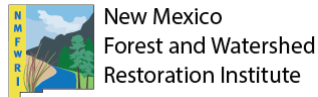# Collaborative Governance Assessment Report
## FOR THE SOUTHERN BLUES RESTORATION COALITION CFLRP

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**SWERI** Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes
Colorado State University : New Mexico Highlands University : Northern Arizona University

COLORADO FOREST RESTORATION INSTITUTE
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY
Ecological Restoration Institute

New Mexico Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute

**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 enacted a process to collect baseline information for all newly authorized and reauthorized projects. SWERI will continue to engage in assessing collaborative health and performance of CFLRP projects. The Ecological Restoration Institute at Northern Arizona University funded survey administration using state funding (Arizona Board of Regents through the Technology, Research and Innovation Fund), which was used as a match to annual federal appropriations to the SWERI.

**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).

**Ecological Restoration Institute (ERI), Northern Arizona University (NAU)**
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 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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# Executive Summary

The Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI) developed a collaborative governance assessment as part of the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) Common Monitoring Strategy. The collaborative governance 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 Southern Blues Restoration Coalition CFLRP in spring 2023, which included members of the Blue Mountains Forest Partners (BMFP) and the Harney County Forest Restoration Collaborative (HCFRC) (collectively referred to henceforth as the Collaboratives) and employees of the Malheur National Forest.

Overall, there was agreement on many indicators that the collaborative process was working well and accomplishing goals, although open-ended responses indicated some disagreement. There was slight agreement that a representative cross-section of individuals who have a stake in the issues are involved in the Collaboratives, although state agencies, tribal representatives, and researchers were not represented in the survey responses, and only one industry respondent participated. A large majority of respondents were from the Forest Service, and thus the results may reflect federal perceptions with limited input from other sectors who play a large role in the Collaboratives.

A majority of respondents agreed that there was a shared understanding of the purpose and key problems addressed by the Southern Blues CFLRP, although most did not perceive agreement on strategies used to address those problems. Most respondents' expectations were met in collaborating with the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service (Forest Service hereafter) through planning, but not in implementation or monitoring. Respondents strongly agreed that the collaborative process has helped build trust, relationships, and mutual respect. A strong majority of respondents trusted the group to achieve desired outcomes and believed that they

and other partners were committed to the collaborative process. A majority of respondents indicated that leaders worked well across organizations and entities, helped maintain a common vision, and motivated others to work together. Participants agreed that there were opportunities to co-generate knowledge and share information, work toward adaptive management, and be flexible when there were landscape changes, although there was concern about flexibility in the face of personnel changes. Respondents felt that the Collaboratives had adequate technical expertise, facilitation skills, and funds, but not adequate time. Respondents perceived that Collaborative participants were held accountable and protocols were understood, but were split on perceptions that protocols were fair, with only a minority perceiving them being used appropriately. Participants largely understood how to give input to the Forest Service and thought the agency was responsive, but most did not think the Forest Service was clear in their decision-making. Most respondents thought that the CFLRP project was moving toward achieving most of the desired collaborative, ecological, and socio-economic goals except for enhancing decision-making, including diverse perspectives, enabling cross-boundary planning, and accomplishing more work on adjacent land. Factors that facilitated achieving these goals included members being willing to communicate and work together and the utilization of the best available science.

Respondents indicated some areas where there was room for improvement and made pertinent recommendations, although not all responses clearly indicated which Collaborative they were referencing. The Collaboratives have dealt with several disruptions, such as frequent turnover, limited agency capacity, funding issues, the challenge of moving from direction-setting to implementation, and biophysical disturbances. Commenters also noted the challenges of lengthy time to complete implementation, COVID-19 reducing in-person events and communication, and the involvement of politicians in the collaborative process. Three key recommendations emerged: 1) include diverse members and perspectives; 2) increase and improve communication and engagement opportunities such as in-person meetings and field trips; and 3) implement a systematic approach to curb turnover impacts within the Forest Service.

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 U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (Forest Service hereafter). In 2021, CFLRP coordinators, Forest Service personnel, and partners led a collaborative process to develop a CFLRP Common Monitoring Strategy consisting 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 Forest Service Washington Office requested assistance from the Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI) in developing and deploying an assessment tool to track collaborative governance. 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 and coordinators 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 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 Southern Blues Restoration Coalition CFLRP in spring 2023, which included members of the Blue Mountains Forest Partners (BMFP) and the Harney County Forest Restoration Collaborative (HCFRC) (collectively referred to henceforth as the Collaboratives) and employees of the Malheur National Forest. The project was originally funded through CFLRP in 2012 and received an extension in 2022. The forest works with both Collaboratives for this CFLRP, with BMFP focusing primarily in the northern Blue Mountain and Prairie City Ranger Districts, and the HCFRC primarily in the Emigrant Creek Ranger District. The report herein summarizes findings from the collaborative governance assessment. We have also integrated, where appropriate, feedback during our final presentation of the survey results and open discussion with the Collaboratives and the Malheur National Forest, as well as information gathered during group interviews on the Collaborative context. See Appendix 1 for a report brief summarizing our findings, and Appendix

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[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).

2 for a presentation we led with the Malheur National Forest and BMFP and a subsequent presentation with HCFRC in November 2023. We briefly highlight the approach, followed by a baseline assessment of findings and document recommendations from respondents to improve the collaborative process.

## 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. To what extent do participants feel the project is meeting process, socio-economic, and ecological goals?
3. What challenges or disruptions affect collaborative performance and durability?
4. What do participants need or recommend to improve the process?

## 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. These can include 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 environmental 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 open-ended survey questions.

## 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).

In FY22, 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.[5] Drawing on experience from Northern Blues and conversations with the next round of CFLRP projects rolling out the survey, SWERI developed a menu of 15 possible appended questions that the projects could add to the end of the standard survey to capture additional information of interest to the project. These questions addressed collaborative structure, participation and engagement, general expectations, successes, and challenges, and acceptance of wildfire mitigation and management techniques. The points of contact also identified key informants to complete a group interview or worksheet to answer questions about collaborative function that provided context for the interpretation of results. These questions included information on collaborative governance structure, rules for participation, dispute resolution processes, defining partnership vision, methods of collaboration with the Forest Service on planning, implementation, and monitoring, and a brief history of the collaborative. The initial survey results were presented to each CLFRP project to give survey respondents the opportunity to participate in an open discussion and provide feedback for this final report.

Partnership and Monitoring Coordinators with the Malheur National Forest and coordinators for the two Collaboratives provided support in recruiting participants and administering the survey through Collaborative and Forest Service email contacts in March 2023. The survey was open for approximately 9 weeks and closed in May 2023. We received 23 usable responses, representing 17% of the emailed recipients. 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

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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 Southern Blues 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.

## Introductory questions

The majority of participants represented the Forest Service (64%), with other respondents being from the interested public (14%), NGOs (9%), and the forest products industry (4%) (Figure 1). Participants that classified themselves as "other" (9%) included a Forest Service retiree and a forestry consultant. It should also be noted that it was not possible to consistently separate results by Collaborative, and thus results are summed for both Collaboratives except for open-ended comments that specified which Collaborative the respondent was referring to. The most frequently reported motivations for being involved in the CFLRP project were to restore forest resiliency (61%), create more local jobs (35%), and increase restoration pace and scale (35%) (Figure 2). The level of engagement in the CFLRP project varied among participants – 63% reported that they were moderately to highly engaged, while 36% reported low engagement, and none reported that they were not engaged (Figure 3). Those respondents who reported still being engaged in the
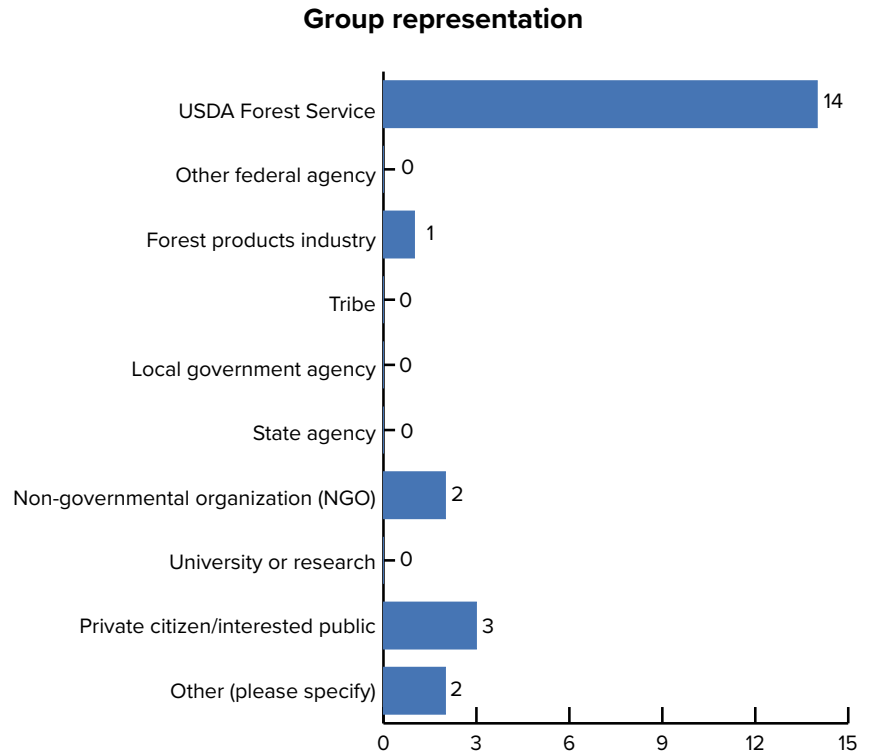


Figure 1: Respondents' self-identified representation with associated organizations.
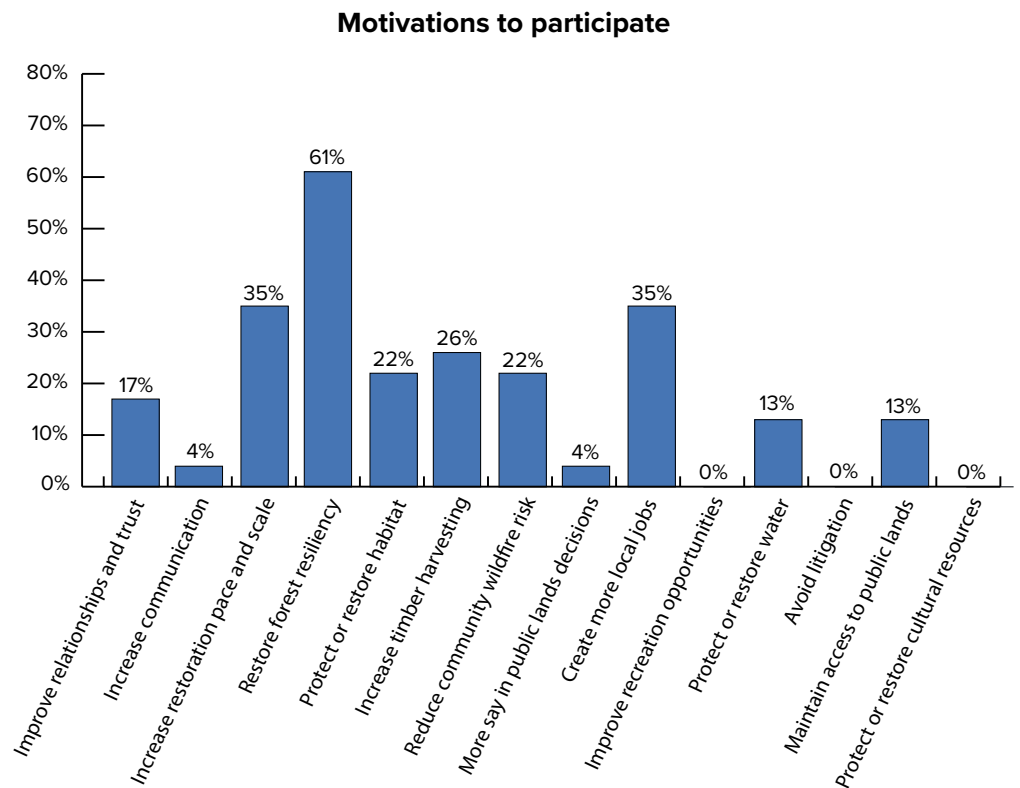


Figure 2: Percentage of respondents who identified the associated motive as reason for their participation in the collaborative. Note – respondents were able to select multiple motives.

CFLRP project recorded an average of nearly 10 years of engagement.

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.*

A slight majority of respondents (55%) indicated the CFLRP project has been collaborative to very collaborative, and 10% said it was not 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.*

A slight majority of respondents (52%) agreed that a representative cross-section of individuals who have a stake in the issues and outcomes of the project were involved (Figure 5). Of note, however, is that representatives from other federal, local government, and state agencies, tribes, and the research community

did not answer the survey despite being involved in the Collaboratives, so their opinions were not included. Several forest products industry representatives, for example, were present at the presentation of results and very active in both Collaboratives, yet only one respondent from that sector completed the survey. Additionally, several opened-ended comments addressed a need to foster greater inclusion in the Collaboratives, particularly the BMFP (see "Recommendations to Improve the Collaborative Process" below). A strong majority of respondents (63%) agreed to strongly agreed that participants worked together to identify shared interests and concerns, and half (50%) felt the collaborative process created a neutral space for CFLRP participants to openly discuss controversial issues (Figure 5).

A strong majority (68%) of respondents indicated that participants had a shared understanding of the problems that impact their landscape and a slight majority (59%) agreed on the purpose of the CFLRP project (Figure 6). However, a minority (45%) showed agreement on the strategies to solve the problems they faced (Figure 6).

