Collaborative Governance Assessment Report

FOR THE NORTH YUBA FOREST PARTNERSHIP CFLRP

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Document Development: In FY21, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service (Forest Service) led a collaborative process to develop a Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) Common Monitoring Strategy that will be required for all newly authorized and reauthorized projects under the CFLRP. The Forest Service Washington Office requested assistance from the Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI) in developing and deploying an assessment tool to track collaborative governance within and across CFLRP projects through time. The collaborative assessment is intended to assess whether CFLRP is encouraging an effective and meaningful collaborative approach, a component within the CFLRP Common Monitoring Strategy. We developed an online, confidential survey that was administered to CFLRP project participants. With support from the Forest Service Forest Management, Range Management, and Vegetation Ecology program, SWERI conducted regional webinars to introduce the assessment and identify project-level points of contact, which were followed by in-depth engagement with key contacts to determine recruitment strategies, administration timing, and project-specific questions. In FY22 and FY23, SWERI will be collecting baseline information for all newly authorized and reauthorized projects. SWERI will continue to engage in assessing collaborative health and performance of CFLRP projects.

Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI)
The Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes include three university-based restoration institutes: the New Mexico Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute (NMFWRI), the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI), and the Ecological Restoration Institute (ERI) in Arizona. These institutes were congressionally appointed in 2004 by the Southwest Forest Health and Wildfire Prevention Act (PL 108-317), and the institutes work together to develop a program of applied research and service to help create healthy forests, prevent uncharacteristic wildfires, sustain the resiliency of water supplies to wildfires, and create jobs. The SWERI receive funding from five primary sources: 1) federal appropriations; 2) additional federal funding (e.g., the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act); 3) state appropriations; 4) in-kind support from host universities; and 5) extramural funding such as grants and agreements. The SWERI receive federal appropriations under the Southwest Forest Health and Wildfire Prevention Act administered through the Forest Service. In accordance with federal law and USDA policy, these institutions are prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights Room 326-A, Whitten Building 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, DC, 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice & TDD).

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The Ecological Restoration Institute is nationally recognized for mobilizing the unique assets of a university to help solve the problem of unnaturally severe wildfire and degraded forest health throughout the American West. ERI serves diverse audiences with objective science and implementation strategies that support ecological restoration and climate adaptation on western-forest landscapes.

Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI), Colorado State University (CSU) The Colorado Forest Restoration Institute is a science-based outreach The Colorado Forest Restoration Institute is a science-based outreach and engagement organization hosted by the Department of Forest and Rangeland Stewardship and the Warner College of Natural Resources at Colorado State University. Colorado State University (CSU) is a land-grant university with a mission to provide teaching, research, public service, and engagement that CFRI strives to uphold. CFRI was established by Congress as part of the Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes to serve as a bridge between researchers, managers, and stakeholders working to restore and enhance the resilience of forest ecosystems to wildfires in Colorado, the Southern Rocky Mountains, and the Intermountain West. CFRI leads collaborations between researchers, managers, and stakeholders to generate and apply locally relevant, actionable knowledge to inform forest management strategies. CFRI's work informs forest conditions assessments, management goals and objectives, monitoring plans, and adaptive management processes.

NAU Land Acknowledgment: Northern Arizona University sits at the base of the San Francisco Peaks, on homelands sacred to Native Americans. We honor their past, present, and future generations, who have lived here for millennia and will forever call this place home.

CSU Land Acknowledgment: Colorado State University acknowledges, with respect, that the land we are on today is the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Ute Nations and peoples. This was also a site of trade, gathering, and healing for numerous other Native tribes. We recognize the Indigenous peoples as original stewards of this land and all the relatives within it. As these words of acknowledgment are spoken and heard, the ties Nations have to their traditional homelands are renewed and reaffirmed. CSU is founded as a land-grant institution, and we accept that our mission must encompass access to education and inclusion. And, significantly, that our founding came at a dire cost to Native Nations and peoples whose land this University was built upon. This acknowledgment is the education and inclusion we must practice in recognizing our institutional history, responsibility, and commitment.

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Cover photo credit: North Yuba Forest Partnership field tour, October 2019 (Source: Alex Boesch, Yuba Water Agency)

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Executive Summary

The Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI) developed a collaboration assessment as part of the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) Common Monitoring Strategy. The collaboration assessment was designed to assess the following questions:

1. What are the structural and functional dynamics of the collaborative? Does the collaborative exhibit characteristics generally associated with healthy, well-functioning, and resilient collaboratives?
2. What do participants need or recommend to improve the process?
3. To what extent do participants feel the project is meeting process, socio-economic, and ecological goals?
4. What challenges or disruptions affect collaborative performance and durability?

The SWERI administered an online survey to members of the North Yuba Forest Partnership CFLRP, which included members of the North Yuba Forest Partnership (NYFP, henceforth referred to as the Partnership) and the Tahoe and Plumas National Forests, from April to July of 2023.

Overall, a strong majority of respondents agreed on almost every indicator that the Partnership members worked well together and were accomplishing their goals. All respondents thought the CFLRP project had been collaborative and that a representative cross-section of individuals who have a stake in the issues were involved in the Partnership. There were, however, no responses from the forest products industry, tribes, and the research community, despite their participation in the Partnership. All respondents agreed that there was a shared understanding of the purpose and key problems addressed by the CFRLP project and strategies used to address those problems. A strong majority of respondents' expectations were met in collaborating with the Forest Service through planning, implementation, and monitoring, although some qualitative comments recommended greater inclusion of partners beyond the planning phase. Nearly all respondents agreed that the collaborative process has helped build trust, relationships, and mutual respect. Nearly all respondents also trusted the group to achieve desired outcomes and believed that they and other partners were committed to the collaborative process. Additionally, nearly all respondents indicated that leaders worked well across organizations, helped maintain a common vision, and motivated others. Participants strongly agreed that there were opportunities to co-generate knowledge, work toward adaptive management, and be flexible in the face of changes. Respondents felt that the CFLRP project had adequate technical expertise, facilitation, and funds, but only a slight majority thought there was sufficient time to accomplish work. There was also strong agreement that protocols were in place to promote accountability among CFLRP participants and with the Forest Service and that protocols were understood, fair and used appropriately. A strong majority of participants also understood how to inform Forest Service decisions and thought that the agency was responsive to collaborative feedback and clear about their decision-making.

Most respondents thought that the CFLRP project was moving toward achieving most desired collaborative and ecological goals, particularly enhancing communication and decision-making, minimizing conflict and litigation, including diverse perspectives, and enabling landscape-scale planning. Most respondents, however, did not think progress had yet been made on several ecological and socio-economic goals, including restoring old growth, improving fire use and habitat, offsetting treatment costs, supporting local employment or training, or accomplishing more work on adjacent lands. Respondents were evenly split in their perception of the project making progress on reducing community wildfire risk.

Respondents indicated some areas where there was room for improvement and made pertinent recommendations. The Partnership has dealt with several disruptions, such as high personnel turnover and limited forest products industry capacity. Commenters also indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic was disruptive and reiterated the challenges of high agency turnover, low agency capacity, and a limited wood products industry (particularly related to few outlets for biomass and a small workforce). Responses to disruptions included continual flexibility in planning and implementation and increasing communication and partner engagement, although some challenges like industry capacity and workforce development were beyond the scope of the Partnership to resolve. Most respondents said that their expectations of collaborating with the Forest Service had been met or partially met and identified several key factors as contributing to the Partnership's success: strong commitment from partners that brought funding and capacity, inclusion of a limited number but crucial stakeholders, and leadership's willingness to support the use of innovative strategies. Three key recommendations emerged: 1) improve communication; 2) enhance partner engagement throughout the collaborative process; and 3) implement a systematic approach to curb the impacts of turnover.

The SWERI will continue to engage in assessing collaborative health and performance of CFLRP projects, with the goal of gauging capacities and identifying areas for improvement.

Introduction

The Forest Landscape Restoration Act (FLRA) was passed in 2009 and established the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP). The purpose of the CFLRP was to "encourage the collaborative, science-based ecosystem restoration of priority forest landscapes"[1] through a competitive funding program administered by the Forest Service. In 2021, CFLRP coordinators, Forest Service personnel, and partners led a collaborative process to develop the CFLRP Common Monitoring Strategy, a set of ecological and socio-economic monitoring questions and indicators that will supplement local project multi-party monitoring plans and will be required for all newly authorized and reauthorized projects.[2]

One core component of the CFLRP Common Monitoring Strategy relates to monitoring collaborative governance.[3] While the CFLRP requires projects to collaborate throughout planning, implementation, and monitoring, "collaboration" was not defined in the FLRA or CFLRP requirements, nor did the CFLRP provide specific guidelines by which collaborative groups convened and engaged in collaborative restoration throughout the life of the CFLRP project. This has resulted in a multitude of collaborative structures, processes, and practices implemented in diverse social and ecological contexts across the country. Also, collaborative groups are nested within and impacted by changes that occur within their group, external changes in social and ecological conditions, and a fluid institutional environment, all of which require groups to adjust and evolve their structures, practices, and processes (Beeton et al., 2022; Ulibarri et al., 2020). Yet, a systematic approach to monitoring and evaluating attributes of collaborative governance and resilience is lacking. Systemic evaluation could lead to better understanding of what factors promote or challenge collaboration across different contexts, help target what kinds of investments are needed, and where to maintain and enhance collaborative capacity.

To address this need, the USDA Forest Service Washington Office requested assistance from the Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI) in developing and deploying an assessment tool to track collaborative governance.[3] During the development of the CFLRP Common Monitoring Strategy, CFLRP coordinators from the Washington Office elicited feedback from CFLRP practitioners, CFLRP coordinators, and subject matter experts to identify monitoring questions, indicators, and available data sources. With respect to collaborative governance, partners wanted to address the question, how well is the CFLRP encouraging an effective and meaningful collaborative approach? CFLRP practitioners and coordinators expressed interest in documenting collaborative health, function, and resilience, as well as performance (perceived outcomes). CFLRP practitioners, coordinators, and subject matter experts also emphasized the need for a tool that is straightforward, not time-consuming, easy to administer, and longitudinal.

To directly inform the components of the collaboration assessment, we incorporated stakeholder feedback and questions of interest developed while drafting of the CFLRP Common Monitoring Strategy. Our objectives were to:

1. Develop a rigorous, systematic, and longitudinal assessment of collaborative governance that is grounded in the science and practice of landscape-scale collaborative forest restoration.
2. Support program-wide evaluation of collaborative progress and performance, and report on findings to Forest Service staff and Congress.
3. Facilitate project-level engagement, reporting, and peer-learning to inform local collaborative work and adaptive management.
4. Contribute to the theory and practice of collaborative governance through the synthesis of findings and lessons learned.

The SWERI administered the collaborative governance assessment — an online survey — to the North Yuba Forest Partnership CFLRP, which includes members of the North Yuba Forest Partnership (NYFP, henceforth the Partnership) and Tahoe and Plumas National Forests, between April and July 2023. While the NYFP has existed since 2018, it began receiving CFLRP funding with the National Forests in 2022 ("About NYFP"). The report herein summarizes findings from the collaboration assessment. We have also integrated, where appropriate, information gathered during a group interview on the collaborative context. See Appendix 1 for a report brief summarizing our findings. We briefly highlight the approach, followed by a baseline assessment of findings and document recommendations from respondents to improve the collaborative process.

[1] PL 111-11 CFLRP Authorizing legislation - https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/110th-congress/senate-report/370/1
[2] CFLRP National Core Monitoring Strategy - https://www.fs.usda.gov/restoration/documents/cflrp/CMS-Fact-Sheet-final-20221013.pdf
[3] Here, we define governance as "the system of institutions, including rules, laws, regulations, policies, and social norms, and organizations involved in governing environmental resource use and/or protection" (Chaffin et al. 2014).

Approach

We developed an online survey to assess:

1. What are the structural and functional dynamics of the collaborative? Does the collaborative exhibit characteristics generally associated with healthy, well-functioning, and resilient collaboratives?
2. What do participants need or recommend to improve the process?
3. To what extent do participants feel the project is meeting process, socio-economic, and ecological goals?
4. What challenges or disruptions affect collaborative performance and durability?

Framework

The survey was structured using concepts from an integrative collaborative governance framework (Emerson et al., 2012), resilience and adaptability literature (Emerson and Gerlak, 2014; Folke et al., 2005; Gupta et al., 2010), and empirical findings from the first 10 years of the CFLRP (Beeton et al., 2022; Butler and Schultz, 2019; McIntyre and Schultz, 2020; Schultz et al., 2018).

Collaboration dynamics – To assess collaboration dynamics, we operationalized the Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance (Emerson et al., 2012). The framework incorporates multiple components of collaborative governance that are grounded in collaborative practice, link collaboration dynamics to socio-economic and ecological outcomes, and promote assessment of collaboratives across settings and time. The components include principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action (Emerson et al., 2012).

