

# The Utilization of COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES in Forest Planning





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*An Applied Research Project  
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# Table of Contents

Preface.....	Page 6
Introduction/Project Purposes.....	Page 9
National Context for Collaboration in USFS Resource Management Planning.....	Page 12
Recent Initiatives.....	Page 17
Policy Mandates.....	Page 19
Rural Community Development and the US Forest Service: Building Collaborative Capacity.....	Page 20
<b>I. Increased Staff Awareness of Collaboration USFS Expressions of Collaborative Ideals and Principles.....</b>	<b>Page 27</b>
Learning from project experiences; Learning from others in the Forest Service; An involved problem-solving process; Collaborative or shared learning; Relationship building; An open and transparent process; Learning about existing expertise within the community; Progress in terms of “substantive agreement”; A better plan and on-the-ground management.	
<b>II. The Social and Historical Context for Collaboration in the Planning Locale.....</b>	<b>Page 35</b>
Changing values, uses, and economies in relation to national forests; Distrust of agency-initiated process; Changing community demographics; Recognition of the interdependence between national forest and communities; Recent collaborative dialogue; Evolving community capacities for collaboration; Roles of local governments.	
<b>III. Initial Internal Capacity Assessment and Building Internal Capacity.....</b>	<b>Page 48</b>
Critical role of leadership; “Pre-planning” work of the team; Outside resources and trainings; Placing the right people in the right positions; Role of internal procedures and culture of staff turnover.	
<b>IV. Constructing Clear Collaborative Expectations.....</b>	<b>Page 58</b>
Develop and widely distribute a clear “road map” of the process; Clearly delineate the “decision space”; Define ground rules of engagement; Time commitments and schedule of outputs and actions; Results of unclear expectations.	
<b>V. Monitoring and Adaptation of the Collaborative Process.....</b>	<b>Page 66</b>
Increased mutual learning and understanding; Increased productive dialogue among diverse stakeholders; Evolving trust relationships; Sustained local participation and support for forest planning and beyond; A work in progress – taking a wait-and-see attitude.	
<b>VI. Collaborative Process Design.....</b>	<b>Page 75</b>
Focus on Desired Future Conditions; Place/landscape-based process; Topic/issue-based process; Structure and organization of group processes; Methods for tracking community input and information; Role of third-party facilitator; Maps as tools to facilitate dialogue and collaborative learning; Planning for contingencies; Integrating various data; Bringing in outside assistance; Steering committee utilization and cooperating agency status; Heightened communication.	
Discussion of Lessons Learned.....	Page 108
A Policy Reflection.....	Page 113
Appendix A – Case Profiles.....	Page 115
References Cited.....	Page 130
National Forest-Plan Revision Websites.....	Page 132

# A Note of Appreciation

We deeply appreciate the time taken by all of the US Forest Service staff and community members to speak with us about their collaborative work in forest planning. Without your work and commitment this project would not have been possible. Thank you for taking on the challenges of building relationships that will over time improve the stewardship of federally managed forest lands.

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# Preface

In 2005, as we conclude the analysis on this research project, there are many visions and expectations about the uses of collaboration in public land and natural resource management. In general, there is a substantial hope that by including a broad range of stakeholders and interests in ecosystem planning processes, over time the quality of land stewardship will increase.

While one can support this optimism with many examples of successful collaborative stewardship over the past 10 to 12 years, it is important to balance this perspective with a clear understanding of how challenging it is to form and implement a collaborative resource planning and management process. Collaboration is being applied in significant numbers of forest restoration and stewardship projects. Multi-stakeholder partnerships have been formed to address such topics as watershed improvements and recreation resource management. In each case, while new partnerships contribute to successful accomplishments, both the land agency and community representatives find many challenges in designing, implementing, and continually adapting a collaborative planning and ecological stewardship process.

The experience of challenge, innovation, and adaptation is no less obvious among those partners who have recently initiated collaborative processes to improve the nature and outcomes of revising the Land and Resource Management Plans or “forest plans” governing each national forest. Both communities and the USFS have seen a need for innovation, have proceeded out of an initial vision of increased partnership and dialogue, have tested new methods of civic engagement through trial and error, and changed and modified their strategies as they see better ways to work together. In each case, the US Forest Service, community, governmental, and non-profit representatives have been, in some degree or another, innovators, risk-takers, leaders, and learners. They most often did not have a detailed set of road maps, but nevertheless possessed a guiding vision and key collaborative principles.

Representatives from both the Forest Service and a wide range of cooperating partners, who have made some of the early attempts at a more collaborative forest planning process, have sensed that improvements were needed. Forest plans could be improved in terms of providing better guidance for agency resource allocation and natural resource management. Relationships with communities and interest groups could be improved. Trust could be increased as political conflict could be decreased. Time spent in opposing each other could be better spent on making systematic improvements on the land. Land stewardship could increase as collaborative learning grew and shared problem solving increased.

Having the vision of a more collaborative approach to resource planning and management, while a necessary starting point, did not automatically provide the practical answers to how to work more collaboratively. These still required considerable discussion, team-building, designing new hands-on tools and techniques, borrowing from neighboring forests, and in some cases, simply “giving it a try.” It required help from the community, assistance from outside cooperators and contractors, and strong internal Forest Service leadership to support innovative forest planning teams. And, in the end, it required understanding the limits of collaboration as it applies to each specific situation.

This report is intended as a basic framework to facilitate the preparation of a collaborative forest planning process. While it will not provide a few silver-bullets or simple steps for a “collaborative forest plan,” it will provide a vision of how to engage US Forest Service, community, local government, and non-profit organizations and stakeholders in critical capacity building dialogue and actions.

The research on which this report is based is comprised of several years of experiences of agency and community partners, who have made some of the early attempts to employ collaborative methods and processes. Subsequent to the publication of this report, it is our intent to evolve more concise guidance in the form of some suggestions and recommendations for collaborative process design and methods. We offer this report as a starting point for those who wish to know about the work of their colleagues and peers, who wish to move forward with collaborative forest planning, and who may be able through their own experiences to add to the knowledge skills of the innovators who have begun the effort.

We have appreciated the opportunity to gather these accounts about this collaborative work from many staff of the US Forest Service, community and organizational leaders, and many partners and cooperators engaged with six national forest plan revision processes in the Western United States (see contact information on page 132 of this report), where there is a significant preponderance of federally managed lands. (It should be noted that some of the experiences reported here may not fully relate to forest planning situations in other geographic regions of the United States.) Clearly, without their vision and work to address the challenges of a more cooperative approach to natural resource planning and management, these lessons learned would not be available to others.

While it is inherent that the mere presentation of such collaborative efforts as these conveys the sense of hope and encouragement of many people, including ourselves, it is not our intent to recommend “collaboration” as some sort of magic *formula* for improved, community stewardship-oriented forest planning. Indeed, there is nothing much magical about it. Rather, it is extremely hard work, requiring an investment of time and resources, considerable thought, true continuous community partnerships, and strong leadership from the line officers of each national forest.

This is an account, a set of stories, about the work of seven national forests in their attempts to increase and sustain their collaborative capabilities through including local communities and external partners in revising their forest plans. The report presents their visions and principles, their new collaborative approaches to engagement and participation, their challenges, adaptations, and lessons learned.

Most clearly, collaboration between community stakeholders, interest groups, and national forests should be looked upon as a long-term endeavor, which has the potential to increase and enhance community and ecological stewardship. The process of collaboration should not be looked upon as a mechanical formula universally applicable to any situation, but as a dynamic enterprise that must be fitted to changing social and resource management situations. It should not be looked upon as an approach that will totally succeed or totally fail in every situation, but as a set of capacities that can potentially be helpful in many situations. Collaboration should not be seen as a mere tool to be applied only episodically during a forest plan, but rather as an investment in a renewed ethic of community-based forest stewardship.

We offer this set of experiences as a first step towards reaching a better understanding of the important work of “collaborative forest planning,” in the hope that it will be of assistance to national forests and their surrounding communities, and that further study can occur to continually improve these methods of engagement.

Sam Burns  
Tony Cheng  
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# Introduction/Project Purposes

This research was designed based on a belief, which has evolved from over ten years of community-forest partnership experiences, that a more collaborative approach to forest planning can strengthen existing links and relationships between communities and public lands. The findings of this research could also serve as an entry point for communities to do their own strategic planning vis-à-vis national forests, thus enabling communities to take charge of their own future. Based on principles of mutual ecological and community sustainability, we have viewed collaborative forest planning within the broader context of community-based natural resource stewardship.

**The overall intent of this research was to discover and select key components of collaborative forest planning from each of six national forest plan revision processes, and to integrate these into a comprehensive inventory of collaborative planning initiatives, strategies, and tools to be shared with USDA Forest Service planning teams and line officers on all national forests.** While the focus of this research was on national forests, along with the opportunity to increase staff skills and capacities, it is not our intent to overlook similar needs and objectives among communities and stakeholders who share a distinct role and responsibility to make collaboration as successful as possible. Hopefully, the transfer of the lessons learned through this research process will be of significant assistance to collaborative interests among communities. We believe that further investigation should focus on better ways to increase the capacity of communities and conservation groups to engage with forest planning.

These tools and strategies, we believed, would include components that have been both successful and challenging. **Because of the different situations in each forest and among the surrounding communities, as well as the stage of completion of each plan, it was not expected that any single-case forest could present anything approaching a representative or generalizable set of workable components for collaborative forest planning. Rather, the uniqueness of the forests could facilitate the discovery of a range of innovations, opportunities, and outcomes.**

Therefore, the primary research goal of the project became:

**To address the potential role of collaborative, stewardship-oriented forest planning, through a substantive inquiry into how planning contributes to both significant forest and community health.**

The research cases selected included the following national forests: Bighorn, Grand Mesa-Uncompahgre-Gunnison, Medicine Bow-Routt, San Juan, and White River in Region 2, and the Dixie and Fishlake Forests in Region 4. Initial contact was made with the forest supervisor or forest planning team leader for each forest to gain approval and support for the research. From them a list of approximately a dozen names was obtained, including both USFS staff and community representatives and partners.

Initial research design occurred in the of Fall 2003, assisted by members of the project's technical advisory team. Field research and data collection began in January of 2004 and concluded for the most part by late summer of that year. For all six national forest cases, on-site visits were made, where conversations and discussions were held with key informants who represented a range of interests and perspectives.

A "talking point guide" was developed to frame the conversations, but which was used adaptively, depending upon the background and experience of the informant. In general, the discussion guide addressed the following topics:

- The theoretical foundations of collaboration being utilized by each forest- and community-planning process;
- How "collaboration," trust, and forest planning are understood by forest planners, members of the interdisciplinary teams, the line officers, community participants, elected officials, and user-group representatives;
- Understanding, skills, and resources for collaborative forest planning that exist or are desired by all the agency and community participants, and the steps being taken to acquire them;
- Opportunities that exist to direct USFS Economic Action and Community Assistance Program resources toward building up these capacities for collaborative forest planning;
- The extent that forest planning is and can be defined within broader land and community contexts — not just starting and ending at the national forest boundary and national forest uses;
- Community-based, intermediary organizations that currently reflect a community stewardship ethic and possess a set of characteristics that give them legitimacy in the eyes of other stakeholders, which enables them to play a facilitating role in community involvement;
- The essential or critical successes, both process and outcome oriented, that participants see resulting from their efforts;
- Constraints, barriers, or delays experienced in the collaborative forest planning process;
- The roles trust and relationship building have played in the collaborative process;
- Changes needed to make collaborative forest planning more successful, given the resource management goals and community needs in the case study situations;
- Critical examples of collaboration, such as particular tools and techniques, in forest planning, and how these might or might not contribute (long or short-term) to community-based stewardship outcomes.

In the vast majority of cases the discussions were tape-recorded, which has led to a rich set of descriptions of collaborative values, principles, methods, and lessons learned, many of which we have attempted to present in this report. However, we want to underscore that due to the space limitations of presenting all the accounts, we believe that additional richness exists in the stories shared with us that we hope to make available at a later time.

In the Fall of 2004, data analysis of the tape recorded discussions began, and proceeded through mid 2005, leading to this report. The basic analytical approach reflected herein is to present the **types of situations and challenges** faced by staff and community members in envisioning, designing, and implementing a collaborative forest planning process. These situations can be defined as a series of large scale or **major steps or components in the collaborative process**, which came to light in most of the cases.

- Each situation presents a step that needs to be addressed, and in which significant challenges often arise.
- The experiences of meeting these challenges provide in-depth, context-based descriptions and lessons learned from the six forest planning endeavors.

In the report, the findings or discoveries are presented according to six broad planning process situations or phases. Within each of these categories, a picture or definition of the situation is presented, along with the experiences of the staff and community participants. **Lessons learned are presented through the words of the participants, supplemented by more analytical statements from our perspective.**

The situations are presented in more or less the order in which they might typically arise in considering, planning, designing, and implementing a forest planning process, although in actuality many or all of them overlap or are integral to each other, and can be separated only for purposes of analysis and interpretation. The **situations** considered in the text below are as follows:

- Increased staff awareness of collaboration which establishes collaborative ideals and principles;
- The social and historical context for collaboration in the planning locale, including community understanding of collaboration and related collaborative capacities;
- Internal forest collaborative capacity assessment and building internal team capacity;
- Constructing clear collaborative expectations;
- Monitoring and adaptation of the collaborative process;
- Collaborative process design.

The research was undertaken jointly by the Office of Community Services at Fort Lewis College and the Department of Forest, Rangeland and Watershed Stewardship at Colorado State University, with each entity conducting the on-site discussions with three of the national forest cases. Staff at both of these organizations have had the good fortune to participate in collaborative forest planning processes, which experience has also assisted in the gathering and analysis of information vital to this research.

In addition to the on-site discussions, a considerable amount of materials developed by the respective national forests has been utilized in the conduct of this research, and can be accessed through each forest's website. (See the web-links provided at the end of the report.)

# National Context for Collaboration in USFS Resource Management Planning

Collaboration between public land agencies and community stakeholders has been a part of USFS resource management planning for well over a decade (Mohai and Jakes 1996, Selin et al. 1997). These range from well-known, enduring collaborative partnerships starting in the early 1990s, such as the Applegate Partnership in southwestern Oregon (Sturtevant and Lange 2003) and the Quincy Library Group (Red Lodge Clearinghouse 2001), to countless, unnamed project-level collaborative processes throughout the past 10 to 15 years.

These community-based collaboratives have gained recognition within the US Forest Service. Over the past years, Forest Service Chiefs Mike Dombeck and Dale Bosworth have expressed support for collaborative approaches for project implementation and forest planning. Recently, the agency has established the National Partnership Office and the Partnership Resource Center (<http://www.partnershipresourcecenter.org/>). While this most recent partnership investment might be viewed as focusing on coalitions in order to accomplish numerous unfunded, agency management objectives, it nevertheless will likely strengthen collaborative strategies also, especially if an effort is made to build long-term, mutually beneficial working relationships.

Outside of the agency, several non-governmental organizations have sprung up or evolved to address assistance, research, and evaluation issues associated with collaborative planning efforts. Examples include the Community-Based Collaboratives Research Consortium (<http://www.cbrc.org/>), the Red Lodge Clearinghouse (<http://www.redlodgeclearinghouse.org/>), Resources for Community Collaboration, a program of the Sonoran Institute ([http://www.sonoran.org/programs/si\\_rcc\\_program\\_main.html](http://www.sonoran.org/programs/si_rcc_program_main.html)), and the Ecosystem Management Initiative at University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources and the Environment (<http://www.snre.umich.edu/ecomgt/cases/>).

Many paths have led to the current national context of collaboration in national forest planning and management. From its inception, collaboration has woven together two problem areas consistently associated with forest planning: public involvement and conflict management. In the applied research arena, Julia Wondolleck, currently an associate professor in natural resource conflict at University of Michigan, was one of the first to conduct an in-depth study of natural resource decision-making and dispute resolution over the use of natural resources (Wondolleck 1988). In examining the process used by USFS planning teams, Wondolleck provides recommendations for reducing conflict through more collaborative, consensus-based approaches.

Similar to Wondolleck, Blahna and Yonts-Shepard (1989) conducted an in-depth case study of six national forest planning processes and compared and contrasted factors influencing the success of the public participation elements of each planning effort. The authors provide the following recommendations:

- Involvement should be conducted early;
- It should be maintained throughout the planning process;

- Input should be representative of all interested citizens;
- Agencies should use personal forms of involvement, such as public meetings, over non-personal communications; and
- The agency should maintain a “transparent” process.

In its own *Critique of Land Management Planning* of the first round of forest planning in 1990, USFS analysts expounded on the central importance of relationships as a primary reason for investing in upfront, continuous, collaborative public involvement:

*“We learned that relationships are vital. People expect us to build ongoing relationships with them. People gave us the unequivocal message that public involvement is not something to be done once at the beginning of planning and once at the end. People want us to interact with them and give them feedback so that they, as well as we, can learn from the dialog. People expect us to involve them, not because we are required to, but because we value their contributions, and because better decisions will result.” (Larsen et al. 1990, p. 9)*

Beginning in 1989 with the “New Perspectives” initiative and continuing through the emergence of ecosystem management in 1992, the USFS has experimented with alternative approaches to public participation in order to more explicitly consider the social context of national forest planning, decision-making, and management (Voth, Fendley, and Farmer 1994). Voth et al. (1994) indicate that the new efforts in collaboration and alternative dispute resolution techniques are attempts to build “a fundamentally new social contract between the Forest Service and its publics.” (p. 20)

The emphasis on relationship-building is a consistent theme in more recent explorations of collaboration. For example, Wondolleck and Yaffee (2000), upon examining over 200 cases of natural resource collaborations, found that successful collaborations established processes through which stakeholders recognize their interdependence by focusing their interactions on shared goals, common problems, a sense of crisis, or a strong sense of place. They point to examples where efforts to create joint mission or vision statements transformed how stakeholders, who often were on opposing sides of resource management issues, were able to attack a common problem rather than continuing to attack one another. This transformation of relationships has been observed repeatedly and is one of the major outcomes of collaboration (Bryan 2004; Cestero 1999; Sturtevant and Lange 2003).

In addition to relationship-building, learning is an equally significant theme in the applied research literature on USFS collaboration efforts. Cortner and Shannon (1993), upon reviewing and analyzing public involvement processes in national forest planning, call for the US Forest Service to consider various perspectives of their own roles and ideas about public participation:

*“If the public is viewed only as a set of ‘interest-holding’ individuals whose preferences are shaped outside the planning process, then public participation is merely a means to gather data for an information base. On the other hand, the public can be understood as a dynamic group of individuals who can learn about themselves and about one another, and whose preferences can be shaped through the planning discussions... Under this view, public participation can help all those involved learn about the place of public lands in the social and economic life of the community, region, and nation.” (p. 16-17)*

The authors challenged the conventional wisdom surrounding public participation and suggest that the planning process itself is, in many regards, a golden opportunity for diverse stakeholders – including the Forest Service – to learn about themselves, one another, and the broader context within which national forest management occurs.

Emerging concurrently with Cortner and Shannon’s learning-based framework for public participation is the “communities of interests and open decision making” framework forwarded by Sirmon, Shands, and Liggett (1993). A community of interests is a diverse group of individuals who engage each other and ultimately resolve issues of mutual concern. Open decision making occurs when participants can have frank exchange of views, genuine information sharing, opportunities for joint problem-solving, and transparency in how the decision was reached. For these authors, communities of interests and open decision making framework implies a very different role of the US Forest Service:

*“A community of interests establishes the working environment for open decision making. Both feature leadership that is shared and distributed among participants, free and open communication and mutual education, and a transparent decision-making process. Effective resource managers become educators, data providers, developers of viable alternatives, interpreters of laws and regulations, representatives for those not able to participate in the dialogue, and protectors of nonhuman and future interests.” (p. 20)*

Sirmon et al.’s framework has been applied on many national forests, including the Bridger-Teton, Huron-Manistee, Nantahala, Ouachita, Pisgah, Siskiyou, and Targhee.

In recent years, the “collaborative learning” work by Steve Daniels and Gregg Walker has captured the interest and attention of many USFS planning staff, especially in the Western U.S. where they have held numerous trainings since 1995. The essence of collaborative learning (CL) is that a collaborative process needs to address both the complexity of resource management situations and the values conflicts that stakeholders bring to the situation (Daniels and Walker 1995, 1996, and 2001). A core part of the learning among stakeholders is about understanding the situation as an interrelated system, where issues, problems, and actions are linked. This “systems thinking” approach fits in well with the complexities inherent in forest planning. To address values conflict, CL incorporates diverse strategies and techniques for facilitating respectful dialogue, with an emphasis on “situation improvement” rather than solving all the problems. CL has been applied to USFS planning situations as diverse as recreation management (Daniels and Walker 1996) and post-fire recovery planning (Daniels and Walker 1995).

The focus on learning is broader than Daniels and Walker’s CL framework. Through an intentional learning process, stakeholders in southwestern Colorado were able to organize around a common problem – declining conditions in the area’s Ponderosa pine forests – and develop, implement, and monitor a program for the restoration of Ponderosa pine stands (Richard and Burns 1998). The program includes the use of commercial timber sales and prescribed burns.

Collaborative learning has expanded beyond national forest management to reach broader issues and audiences, especially in the context of community-based natural resource management. For example, the Collaborative Learning Circle (CLC) was established in 1994 in the Pacific Northwest to fill unmet needs in rural forest-dependent communities. According to its website ([www.communityforestry.net](http://www.communityforestry.net)):

*“CLC provides a unique venue for practitioners in our region to discuss the practical aspects of a full spectrum of on-the-ground programs that promote sustainable, equitable activities in rural, forest-based communities across the region. Experienced and new practitioners transfer knowledge on the nuts and bolts of how we, and our community’s businesses, workers, and agencies tackle diverse programmatic and organizational challenges. Participants gain organizational exposure, strategic brainstorming, knowledge of funding opportunities, and moral support. Through networking, we provide continuity and work to ensure that large-scale programs (Northwest Forest Plan, National Fire Plan, Oregon Salmon Plan, etc.) reach the ground to support ongoing programs and foster capacity in communities that need it.”*

In the context of community-based natural resource management, collaboration is not simply a process for gathering diverse stakeholders into a planning and decision-making process; it is seen as the foundation for building “social capital” – a community asset based on trust, reciprocity, networks, and collective action that community members can draw upon to meet new challenges and opportunities (Flora 1995).

Numerous efforts have been made to identify relatively finite lists of key factors to success in collaboration. For instance, Schuett, et al., in reviewing previous efforts in this regard, state:

...specific factors have been identified that contribute to the success of collaborative efforts in natural resources (Kenney and others 2000, Selin and others 1997). Key aspects identified in measuring elements of successful initiatives suggest inclusion of a broad representation of stakeholders represented in the collaborative effort (Cestero 1999, Grimble and Chan 1995, Sample and others 1995), well-defined goals and objectives (Mattessich and Monsey 1992), information exchange, shared decision-making (Lampe and Kaplan 1999, Moote and others 1997), and building linkages beyond the community (Cestero 1999). (Schuett, et al., 2000, 587.)

Later, the same authors note that a review by Kenny and others (2000) of over 100 cases of watershed initiatives indicated that success factors fell into 10 categories:

- 1) Collaboration, consensus, and/or participation by stakeholders;
- 2) Consistent funding/paid staff;
- 3) Education of participants and/or the public;
- 4) Coordination of participants/agency efforts;
- 5) On-the-ground projects/modifications;
- 6) Clearly identifying the problem;
- 7) Following through on goals;
- 8) Leadership;
- 9) Long-range vision or outlook; and
- 10) Government and/or stakeholder buy-in/investment in the project. (Schuett, et al. 2000, 588)

A similar list of factors has been developed by Resolve, Inc. in its assessment of the Willamette Restoration Initiative Strategy (2001):

- **Inclusion of all affected stakeholders.** Collaborative planning and watershed management efforts must include all parties with a stake in the results.
- **Incentives to participate.** Stakeholders must have sufficient and continuing incentives to participate.
- **Representation and accountability.** The participants who represent groups or organizations must effectively speak for the interests they represent.
- **Learning and capacity building.** In order to be successful, watershed partnerships must engage in active internal and external learning.
- **Clear objectives and projects.** There should be clear objectives and these should include projects or plans that change the way things are done on the ground.
- **Scope of the partnership.** Similarly, there must be agreement on the scope of the partnership. Scope includes the general description of the extent and scale of the partnership efforts as well as the intent.
- **Sufficient resources.** There must be sufficient resources, which include time, staff, information, and money for the partnership to be successful.
- **Ensure full participation and communication.** There must be a level playing field. Participants may vary in their style or ability to participate.
- **Manage the process carefully, consistently, and continually.** The process must be carefully managed. The group must clearly define participant roles and responsibilities and establish clear ground rules and protocols.
- **Connect implementation to planning.** Beginning to address implementation issues during the planning process helps set the stage for successful implementation of an agreement.

(Full text of this paper with descriptions of the factors is available at <http://www.resolve.org/index.html>.)