A slight majority (57%) of respondents felt that the level of collaboration between the Collaboratives and the Forest Service met their expectations during planning (Figure 7). A minority, however, indicated that collaboration between project participants and the Forest Service met their expectations during implementation (46%) or monitoring (35%) (Figure 7).
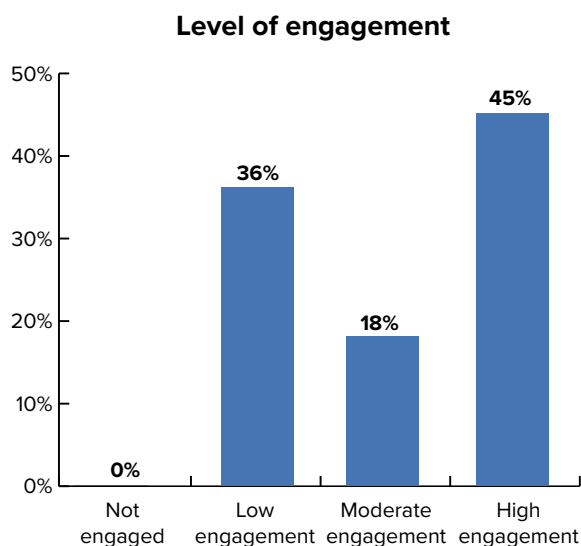
**Level of engagement**



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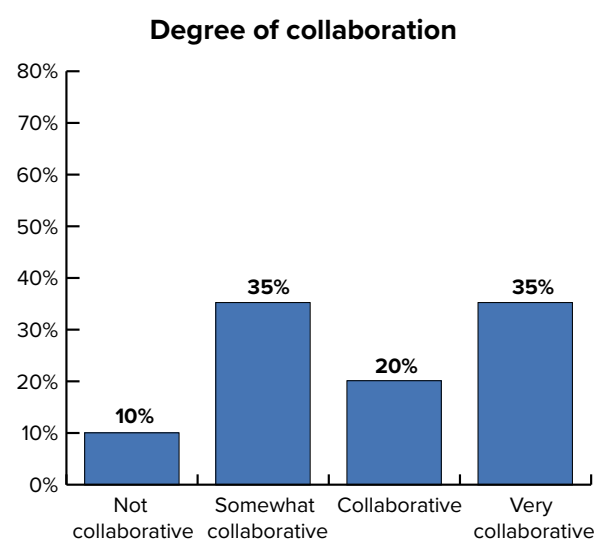
**Degree of collaboration**



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

## 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 (71%), relationships (78%), and mutual respect of others' positions and interests (72%) (Figure 8). A strong majority (68%) of respondents also trusted the group's ability to achieve desired actions and outcomes (Figure 8). A strong majority of respondents indicated that they (73%), the Forest Service unit level staff (63%), and other project participants (69%) were committed to the process (Figure 9).

## 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 Collaboratives had leaders who work well with other people (81%) and maintain and communicate a common vision and direction (62%) (Figure 10). A slight majority (57%) agreed that the leaders motivate others to work together (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.*

A strong majority of respondents agreed that the CFLRP process provided opportunities to co-generate knowledge

**Principled engagement:
collaborative environment**
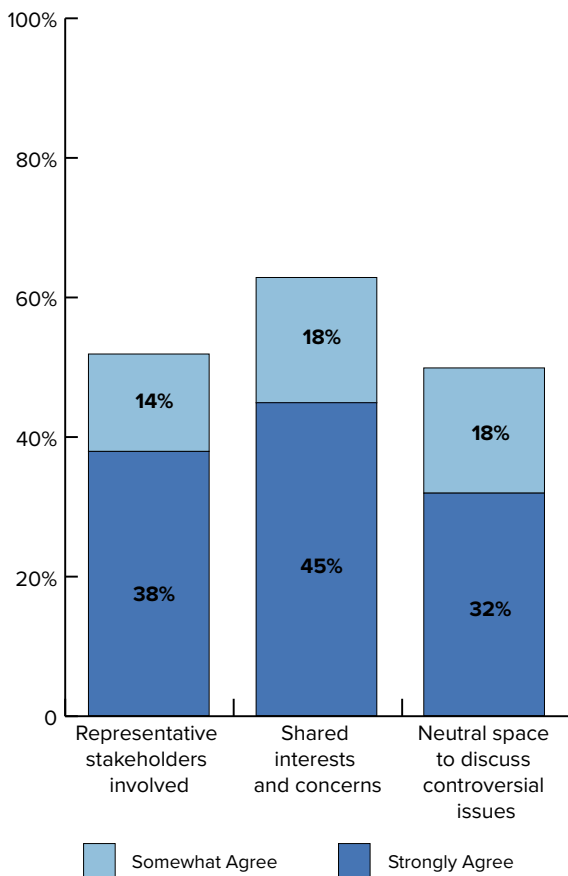


Figure 5: Percentage of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that representative stakeholders are involved, stakeholders have shared interests and concerns, and the collaborative is a neutral space to discuss controversial issues.
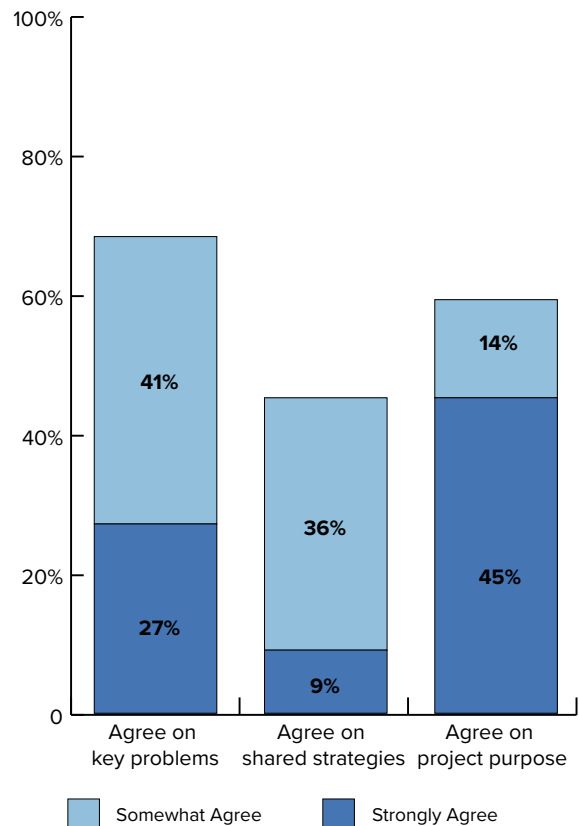
**Principled engagement: agreement**



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.

to learn and solve problems together (62%) and that knowledge and information was shared equally among participants (62%) (Figure 11). A strong majority also agreed that participants were committed to informing adjustments to management practices based on learning and feedback (i.e., adaptive management; 71%) and that they had the flexibility to alter course when landscape conditions change (e.g., wildfire affects a planning unit; 62%) (Figure 11). In contrast, a minority of participants indicated they had the flexibility to alter course when the collaborative changes (e.g., new faces or priorities; 43%) (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 (72%) agreed that the project had adequate access to funds to carry out tasks

and accomplish work (Figure 12). A slight majority agreed that the project had adequate access to technical expertise (52%) and facilitation skills (57%) to get work done (Figure 12). Meanwhile, a minority (43%) agreed that the group had adequate time to carry out tasks to accomplish their work (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 (62%) agreed there were protocols in place that promote accountability between the Forest Service and CFLRP project participants (e.g., decision rules, charters, memoranda of understanding) (Figure 13). A slight majority agreed the protocols promoted accountability among CFLRP

### Collaboration with USFS
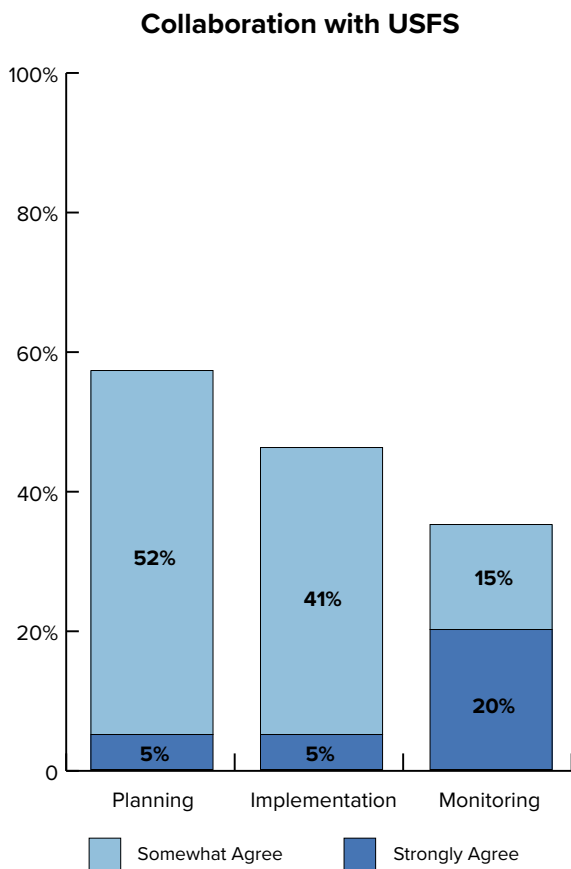


Figure 7: Percent of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that the USFS collaborates during planning, implementation, and monitoring stages.
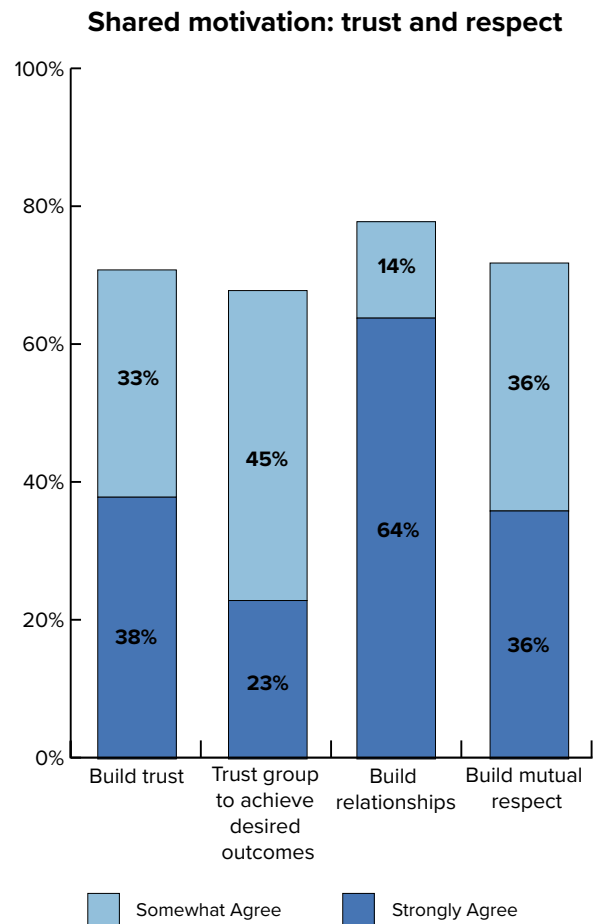
### Shared motivation: trust and respect



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.

participants (57%) and that those protocols were clearly understood (58%) (Figure 13). While half agreed that the protocols were fair and equitable (50%) and a minority agreed that they were used appropriately (47%) (Figure 13).

A slight majority of respondents (58%) felt that project participants understood when and what collaborative input was useful to inform Forest Service decisions (Figure 14). Further, a strong majority (63%) reported that the Forest Service was responsive to collaborative input, although a minority (38%) agreed that the agency was clear with CFLRP project participants about the decisions they make and why they make them (Figure 14).

## Outcomes

We assessed perceived progress on process, socio-economic, and ecological outcomes for the Collaboratives. The Southern Blues CLFRP originally received funding in 2012 and was approved for an extension in 2022, so there has been a decade of CFLRP funding to influence significant outcomes.

A majority of respondents agreed to strongly agreed that the collaborative process enhanced communication among participants (71%), minimized conflict among stakeholders (76%), reduced or improved outcomes of litigation (79%), and enabled landscape-scale planning (66%) (Figure 15). In contrast, less than half agreed that the process has led to enhanced decision making (45%), included diverse perspectives (48%), or enhanced planning across boundaries (40%) (Figure 15).

With regards to ecological goals, a strong majority reported moderate to substantial progress in meeting the ecological goals of improving restoration pace and scale (86%), restoring old growth (81%), reducing fuel hazards (90%), improving fire use (66%), improving habitat for focal species (76%), and improved watershed function (88%) (Figure 16). A slight majority indicated progress in invasive species control (56%).
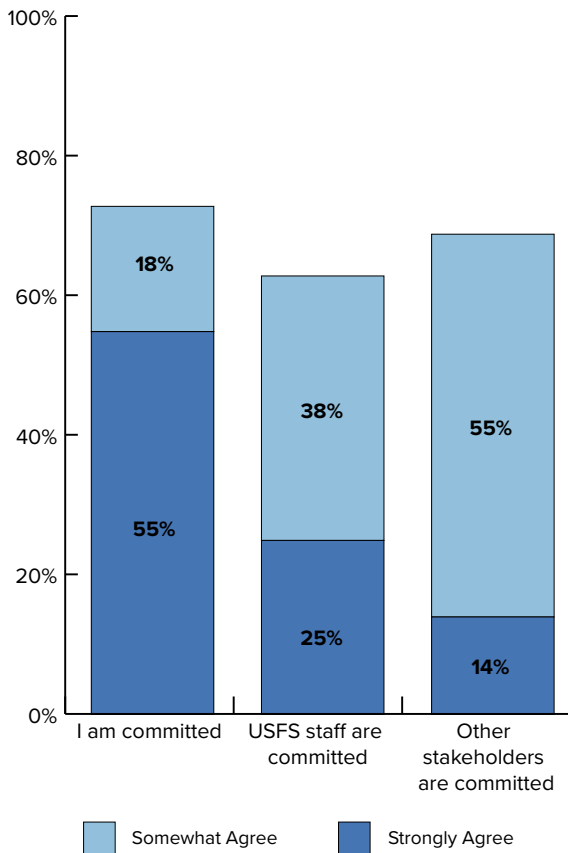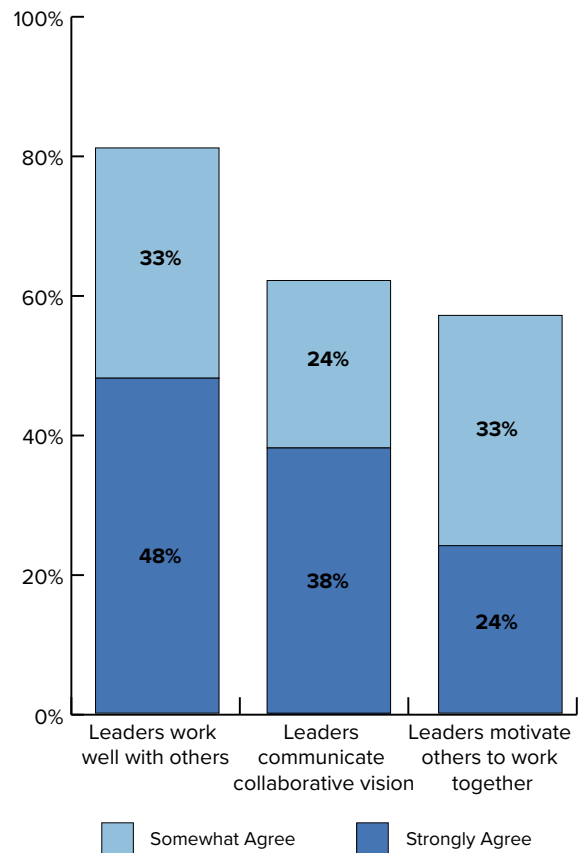


Figure 9: Percentage of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that they, the USFS, and other stakeholders are committed to the process.



