

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.

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,

Group representation

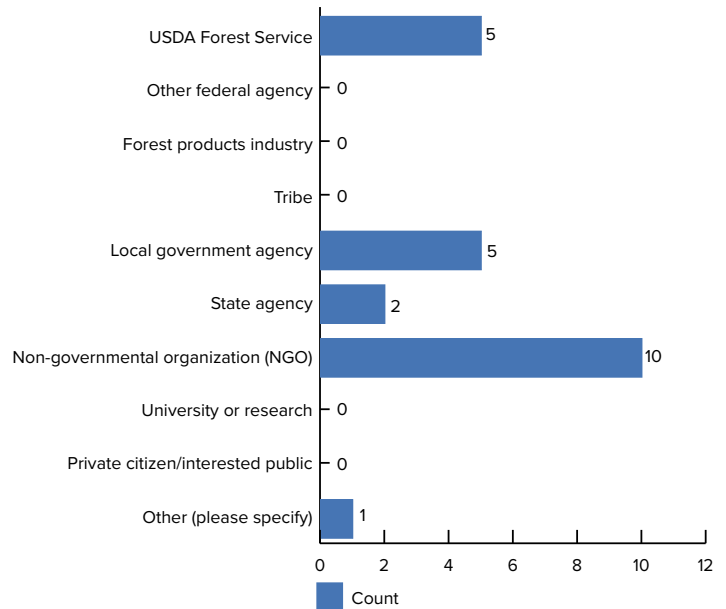


Figure 1: Respondents' self-identified representation with associated organizations.

**Capacity for joint action:
USFS responsiveness and transparency**

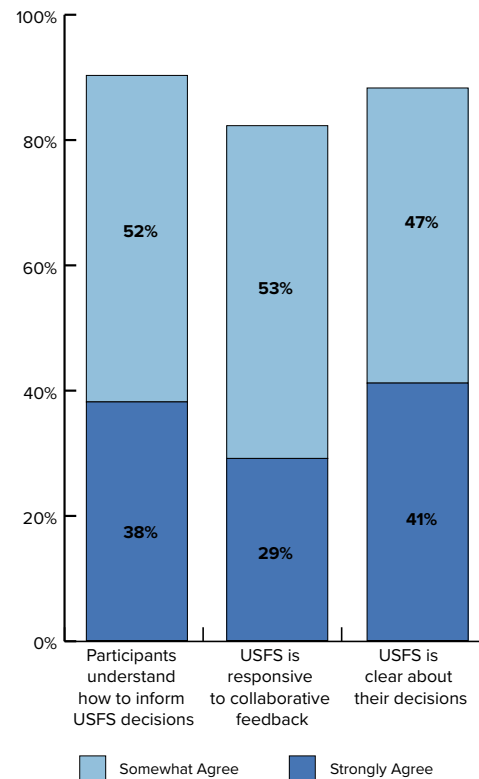


Figure 2: Percent of respondents who agreed or disagreed that they understand how to inform Forest Service decisions, the Forest Service is responsive to feedback, and the Forest Service is clear about decisions.

¹USDA 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

Perceived outcomes: socio-economic goals

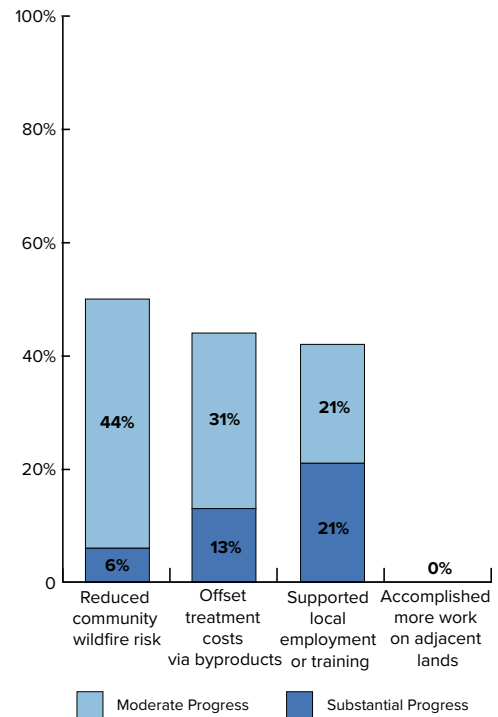


Figure 3: Percent of respondents who agree or disagree that the collaborative process has impacted the function and capacity of the collaborative.

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.

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.