Principled engagement refers to ensuring the right people are involved, i.e., a representative cross-section of people and entities who have a stake in the issue. Principled engagement also emphasizes the principles of open and inclusive communication and negotiation, where individuals with diverse perspectives and knowledge work together to identify shared problems, agree on strategies to solve those problems, and agree on the purpose or scope of the collaborative.

Shared motivation refers to the interpersonal and relational elements of collaborative dynamics. Shared motivation includes the sub-components mutual trust, understanding, and commitment. It is often referred to as social capital, or the "glue" that holds groups together through networks, norms, rules, and trust that promote collective action (Pelling and High, 2005). This glue is crucial for effective collaboration; social capital is built through investments in social relationships and can be expressed through mutual commitment of individuals and groups to common collaborative goals.

Capacity for joint action comprises four sub-components: leadership, knowledge and learning, resources, and institutional arrangements (Emerson and Gerlak, 2014). Leadership is essential for managing collaboratives, and leaders can fill many roles including convener, sponsor, public advocate, facilitator, and others. They are important for: building trust; sensemaking; bringing people together; initiating partnerships; motivating people to work together; compiling, generating, and disseminating knowledge; developing visions of and support for change; and managing conflict (Folke et al., 2005).

In a collaborative setting, participants should work together to co-create and co-develop shared understanding and knowledge through social learning; knowledge and information should be equally accessible to all members of the collaborative; and learning and knowledge should be used to inform flexible, adaptive management (Emerson and Gerlak, 2014). Social learning occurs through repeated interactions and joint problem-solving among participants. It emphasizes testing, monitoring, and reevaluating participants' assumptions and understanding of ecosystem responses and feedbacks to learn and adapt management actions (Folke et al., 2005; Lebel et al., 2010; Sharma-Wallace et al., 2018). Collaboratives often pool and share resources to accomplish tasks and get work done, including funding, personnel, science and technical expertise, facilitation, and coordination.

Institutional arrangements are the processes, protocols, and structures needed to manage collaboration over time, i.e., the rules of the game. Collaborative structures, processes, and protocols should be clearly understood, transparent, perceived as fair and equitable, and include mechanisms of accountability (Emerson et al., 2012; Gupta et al., 2010; Stern and Coleman, 2015). Capacity needs change through time, and the relative amount of these

four capacity types is contingent upon the local context — e.g., history of conflict, people involved, purpose and objectives of the group, among others (Imperial et al., 2016).

Perceived outcomes – Our assessment focuses both on perceived "process" outcomes (e.g., did the collaborative process reduce conflict, or increase the ability to plan at a landscape scale?) and socio-economic and ecological outcomes. The outcome metrics chosen for evaluation were derived from several sources: the intent of the FLRA of 2009 and the CFLRP; project proposals; and conversations with local, regional, and national CFLRP coordinators while developing the Common Monitoring Strategy.

Challenges or disruptions that affect collaborative performance and durability – Disruptions—i.e., personnel turnover, legal or policy changes, and biophysical disturbances like wildfires or insect outbreaks—can happen at any time. These disruptions may impact collaborative progress and performance, and/or force groups to adapt. We developed a list of common challenges that CFLRP projects and other landscape scale forest collaboratives reported in: 1) breakout group discussions and focus group sessions at the 2020 SWERI Cross-boundary Landscape Restoration Workshop (SWERI, 2020) and the 2020 Idaho forest collaborative shared stewardship workshops; 2) the 2020 CFLRP Collaboration Indicator Survey administered by the National Forest Foundation[4]; and 3) a survey administered to Forest Service staff engaged in 2010 and 2012 CFLRP projects (Schultz et al., 2018). Identifying current challenges or disruptions that CFLRP projects are grappling with can support strategic investment toward solutions to maintain collaborative performance and durability.

Needs or recommendations to improve the process – We captured respondents' perspectives on needs and recommendations to improve the collaborative process by including an open-ended survey question.

Data Collection and Analysis

We developed a standardized survey in the online survey tool Qualtrics that consisted of 21, mostly closed-ended statements using a Likert scale. SWERI piloted the assessment with and elicited feedback from the Northern Blues All-Lands Restoration Partnership and Northern Blues CFLRP project participants (n=37), as well as participants of the Colorado Front Range CFLRP (n=3) in FY21 (Beeton et al., 2022). SWERI and the Forest Service held regionally focused webinars to introduce the assessment and identify key points of contact for each newly authorized and reauthorized project to help with recruiting participants, scheduling the assessment, and identifying project-specific questions of interest that were appended to the standardized survey, which is outlined in our standard operating procedures document.

Key points of contact from The Nature Conservancy and the South Yuba River Citizens League provided support in recruiting participants and administering the survey through the Partnership listserv from April through July 2023. The survey was open for 10 weeks. We received 25 usable responses, representing more than 43% of the population. We used the statistical software program Statistical Software for Social Sciences (SPSS) to document mean responses and variation in responses. Open-ended questions were analyzed using a thematic analysis (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Small sample sizes prohibited further statistical analyses, though this will be possible when more data has been collected.

Findings

Our results are organized as follows. The first section includes responses related to respondents' affiliations, motivations for being involved in the CFLRP project, level of engagement, and the degree to which respondents felt the project was collaborative. We then provide a description of findings related to collaboration dynamics (i.e., **principled engagement**, **shared motivation**, and **capacity for joint action**). We provide a short description of each collaboration dynamic construct in italics to orient the reader. We follow with findings on perceived outcomes, disruptions that are challenging to collaborative progress and performance, and recommendations to improve the process. Finally, we present results from the appended question set that was developed in coordination with key points of contact affiliated with the North Yuba Forest Partnership CFLRP. For scale items (e.g., strongly disagree to strongly agree, progress scales), figures depict the percentage of survey participants that somewhat agree to strongly agree. This was done for consistency in visualization and ease of interpretation. For clarity, we describe majority or strong majority results as greater than or equal to 60% agreement and slight majority as greater than 50% agreement. Some participants did not respond to certain questions or chose the option, "don't know/not applicable," and thus their responses were removed from the analysis of those questions.

[4] https://www.nationalforests.org/assets/pdfs/Collaboration-Indicator-Survey-Results-2020-publish.pdf
[5] https://cfri.box.com/s/hfu5cdk599j5gp5ixphm2qj7gdp4h1ef

Introductory Questions

The majority of participants represented non-governmental organizations (NGOs; 43.5%), local government agencies (21.7%), and the Forest Service (21.7%) (Figure 1). There were no responses from certain categories that are participants in the Partnership, including the forest products industry, tribes, and the research community. The "other" respondent was a previous Forest Service employee. The NYFP is comprised of nine official project partners who signed the North Yuba Partnership Memorandum of Understanding: the Tahoe National Forest, South Yuba River Citizens League, The Nature Conservancy, Yuba Water Agency, Camptonville Community Partnership, Nevada City Rancheria Nisenan Tribe, National Forest Foundation, Sierra County, and Blue Forest (NYFP "About"). Additional partners listed in the CFLRP proposal include Sierra Pacific Industries and other industry representatives, state agencies (such as the Sierra Nevada Conservancy), other nonprofit environmental groups, and recreation interests. Most of the CLFRP landscape acres are located in the Tahoe National Forest, which also signed the MOU, is part of the NYFP, and has been the main agency collaboration partner for the CFLRP, but some acreage of the CFLRP project is also in the Plumas National Forest. Interviewees indicated that the Plumas National Forest may engage in future years.

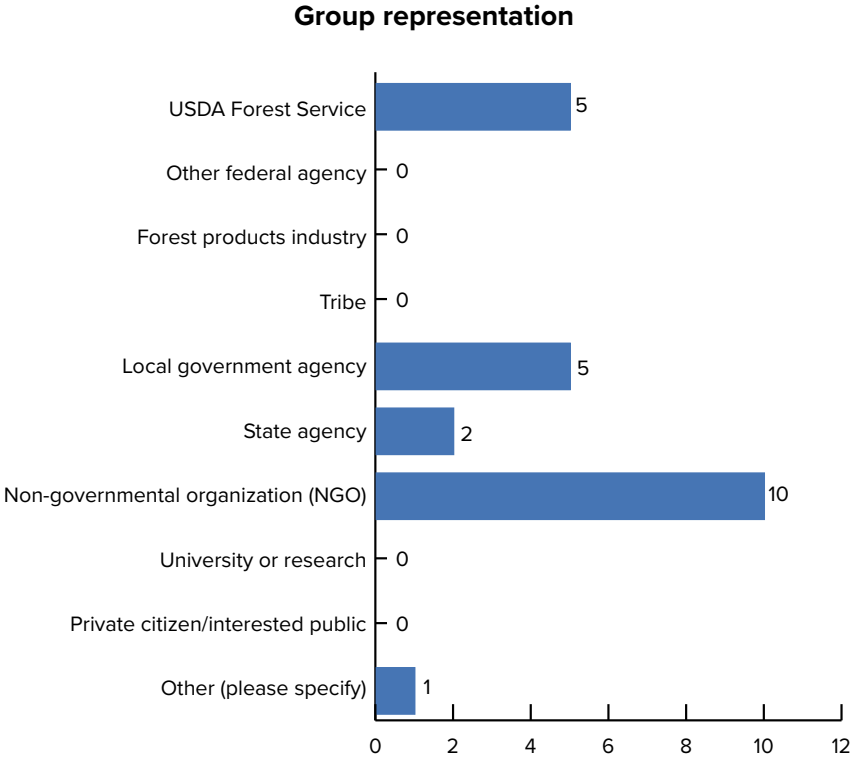

Figure 1: Respondents' self-identified representation with associated organizations.

The most frequently reported motivations for being involved in the CFLRP project were to restore forest resiliency (84%), reduce wildfire risk to the communities (68%), and to increase the pace and scale of work (52%) (Figure 2). The vast majority of respondents (96%) said that they were moderately to highly engaged in the CFLRP project during the past 12 months, and no respondents reported that they were not

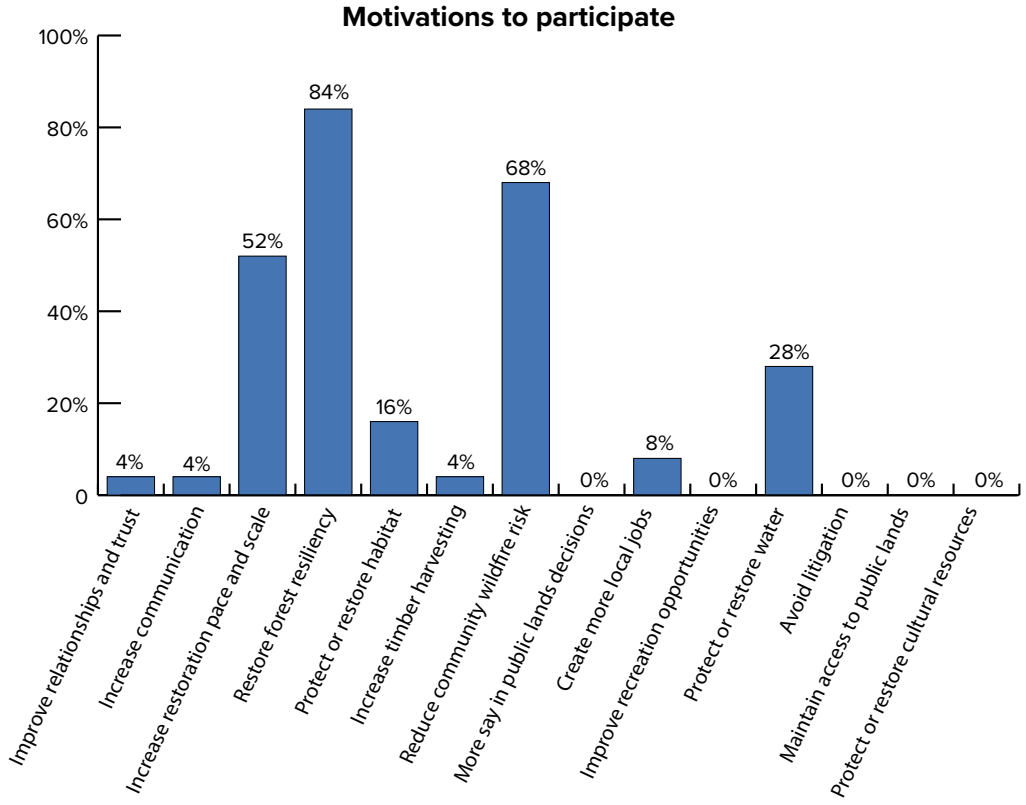

Figure 2: Percentage of respondents who identified the associated motive as reason for their participation in the collaborative. Note: respondents were able to select multiple motives.

engaged (Figure 3). Respondents reported an average of 3.6 years of involvement in the Partnership.

