

CFLRP Collaborative Governance Assessment: Summary of Findings for the North Central Washington 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 North Central Washington Forest Health Collaborative, the official collaborative of the North Central Washington CFLRP that works with the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, in spring 2023. We received 23 usable responses (44% 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.

Findings

What has worked well for the North Central Washington CFLRP?

Overall, there was strong agreement on most indicators that the collaborative process was working well and accomplishing goals, although some responses indicated 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 tribal representatives were not present in the survey responses (Figure 1). Most respondents’ expectations were met in collaborating with the Forest Service through planning, although not in implementation and monitoring (Figure 2). Respondents strongly agreed that the collaborative process has helped build trust and relationships. A majority of respondents perceived of leadership positively and thought there were opportunities to co-generate knowledge. Respondents felt that the Collaborative had adequate technical expertise, funds, and time, but were evenly split on their perception of having adequate facilitation. Respondents were also split in their perception that project participants were committed to adaptive management, and only a minority thought there

was flexibility to alter course when the Collaborative changes or that information was shared equally. A majority of respondents thought that existing protocols were fair, were used appropriately, and promoted accountability among CFLRP participants. A minority of respondents thought that protocols promoted accountability between the Forest Service and the Collaborative, that protocols were understood, that participants understood how to inform Forest Service decisions, and that the Forest Service was responsive to feedback from the Collaborative. A majority thought, however, that the agency was clear in the decisions they make and why.

What disruptions and challenges have affected collaborative progress and performance?

The Collaborative has dealt with several disruptions, particularly moving from direction-setting to implementation, personnel turnover, biophysical disruptions, conflict among participants, and limited industry and agency capacity. Commenters also noted that additional disruptions included challenges of Forest Service inconsistent communication, slow implementation, and variable leadership direction and lengthy NEPA processes. A few respondents said that the Collaborative took action to respond to these disruptions, namely developing multi-party

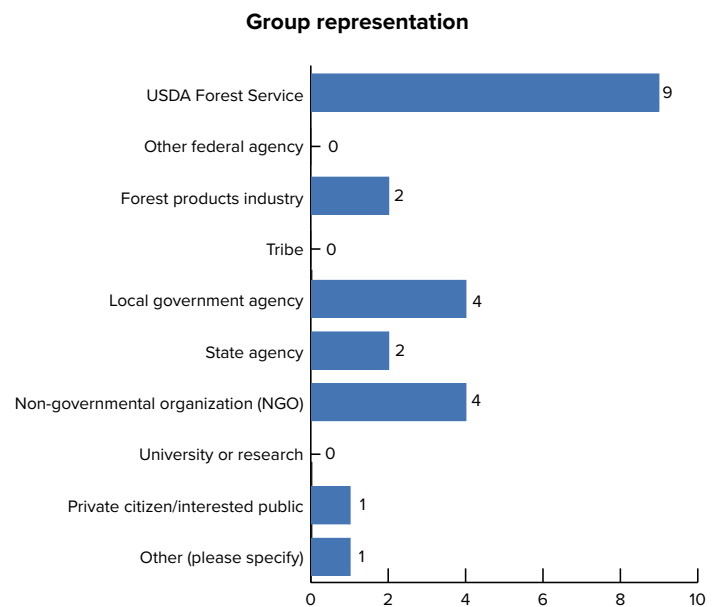


Figure 1: Respondents’ self-identified representation with associated organizations.

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

monitoring plans and funding facilitators, although others called for increased intervention.

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, including but not limited to:

- Enhanced communication, included diverse perspectives, and enabled landscape-scale planning
- Improved restoration pace and scale, reduced fuel hazards, and improved watershed function

In contrast, only a minority perceived the CFLRP as making progress on minimizing conflict, restoring old growth, improving fire use, improving habitat, controlling invasive species, offsetting treatment costs, supporting local employment, and accomplishing more work on adjacent lands. The Collaborative was established in 2013 but only recently began CFLRP funding in 2022.

