

CFLRP collaborative governance assessment: Summary of findings for the Southern Blues Restoration Coalition 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 Southern Blues Collaboration Restoration Coalition CFLRP project, which includes the Blue Mountains Forest Partnership (BMFP), the Harney County Forest Restoration Collaborative (HCFRC), and the Malheur National Forest, in spring 2023. We received 23 usable responses (17% response rate). Figure 1 illustrates what groups were represented in the questionnaire; 64% of respondents represented the Forest Service. 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

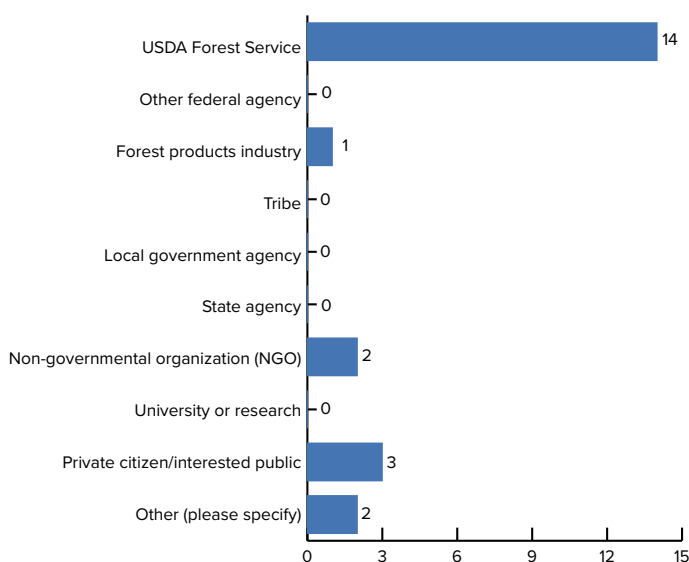


Figure 1: Respondents' self-identified representation with associated organizations (n=15).

Findings

What has worked well for the Southern Blues 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. A slight majority agreed that a representative cross-section of individuals who had a stake in the issues were involved in the Collaboratives. There were, however, no survey responses from tribes, researchers, and agencies outside the Forest Service, and the forest products industry only submitted one response, despite being involved in the Collaboratives. Most respondents thought their expectations were met in collaborating with the Forest Service in planning, but not in implementation and 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 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 forest conditions change. Respondents felt that the Collaborative had adequate technical expertise, facilitation skills, and funds, but lacked adequate time. A majority of respondents perceived that protocols were clearly understood, but respondents were split on their perceptions of protocols being fair and equitable or that there was a neutral space for discussion.

What disruptions and challenges have affected collaborative progress and performance?

The Collaboratives have had to deal with several disruptions, particularly frequent turnover, limited agency capacity, funding, moving from direction-setting to implementation, and biophysical disturbances. Commenters also noted the challenges in lengthy timelines to achieve implementation, COVID-19 reducing communication, and the involvement of politicians in the collaborative process. A response to these disruptions included hosting a "Collaboration 101" workshop for new Forest Service employees, but respondents thought more could be done. Quantitative responses also illustrated that most respondents did not think the Forest Service was clear about the decisions they make and why or that protocols were used appropriately.

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

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

A strong majority of respondents indicated that the CFLRP project has moved toward achieving a variety of desired collaborative, ecological, and socio-economic goals in its first decade of funding, including but not limited to:

- Minimizing litigation and conflict and enhancing communication.
- Reducing fuel hazards, improving or maintaining restoration pace and scale and watershed function, and restoring old growth.
- Reducing community wildfire risk and offsetting treatment costs.

A majority, however, largely did not see the CFLRP as yet achieving enhanced decision-making, inclusion of diverse perspectives, cross-boundary planning, and work on adjacent land. Several factors were identified as facilitating achieving goals, such as having members willing to communicate and work together and utilizing the best available science.

Recommendations to improve the collaborative process and performance

Respondents provided several recommendations to improve the collaborative process and performance. It was not possible to determine which Collaborative respondents were referring to for all responses.