We asked respondents to reflect on the degree to which they thought the CFLRP project was collaborative (on a scale from not collaborative at all to very collaborative), which we defined in the survey as:

> *Collaboration occurs when multiple parties come together to address problems that could not be achieved by acting alone. Effective Collaboration should typically include: inclusive and diverse stakeholder interaction throughout the process; venues for open communication and negotiation about values, interests, and appropriate management actions; and opportunities for social learning.*

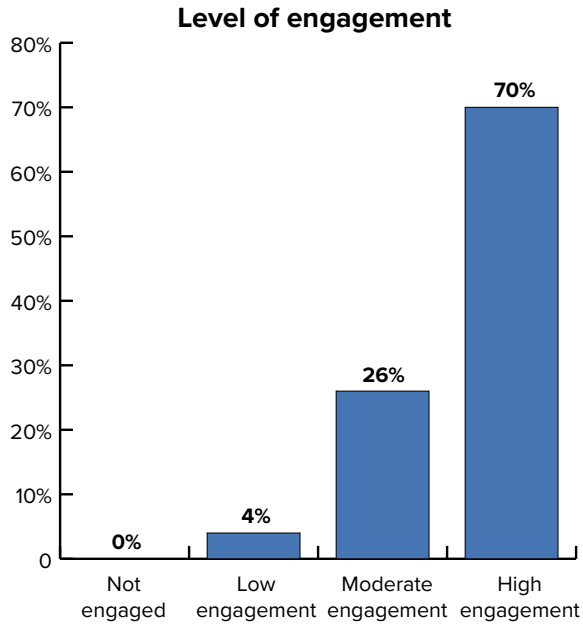

Figure 3: Percent of respondents who rated their involvement in this project as "Not engaged," "Low engagement," "Moderate engagement," or "High engagement."

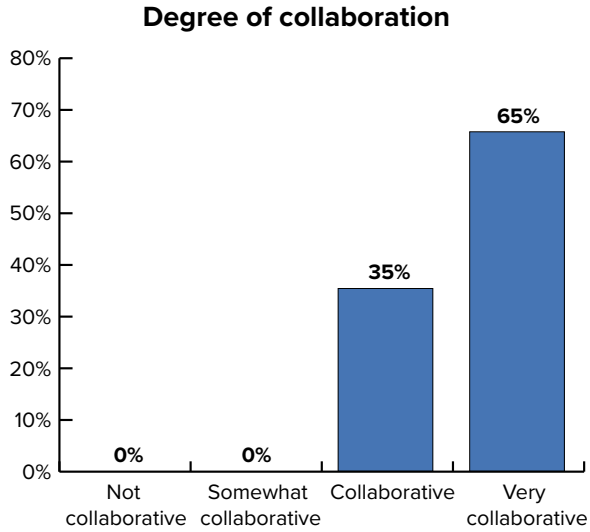

Figure 4: Percentage of respondents who reported this project to be "Not collaborative," "Somewhat collaborative," "Collaborative," or "Very collaborative."

All of the respondents (100%) indicated the CFLRP project has been collaborative to very collaborative (Figure 4).

Principled Engagement

Principled engagement refers to having the right people involved in iterative and inclusive dialogue to determine shared problems, identify shared strategies to solve problems, and agree to the shared purpose of the project.

All respondents (100%) agreed that a representative cross-section of individuals who have a stake in the issues and outcomes of the project were involved (Figure 5), although, as noted above, representatives from several participating sectors did not answer the survey. Likewise, all respondents (100%) agreed that participants worked together to identify shared interests and concerns, and they all felt the collaborative process created a neutral space for CFLRP participants to openly discuss controversial issues (100%) (Figure 5).

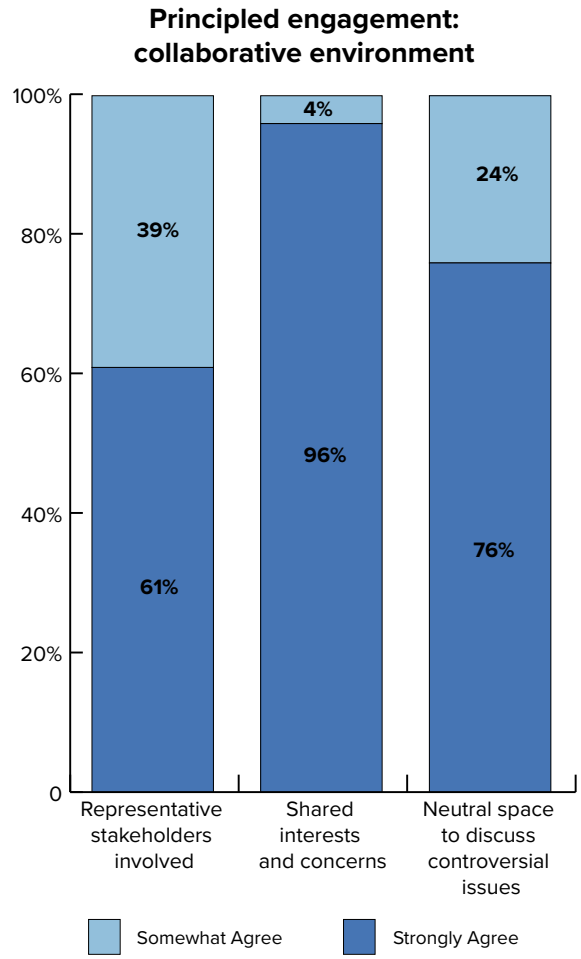

Figure 5: Percentage of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that representative stakeholders are involved, stakeholders have shared interests and concerns, and the collaborative is a neutral space to discuss controversial issues.

All respondents (100%) indicated that participants had a shared understanding of the problems that impact their landscape, the strategies to solve those problems, and the purpose of the CFLRP project (Figure 6).

All respondents (100%) felt that the level of collaboration between the Partnership and the Forest Service met their expectations during planning (Figure 7). A strong majority also indicated that collaboration with the Forest Service met their expectations during implementation (84%) and monitoring (79%) (Figure 7).

Shared Motivation

Shared motivation refers to trust, mutual understanding, relationship-building, and commitment to the collaborative process.

A strong majority of participants agreed the collaborative process helped build trust in each other (100%), relationships (96%), and mutual respect of others' positions and interests (95%) (Figure 8). All participants also trusted the group's ability to achieve desired actions and outcomes (Figure 8). A strong majority of respondents perceived that they (96%), Forest Service unit level staff (100%), and other project participants (100%) were committed to the process (Figure 9).

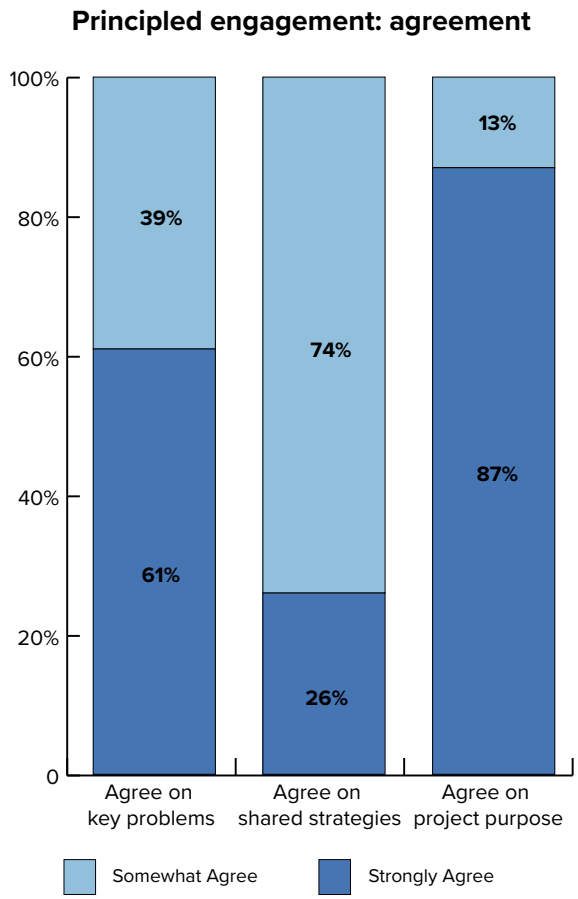

Figure 6: Percentage of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" on the key problems that impact the landscape, strategies to solve problems, and purpose of the collaborative.

Capacity for Joint Action

Capacity for joint action includes four components: collaborative leadership, knowledge and learning, resources, and institutional arrangements that support fair governance.

Leadership

Leadership is a critical component for collaborative governance. Leaders are needed to convene partners, communicate a shared vision, and motivate people to work together.

A strong majority of respondents agreed that the Partnership had leaders who worked well with other people (96%), maintained and communicated a common vision and direction (95%), and motivated others to work together (95%) (Figure 10).

Knowledge and Learning

Collaboratives should engage in a knowledge generation and social learning process for joint action. Knowledge should be co-produced, equally available to all partners, and be used to implement adaptive management.

For the Partnership, a strong majority of respondents agreed that the CFLRP process provided opportunities to co-generate knowledge to learn and solve problems

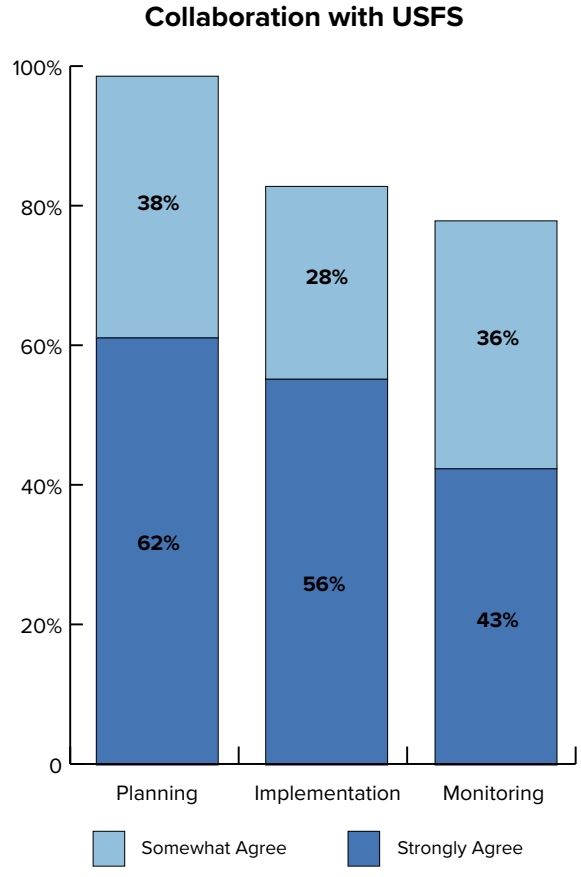

Figure 7: Percent of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that the Forest Service collaborates during planning, implementation, and monitoring stages.

together (95%), that knowledge and information were shared equally among participants (87%), and that participants were committed to informing adjustments to management practices based on learning and feedback, i.e., adaptive management (96%) (Figure 11). A strong majority also felt that participants had the flexibility to alter course when landscape conditions change (e.g., wildfire affects a planning unit) (90%) and when the collaborative changes (e.g., new faces or priorities) (81%) (Figure 11).

Resources

To accomplish tasks and get work done, collaboratives often pool and share resources, including funding, personnel time, technical expertise, and facilitation, which, in turn, can support buy-in.

A strong majority of participants somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that the project had adequate access to funds (91%), technical expertise (78%), and facilitation skills (100%) to get work done (Figure 12). Only a slight majority agreed that the group had adequate time to carry out tasks and accomplish their work (54%) (Figure 12).

Institutional Arrangements

Institutional arrangements are the rules of the game. They include processes, protocols, and structures needed to manage collaboration over time. They should be clearly understood, perceived as fair and equitable, and include accountability mechanisms within and between entities.

A strong majority of survey respondents agreed there were protocols in place that promote accountability among CFLRP participants (95%) and between the Forest Service and CFLRP project participants (e.g., decision rules, charters, memoranda of understanding) (90%) (Figure 13). Similarly, a strong majority agreed those protocols were clearly understood among participants (100%), fair and equitable (90%), and used appropriately (88%) (Figure 13). Group interviewees explained how there was disagreement about suggested changes to the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), but they chose to write one consensus letter representing the Partnership with all "common points of agreement" to "assert what we share in common." Partners could also submit their own comments and concerns that may not have been agreed upon by the entire Partnership.