It is often valuable to consider such success factors in beginning any collaborative endeavor, if nothing more than to keep in mind some general values and principles. It is, however, imperative to understand and consider the specific elements, steps, and methods that will make each collaborative process work from a collaborative perspective. “Forest planning” is a particular sort of strategic planning, with its own language, requirements, and intended outcomes. Herein lies the challenge of adapting collaborative principles, methods, and procedures to an existing set of authorities, expectations, and public land management practices. It is in this sense that the experiences of the national forests that form the cases for this research are most valuable because they have endeavored to make this challenging adaptation possible.

As opportunities and demand for collaboration in national forest planning and management expand, many hands-on, tailored training programs have arisen to meet growing agency needs. An excellent source for such training is *Collaborative Stewardship Training Opportunities* published in June 2001 by the Pinchot Institute for Conservation for the USFS (see [http://www.swstrategy.org/library/PIC\\_Collaborative\\_Training.pdf](http://www.swstrategy.org/library/PIC_Collaborative_Training.pdf)). The publication highlights eight training opportunities:



- CDR Associates in Boulder, CO
- RESOLVE, Inc., in Washington, DC
- Bureau of Land Management National Training Center in Phoenix, AZ
- US Fish and Wildlife National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, WV
- Pinchot Institute for Conservation in Washington, DC
- Integration, run by Zane Cornett and Elaine Twigg Cornett in Eugene, OR
- Sonoran Institute, based in Tucson, AZ, and Bozeman, MT
- The Consensus Institute at Washington State University, Pullman, WA

It is clear that the market for collaboration training continues to grow and that numerous opportunities occur in addition to those listed in the Pinchot Institute's 2001 publication. Indeed a word of caution is appropriate: Even with the general enthusiasm for collaboration, there are still unanswered questions about how it is being applied in national forest planning as a specific context. Environmental groups and activists remain skeptical over its use, claiming that it inappropriately devolves power to local communities (Coggins 1999), is often unrepresentative of the larger public (McCloskey 1996), is easily co-opted by powerful business interests (Singleton 1999), and does not necessarily result in improved environmental outcomes (Blumberg 1998; Getches 1998; Kenney 2000). Despite these reservations, there is a recognition that collaboration is here to stay and efforts are being made by environmental groups to become involved in the front end to help design, implement, and evaluate collaborative processes that address their concerns (Dukes and Firehock 2001).

At this juncture in history, collaboration is definitely on the rise, with national-level initiatives and grass-roots, community-based efforts constantly springing up. National forest planning in particular is an arena in which collaboration has taken root (Selin, Schuett, and Carr 1997). Recent policy and programmatic initiatives have contributed to this national context of collaboration in national forest planning.

## Recent Initiatives

Since 2000, the term "collaboration" has become commonplace in administrative and legislative policy, and is associated with innovative programs. Prominent examples include:

***Community Forest Restoration Act of 2000 (Title VI, P.L. 106-393):*** The purpose of this bill is to "provide incentives for collaborative forest restoration projects on National Forest System and other public lands in New Mexico." The act established the Collaborative Forest Restoration Program operated by the State and Private Forestry office in Region 3. The program provides financial cost-share grants to stakeholders for experimental forest restoration projects that are designed through a collaborative process. (Further information about this program can be found at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/spf/cfrp/>.)

***Four Corners Sustainable Forests Partnership:*** This partnership emerged from regional forest health and community conditions and concerns, which called for a new strategy to integrate community and economic development with the ecological improvement of forests. Congress appropriated funding to the FCSFP, which received \$5.5 million between 1999 and 2003. The majority of funding (\$3.4 million) went to competitive small grants for communities and businesses addressing forest restoration issues, and an additional \$.5 million was placed into four state revolving loan funds. The results of the FCSFP were: diversity of partnerships and networks for forest restoration; a regional support system for community-based forest restoration; increased community capacity for economic sustainability; demonstrations of ecological stewardship and sustainability; and recognition of the importance of networking, communication, monitoring, and evaluation. (Lessons learned from this collaborative effort are available at the Southwest Community Forestry Caucus website at <http://ocs.fortlewis.edu/SWCommunityForestry/default.asp>, where a final report is available on the home page.)

***Expansion of Stewardship End Results Contracting Authorities (16 U.S.C. 2104 Note, revised February 28, 2003 to reflect Sec. 323 of H.J. Res. 2 as enrolled):*** The authorities allow Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management, via agreement or contract as appropriate, to enter into stewardship contracting projects with private persons or other public or private entities to perform services to achieve land management goals for the national forests and the public lands that meet local and rural community needs. As an essential part of Stewardship Contracting, the Forest Service and the BLM shall establish a multiparty monitoring and evaluation process that accesses the stewardship contracting projects. In addition to the Forest Service and BLM, participants in this process may include any cooperating governmental agencies, including tribal governments, and any interested groups or individuals.

***Implementation Plan for the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy for the National Fire Plan – A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment*** (May 2002): The Plan reflects a working collaboration between individuals from the Interior and Agriculture Departments, and representatives from state governors. The Plan is to carry out “a long-term strategy to deal with the wildland fire and hazardous fuels situation, as well as needs for habitat restoration and rehabilitation in the Nation. The managers expect that a collaborative structure, with the states and local government as full partners, will be the most efficient and effective way of implementing a long-term program.” (A pdf of the 10-Year plan is available at [http://www.westgov.org/wga/initiatives/fire/implem\\_plan.pdf](http://www.westgov.org/wga/initiatives/fire/implem_plan.pdf).)

## Policy Mandates

**More significantly for national forest planning, a variety of mandates and policies have been recently enacted to provide further support for a new movement in collaborative resource planning and management.**

*Executive Order 13352, “Facilitation of Cooperative Conservation,” August 26, 2004:* The purpose of this order is to ensure that the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, and Defense and the Environmental Protection Agency implement laws relating to the environment and natural resources in a manner that promotes cooperative conservation, with an emphasis on appropriate inclusion of local participation in Federal decision making, in accordance with their respective agency missions, policies, and regulations. (White House Press release)

*Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 (P.L. 108-148):* The Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA) specifically authorizes the USDA Forest Service and the USDI Bureau of Land Management to plan and conduct hazardous fuels reduction projects on federal lands located in the wildland-urban interface or intermix community, or on lands where wildfire would threaten values in the interface or intermix community. Several of the HFRA provisions specifically speak to the value and importance of collaboration, especially at the local community level. Section 104(d) states, “In order to encourage meaningful public participation in the identification and development of authorized hazardous fuels reduction projects, the Secretary concerned shall facilitate collaboration among governments and interested persons during the formulation of each authorized fuels reduction project in a manner consistent with the Implementation Plan.”

*Final Rule, National Forest System Land Management Planning, 36 CFR Part 219 (Federal Register: January 5, 2005 (Volume 70, Number 3), pages 1023-1061):* The new administrative rule governing national forest planning restructures forest planning in significant ways. The new planning rule requires plans to include Desired Conditions, Objectives, Guidelines, Suitability of Areas, and Special Areas designation recommendations. To develop these plan elements, Section 219.9 requires that “The Responsible Official (i.e., forest supervisor) must use a collaborative and participatory approach to land management planning... by engaging the skills and interests of appropriate combinations of Forest Service staff, consultants, contractors, other Federal agencies, federally recognized Indian Tribes, state or local governments, or other interested or affected communities, groups, or persons.”

The rule goes on to require that “The Responsible Official must provide opportunities for the public to collaborate and participate openly and meaningfully in the planning process, taking into account discrete roles, jurisdictions, and responsibilities of interested and affected parties. Specifically, as part of plan development, plan amendment, and plan revision, the Responsible Official shall involve the public in developing and updating the comprehensive evaluation report, establishing the components of the plan, and designing the monitoring program. The Responsible Official has the discretion to determine the methods and timing of public involvement opportunities.” (36 CFR 219.9a)

It is clear that the policy terrain for national forest planning has shifted to include collaboration as a prominent and essential feature. Given this, what constitutes “meaningful” participation? Given the Responsible Official’s discretion, what are the critical considerations in determining the methods and timing of collaborative public involvement opportunities? How can USFS line officers and planning teams think strategically about collaboration in forest planning? It is with these questions and the new planning rule in mind that we present the experiences of people who have been working through collaborative forest planning “on the ground.”

In examining the experiences of national forests in recent years with regard to forest plan revisions, it is important to recognize the capacity building that has occurred over the past decade through a variety of community assistance and economic revitalization efforts, sponsored by the USDA Forest Service through its State and Private Forestry Programs.

## Rural Community Development and the US Forest Service: Building Collaborative Capacity

After the formation of a task force by USFS Chief Dale Robertson in 1989, “*A Strategic Plan for the ‘90s: Working Together for Rural America*” was published in September of 1990. Its strategic goals were strongly focused on changing the way the agency works with rural people and communities in order to emphasize “...efforts on greater internal coordination, greater cooperation with other public and private entities, and greater emphasis on being part of community-based activities.” In December, the 1990 Farm bill was enacted containing a Rural Development Title (Title XXIII) with new authority for the USFS in Subtitle G, Chapter 2, titled “National Forest-Dependent Rural Communities Economic Diversification Act of 1990”; Congressional appropriation bills later used the name “Economic Recovery” to implement the Act.

After initial “Implementation Guidelines” were issued to Forest Service field offices for Subtitle G, along with first appropriations for the “Economic Recovery” Program, staff began working with local rural communities and community-based groups across the country to implement the program and build community capacity to manage change. This was the beginning of long-term relationships with such groups as the Community Public Land Partnership in Colorado, the Applegate Partnership in Oregon, the Watershed Research and Training Center in California, the Swan Ecosystem Center in Montana, the Tennessee Overhill Heritage Association in Tennessee, the Newton County Resource Council in Arkansas, the Menominee Nation in Wisconsin, and the Zuni Pueblo in New Mexico, among many other community-based forestry organizations. Over a period of several years, this work within the Forest Service became known as Rural Community Assistance (RCA).

In order to strengthen networking and build relationships between the USFS and adjacent communities, a series of Rural Community Assistance Partnership conferences were held every several years: Globe, Arizona, in February 1993; Ithaca, New York, in June 1994; Knoxville, Tennessee, in October 1995; Kalispell, Montana, in August 1997; and October 2000, in Stowe, Vermont. Accompanying the conferences, a series of publications were made available over approximately a decade, providing further guidance and recommendations about community and agency collaboration and capacity building:

- *Working Together: Rural Communities and the Forest Service*, USDA Forest Service, August 1993;
- *The Power of Collaborative Planning; Report of the National Workshop*, USDA Forest Service, September 1993;
- *Collaborative Planning: Cases in Economic and Community Diversification*, November 1994;
- *Toolkit for Transitions – Building Community Capacity*, designed to extend the ideas and information presented during the 1994 and 1995 National RCA Partnership Conferences, USDA Forest Service, August 1996;
- *Collaborative Stewardship – Pathways to Collaboration*, presenting the results of the 1997 RCA conference, USDA Forest Service;
- *Taking the Pulse: Revisiting Working Together for Rural America*, November 1997;
- *Measuring Community Success and Sustainability: An Interactive Workbook*, produced in partnership with the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, June 1999;
- *Toolkit for Transitions II – Sustaining Community Capacity*, USDA Forest Service, August 1999;
- *Working Together for Rural America: 2000 and Beyond: Integrating Natural Resource Management and Rural Community Assistance*, USDA Forest Service, September 2000, which placed emphasis on the strategic purpose to “develop and enhance rural community vitality, resiliency, and economic opportunities within a sustainable natural resource framework.”

It would appear that the initiatives reviewed above, (undertaken in large measure through the various efforts of the Rural Assistance Programs, sometimes under the rubric of Economic Assistance Programs of Cooperative Forestry, a division of the USFS State and Private Forestry) have substantially enhanced the capacity of both communities and USFS staff. Two reports, among several others, that have described some of the collaborative relationships and related collaborative capacities that have been built over the past decade are:

- “Rural Development and Community-Based Forest Planning and Management: A New, Collaborative Paradigm,” which provided a list of recommendations to the Forest Service at all levels – District Rangers, Forest Supervisors, National Forest System Deputy Chief, RCA-Washington Office and RCA field coordinators, as well to community leaders to strengthen relationship building among multiple parties. This report was based on approximately twenty RCA/EAP-funded community development and forest stewardship projects. Irene Frentz, et.al. 1999.
- *Forest Communities, Community Forests*, J. Kusel and Adler, Editors, 2003, originally prepared for the Communities Committee of the Seventh American Forest Congress, presents twelve cases that demonstrate the connection between community capacity and forest stewardship, with many ties to EAP and RCA Program support. The cases range from the work in the New York City Watershed to Catron County, New Mexico, to the Ponderosa Pine Partnership in Colorado, and the Clifton Choctaw Longleaf Pine Restoration Project in Louisiana.

Finally, it should be noted that over the past decade, through the work of the Committee of Scientists (COS), there has been much discussion of forest planning, and in particular of collaboration as an important component. The COS, appointed by Secretary of Agriculture Glickman in 1997, was chartered to make recommendations “on improvements that can be made in the National Forest System Land and Resource Management Planning Process.” In Chapter Four of their final report titled *Collaborative Planning for Sustainability*, the Committee made the following statement:

The planning process is collaborative in nature. It provides incentives for people to work together and to contribute to forest planning in meaningful and useful ways.

Effective stewardship of National Forest System lands must engage those who have the information, knowledge, and expertise to contribute; those who have sole control or authority over lands and activities adjacent to national forests and grasslands; those who have the skills, energy, time, and resources to carry out stewardship activities; and those who can independently validate the credibility of stewardship decisions and the reality of achievements. In short, many and diverse collaborative relationships between and among the Forest Service and other agencies, governments, organizations, communities, and individuals are central to stewardship. An important function of the planning process is to build these relationships, and it does so by making collaboration a core characteristic of all phases of the process. (Committee of Scientists, 1999, 86)

This statement by the COS, along with subsequent principles and actions that they influenced leading up to the formulation of the new forest planning rule, (36 CFR Part 219 – Federal Register: January 5, 2005) have focused “community collaboration” as a core strategy of forest planning. Arriving at this point, where relationships, dialogue, and knowledge sharing are viewed as key to improved forest resource planning, has also been influenced by the difficulties experienced in implementing the 1982 planning rule.

## Traditional forest planning as part of the collaborative context

Most experiences with forest plans over the past 20 or more years have been organizationally frustrating and inefficient (Larsen et al. 1990 – Synthesis of the critique of land management planning). They have also been dissatisfying for community leaders and the public. The traditional forest planning process, required by the National Forest Management Act, based on rules promulgated in 1982, has been difficult to implement in a coherent and transparent manner. The process of planning became linked to NEPA, which resulted in the development and analysis of multiple alternatives. Large amounts of staff resources were devoted to the analysis of potential environmental consequences, which in reality never occurred at the project level.

Linkage to NEPA also created a formal public involvement process that has heightened divisions among national forest interest groups. Each group or interest entered the process not to engage with each other or attempt to balance their own interests within the inherent constraints of a particular ecological context, but to voice their own objectives for use or conservation. As the preamble to the Final Rule for National Forest System Land Management Planning states:

“The Forest Service has found that the traditional way of developing plan alternatives under the 1982 planning rule was not very useful. The traditional approach of developing and choosing among discrete alternatives that were carried throughout the entire planning process often proved divisive, because it often maintained adversarial positions, rather than helping people seek common ground.” (Federal Register, Vol. 70, No. 3, Wednesday, January 5, 2005, p. 1028)

A significant result of this history is that some staff within the USFS have come to view the old or traditional planning process with skepticism and anxiety. They express dissatisfaction over the past ineffectiveness of forest planning because it failed to provide useful and flexible management direction. To many USFS field staff, forest planning has become time consuming, litigious, expensive, and has not authentically or effectively guided on-the-ground ecosystem improvements.

Hence, an essential contextual factor to understand before embarking on a collaborative forest planning process is that **current decisions about making an investment in collaboration should be viewed within the background of previous experiences with previous forest planning efforts.**

One district ranger put it this way:

*“I’m a skeptic, if not a cynic, when it comes to forest planning. Forest planning is something that we at the ground level often view as something that has to be done; and if it has to be done, let’s get it over with, and get back to the things that we really do on a daily basis. In some cases, the forest plan in theory is supposed to make our jobs easier by doing some zoning, and things like that. But in the past, the on-the-ground use of the forest plan has been going to the standards and guides, as opposed to going to the plan. That’s the hope behind this collaborative process – that there will be enough people engaged and involved in the community so they can see that some of the things we actually do on a project level relate back to decisions on which they’ve had input at the forest planning level. That’s the theory. If it doesn’t make our jobs easier on the ground, then I don’t care what kind of model you come up with – it’s still going to be viewed as essentially the same as the old model.” FS*

“ **You surprise everybody** ”

“In the past, we used a certain type of process to develop plans and a certain type of public involvement process which was very by-the-book in terms of: okay, you’re doing a NEPA process; how do you involve people? You scope, you hold a couple of open houses after you’ve produced a product, and then you surprise everybody and a lot of people get really angry at you. And you end up in court over your forest plans. It just didn’t work for anybody. Hopefully we’ve come a long way since then.” FS

**\* Note: Quotations in this report from community members are indicated with the letter “C” and those from US Forest Service staff by “FS.”**

“ **A more enjoyable process** ”

“I hated forest planning for at least 20 years of my career. I abhorred it, I really did. I didn’t want anything to do with it. Now I’m finding it a forum for how successful we are on small-scale decisions as well as large-scale ones. It’s a great way for us as an agency to know what we’re doing right, as well as where we need to improve. That’s a far cry from how forest planning used to be.” FS

Another USFS line officer had similar thoughts:

*“I started my career in forest planning as an analyst in Oregon in Region 6. I didn’t think the approach felt very good, the last go-around. You ... would do all this analysis, and hardly any people would come to the standard public meetings. The leadership team wasn’t very engaged. They thought of planning as some black box function where planners just sat at computers and made models.” FS*

There has also been community dissatisfaction with traditional forest planning processes:

*“I’ve been involved with forest planning for over 25 years. The Forest Service has always handled it in a pre-decided manner; they make the decision of what they’re going to do, and then they build a case around it. I’m sure people can argue that with me, but I’m just going on what’s been done in the forest in Region 2, and that’s how forest planning has gone historically in this region.” C*

*“This last study group process that we went through, when we broke down into all the different topics, was a whole new process for this national forest. Before, we had a public meeting with everybody coming, giving input and writing letters, but it wasn’t like a sharing process. You didn’t know exactly where you would fit in. In a huge public meeting, you don’t get any input. Not that many people can stand up and say anything. That’s a bust.” C*

Both Forest Service staff and community members believe that collaborative processes have greater emphasis on exchange of ideas and mutual learning than traditional scoping and open public meeting approach:

*“It’s a higher level of public engagement than our typical scoping where they write letters and get a response back. Just like we’re doing now, we have several meetings, depending on the topic. The public comes with other viewpoints and they actually exchange ideas as you’re doing it, as opposed to: ‘Here’s our [FS] viewpoint, here’s the public’s viewpoint’, then we go off and make a decision.” FS*

*“I think that’s better than just having a couple of big public meetings, or expecting people to email or write a letter with their concerns. If you get together with people enough times and talk about different issues, you get a lot more on the table – things you might not have thought of until brought up with a specific topic. Then you get to hear somebody else’s experience or somebody else’s expertise. So, we were able to cover more topics instead of going in one night and saying, ‘Tonight we’re going to talk about three things and we’ve only got two hours.’” C*



Many people, both with the USFS and outside, having reached various levels of frustration with “traditional forest planning,” believe that improvements could be made. Therefore, to a rather significant degree, the difficult and stressful experiences with forest planning in the past 20 years have become a prime motivator to try a new approach.

Most leadership and planning team members with whom we have spoken have entered the current round of forest plan revisions believing that it could be “a more enjoyable process,” and produce “a better product,” if it was based on a “greater exchange of ideas.” Obviously, this is not to say that USFS staff and others have not created opportunities to work collaboratively under the 1982 forest planning rule, although it was not “mandated,” as has recently occurred. In fact, these six cases are demonstrations that collaboration was indeed possible under the older authority, since all of the experiences reported here occurred prior to official adoption of the 2005 rule, albeit in several instances the new rule was being anticipated by the national forest leadership and planning teams.

We should also note that in the application and practice of collaborative principles and methods there are many organizational frameworks and levels of intensity. For example, see the table on the following page, excerpted from a paper by Ann Moote and Kimberely Lowe, titled “Form and Function of Large-Scale Collaborative Planning Processes,” August 2004.

“ **A better product** ”

“I’d say the cumulative knowledge of the group probably resulted in a better product than if we had done it the old way.

More voices are heard, more options are put on the table, and more opportunities for discussion lead to a point where we can keep moving forward.”

FS

# Table 1. Forms and Functions of Collaborative Groups<sup>1</sup>

TYPE	PURPOSE AND GOALS
Networks	Loosely defined group of individuals and/or organizations with overlapping interests or responsibilities who engage in intermittent, informal communication over extended periods of time. The goal is information exchange and resource sharing, not conflict resolution or shared decisionmaking. Participation is voluntary and often ad-hoc and there are no formal rules of operation.
Dialogue groups <i>(e.g., town hall, search conference, community visioning)</i>	Individuals with diverse interests participating in single events or ongoing gatherings to share ideas and create a vision for future action. Participants share information and ideas, explore issues, and attempt to identify common values, but do not attempt to reach agreement or make decisions. Participation may be open or by invitation only. Meetings are semi-formal and facilitated.
Advisory groups <i>(e.g., advisory council, planning committee)</i>	Regular, facilitated meetings of individuals who are usually invited or appointed based on their expertise. Participants often represent specific interests or agencies rather than their individual perspectives. The group works together to develop guidelines or plans for others, analyze trends, review plans or proposals, and make recommendations, but has no decision-making authority.
Partnerships and Councils <i>(e.g., watershed council, coordinated resource management group)</i>	Participants with diverse interests working together, both formally and informally, to achieve a common purpose. Typical group activities include developing and advancing a shared vision, mission, and goals; collectively identifying issues, gathering information, and learning about the issues of concern; generating options and developing recommended actions; engaging in joint projects; and monitoring and evaluating activities. Participation is open to any interested group or individual, but membership may be formally defined. Group makes decisions through a formal, defined process. Group will typically develop a budget and seek funding independent of their member organizations.
Comanagement <i>(e.g., partnership parks, negotiated settlement)</i>	Formal process to reach agreement on joint management. Participants may coordinate or jointly define goals, develop and analyze proposals, and develop and ratify legally binding agreements. Participation is limited to those with legal authority over and decision-making capacity for the land or resource in question.

<sup>1</sup> This table draws upon the work of Bergstrom et al. 1996, Cigler 1999, Cestero et al. 1999, Dukes and Firehock 2001, Gray 1989, Hummel and Freet 1999, Ingles et al. 1999, London 1996, Mandell 1999, Selin and Chavez 1995, and SPIDR 1997.

# I. Increased Staff Awareness of Collaboration

USFS Expressions of Collaborative Ideals and Principles



Many USFS staff have realized **from their own experiences** in project-level implementation – especially in working with partnerships groups in forest restoration projects or recreation planning – that a different approach to community participation is needed. These individuals have subsequently begun to evolve a set of values and principles for collaboration that they believe could be implemented at the strategic planning level. They believe if it works to bring different interests together, build community relationships, and get action accomplished on the ground, then let’s try it on a strategic planning level where **the need for a common vision** is perhaps even stronger because of the longer term, strategic nature of ecosystem management plans.

*“Part of it is that you try something new and it works. For me that was at the project level, in my early days as a district ranger. Maybe all of us have one of those little successes, those moments of truth where you say, ‘Oh, I guess there is a different way. Don’t go into the situation assuming everyone is polarized and there’s no common ground. You’re just going to have to make a decision.’ For me, it was having an experience where you realized that wasn’t the case, at a project level. Really getting out on the ground, working on a project where all of a sudden people came together and we worked something out. And it set the stage for the next project, and the next project.” FS*

USFS staff who have begun to participate in collaboration at the forest planning level have also had previous community relationship building opportunities, through which they have gained experience and some confidence in alternative forms of public engagement and dialogue.

*“I’ve been in the Forest Service for 20 years. You realize there has to be a different way to make decisions that gets communities and interests and other people engaged. I have had a lot of experiences where people actually committed to sit around a table, go to the field together and try to look objectively at problems. I think they come up with creative solutions.” FS*

*“On the Manti-La Sal N.F., I had a lot of involvement in what would be considered collaboration. We did a large scenic byway there, a million dollar project. I was the administrator. We received 20 percent match from local communities. That took collaboration. Then I chaired a steering committee made up of state, local, county, and city entities that designed and carried out the project.” FS*

On some occasions, staff members have had opportunities to learn about collaborative approaches through **formal education or training**, such as a landscape architect on one of the planning teams who had taken courses and completed projects with community groups in a master’s degree program. Forest supervisors and planning team leaders have been able to participate in workshops that have built a readiness for deeper public engagement.