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.

In terms of socio-economic goals, a strong majority of respondents agreed that the CFLRP project has made progress on reducing wildfire risk (77%), offsetting treatment costs with the use of byproducts (66%), and supporting local employment or training (60%) (Figure 17). However, a minority indicated the project accomplished more work on adjacent lands (40%).

## 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; and 3) a survey administered to Forest Service staff engaged in 2010 and 2012 CFLRP projects (Schultz et al., 2018). Based on that list, frequent turnover (96% of respondents agreeing this was a moderate to significant challenge) and limited agency capacity for collaborative

engagement (80%) were the most substantial challenges the Collaboratives faced at the time of this survey (Figure 18). A majority of respondents also perceived funding (66%), moving from direction-setting to implementation (62%), and biophysical disturbances such as wildfire, insects, or disease (55%), to be disruptions that posed challenges to the CFLRP project.

We also asked respondents what additional disruptions and challenges have impacted the Collaboratives' performance and durability. The most common disruption, noted by five respondents, was the length of time to achieve implementation, which was tied to rapid turnover and insufficient staffing, particularly in the Forest Service. Respondents argued that both the NEPA process and post-NEPA implementation were lengthy, with one stating that "there are some field trips where we look at a timber sale unit that was recently implemented but based off a NEPA decision and prescription that is 7-plus years old." Another Forest Service employee wrote, "turnover with the added changes in timelines and policy have all of us on a steep learning curve and doing jobs



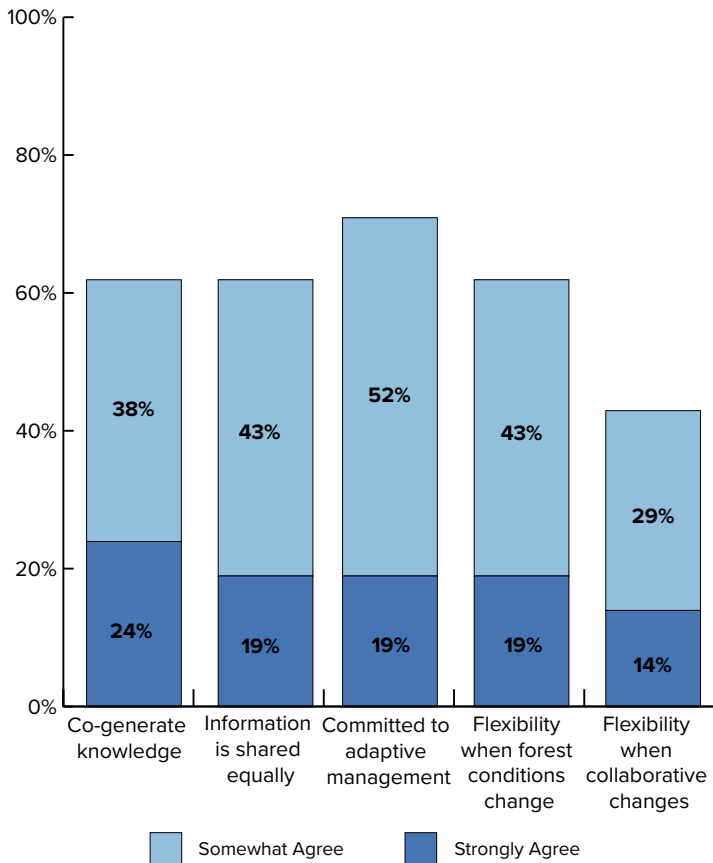Figure 11: Percent of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that knowledge and information is co-generated by participants, shared equally, and used by participants to adjust management practices.
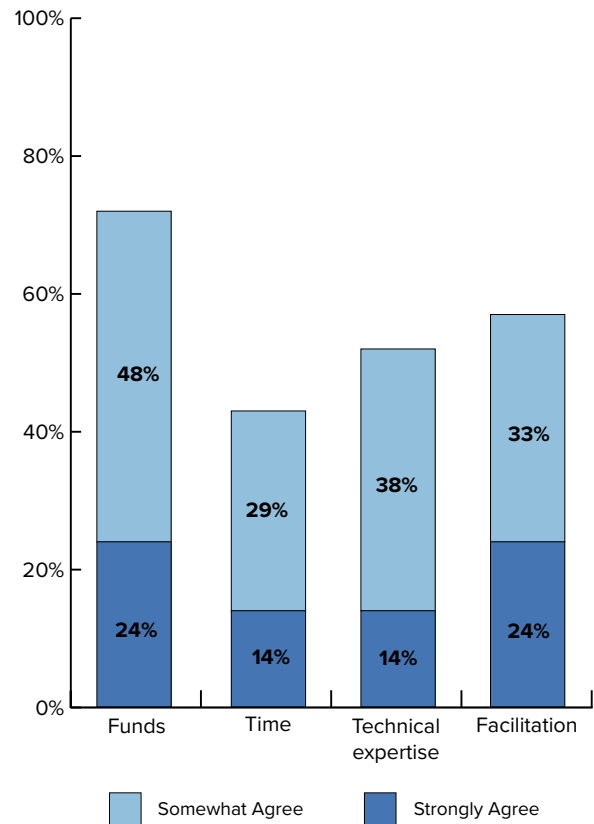


Figure 12: Percent of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that the collaborative has adequate: funds, time, technical expertise, and facilitation skills to accomplish work.

that used to be 2 or even 3 individuals' workloads. It is not sustainable."

A respondent mentioned that the Collaborative had addressed this challenge by trying to reduce the loss of institutional knowledge through training for new Forest Service staff on the collaborative process: "We sponsor a Collaboration 101 workshop every few years to help bring new Forest Service employees up to speed on collaboration." Another respondent suggested that there is little that could be done to address staff turnover except "take the time to bring new members up to speed," but hoped that the Forest Service would place greater emphasis on attending collaborative meetings and field trips to support interactions and mutual learning.

COVID-19 and its impacts on the capacity for the Collaboratives were also mentioned as disruptive to the

collaborative process. Specifically, respondents identified the challenges associated with the lack of in-person events as detrimental to communication within the Collaboratives:

> *Not being able to meet in person has posed challenges in routine communication methods that need to be reestablished. Turnover in the agency during this time of limited personal interaction has left holes in communication, and these relationships need to be reestablished as well.*

To address the legacy impacts of COVID-19, the Collaboratives could better support communication by recommitting to in-person meetings and field trips whenever possible.

**Capacity for joint action: process and accountability**
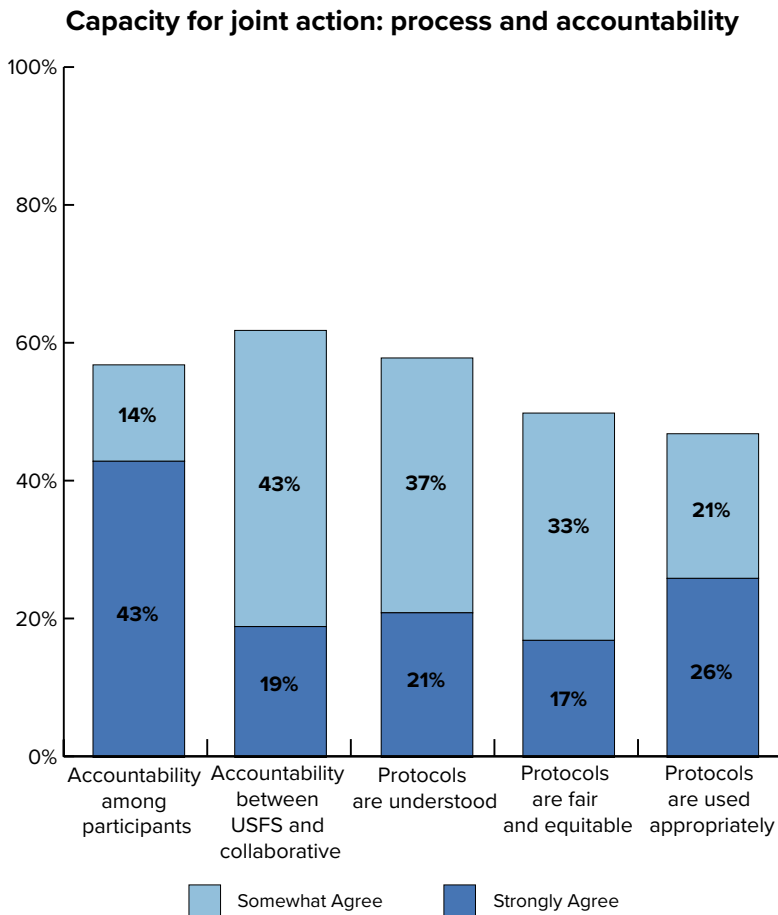


Figure 13: Percent of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that protocols promote accountability among participants, between USFS and the collaborative, and that protocols are understood, fair and equitable, and are used appropriately.

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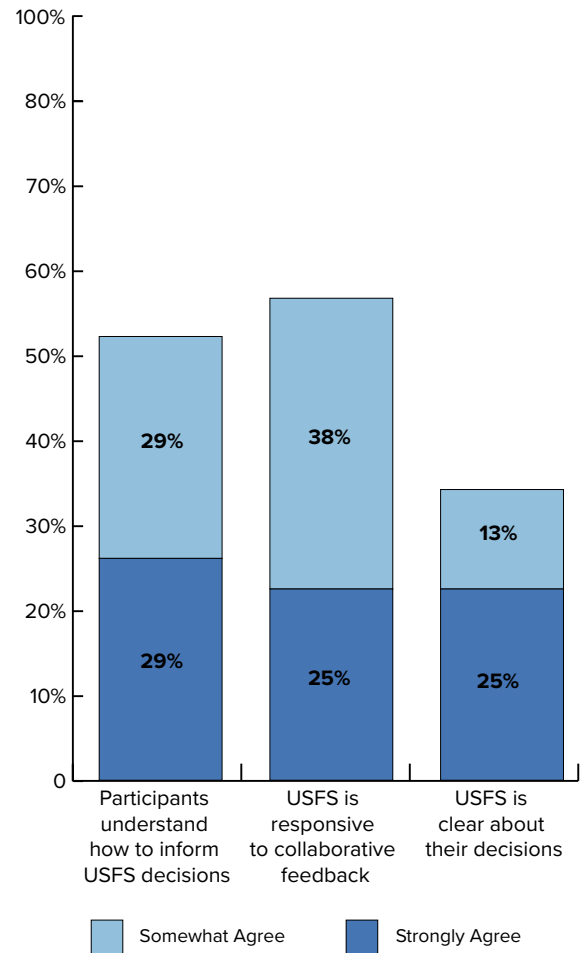


Figure 14: Percent of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that they understand how to inform USFS decisions, the USFS is responsive to feedback, and the USFS is clear about their decisions.