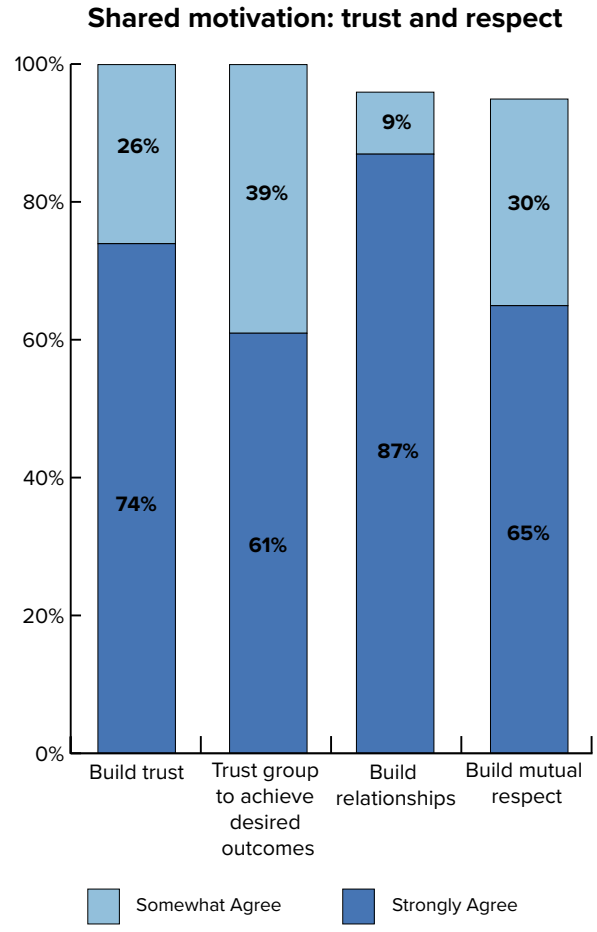

Figure 8: Percentage of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that the collaborative process has helped build trust, relationships, and mutual respect, as well as the extent to which participants trust the group to achieve desired outcomes.

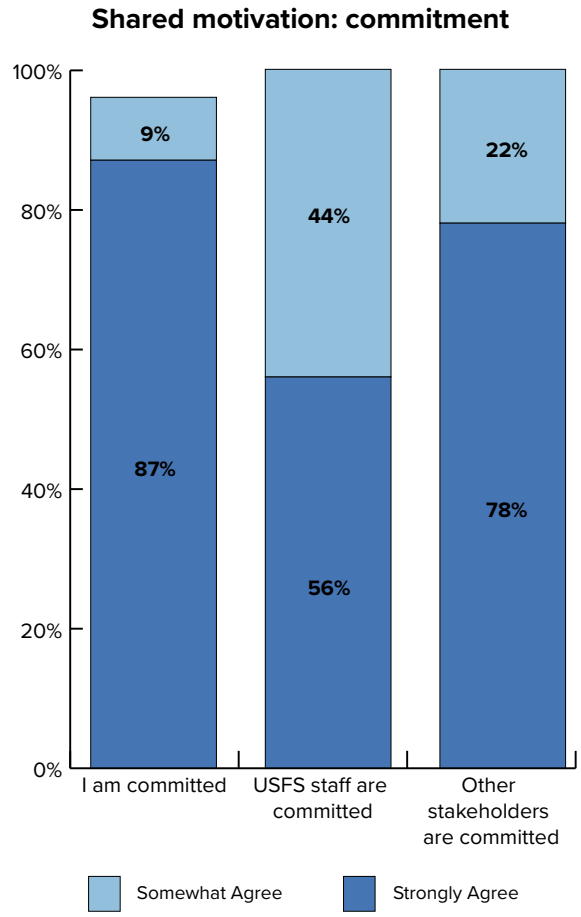

Figure 9: Percentage of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that they, the Forest Service, and other stakeholders are committed to the process.

A strong majority of respondents felt that project participants understood when and what collaborative input was useful to inform Forest Service decisions (90%) (Figure 14). Further, a strong majority reported the Forest Service was responsive to collaborative input (82%) and the agency was clear with CFLRP project participants about the decisions they make and why they make them (88%) (Figure 14).

Outcomes

We assessed perceived progress on process, socio-economic, and ecological outcomes for the Partnership. Notably, the assessment was administered during the first year the Partnership received CFLRP funding, and thus several socio-economic and ecological outcomes related to the CFLRP specifically may not be realized for several years.

A strong majority of respondents agreed that the collaborative process has made progress on all listed collaborative outcomes (Figure 15). These included enhancing communication among participants (95%), minimizing conflict among stakeholders (100%), enhancing decision making (100%), including diverse interests, perspectives, and knowledges (91%), reducing or improving outcomes of litigation (94%), enabling landscape-scale planning (100%), and enhancing planning across boundaries (73%).

With regards to ecological outcomes, a strong majority reported moderate to substantial progress in maintaining or improving the pace and scale of restoration (75%), reducing fuel hazards (69%), maintaining or improving watershed function (e.g., aquatic habitat, water quality, soil productivity) (72%), and contributing to treatment or control of invasive aquatic or terrestrial species (70%) (Figure 16). However, only a minority reported moderate or substantial progress in contributing to restoration of old-growth stands (38%), improving the use of planned or unplanned wildfire (i.e., prescribed or managed) (40%), and improving habitat for focal species (33%) (Figure 16).

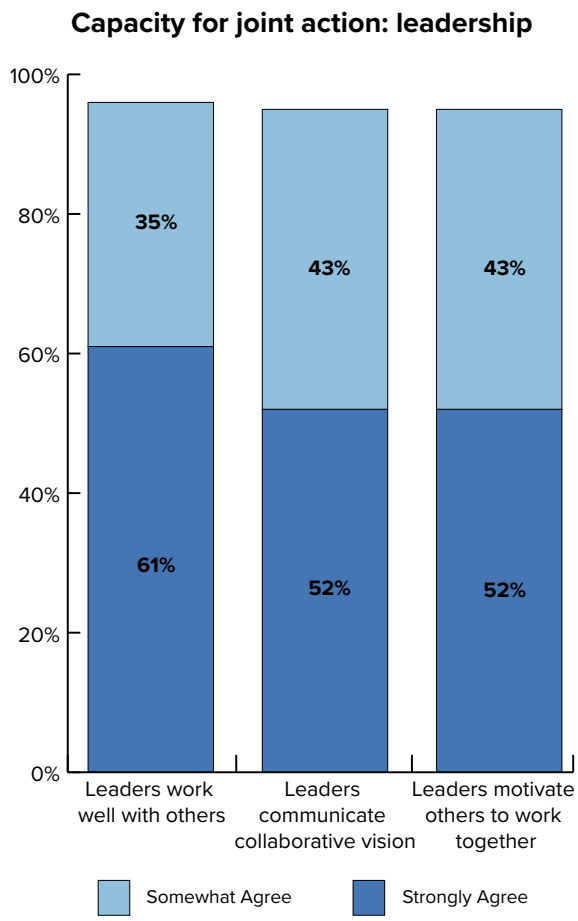

Figure 10: Percent of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that the leaders work well with others, communicate a common vision and direction, and motivate others to work together.

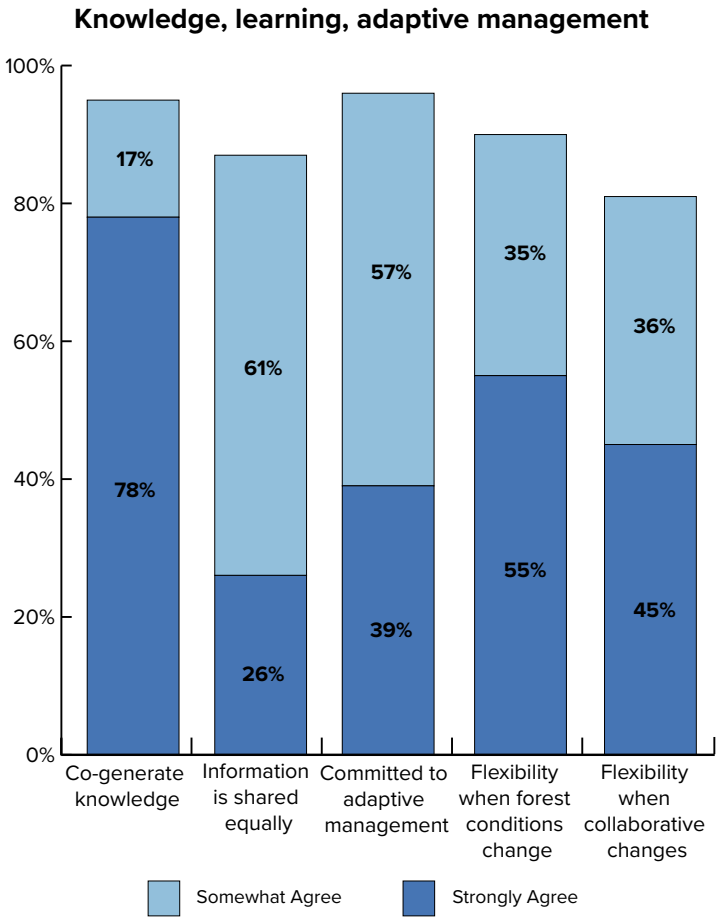

Figure 11: Percent of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that knowledge and information is co-generated by participants, shared equally, and used by participants to adjust management practices.

In terms of socioeconomic goals, half reported moderate to substantial progress in reducing the risk of wildfire to communities (50%) (Figure 17). However, less than half of respondents reported progress in offsetting treatment costs with restoration byproducts (e.g., woody biomass) (44%), and supporting local employment or training opportunities (e.g., forest products industry, youth/citizen science) (42%). No respondents thought moderate to substantial progress had been made on accomplishing more work on adjacent lands (e.g., tribal, state, private lands) (Figure 17).

Disruptions

We developed a list of common challenges that CFLRP projects and other landscape-scale forest collaboratives reported in: 1) breakout group discussions and focus group sessions at the 2020 SWERI Cross-boundary Landscape Restoration Workshop (SWERI, 2020) and the 2020 Idaho forest collaborative shared stewardship workshops; 2) the 2020 CFLRP Collaboration Indicator Survey administered by the National Forest Foundation[6]; and 3) a survey administered to Forest Service staff engaged in 2010 and 2012 CFLRP projects (Schultz et al., 2018). Based on that list, limited capacity of local wood product industry (95% of respondents thought this was a moderate to substantial challenge) and frequent turnover (61%) were the most substantial challenges the Partnership faced at the time of this survey (Figure 18).

When asked to identify any additional disruptions that impacted collaborative performance and durability, respondents highlighted a few factors. The most common response (3 respondents) was that the COVID-19 pandemic was a major disruption. One respondent specifically noted the impact of COVID protocols on the collaborative's capacity to communicate: "COVID protocols diminished communication. Collaborative did its best, and amazingly moved forward with EIS [Environmental Impact Statement]."

Respondents also reiterated how agency turnover and reduced agency capacity were significant challenges. When agency turnover does occur, one respondent noted the difficulties the agency faces in hiring new personnel:

Agency administrative support for hiring, contracting and grants/agreements staff has been very challenging despite

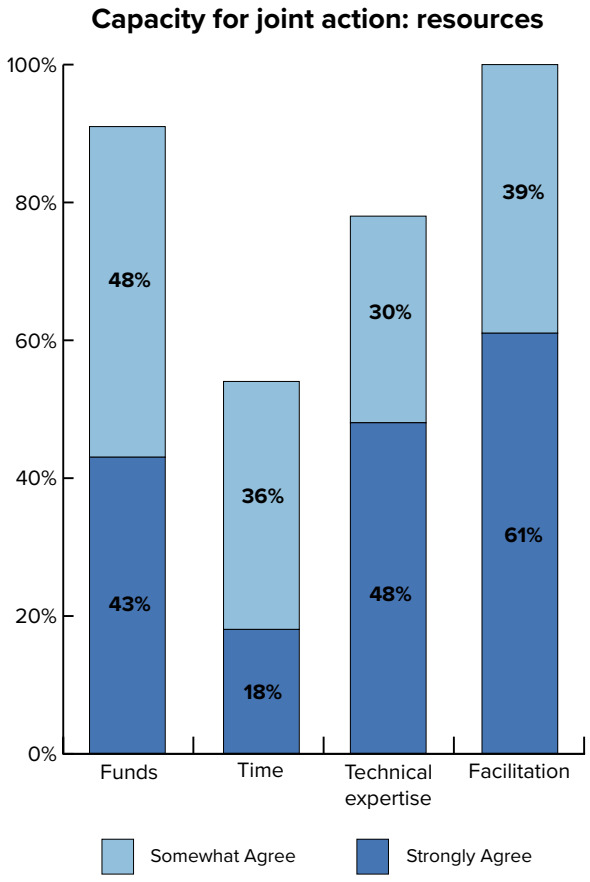

Figure 12: Percent of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that the collaborative has adequate: funds, time, technical expertise, and facilitation skills to accomplish work.