## “ Highlighted for me ”

“It was an outgrowth of my cumulative Forest Service planning experience, working in places like Happy Camp, on the Klamath in California, and in the spotted owl, old growth controversy – a highly contentious environment. Collaborative participation wasn’t the buzzword, or the emphasis area it is now. But back then I had experiences with appellant groups and stakeholders that began to highlight for me the benefits of a more collaborative approach.” FS

*“There are numerous opportunities for Forest Service people interested in learning about collaboration and getting started. A few of us got our feet wet with the collaborative learning trainings Daniels and Walker have done. And many of our staff have been building relationships and working collaboratively with county commissions for a long time on different projects and plans.” FS*

*“...[W]e were all trained in the theory and approach of collaborative learning. [Collaborative learning] talks about concepts such as dynamic complexities, system thinking, exploring multiple perspectives and viewpoints on issues, problems or situations. I bought into that because it didn’t push consensus. It wasn’t like an idealistic model.” FS*

*“I think we’ve all had pretty good training, but practice can be somewhat limited. For the most part, I believe my employees and I have a lot of background training. The tools are there but the practical experience varies widely depending on how you operate and what level you are in the agency.” FS*

Among some USFS staff, talk of collaboration goes back eight to 10 years, and in some cases even longer:

*“Back in 1992 I tried to put together a collaborative approach to addressing a certain set of discreet questions and issues. We had parallel effort that preceded the forest plan revision that addressed wilderness management on the forest. That was headed up by staff here. There were things going on in the [forest] that were nurturing a different culture in terms of how we approached large far-reaching projects and initiatives.” FS*

*“Even when I got here in 1986, the whole leadership team said, ‘This is something that’s important to us. We want district rangers and their staffs to have good relationships with the communities.’ I’ve actually seen that in every place I’ve worked on this forest throughout my career. It just seemed to come to fruition and blossom easier here than maybe some other places. And over the years it’s – for a lot of folks down here – become the way to do business.” FS*

While there does not seem to be a formal mechanism for knowledge transfer among staff, informally national forest agencies often **learn from each other about collaborative planning approaches:**

*“I learned about Montana forest planning from a conference. I brought back their draft plan, which informed our plan format and documentation process.” FS*

“ **In the mid-’90s** ”

“We started discussing and promoting collaboration back in the mid-’90s, and our forest supervisor was a strong proponent of it. As a forest leadership team, we were all requested to attend collaborative training sessions in the mid- to late-’90’s in Sheridan and Billings. When we came back, we saw we had a chance to build on a history of communications with the community and the commissioners.” FS

An understanding of the challenges of community collaboration continues to grow throughout the implementation of forest planning – that simply holding public meetings is a necessary but insufficient activity. Participation demonstrates that collaboration **is an involved problem-solving process**:

*“There’s definitely a value in community groups organizing and getting involved out there ... but I think that actually sitting down, coming to solutions on major issues is a problem. The value of all the community involvement we did with public meetings, open houses, and individual meetings was just a first step towards hearing what people had to say, and then trying to factor that into the rest of our discussions. It’s a slow, stepwise building process.” FS*

“ **It’s the way to do business** ”

“To implement your forest plan, think how much easier it would be if you had a relationship with people before you started to do the NEPA. When people work through one process, they build capacity for relationships but they also gain some knowledge about the land and social values in their community that helps them in their next process. When you work collaboratively, you can’t measure how it’s helped, but you’ll feel it as you work through the next process. You just do. It’s the way to do business.” FS

• **USFS expressions of collaborative ideals and principles**

In our research, many conversations with leadership and planning team members show that **there is a growing familiarity and comfort with the fundamental values and roles of community in the stewardship of “public” lands**. Planning and leadership team leaders have grown in their understanding of collaborative methods to the extent that they can readily express a new vision about forest planning. They demonstrate a growing capacity to articulate guiding principles for a more collaborative approach to forest planning.

**The mere fact that USFS staff can more readily describe and define community collaboration has significantly increased the internal capacity of the agency to undertake these efforts on a strategic level**. Nevertheless, as the opportunities for collaboration through forest planning and resource stewardship increase, staff capacities will need to be continually developed, and therefore point to a need for follow-up to sustain them through hands-on learning, especially through peer interaction and sharing.

While on occasion some persons involved in collaboration may note that they aren’t always clear about how to measure the outcomes or benefits of collaboration, as these are often somewhat intangible, others point to improved relationships, or better decisions, among other noticeable benefits. (Developing some basic measures of collaborative outcomes may be an area for future study.)

*“My desired outcome was to make progress or develop positive outcomes in the relationship building and process side ... the substance side was always going to be highly variable and subjective in terms of what be might viewed as good or bad regarding decisions. If we could get the preponderance of the stakeholders to believe that it has been a fair process, they were fully consulted and had their opportunity for input, and they actually learned something in the process not only from the agency but from each other, we would have not only better decisions, but more implementable decisions and less contentious.” FS*

Experienced staff members articulate that one of the key objectives of increasing collaboration in the forest planning process is to help the public see how a partnership can work for mutual benefit.

*“From the very beginning, we wanted to have an open and transparent process. We wanted people to have an idea of the inner workings of forest planning, the considerations that the agency had to do to get to a proposal, to reach a decision. And then show the public where the opportunities were for involvement or effective input into that open kind of process.” FS*

One of the more fundamental principles of civic engagement in forest planning, often articulated in one way or another, is collaborative or shared learning.

*“One of the key differences between collaboration and other more traditional public involvement techniques is that you literally have all the parties sitting around the table, hopefully listening and learning from one another in terms of their perspectives. Through the learning process, people listening to other stakeholder viewpoints, they begin to see areas of common ground and points of agreement. Developing relationships lets them make progress in terms of ‘substantive agreement.’” FS*

*“We didn’t necessarily set ‘collaborative learning’ as the objective, but it happens. People walk out of a session ‘more informed than when they walked in.’ It doesn’t mean that they have changed their minds about anything. It just means that their breadth of knowledge has increased because they have been with other people from different walks of life who have added some things to think about. It has helped erode some of the sharp differences. There are differences, but they are not nearly as sharp as they used to be. What’s really cool is when you see after the meeting or during the break, people who are publicly expressing their differences of opinion are actually talking and not ignoring each other. They are actually engaging each other in conversation.” FS*

A facilitator comments on the importance of a mutuality in learning and knowledge:

*“A collaborative learning process builds upon mutual learning. Every voice needs to be heard. Knowledge is equal. Not a hierarchy of voices. The Forest Service is a stakeholder in the process.” FS*

In this context, learning is interactive: The Forest Service is learning about the community and how it uses or connects to the forest. The community learns about the diverse values of the forest, about resource management, and about Forest Service planning process. One critical community learning outcome in this regard is why certain decisions are made in the planning process.

*“I would like to see everyone get an appreciation for what is actually involved in a forest plan and the complexity of it. There are a lot of competing interests that can’t all be satisfied all the time. It’s a big job and I’d like to see more people understand that and see where they can fit into the process.” FS*

*“We’re now able to show [the community and elected officials] how and where their contributions are used, or not used in some cases. We can show them how their input has made a difference, or maybe why their input was considered but did not change part of the proposed plan. Mainly, that they feel like they have had contributions, that they’ve been heard and their input has genuinely been considered. I think just showing how and where input is used goes a long way.” FS*

*“Hopefully, this intensive collaboration has given the Steering Committee [local elected officials] a better understanding of the process. They can take this back to their constituents in the community and break down some of the uncertainties and unknowns about the planning process, and how the average citizen can participate. I think we’ve seen better community participation in meetings as a result.” FS*

*“It’s kind of a mix of public education. The public doesn’t necessarily understand much about what we’re really trying to do. The study group process was interesting because it brought together people with very different viewpoints. It’s interesting how, when they’re together in a small group, they start to understand a little bit about the other person’s viewpoint, rather than just pure dogma – which is what you get when they’re on their own.” FS*

**In such a learning environment, the USFS is a facilitator of and participant in collaborative learning rather than detached technical analysts and experts. It is a subtle yet significant shift in the role of the USFS – a facilitator of social learning.**

Care is taken among staff to point out that collaboration is based on LEARNING, NOT CONSENSUS.

*“Never expect buy-in. The best you can get is that people understand how and why you’ve made a certain decision. But don’t expect total 100% buy-in.” FS*

*“To me it’s just bringing people of different viewpoints together and helping them understand the various points of view. But also try to get some education and the actual science involved in the discussion, rather than just opinion. People’s points of view or their beliefs may be contrary to the realities of science and the natural world ... Bringing that all together and maybe not reaching consensus, but getting everybody at the table and understanding each other’s points of view ... lets them see and learn more about the facts and where other people are coming from.” FS*

## “ It’s a different model ”

“In my mind, the change is this: If we’re one of the people sitting around the table talking about what we want in the future, how we want to manage, and everybody’s listening to the varied viewpoints, perspectives, reasons, values, and those kinds of things, then hopefully there’s some finding of common ground. That doesn’t always happen. Some people will take their chair and choose not to participate because they end up feeling like they’re giving up something. But more and more, we’re around the table with the people we’re working for, the communities we live and work in, the businesses and the public, and we’re all part of the process and part of the dialogue. And we may be facilitators of that process, rather than gathering it all and giving you the answer. That’s probably one factor — it’s a different model.” FS



Staff believe that cumulative learning and knowledge result in a **better plan and on-the-ground management:**

*“Hopefully you get quality management on the ground. The public understands and appreciates that while not everybody will agree on everything, they can reach an acceptance of the real situation on the ground and what may need to be done to manage it for everybody. The Pines [Forest Restoration] Project is a really good example. We’re getting some really quality work done at very little cost to the taxpayer with very few appeals or litigation, which has become pretty commonplace in most everything we do.” FS*

The learning orientation that has emerged from these experiences has had an impact on USFS staff attitudes. Specifically, collaboration itself is an attitude, a way of looking at the job of public land management, but it certainly is not feasible to do for every single action:

*“It’s really spread, but ... there’s really not time to go into every little project. [Collaboration has] maybe influenced attitudes to where people are more open in how they do things, but we don’t design collaborative processes to do everything. For lots of things, it’s just not worth it.” FS*

*“I think that the model for national forest planning now is very heavily weighted towards community collaboration, and we would expect to see that reflected in any regulations that may emerge as a final set. From a management standpoint, I don’t think you’ll find a manager who wouldn’t attempt to weight their planning efforts very heavily towards collaboration. I just think it’s the way we do business now, and the way the world has evolved around planning.” FS*

In reflecting the development of collaborative skills and capacities, USFS staff commented that they have:

- Learned from project-level experiences;
- Had opportunities for formal education and training;
- And learned from others in the Forest Service.

This has brought them to a point where they understand collaboration as an involved problem-solving process, **which needs to be built up in a “step-wise” manner.**

“ **This is an opportunity to learn about them** ”

“If you open up the opportunity, you’ll find that there’s a lot of expertise right here in our community. People are up in the forest all times of the year doing different activities, seeing different changes than we do. We can learn about what they know in a collaborative manner and it really opens up the dialogue.” FS

“One advantage of collaboration is that it allows for dialogue where the Forest Service and community members can clarify their concerns and issues, rather than taking sides and hunkering down.” FS

“Not only do they learn about us but we’re learning about them, and everybody’s learning from each other, so it’s a little higher level of understanding of the bigger picture ... This helps build a trust relationship, not only with us but amongst all the players out there.” FS

“ **expertise  
within the  
community** ”

“Having the people from the Forest Service there to sit back and listen to what various groups had to say was a good thing. They gained a lot of insight from hearing where the community was basically coming from, regardless of whether it ever got put into the works.” C

“I sometimes think that the people doing the planning are not necessarily the people out on the ground, and they’re not familiar with how this particular forest, its climate, and the type of people are different here than a forest someplace else.

That’s why the collaborative process gets it down to a more local level, not just ‘This is a management plan for the national forests.’ ... We have different grasses, needs, scenery, and different access questions.” C

As Forest Service staff have described the values and principles which have guided their work, they identify the following in particular, among others:

- **Collaborative or shared learning;**
- **Relationship building;**
- **An open and transparent process;**
- **Showing the community members how their input has made a difference;**
- **Breaking down some of the uncertainties and unknowns about the planning process;**
- **Learning about existing expertise within the community;**
- **Making progress in terms of “substantive agreement”;**
- **Creating a better plan and on-the-ground management, or more implementable plans.**

## II. Social and Historical Context for Collaboration in the Planning Locale



Quite often, when talking about the **beginning stages of planning**, people describe recent events or management activities that have stressed or undermined working relationships between the national forest, other federal agencies, and the community. These events and activities form the social and historical context in which collaborative forest planning occurs in each specific case, and form in the minds of the planning and leadership teams the background for their collaborative strategies and goals.

Those who have been initiating these collaborative planning processes have recognized **the importance of assessing the feasibility of their use in a context of declining community and public land agency relationships**. USFS staff senses that **some amount of community readiness** is necessary to initiate and succeed at a collaborative planning process. Time is needed to look at the factors, both pro and con, that have contributed to the current situation with regard to trust between the community and the agency. Only by doing so are the possibilities and limitations of taking a more collaborative approach better understood. This initial appraisal of the community and planning context can best be accomplished jointly with community representatives. (It is anticipated that a template for conducting a community assessment will be forthcoming through future dissemination efforts of this project.)

We have identified seven attributes of the social and historical context for collaboration in the planning locale from our case study:

- 1) **Changing community values, uses, and economies in relation to national forests;**
- 2) **Distrust of agency-initiated process;**
- 3) **Changing community demographics;**
- 4) **Recognition of interdependence between national forest and communities;**
- 5) **Recent collaborative dialogue;**
- 6) **Evolving community capacity for collaboration;**
- 7) **Role of local governments.**

“ **Do assessments of the area** ”

“Get internal support, make an effort to talk to the externals (key leaders – mayors, county officials) to create advanced warning, secure funding, define expectations and decisions phases, set out a process map in pencil. Do assessments of the area before you start to get a snapshot of the community [with regard to orientations towards working collaboratively]. This would have given a clear picture of relations, history, what people were angry about or wanted, what their issues were, the hierarchy of information exchange, what collaborations were here, etc.” FS

## 1) Changing community values, uses, and economies in relation to national forests

In many cases, public perceptions and attitudes of some stakeholders have grown hostile as a result of a fundamental sense that “traditional uses” are being excluded from public lands (e.g., livestock grazing, timber harvesting). Although this is only one perspective, it is a consistent one among long-standing community members. This sentiment presents an important aspect of planning contexts, especially where very high percentages of public lands exist.

*“In the early ‘90s, our communities were experiencing reductions in natural resource activity, and opportunities for employment were collapsing in on themselves. Social problems started to take place. Uranium mining had been strong...that went away. Coal mining had the potential to replace the timber business, but that got shot down with the designation of the Grand Staircase National Monument.” C*

*“A whole different set of people have moved in with different values than we grew up with. They’ve kind of shut out the people that have lived there all their lives and it’s just not the same. No sense of community at all anymore. It used to be that if something came up, everybody was there to help anybody else out, and that’s all gone now. The people who were originally there were ranchers ... Montezuma County is 70 percent public land. All of us were depending on public land for our lives, and people that are now coming in never even got on the public land unless on a bicycle or with a backpack. ‘I’ve got mine, now let’s close it down’... That’s what’s changed so much. They just have different values than we have.” C*

Many of these changes are perceived to be the result of environmental activism. As a result of a decade or more of tensions between environmentalists and loggers, planning itself has been made more difficult. As reflected by several community members, the emotions between factional interests can present a significant barrier when they overwhelm scientific and common-sense thinking, and ultimately set the stage for litigation:

*“If you’ve got extractive and consumptive needs on one side, and preservation or ‘don’t touch it at any cost’ attitudes on the other – these extremes – they’re not going to get along. This is like the West Bank – they’re not going to get along.” C*

### “ Some sort of livelihood ”

“The Forest Service has played a critical role in how these communities have developed. Up until the late ‘80s and early ‘90s, a logger or sawmill owner would get a little wood wherever the ranger thought was most appropriate. When Forest Service policy changed, that put the clamps on a lot of these little sawmills. The relationships changed drastically at that point, including the economy and social aspects. Twenty-five years ago there were 16 little sawmills in this valley. Now we’re down in 2004 to one operating sawmill. With a county of only 2,500 people and 97.5 percent public lands, we have to be able to rely on these agencies for some sort of livelihood. It’s had a large economic and social effect. The relationships have deteriorated and the trust has broken down.” C

*“There’s the science of the timber industry and the emotion. The science you can deal with, the emotion you can’t... that’s been the whole problem. If it becomes an emotional problem, it’s like a religion and it doesn’t have to make sense. Good science doesn’t matter at that point... On the litigation side, it’s a lot easier to shut something down than to start something. And that’s the point that we’ve got to get past.” C*

The local context may also be dictated from forces external to the local community. A forest planning team leader realized that in starting the forest plan revision, the national forest had to dig itself out of a “hole” politically and socially due to policies made in Washington, DC:

*“For our revision effort, the bump in the road was the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument. County residents were not very happy about the designation of the monument. But they said, ‘Hey, let’s try to make the best out of a bad thing. Let’s get involved in the process, and let’s make sure we can help mold that management plan.’ And what happened was that, even though they had a lot of public meetings and people who left those meetings felt they had contributed, a lot of people now feel the decision was preordained. And that their involvement was almost kind of superfluous. In the end it really didn’t matter. So you had that established back in 1999, and that has left a bitter taste in the peoples’ minds since then. So we were already in a hole relationship-wise, at least in terms of planning. And we have been trying to climb out of that hole to the best of our ability.” FS*

## 2) Distrust of agency-initiated process

Overlaid on the social and historical context of the planning locale is a distrust of any collaborative planning processes initiated by the USFS. At the very outset of the planning process, mistrust may be quite extreme. Collaboration is looked upon as a “socially extractive” process – asking citizens to contribute a lot more than they will get back in return, as a RC&D Director reflects:

*“The communities view this forest plan as a bunch of Fed guys needing something because the law says they have to do it. The community view is that they’re holding a bunch of meetings because they have to and they need something from us. They view it as not fair. They view the Forest Service as impinging on their rights. A lot of them resent the fact that they can’t make a living off the forest anymore, such as logging.” C*

Another source of mistrust is the perception among certain individuals and groups that they are being intentionally excluded or at least having their influence diluted through the collaborative process. This perception of exclusion has led to bitterness, reaction, and opposition.

*“Ten to 15 years ago it was a totally hostile environment on both sides. We were completely left out, no matter what we did. We [environmentalists] weren’t invited to participate at all when there was a lot of collaboration going on between the forest supervisor and off-road users. He wouldn’t let us play unless we went through the courts or through a protest. We had to jump through hoops to be invited to the table at all and when we were, it usually wasn’t the important table.” C*

Collaboration is viewed suspiciously because community members often think that the process does not really provide genuine involvement:

*“If the perception is that the experts, the bureaucrats, come up with the plan, and that the public did not have a whole lot to say about it or they didn’t listen to the public, then the public, particularly the environmentalists, but the other groups can do it too. They will try and say, ‘No.’ Will try and stop it [the plan or project]. So the Forest Service and the other public land agencies, by trying to hang on to all the power, have lost it.” C*

*“They haven’t truly attempted collaboration and I don’t think they should make false pretenses if it’s really not collaboration. If somebody within the Forest Service is representing what they did as collaboration, that’s just a false representation that they really made an effort at it and they did not. They want to give lip service: ‘We collaborated and we listened, and our decision is truly a result of a collaborative process,’ but it is not and rather than fake it, I’d rather have them just forget it.” C*

Community members perceive that the agency as a whole is not really committed to collaboration by failing to reward staff – or, in isolated cases, as an administrator of an association of governments representing multiple counties pointed out:

*“My job is to represent the local officials and my perspective will always come from that direction. I have always been cautious of any Trojan horse that has been brought to the local elected officials as an offering to collaborate and work together. It almost seemed as if it was some sort of punishment for someone who took that position working for the Forest Service or BLM. The closer the manager or staff would get to cooperative action with local elected officials or policies, they got transferred. We haven’t been able to establish an ongoing history with individuals or policies because they change every time a new president comes in and selects a new cabinet. In 30 years, I only had one time where the local resource management planner came to me and said, ‘We want you to help us write our plan.’ We did that and then that person got transferred and things went back to normal, where local officials become nothing more than a special interest group.” C*

For some community stakeholders, collaboration is a distraction – traditional NEPA public input process is preferable because this is the process they know best and see as having the most influence:

*“We view the NEPA process that’s already laid out in the forest planning regulations and in a few key NEPA regulations as providing adequate opportunities for citizens to get their concerns across. To have a dual track when there’s already one required by law increases the burden on concerned citizens, particularly those who are not paid staff that have concerns about the way the public lands are managed.” C*

*“You don’t need the collaborative process. We believe we are collaborating when we submit 200 pages of comments on the NEPA process. The Forest Service needs to read them and respond cogently for them to hold up their end of the collaborative bargain.” C*

### 3) Changing community demographics

Communities are dynamic, with individuals, social relationships, and public land uses and values constantly shifting. Even in this socially changing environment, opportunities arise to initiate a collaborative working relationship around the planning and management of public lands. It is important that staff recognize that, even in the midst of a climate of distrust, a workable level of collaboration could be present and available to the planning process.

In the experience of several of our interview respondents, new opportunities arise especially with the rapid influx of people into rural communities in and near public lands. These newcomers often bring with them fresh perspectives on how to work with government agencies to benefit their newly-adopted communities. It is important to recognize if this demographic transition might be taking place in order to give both agencies and community participants the confidence to initiate and maintain a collaborative effort:

*“People are attuned, they understand their role. I was very impressed and surprised with how much civic capital there was here. Newcomers have come in and brought new processes and experiences but another is that this area of the world operates somewhat in isolation and they figured out a long time ago that they have to work together to make it work.” C*

The term “civic capital” can be interpreted to mean the networks and involvement of individuals to solve problems, commit to common causes, and generally help each other out. Newcomers into a community may create their own civic association and relationships to change aspects of the community. These networks and active individuals are assets to a community that can be drawn on for collaborative forest planning, as one county administrator pointed out:

*“Relationships were present at the outset and were established from other working groups that were pre-existent. Also, new people moving in to the county came with leadership skills and knowing how to work together towards common solutions. They have time to engage in practices and collaboration. They have resources and they’re willing to give. If we can learn how to capture some of that capacity to use, it would be helpful.” C*

**Rural communities in the Intermountain West are especially undergoing profound demographic shifts, with many people emigrating from urban areas into rural communities adjacent to public lands for their amenity values. They are typically more affluent than long-time residents, have attained advanced degrees, and are more ready to interact with government officials on issues of concern.**



“ **What is good for the community or county should be good for the forests and vice versa** ”

“We try to work with people on being reactive vs. proactive. Often we wait until the decision is made, and then we respond to it. We’re trying to convince people that you really need to be proactive; you need to be the instigator of policy from the start. We’re working statewide with our communities to help them establish a planning process using the same terminology that the BLM or Forest Service does in their planning. Then you begin to create a community planning document that has the same language as the forest or BLM plan. Laws have been passed that the BLM or Forest Service have to consider in their planning. My long-range aspiration is that these planning processes, from local to state and federal, become seamless and done together. That’s what we’re aiming for. What is good for the community or county should be good for the forests and vice versa.”