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

## Perceived outcomes: collaborative process


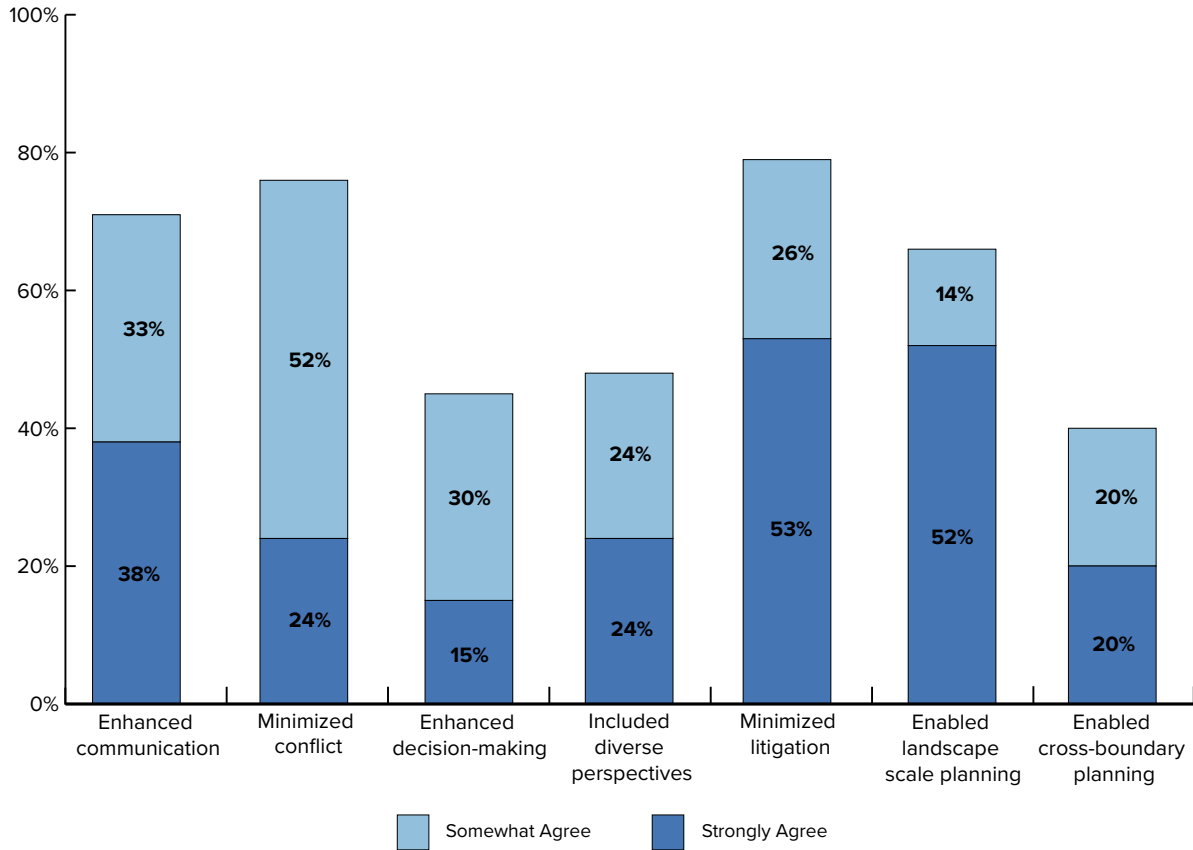
Figure 15: Percent of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that the collaborative process has impacted the function and capacity of the collaborative.
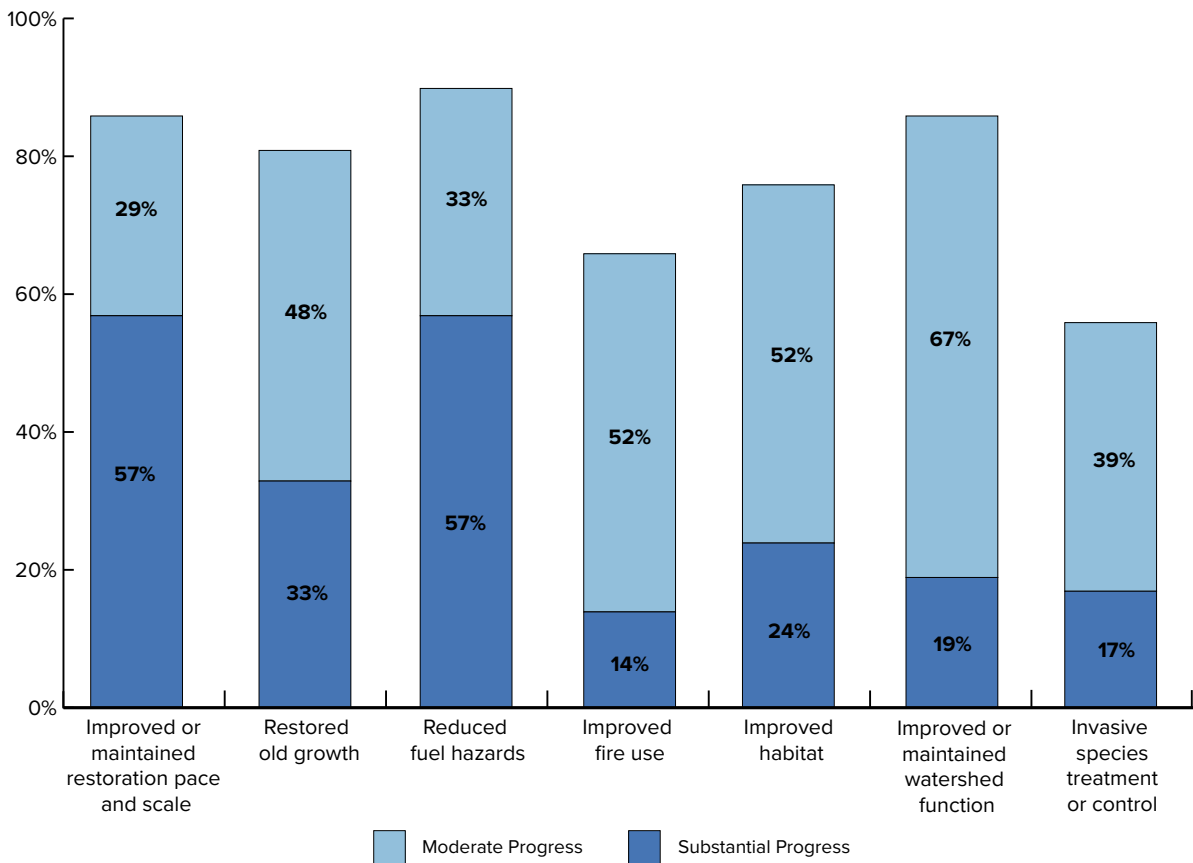
## Perceived outcomes: ecological goals



Figure 16: Percent of respondents who reported "Moderate progress" or "Substantial progress" towards ecological goals.

Three respondents argued that involvement from politicians in the collaborative process and a few key collaborative participants profiting from collaborative decisions have created disruptions (more comments on these issues are noted below in "Recommendations to Improve the Collaborative Process"). For example, one respondent argued that:

> *Frequent involvement from state senators and representatives has disrupted the decision-making process within the Forest Service to ensure that decisions made through the collaborative process continued to benefit the handful of constituents that the collaborative has strived to keep as primary benefactors of the work provided through the project.*

Individual respondents also noted challenges such as the lack of diversity of interests in the collaborative process discouraging participation of other new interests and how the reliance on a single long-term Stewardship contract has increased project costs and led to "minimal results" due to limited competition.

**Perceived outcomes: socio-economic goals**



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

We also asked if and how the Collaboratives responded to these challenges and disruptions. Only eight respondents (35% of total respondents) answered this question, with 5 arguing that either nothing or not enough has been done to address disruptions. A respondent noted:

> *Letters were submitted to the collaborative group to remind them of the rules they must follow in order for the Forest Service to consider them a viable collaborative. That was answered with some small changes; however, they are still limiting membership and have a controlling board that benefits directly from the decisions made within the project.*

Another respondent argued that the Forest Service is not taking enough action to limit the impacts of turnover and should be "emphasizing the importance of attending BMFP meetings or field trips," arguing, "I think a lot of good discussion and learning is not had" without their participation.

Other individual respondents also noted several positive steps taken toward minimizing disruptions, including relying on the significant support the Collaboratives have from local stakeholders and identifying challenges and establishing protocols to address them:

> *We are well versed in planning and adapting to unplanned fire and have significant support from stakeholders for local infrastructure, including several new businesses.*

> *I feel like we are starting to gain ground, in some cases the issues have been identified, and we will likely be working through establishing protocols moving forward.*

## 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. On average, 49% of respondents included answers for open-ended questions throughout the survey. These recommendations included: 1) inclusion of diverse members and perspectives; 2) increased communication and engagement opportunities; and 3) implementation of a systematic approach to curb impacts of turnover within the Forest Service. We expand on these themes by also drawing on follow-up discussions on survey results with the CFLRP participants from the Forest Service and both Collaboratives in November 2023. We identified which Collaborative the comment was related to whenever possible but unfortunately cannot determine that for all remarks.
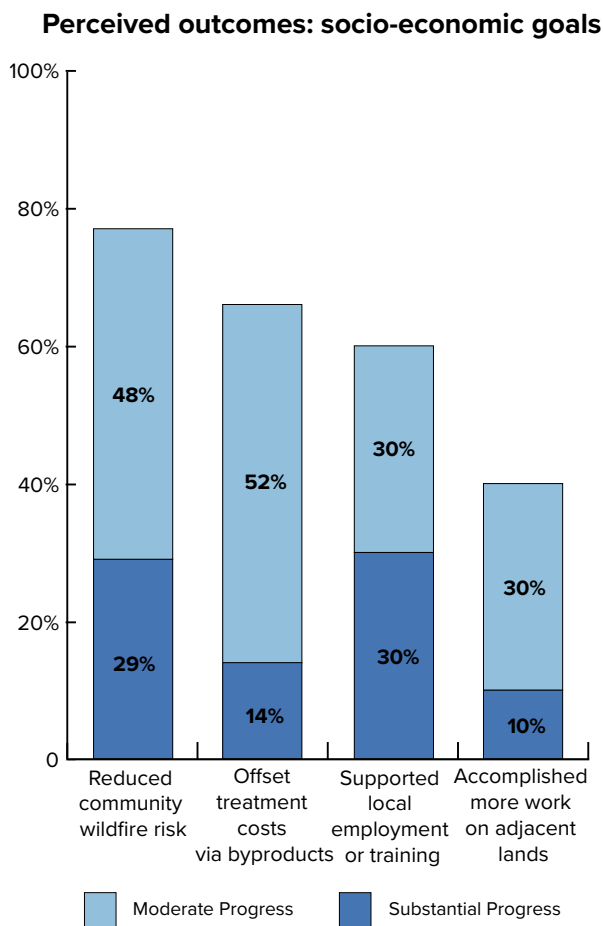
## Inclusion of Diverse Members and Perspectives

The primary recommendation expressed by respondents was the need for increased diversity of perspectives within the collaborative process (6 respondents). Many respondents highlighted this need and further suggested that the lack of diversity benefited some interests at the expense of others (see Appendix 3 for additional comments on the importance of including diverse interests). When asked what recommendations they had for the Collaborative, one respondent argued:

*Include a more diverse cast of participants, ideas, and values. There is no collaborative representation for many user groups of the National Forest, primarily those who truly value conservation and future generations. Although there are members who claim to represent the environmental or conservation side, the priority focus seems to be the immediate economic gain of few and providing for timber industry. The group also refuses to address many aspects of restoration, particularly those that may be challenging or controversial, which is where collaboration is needed most now and into the future. There is a perception among some in [the] Forest Service and local community that would label them as more of a lobby for industry than a restoration-focused collaborative group.*

Further, several other respondents also expressed concern of efforts to exclude certain voices from the collaborative, especially within the BMFP, to benefit others (4 respondents):

*The Blue Mountains Forest Partners are no longer an appropriate functioning collaborative. They do not welcome new members or work through diverse or differing opinions. The steering committee appears to be members that either have financial incentive or are with the same entity. These things need to change if this collaborative is to be truly "collaborative." It's more like a club now.*

Several other respondents also expressed their belief that an underlying reason for exclusion and lack of diverse voices may be because some influential participants financially benefit from the collaborative process's decisions (5 respondents). Another respondent wrote:

*BMFP heavily profits a handful of individuals that sit on their board of directors. BMFP seems as though it is a group of so-called elitists and will not allow others to join. There seems to be a lot of money being funneled to the BMFP with not a lot of transparency.*
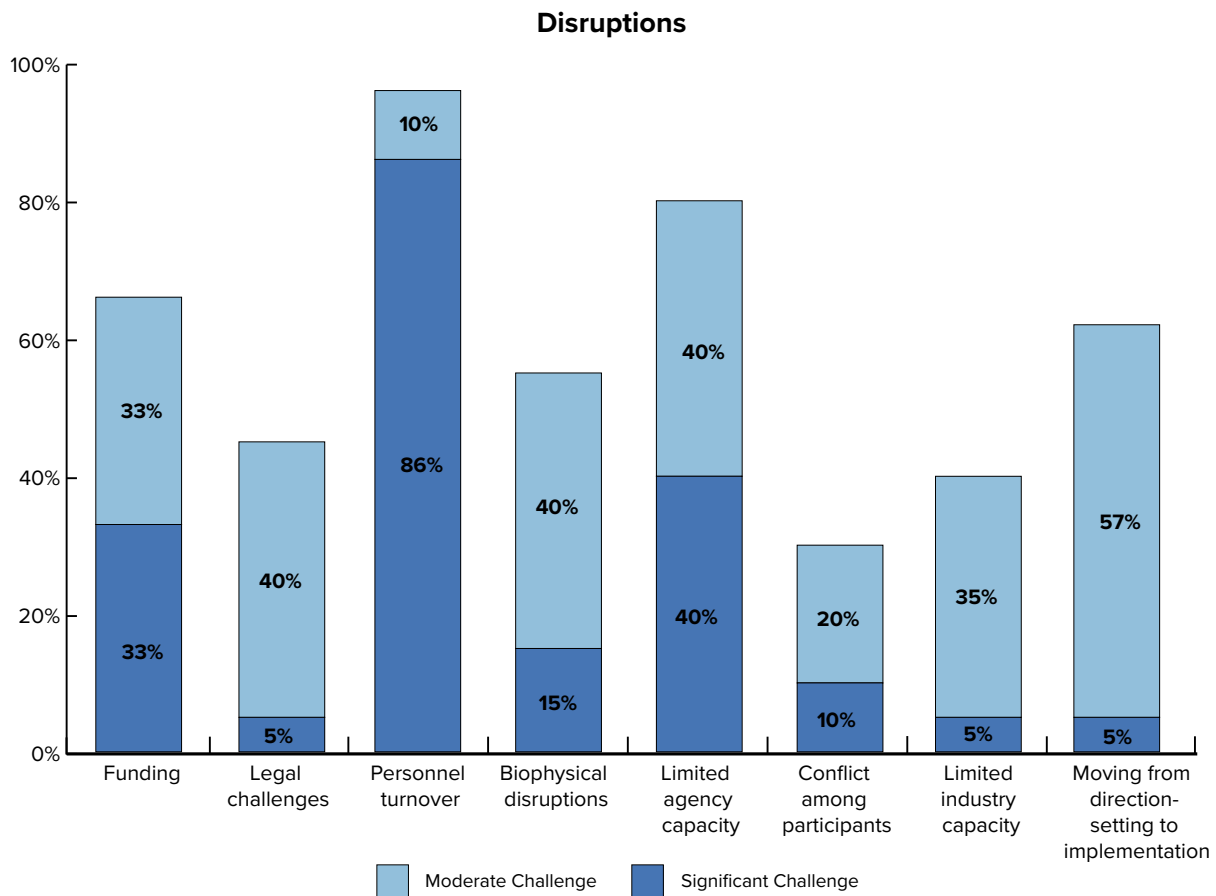
**Disruptions**



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

Another commenter noted the challenge of including a variety of interests when "appropriate and interested stakeholders who are not in some type of pay status can't afford to attend."

While a lack of diversity within the collaborative was called out by multiple respondents in this survey, it was noted to be a rather recent concern. For example, one respondent noted:

> One of the two collaboratives supporting our CFLRP has a longstanding reputation of being functional and successful, however, I feel we have reached a point where the diversity that used to be in this group no longer exists… Our collaborative only has one voice now, does not feel [like a] diverse group of stakeholders any longer and has not for several years.

A couple of respondents were concerned that limiting the diversity of interests included has led to a focus on timber, and other resource specialists and interests should be more included to achieve desired restoration outcomes:

> There needs to be a deliberate intent to understand challenges outside of commercial timber removal from the forest to shift some of the support to other resources, cultural and natural, to support addressing other challenges (wildlife, range, heritage, prescribed fire, etc.) of getting our restoration objectives met while enhancing the multiple values we are tasked with managing across the forest.

Commenters in the appended questions (see Appendix 3) suggested focusing on utilizing a variety of restoration tools, such as prescribed fire, and addressing restoration in riparian areas, fencing, grazing, and road closures as well.

