.
- Increase and maintain consistent funding.
- Increase the utilization of the best available science and science communication to Collaborative members, stakeholders, and the broader community.

Next steps

Results from this questionnaire provided a baseline assessment of collaborative governance among the Deschutes 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.