C

#### 4) Recognition of interdependence between national forest and communities

As values, uses, and economies associated with the national forest have evolved – and sometimes resulted in difficult disruptions – there is a strong recognition of the mutual relationship between the national forests and local communities. A forest supervisor presents her appraisal of local capacity for collaboration that she believes is grounded in the people’s attachments to the land:

*“In Utah, maybe it’s the pioneer heritage or quality of life issues, but I am always amazed, even in the business community, how tied people are to the forest. The uses go back generations, the spots people go to [in the forest] go back generations. To me it really felt as if these communities would be interested in a collaborative approach, rather than just having the agency do our planning and commenting on it. It felt to me as if people liked the idea of ‘let’s build something together.’” FS*

A local community leader sees that the economic and growth interests and values of the community must support or integrate with the objective of public land management if success is to be achieved. This is perhaps the ultimate expression of the need for collaboration, not just about the forest lands, but in an integrated fashion across private and public jurisdictions:

*“A lot of communities want continued growth because that’s good for the economy, but the growth is not good for what’s going on in the forest plan. The forest is a resource that is right at its capacity for recreation and big game hunting. The livestock industry has been managed forever...we have to reduce numbers, we have to move to certain pasture on certain dates and see that we leave so much grass. So we know what needs to be managed out there, but the public doesn’t. The public continues to encourage tourists to come here and keep the economy going, but the forest is right at capacity. The quality of the experience goes down for the individual coming in, but the resource is seeing the impact...and that’s hard to bring back. The Forest Service can’t hire enough people to come in and enforce their regulations. I see a real need for the community plan and forest plans to come together.” FS*

## 5) Recent collaborative dialogue

While collaboration in the context of forest planning may be relatively untested, many forests have initiated collaborative dialogue and processes at the project level in the past 10 years. Some community members acquire training or experience on collaboration that they bring into the process (e.g., community trainings, project-level collaborations, Stewardship Contracts):

*“A lot of those same people [involved in a project level collaboration] were the people that were also involved with the study groups [that worked on the forest plan revision back in 1995-97]. Because they’re the people that want to get involved. They participated in monitoring – that was part of the requirement: we had actually collected money from the sale of the timber to do the monitoring, wildlife, and various things that the group decided needed to be monitored. So these people were already ramped up for the forest plan.” FS*

*“We’ve developed a trusting relationship with the Forest Service over the past few years. We brought a lot of great volunteers into the forest [to do on-the-ground projects]. They need it desperately because their budgets have been slashed for the field staff and so they hardly have any field staff anymore.” C*

*“I attended an evening class on collaboration at the university but none of the Forest Service staff did. It was right here in town. I now base my discussions about collaborations on the things the instructor taught me about what collaboration truly is. And what the Forest Service is doing is not collaboration. What they attempted to do on the [forest] was not collaboration, based on the definitions I’ve learned from [the instructor].” C*

Even pre-planning dialogue has resulted in a slow transformation of attitudes. A county commissioner notes that even though historically there has been animosity, recent interaction and communication has begun to create improvements:

*“For the first few years I was a commissioner, we talked a lot about public land issues but we didn’t have much interaction with the federal land managers themselves. When we first started working together there was some animosity and mistrust but every year, over the past seven or eight years, I’ve seen it get a little bit better. We are able to sit down and talk, and even if we don’t agree on the issues, we can visit in a congenial manner... Both of us have decided that we can accomplish more on both levels if we include each other.” C*

### “ They appreciate having the doors opened ”

“We started discussing and promoting collaboration back in the mid-’90s, and our forest supervisor was a strong proponent of it. As a forest leadership team, we were all requested to attend collaborative training sessions in the mid-to late-’90s in Sheridan and Billings. When we came back, we saw we had a chance to build on a history of communications with the community and the commissioners.” FS

A rural development administrator speaks of the community taking ownership of forest planning and stewardship:

*“I think that ‘we’-equation has started to come into the discussion. This isn’t just a Forest Service problem or an agency problem, this is OUR problem, OUR opportunity and we need to be involved in it. I sense a little more buy-in to that. Are we where we need to be yet? Probably not, but at least this is starting to become part of the dialogue. If we can encourage and keep them involved, they will become invaluable partners to the implementation and the whole process.” C*

Community leaders and representatives have increasingly recognized the potential of entering partnerships in forest restoration and stewardship of public lands, and can articulate a vision for a more collaborative approach to forest planning.

*“What’s amazing in this area is we have had the dialogue. A lot of times when you start talking, we find out how many values we share. We find out that it’s a lot bigger than a lot of us expect. We get this view that it’s an ‘us against them’ situation. Then all of a sudden we start talking with them and find we share more values than what we thought we did. So if we work only on some of the things that we can agree on, let’s work on those things. We have limited resources, and we couldn’t do everything anyway. We can’t even do the things that we agree on.” C*

*“The driving force behind wanting to do it this way [collaboration] was so that when you got past the forest plan revision to specific projects, there would be less opposition to decisions because you would say, ‘Hey, but [remember] way back when we all worked together and agreed this was it?’ That was my understanding...one of the reasons you’re willing to invest so much up front...[is] so that we learn together and we understood together why those decisions might be made project specific, rather than challenging them.” C*

Community members have begun to see that long-term benefits can result from making an investment in collaboration in forest resource planning. Collaboration doesn’t simply end when the final decision is made on the forest plan.

*“We all like the idea that the Forest Service is looking at the forest as a landscape. We’re thrilled that the Forest Service and BLM are working together in terms of watersheds. We’re thrilled that they’re moving in that direction. I have seen skepticism about the process; however, we’re committed to being represented in it, because we definitely understand that it’s our opportunity.” C*

## 6) Evolving community capacity for collaboration

Just as communities' demographics, values, uses, and economies are dynamic, so are communities' capacities for collaborative forest planning. Several community members note that even though the community may have the capacity for collaboration, they still can be limited in terms of how much they can give of themselves as volunteers in the planning process:

*"It was a very interesting process to see how the community asked for all these things, and once they got them, they didn't know how to handle it. It's a very interesting concept that the agencies have to think about when they ask for public involvement, because you actually can wear the public out. That's one of the biggest observations I've seen with the forest planning process. By the time they got done, they had over a hundred meetings in a two-year time period."* C

*"Our little rural counties don't have the capacity to do this. Maybe a round of capacity building workshops for community members should be held before the planning process begins. We don't have the capacity, whether it's the capacity to fund people to go to these meetings or whether it's the capacity to understand the laws [NEPA, etc.]. We don't have the capacity to consistently go to each meeting, which is necessary so you have consistent input and train of thoughts. We don't have the manpower or time. These counties need to be at the table and need to be able to participate in a way that's meaningful, and they're just not able to."* C

Some level of resource management knowledge may be essential, but not necessarily knowledge about policy, as one USFS staff member describes:

*"I think there's almost no minimum knowledge about NEPA or NFMA in order for the public to participate. But they've got to have some understanding of resource management, with which people who've lived here often have some experience. If they don't have that resource knowledge, they have to bring themselves up to speed."* FS

Individuals within communities may gain experience and training over time, giving them knowledge and confidence in collaborative planning processes, such as this county commissioner:

*"I didn't have the right skills initially. But I just finished a two-day training on NEPA the other day [sponsored by the BLM for their Resource Advisory Councils]... And I wish I would've had it two years ago. Having sat through it, I thought, 'Oh, if I'd have had that [before], I could have spoken intelligently.' Because what happens is, we're intimidated. When we go into that steering committee meeting and they have a Forest Service guy stand up there and spout all their wisdom about all the terminology they use, we've actually felt pretty baffled by acronyms and terms that we don't know...And then all of a sudden two meetings later the light comes on and we say, 'Oh, that's what they were talking about.' Well, we have a real problem with that. Then they'll say, 'Well you know guys, we've been talking about this for two years now, and all of a sudden you have a problem, and we've been dealing with it for two years.' Yes, now all of a sudden we have a problem with it because now all of a sudden we understand what you're talking about!"* C

Despite what is often a relatively low starting point in community capacity for collaboration, capacity is continuously built through learning-by-doing, where community members transform attitudes and approach the collaborative process as they engage in the actual process. This transformation becomes part of the local social and historical context.

*“It’s definitely a steeper learning curve for the community. We have insurance salesmen, technicians, and equipment operators – collaboration’s not their focus, so it’s harder for them to learn. They have hardly any training opportunities like we do. But a lot of them pick up collaboration pretty quickly along the way. They roll their sleeves up and dive right in, asking questions, wanting more information – sometimes faster than we can get it to them.” FS*

*“Two and a half years ago when we started, we were all pretty green, even the Forest Service personnel. But as we moved forward we’ve all become more efficient and gotten to know each other...generally speaking we’ve become better and more efficient with our comments, and we knew what to expect. I’d say it’s changed a little [the collaborative process], and I would say it’s positive change.” C*

*“If a conservation district person was there, they knew they had to come to the meeting. They couldn’t just come to the meeting and start rendering a bunch of opinions or throwing out a bunch of ideas. They had to actually produce things...We evolved from people coming to a meeting, kind of expecting to demand an extra this or an extra that, moving towards getting something done. They really had to step up to the plate.” FS*

*“There are some sharp people out there that have done their homework. And it’s funny; I’ve found in general they’re not usually the ones that are spouting the ideology. They’re the quiet ones in the back but they’ve done their homework. They’ve figured out what are really the facts and they’ll ask a few very to-the-point questions. You realize pretty quickly by the questions they ask they know what they’re talking about and that they get information from various places. You’ll find people that have tremendous amounts of education, and you probably wouldn’t have realized they did until they started speaking out or asking questions.” FS*

*“As a whole, I think basically people came in holding their ideas and their attitudes and their values with very narrow vision. And as they worked through the process, I think they became more aware and understanding of other people’s views of the national forest and what this process should be. That’s where the educational process might help people become more aware of the greater community before they come to the table.” C*

The multitude of efforts to build community capacity for collaboration on stewardship of public lands will underscore the perspective that the public land agencies, the USFS in this case, cannot be expected to bring all the necessary collaborative resources or capital to the table. Indeed, the range of collaborative stewardship resources, from knowledge of the land; commitments to a balance between conservation, protection, and use; long-term social, economic, and ecological sustainability; and a willingness to support appropriate management, among others, have to be actively supported by a wide array of formal organizations, communities, resource users groups, non-profits, local governments, and public agencies. Just as the process of collaboration is a mutual responsibility and opportunity, the work to build the necessary social and political capacity to work together must also be implemented cooperatively.

## 7) Role of local government

Local government entities and officials can be an efficient and powerful way of establishing and maintaining collaborative working relationships with communities in forest planning. Depending on the state, conservation districts are especially important players:

*“The conservation districts had a pretty high skill level coming in because of their working with the public, and applying for grant money, and coming up with project solutions. They probably were in the seven to eight level [on a one to 10 scale] when they hit the ground at the first meetings. But the county commissioners weren’t quite as prepared for it. They didn’t quite understand what we were trying to do as well, just because the processes they operate under are distinctly different than collaboration. But they had no problem speaking their mind, being elected officials.” FS*

Some of the civic capital of communities in and around national forests is located in local governmental entities. Forest Service staff would be wise to assess the availability of networks and structures through which they could work cooperatively. Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) and Cooperative Agency Status agreements are available options.

*“We pursued quite early in the process MOUs with the counties to acquire cooperating agency status through the NEPA regulations. The counties have been very excited, I think, about having that status in an official capacity. What it says is that they have...they’re just not part of the general public anymore. They have to have a special relationship with the federal agency to engage in doing work, and more particularly in analysis work, to which they can contribute skill that we don’t typically have.” FS*

*“I’ve always tried to maintain it would be in the best interest of the federal land management, local government and the state of Utah if we worked together during the process, taking this mammoth document and breaking it into pieces, a month at a time. When they extended cooperative agency status to us, I think their intent was if we can do that, we can accomplish our goals in one meeting instead of having to go around to five different counties.” C*

In the midst of working with local elected officials (e.g., county commissioners) in formal arrangements such as an MOU, USFS staff have experienced how elections and other political events can have unanticipated effects. The key is to be flexible but focused on the goal of the collaboration. For example, the change in gubernatorial administration in Wyoming dissolved the umbrella Memorandum of Understanding between the state, local governments and the Forest Service. Instead of abandoning the MOU structure, the Forest Supervisor developed individual MOUs between the Forest Service and the state and local governments. This preserved the continuity of the process and is now part of the locale’s social and historical context.

A word of caution is necessary, however, in relying too heavily on locally elected officials. They are political players and bring to the table agendas that may not necessarily be representative of the broader communities:

*“Unfortunately, I think the steering committee had an impact, in terms of their individual agendas. With the steering committee involved, it’s probably taken the Forest Service twice as long to do this plan. They’ve had to explain every detail of the process, the whys, presentations by their experts, presentations on how the process works, presentations on everything to educate this group of people who don’t really care, for the most part. The majority of them don’t really care about any of that. They just want their agenda addressed – period.” C*

As a part of the ongoing relationship building needed to support forest planning and management, it is worth an investment of USFS staff time to appraise the opportunities for collaborative engagement with not only local government elected officials, but with key staff in community planning and economic development, as well as with a wide range of organized recreation, travel, and resource conservation and utilization groups. If federal and state land management agencies would take a joint approach to building stewardship enhancement coalitions, the investment for all concerned, including many representatives within communities, would become more focused and produce longer term benefits in return for the amount of staff and leadership time allocated.

### III. Initial Internal Capacity Assessment and Building Internal Capacity





National forests also need to assess their own internal collaborative capacity: Will our forest staff have the capacity to plan, design, and implement an integrated and sustainable collaborative planning partnership? What resources do we need to build a team? What kind of external help will we need? The work of collaboration requires specific skills in and a commitment to relationship building, communication, and facilitated dialogue. Some staff have evolved these skills through previous experiences or training, while others may need some additional amount of orientation and preparation.

Part of the internal assessment also needs to address the feasibility of allocating additional staff into process planning and communication roles to support the traditional “analysis” capacities of the planning team. Collaboration creates an additional staff and agency resource burden that is unpredictable and results in new expectations among community stakeholders.

We identified five attributes of internal agency capacity for collaborative forest planning from our case study:

- 1) Role of forest-level leadership;**
- 2) “Pre-planning” work;**
- 3) Utilizing outside resources and trainings;**
- 4) Placing the right people in the right positions;**
- 5) Role of internal procedures and culture of staff turnover.**

These attributes are not listed in any particular order, nor is this listing intended to convey a step-by-step approach that national forests should take. Each is considered fundamental to making collaboration work effectively in the context of national forest planning.

## 1) Role of forest-level leadership

One of the primary keys to the appropriate conduct of an internal assessment is the role of the line officers and leadership of that individual national forest. Are they willing to provide the organizational vision, commitment, and resource support to a multi-year effort?

*“You have to float these ideas by the forest leadership team, and get coherence that this is the way they want to go. Because there is kind of a leap of faith here, that investing this time, energy, and money up front is going to pay off down the road. So there needs to be a deliberative process and a commitment made ahead of time, because people have to understand what they are buying into. It does take a lot of everybody’s time. I don’t think you can put this into your cookbook and say, ‘All forests will do it this way.’ It takes real leadership and real vision. Because this thing has been so polarized for so long, you don’t find many people who are predisposed to collaboration. But, with the right leadership and the right facilitators, it could go on.” C*

*“When you talk about community-based collaboration, you’re really talking about getting the district rangers and their staffs participating. So that was probably the first step, getting the leadership to agree to the undertaking, that this is the way we want to go.” FS*

At the early stage of initiation of collaborative process, the need for committed leadership to support the forest supervisor and district rangers cannot be underestimated. Without a firm and concrete decision to go forward with collaboration, little can be accomplished or sustained.

*“When the new supervisor came in, some of my initial ideas on the collaborative process definitely differed from what it evolved into. I saw the collaborative process as a bunch of input that would be provided to us, and then we’d eventually look at it, weigh it, and then move on. I didn’t really have a vision of working side by side with others on problem-solving of direct issues on the plan, which is where I think it evolved.” FS*

*“Our opinion of the [forest] is that it’s probably the most progressive forest in the region. Maybe because it’s a desirable location, they seem to attract a bigger pool of applicants. And so the last three or four supervisors they had ... have been on the leading edge of more progressive, innovative approaches to dealing with all sorts of issues that face national forests.” C*

A forest supervisor expresses a commitment to a level of dialogue needed to sustain a collaborative planning process:

*“Collaboration for me, figuratively, is the act of being willing to come to the table, and some willingness to work together. I don’t think it’s looking for absolute agreement. Everyone has to come to the table with some particular need. As the agency... we come to the table not advocating some particular outcome, but with the mission of the agency, our stewardship responsibilities, compliance with environmental laws, and all of that. We don’t give that up. But beyond that, you try to give up some of those other positions that you bring to the table. As an agency, we can be so convinced of a particular ‘how to do something,’ that this is the only way to achieve this particular outcome. Very seldom are we right about that. There are a lot of different ways to achieve a particular desired outcome.” FS*

We heard many comments from community members relating to the importance of “higher-ups” not overturning decisions worked out through local forest and community collaborations. This highlights the need for **vertical integration of support** throughout the leadership chain-of-command, such that national forests have appropriate backing for being collaborative from USFS regional foresters, program directors, and planning staff.

*“Supervisors can’t do their job without their superiors saying, ‘This is what we’re doing and why, and I’m going to give you the tools necessary. If you need to hire consultants to beat the drum for you, we’ll do that. But we’re going to take a little different approach to public involvement, so we’re not standing up there in our green uniforms as the aircraft carrier that’s done the same thing for 100 years.’” C*

*“A lot of the Forest Service people act like they don’t really want to talk to you. You wonder whether there’s any value to the process at all. At the highest levels, some kind of responsibility needs to be taken in consideration of the process, and willingness to listen. If the upper levels aren’t going to respect what the lower levels are doing, work with them and learn from them, what’s the point other than to say, ‘Well look how big we are, we had a citizens’ group. But we don’t listen to them, we’re not going to.’” C*

*“I can’t tell you how many leaders in land management and wildlife agencies have implied or outright said to me, ‘You’re right, this is going to have bad impacts but I don’t have the political cover to do anything.’ So where does that fit into the collaborative process? They’re knowingly doing what is bad for the resource they are paid to protect.” C*

*“The hardest, most frustrating thing in this whole process is, you go to the top and they say, ‘Let the local people have authority over that.’ You go to the local people and they say, ‘No, the regional people have to make that decision.’ Nobody seems to know what the situation is. We’re land-locked. Seventy-five percent of our land in this geographic area is owned and controlled by the federal government. And when you can’t collaboratively sit down and come up with a solution to solve these problems because of federal red tape or whatever, that’s frustrating.” C*

*“If [directives came] from Washington on down saying, ‘This is how the forest plan will be done; here is the expectation and the funding; we’re going to work with the community steering committee. We need to define the expectations of what they’re going to do.’ They also have to be willing to spend time in a couple of meetings or some trainings on how we’re going to go about this so that everybody’s on the same page.” C*

While forest planning team members did not express significant concerns about not having vertical leadership support above their own leadership teams, nothing they described about the challenges of collaboration would indicate anything other than they need as much support as they can receive in the form of acknowledgement, practical process methods and tools, and readily available data.

## 2) “Pre-planning” work

Community-based collaborative forest planning is not simply a matter of calling a public meeting. Collaboration is a total way of doing business, both internally within the agency and between the agency and its stakeholders. Collaboration between Forest Service and community begins with the ability of the planning and leadership teams to collaborate internally:

*“I think the [Forest Service] staff involved in the process support the collaborative approach at a level of seven or eight on a scale of one to 10. It really varies because everyone has a big workload and collaboration is perceived as yet another task. I don’t think we could have gone as far as we have without this level of staff support. There’s no way.” FS*

*“We had formed a basic steering committee of all the line officers – which is all the district rangers and involved staff on the forest as a whole. I was placed on that steering committee to help provide issues from the district level, mostly at this district. My role was to represent, as I saw them, the interests of the community and the district specialists here in forming a good forest plan revision.” FS*

*“Going back to my experience on [another forest], generally you would assemble an ID team in a supervisor’s office. And you didn’t have really a ground-up type of participation in that process, so districts would feel alienated, like they hadn’t been brought into the process. What we tried to do in this case was to bring district personnel into this process very carefully and incorporate them into the process, from the district ranger right down to their staff. Each district ranger participated in every meeting in the three different towns. The district ranger, depending on the theme of the meeting, would bring staff to the meeting as participants, in addition to a counterpart here in this office.” FS*

Working on collaboration internally allows the USFS to provide a more consistent voice and set of information to the community in a collaborative process:

*“We’re working collaboratively internally...all the resource specialists, everyone has their special interest and folks don’t want to give up that suitable land in that area that they used to have. But they’re realizing, for example, that yes, recreation probably is a better use in that particular area. So, we’re learning about collaboration internally, which should position us when we have the public meetings.” FS*

“ **A tremendous amount of up-front planning** ”

*“We were developing as we went. Not only developing, but it took a tremendous amount of up-front planning to actually outline each meeting, get the presentations and meeting processes in place. Then to actually go out and conduct them in three different communities over and over again each month was extremely taxing and took a lot of work.” FS*

*“It would have been nice if we could have met as a core team to identify what we know and can handle internally, and what needs public input. We never identified things that were missing components of our analysis process that we can only get from the public. There’s a value in getting everybody together, with different backgrounds. Some of these ranchers are tremendous sources of information. They have a lot of woods knowledge and have observed a lot over the years. On our own, we’re not going to get a list of really good stuff and make it bulletproof.” FS*

There are also opportunities to lay collaborative groundwork with the communities in advance as well by encouraging USFS staff to attend meetings and have one-on-one conversations with key individuals. One forest developed a “buddy system” where each USFS staff is given a key local official to stay in touch with:

*“Way before we started the collaborative process, I told our guys to spend as much time as possible attending commission and CD [conservation district] meetings, to keep them updated about what we were going to do and where we were going. So, we had more of an intensive informative mode before going to this high-speed collaboration.” FS*

### 3) Utilizing outside resources and trainings

Even if a forest agency has strong, committed leadership at all levels and has invested in pre-planning efforts by developing and maintaining internal collaborative working relationships, we found that there was still a need for outside assistance and training, as one planning team member describes:

*“When you get into the process, all of a sudden you find that you’re overcommitted in some respects, you’re understaffed, and you need to adjust somehow or you’re going to lose your ability to expend that amount of energy. Early on we brought in the Office of Community Services (OCS) because we thought we needed additional experience. [These] people were very conversant with the facilitation processes, well thought of in the community, with contacts within the community, whether that’s the general public, the educational branch, or the community government. So even with enlisting the OCS and their staffs, plus myself, [the planning team leader], and the support we had at the district level, there were points in time where I felt totally overtaxed by the process. And that lasted for at least three to four months during the critical study group process phase.” FS*

One specific area of outside assistance that is often sought is increased capacity building in developing and managing a collaborative process. In addition to the individual trainings that some USFS staff have attended over their careers, planning teams have sought assistance from organizations like the Office of Community Services at Fort Lewis College, faculty at the Department of Forest, Rangeland and Water Stewardship at Colorado State University, and staff from the USFS Inventorying and Monitoring Institute in Fort Collins, Colorado. Since the choices can be numerous, it is advisable for each national forest to assess which type and form of assistance will fit its needs at key points throughout the planning process.

For example, one popular alternative is the collaborative learning approach developed by Steve Daniels (Utah State University) and Gregg Walker (Oregon State University).

*“There are numerous opportunities for Forest Service people interested in learning about collaboration and getting started. A few of us got our feet wet with the collaborative learning trainings Daniels and Walker have done. And, a lot of our staff have been building relationships and working collaboratively with county commissions for a long time on different projects and plans. But there’s a limit to what you can get from trainings; at some point you just have to do it.” FS*

### “ Team building skills ”

“The first training I would give to the core team is some team training, team building skills, then facilitation. We were broken down into small groups, and it was very difficult. You become a participant only and may get distracted and only talk to a few folks for a time. Others get bored or are having their own side conversations. You should really be managing the whole conversation, making sure everyone gets something to say, staying on task, etc. You need those skills. Most of us got into natural resources because we didn’t like to work closely with people. We were much more comfortable working outside. We didn’t want to be ‘people’ people. People need good listening skills. Good personal skills. It was very easy to get drawn into a discussion with somebody and if they were wrong, by god you wanted to tell them. You don’t want to do that because then you’re representing the forest, that this is a Forest Service opinion, and you don’t want to steer them in any particular way. You want to get from them what they’re really feeling, whether you agree with it or not. Don’t tell them where they’re wrong.” FS

*“Our forest planner is the cosmic glue and it was his brilliant idea to try this here. He was very familiar with Daniels and Walker and the difference between collaborative processes and collaborative learning processes, and espoused the second. Internally, a couple of workshops about internal collaboration took place – 150 Forest Service employees and community members attended one meeting and just talked about the idea of collaborative learning processes to get the idea.” C*

Whether a given forest uses any particular approach is less important than that they work continually as a team to form specific shared understandings and skills about collaborative expectations, processes, and outcomes.