- Include diverse members and perspectives in the Collaboratives, especially BMFP. This should involve perspectives that focus on restoration beyond timber and fuels management such as prescribed fire use, cultural resources, wildlife, grazing, riparian areas, fencing, and road closures.
- Increase and improve communication and engagement opportunities, particularly meeting in person and increasing the thoughtful utilization of field trips to track meeting desired goals and move toward adaptive management.
- Implement a systematic approach to curb turnover impacts at the Forest Service, such as regularly offering the “Collaboration 101” workshop, having agency leadership emphasize the importance of collaboration, and increasing agency staffing to create redundancies in collaborative engagement.

Next steps

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

Collaboration with USFS

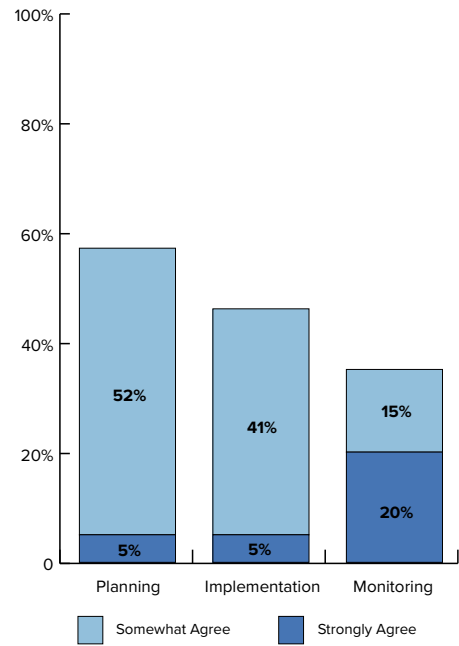


Figure 2: Percentage of respondents who either “Somewhat Agree” or “Strongly Agree” that they understand how to inform Forest Service decisions, the Forest Service is responsive to feedback, and the Forest Service is clear about decisions.

Perceived outcomes: collaborative process

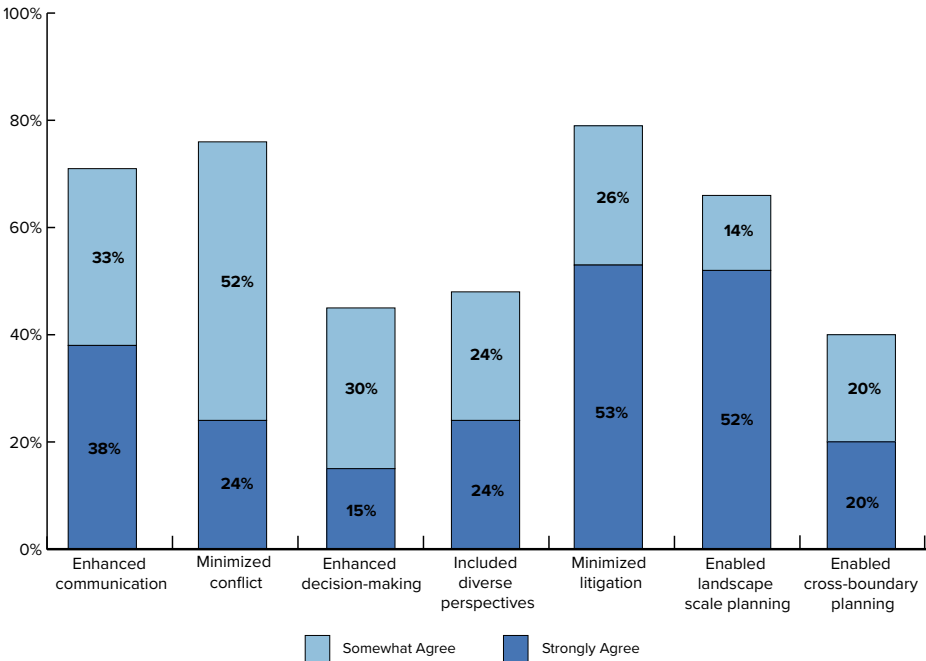


Figure 3: Percent of respondents who either “Somewhat Agree” or “Strongly Agree” that the collaborative process has impacted the function and capacity of the collaborative.