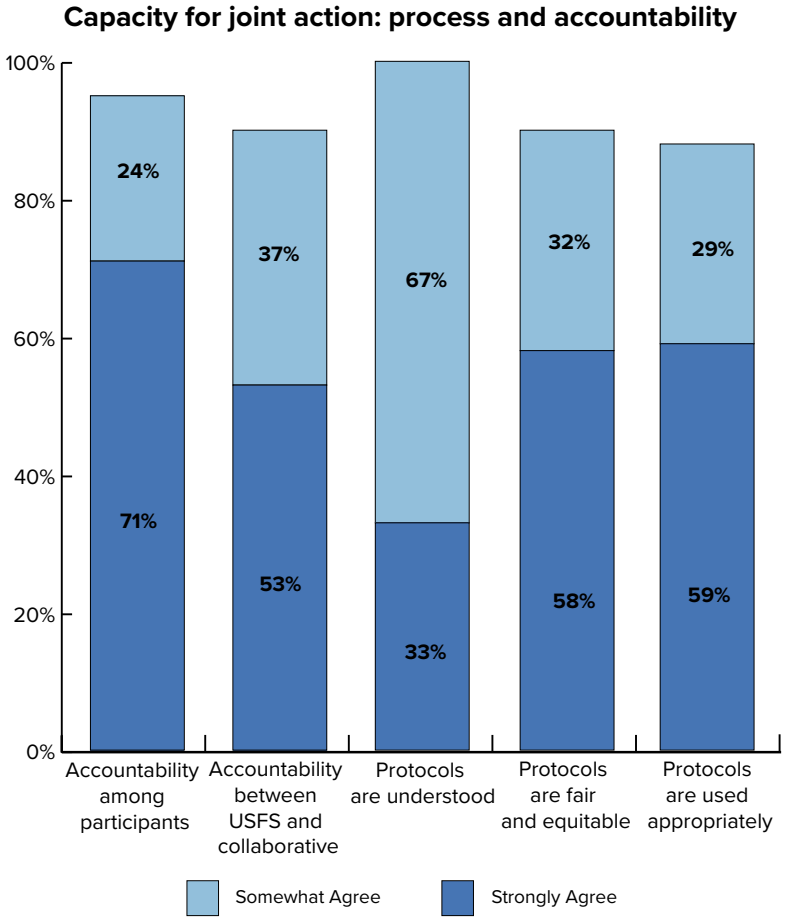

Figure 13: Percent of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that protocols promote accountability among participants, between Forest Service and the collaborative, and that protocols are understood, fair and equitable, and are used appropriately.

[6] CFLRP Collaboration survey administered by the National Forest Foundation — www.nationalforests.org/assets/pdfs/Collaboration-Indicator-Survey-Results-2020-publish.pdf

the prioritization of the landscape for these services. Hiring within the agency has resulted in simply moving people around. That is, very few people hired for the landscape were coming from outside the forest or adjacent forests.

The failure to replace personnel can impact the capacity of the Forest Service to accomplish on-the-ground work and engage in collaboration. For example, another respondent connected agency turnover and contracting implementation with nonprofits as leading to discrepancies between planning and implementation:

Changes in F.S. personnel and working with non-profits to implement projects has left a disconnect between what was planned, is legal, and what is actually being implemented. F.S. personnel don't seem to know if/when implementation is contrary to environmental documents and F.S. LMP [Land Management Planning] Standard and Guidelines, nor do they get out on the ground to look when made aware of problems, nor timely correct problems. ... There is no communication within the collaborative, nor acknowledgement that implementation mistakes have been made, and it is not clear what corrections occur, if any. It is early in the process for implementation, and the monitoring plan is not yet complete, so this may get better.

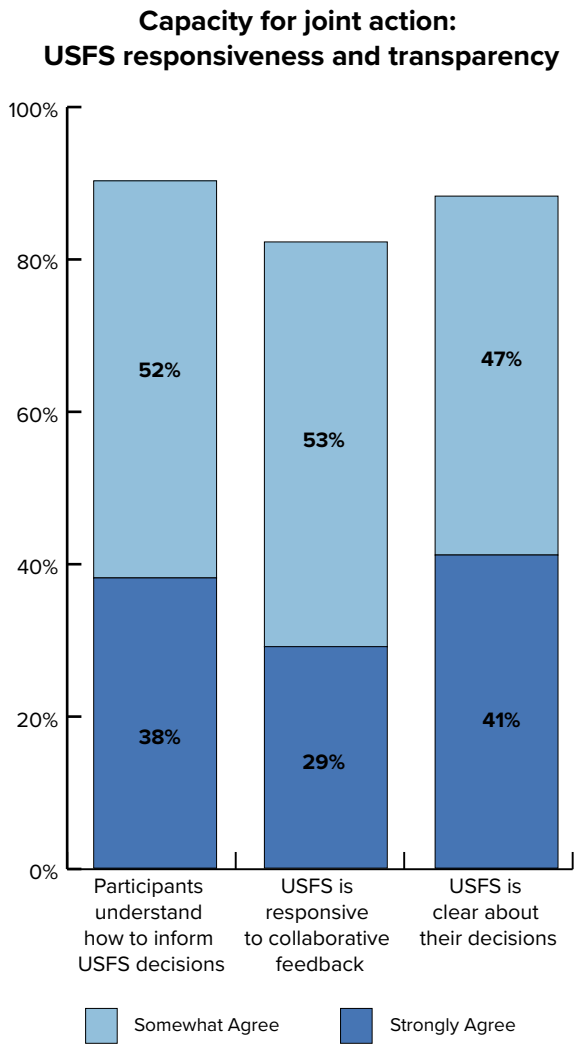

Figure 14: Percent of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that they understand how to inform Forest Service decisions, the Forest Service is responsive to feedback, and the Forest Service is clear about their decisions.

Decreased capacity can be further exacerbated when Forest Service staff are confronted with competing priorities, which one respondent identified as a disruption: "fire season and/or other duties from staff and participants occasionally take focus away from collaborative process."

Further, inadequate capacity and under-investment in private industry and workforce development was mentioned by one participant as particularly disruptive even if implementation funding has increased. They concluded:

Lack of state and federal investments in biomass utilization (including combustion-based biomass plants), forestry workforce development and policies that allow for more working days in a season, even in very dry conditions, all impact pace and scale significantly and will hinder implementation no matter how much implementation money is available.

Finally, a respondent also discussed how a government shutdown and an agency-wide prescribed burning ban were disruptive events to the collaborative.

Respondents articulated a few ways in which the Partnership has responded to the disruptions identified above. It was noted by a couple respondents that the Partnership continually sought to adapt. One respondent stated that the collaborative "redesigned operational plans to work around biophysical disturbances such as LOPs [Limited Operating Periods], severe tree mortality, and protected resources." Further, a respondent discussed how the Partnership response was to "stay engaged, transparent, and work through disruptions."

Despite efforts to adapt, other respondents felt that the disruptions remained beyond immediate control of the Partnership, particularly with regards to limited local capacity for processing biomass and in the local implementation workforce. Respondents noted:

We constantly identify and address bottlenecks, but workforce and wood utilization infrastructure are huge needs that we cannot really address quickly or by ourselves.

The CFLRP has supported the development of a biomass center, though it hasn't been financed in full yet.

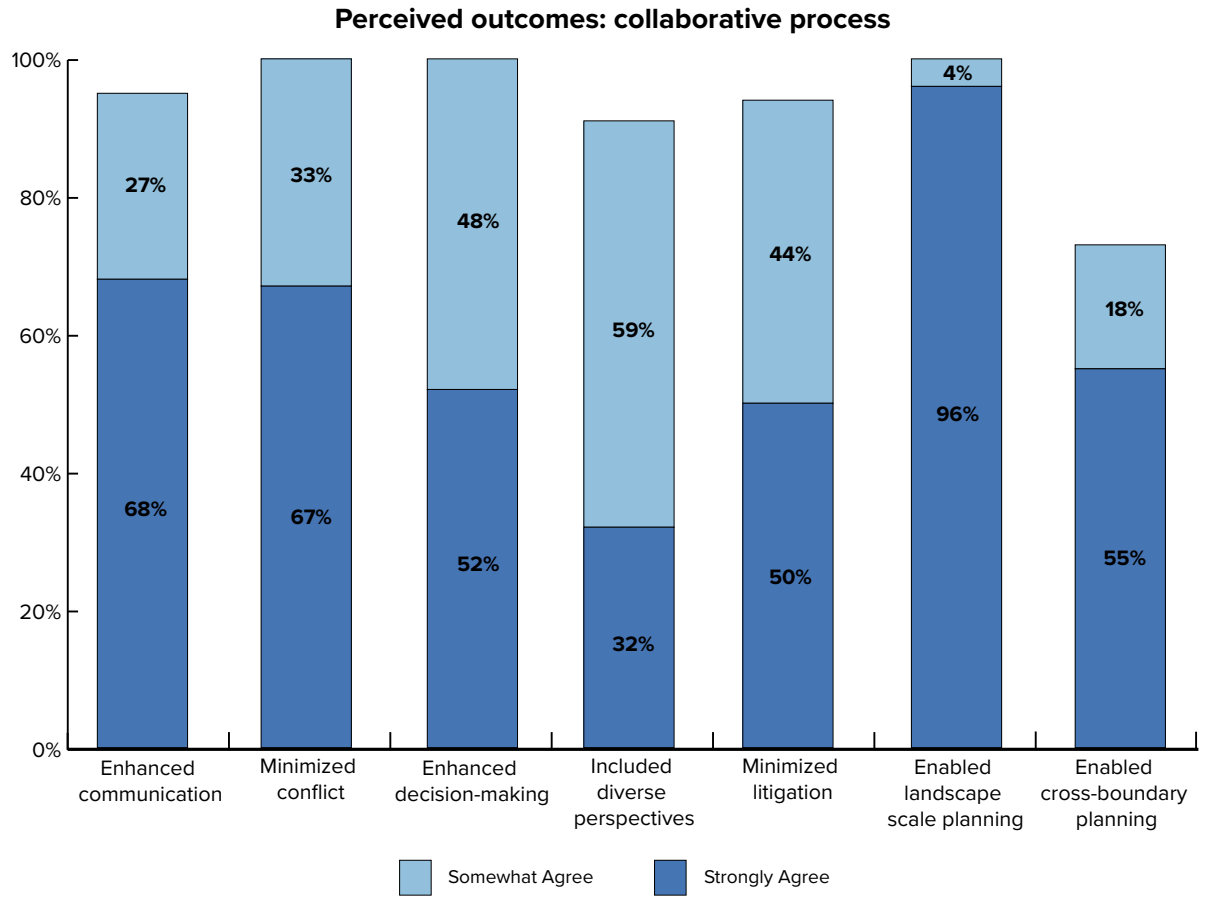

Figure 15: Percent of respondents who either “Somewhat Agree” or “Strongly Agree” that the collaborative process has impacted the function and capacity of the collaborative.

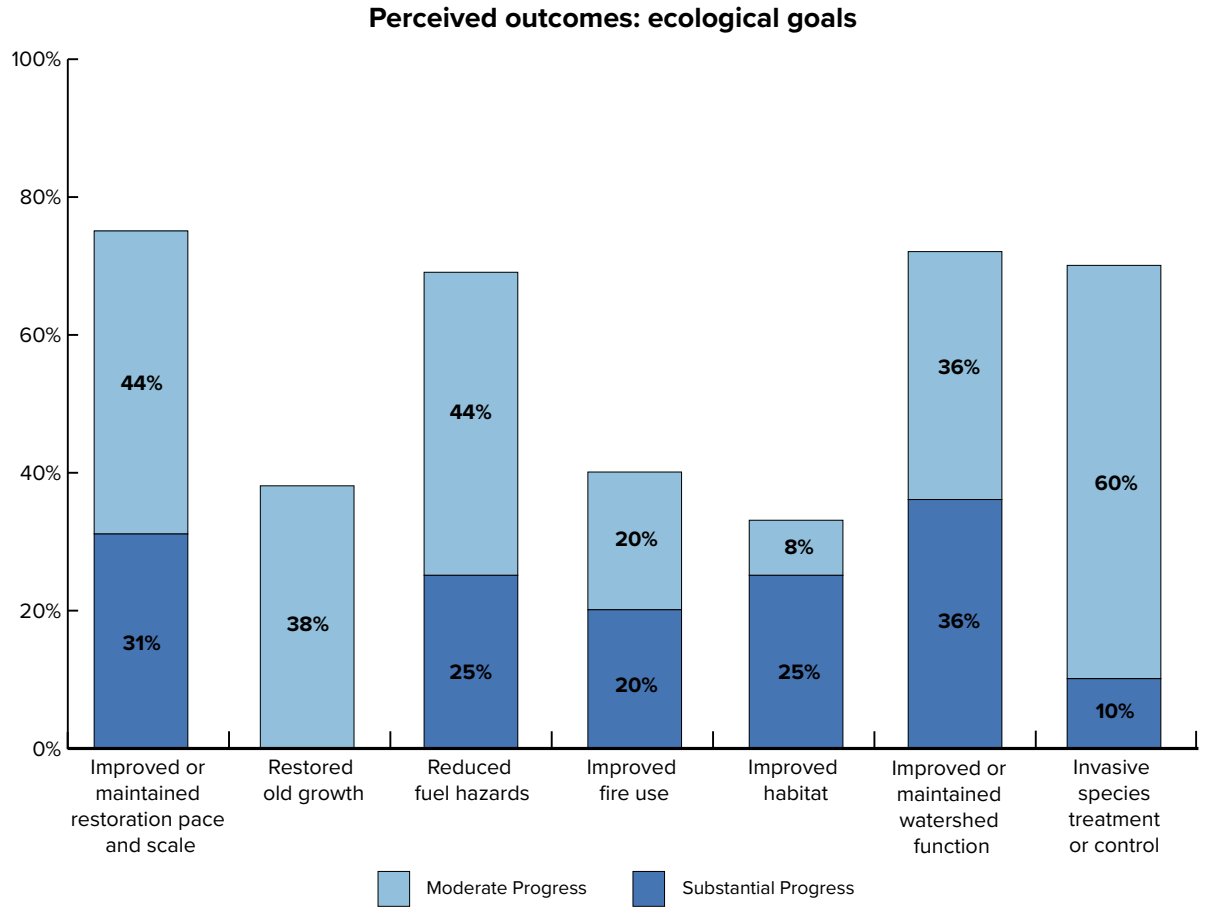

Figure 16: Percent of respondents who reported “Moderate progress” or “Substantial progress” toward ecological goals.