*“We tried to develop capacity early on before we got started. So we formally trained the internal participants, the core team members, the line officers, the district staffs, and the extended ID team that was going to be involved. The training included what the content was and what we were trying to achieve to align expectations and understandings; and also to work with the communities and stakeholders, both formally and informally, to let them know what we had in mind and to get their input on framing the process. We did do a lot of homework, evolving a framework, a handbook if you will. Then bringing in the entire planning team, and bouncing these ideas off them and the leadership team. It developed over a period of six months to a year.” FS*

## 4) Placing the right people in the right positions

Collaboration can be an intense social process requiring a good level of people skills. Interacting with diverse people is not a core strength of many USFS staff, as one resource specialist observed:

*“I am a forester, a CSU graduate. They teach us a lot about how to manage trees, but we don’t learn a lot about how to manage people. And at this level in my job, I do a lot more management of people and politics than I do trees. So, not saying that couldn’t really be added as part of the forestry program, but that’s the reality that we have now. And you know, I’ve learned a lot the hard way, and things change.” FS*

However, all the forests in our study had people that exemplified the people skills needed in a community collaborative planning process. Placing the right people in collaborative planning processes is critical:

*“I have been impressed with the Forest Service personnel. There are some great public servants out there, that care very deeply about what they do. They do it in a real professional manner, and they do care about that public that I mentioned before. And as you do this report, I hope that you’re hearing this from others also. I hope that through this we were able to settle or encourage great Forest Service employees that have really been working their hearts out.” C*

*“I don’t think you can grade the agency across the board. I think that that some individuals in the Forest Service were better suited than others to engage in this. Without mentioning any names, I’m going to say that some of the key players in the collaborative process of the Forest Service were high strung and tended to get defensive when approached by the public, regardless of what direction they were approached from.” C*

In assessing the internal agency capacity for collaboration, populating the planning team with the right mix of people can make an enormous difference:

*“You need to have the skills to train internal participants in the process. You’re going to need a team of collaborative process leaders to go to a ranger district to teach the ranger and the staff about the process – what’s going to happen and what will be expected of them. And you have to recognize that not everybody is a collaborative process player. There are some people on the districts that just aren’t comfortable with those types of situations. You need the skills to size up the situation and orchestrate it.” FS*

*“You need to make sure that you have a mix of personality styles on the planning team [analytics and big-picture thinkers]. Think about the process of public involvement and writing the document and how people work with other people. You need to have a team that can work well together. You need to have more formal technical presentations to large groups, not just technical people facilitating smaller groups. Make sure these technical people can relate to the public well, or have someone else who is more comfortable help them with a presentation.” FS*



## 5) Role of internal procedures and culture of staff turnover

Administrative rules, regulations, and procedures often present great additional burdens to community collaboration – especially relating to contracting and procurement:

*“Probably what personally challenges me the most is our own internal processes. Fiscal, accounting, procurement, personnel, administrative – all that stuff I’d put under administrative. None of those things are bad in and of themselves, but when we first started working with the partnerships, we were really encouraged to do this. At the beginning, the paperwork was sometimes a two or three page little partnership agreement, a cost-share agreement or something, and we went off and did good things and everybody was happy. But lately it’s becoming more and more regulated, like our contracting process is very regimented, very specific. Certain things you do here, and there are certain ways to document things and all kinds of tracks for fiscal and legal accountability. That’s creeping into this whole agreements area to where it’s creating more and more hoops to jump through, more and more paperwork, more and more process that sometimes gets in the way of building this relationship. I end up spending more of my time fussing with the paperwork to get a project approved than in some cases we spend in actually implementing it. And how the partner invoices [get done] – it is getting more complicated and they’re saying ‘what are we doing this for?’” FS*

Perhaps a larger impediment to community collaboration than agency procedures is the legacy of staff turnover at the forest level, where supervisors, district rangers, and planning staff change every few years, oftentimes leaving in the middle of a collaborative process. This culture of turnover can be disruptive and may cause the community to distrust the agency:

*“The forest supervisor and the forest planner both changed since the process got restarted. To tell you the truth, I think every person on the ‘leadership team’ of the forest changed during the planning process. Part of a collaborative process is commitment from the people involved: number one, to make it work; two, to stick with it and develop the decision process. And when everybody changes out on the forest, and they don’t have a lot of experience on the ground, it does not make for a good decision and/or a good process.” C*

*“The lack of continuity and staff turnover is a big problem. And the lack of continuity is also a liability that can damage their trust with the public because now, when they have to start over again, people are going to roll their eyes and say, ‘Well, you did this already.’” C*

# IV. Constructing Clear Collaborative Expectations



Many reports are available (including one compiled and edited by Ann Moote and Dennis Becker, “Exploring Barriers to Collaborative Forestry,” report from a workshop held at Hart Prairie, Flagstaff, Arizona, September 17-19, 2003) about the failures of collaboration resulting from mixed or unclear expectations about the process or outcomes.

*Inconsistent and unrealistic expectations of collaboration, and a lack of criteria for measuring the effectiveness of collaboration, lead to unfair criticism of collaborative efforts, accusations of failure, and both participant and agency burn-out.* (Hart Prairie, Barrier One, p. 4. Ecological Restoration Institute, Northern Arizona University)

Although many forest planning initiatives begin **without a complete “road map,”** and are often changed or adapted at times during implementation, one of the most highly recognized success factors is establishing clear outcomes or objectives right at the very beginning. Where are we trying to go? How will community involvement or input be utilized? What is the anticipated time frame for the planning process? What will the forest plan accomplish? What is the role of the community participant?

We identified five factors related to clear expectations for collaborative forest planning from our case study:

- 1) **Develop and widely distribute a clear “road map” of the process;**
- 2) **Clearly delineate the “decision space”;**
- 3) **Define ground rules of engagement;**
- 4) **Time commitments and schedule of outputs and actions;**
- 5) **Results of unclear expectations.**

“ **Both the agency and the public may have unrealistic expectations** ”

“To begin, I think perhaps both the agency and the public may have unrealistic expectations. We need to educate each other. I think the public expects they could come to the meetings and begin making small decisions which add up to big things, perhaps where they would be able to drive their ATV, or where they would be able to exclude motorized use perhaps for backpacking reasons. And I think too often the agency expected cooperation right off the bat. So I think both of them together are learning realistically how effective each side is. It’s kind of a jousting match. So basically I think it begins as a dance to kind of educate each other.”

FS

## 1) Develop and widely distribute a clear “road map” of the process

Everyone involved in the collaborative forest planning effort – both agency and community participants – needs to know what the process is, what it is expected to accomplish, and how and where it will go to get there. What does the USFS expect from community participants? What do community members expect from the USFS?

*“Knowing what we wanted from the public, we tried to strategize what we needed to get out of meetings. But it turned out to be us giving them information. ‘Here’s what we think you need to know’ instead of asking folks what they thought they needed to know and then coming back with that information. It evolved as we went around the geographic areas. What we really wanted was their vision of the desired condition for a particular landscape. After the Gunnison meetings, we were ready to start the collaborative process. We had a better idea of what we wanted. We knew what tools we would need in the form of informational products, and we were better at facilitation.” FS*

The lack of a well-defined road map can leave participants frustrated and confused:

*“I’ve wondered if the guys that are doing it really understand it any better than the rest of us at times. Because I sense sometimes that they’re just as frustrated with the process as we are, because it’s a huge area, and they not only have to deal with the local people, but it’s a national forest. So they know that they’re going to be getting comments from all over the U.S. about what happens on this forest. And I’ve been concerned at times that they even know what they need to be doing.” C*

*“One thing that really set us back early on was the poor planning of the structural organization from the start. In my opinion, we sort of lost a year or maybe a year and a half because it was poorly structured, and we didn’t know any different, so it didn’t work.” C*

*“In the beginning it was still amorphous. Nobody could really tell what was being talked about, which is the difficulty with initial stages of this, no matter what. I remember one meeting where there were no alternatives. There was just nothing for people to get a handle on. I don’t know if that’s avoidable or not, because if you want people to provide input on what the issues are but lack alternatives, people get lost. There was structure to the evening, but the questions were amorphous.” C*

The advice from those who have gone through collaborative forest planning processes is clear to those who are just embarking:

*“The key advice I have for people going into this, to emphasize up front, is to develop common sets of expectations, internally and externally, of what this collaborative effort is going to produce, what constitutes progress, talking about potential outcomes, which outcomes that you want to emphasize. Because if you don’t, the biggest stumbling block we had was the need to resolve differing expectations internally regarding what this was going to produce. Pin those expectations down up front, realizing that it’s going to be a dynamic process, but agree on focus areas, and on what will constitute successful outcomes in our perspective.” FS*

*“One of the good things that the Forest Service did right up front was they laid out some laws that govern how they have to function. I don’t think that people really understood that. We didn’t have a lot of time to talk about it in detail, but people did begin to grasp it.” C*

*“I’m a big fan of collaboration and I think it can work, but you have to be realistic about your expectations. That to me is one of the stumbling blocks, that people have different expectations, and that wasn’t clear [in this situation.]” C*

## “ Otherwise, they feel betrayed ”

“We have a challenge educating people that ‘this is the forest plan and this is the decision space where you can have input about suitability, where you can add into these different components.’ People think *collaboration* and [then] think we’re all going to get together to make this decision without the understanding that the Forest Service is not relinquishing their ultimate responsibility. Definition and clarity are absolutely key. You can’t explain it enough, with newcomers coming in all the time, that ‘this is where you come in, this is where you fit in the process.’ Otherwise, they feel betrayed, because they devoted all that time, all those meetings, all that input, and they never saw where they fit in the puzzle.” FS

## 2) Clearly delineate the “decision space”

Decision space can be defined as the aspects of a situation that are available for change and that all stakeholders are capable of influencing. Many community stakeholders come into a collaborative forest planning process thinking they are going to directly influence decisions affecting their narrow interests. According to one community member:

*“Collaboration means having a part in making the decision, which never before happened in the forest planning process. True collaboration is everybody participating in making the decision, as opposed to the Forest Service saying, ‘We want to collaborate. You can give us input, but we get to make the decision.’” FS*

By contrast, USFS staff see things differently:

*“I think it was laid out well with what [the forest supervisor] said – that it will be a Forest Service decision. As we got over the honeymoon period, which was collecting data and sharing what the process and end product would be and the different layers in all that, he just said, ‘It will get more contentious; I don’t expect you to support what we end up [selecting] as a preferred alternative, but hopefully you’ll understand it and be able to explain the trade-offs.’ I think we’ve gotten there for the most part, but when you talk collaboration, people think they’re going to have a part of the decision. It actually can be unsettling to them to say, ‘Well, if we’re going to talk and you’re still going to make your decision, why should we discuss it?’ For me it’s like this: ‘Well, maybe you have some ideas to contribute. If you can find some of those ideas and actually adopt them it’s great. If you can’t, then it shows a little bit of failure that you didn’t have anything that you bought into.’” FS*

Defining the decision space is paramount to establish realistic expectations and, therefore, cultivate trust among the participants, especially the agency. Defining the decision space is a challenging task, but requires up-front effort and persistence.

*“It’s really hard because every forest is doing something differently and we aren’t sure at this point what planning rule we’ll be working under. Those things need to be pretty well understood going in. What is the decision space? We don’t want to give the public the idea that they have more power than they really have. From my perspective there were many things I didn’t know going into this, things I still don’t know...we’ve all been doing some learning. Ideally, you have all your ducks in line, so when you get these folks in a meeting you can facilitate the meeting and get what you need out of it. They get what they need out of it, and everyone is happy.” FS*

*“You have to really work on defining what we’re doing and expectations, and getting those in line, because a lot of the people that we are really trying to pull in don’t have a good feel for all of that. Paid interest group people have a better understanding because they’ve worked around it more, but we’re trying to keep them from dominating the process and to bring in other people who may know a lot about resources on the ground – trails, wildlife stuff – but they don’t know much about process. So in your invitations and your first meeting or two where you talk about what you’re doing, you need to be real up front about what the process is geared to, what kind of decisions you’re trying to make, the time frame. Some people when they understand that will realize that’s not what they wanted to do.” FS*

*“One of the issues with conservation districts was that they kept wanting us to put detail in the forest plan about how we were going to do these things. Forest plans are broad, programmatic prescriptions, standards and guidelines, goals and objectives that set sideboards, but they don’t tell you how to do something. And so we said. ‘No, that’s a tool, that doesn’t need to be in the forest plan, it’s just a tool. We will use it, we’re interested in using it, we’re committing to using stewardship contracting, but we’re not going to put language like that in the plan.’ Well, that is one of their appeal points – ‘You didn’t say that you’re going to use stewardship contracting and that’s a new authority.’ ‘We talked about that, we told you we’re not going to put that in there because it’s too specific. This is a broad plan.’” FS*

### 3) Define ground rules of engagement

Ground rules are the fundamental rules upon which participants in a collaborative forest planning process behave. Examples include focusing on issues rather than personalities, taking turns when talking about a topic, and never interrupting when someone else is talking. From our case study, we heard many different suggestions for operating ground rules, especially focusing on coming to meetings prepared:

*“If we did it all over again, we would lay out more stringent operating principles, procedures, and norms for the group. We should have gotten a stronger collective understanding of ground rules and identified the specific roles of the players at the table. This steering committee involves a lot of homework. If you become a steering committee member, you should be obligated to come to every meeting prepared and keep moving. Attendance should be required to be a member – otherwise you have no business being there.” FS*

*“As the decisions moved toward the point of involving the communities through the conservation districts, county governments, state government – to sitting down with the forest [staff] at that point – it was something new without well-defined ground rules nor well-defined expectations of what would be done and what the steering committee members would be doing. And that has morphed or evolved.” C*

*“The Forest Service needs to have a clearly defined role in the process. What I see these days is they like to pretend they’re not involved somehow, but they clearly have their own agenda. They need to participate in the planning process equally with the other participants, and not put themselves aside from it as the observers.” C*

Ground rules are useful for establishing norms of cooperative behavior, even when individuals and groups have diametrically opposing views. Such rules are fundamental to any group process.

#### 4) Time commitments and schedule of outputs and actions

The collaborative forest planning processes we studied each lasted at least two years; several are ongoing even after three years of work. Such long time frames are taxing on both agency staff and community participants. It is common for people to experience “meeting fatigue” where there are seemingly endless monthly meetings on forest planning.

*“The majority of the public is not going to stay involved in a process that lasts more than a few months. The bureaucracy of the Forest Service will outlast most of the public in a collaborative process. I don’t think that you could start a collaborative process and tell most people that they’d have to do this for two to three years without the majority of the people falling by the wayside. So much turnover within the Forest Service also makes it difficult. Even if you could get a commitment from a high-level person within the Forest Service, if that person leaves, I’ve not seen a way to get a commitment from the successor to continue with the same process.” C*

*“After going through this last round, I do think sometimes we have unrealistic expectations on collaboration and what it really means. We’re not always going to be able to get people that can contribute at the N<sup>th</sup> detail level and ... be there all the time from day one. That’s great if we can get that but sometimes we can’t. So we need to make sure our expectations are very clearly outlined at the first of these processes. If we launch a collaborative process where we have expectations of refining something down to that level where it’s going to take weeks and months, we better make sure that’s a realistic process.” FS*

An important perspective to have going into a collaborative process is that one of the primary goals of collaboration is to develop different kinds of working relationships with different people. And relationship-building is time consuming.

*“It takes time and energy to facilitate a process and to build and maintain a relationship. And to me, collaboration is about building relationships, long-term relationships that need some tending and some care, and that takes time. Sometimes as we’re planning our work on a year to year basis, I’m not sure we actually count that time, that capacity that’s needed to do that very well. Some people do, and some don’t. They’ll take on their normal plate of work and they say, ‘Well I’m also going to do this and this and this through these collaborative or partnership processes.’ But they don’t account for the time that’s needed to facilitate and work with the processes.” FS*

Setting reasonable time commitments and being clear and up front about the proposed schedule of outputs and actions is critical to keeping people interested and engaged, and maintaining trust in the process and the planning team. Process delays can set relationships back, as one county commissioner noted:

*“There were a few reports that were delinquent or extremely late, and that’s what stopped the process. It wasn’t from this forest, but it was information that they knew they needed to have and utilize. Just like we have a time frame, maybe there should have been a time frame on these other people. Perhaps they could have done another section while they were waiting, because it really is kind of a thorn in a lot of people’s sides... I think that certain people within the group thought that the Forest Service intentionally withheld the information.” C*

## 5) Results of unclear expectations

Failing to clarify expectations can result in community stakeholders losing interest, patience, and trust in the process and in the USFS. Given the complex nature of forest planning, it is often easy to overlook clearly explaining to community participants the decision space available to them. Additionally, given the fluid, uncertain nature of forest planning, planning teams continually adapt to new situations, such as new information, stakeholder dynamics, budget constraints, or pressure from above to get things done. While the USFS planning staff may have legitimate reasons for shifting gears, delaying an important analysis, or switching topics for collaborative discussion among community stakeholders, not communicating these changes can leave stakeholders wondering what is going on, as two community participants note:

*“The Forest Service stated they would have the landscape assessment in six weeks. It’s been almost two years since the last meeting and it’s not done yet. The public doesn’t understand what happened. This leads to mistrust about whether the Forest Service was serious about collaboration.” C*

“ **Right there  
you lose  
your trust** ”

“A lot of people thought they were going to have the opportunity to comment on travel management. Within the Forest Service, travel management is a separate issue from the management plan. I can see why they were separated, but in some regards, they shouldn’t have been. The public’s comments were often related to travel management. Facilitators had to stand up and say, ‘We appreciate your comments, but this isn’t the time to do that.’ That just blows the public back...saying, ‘Why did I come?’ Right there you lose your trust.” C



*“[The collaborative process] is new to the county, and it’s new to the Forest Service. But they’re doing things that they would just typically do and then they come back to the steering committee. And the counties may not approve, or have a differing opinion, or whatever. Then the Forest Service ... they’re a little frustrated with this ... they’ll have their ID team meeting and they’ll come back and hand out the new documents. For me, it’s like, ‘When did this change and why?’ And it maybe wasn’t a significant issue to them, but to us it is.” C*

Some individuals come to the table with specific expectations about what they envision as possible from a collaborative process:

*“I’m upset that the planning staff wasn’t using the socioeconomic data [we helped develop] but rather some trend analysis from somewhere else. It’s important to include socioeconomic data here and in many other rural western communities because the economies and the drivers of those economies are changing. What was happening 20 years ago isn’t as much concern to us. Trying to think about the future is through understanding what’s going on today. We need to find a way to use both trend analysis and socioeconomic data. Also, include some stories, some narrative in the plan. Otherwise, if it’s just tables and charts, it will go on a shelf. There seems to be a reluctance to do that, because maybe it’s going to be too much work. But that defeats how it was represented in the beginning and therefore compromises the trust people have about whether the Forest Service walks their talk.” C*

Lack of clear expectations about the decision space is common and leads to a perception that decisions are already made prior to the collaborative process:

*“We’ve come up with suggestions and then we’re told we can’t do that. We ask why not? Well, because the regional forester, or because of... mostly they’ll tie it back to their superiors, and they’ll say they just can’t do it. So, being naive like we are because we haven’t been allowed to participate in a process like this before, we say, ‘Well, okay.’ And then someone will go back and call the right person and ask the right question, and they’ll come back and say, ‘Yes, they can do that.’ For example, when we were looking at the goals and objectives for the forest plan revision, forest-wide goals and objectives, we wanted to change some of the words in those goals and objectives. And we were told we couldn’t do that... So instances like that that have caused some real mistrust.” C*

*“When I attended those meetings it was pretty obvious to me that the mindset was already there... I think that the Forest Service personnel already have a mindset on what they feel should be happening in the forest... The meetings were pretty programmed. And the Forest Service personnel did a lot of work, and some of it very good work I’m sure, about every aspect of the forest or its administration. But throughout, you could feel that our, or at least my, thinking wasn’t going to be considered.” C*

In the absence of clear expectations about outcomes, community participants perceive that the collaborative planning process will be taken over by organized interest groups:

*“I don’t think the Forest Service gave us a clear-cut idea of what they wanted. Even in the end it was a mish-mash of maybe this and maybe that. And the special interest groups took that as an opportunity to grab it and then to pull it apart.” C*

# V. Monitoring and Adaptation of the Collaborative Process



The emergent nature and utilization of increased collaboration in forest planning necessitates an emphasis on adaptation. Few if any complete road maps to guide the processes and structures of planning have been available to National Forests up to this point. This has meant that being prepared to adapt methods of implementation, specific tools and techniques, approaches to community participation, and data use and dissemination have been extremely important. To make appropriate adaptations also relies upon some level of monitoring, accomplished collaboratively in many instances.

“ **Moving on and cycling through the topics too quickly** ”

“Sometimes we did larger adaptations: One of the things we heard at the workshops, both at the forest level and geographic level, is that we seemed to be moving on and cycling through the topics too quickly. People wanted to have more time to delve into issues and to hear what other people in the room thought, because in some cases they had never really talked to people from different organizations about how they viewed the world. And so we decided that we would form groups – Topical Working Groups [TWiGS] – to delve into five topics that seem to have the most interest. And get people to commit to coming to a meeting, at least one meeting a month for five months. So this meant they could have an extended conversation. And that was why we came up with the TWiGS. It was an idea loosely based on something we had heard about that the San Juan N.F. had tried.” FS

*“We moved our focus to a ‘management theme’ concept in the North Fork [geographic area], with only a few meetings left. The public loved it. They could really look at the landscape and understand the interconnections of resources. We had people sit at tables where they knew the landscape well. People wanted to work longer – and we added two meetings to finish the process. It gave them an ability to learn and make suggestions regarding themes and putting systems together. They were learning without a formal presentation – that’s why they wanted to work longer because it worked for them. This increased the capacity of the public to work together! We incorporated feedback in the next meetings. We did an internal evaluation. In 10 workshops over four weeks no two were the same. It was a little hectic. In some cases we made some fairly significant differences in the agenda, or even in the way we set up the room ... sometimes we changed our PowerPoint presentation.” FS*

*“To their credit, they’ve made some changes. They’ve changed a lot from when we originally started. That means to me that they’re open-minded ... I think they probably feel relieved on some of them, because they actually [said], ‘Hey, we’re expressing what the people say, and we won’t have to hear about that after it comes out.’” C*

Adaptations need to be made to address the planning team’s needs as well. Here are two different views of the same concern, one from a planning team member and one from the facilitator who also saw the need for monitoring and adaptation:

*“This is the first planning effort I’ve been involved in. I’ve been involved in a lot of project level NEPA, working with the ID teams. Seems like we didn’t really know what we wanted to begin with. Each geographic area that we’ve done, we’ve done differently. I think when we got to the last one, we sort of knew what we wanted. So, we went back to the first one, brought it up to speed – didn’t use the landscape units but rather had the geographic areas.” FS*

*“A primary success was our ability to adapt the process. For example, to include landscape working groups or by responding to the planning team’s need for more substance/content at meetings. This is when a systematic monitoring process kicked in, which, had it been in place, would have revealed much earlier the need to adapt the process.” FS*

Sometimes adaptations need to be made as a result of the geographic locale or because of challenges about how the group is, or is not, functioning:

*“When they’d get to different parts of the county or forest, they knew from the Monument planning [Grand Staircase Escalante] that they didn’t like a particular kind of process, such as the small working groups. They want to hear what everybody is saying because they think it’s all very relevant. We heard that and I made sure the planning team heard that. So, we changed the process over there.” FS*

*“The TWiG process is really the meat and gravy part of it. This is where it’s really happening. When we started the TWiG process, the professionals that worked for a major ATV organization and snowmobile association really started to take over. The facilitators were too willing to let them dominate the meeting. I resisted that vocally, a lot. Behind the scenes, I spoke with the facilitator and planner and they adapted to make sure that no one was taking over the meeting and reducing us to polarization. They worked together to iron out this problem so that we were in fact there sharing opinions, discussing the issues, and not just arguing over whether ATVs had more impact than hikers. That isn’t the issue at this level of planning. They have adapted as the situation has dictated.” C*

*“The first meetings identified some of the issues in that area. Then the Forest Service started out by giving information at the next series of meetings on water, which was too technical – over people’s heads. Then they realized there were some changes needed. The Forest Service came back with a blank sheet and said, ‘You tell us what’s going on here.’ That wasn’t fruitful. Then the Forest Service came back and said, ‘This is how things are...do you agree?’ That was more helpful, as the public didn’t need to have technical knowledge for that. From that they were getting a clue that we’ve got to bring some information, we can’t just have it open ended. So then at the next meeting, they actually had some management themes and what would fit under those themes, and they asked us to have discussions about that.” C*

Sometimes adaptations are necessary to keep the USFS staff from burning out:

*“The Forest Service continued to learn new processes and changed their approaches, depending on the communities they were in. They changed the intensity of how they addressed some of the issues, to get to the values, partially so that staff weren’t getting worn out or bored with recreating the wheel.” C*

Midstream course corrections or changes can be good, but if they are not explained or are perceived to be sudden changes, they can breed distrust.

*“The steering committee started out open to the public to sit in, but became closed to the public. It got to be very exclusionary and people around here don’t like that.” C*

*“The way the public comments were taken at the public meetings changed ... from being an open forum to more of an open house. I don’t know why or where all those comments ended up.” C*

The message here is to be flexible but transparent about mid-course corrections and changes.

When given a chance to reflect on how the collaborative forest planning process has fared, individuals in our study identified five outcomes:

- 1) Increased mutual learning and understanding;**
- 2) Increased productive dialogue among diverse stakeholders;**
- 3) Evolving trust relationships;**
- 4) Sustained local participation and support for forest planning and beyond;**
- 5) A work in progress – taking a wait-and-see attitude.**

## **1) Increased mutual learning and understanding**

One of the most cited outcomes of collaborative forest planning is that individuals are afforded unprecedented opportunities for learning about community values and expertise, constraints on resource management, and forest planning process in general.

*“You get to know what other agencies are doing and the problems that they’re facing, maybe budgetary or personnel problems. You learn the problems because of the interaction of the different people and different agencies at those meetings. You become much more knowledgeable about not only all the associated problems that everybody has but all of the positive things ... you might help them and vice versa. Then you also find out how damn opinionated people are and that they have no flexibility.” C*

*“I think those that were actually community members that were part of the cooperating agencies have better understanding of the entire scope of what we’re trying to do, our mission, and how we do things. The community definitely has a better understanding of what we are trying to do and of the difference between forest planning and project planning.” C*

*“Some people walk in with their ideology kind of on their lapel. And by the end their points of view had softened quite a bit, and they had a better understanding of the realities. I had one guy tell me on a tour, ‘Man I wouldn’t want your job,’ when he realized what we were really up against. And the complexities – things aren’t as straightforward and simple as people think they are. Most people said they learned a lot about what really goes on in the woods and why we do some of the things we do, or why we propose to do some of the things we do.” FS*

*“We went through the study group process, which was really a learning process for the participants. They’re the ones who help us understand community vision. If they’re going to participate in national forest planning, they have to have some grounding. In other words, they have to have some level of education regarding national forest management so that they can participate in a meaningful fashion in this process. So we went through a lot of educational work first – laying out issues, management, and concerns. And then, in turn, we took that information back from the study group – what their knowledge of the forest is, what their concerns are, and things of that nature.” FS*

## 2) Increased productive dialogue among diverse stakeholders

Collaboration opens up and sets expectations for continuous dialogue between Forest Service and community. Not just about forest planning, but it can be the foundation for ongoing planning in the future. Collaboration, then, is not just a one-shot interaction with the community, but a continuous dialogue.