To address these concerns, respondents argued for the need to participate throughout the collaborative process and do "less 11th-hour catering to groups not involved," or to complete a publicly available audit to illustrate where funding is allocated.

These comments are collected from survey respondents who opted to include open-ended comments and thus likely represent those with the most passionate viewpoints.

## Increased and Improvement of Communication and Engagement Opportunities

Four respondents recommended the Collaboratives seek to increase and improve opportunities for both communication and engagement. These respondents highlighted the benefit of continuing to meet regularly, which would enable members to share their perspectives and ideas. It was further suggested that protocols for communication and working through projects be reestablished in the post-pandemic period, that time limits be set on speakers to encourage fresh perspectives, that the Forest Service should emphasize the importance of attending Collaborative events, and that meeting and engagement such as field trips should be better planned and structured. One respondent recommended:

> Have better field trips (e.g. better coordination between Forest Service and BMFP on site visits, objective of visits, and capturing questions and concerns) and follow up on discussions had at field trips. I would like to see more restoration project visits included with the timber sale area visits. I would like to see BMFP go through a decision from a collaborated project and line by line go through and ask each other 'did we do what we said we were going to do'.

Increasing the meaningfulness of in-person meetings and field trips can help enhance relationships that have been hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic (see "Disruptions" above). Interviewees with both Collaboratives emphasized how field trips were useful to learn and adapt, with two participants in HCFRC noting how key they were to collaborative functioning and adaptive management:

> I think one of the most important things we do is post-treatment, we go out and look at these sites and say, 'well, what does it look like now?' And that post-treatment analysis has helped us evolve as a collaborative to make better and better prescriptions.

> Post-treatment visits have probably moved us in the right direction or helped us evolve more than anything else that we have done.

Quantitative responds to an appended question also indicated that most respondents found field trips and monthly in-person meetings to be the best use of their time (Appendix 3, Figure A2).

## Systematic Approach to Curb Impacts of Turnover within the Forest Service

Finally, it was noted that there is a need for the Forest Service to address ongoing issues related to frequent turnover of agency personnel. This need is further supported via quantitative results, where 96% of respondents indicated that personnel turnover was a disruption to collaborative performance and durability (Figure 18). One respondent noted, "Turnover in the Forest Service is a major obstacle in implementing restoration projects and completing them consistently. The Forest Service needs a system in place to bring new personnel up to speed on the collaborative process quickly." One respondent noted above (see "Challenges

and Disruptions" section above) that every few years there is a "Collaboration 101" workshop for Forest Service employees; increasing this frequency and leadership encouraging attendance might mitigate turnover. Another approach to may be to increase agency staffing and redundancies (Beeton et al., 2022); respondents noted the challenge of high workloads on agency personnel (see "Challenges and Disruptions" section above).

## Other Recommendations

Additional recommendations included increasing outreach and funding for participants to spend more time writing Zones of Agreement (ZOAs; statements of BMFP positions on broad issues such as wildlife habitat to streamline input at the project-level), and increasing transparency in Forest Service decision making (also reflected in only a minority agreeing that the Forest Service is clear in decisions they make and why; Figure 14). Another Forest Service employee suggested reminding "collaborative members that the Forest Service does not have to do what they recommend; however, they can consider it and adjust if needed. Handbook policy, best value to the taxpayer, and fair market competition should always come first."

# Discussion and Conclusions

The Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI) deployed an online survey to the Southern Blues Restoration Coalition CFLRP, which includes the Malheur National Forest and two Collaboratives (Blue Mountain Forest Partnership, BMFP, and the Harney County Forest Restoration Collaborative, HCFRC), in spring 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 agreement on many indicators that the collaborative process was working well and accomplishing goals, although open-ended responses indicated some disagreement. Unfortunately, it is not possible to separate responses by Collaborative unless indicated in open-ended comments; future iterations of the survey should include an option for respondents

to select which Collaborative(s) they address in their responses because the Collaboratives' focus and processes are different. A slight majority (55%) of respondents thought the CFLRP process was collaborative to very collaborative overall. A slight majority (52%) also agreed that a representative cross-section of individuals who have a stake in the issues were involved in the Collaboratives. There were, however, no survey responses from tribal, state agencies, or the research community and only one response from the forest products industry despite their regular participation in collaborative governance; a strong majority were Forest Service respondents and thus the survey results may strongly reflect a federal agency perspective. Several open-ended comments indicated a concern for the exclusive nature of the Collaborative, particularly BMFP, and called for participation of a greater diversity of interests. Including a broad swath of participants can help strengthen the Collaborative'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).

A majority of respondents agreed that there was shared understanding of the purpose of the CLFRP project and key problems impacting the landscape. A slight majority of respondents' expectations were met in collaborating with the Forest Service in planning, but only a minority of respondents' expectations were met during implementation and even fewer during monitoring. A strong majority of respondents agreed that the collaborative process helped build trust, relationships, and mutual respect. A strong majority of respondents 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 largely agreement that most aspects of capacity for joint action were strong. The perception of leadership was largely positive, with a majority of respondents indicating that leaders worked well with others, maintained a common collaborative vision and direction, and motivated others to work together. A 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 forest conditions change. A majority of respondents felt that the Collaborative had adequate technical expertise, facilitation skills, and funds. There was also a majority in agreement that Collaborative participants were held accountable and protocols were understood. Participants also largely understood how to give input to the Forest Service and perceived the Forest Service to be responsive to Collaborative feedback.

A strong majority of respondents indicated that the CFLRP project was moving toward achieving most of the desired collaborative, ecological, and socio-economic goals, with a few exceptions. Only a minority of respondents thought that the collaborative process has so far enhanced decision-making, included diverse perspectives, enabled cross-boundary planning, and accomplished work on adjacent lands. Several factors were identified as facilitating goal accomplishment, including having members who were willing to communicate and work together and utilization of the best available science.

Respondents indicated some areas where there was room for improvement. Expectations for collaboration with the Forest Service have not been met for most respondents during implementation and monitoring, and most did not think that the Forest Service was clear about the decisions they make and why. While respondents perceived agreement on identifying key problems, most did not think there was agreement on shared strategies to solve these problems. Only a minority agreed that participants have the flexibility to alter course when the collaborative itself changes. The primary limiting resource for the Collaboratives was time, and qualitative comments indicating that high workloads have been challenging. Respondents were split on their perception that protocols were fair and equitable or that there was a neutral space to discuss difficult issues, and a minority thought that protocols were used appropriately.

The Collaboratives have dealt with several disruptions, with most respondents indicating that frequent personnel turnover and limited agency capacity as the most significant ones. The majority also found that funding, moving from direction-setting to implementation, and biophysical disturbances were challenging. Turnover in particular 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). The impact of high turnover can be alleviated through redundancies and overlapping job duties to create continuity (Beeton et al. 2022). Qualitative comments also indicated additional challenges included the length of time to achieve implementation (due to high turnover and insufficient staffing), COVID-19 leading to fewer in-person events and reducing communication, and the involvement of politicians in the collaborative process. Some respondents said that the Collaboratives took action to respond to these disruptions, namely hosting a "Collaboration 101" workshop periodically for new Forest Service employees, although the most common response was that not enough had been done to tackle these challenges.

Three key recommendations emerged from participant responses. First, respondents suggested increasing inclusion of diverse members and perspectives in the Collaboratives, especially BMFP. A particular challenge is including stakeholders who are not paid for their time working with the collaborative process. Some respondents encouraged including diverse perspectives that will focus on restoration beyond timber and fuels management to include more prescribed fire use and to address cultural resources, wildlife, grazing, riparian areas, fencing, and road closures. Secondly, respondents suggested increased and improved communication and engagement opportunities, particularly meeting in person and increasing the thoughtful utilization of field trips to track meeting desired goals and adjust as needed. Third, respondents have seen that frequent turnover and understaffing within the Forest Service disrupt collaborative function and suggested utilizing a systematic approach to curb turnover impacts. This can involve regularly offering a "Collaboration 101" workshop, having agency leadership emphasize the importance of participating in the collaborative process, and increasing agency staffing to create redundancies in collaborative engagement.

This report provided a baseline assessment of collaborative health and performance among the Southern Blues Collaboratives. 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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## Appendix 1. CFLRP collaborative governance assessment: summary of findings



# CFLRP collaborative governance assessment:
## Summary of findings for the Southern Blues Restoration Coalition CFLRP

The Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI) developed a collaborative governance assessment as part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (Forest Service) Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) Common Monitoring Strategy.[1] The collaborative governance assessment was designed to evaluate collaborative health, function, resilience, and perceived outcomes of collaborative work. The SWERI administered an online questionnaire to members of the Southern Blues Collaboration Restoration Coalition CFLRP project, which includes the Blue Mountains Forest Partnership (BMFP), the Harney County Forest Restoration Collaborative (HCFRC), and the Malheur National Forest, in spring 2023. We received 23 usable responses (17% response rate). Figure 1 illustrates what groups were represented in the questionnaire; 64% of respondents represented the Forest Service. The purpose of this brief is to:

- Summarize high-level findings from the collaborative governance assessment; and
- Document participants' recommendations to improve collaborative performance and progress.
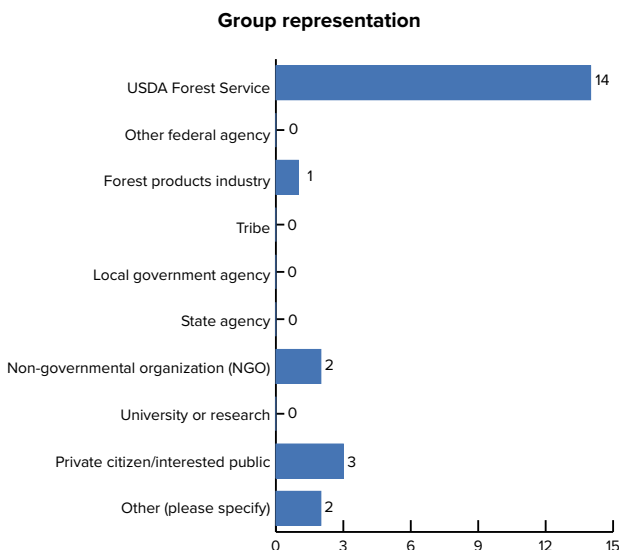
### Findings

#### What has worked well for the Southern Blues CFLRP?

Overall, there was strong agreement on most indicators that the collaborative process was working well and accomplishing goals, although open-ended responses indicated some disagreement. A slight majority agreed that a representative cross-section of individuals who had a stake in the issues were involved in the Collaboratives. There were, however, no survey responses from tribes, researchers, and agencies outside the Forest Service, and the forest products industry only submitted one response, despite being involved in the Collaboratives. Most respondents thought their expectations were met in collaborating with the Forest Service in planning, but not in implementation and monitoring (Figure 2), and that the agency was responsive to input. Respondents strongly agreed that the collaborative process has helped build trust and relationships. A majority of respondents perceived of leadership positively and agreed that there were opportunities to co-generate knowledge, work toward adaptive management, and be flexible when forest conditions change. Respondents felt that the Collaborative had adequate technical expertise, facilitation skills, and funds, but lacked adequate time. A majority of respondents perceived that protocols were clearly understood, but respondents were split on their perceptions of protocols being fair and equitable or that there was a neutral space for discussion.

#### What disruptions and challenges have affected collaborative progress and performance?

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

**Group representation**



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

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

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

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

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

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

## Recommendations to improve the collaborative process and performance

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

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

## Next steps

Results from this questionnaire provided a baseline assessment of collaborative governance among the Southern Blues CFLRP. The SWERI will continue to engage in assessing collaborative health and performance of CFLRP projects, the goal of which is to identify where capacities lie and areas for improvement to target investments and activities that support resilient and durable collaboration.
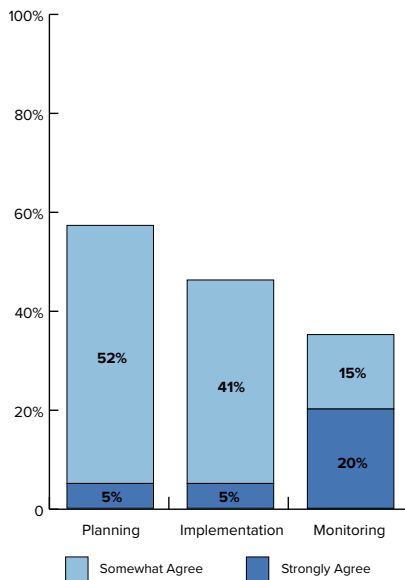


**Collaboration with USFS**

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



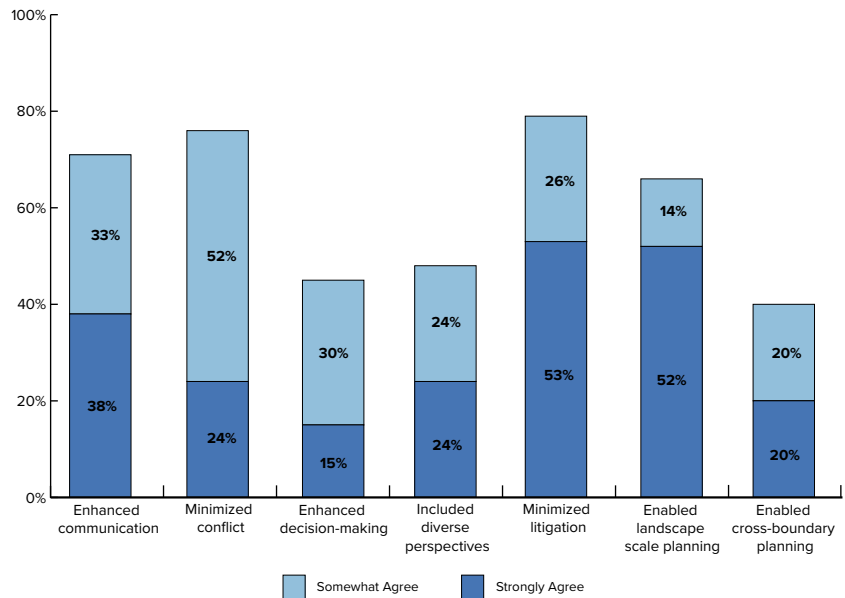**Perceived outcomes: collaborative process**