We recognized these issues years ago and discuss them in every venue we can, but policymakers and funding programs still have not responded adequately. The lack of significant investments in biomass utilization and workforce demonstrate a major disconnect in understanding what it actually takes to work at a landscape scale.

Three other respondents remarked that in response to disruptions, the Partnership has tried to increase communication. One noted that improvements implemented included "regularly scheduled meetings; clear and transparent communication from the Forest Service and other partners; governance documents to facilitate discussions on differences; regular field trips."

Other individual respondents noted yet additional efforts to tackle disruptions. One respondent called out the Partnership's efforts to secure funding and "reliance and trust in using NGOs and private entities to perform work" as positive responses to challenges. Another said that "prioritizing the landscape needs over the needs of the forest" and creative hiring methods have helped the Partnership's efforts.

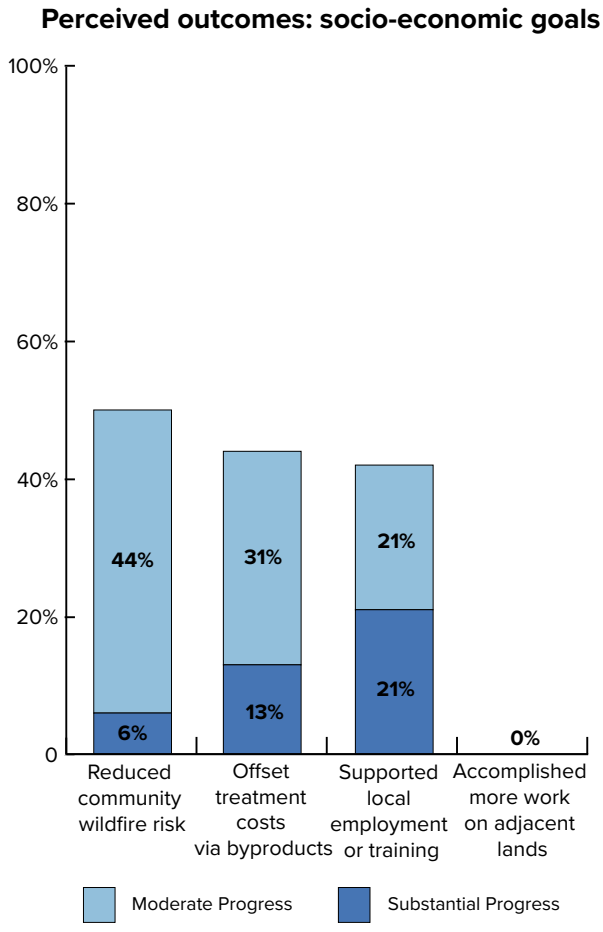

Figure 17: Percent of respondents who reported "Moderate progress" or "Substantial progress" toward socio-economic goals.

Recommendations to Improve the Collaborative Process

We asked participants to suggest recommendations to improve collaborative process, durability, and performance. Based on open-ended responses and the quantitative data reported herein, we identified three key themes for improvement. These recommendations included: 1) improve communication; 2) enhance partner engagement throughout the collaborative process; 3) implement a systematic approach to curb the impacts of turnover. On average, 41% of respondents (10 individuals) included answers for open-ended questions throughout the survey; their responses are summarized in these recommendations.

Improve communication

A prominent theme discussed by respondents concentrated on the role of communication within the collaborative. A few respondents discussed ways that the collaborative could strategically enhance communication, such as holding in-person meetings, improving access to Forest Service information outside of meetings, and broadly sharing the Partnership's successful collaboration. According to one respondent, the collaborative could benefit from meeting in-person again to help support development of relationships and enhanced communication:

Re-initiating in-person meetings following COVID restrictions would better facilitate inter-personal relationships and provide better opportunities for informal communication among participants. Scheduling open time during meetings for additional comments/thoughts would enhance communication, even if it means having a longer meeting to allow for this.

Most respondents overall, however, did not prioritize monthly in-person meetings (see Appendix 2 for appended question responses). Other respondents commented that it was difficult to get information from the Forest Service outside of meetings or through public information requests (see appended question responses in Appendix 2).

A respondent also discussed that the Partnership should communicate their collaborative successes to improve collaboration even beyond this CFLRP project. Specifically, they suggested that the Partnership "share the successful processes the NYFP has used particularly related to the expedited and broad scale planning. Also, the use of NFF to implement large projects." This respondent also argued for more support for sharing success through California's SCALE (Sierra to California All-Lands Enhancement)

project that regularly brings collaborative groups together:

> *We need a more robust approach to sharing success — particularly what is working for FS units that can move projects forward timely and still maintain the trust of partners and public … However, it takes resources to support this collaborative learning and sharing at both macro and micro levels. Investment should be enhanced to deepen the learning and sharing experience.*

Enhance partner engagement throughout the collaborative process

A second theme discussed by several respondents included efforts to increase and enhance collaborative engagement through inclusion of more voices in several aspects of the collaboration process. Respondents endorsed enhanced engagement through the collaborative retreats and through the inclusion of partners beyond initial planning stages.

Two respondents articulated the need to "continue the tradition of having an overnight field trip every year." Retreats can often help develop and sustain personal and working relationships among collaborative members. These events were noted to be essential for Partnership members to "get to know the people serving in the agencies and organizations."

Two respondents also emphasized the need to continue or enhance a variety of partners' engagement throughout the collaborative processes, not just initial planning states. For example, one argued for the need to "continue to communicate and include voices in strategic and operational and monitoring planning and implementation of the project." Another critiqued the collaborative processes in place as being insufficient and argued for alternative paths to create better engagement:

> *There needs to be an easy way for collaborative partners to [be] more legally active [...] in the NEPA process after initial scoping, but before publication of the DEIS [Draft Environmental Impact Statement]. Creating a Federal Advisory Committee is good, but so bureaucratically slow it's essentially impossible and not practical. Our collaborative partners bring a lot of refereed science to the table and not having them transparently there was not efficient for FS nor for the collaborative partners. The USFS Tahoe NF never intended to be a "black box" during this stage of the planning process.*

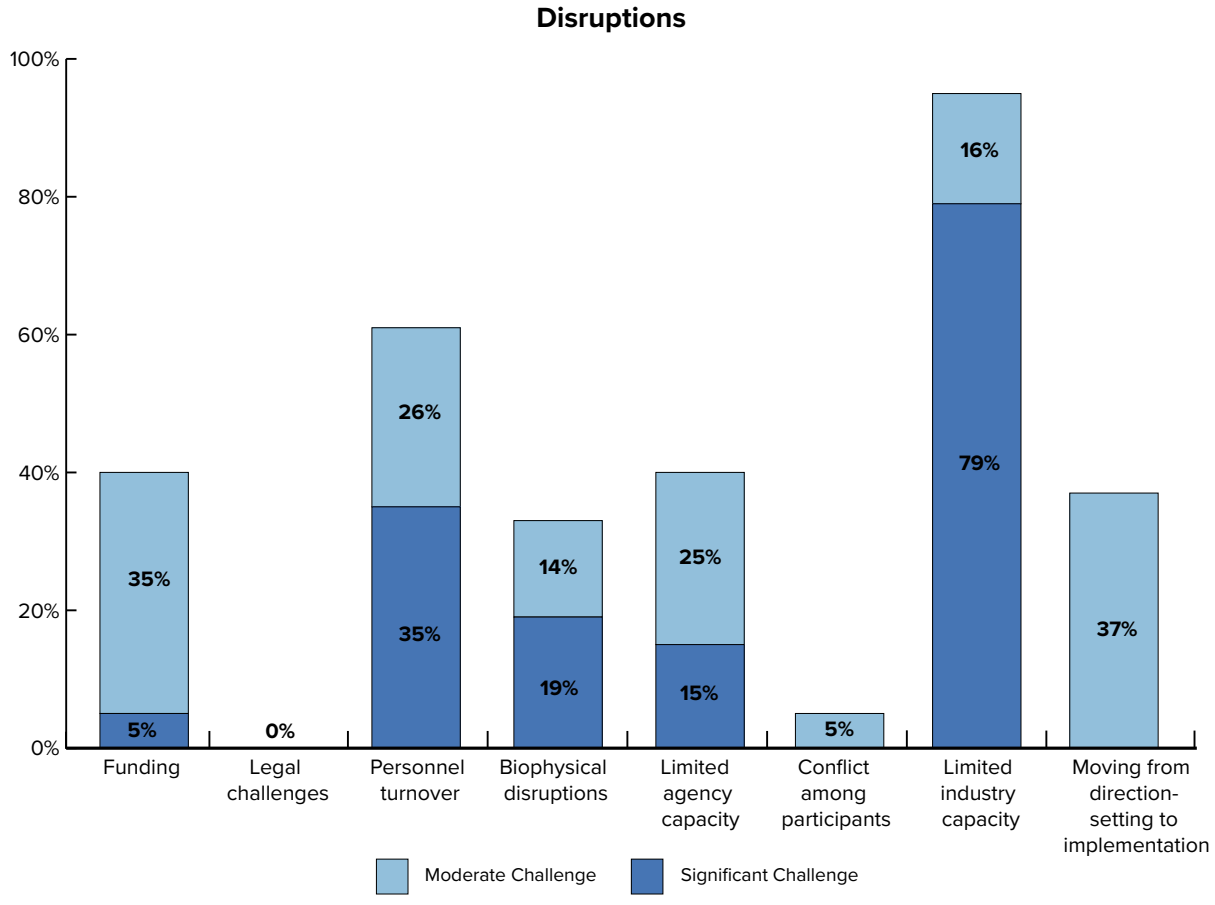

Figure 18: Percent of respondents who reported disruptions posed "Moderate challenges" or "Substantial challenges" to collaborative performance and durability.

Commenters in the appended questions (see Appendix 2 below) also similarly noted that input during planning processes met their expectations, but there was less engagement in the official NEPA phase, post-planning, and implementation.

Other individual respondents suggested additional avenues of addressing engagement. It was suggested that the Partnership focus on developing processes that support adaptive management: "there needs to be a clear path to adaptative management and a process in place to engage the collaborative in this process." Another respondent also recommended that collaborative members "revisit our MOU and governance structure every year so all newcomers and old-timers alike are clear on why and how we work together." Another respondent argued, "we need participative funding for tribal partners," whose limited engagement can be seen in the lack of survey responses from tribal representatives.

An additional respondent believed that the collaborative process has excluded some environmental voices and prioritized organizational input with little access for individual participation:

> *Initial makeup of the collaborative did not include the environmental community, which was beneficial in progressing quickly and minimizing conflict, but negated good open communication regarding goals and rationale for proposed actions for planning purposes. Only organizations were invited to join; no private individuals.*

Implement a systematic approach to curb the impacts of turnover

One of most frequently perceived disruptions was high personnel turnover, with 61% of respondents identifying this as a challenge (Figure 18), and additional open-ended comments noting the impacts (see "Disruptions" above). For example, one respondent recommended "consistent USFS participants," arguing that there were "too many new faces/details over time."