*“This is the first time I’ve been involved with a government organization, like the Forest Service, where I honestly felt I was being listened to, [the commissioner] was being listened to, other people were being listened to. There’s a history of distrust for the Feds, but I think this process has a good opportunity to turn that around. And when they find out how much has changed because of comments, I think it’s going to alleviate some of that distrust.” C*

*“In the collaborative learning [process], I have on more than one occasion had someone diametrically opposed to our position on an issue say, ‘Yeah, I’d rather argue with you than some representative from a national group.’ So when we go to meetings that we think are useless in terms of the end result, frequently the only reason is so people can put names and faces together. So when we disagree, we do so in a less confrontational manner, and they know their actions are coming from the heart.” C*

*“People’s level of knowledge and understanding about these issues, that they didn’t have walking into the process, is heightened. The dialogue helps us as Forest Service employees understand the values of the people that live in these communities and the local politics ... Understanding what local politicians, elected officials, and resource managers are thinking helps us be able to say, ‘Okay, what’s interesting about this or that idea? Not just, ‘I don’t like it,’ or ‘I do like it,’ but, ‘I’m not sure I like it, but tell me more about that so I understand it better.’” FS*

*“I think it’s really the wave of the future, and the only way that you’re going to make much progress on most of these issues of forest management. The process is the only way you really can move beyond conflict. A lot of side benefits result because of the personal relationships you build among community members. They have to interact with each other as individual human beings, and it reduces the whole level of conflict and tension over issues. People are a lot less likely to blame one another, like with letters to the editor, if next week they have to talk to them face to face.” C*

### 3) Evolving trust relationships

Despite the positive perspectives relating to learning and dialogue, collaborative forest planning does not necessarily lead to improved trust relationships. It is, however, perhaps a beginning or a transition.

*“I think it was important to get to know those people and where they’re coming from ... [maybe] it’s a trust thing, but I know it’s a more open communication on a better level.” C*

*“We [Forest Service] offer a lot of expertise on resource management issues, but the trust isn’t there yet. If we say, ‘This is how the model is, this is how we see it [resource management issue],’ they want somebody else to check it out. We see this with a coalition of the steering committee hiring their own consultants to come up with their own numbers.” FS*

*“Some of those who worked side by side and helped us come to the final outcome appealed the plan, and some of the appeal points were things that some of us felt were fully resolved in the steering committee process. And I think the trust level there is affected – do you still trust the person or not. I myself think it wasn’t an unexpected outcome. For some of those folks, siding with the Forest Service and saying this is a good thing – well, there was nothing in it for them at the end. At least I know in my heart that a lot of those folks still gained a lot from the process and really did have a good understanding of where we ended up.” FS*

Trust building is an outcome of relationship building, both of which cost an enormous amount of time. There are opportunity costs to investing this time in relationship and trust building. If time is invested in relationship building in a forest planning process, the opportunity cost may be completing the necessary technical analysis for the plan:

*“Good relationships always happen, but only with time. The more time you spend together, the more trust and relationship building you have. Great. But in the meantime everybody is getting worn out. So it’s a compromise as to whether you spend a lot of time building trust and relationships or a lot of time gathering information, taking the professional expertise that you have on staff, condensing it, and making a decision. You invite everybody to a series of 18 to 24 meetings so that you can get to know one another. Great. But at the end [if] you’re not able to finish the process, the relationship didn’t do much good.” C*

## 4) Sustained local participation and support for forest planning and beyond

The social outcomes of collaboration can be measured by several indicators, including indications of local support, sustained participation, and spin-off collaborations. By bringing community stakeholders into the process, collaboration can produce local champions of the process who understand what and why decisions are made, which one USFS planner sees as a valuable metric of collaboration success:

*“The biggest success we’ve seen is when we go into community meetings and we see the local representatives stand up and tell everyone that we [Forest Service] really made an effort to involve everyone and get the community input. They really stand up for the process even if they don’t necessarily like the outcomes.” FS*

Sustained, enthusiastic participation throughout the process is also a metric of success:

*“We had a lot of staying power within the group ... because they were engaged. They were being asked to participate. They weren’t there to simply listen, they were there to roll up their sleeves and present us with creative solutions to difficult problems. So we had very good participation and a lot of staying power in the groups. We had a very, very small dropout rate.” FS*

Produces collaborative relationships beyond the forest plan:

*“I think another big benefit is that although people come in for one thing, they may remain engaged to continue on and do some other things for you. Not just decision-making things, but I think we sometimes bring people in through our collaborative processes on project or forest planning, and they end up becoming volunteers on recreation projects or something totally different.” FS*

*“When the Missionary Ridge fire happened in 2002, we were trying to figure out how to quickly engage the community on a lot of fronts. We relied on a group called the Regional Resource Coordinating Committee [RRCC]. The Office of Community Services at Fort Lewis College, Forest Service, and BLM are members, so we had that connection. The local economic development group and the RC&D... there’s like eight groups that are in it. Operation Healthy Communities is a big part and chairs it. RRCC met and invited not just the eight members but Red Cross and other folks, and had all kinds of stuff up and rolling in a week. That never would have happened if the San Juan hadn’t had this collaborative focus and was already working with so many of those people. [Otherwise] I’m not sure so many of them would have said, ‘Sure we’ll drop what we’re doing and we’ll be there.’” FS*

*“We’re seeing land use committees and stuff that the counties didn’t used to have. They formerly didn’t look at their whole picture, how this segment interacts with that segment, and how this area interacts with that area. This spills over into the Forest Service and any of the public lands. There’s a lot more awareness of how it all fits together.” C*

The “spill-over” effects from collaborative forest planning into other issues or projects can be profound and underscore the ongoing, continuous nature of collaboration as a social process.



## 5) A work in progress – taking a wait-and-see attitude

During the forest planning processes that we have examined, a common public perception is that we need to wait and see what the outcome of the plan is before we can evaluate how effective collaboration has been. At the heart of this perception is the question, “Have they listened to us?” Until people see that some things they have said have been incorporated in the final plan, they will withhold judgment as to whether the process is working, or has improved. **Let’s just wait and see.**

*“And we won’t know how successful we are until we’re done and we put the document out on the street.” C*

*“The proof is in the pudding. Time will tell if this works and people feel that they’ve been heard and the input is there. People will look at this and say either, ‘This has been a good process and the way we need to be going, we need to go more this way,’ or, if they feel they haven’t been heard, then it can crumble.” C*

While USFS staff believe there are many benefits from collaboration, they also are challenged by the practical steps of incorporating the learning, relationship building, and local community knowledge into a forest plan revision. While they have felt strongly they have for the most part been doing the right thing by being more collaborative, until the forest plan revision is completed, reservations remain.

*“We have been basically succeeding in climbing out of the hole, but whether we truly get out of the hole is dependent on how people view our proposal and our final decision, as to whether or not they can see actual contributions on their part in our forest plan. ‘We [the public] are really going to withhold judgment until we see what you come up with.’ That’s fair.” FS*

There is a sense that the “opportunities” have been created – that the stage has been set, so to speak – for moving forward towards a new form of partnership:

*“We’ve had every opportunity to find out what they’re doing – they’re so totally open. We’ve had every opportunity to tell them what we want, provide them with our input and so forth that it really justifies a huge expenditure of time and money. Unless they totally turn around and do what they’re told to do by Washington D.C., they’ve got cover.” C*

**“They’ve got backup for their decisions”**

“Cynically, you could say that the supervisors already know these things [that there was a divergence of opinions about forest management] from the beginning, but the advantage to them is that we can’t claim that we didn’t have our opportunity and neither could anybody else. The supervisors have the best of all worlds. They’ve got backup for their decisions. We really believe that the supervisors won’t take advantage of us in this regard but only time will tell. We will see how brave they really are.” C

If, for some reason, the collaborative efforts and investments being made are not fruitful, don't result in building better relationships and creating a more supportable forest plan, then a great deal will be lost. **Trust, a tremendously valuable asset which has taken a significant investment and has been growing, will be lost, resulting in a significant step backward:**

*“If they don't incorporate the work of the TWiGs and public meetings as we filter down and get more and more specific, then they have failed and they will step back 15 years and will lose the trust that we are beginning to build again with some parts of the communities and the forest [agency]. We shall see.” C*



# VI. Collaborative Process Design



After an internal organizational capacity assessment has been made, a firm decision made to implement a collaborative process and monitor it, and expectations clearly defined, the next most important element is deciding **what sort of collaborative community process will be utilized**. This involves making choices about a broad range of key elements or orientations in the planning process. The selection of these process components, including which group interaction and facilitation approaches and tools will be used, will significantly affect the character, framework, and length of the entire forest planning process.

We identified 12 attributes of process design for collaborative forest planning from our case study:

- 1) **Focus on Desired Future Conditions;**
- 2) **Place/landscape-based process;**
- 3) **Topic/issue-based process;**
- 4) **Structure and organization of group processes;**
- 5) **Methods for tracking community input and information;**
- 6) **Role of third-party facilitator;**
- 7) **Maps as tools to facilitate dialogue and collaborative learning;**
- 8) **Planning for contingencies;**
- 9) **Integrating various data;**
- 10) **Bringing in outside assistance;**
- 11) **Steering committee and cooperating agency status utilization;**
- 12) **Heightened communication.**

In most applications observed through this research the emphasis in collaboration was on either regional meetings or orientations, but in local communities where USFS Ranger District offices were located, the general lessons learned about engagement and dialogue could also be applied to working with stakeholders and public at a greater geographic distance. Among the cases examined in this research in the Rocky Mountain West, it was pretty much possible for the national forests to focus on a few communities that were closely aligned with their districts, and around which they could focus their collaborative involvement. In other geographic areas, for example the US Forest Service Southern Region where communities are closer together, a strategy for “multiple community engagement” will likely be necessary. (This need could well deserve additional inquiry.)

In the national forest cases we examined, there was also an increasing use of websites to archive and share meeting notes, share resource specialists' assessments, and even provide opportunities for any interested party to participate through comment surveys or by listing a management concern regarding a given ecological theme or landscape. The increased use of appropriate communication technologies may facilitate collaborative involvement among some segments of the public, but will most likely never take the place of face-to-face participation, whenever that is possible.

## 1) Focus on Desired Future Conditions

Three of the six forests in our case study are conducting plan revisions in a manner consistent with the 2005 planning rule (as published in the Federal Register, vol. 70, no. 3, January 5, 2005, pp. 1023-1061). Under the new rule, each forest plan begins with desired conditions, which are defined as "the social, economic, and ecological attributes toward which management of the land and resources of the plan area is to be directed. Desired conditions are aspirations and are not commitments or final decisions approving projects and activities, and may be achievable only over a long time period." (Federal Register, vol. 70, no. 3, January 5, 2005, p. 1057)

Desired conditions, or desired future conditions, are highly useful starting points in collaborative forest planning. As one forest planner contends, it is a simple way to engage community participants in expressing what is important to them about the national forest:

*"We did say from the outset that in terms of decision space afforded to the forest supervisor to make decisions, because there are all these boundaries of environmental law, probably the most effective involvement of a person from the general public would be a discussion of those desired conditions. In fact, the questions we asked people at the local level meetings were, 'What uses do you have in the national forest? Where specifically do you do that use?' And, most importantly, 'Why do you go there as opposed to somewhere else to do that use?' What we were trying to figure out is, given the geographic areas on a particular district, how are some of those uses getting played out across a district? Is there one area that's attracting the majority of people for a particular use because of a specific reason, as opposed to another area that doesn't have that same attraction? If that's the case, then maybe that's a good way for us to start thinking about managing that landscape around that value or around that use. So our initial focus was on desired conditions. That is the anchor, the rock of our plan. It is the place for us to continually go back to and say, 'How different are we today versus where we want to be in the future?'" FS*

Engaging diverse community stakeholders in a collaborative dialogue to define desired future conditions provides a gateway to stair-step into other plan elements, such as objectives, special designations, and land suitability:

*“The elements we had hoped to get advised on are primarily desired conditions ... And that’s where we spent most of our effort. In the last year or so, we have sort of gotten away from desired condition. We’ve been taking the information that we learned in our first round or two of meetings, of workshops, massaging that, and reviewing it internally and with our partners in the regional office. But with the public more recently we have focused on objectives, which is a way to get towards desired conditions – activities you might actually do. We talked to them about special designations as well: What are areas so special that we might want to have an emphasis on a particular management? So those are the three elements we have spent time on in collaboration: desired condition, objectives, and special designations.” FS*

Despite emphasizing desired future conditions (DFCs), planners find it inevitable that stakeholders want to talk about management actions to achieve DFCs – especially timber harvesting, grazing, and other vegetation management practices:

*“Where we get divergent opinions is how we get from where we are to the end condition. Whether it is very passive management, or very active management, or something in the middle. It’s primarily in the desired conditions. There has been grudging acknowledgement that the other solutions are not entirely bad. For instance, we see people that are on the environmental spectrum, saying, ‘Well, I can see that there is a place for grazing. Although I would prefer to have no grazing at all, I don’t think that is realistic. And so how are we going to graze it in the most sensitive way?’ Or, ‘I can see that there places where vegetation management is a quicker way to get the desired condition.’ And we see people on the more commodity end saying, ‘I can see there is value to having undisturbed areas and places. We get a primitive experience in the motorized access.’ We’re acknowledging the value, to an extent, of each other’s positions.” FS*

## **DRAFT VISION STATEMENT-GUNNISON BASIN**

The Gunnison Basin is a diverse place of multiple uses that provide for sustainable, healthy ecosystems with rich biodiversity. Ecological, social, and economic conditions vary from a highly developed ski resort to pristine wilderness and other special areas. Naturalness and scenic beauty are maintained while providing year-round recreation opportunities. Headwaters, unique flora and fauna, and special geologic, historic, and research areas are recognized and sustained. Forestlands are valued and respected by all types of users who, being good stewards, collaborate in protecting values and uses important to individual quality of life and community well-being.

### **Contributions that the National Forest System lands in the Gunnison Basin will make:**

- Rugged, remote, altitude, climate, untouched, spectacular beauty/scenery, high peaks, vistas
- Diversity of terrain and wildlife, more land above timberline
- Large amounts of public lands with free motorized and non-motorized public access
- Water, wood, minerals, forage, rocks, renewable resources
- Stable community and regional economies
- Freedom from stress, escape, peace
- Cultural heritage – Native Americans
- Enjoyment of nature in a pristine state
- Wilderness areas help protect quality of life and is a draw for visitors
- Mental and spiritual health benefits
- Assist local economies in a sustainable way
- Land for education and research
- Higher percentage of roadless/undeveloped lands
- Protected lands and resources
- History of mining and railroads
- Ecological values and benefits
- Tourism generator
- Alpine Loop (winter and summer), Silver Thread

*Gunnison Basin Geographic Area (GMUG Website)*

## **DIXIE FISHLAKE NATIONAL FORESTS DESIRED CONDITIONS – SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC – DRAFT 6/15/04**

The Dixie and Fishlake National Forests contribute to the sustainability of the social and economic systems in southwest Utah. The National Forests do not independently sustain a social and economic system, but are critical components of the system. Forest managers understand the numerous ways people are linked to the Forest. These links are balanced within the managers' decision space. Forest managers understand how their decisions may affect current and future social and economic conditions. Objective decisions balance science, multiple uses, sustainability, and desired conditions for the good of the land over time. The Forest is managed with a sustainable, multiple-use philosophy.

Local communities and Forest users understand how their actions may affect others and participate in appropriate activities. This understanding is supported by cooperative education programs. Forest users are good stewards of the land:

- They exhibit responsible behavior;
- They encourage others to do the same; and
- They contribute to society's responsibility for the long-term sustainability of the Forests.

*(Excerpted from the Dixie-Fishlake National Forest's planning website,  
<http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/dixie/projects/FParea/HomePage.htm>.)*



One strategy used on several forests to hone in on DFCs is to center the collaborative discussion on “need for change.” On one forest, the progression from DFCs to need for change followed a logical sequence of community meetings:

*“[W]e had a round of 10 geographic-area level meetings, and we asked people what they do on the forest, and why do they go there instead of someplace else. The idea was to get at their values, of how they were using the forest, and what it is about the forest that they value. Then we did a second round of 10 workshops at the geographic-area level. This time we asked people what about the way the forest is now would they like to see retained in the future, and what would they like to see changed in the future. This is getting very directly at their desired conditions. We took that input, massaged it, and changed it into ‘planner-ese,’ and developed an outline of bulleted statements about desired conditions for six broad topics. And we took those back to the forest level, back to the five communities, and showed them what we had heard at the local-area level, and we got a reaction to that.” FS*

Need for change discussions can draw on the existing forest plan as a starting point:

*“I believe the revision looks at these decisions that were made 15 years ago and asks if they’re still valid. Have things changed enough that we need to have the conditions change out there? So, I think the desired condition is the one element that’s consistent and most valuable. This is what the desired condition is that we’ve identified in the current forest plan. This is the condition on the ground. Is this still a valid desired condition and if not, what would you like to see? And is it feasible to do that from what we have on the ground now?” FS*

## 2) Place/landscape-based process

One of the more interesting innovations coming from the forests in this case study is the organization of collaborative processes around geographic areas – an approach that has been called “place-based planning.” By focusing on geographic places, USFS planning staff have noticed that discussions gravitate towards problem-solving rather than focusing solely on preferred policy positions on X or Y management practices:

*“We decided to go another scale down to the local communities, and had these community workshops all centered on a town that basically had a ranger district office in it. So we talked about the specific district. And we went even further than that and said in terms of loosely using this sense of place philosophy, that a district can be divided into several geographic areas that would represent a place. People can draw on a map the influence area of Duck Creek, and the district personnel would probably do the same thing. So we decided to have each district divided up into geographic areas that would represent ‘places.’ They could be centered on landmarks ... these were areas people could identify with. So at these local area workshops we had specific conversations about each geographic area. It was a forum for people to get out their more specific linkage to the N.F. – my particular use, my particular value with the area. So that’s how we started out.” FS*

*“Small is beautiful. I don’t know how the process might be changed to streamline it and just focus on certain pieces that certain people who want to be involved want to contribute on. For those of us in Durango to look at the entire San Juan National Forest when most of us have knowledge of our neighborhood in the forest but not beyond that, it would be great to break it up into districts or regions or neighborhoods, or something to get more focused input with the goal of streamlining.” C*

## “ Talking about smaller pieces of the forest ”

“Another guiding principle was to make it as place-based as possible, by subdividing the forest into geographic areas along social, economic, and ecological factors. We went to the small communities, talking about the parts of the forests and the landscape they were most interested in. So we really chunked it down to make it place-based and motivate people to participate. They could see that their input was tied to forest plan revision, yet they were talking about smaller pieces of the forest which they had most ownership in, rather than the entire three million acres in a broad sense. If we would have kept it broad-scaled or kind of generic forest-wide, a lot of dialogue turns into policy based, positional dialogue: ‘Why I don’t like timber harvest. Why I don’t like oil and gas leasing.’ If you can pin it down to a landscape, then, ‘Okay I can agree that timber harvest is an appropriate use in this spot. There are other spots that I would fight to the death, but there are areas of the forests where certain activities are appropriate,’ rather than people having to take policy positions, dogmatic and ideological positions.” FS

## **LANDSCAPE WORKING GROUP PROCESS ON THE GRAND MESA-UNCOMPAHGRE- GUNNISON NATIONAL FOREST (GMUG)**

As a part of each geographic area assessment, a landscape working group (LWG) was established, which essentially included any and all individuals and groups interested in the desired future condition and management of the geographic area. Each LWG was a facilitated collaborative learning process providing opportunities for diverse stakeholders to contribute to defining issues, current conditions, and desired future conditions.

From February 2002 through October 2003, the GMUG planning team held 42 LWG meetings in communities throughout the GMUG area, starting with the Uncompahgre Plateau and ending with the Gunnison River Basin. There were 1,035 registered participants representing the broad spectrum of perspectives, interests, and organizations with a stake in the GMUG.

Each LWG meeting was convened by a neutral third-party facilitator contracted through the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution, a federal agency based in Tucson, Arizona. The facilitator helped establish and maintain an atmosphere for productive mutual learning. A collaborative learning process fosters respectful, civil interchange between LWG participants and the planning team by emphasizing need for change and how desired landscape conditions can be achieved or maintained.

The LWGs collectively developed vision statements for the desired future conditions for four out of the five geographic areas and provided recommendations for each specific landscape (with the exception of the Uncompahgre Plateau). This information will be carried through into the geographic area assessments, with the range of landscape-specific objectives for desired future conditions and potential management actions. The LWG process and geographic area assessments are “pre-NEPA” and do not constitute a decision or federal action.

The GMUG was committed to a place-based collaborative process from the start, structuring the community collaboration around the five geographic areas that comprised the 3.1 million-acre national forest.

For each geographic area, the planning team focused on developing a ‘geographic area assessment’ defining historic and current conditions, analyzing risks and trends, and recommending desired future conditions and management actions to be considered in the draft plan revision.