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

## Appendix 2. SWERI presentation to the Southern Blues CFLRP

The document can be found online at: https://cfri.box.com/s/abmdt2991bzgs90b39k29axaw470x59w

**SWERI** Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes

Northern Arizona University   Colorado State University   New Mexico Highlands University

### CFLRP collaborative governance survey:
### Summary of findings for the Southern Blues CFLRP

Niki vonHedemann[1], Tyler Beeton[2], Melanie Colavito[1], Ch'aska Huayhuaca-Frye[2], Adam Snitker[2] and Tony Cheng[2]

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[2]*Colorado Forest Restoration Institute, Colorado State University, tyler.beeton@colostate.edu;*

November 6, 2023

## Objectives for Today    🌲 SWERI

- Background on the survey development and rollout

- Show survey results on a few key themes:
  - Stakeholder engagement
  - USFS collaboration
  - Trust levels
  - Resources
  - Accountability and protocols
  - Collaboration outcomes
  - Recommendations for improvement
  - Challenges and disruptions
  - Meeting expectations
  - Support for common forest mgmt. practices

- Next steps and deliverables

- Discuss if/how results resonate with the collaborative and feedback on the survey
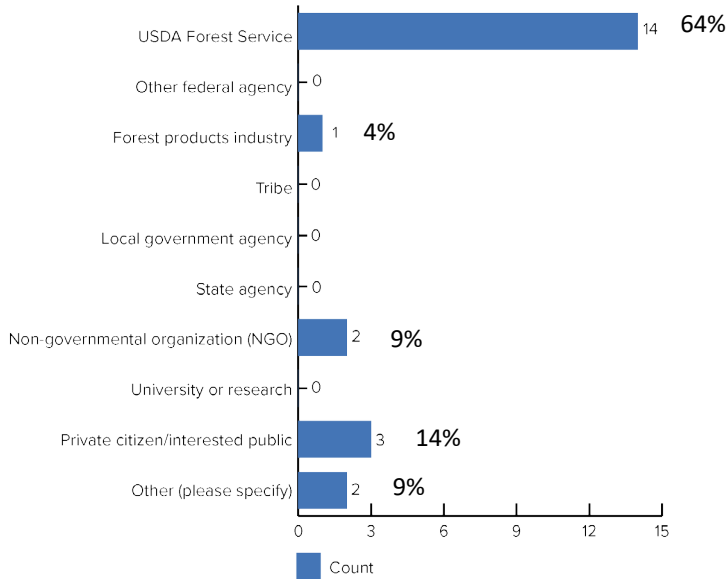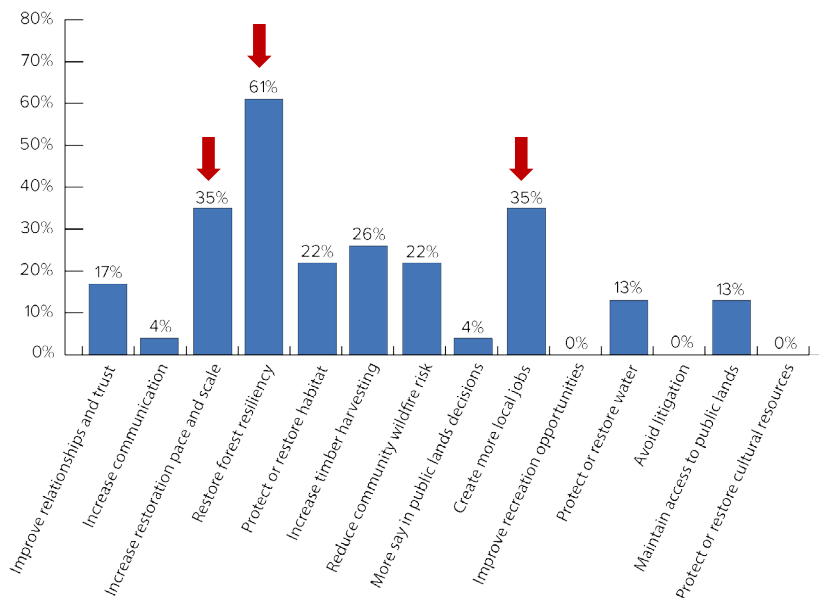
## Background and Context
## CFLRP Common Monitoring Strategy

🌲 **SWERI**

- 2021 – USFS led a collaborative process to develop national common monitoring strategy

- Core set of social, ecological, and economic indicators

- Required of all newly authorized and extension projects

- Meant to:
  - Supplement but not replace local multi-party monitoring
  - Provide standardization across projects

- This survey addresses core monitoring indicator question 12: *How well is CFLRP encouraging an effective and meaningful collaborative approach?*

## CFLRP Collaboration Assessment - Approach

🌲 **SWERI**

- Survey: ~20 minutes to answer
- Distributed to all collaborative members March-May 2023
- Confidential, longitudinal, and standardized
- Will re-administer every ~3 years
- 23 responses, 14% response rate
- Results inform:
  - Program-wide evaluation
  - Project-level progress and performance

## Respondents

**SWERI**

**Group representation**



- USDA Forest Service — 14 — 64%
- Other federal agency — 0
- Forest products industry — 1 — 4%
- Tribe — 0
- Local government agency — 0
- State agency — 0
- Non-governmental organization (NGO) — 2 — 9%
- University or research — 0
- Private citizen/interested public — 3 — 14%
- Other (please specify) — 2 — 9%

■ Count

- Discussion:
  - Did most of the major players take the survey?

## 1. Motivations for involvement

**SWERI**

**Motivations to participate**

- Primary motivation: to restore forest resiliency
- Other common motivations:
  - To increase restoration pace and scale
  - To create more local jobs



Improve relationships and trust — 17%
Increase communication — 4%
Increase restoration pace and scale — 35%
Restore forest resiliency — 61%
Protect or restore habitat — 22%
Increase timber harvesting — 26%
Reduce community wildfire risk — 22%
More say in public lands decisions — 4%
Create more local jobs — 35%
Improve recreation opportunities — 0%
Protect or restore water — 13%
Avoid litigation — 0%
Maintain access to public lands — 13%
Protect or restore cultural resources — 0%

## Overall, how collaborative?

**SWERI**

**Degree of collaboration**

- 55% of respondents say this CFLRP is collaborative/very collaborative



## Stakeholder Engagement

**SWERI**
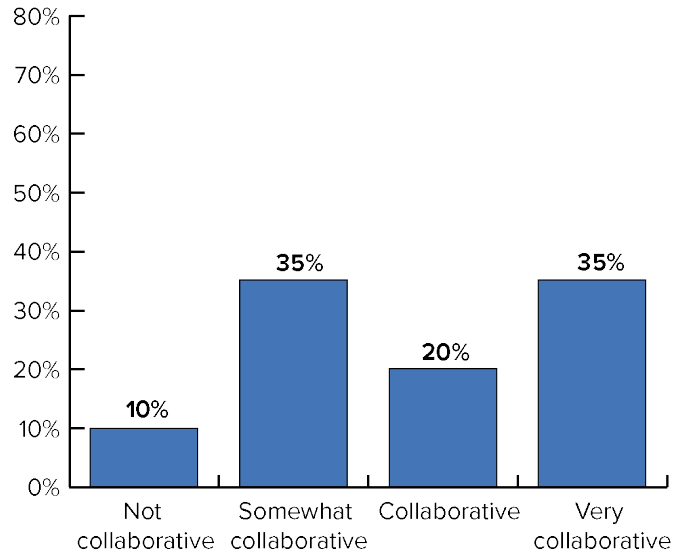
**Principled engagement: collaborative environment**
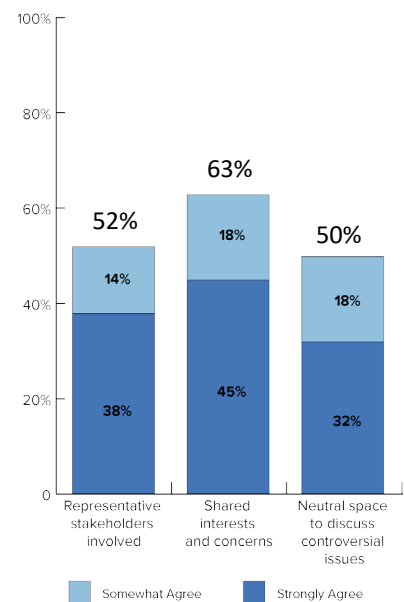
- 63% agree that participants work to identify shared interests/concerns

- About half agree that representative stakeholders are involved and that the collaborative process creates a neutral space for discussion

## Stakeholder Engagement

**SWERI**

**Principled engagement: agreement**

- Relative agreement that participants agree
  - About key problems (68%)
  - About purpose of CLFRP project (59%)
- Less than half think that participants agree about the strategies to solve problems



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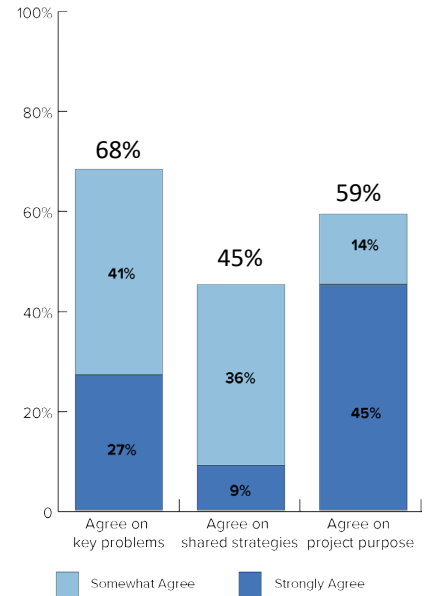
## 2. Aligning expectations: USFS collaboration

**SWERI**

**Collaboration with USFS**

- Collaboration between CLFRP participants and the USFS has met expectations during:
  - Planning (e.g., environmental analysis, NEPA): 57% agreed
  - Implementation (e.g., post-NEPA, operations): 46% agreed
  - Monitoring:  35% agreed ← lowest
- Collaboration is required in all of these, yet not defined in CFLRP/FLRA
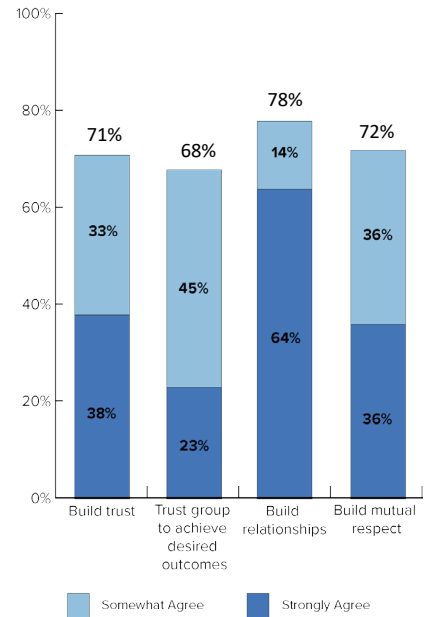  - Expectations may differ
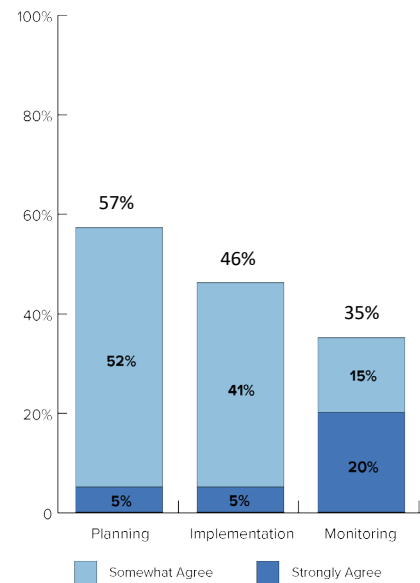
## Shared Motivation: Trust

**SWERI**

- Social capital – the "glue" that holds groups together
- High agreement that
  - the collaborative process builds trust, working relationships, and mutual respect
  - the group can achieve desired outcomes

**Shared motivation: trust and respect**



## 3. Capacity for Joint Action: Resources

**SWERI**

- Most agree that funds are adequate
- Around half agree that technical expertise and facilitation are adequate
- Much lower agreement that there is adequate time
  - Most limiting resource

**Capacity for joint action: resources**

## 3. Capacity for Joint Action: Process and Accountability

**SWERI**
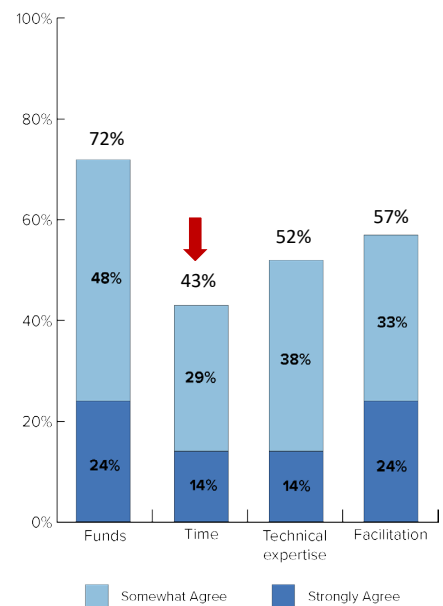
- There are protocols in place that promote accountability (e.g., decision rules, charters, MOUs)
  - *Among* CFLRP project participants: 57% agree
  - *Between* CFRLP project participants and the USFS: 62% agree
- Collaborative protocols
  - Are clearly understood: 58% agree
  - Are fair and equitable: 50% agree
  - Are used appropriately: 47% agree
- → Moderate to low agreement that processes and accountability are sufficient

**Capacity for joint action: process and accountability**
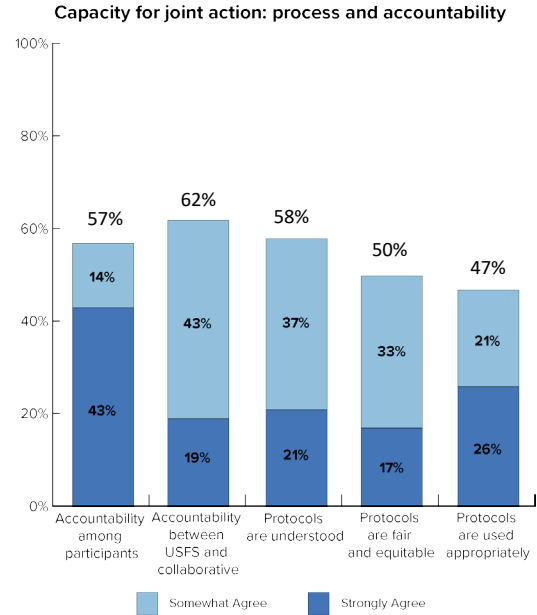


## 3. Capacity for Joint Action: USFS Process and Accountability

**SWERI**

- Moderate agreement that
  - Participants understand how to inform USFS decisions
  - USFS is responsive to feedback
- Lower agreement (38%) that USFS is clear about decisions