Recommendations to improve the collaborative process and performance

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



- Clarify protocols, adjust them as needed, and enhance facilitation, including setting clear and distinct meeting objectives with linked outcomes.
- Clarify input processes and increase opportunities for the Collaborative to influence project prioritization.
- Move beyond planning toward collaborative adaptive management through setting goals, holding participants accountable to those goals and the incorporation of Collaborative input, and clarify input processes during implementation and monitoring.

Next steps

Results from this questionnaire provided a baseline assessment of collaborative governance among the North Central Washington 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

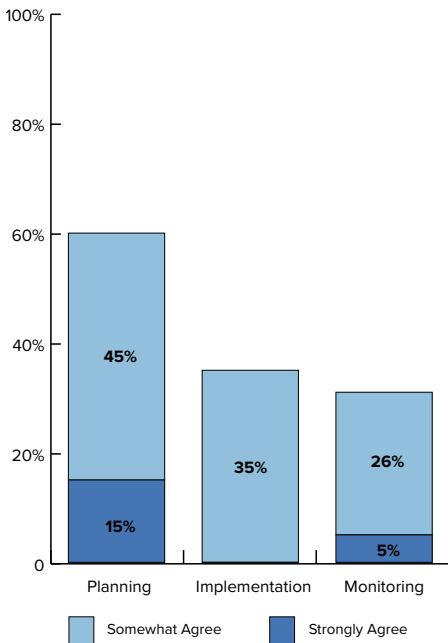


Figure 2: Percent of respondents who either “Somewhat Agree” or “Strongly Agree” that collaboration between members and the Forest Service has met their expectations during planning, implementation, and monitoring.

Perceived outcomes: collaborative process

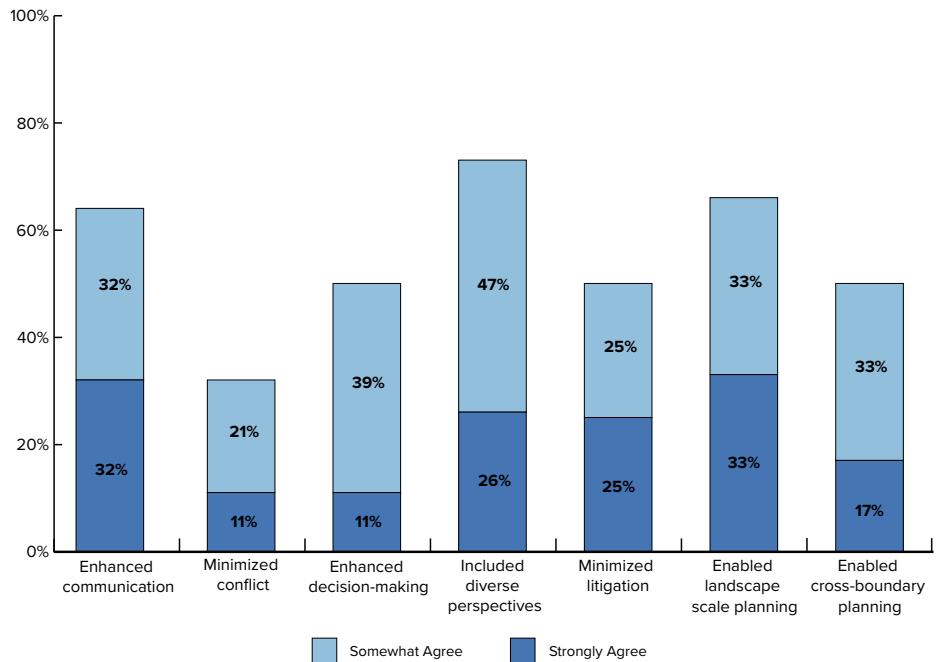


Figure 3: Percent of respondents who either “Somewhat Agree” or “Strongly Agree” that the collaborative process has impacted the function and capacity of the collaborative.