With frequent turnover likely to continue, systems could be put in place mitigate its disruptiveness. Some ways of dealing with turnover are outside of the control of a collaborative, such as increasing overall staffing. However, building relationships with several Forest Service personnel at multiple levels can create helpful redundancies, rather than relying on one key contact. Written agreements and commitments from the Forest Service (e.g., a Forest Supervisor or District Ranger) adds legitimacy to co-developed charters, Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), etc. (see "Disruptions" above). Written commitments, even if informal, can serve as valuable onboarding materials to familiarize new personnel with collaborative efforts, and potentially reduce the likelihood that leadership turnover will require the collaborative to start from square one (Beeton et al., 2022; Huayhuaca et al., 2023). Forest Service Partnership Coordinators, where present, can be excellent conduits for two-way information flows between the Forest and a collaborative group. If resources and expertise are available, the Partnership or Forest Service (or both together) could host a workshop for new Forest Service employees to build alignment around the value of collaboration to achieve landscape level objectives. Some respondents had specific suggestions for information sharing and staff coordination to mitigate disruptive personnel changes:

> *Better communication in the beginning of the process between partners and Forest Service in data creation and data sharing. Early data was lost before it was shared, people left their positions, did not coordinate the transfer or maintenance of data and time was lost. Too many data updates during the NEPA process requiring extensive repetition of data analysis and number crunching.*

> *We need to ensure that staff engage and work to produce outcomes that are sustainable whether they move on or not. That is, if people are replaced, their replacements can pick up where they left off.*

Discussion and Conclusions

The Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI) deployed an online survey to the North Yuba Forest Partnership CFLRP, which includes the North Yuba Forest Partnership (NYFP) and the Tahoe and Plumas National Forests, between April and July 2023 to assess collaborative health, function, and resilience, as well as perceived outcomes of collaborative work. Specifically, we assessed: whether the CFLRP project exhibited characteristics generally associated with healthy, well-functioning, and resilient collaboratives; the extent to which the project has made progress on meeting process, socio-economic, and ecological outcomes; what challenges or disruptions affected collaborative performance and durability; and actionable recommendations to improve the collaborative process from respondents' perspectives. The assessment serves as the collaboration assessment for the CFLRP Common Monitoring Strategy (question #12).

Overall, there was strong agreement on almost every indicator that the collaborative process was working well and accomplishing goals. The Partnership had primarily engaged with the Tahoe National Forest (which contributed more acres to the CFRLP landscape) rather than the Plumas National Forest, which may engage

more as the project progresses. All respondents thought the CFLRP process — beginning in 2022 after formally establishing the NYFP in 2018 — was collaborative to very collaborative overall. All respondents also agreed that a representative cross-section of individuals who had a stake in the issues were involved in the Partnership. There were, however, no responses from the forest products industry, tribes, or the research community, despite their participation in the Partnership. Including a broad swath of participants can help strengthen the Partnership's adaptive capacity by encompassing a diversity of interests, perspectives, capacities, and proposed solutions from a variety of partners and creating redundancies, can make collaborative function more resilient (Beeton et al., 2022; Folke et al., 2005; Gupta et al., 2010).

All respondents agreed that there was a shared understanding of the purpose of the CFLRP project and both key problems impacting the landscape and how to solve them. A strong majority of respondents' expectations were met in collaborating with the Forest Service in planning, implementation, and monitoring, although qualitative comments recommended greater inclusion of partners in post-planning processes. Nearly all respondents agreed that the collaborative process helped build trust, relationships, and mutual respect. A strong majority also trusted the group to achieve desired outcomes and believed that they and other partners were committed to the collaborative process. Mutual commitment, especially among those with decision-making authority, is critical for collaborative durability. The Forest Service retains decision-making authority in treatment planning and implementation on Forest Service-managed land. The agency also gives substantial discretion in decision-making to local units; thus, it is often up to Forest Service unit-level line officers to make or not make collaboration a priority by providing staff, resources, etc. (Beeton et al., 2022).

There was strong agreement that most aspects of capacity for joint action were functioning well. The perception of leadership was very positive, with nearly all respondents indicating that leaders worked well with others, maintained a common collaborative vision and direction, and motivated others to work together. A strong majority of respondents also perceived knowledge co-production positively, agreeing that there were opportunities to co-generate knowledge and share information, work toward adaptive management, and be flexible when conditions (either landscape or personnel) change. A strong majority felt that the CFLRP project had adequate facilitation skills, technical expertise, and funds, but only a small majority felt that it had sufficient time. There was also a strong majority in agreement that protocols promoted accountability among CFLRP participants and with the Forest Service and were understood, fair, and used appropriately. Participants also largely understood how to give input to the Forest Service and how the agency makes decisions and perceived them to be responsive to collaborative feedback. In qualitative comments, most respondents said that their expectations for collaboration with the Forest Service had been met or partially met.

A strong majority of respondents indicated that the CFLRP project was moving toward achieving several desired collaborative and ecological goals, including enhancing communication and decision-making, minimizing conflict and litigation, including diverse perspectives, and enabling landscape-scale planning. Most respondents, however, did not think progress had yet been made on several ecological and socio-economic goals, such as restoring old growth, improving fire use and habitat, offsetting treatment costs, supporting local employment or training, or accomplishing more work on adjacent lands. Respondents were evenly split in their perception of the project making progress on reducing community wildfire risk. Several factors were seen as contributing to the success of the CFLRP project, including strong commitments among partners that also brought capacity and funding, including a limited number but key participants with a stake in the issues, and leadership willing to support the use of innovative strategies.

Respondents indicated a couple of areas where there was room for improvement. The Partnership has dealt with several disruptions, with a strong majority of respondents indicated that high personnel turnover and limited forest products industry capacity were the most significant ones. Qualitative comments also indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted collaborative functions and emphasized the challenges of high agency turnover, low agency capacity, and the limited wood products industry, particularly with regards to outlets for biomass and insufficient workforce. Respondents said the Partnership took action to respond to these disruptions, namely remaining flexible and adaptive in planning and implementation and increasing communication and partner engagement. Some emphasized, however, that challenges like industry capacity and workforce development cannot be solved by the Partnership alone. Interestingly, despite the clear identification of insufficient wood products industry capacity as the primary disruption, few recommendations explicitly addressed solutions to this issue; this may also stem from receiving no survey responses from representatives of the wood products industry.

Three key recommendations emerged: 1) improve communication; 2) enhance partner engagement throughout the collaborative process; and 3) implement a systematic approach to curb the impacts of turnover. First, several respondents suggested improving communication both within and outside the Partnership. Suggestions included increasing in-person meetings, increasing the ability of the Forest Service to engage in communication outside of meetings or through information requests, and communicating the successes of the collaborative to other groups working through similar issues. Secondly, several respondents expressed a need to include more participant input throughout the collaborative process, as collaboration was seen as being most successful in early planning processes with less input in later planning (post-scoping and pre-DEIS), implementation monitoring, and adaptive management. Quantitative results still indicated, however, that a strong majority thought their expectations had been met regarding collaboration with the Forest Service during planning, implementation, and monitoring thus far. Additionally, respondents emphasized the importance of continuing retreats and field trips to build relationships and funding to facilitate tribal participation. Lastly, a systematic approach to curb the impacts of turnover could be implemented. As respondents noted, turnover can undermine relationships and trust, slow progress, and lead to lost institutional knowledge (Beeton et al., 2022; Coleman et al., 2020). Collaborative engagement is often not part of primary job duties for agency staff; when combined with vacant positions and multiple, sometimes conflicting, mandates and priorities, agency staff may not have the capacity to engage to the extent that stakeholders expect or desire (Beeton et al., 2022). With turnover likely to continue, several steps could be taken to limit its effects, such as creating redundancies, getting agreements in writing, sharing data, hosting a workshop on collaboration basics with new employees, and increasing agency staffing with overlapping job duties (Beeton et al., 2022).

This report provided a baseline assessment of collaborative health and performance among the Partnership. Collaboratives are dynamic — they continue to adapt and evolve as needs or priorities change, and in response to internal and external disruptions (Imperial et al., 2016). Thus, it is important to continue to self-assess collaborative progress, durability, and resilience, so that groups can identify what is working well, what may need some work, and what support and/or guidance is needed to address challenges to maintain performance. The SWERI will continue to engage in assessing collaborative health and performance of CFLRP projects. There will be multiple opportunities locally, regionally, and nationally for peer-networking and learning events to share successes and challenges and learn together about how to encourage healthy, durable, and resilient collaboration.

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The results to the following questions reported here were

Appendix 1. CFLRP collaborative governance assessment: summary of findings

CFLRP collaborative governance assessment: Summary of findings for the North Yuba Forest Partnership 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 Yuba Forest Partnership CFLRP, which includes the North Yuba Forest Partnership and the Tahoe and Plumas National Forests (primary collaboration has occurred with the Tahoe National Forest thus far) from April to July 2023. We received 25 usable responses (43% 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.

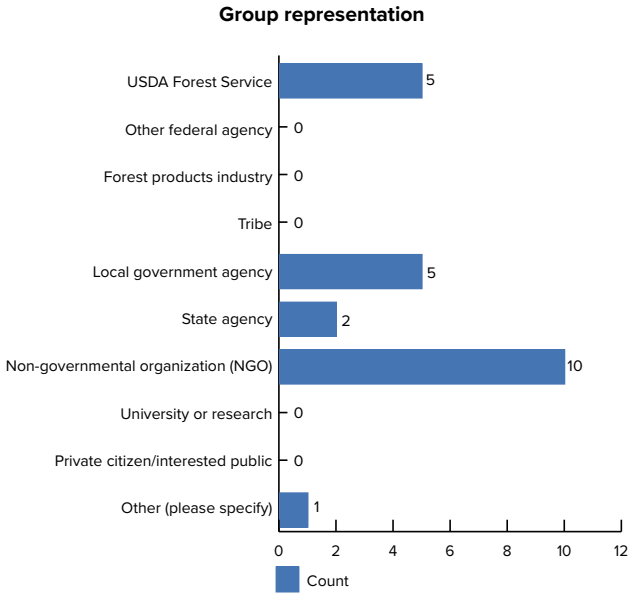

Figure 1: Respondents' self-identified representation with associated organizations.

Findings

What has worked well for the North Yuba CFLRP?

Overall, a strong majority of respondents agreed on almost every indicator that the Partnership members worked well together and accomplished their goals. All respondents agreed that a representative cross-section of individuals who had a stake in the issues were involved in the Partnership. There were, however, no respondents representing the forest products industry, tribes, and the research community. A strong majority of respondents thought their expectations were met in collaborating with the Forest Service in planning, implementation, and monitoring. A strong majority of participants also understood how to inform Forest Service decisions and thought that the agency was responsive to collaborative feedback and clear about their decision-making (Figure 2). Nearly all respondents also 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. A strong majority of respondents felt that the Collaborative had adequate technical expertise, facilitation skills, and funds,

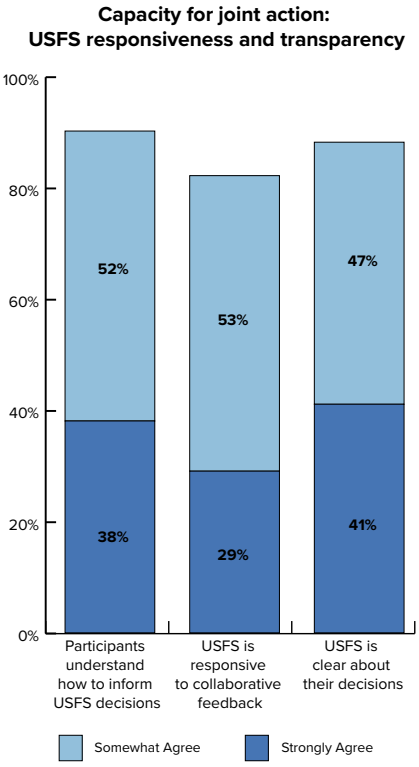

Figure 2: Percent of respondents who agreed or disagreed that they understand how to inform Forest Service decisions, the Forest Service is responsive to feedback, and the Forest Service is clear about decisions.

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

but only a small majority thought there was sufficient time. There was also strong agreement that protocols were in place to promote accountability among CFLRP participants and with the Forest Service and that protocols were understood, fair, and used appropriately.

What disruptions and challenges have affected collaborative progress and performance?

The Partnership has dealt with several disruptions, particularly limited industry capacity and personnel turnover. Commenters also mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic and industry challenges of a limited workforce and outlets for biomass. Responses to these disruptions included flexibility in planning and implementation and increasing communication and partner engagement, although some industry capacity challenges will require efforts beyond the capacity of the Partnership.

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 and ecological goals, including but not limited to:

- Enhancing communication and decision making, minimizing conflict and litigation, including diverse perspectives, and enabling landscape-scale planning.
- Improving restoration pace and scale and watershed function, reducing fuel hazards, and controlling invasive species.