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

## 4. Perceived Outcomes: Collaborative Process

**SWERI**
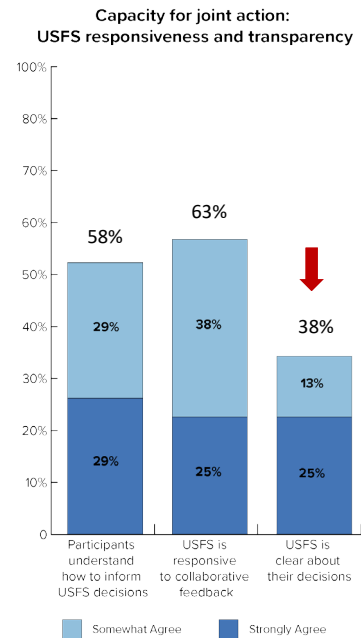
- The CLFRP collaborative process has…
- Relatively high agreement on most issues
- Less than half think that CLFRP has
  - Enhanced decision-making
  - Includes diverse perspectives
  - Enabled cross-boundary planning

**Perceived outcomes: collaborative process**



Legend: ■ Somewhat Agree  ■ Strongly Agree
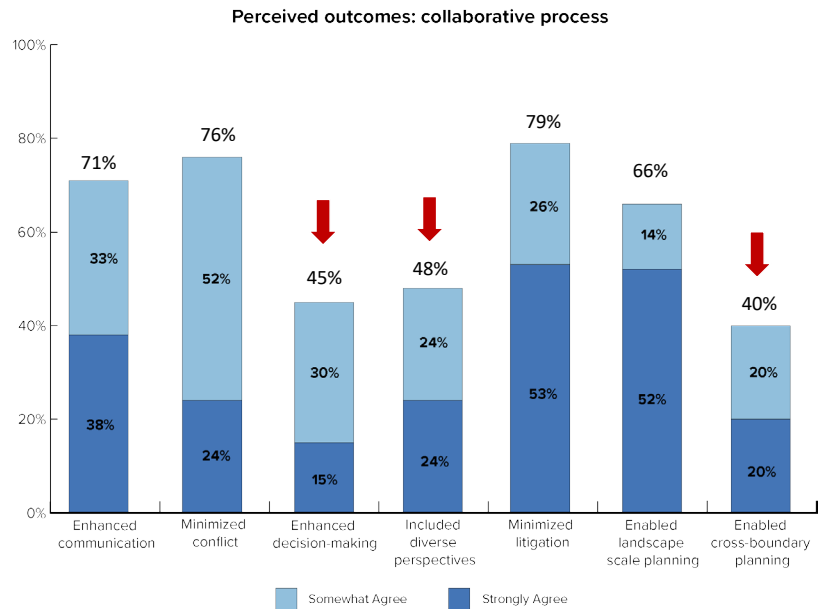
## 4. Perceived Outcomes: Recommendations to Improve or Maintain Collaborative Progress (n=14, 61%)
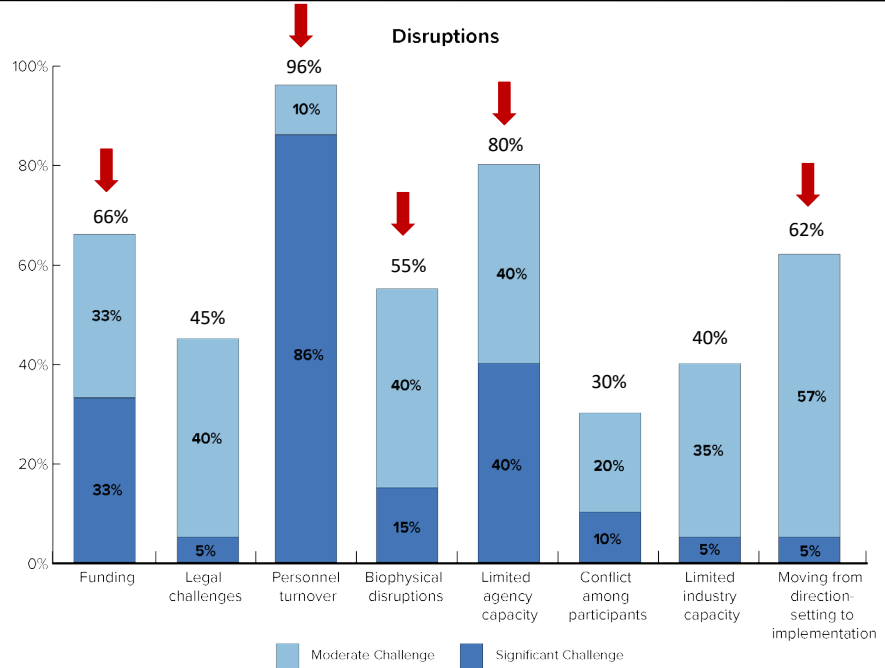
**SWERI**

- Increase diversity of participating interests and be more inclusive (6 responses)
  - Concern that a few key players benefit financially (5 responses), and more transparency is needed in finances (2) and USFS decision-making
  - Some respondents felt that BMFP does not let new members join (3 responses)
  - Concern that the focus is on timber, excluding other resource specialists and user groups (2 responses)
  - Should increase outreach
  - However, one respondent encouraged not catering to last minute interest groups not involved in the collaborative
- Suggested improvements to collaborative coordination: increased engagement and communication
  - Continue to meet regularly and share ideas
  - Reestablish protocols for communication, field trips that need rejuvenation post-covid
  - Organize field trips with clear objectives, capturing questions and concerns, follow up, verifying if action matches planning
  - Establish time limits to speakers to encourage fresh perspectives
- Increase funding
  - Needed to increase time writing ZOAs
- USFS improvements: curb the impacts of turnover
  - Improve onboarding because high turnover limits collaborative work

## 5. Challenges and Disruptions

**SWERI**

- Did these disruptions pose challenges to the CFLRP's performance and durability?

- Most significant challenges:
  - Personnel turnover!
  - Limited agency capacity
  - Funding
  - Moving towards implementation
  - Biophysical disruptions



**Disruptions**

| | Funding | Legal challenges | Personnel turnover | Biophysical disruptions | Limited agency capacity | Conflict among participants | Limited industry capacity | Moving from direction-setting to implementation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 66% | 45% | 96% | 55% | 80% | 30% | 40% | 62% |
| Moderate Challenge | 33% | 40% | 10% | 40% | 40% | 20% | 35% | 57% |
| Significant Challenge | 33% | 5% | 86% | 15% | 40% | 10% | 5% | 5% |

Moderate Challenge    Significant Challenge
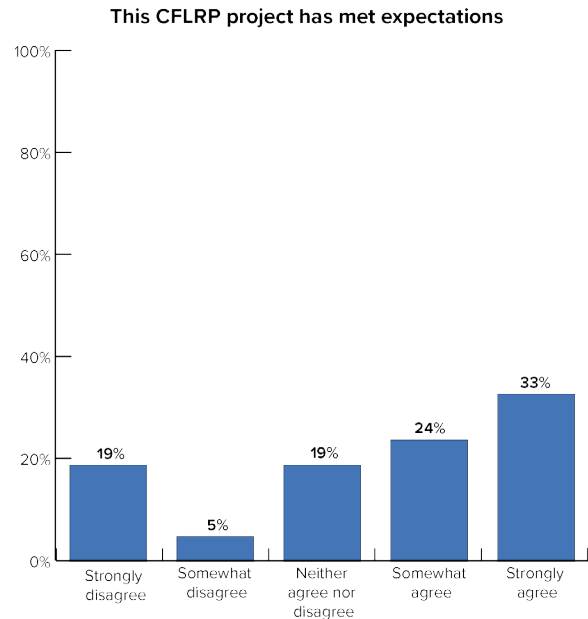
## Appended Questions

**SWERI**

- The remaining questions were developed with project leaders and are specific to this survey for the Southern Blues CFLRP

## Appended Question: meeting expectations

**SWERI**

- 57% agree that the project has met expectations
  - 24% disagree

**This CFLRP project has met expectations**



## Appended Question: explain how meeting expectations (n=13)

**SWERI**

- More diverse interests need to be included (6 responses)
- A few individuals profit (5 responses), need more financial transparency
- The focus should shift from timber to other resource restoration (2)
- There has been success in reducing litigation (2) and increasing pace and scale of restoration (2)
- Would like to see more discussion of prescribed fire (2), riparian areas, fencing, grazing, road closures (1)
- Progress is slow (1) and hindered by USFS turnover (1)
- More accountability in follow-up after meetings/field trips is needed (1)

## Appended Question: factors contributing to success (n=11)

🌲 SWERI

- People willing to work together respectfully (4 responses)
- Using best available science (3)
- Diverse participation, with everyone able to join (2)
- Other responses (1 response each):
  - Frequent agency engagement
  - Steady funding
  - Work being done on the ground
  - Field trips
  - Good facilitation
  - Right people at the table
  - Common goals and vision
  - Perseverance
  - USFS leadership willing to take risks
  - Good communication

## Appended Question: forest management practices

🌲 SWERI

- Over 70% support
  - Reducing hazardous fuels
  - Prescribed fire
  - Building fuel breaks
- Half support letting lightning-ignited fires burn

**Acceptance of forest management practices**



Legend: Moderately acceptable, Very acceptable

## Conclusions

**SWERI**
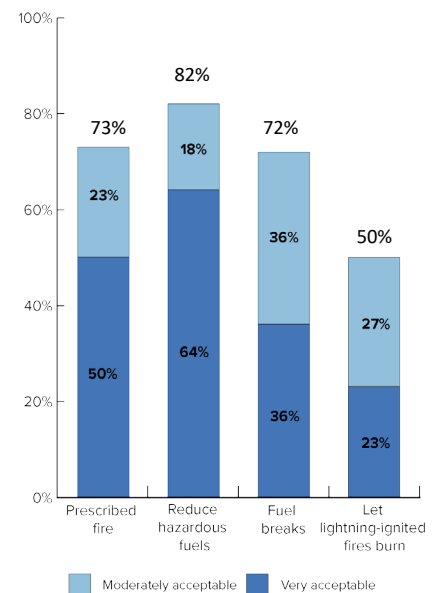
- Our final report will include responses to other survey questions about: commitment levels , leadership, co-generation of knowledge, ecological and socio-economic goals, other appended questions
- Conclusions:
  - Less than half agree on shared strategies to solve problems, but higher agreement on what those problems are
  - More than half agree that expectations were met in planning, but less in implementation and monitoring
  - High agreement that the CFLRP has helped build trust, relationships, and mutual respect
  - Time is the most limiting resource
  - USFS not seen as being clear about decisions, but moderate agreement that they are responsive to feedback
  - High agreement that collaborative process has minimized litigation and conflict, enabled communication and landscape planning, but less agreement that it's enhanced decision-making, included diverse perspectives, and enabled cross-boundary planning
  - Repeated comments on the need to increase diversity participating interests, to be more inclusive, and to tackle the issue of a few key players profiting from collaborative decisions
  - High agreement that most ecological goals are being achieved, moderate to high agreement on most socio-economic goals
  - Most challenging disruptions are personnel turnover and limited agency capacity, funding, and moving to implementation

## What to expect next

**SWERI**

- Short-term
  - Presentation slide deck
  - 2-page fact sheet of findings
  - Report on responses

- Longer-term
  - Larger report/publication on responses across CFLRPs
  - Peer-learning among CFLRP community of practice

- Happy to engage in follow-up conversations and/or provide support if/when needed!

## Feedback on Survey

**SWERI**

- This assessment will be completed every ~3 years
  - Needs, capacities change – iterative process

- What worked well?

- What could we improve?

- Is there anything we did not ask that we should have?

## Discussion on major themes

**SWERI**

- Stakeholder engagement
- USFS collaboration
- Trust levels
- Resources
- Accountability and protocols
- Collaboration outcomes
- Recommendations for improvement
- Challenges and disruptions
- Meeting expectations
- Support for common forest mgmt. practices

- Do these results resonate with you? What might we be missing?
- Do any recommendations mentioned seem feasible and desirable? What help is needed?

## Appendix 3. Appended questions

The results to the following questions reported here were developed in coordination with local CFLRP project staff, coordinators, and partners affiliated with the Southern Blues CFLRP. These questions are not part of the CFLRP Common Monitoring Strategy.

Coordinators were interested in understanding if collaborative engagement opportunities were at the appropriate frequency. A large majority (76%) thought the frequency was currently appropriate (Figure A1), while 24% thought they were not frequent enough. No respondent thought engagement was too frequent.

Respondents were asked which forms of communication and engagement were the best use of their time with the ability to select multiple options. The most supported forms of engagement were field trips (16 respondents) and monthly in-person meetings (11 respondents) (Figure A2). Respondents who selected "other" suggested issue-based focused meetings or working groups (2 respondents), science forums (1 respondent), and annual after-action review (1 respondent).

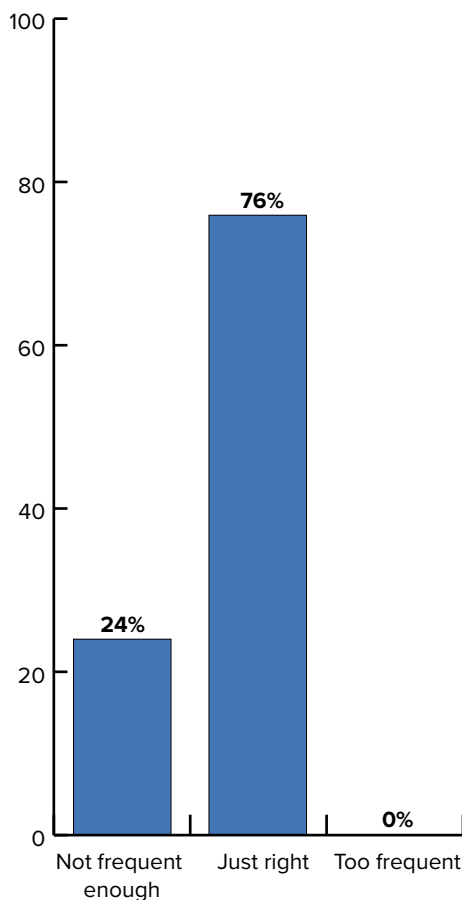### Frequency of engagement opportunities



Figure A1: Percent of respondents who reported attending CFLRP project meetings or activities in the past year by number of events attended.