The GMUG introduced a “landscape management themes” framework where each theme denoted a general set of characteristics for a type of landscape. On one end of the spectrum was Theme One, which are landscapes shaped only by natural disturbances and no management intervention would ever occur (e.g., congressionally designated wilderness). On the other end was Theme Eight, which are landscapes permanently altered by human intervention, with impervious surfaces and permanent structures (e.g., ski resort or subdivision development). At the LWG meetings, community stakeholders and USFS staff would break out into small groups around small-scale (large amount of detail) maps of the GMUG geographic area that had been delineated into smaller landscape units. As members of the GMUG planning team explain the process:

*“The landscapes were chosen through an exercise between the core planning team representatives and the district ranger and staff. Sometimes they were just logically watersheds. Some of the times they were more place-based areas. Folks generally relate to places like the Flat Tops. And again, boundaries are never perfect. But in terms of capturing 80 percent of the area and the desires of management on that place, it works.” FS*

*“At meetings where there were smaller breakouts – 10 to 12 people – they had three regions [landscapes] they were to talk about. Participants were assigned one area and got to choose two others. There was a series of questions that they were trying to answer. They had enough space where they could put in all comments. Management themes were used. We were asked if there was a way to manage the forest differently. They tried to break up interests of participants, so the tables represented a diversity of experiences and interests ... not all environmentalists or ranchers at one table. We got to hear back at the end of the meeting what each group had to say about a particular place. Surprisingly, at the end of the night, the groups were very close in what they had to say. They then went to different communities and did the same thing, then came back and gave a representation of what happened in other communities.” C*

By focusing on landscape management themes, stakeholders tend to abandon hard positions and are able to have more holistic discussions about the desired future condition for specific pieces of ground:

*“We moved the focus to a ‘management theme’ concept, with only a few meetings left. The public loved it. They could really look at a landscape and understand the interconnections of resources. We had people sit at tables where they knew the landscape well. People wanted to work longer – and we added two meetings to finish the process. It gave them the ability to learn and make suggestions regarding themes and putting systems together. They were learning without a formal presentation – they wanted to work longer because it worked for them. This increased the capacity of the public to work together!” FS*

*“Everybody comes into the meeting ready to defend their interest. They’re convinced that we’re going to shut this area down to timber or we’re going to close all these trails, etc. They pretty quickly see that you can do a lot of different things on the landscape, that a lot of activities can be compatible, and that we’re not going to do this at the exclusion of that. [Management] themes really help because they set a general framework for this area. It’s not real strict ... yes, it’s a theme three, and a natural process is going to be emphasized, but you can still do some things in there. You can still manage some timber for insect disease, not for timber production. This area is going to be a five, it’s going to be more heavily managed than the three over there, but there are still going to be areas that are semi-primitive non-motorized. I think that works, rather than saying this area right here is going to all be wilderness.” FS*

Not all forests are ready or able to initiate the intensive process used on the GMUG. Nevertheless, there are approaches that can emphasize specific geographic places that can get at the same type of outcome as the LWG process, as the San Juan National Forest is attempting through a “community study group” process:

*“A lot of our focus is to organize around the three ranger district field offices in those communities, pretty much like we did with the study groups earlier. Just the west side extends a lot farther west and north with the BLM now included. We’ll spend our first few sessions just talking a little bit about what we’re trying to accomplish, some background materials, probably do some vision/niche type of stuff. Probably do some of those exercises about, ‘Where’s a special place and what’s important about it’ – some of that kind of stuff to get going.” FS*

*“The focus of the study groups was trying to understand how the communities see their futures. Local knowledge comes into play in that question. So you’d have a group over on the west side of the forest that has a whole different culture than the Durango group, which has a different culture than the primarily retirement group over in Pagosa Springs. So you have three really distinct cultures working, and the groups were like night and day. But it’s okay to develop plans around those types of themes also. When you’re thinking in terms of how you want to actually zone a forest, it’s okay to think in terms of those smaller geographic areas.” FS*

### 3) Topic/issue-based process

As encouraging as the place-based approaches have been in collaborative forest planning, there are issues that defy spatial boundaries and stakeholders who need more than a place-based collaborative planning process. Planners on the Dixie-Fishlake National Forest supplemented their geographically-focused collaborative process with topical working groups:

*“It became pretty obvious to us that there were other things out there that people were interested in that were not necessarily spatially based – not necessarily a national forest thing or a geographic area thing. They are a topic thing or an issue thing. People really couldn’t care less about whether it is locally specific or forest-wide. They just want to talk generally about the concept. So we decided to go with what we called topical working groups, which had the acronym of TWiGS.” FS*

Non-spatial issues tend to be about forest uses. Access for recreation, logging, livestock grazing, and water rights are a few examples. They may have spatial implications but, as issues, they apply to all public lands. Interest groups are generally organized around policy positions pertaining to the suitability of specific uses and, therefore, require a public process that is not solely focused on geographic areas. As such, the Dixie-Fishlake organized the TWiGs as a way to engage stakeholders in discussions pertaining to land suitability, which is defined by the new planning rule: “An area may be identified as generally suitable for uses that are compatible with desired conditions and objectives for the area.” (Federal Register, vol. 70 no. 3, January 5, 2005, p. 1057)

*“Initially we had the TWiGS set up to deal with the suitability question. Where is a use suitable? Some of them have broadened out, and they want to talk about objectives or perhaps even standards because the suitability issue was difficult for them to grasp. And we have some region-wide or national direction on suitability for some issues, and some groups felt maybe this was a decision that was already made.” FS*

*“The other thing here would be suitable uses. The overriding statement or thought process here is that there are many different uses on the national forest, and they are suitable to occur on the national forest unless they have been determined to be unsuitable, not appropriate. And that’s where the TWiGS have really been focused. Where is it appropriate and where is not appropriate to have a certain use occur in the national forest?” FS*

Finding common ground around the suitability of specific national forest uses remains the most vexing social dimension challenge of public lands policy, planning, and management. While community stakeholders actively participated in the collaborative TWiG processes, they remain cynical about the outcomes:

*“If they want to practice collaboration in the planning process, then they better have the backbone to include something like the suggestions that came out of the timber TWiG. Otherwise, our TWiG was useless. We gave them something that was incredible as far as common ground on a really touchy point. I don’t think they’ll do it but if they did, it would prove to me that they were really trying hard to work with what we gave them and stick it into the plan and then stand by it.” C*

*“I’m serving on the Dixie’s timber suitability task force, and the driver for that, based on the forest planning process, is that the law says you have to address timber suitability. Gosh, we blew that up 10 to 20 years ago with appeals and lawsuits because no one wants to use the national forest just as a timber crop... Why are we driving down that road? Our TWiG group came to an agreement that timber suitability was not the issue. It had to do with priority future conditions on vegetative management. The law may have some teeth in it, but I think there’s flexibility in the planning process to talk about vegetative management across the landscape without focusing again on commercial timber sales. Each time it keeps coming back to that regulatory question, [where] it crashed on take-off to begin with. So, planning staff on the two forests have had that stuck in their heads and they acknowledged it ... we get dragged back to it every time we meet. I’ve been so vocal about it that our group asked me to be the spokesman. Even the enviro’s agreed for me to speak out about it. I think they agree with us. If there is ever a time to fix this stuff, it’s now.” C*

Despite the challenges, organizing a collaborative process around non-spatial forest issues or uses can be a productive way of engaging diverse stakeholders in a proactive, collaborative learning-oriented dialogue, as planners on the San Juan have done:

*“After we went through the study group process, we then transitioned into a thing called work groups, which was more resource-oriented. You may have a work group which is focused on recreation issues, or range management, or timber management. The idea was to become more grounded with the subtle nuances of that type of management, with the idea that if you’re working with an educated participant you’ll end up with a set of very knowledgeable, reasoned recommendations. The recommendations themselves would then be used to build a series of management alternatives for the forest. Again, we were trying to ground those alternatives compatibly with community futures. You didn’t want to have the community thinking along these lines, with us going off in this [different] direction in terms of management ... you’d end up with a forest plan that has no acceptance, no grounding in any sort of reasonable collaboration.” FS*

Both the **landscape-** and **issue-based** approaches have contributions to make towards a well-grounded, collaborative forest planning process. The landscape emphasis promotes an integrated focus on particular pieces of ground, where local knowledge may be especially helpful, and where trade-offs among desired future conditions and appropriate uses can be made in real, on-the-ground terms. The issues-based approach facilitates in-depth discussions of key management concerns and resource uses – such as recreation and travel management, forest restoration, wildfire management, or water conservation – enabling a deeper analysis of “suitability” and related management strategies.

While we have noted individual or distinct uses of these perspectives by particular national forests, it is also evident that both approaches often need to be used in a comprehensive, collaborative process. In fact, it would appear that utilizing both the landscape- and issues-based approaches can move the planning and problem-solving dialogue along further and deepen the collaborative process. Since these and other collaborative methods are continually emergent, we should expect that specific new techniques for each will be discovered, perhaps allowing for further integration in ways that will enhance the special contributions of each.

It is also evident that somewhat different skills and capacities are required to implement the landscape- and issues-based approaches, whether it be in the length of time to conduct the processes, the different uses of GIS-based data, or how staff are allocated to document and communicate the results of dialogue and problem solving.

## 4) Structure and organization of group processes

Collaboration implies a continuous interaction among stakeholders over time in order to maximize social learning, information sharing, problem solving, and relationship and trust building. In this way, collaboration differs from traditional public involvement, which tends to take the form of singular public “scoping” meetings.

USFS staff and community stakeholders with broad experience in collaborative forest planning have learned about the nuances of how to structure and organize collaborative group processes:

*“A combination of large group presentation and participatory decision-making was a part of every meeting. All meetings were three hours and would include some shared information. Breaks are very important. Always include some small group process with heterogeneous groups, including numbers on name tags to break them up. Do it convivially. Always have a task at hand to do – talk about this, do this. Build capacity by training district folks to be small group facilitators. Have small groups report back to the large group where everyone hears each other’s ideas, and finally, a wrap-up or synthesis. Hear everyone’s voice at least three times. Send out summaries on the web. Issue identification – make sure everybody understands – ‘this is what we’re doing tonight.’ Otherwise, you’re lost if you don’t have this.” FS*

Having the right mix of presentations, participatory decision-making, plus large and small group activities appear to be critical in keeping people engaged and making sure diverse voices and viewpoints are heard. Specific techniques include flipchart recording and using colored dots to prioritize issues for all to see:

*“After doing the presentations, we wanted to capture their thoughts, concerns, and recommendations regarding management. So quite often we would break into smaller groups and through a facilitated process try and capture information from the group itself or the subgroups.” FS*

*“Each time we met we discussed a different topic, and then [the facilitator] would ask a series of questions. Then people would speak up and say, ‘I’d like to see a road into so-and-so place,’ or ‘I’d like to see better access into such and such.’ Every time somebody said something it was written on the chart, and then they’d go through and evaluate each thing.” C*

*“You only have so many dots, so you really have to prioritize your own ideas and issues before prioritizing the larger board of the issues, or solutions, or problems that people see. I think that’s an excellent technique to utilize because you not only have to make the decision on what is most important to you. The individual aspect of seeing what’s important to the different groups of people was very important, very informative.” C*

Planning staff and community stakeholders have also learned about the benefits and drawbacks of an open-invite versus a selective-invite process:



*“If study groups are used, you almost have to select participants. Otherwise you tend to get your paid guns who are on someone’s time clock, as well as retirees or second-home owners – regular working folks don’t have as much time to be present consistently. You also tend to get people saying, ‘You didn’t ask me.’ Those are the weaknesses of a consistent group format. At open meetings, you get more of the ‘everybodies’ there. There are strengths and weaknesses in whatever public process you use – you just have to recognize them.” FS*

*“Having participants at the succession of meetings is important, because you build a relationship with the people around the table. If you just come around the table twice, you don’t have the same trust and openness that you do if you come around the table eight times and you worked through it from the beginning.” C*

*“Originally, we thought we could get people involved who would stay involved, and they would see this process through and be part of the iteration. What we learned pretty quickly is that without having an advisory group or a FACA [Federal Advisory Committee Act] authorized group, you get a different collection of people every time. You get a few, a couple dozen, that have been involved from the beginning and have stuck with it. But a lot of people come in and are involved with one phase, and then they slip back out. It is sort of growing like a snowball rolling down hill. We are getting more people involved each time we do something. But it’s a different set.” FS*

*“In terms of the public meetings, the most memorable were the ‘alternatives’ meetings. I went to three of those and they were all open-house format rather than stand up and speak. It was very interesting the way that people interacted in those meetings. It was a lot different, and I had a number of friendly, constructive conversations with people ostensibly on the other side of the fence where we came to understand each other’s viewpoints a lot better.” C*

If the USFS expects a large, consistent turnout of a representative spectrum of the community, it must schedule community meetings so that people can attend. Business hours during weekdays are likely the worst possible times:

*“And they hold them (the meetings) in the day so people can’t be there ... I know they’re doing that so they can cut down on the amount of people they have to talk to. People resent that they set these meetings up during the day. And they say, ‘Well that’s because we have to get people from here and there and everywhere.’ It’s fine to bring ‘em in, put ‘em up for the night.” C*

Having both open-invite and selective-invite collaborative processes is worth considering, but requires an enormous amount of pre-planning and commitment of staff resources. As such, organizing internal staff roles and participation in the collaborative process is essential:

*“The organization was pretty much done by the planners but we were given an assignment, usually either to give a presentation or facilitate a group. Usually the ID team members would be there, and then there would be even smaller groups within the plan – groups that were interested in a specific thing, such as the suitable base or something we were doing in timber. Then that group would be facilitated by me, for example.” FS*

*“We had different people from the Forest Service, which was a really good idea because they could provide the initial insight as to what perhaps they were looking for, and perhaps they would introduce themselves. Then they would take a backseat role and listen while the questions were asked, comments were made, and things were taken down. The people that came in were very well prepared in terms of presenting why they needed this information and what they were going to do with it when they got it. We had everybody there, and everything that the Forest Service represents had a representative there.” C*

## 5) Methods for tracking community input and information

During the course of a collaborative process, especially one that may involve multiple community meetings, there is a lot of information and feedback exchanged. The process is fluid and prone to continuous change, which is often necessary to keep up with changing conditions. While USFS staff may attend all the meetings and have an overall picture of what is happening, community stakeholders may not attend all the meetings and often wonder what is happening to their input and where the input fits into the whole process. The forests in our case study developed **ways of tracking community input and information in order to be transparent**. Working with a steering committee of locally elected officials, one forest spent several weeks working through the wording for objectives, standards, and guidelines:

*“We used a set of matrices for the objectives, standards, and guidelines. For each comment or suggestion the steering committee came up with, we explained how it did or did not get incorporated into the new draft. It was time consuming and a laborious process, but it gave us a chance to show the group that we were seriously considering their input, and actually showing them where and how that input resulted in changes. For some of the committee, this was a real turning point in building trust and showing we were listening.” FS*

“ **There’s some assurance that their input is going to be important** ”

“With this ‘creative system of collaboration’ where everybody throws their ideas out and you try to come up with what’s really important and walk out, what happens if the professional planner, once he gets all the input, says, ‘Yeah, I’d like to do all that, too, but it’s not realistic.’ And so it doesn’t come in the final plan. Then people look at it and say, ‘Well, why the hell did I spend all my time doing this if it didn’t get in there?’ So I think it’s important that when people leave the room after that night’s collaborative work, there’s some assurance that their input is going to be important enough to be a part of the final planning process ... I think that trust is really important as part of the process.” C

For one forest supervisor, the barometer for keeping track of community input was if all stakeholders attending collaborative meetings were able to see their interests and values expressed in one of the plan alternatives:

*“What we really wanted to do when we took those alternatives out to the community open houses was to say to the public, ‘Do you see your issues represented in at least one alternative?’ That was what we were trying to get. If every member of the public could say, ‘Hey, I see my issues reflected in alternative B and D,’ that was great. If someone said, ‘I don’t see my issue reflected,’ that would have been a red flag that we need to go in and develop one. When we held that second round of public meetings, with draft alternatives based on the new themes developed the prior November, several groups of the public said, ‘Well, we would really like to develop our own alternatives. Even though some of our input is captured in these, we think we could do a better job.’” FS*

“Having a facilitator present really helped keep those meetings on track, kept everybody within the sideboards of what we needed to be dealing with.” FS

## 6) Role of third-party facilitator

All the collaborative forest planning efforts in our study had a third-party, neutral facilitator to assist in designing, convening, facilitating, and evaluating the collaborative process. All facilitators were community residents with training in facilitation. Two of the facilitators were contracted with the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution, a federal agency based in Tucson, Arizona (<http://www.ecr.gov/>). Established in 1998, the Institute was created to assist in the resolution of federal environmental, natural resources, and public lands conflicts and controversies through facilitated negotiation, mediation, and collaborative problem-solving. The Institute staff provides professional conflict resolution services and training and draws on a national roster of professional mediators and facilitators.

The benefits of a good facilitator are clear:

*“Really, [having a] third party is helpful ... a lot of us aren’t very well trained to do this, and so it does help to bring in someone who really is, like OCS [Office of Community Services at Fort Lewis College]. Right there was real help in facilitating all that. And certainly there are people in the agency that do have those skills but we’re all so busy, somebody has to make it a priority.” FS*

*“This is a small community and so everybody knows everybody, and I think the initial trust was already there before the process actually began. And it was still there after the process ended. What was said in the meetings didn’t go beyond if it needed not go beyond. It was well done. Again, I attribute that to the facilitator.” C*

*“Definitely a good facilitator. He kept us on track and the meetings focused, and he got the information that he needed. Then they took that and ran with it.” C*

*“There’s huge value in knowing what someone’s position is. If you have skilled facilitation and you understand what people’s positions and needs are, then you can start to collaborate in order to meet your objectives. The agency needs to get beyond the trust issue to bring people back to the table, but when they get them there, they have to bring in talented enough facilitators so that people don’t feel like they’re wasting their time.” C*

Equally clear is that the USFS should not be the facilitator of the collaborative process but should remain as a participant and technical consultant to the collaborative process:

*“The Forest Service should be a player in the process, but not the facilitator. They can’t control it or drive the process. With outside facilitators, you can set ground rules. It lends itself to the learning process. A facilitator softens the Forest Service’s ability to present itself as a little bit more open and closer to the public. Once you do that long enough it leads to trust, because the Forest Service is not dictating rules and regulations but rather giving input to the facilitator or the process.” C*

## 7) Maps as tools to facilitate dialogue and collaborative learning

All of the forests in the study employed maps to varying degrees as part of the collaborative process. For the GMUG, maps were crucial for facilitating collaborative dialogue about desired future conditions:

*“We ended up producing existing condition maps, forest plan desired condition maps, existing on-the-ground condition maps, and had them tell us, in your opinion, does the desired condition we identified 15 years ago still apply? We started moving in the direction of them telling us how they would like to see those landscapes managed. The management areas in the original plan were complex. We subdivided into smaller units and tried to make them a little broader. We didn’t go down to the individual management prescription level, although lately we’ve been heading more that way because in some sense they’re too broad. People seemed to understand those and we were getting some good feedback.” FS*

Maps are powerful tools to foster collaborative dialogue and help narrow conflict.

*“I think that that was their real success, when they had the small groups looking at maps together. And the fact that it went on for a long period of time, so you see the same group of people over a period of many months. You got to develop general relationships with people that way, which was pretty crucial, I think.” C*

*“If I look back at our earlier work, we were always most successful when we were gathered around maps and talking about pieces of land or specific things. So I guess my observation is that people tend to do better on that than when you’re very abstract. In my experience, if you’re trying to do [something] like desired future condition at a real conceptual level, people just kind of nod their heads but they don’t say much, so visualizing might help.” FS*

*“We may find that management of a particular drainage was wholly problematic because we were experiencing certain types of resource damage. Or we may have significant conflicts between types of recreation activities. So from that you were able to draw out a map across the larger geographic area of the forest, which began to help you focus on where you thought you might need to change management and how that would then facilitate the development of thematic alternatives. So we would go through that process through a number of resource areas, repeating in other words, imparting knowledge, taking information back and bringing that into the forest planning process.” FS*

*“When we started looking at the maps, off-road vehicle people would say, ‘Here’s what I really care about,’ and they’d circle an area. And it turned out not to be at all what the wilderness people really cared about, as they were somewhere else in the forest. When you actually started looking at the landscape, it’d be much more apparent that the areas of disagreement were pretty small. Whereas if you say, ‘Yeah, I hate motorcycles on the trails, period,’ and they say, ‘Oh, we should be able to drive anywhere we want to’ – you don’t get anywhere. And that’s what the stiffer scoping processes are like.” C*

However, whenever using maps in collaborative analysis and communication with the public, engage the participants on the front end to help develop the maps, instead of having them merely react to the ones that the USFS has already developed. This will more likely avoid the perception of a “pre-determined decision,” which can breed distrust.

*“The meetings where the Forest Service was presenting their maps of the alternatives were in my opinion bad, in that the Forest Service did not want participation in developing the maps. They only wanted comments on maps once they had drawn their circles and areas, and that was a major screw-up in my opinion. They created some management problems for themselves, and the general public could not understand what they were looking at with the maps. Or they did not understand the differences between the alternatives.” C*

*“I think that the mapping of the management areas that’s being done behind closed doors, and [the public] not having an opportunity to work on the development of the mapping, was a major stumbling block.” C*

## 8) Planning for contingencies

Forest planning has a lot of uncertainty and many starts and stops and direction changes. USFS planning teams should make an effort to plan for these contingencies and inform participants how, what, and why changes were made. Most important is to minimize starts and stops. Maintaining continuity is necessary to keep community participants involved and informed about what’s going on.

*“The disappointing thing to me is that we kind of came to a screeching halt in planning just when we were getting to the good part, which was to take all of this information we collected for this concentrated period of time, and then begin to develop management alternatives. We never got to that point. So it’s like the end that you were really working for, the development of alternatives that you can actually present to the public, we never got to that. The large thematic alternatives were never drafted. We spent a lot of time talking about how we were going to do that and how this information was going to play into that, but we just never got to that point.” FS*

*“We worked a year and a half and were excused unexpectedly. Our work was not complete. We did not see the meaning of that explanation as to why and still haven’t – to this day have not been told exactly why.” C*

*“Because the process was stopped, people question how much their input was valued. And then the next time around, people say, ‘Well, we didn’t see any results from this so why take the time and effort to become involved in the process?’ And it’s not that we fault anyone in particular per se, because we know that they were all involved, they were putting the energy into it. But then it came from the administration and our feeling here is that those individuals know nothing about the [resulting] problems that we are experiencing.” C*

Because the situation can change over the course of the forest planning process, the USFS must be able to clearly demonstrate that it can follow through with proposals. One thing community stakeholders appreciate is to have some assurance from the USFS that there will be follow-through:

*“I think a follow-up part of this process is, what happens when these ideas and things aren’t really being implemented when the process is through? That should be a part of this process. I am looking at this as a ‘political floor’ and a ‘community floor,’ and if the Forest Service put us through this long drawn-out process, well, we had expectations. So the Forest Service must be held accountable for producing. And if you don’t, then there is a group of people here who can say, ‘Hey, let’s get on with the show, let’s move this on.’” C*

*“The Forest Service needs to be able to make a commitment to follow through and finish the process. I know it’s a bit out of their hands, but they could have maybe [explained the] congressional appropriation and budget [problems]. I think they really need to be able to tell the public, ‘Yes, if you participate for the next year or two we will absolutely finish this.’ If it is actually a collaborative process, they need to spell it out on the front end to everybody, and they need to organize it like it is. They need to make sure that the diverse interests are there that represent everybody, and they also need to spell out their rules of engagement: what they expect of people, how they expect people to behave, and what the product is that is actually going to come out of this.” C*

This last point reiterates the importance of developing and maintaining collaborative working relationships internally so that the planning team can provide continuous and immediate feedback to the communities on what proposals can be acted on and what will be delayed.

## 9) Integrating various data

Developing new methods of utilizing data in collaborative forest planning is essential, as participants in the collaborative process need to know their input and effort is worthwhile. Working collaboratively between ordinary community members who utilize forest resources, and staff, who possess a more or less scientific resource perspective, requires a more intensive level of knowledge sharing.

Traditional forest planning, which focused extensively on specific resources, rewarded specialized analysis of wildlife habitat, timber suitability, and range conditions. Staff specialists could individually collect and analyze highly technical data sets, share these among the interdisciplinary or core team, and build whatever integrated resource systems that were deemed appropriate.

In more intensive community collaborative approaches, scientific data, which might not have been communicated in traditional planning models, needs to be shared in some appropriate degree with a public audience or partner. Conversely, community knowledge of landscapes, portrayed as existing uses, desired conditions, or management concerns, has to be documented and communicated to forest planning staff and among groups of community participants.

“ **Give enough time** ”

“For technical presentations by Forest Service staff, give enough time for presentations and learning, not just ‘spitting it out’ due to shortness of time, rather than having a dialogue about it to make sure the public understands the information. Or cut it in pieces, and don’t try to cover the whole spectrum of presentation if it is complex. It’s just overwhelming, and all of a sudden it’s time to move on to something else.” C

*“You have to be able to integrate non-science philosophies and perspectives merging with science. The challenge is finding the intersection of parallel roads of these two. Focus on the process, relationships and content triangle.” FS (The reference here is to the “Progress Triangle” in *Working through Environmental Conflict: the Collaborative Learning Approach*, by Steve Daniels and Gregg Walker (2000, Praeger).)*

*“You do have these highly technical folks that speak in ‘bureaucratese’ and use all these technical terms that people don’t understand, and don’t connect the dots for the public in terms of how this information relates to their issues. Sometimes when we were going to have presentations, we would have the specialist give a dry run in front of the core team audience or even a layperson audience. But a lot of times there isn’t the time to do that because this is a rapid-fire process. Those are professional skills that we as an agency need to develop better, like through careers. It can’t happen instantaneously. It’s a skill you need to nurture throughout their careers.” FS*

One of the real challenges is presenting information in a limited amount of time. One suggestion is to prepare data summaries in advance that are easily digestible:

*“It would have been useful to have had better data summaries ahead of time to bring in, such as an outline of our geographic area assessments and what we want to display in those documents. I think much of that data could have been prepared ahead of time. We would have been well suited to delaying our collaborative process until that data was ready, sort of compendiums of information to share on that spot. We did pretty well developing and sharing data, but we could have done better by having little summaries, brochures of historic or current conditions for people to look at as they had this dialogue. There’s not a real reason not to have it prior to the collaboration. It takes work to rack it up and document it, but...” FS*

Having GIS staff capable and available to engage with community stakeholders can be extremely helpful since so much of the information going into forest plan revision is stored in GIS:

*“From a data standpoint, I’m interested in knowing what they know about the national forest. We can tell them what we know but maybe they’ve been places we haven’t. Maybe they can validate some of our data. We serve up a lot of data to the public, as a lot of interest groups are getting GIS software and they want our data. I always hand it out freely because I want them to know what we have, the quality of it and what it takes to produce quality data. I always say, ‘This is subject to change, it’s a work in progress and if you have anything to add, please let me know.’ I haven’t gotten anything back yet from anybody, but at least they have an appreciation for what we have and how we use it. I think that’s valuable.” FS*

*“Every time there were new sets of GIS information. They were constantly being presented. Maps were all over walls. People could see what kind of historical treatments there were, what type of vegetation, etc. The Forest Service was able to say, ‘This is what we have right now, this is what we’re doing, next meeting we will update you on new information we have.’” C*

Maps also level the playing field for diverse stakeholders to express their knowledge, experience, and interest in specific geographic places on the forest:

*“What the locals bring is the local understanding ... I bring an expertise on that allotment. There are not a whole lot of people who know that landscape better than I do. I am not sure there’s anybody working for the Forest Service that knows that particular, small landscape better than I do. What you have are a lot of local people who will have an expertise on a particular area. That’s what you could tell, especially when we began talking ... and letting them draw on the map ... This person has hunted in this area for 20 years and knows all about that particular little area. This person has been a coal miner and knows all about underneath over there. Other people have hiked certain areas quite a bit. So they bring that. I was prepared to work off that expertise. And I think people appreciate it when they have an opportunity to share that.” C*

Community stakeholders are not only interested in or concerned about the ecological information, but many are equally or more concerned about the socioeconomic affects of the forest plan into the future:

*“It’s important to include socioeconomic data here and in many other rural western communities because the economies and the drivers of those economies are changing. What was happening 20 years ago isn’t as much concern to us. Trying to think about the future is in understanding what’s going on today. You need to find a way to use both trend analysis and socioeconomic data.” C*