A majority, however, did not see the CFLRP as yet achieving restoring old growth, improving fire use and habitat, offsetting treatment costs, supporting employment and training, and accomplishing more work on adjacent land (Figure 3). Respondents were split in their perception of progress on reducing community wildfire risk. Several factors were identified as facilitating this forward movement: strong commitment from partners bringing funding and capacity, inclusion of a limited number but crucial stakeholders, and leadership's willingness to support the use of innovative strategies.

Recommendations to improve the collaborative process and performance

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

- Improve communication both within and outside the Partnership through in-person meetings, improved response by the Forest Service outside of meetings, and communicating Partnership successes.
- Enhance partner engagement throughout the collaborative process, particularly beyond initial planning stages and through the use of retreats and field trips.
- Implement a systematic approach to curb the impacts of turnover through creating redundancies, establishing agreements and data sharing processes, and educating new agency staff on collaboration.

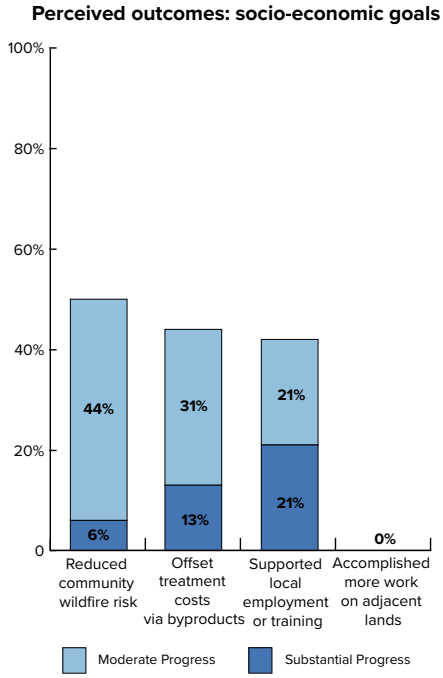

Figure 3: Percent of respondents who agree or disagree that the collaborative process has impacted the function and capacity of the collaborative.

Next steps

Results from this questionnaire provided a baseline assessment of collaborative governance among the North Yuba Forest Partnership 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.

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IRB approval – This work is approved by the Institutional Review Board at Colorado State University (#2679) and Northern Arizona University (#1809777-3).

Appendix 2. Appended questions

developed in coordination with local CFLRP project staff, coordinators, and partners affiliated with the North Yuba Forest Partnership CFLRP. These questions are not part of the CFLRP Common Monitoring Strategy.

Key contacts wanted to better understand participants' preferred methods of communication and engagement; respondents could choose more than one answer. The most popular method of engagement was field trips (19 respondents), followed by monthly virtual meetings (14 respondents) (Figure A1). Few respondents (3) wanted monthly in-person meetings. Respondents selecting "other" encouraged a mix of the listed options or "informal one-on-one communication to address individual issues as they arose."

Respondents were also asked about the CFLRP work group structure and were able to select multiple options. The most common response by far was that work groups were currently sufficient and effective (15 respondents) (Figure A2). A commenter also noted that "the monitoring workgroup needs a USFS point person to coordinate monitoring for the Forest Service so it isn't spread across several people."

Respondents were also asked how they perceived various forest management options. All respondents found reducing hazardous fuels as moderately to very acceptable. A strong majority also found prescribed fire (92%), fuel breaks (87%), and letting lightning-ignited fires burn (69%) (Figure A3). At the end of the survey, one respondent recommended "a more aggressive approach to the forest management practices. Prescribed fire and managed lightning strikes rarely seem to occur on the landscape."

Respondents were asked whether the Forest Service staff had met their expectations for engagement, capacity, and/or commitment, and most recorded positive responses. Specifically, one respondent noted that "the commitment to success on this landscape is like no other. There is a willingness to be innovative and do things differently that avoids paralysis and stalling." Group interviewee

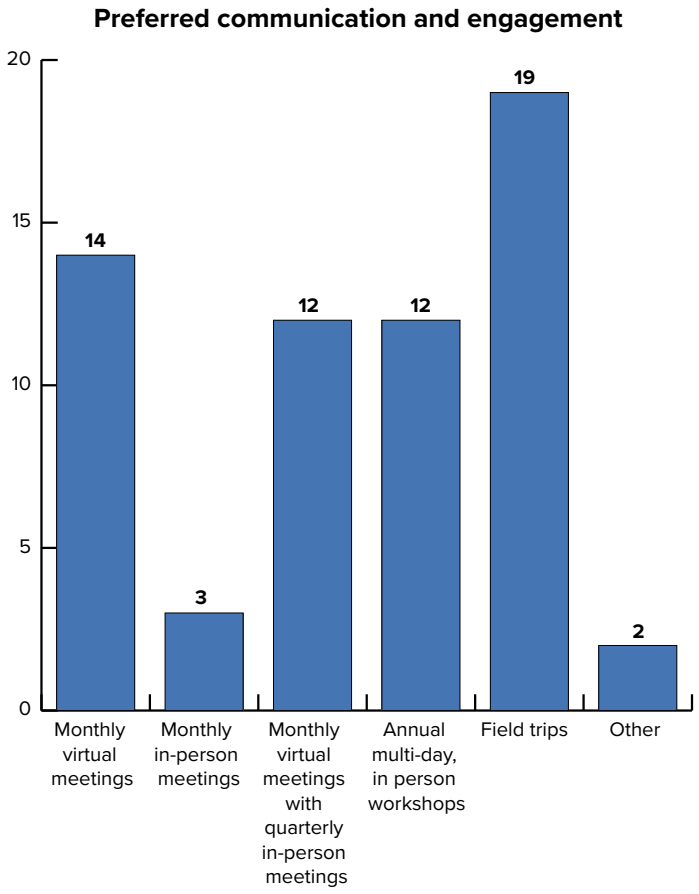

Figure A1: Number of respondents that indicated a preferred form of communication and/or engagement.

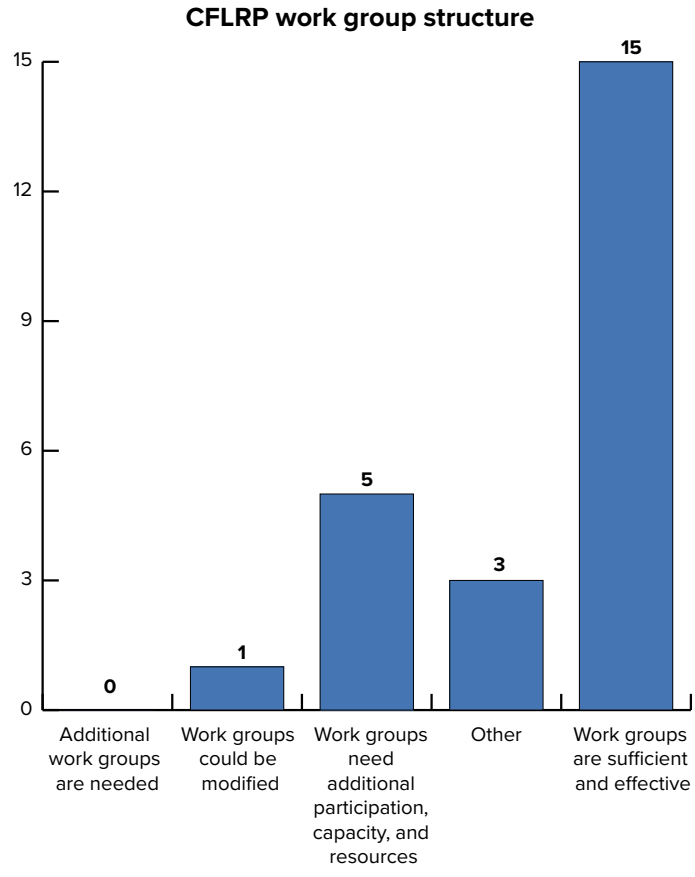

Figure A2: The number of respondents who reported a preference for work group structure.

participants said, "there's a very innovative spirit within the Partnership of how can we do things differently. How can we work smarter or how can we work at scale?" For example, interviewees indicated that the Partnership completed a landscape-level environment analysis followed by later resource surveys based on project needs, with the goal of "trying to rethink how we do NEPA" and putting "a lot of investment up front" in order to build "something that's both durable and flexible."

A few respondents indicated that their expectations had been met in certain areas, but not others. For example, one respondent stated that "the initial engagement to plan the project met my expectations but once we entered the official NEPA phase, the Forest Service engaged the partnership on a much more superficial level, and this was a hard adjustment." Similarly, another respondent noted that while "USFS staff have met expectations for engagement and commitment," "there is a consistent issue with capacity and support when it comes to post-planning and implementation."

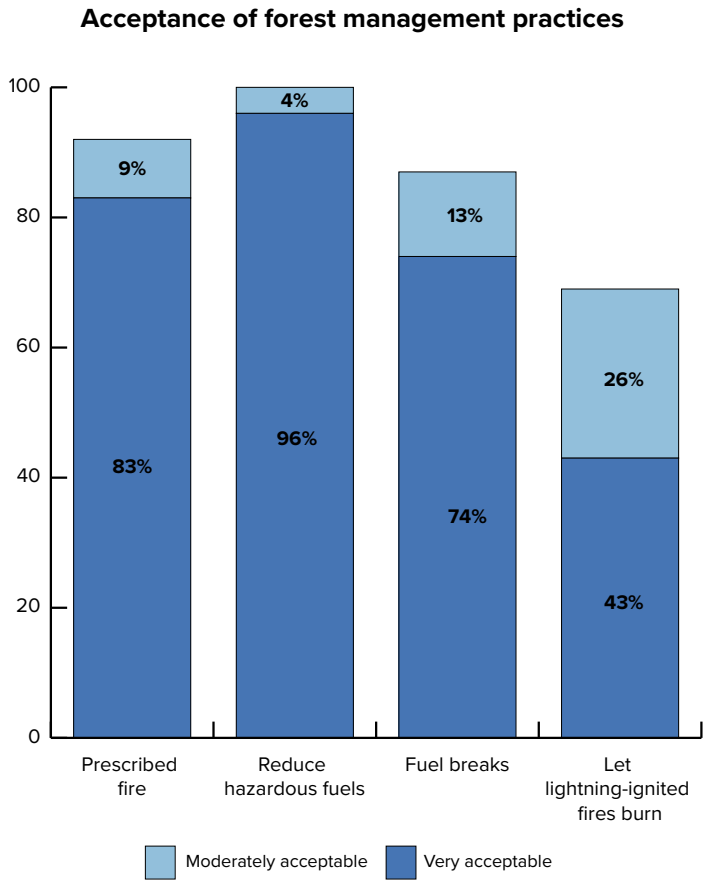

Figure A3: Percent of respondents who reported that certain forest management practices were either "Moderately acceptable" or "Very acceptable."

Meanwhile, some respondents discussed their disappointment in communication with the Forest Service. Two respondents remarked: "if they don't show to our monthly meeting, it is very hard to get a hold of Forest Service staff when we have questions about the project or need updates" and "public requests are not responded to efficiently or effectively." Another two respondents said that while their expectations were in part met, there needed to be more concrete systems in place for addressing the impacts of high agency turnover (see "Recommendations" above).

While reflecting on factors that contributed to the success of this CFLRP project, the most common response was that commitment of all involved partners was significant for collaborative success. One respondent even proclaimed that "the commitment of the individuals and entities involved was outstanding!" Partner commitment manifested into positive collaborative attributes, such as "a focus on relationships and on our shared goals," "open communication, shared commitment to need," or "a shared focus of the partnership."

Several respondents also acknowledged how collaborative partners were crucial, discussing how partners contributed resources, commitment, inclusion, and leadership. For instance, one respondent noted that "well-funded partners [have] been the key to our success." Partner resources often translate into the collaborative as added capacity, and another respondent recognized "participants that have brought capacity and [are] able to elevate the issues."

For others, the inclusion of stakeholders was seen as beneficial to the collaborative. A respondent noted that "the collaborative process was very inclusive of all interested and effected parties. Participant involvement was pretty much left up to how much time and interest people had devote to the project." While the collaborative is not necessarily open to all parties, it was acknowledged that the included parties helped foster a productive environment:

> *Makeup of group, although not open to anyone interested, has avoided conflict and facilitated efficiency that largely contributes to successes … Broad makeup of groups – Forest Service, non-profits, water agency, local government – has promoted wide support during environmental planning, fostered relationships, facilitated funding opportunities, and promoted implementation.*

A few respondents also mentioned how a "strong leadership commitment of all partners" contributed to their success. For one respondent, leadership's amenability to deviate from the norm was an asset for

collaborative success. Other respondents noted the importance of supporting innovation: "leadership [is] willing to do things differently," such as using "innovative planning and implementation strategies" "that facilitated landscape-level planning."

Lastly, another respondent noted the organizational processes of the Partnership being key to its success, such as, "regular meetings and field trips; effective subcommittees; agreed upon governance structure; facilitation and record keeping."

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