Respondents were also asked how the CFLRP collaborative Respondents were asked what specific resources and capacity they or their organization could contribute to the CFLRP effort at the time of the survey, with the option to select multiple responses. By far the most common response was personnel time (18 responses) (Figure A3). Other resources mentioned included capacities to "revisit where collaboration will serve our communities and forest best" and "improved partner engagement."

When asked if their expectations for the CFLRP had been met, the majority (57%) of respondents either somewhat or strongly agreed that they had, and 24% said that their expectations had not been met (Figure A4).

In alignment with these results, short answer responses suggested that there is variability in how respondents perceived their experiences in relation to their expectations. Four respondents indicated that their expectations had, at least in part, been positively met. Some were pleased to see accelerated restoration and how Collaborative members came together around accomplishing their communal forest restoration goals, including one who stated:

> I have seen a tremendous increase in the agreement around forest restoration, improved knowledge and understanding of ecological processes and how we meet goals for forest restoration, and an increased pace and scale of treatments. While there are still lots of issues to work through, we have made much progress over the past 15 years.

Moreover, two respondents indicated that the collaborative process had enabled the group to move forward with implementation without threats of litigation, particularly through the 10-year stewardship contract. These respondents saw the changed expectations regarding litigation as positive toward meeting some goals:

> It was successful to allowing us to move forward without litigation on commercial removal. The focus on this has taken value from the other cultural and natural resources in need of restoration activities. We have successfully removed lots of commercial timber and lessened risk of litigation but have not truly done restoration, and now are faced with how we can get to the biomass removal after timber with value has been removed.

Despite a perceived decreased in threat of litigation, the above respondent also indicated that the Collaborative might have failed in their expectations to accomplish "true" on-the-ground restoration work. This sentiment was echoed by another respondent who worried about

the focus on timber and stated:

*As the Forest became more successful in planning and implementing commercial vegetation and fuels reduction projects, it has become more and more apparent that their focus is to continue increasing commercial volume to keep local industry afloat and not restoration. This is apparent when looking at what planned work is actually getting accomplished, the proportion of the types of accomplishment that is reported through CFLRP, and the challenges the group is willing to engage in. … When the expectation is a balanced, multiple use approach (including commercial and fuels reduction) to restoration on a large public landscape as advertised, my expectations have not been met. Outside of timber production and fuels reduction, some resources and habitat may be worse off than before collaboration.*

Similarly, several respondents acknowledged many other ways that their expectations had not been met by the collaborative process. The primary way that expectations fell short, as noted above, was the lack of diversity among membership within the group and the perceived financial motivations of certain Collaborative members (7 respondents). Some of these comments were directed toward the BMFP, however, it is not possible determine which Collaborative all commenters were referring to.

*Our local collaborative (BMFP) has no credibility as long as they refuse to allow any and all interested parties to participate. It is currently being used to financially profit a very small group. Transparency of where the dollars are actually going appears to be virtually non-existent.*

Respondents also indicated there are a few areas of interest that they expected the Collaboratives to address, including restoration of riparian areas, fencing, grazing, road closures, and the treatment of forested acres with a variety of restoration tools, including prescribed fire. Others individual respondents said expectations had not fully been met due to the slow process of collaboration and implementation, the challenge of high Forest Service turnover, and the need for
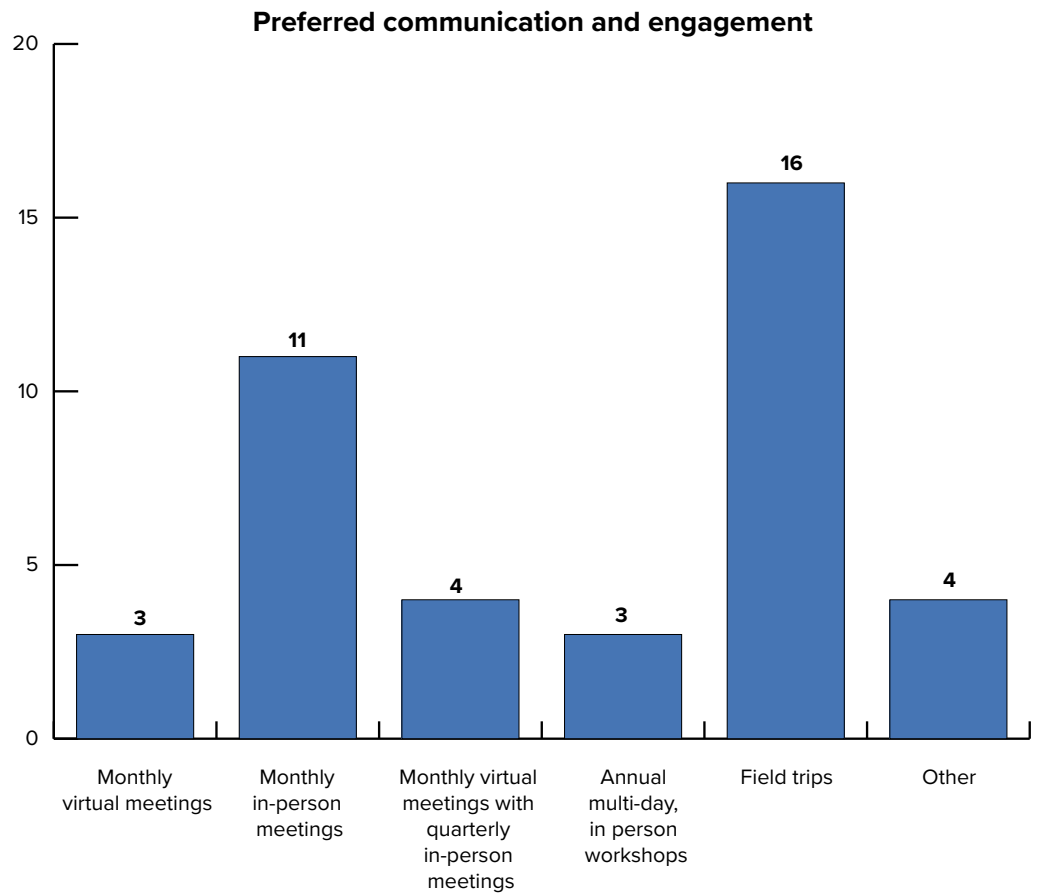


Figure A2: The number of respondents who reported a preference for work group structure.
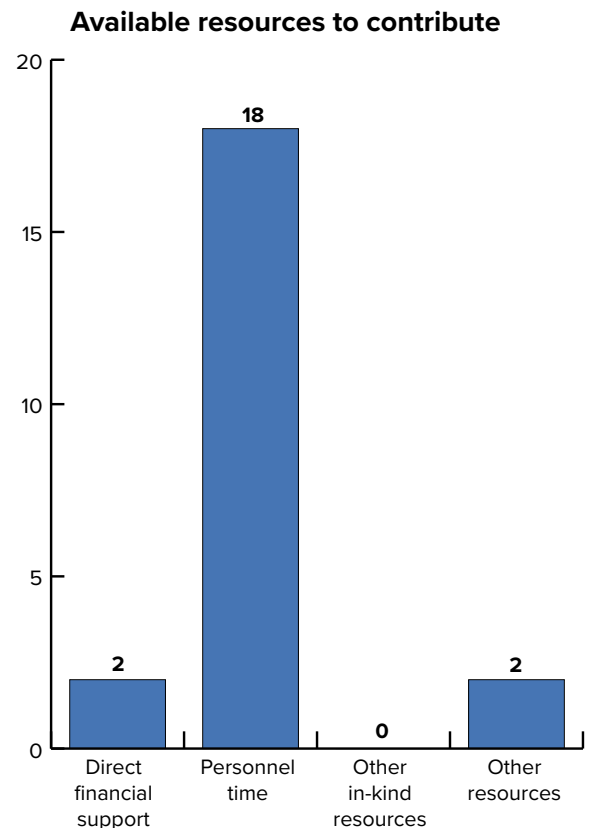


Figure A3: Percent of respondents who reported they, or their organization, could contribute "Direct financial support," "Personnel time," "Other in-kind" resources, or "Other" resources to this CLFRP project.

increased accountability in following up on topics that emerge from meetings and field trips.

When asked what factors, if any, had contributed to the successes of the CFLRP collaborative process, respondents pointed to a variety of reasons. Specifically, they highlighted the characteristics of participants involved, the Collaboratives' use of the best available science, and support for diverse Collaborative membership.

Five respondents suggested that having willing participants in the Collaboratives was one of the most important contributing factors to collaborative success. They explained that having members who have "common goals, vision, persistence, perseverance" and "are willing to meet and work together," including having respectful disagreements and open communication, contribute to success. Another respondent said success was achieved because "we have an excellent group of very engaged participants in our collaborative."

Other respondents also noted that successes of the Collaborative could be attributed to their reliance on the best available science to inform decisions (3 respondents) and openness to allow anyone join the collaborative (2 respondents). Other individuals attributed success to such factors as steady funding, frequent engagement with the public and agency personnel, field trips, good facilitation, engaging the right people in the Collaborative, and Forest Serice leadership willing to take risks.

In contrast to characteristics attributed to this collaborative process, a couple of respondents articulated characteristics that would produce successes, but explained that the collaborative currently lacks. For example, a respondent thought a factor contributing to collaborative success was "passionate people who are respectful and agree to use the best available science to move forward," however, "we almost seem to be dictating our science now, becoming a vacuum to serve a small but vocal group of needs." This comment aligned with previous statements by respondents that indicated frustration over the general direction of the collaborative.

Lastly, participants were asked their perceptions on acceptance of various forest management strategies. A large majority of respondents found using prescribed fire (73%), strategic removal of trees to reduce hazardous fuel (82%), and creating fuel breaks (72%) moderately to very acceptable (Figure A5). Respondents were evenly split on their acceptance of allowing lightning-ignited fires to burn to improve forest health.

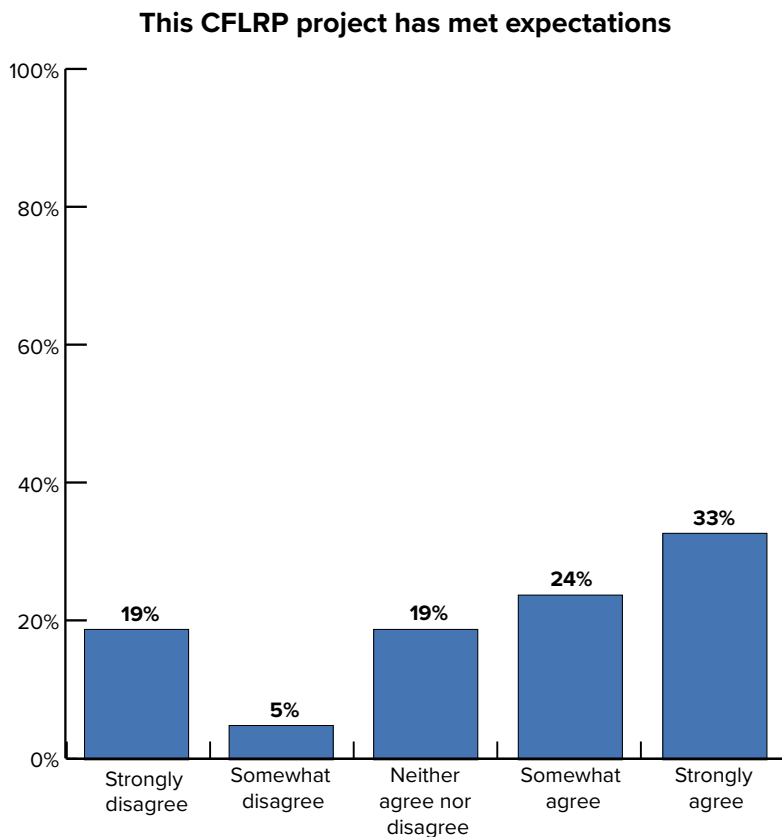**This CFLRP project has met expectations**



Figure A4: Percent of respondents who reported that this CFLRP has met their expectations.
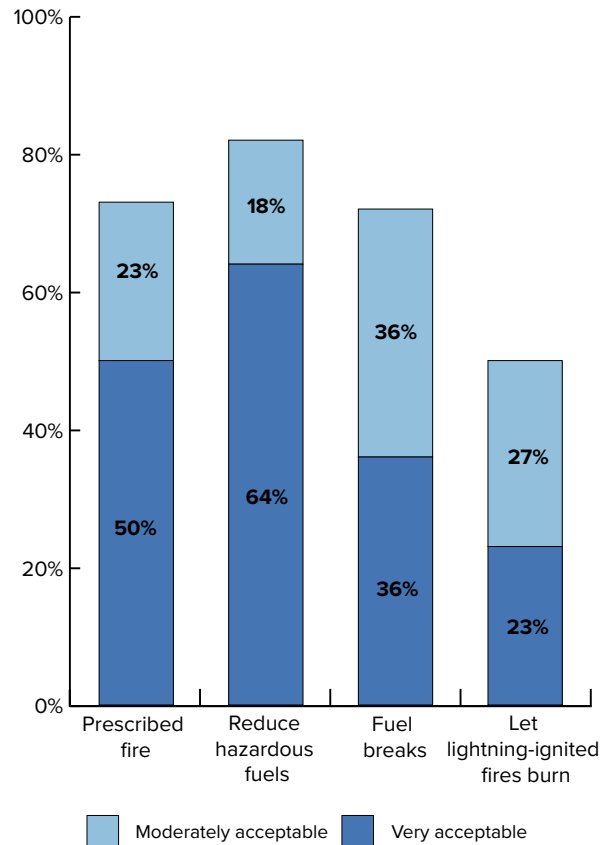
**Acceptance of forest management practices**



Figure A5: Percent of respondents who reported that certain forest management practices were either "Moderately acceptable" or "Very acceptable."