*“There was a social assessment sent out about three years ago. The University of Wyoming sent out 2,500 surveys to people in the four counties and received about half of them back. The top rated things were wildlife, water quality, and recreation. That’s what the people said were important. Timbering, mineral development, and additional grazing were at the bottom of the list. But with the commissioners, who have always been more ag-oriented, all of a sudden those have flip-flopped. They don’t care what the people think – [that] tourism and recreation are important.” C*



A community organizer talks about the importance of utilizing socioeconomic data from outside the USFS:

*“Socioeconomic assessment from the AOGs (Association of Governments) office was valuable information. Agency people aren’t going to plow through the socioeconomic assessment and base parts of the plan from that info. If they did, it would be very useful due to the heavy reliance on public lands for economic benefit.” C*

From the perspective of a rural development officer:

*“The socioeconomic data has been effective in that there’s an acceptance of the figures [by local governments] ... because it’s not federal people doing it. It’s some of our own people doing it. They have come under some criticism because they’ve missed some of the areas... population info, which was based on census info. For the most part, people have viewed it as being a positive. It’s bringing more people onto the playing field as participants.” C*

Since community-based collaborative forest planning is an emerging and dynamic process, integrating various data and information remains an ongoing challenge. Perhaps the most noted problem is how a balance is struck between having the USFS planning team dominate the process by providing all the information, and starting with a blank slate on which community stakeholders provide input and information:

*“I worry about leading the public too much, and giving them so much information that all they do is say, ‘Okay, that is what we thought, you got it right,’ before we ever ask them. The other side of the coin is saying, ‘Here we are, what do you think?’ And they can’t focus comments very well unless they have something to react to. It’s sort of a balance. You want to provide them enough information to react, but not so much that they are overwhelmed, or they feel like their input has no value because it is already done.” FS*

*“When do we put our issues on the table and share our internal agency knowledge and expertise? When you stated the need for change and desired conditions, the way we started the process to some extent sounded wide open. Whatever you think? Asking the public, ‘What do you want to see for the forest, for the landscape, for these geographic areas?’ I think that was very good, but there is some agency knowledge and expertise, and also some agency interest, in what things need to change. I don’t have a magic formula for that. I had for some time felt that maybe we were missing that. Maybe we were not strong enough. There is always that balance if you want to be open to all those options for doing things, and what people value, and what is important. But the agency has a lot of knowledge and expertise, and a lot of monitoring to lay out there as well. And so we have done this dance around ‘when is the right time to put that in front of people?’ Even some of our agency specialists, our hydrologists and fisheries people, have felt like there are some real need-for-change-issues related to how we deal with riparian protection or water quality, or how we see particular issues.” FS*

Because there is no “magic formula,” each forest planning team needs to carefully develop a system by which it experiments, evaluates, and learns about the appropriate balance for how various data and information are integrated:

*“We’d all been to the collaborative learning meeting, so initially we thought the first thing we needed to do was help the public learn – here are the existing conditions out there, here are some concerns we have about the existing conditions, that kind of thing. We had presentations and panels of local experts, where we were giving information to the public. That evolved into working more with maps and having them all over the place in the meeting. We’d ask people to mark up the maps if they knew about something in a particular area that they thought we should know about. We started building the relationships at the beginning and sharing information. Then we decided that the clock is running and we need to get some feedback as fast as we can to the desired condition. We shifted. The first meetings we did on the Uncompahgre were heavy on information sharing. By the time we got to Gunnison, we didn’t do any of that. We came prepared with lots of information but we found we didn’t really need it all. It turned out the best thing to do was to find out from them what they needed more information about, and then focus on that at the next meeting.” FS*

In efforts to integrate data and information in forest planning, quality control is a primary concern. Many communities do have resident expertise that can provide quality information. Local or regional economic development non-profits can provide recent demographic and economic data. USFS staff need to at least acknowledge the data and explore ways of integrating it or else local stakeholders may suspect being marginalized. Additionally, organizations like The Nature Conservancy and other conservation organizations often have their own inventory data. USFS staff need to at least acknowledge the data and explore ways of integrating it or else local advocates will use this data to refute proposals. As a conservation district representative contends:

*“We brought a lot of expertise to that table. We had people with interests in watersheds, birds, skiing, botanists, right down the line, and a lot of highly qualified people. Why not use that? They don’t have a botanist on the forest planning team that has the training I have. Why not use those talents to benefit everybody?” C*

However, due to the open nature of collaboration, there often are not data and information quality-control mechanisms in place which can keep a collaborative process from derailing.

*“There are examples from the steering committee where personnel that are neither trained in wildlife management nor certified biologists, that are experts only at the coffee shop or in that arena, who would then use the steering committee to report or express opinions on wildlife-type management issues that were incorrect and not based on biological information or best science. But they had the forum at the steering committee meetings to try to influence others on the committee or the Forest Service in areas that were not their area of expertise.” C*

*“One of the disadvantages about collaboration is that a lot of management can occur in response to scientific knowledge, which is not always reflected in the collaborative process. Take a look at the stakeholders, the folks that have an interest – we happen to be there as an interest in biodiversity and ecological function. But not all processes will have somebody that has that interest. Maybe the conservationist community is more interested in recreation, non-motorized recreation, or something. You don’t always have a player with a really strong foundation in that kind of science-based stuff. So, one of the dangers of collaboration is that you don’t necessarily automatically get a voice for science. And that should be, in our view, a really key part of the process. If you go to pure collaboration to solve these problems with stakeholders, you might throw out that science with the bathwater, which would be really unfortunate because... these lands ought to be managed based on the scientific knowledge that has been developed over the past 50 years.” C*

## 10) Bringing in outside assistance

Rarely is it feasible for a single national forest to carry out a complete collaborative forest planning process with only their internal resources. Specific skills are often not available for one more task, or it could simply be more efficient and timely to contract for certain services. Sometimes research, analysis, or facilitation services can be more productively provided through an external agency or institution. On occasion, these types of arrangements can also maximize collaboration by bringing others in as partners.

*“We were also able to co-op the director of the Center for Rural Life (at Southern Utah State University), and he has contacts in state and county government and is a long-time resident of southern Utah. He has a lot of local trust, but not affiliated with the Forest Service. I think that helped. We may not have used that aspect as fruitfully as we originally hoped. His role is officially the convener, bringing the collaborative meetings together. Another one would be The Nature Conservancy. They have a process of eco-regional assessment, working their way across the U.S. It so happened that they were doing their assessment in the same area, called the High Utah Plateau, which covers most of the Dixie and the Fishlake and half of the Manti, and a bunch of BLM land. They have been an excellent convener, bringing in the Division of Wildlife and other interest groups. The BLM helped us bring in other partners, and they became involved in our process. We’re working with the Governor’s Office of State Planning and Budgets. They are helping us with the social-economic assessment, and they are providing an excellent conduit between the Forest Service and the counties, because the counties work with them on a regular basis.” FS*

*“The U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution had an MOU with the Forest Service. They were a tremendous resource. The neutral role they played as a convener is very important, as the facilitator is not paid by the Forest Service, but by the Institute. Academic institutions provide abstract philosophy overlying the process, and an ability to analyze and make information transportable. You must define expectations with each other [institute and academic institution]. Academic expectations may have been too idealistic, esoteric, and abstract. It’s important to define roles, responsibilities, and expectations of each intermediary group that is involved. We also learned a great deal by exchanging info with other forests that are undergoing planning processes.” FS*

*“The UP [Uncompahgre Project] hired a group to conduct a landscape health assessment of the Uncompahgre Plateau, which the Forest Service primarily funded. It looked across jurisdictional boundaries, including private, Forest Service, BLM, and state boundaries, and it gives probably the most detailed analysis of landscape health based on a whole variety of parameters. The beauty of this is it provided a lot of information for the Forest Service to do their forest planning based on data, not just based on what people think, or on traditional or economic and cultural values. It actually gave them some data to look at. Decisions that the agency has made in the past have not always been based on science, but experience and seat-of-the-pants expertise. When you start bringing in the universities to do the research, it helps answer some of the specific scientific questions.” C*

*“You need someone [like a RC&D director] who has a very close, inherent understanding from a community standpoint. I think that’s where you would get it, from a person like me who’s been out there and can talk from the communities’ perspective. Anyone from the Forest Service side doesn’t have it. Maybe they can get that from the community working groups. I’m not sure they’re getting it right now ... I don’t think they’re getting the true picture.” C*

*“When you get into the process, all of a sudden you find that you’re overcommitted in some respects, you’re understaffed, and you need to adjust somehow or you’re just going to lose it in terms of your ability to expend that amount of energy. Early on we brought in the Office of Community Services because we thought we needed additional experience. [These are] people who were very conversant with the facilitation processes, people who were well thought of in the community, who have contacts within the community, whether that’s the general public or the educational branch or the community government. So even with that, even with enlisting the OCS and their staffs, plus myself [the planning team leader], and the support we had at the district level, there were points in time where I felt totally overtaxed by the process. And that lasted for at least three to four months during the critical study group process phase.” FS*

Many national forest planning efforts have the involvement of an existing community-based collaborative partnership, such as the Public Lands Partnership encompassing Delta, Montrose, Ouray, and San Miguel counties in the GMUG planning area. Such community groups can be **effective intermediaries** between the communities and the USFS.

## “ Let’s learn from our mistakes and move forward ”

“Having an outside autonomous person say what the general public needs to hear was really key. There were times when I’d [from the perspective of the Uncompahgre Project] stand in a public meeting and say, ‘The agency has screwed up big time and this is why....but it’s ok...they didn’t do it intentionally...but you folks need to understand that they do make mistakes. But let’s learn from our mistakes and move forward.’ Without PLP [the Public Lands Partnership], we couldn’t have done that, because they were always there to say, ‘That’s right,’ or ‘Let’s move forward,’ or ‘Let’s make sure that you’re answering our concerns.’ It really held the agency accountable, which – historically, they just did what they did because that’s what their charge was. And everybody thought, ‘That must be right, because they’re the experts,’ and in a lot of cases, their decisions were based on politics or egos at the top, saying, ‘This is what we’re going to do, the heck with the process.’” C

*“Sometimes previous collaborative efforts can build capacity for collaboration in a community and assist in the planning revision process. PLP [the Public Lands Partnership] started meeting and bringing diverse stakeholders together. The community started to evolve ... people started talking. PLP was a catalyst for community communication, and communication between the land managers and the Division of Wildlife.” C*

Such local community groups may go so far as to go outside the planning process and bring in their own consultants (“hired guns”) to develop their own alternative/proposal:

*“To make it even more complicated, there’s a group called the Bighorn County Coalition. The four counties had formed the coalition to address or keep us informed of things that were happening on the forest that were affecting the county. That group has some money, and they decided that they would be able to put that money towards a consultant to help the four counties with this plan. That didn’t work out very well. Just personalities, or usually the people on the steering committee didn’t feel like we were getting where we needed to go.” C*

Utilizing and integrating academic scientists in on-the-ground collaborative problem solving can prove beneficial:

*“In the early stages of the Ponderosa Pine Project, there was a general recognition among agency and community stakeholders that something needed to be done, but there were conflicting perspectives. So we stopped and brought in a number of academics, people outside the Forest Service that were also saying, ‘There needs to be some treatment here.’ And I think the key was bringing in the science and saying, ‘Okay, this is what’s out of whack and needs to be changed. Do we all agree that it needs to be changed?’ I think the group agreed on that, and then the ‘how to’ was the ‘devil’s in the details.’ Different places will have different issues and problems, but the collaborative partnership process is, I think, still a good one.” FS*

## 11) Steering committee and cooperative agency status utilization

There is considerable variance among national forests in terms of how they involve community members and organizations in developing and implementing the collaborative components of the forest planning process. In several instances, either formal or informal steering committees have been utilized – or at least suggested – with the primary purpose being to jointly build and guide the steps and content of a co-participatory process.

*“[There’s] some type of steering committee, community stakeholder/focus group/process advisory group to consult with as the adaptations or adjustments in the process come about. Friction was created in our process, some relationship damage if you will, because we made changes to our process from one geographic area to the next without formal consultation with key stakeholders, without really doing that collaborative learning as to why we were adapting the process with them. Some folks were surprised by the fact that we were doing things differently on the Grand Mesa than we did in the North Fork.” FS*

“ **We could have been advocates in the community** ”

“I would have had a steering committee that had more than just agency people and a facilitator. I would have had some community people there, and I would have clarified what the expectations were and revisited that. When we got to the different decision points of, ‘Are we going to modify this or that,’ I would have gone back to the steering committee and used them, because we could have been advocates in the community to say, ‘They haven’t forgotten what they were going to do,’ or, ‘This is where they’re at.’ As it is, it’s just gone into a big black hole.” C

*“A steering committee would have offered joint power sharing and decision making, but it could be hard because you’d have to spend so much time to figure out how to work together before you even got to figuring out how to plan the forest plan.” C*

In other instances, the process is clearly agency-driven and involving local governmental entities as community representatives. Steering committees made up of elected officials are good to integrate local social and economic issues – bringing in local voices and perspectives. Elected officials are also conduits to larger constituencies and community segments.

*“What our responsibility is, as elected officials, conservation districts, the county commissioners, and so forth, is to put a voice to the people that elected you. Not to one industry, not to one issue, but to have an all-encompassing voice, that you’re representing all the people, and I take that very seriously.” C*

*“The steering committee, the cooperating agency people, also mirrored that they heard that from their constituents too. So it really helped the process to have all three line officers: internal, cooperating agencies, external – but maybe a little bit more connected. Then the public’s hearing all that and making sure you actually sit down and try to resolve that.” FS*

However, local elected officials are part of a larger political environment that often plays out in the forest planning process – divergent visions for the local area’s economic future and role of public lands resources in that future. As officials change, the steering committee dynamic will change:

*“To me, we’re more like a sounding board, and if something looks way out of whack we can let them know. But none of us are foresters, none of us are wildlife experts. Instead, there are a lot of individual agendas and they work at cross purposes.” C*

*“I’m pretty disappointed in this committee because it’s become just another voice of industry that’s becoming irrelevant. They’re not really representing the people. The counties and I have not signed on to these things. In the past they’ve been able to get all the commissioners to sign and document for or against this or that. But I just refuse to do that. They’re trying to ramrod the process in a direction that they want, yet they don’t care what the effects would be.” C*

*“I’m not sure how much county commissioners heard from non-industry constituents. And why would they? If you’re ‘Joe Citizen’ and the Forest Service asks you for input, why would you go and talk to a county commissioner? It doesn’t make any sense. There’s no logical connection unless you understand that sometimes these county commissioners get much greater weight by the book. But average students don’t know that ... why would the average citizen expect that the avenue to get their concerns across to the Forest Service is through some other elected or appointed official? It doesn’t make any sense at face value.” C*

For steering committees composed of local governmental representatives, cooperative agency status and formal memoranda of understanding are available tools. These types of arrangements formally establish working relationships, roles, and patterns of communication between the USFS and other entities, which facilitate information sharing, and joint use of resources.

“ **A basic shoulder to shoulder** ”

“The problem-solving aspects of things weren’t necessarily what we got out of the public involvement end, versus what we got out of the steering committee and what we did later with our cooperating agencies. So I think there’s a real difference there that needs to be recognized – public input versus intensive problem-solving that deals directly with laws, regulations, policies, community needs, issues, and desires. All those types of things really get down to a basic shoulder to shoulder. In the steering committee, you’re working on these issues rather than just speaking your positions or reporting on what you want out of the forest.” FS

*“The relationship between the counties and the Forest Service is quite good. It was actually very encouraging to see that. We pursued quite early in the process MOUs with the counties to acquire cooperating agency status through the NEPA regulations. And the counties have been very excited, I think, about having that status in an official capacity. What it says is that they’re not just part of the general public anymore. They have to have a special relationship with the federal agency to engage in doing work, and more particularly in analysis work, to which they can contribute skill that we don’t typically have. On social and economic issues, we are not really strong within the Forest Service. Counties have economic developers. They know the numbers and that kind of stuff. So we’re trying to use their knowledge to the best of our ability to help us understand how to do the revision. So the relationship with the counties has been really good.” FS*

*“I trust their expertise [the counties and conservation districts] more than I ever would have. I trust their motives even more than I ever would have. Two heads are better than one on a lot of this stuff, and that is an absolute key to what I think we gained on this. I will attempt to utilize whatever expertise I can that I know exists for any of these problems that we have in the future, and I view that as a true partnership. Plus, working with the state, I think there are an awful lot of opportunities to develop very specific partnerships on motorized trail programs. It’s nothing new with the state, but perhaps we figured out other ways to expand and develop these partnerships to take them to the next level.” FS*

*“That’s what I felt was one of the great things with the cooperating agencies. They did have some expertise to contribute, which is why they were granted that cooperating agency status. And so they could sit down and we could actually assign, ‘Okay, you’re going to come to the next meeting with this product.’ And I think on a broader level, if it was an open invitation to any group like the cooperating agencies had, I don’t think the process would work.” FS*

*“At first, the Forest Service kind of threw the door open and said, ‘Who is important to have as a part of the process?’ And a bunch of us said, ‘This is an important aspect.’ It was very interesting because the conservation district, which is my part, was basically on*

*the coattails of the state. And then the state said, 'We don't want to have your voice in there on our MOU, so what we're going to do is allow the Forest Service to decide whether you're still at the table or not.' And the Forest Service allowed us to continue on."* C

Clearly, there is a range of possible arrangements and purposes of a collaborative planning steering committee, from informal community groups providing guidance and feedback on collaborative process to formal cooperating agency groups who work side by side with the ID team. Regardless of the structural arrangement of a steering committee or cooperating agency status agreements, it is nevertheless critical to lay out expectations:

*"Not even the agency itself understands what needs to be done. The whole process is somewhat evolutionary and somewhat dynamic. I had the idea that to be a true cooperating agency required work, a lot of work. I don't think that my [county] commission recognized that, and I don't know that many other local governments recognize it. To do it right and really protect your interest, you're coming with analysis, data, and new proposals. You have gone beyond what the Forest Service and the BLM have, and said, 'This is the way I would like to manage it.'" C*

*"If we did it all over again, we would lay out more stringent operating principles, procedures, and norms for the group. We should have gotten a stronger collective understanding of ground rules and identified the specific roles of the players at the table. This steering committee involves a lot of homework. If you become a steering committee member, you should be obligated to come prepared to every meeting and keep moving. Attendance should be required to be a member – otherwise you have no business being there." FS*

## 12) Heightened communication

Whatever form or intensity of collaboration is utilized for the forest planning process, an investment needs to be made in greater communication. Participants and partners will not be able to build relationships or contribute to the knowledge and learning formation without appropriate and clear communication. Standard levels of communication, found in a typical public affairs approach to forest resource management, will not be adequate to support a fully developed collaborative forest planning process. Increased communication will require the allocation of additional community-oriented outreach.

## “ You don't have the fundamental base of communication ”

“There has been very little long-term communication on forest management and national forest planning issues within this community. Some people scrambled to get things together during that planning process, but if you wait till the planning process starts, you don't have the fundamental base of communication within the community to really do a collaborative process. You can't put out a recipe that says, 'This is the way you have to do it.' You have to have people that are interested. If they're not interested you can't go out and do it, I can't go out and do it, the Forest Service can't go out and do it. But when they do have people that are interested in participating in a collaborative way, they should take advantage of it rather than trying to kill it like they always do.” C



“ **Give enough time for the relationships to develop** ”

“It goes back to communication and not having a lag time where so many things can happen that can change a perspective ... if communication doesn't keep up with that change, you've lost the ability to communicate. The more often you meet, the more able you are to keep communication open, the more trust you develop, and the more you're willing to give. You have to give enough time for the relationships to develop – to turn the corner.” C

“Having a public affairs specialist or comparable person [human dimensions] to work with the public, the districts, and the management team is very helpful.” FS

USFS staff involved in collaborative forest planning processes have learned the necessity of using diverse kinds of **communication within the process**.

“The first meeting identified some of the issues in that area. Then they started out by giving information at the next series of meetings on water – too technical, over people's heads. Then they realized there were some changes needed. The Forest Service came back with a blank sheet and said, ‘You tell us what's going on here.’ That wasn't fruitful. Then the Forest Service came back and said, ‘This is how things are ... do you agree?’ That was more helpful, as the public didn't need to have technical knowledge for that. From that they were getting a clue that we've got to bring some information, we can't just have it open-ended.” C

Trial and error is often necessary to understand where community participants are in terms of their knowledge, interests, and readiness to contribute to plan elements, such as desired conditions and objectives. Field trips, although they can be expensive and logistically difficult, offer stakeholders opportunities to communicate knowledge and information in ways that indoor meetings can not:

“I thought the field trips were the biggest part of educating people on multiple use. We still had to have grazing, we still had to have timber, but we could have both along with recreation.” C

“There was nothing like being out on the ground and seeing it for real, seeing what they were talking about. The lectures can get kind of dry.” C

At times, members of the public or community become aware that information or dialogue is needed to get a process moving forward, to improve communications, or overcome a roadblock.

“I think it would be beneficial to set aside time to have a workshop between county planners and the forest staff. It all comes back to communication. The 10-year deal takes too long to write ... by the time you go through the public planning process and sift through everything things have changed and it doesn't fit. The process is too slow. There needs to be something that continues to grow, that can keep up with the changes in the area.” C

*“The Forest Service has lost momentum, and part of that is that Forest Service staff was overwhelmed and was afraid to let go. I’m getting a sense that they’re almost afraid to put anything out, they want to be so perfect. But why not involve us and say, ‘Would this satisfy you? Is this what you were looking for?’ My perception is they’re stuck. They don’t know how to package it.” C*

Maintaining some form of ongoing, continuous communication from meeting to meeting, with the same set of core participants, can be beneficial:

*“I think it was good to keep communicating with as many of those people as we could, the first of the people who started in the study group process. It was important to keep communicating with them so we didn’t just drop them. ‘We’re having another meeting, come join us.’” C*

*“I don’t think the Forest Service ever communicated that back to the public very well. The meetings sort of ended and nothing else happened in the public’s perspective. I think it seemed like the Forest Service just lost interest and went off and did something else instead.” C*

*“The Forest Service started out with this kind of generic forest plan revision newsletter, which was great, and then they stopped it [because of] funding or whatever. I think that was maybe one of the most important roles, being able to tell what happened at the meetings, where they’re going, what their plans are. How to involve the community would be a good one.” C*

In addition to investing in improving communication within the process, it is also necessary to invest in **communication about the process**. This outreach communication should not be just about the forest plan, but include larger issues relating to the national forest and its relationship to broader communities and non-local stakeholders:

*“The problem I see is that when you get to the place where everyone’s on the same page of learning and knowledge of the issues, and they’re giving, they see the goal, you’ve weeded out the ones that won’t participate and the quality people are still involved, you’re only educating those people. How do you take what those people are learning to the community as a whole? How do you broad-brush or broad-stroke the whole community with this group’s knowledge?” C*

## “ **Become more communicative within the community** ”

“A major thing I would like to see is the Forest Service as a whole become more communicative with the community, and not only what their needs are but what they are able to do as servants to the community. Basic collaborations on how we can increase the communication within the group, communication and knowledge of one another, brings respect and trust. And with the next round of collaborative experiences we’re one jump ahead.” C

*“I think that an inclusive broad outreach plan is essential. But it can’t and shouldn’t stop at the community border, because we define the community as being citizens of the United States, co-owners of the forest. This is where a little imagination and creativity can go a long way. Taking out a newspaper ad in the classifieds does not count as a creative solution to reaching out to people.” C*

*“We need a process to bring people up to a general understanding, but we cannot possibly bring people up to a full technical level or anything like that, at least not during a full-blown forest planning process. I think it would be remissive to try and do that type of thing. So we need to do a better job providing those resources in general. I don’t think we have the time, resources, whatever to bring people up to speed via planning sessions. And so I think in a general sense we bring people in, provide them with reference material and resources online, then work with people on the true collaboration, which is figuring out what people’s interests are and how to get there.” FS*

*“Generally speaking, I don’t think the community experiences very much from the national forest. I don’t think that that communication is happening. And I think that there is a dearth of projects that could take place ... What is happening is good, but not enough. I’m not sure they’re really engaging the community, communicating well with them, and making a full partnership, community/forest interaction.” C*

# Discussion of Lessons Learned

The research goal of the project has been to examine the potential role of collaborative, stewardship-oriented forest planning. We have sought to place forest planning in the context of its potential contributions to sustainable forest and community health, rather than the mere creation of a “required” resource management document.

Through the six theme areas explored, key components of collaborative forest planning were discovered and six national forest plan revision processes have been presented. These components have been drawn from the experiences of forest planning teams and line officers of the respective national forests, and from a diverse array of community participants. Within the six major themes, specific collaborative challenges, strategies, and actions have been described, with the intent of sharing the ways in which they have been addressed by the many partners, both individuals and organizations.

Although each of the national forest plan revision processes took place in varied social and ecological settings, we have sought to draw out the **common situations** faced by all of them. These situations can be defined as a series of strategic or major steps in the collaborative process. Each situation presents a significant step that needs to be addressed, within which numerous challenges often arise. The experiences of meeting these challenges provide in-depth, context-based descriptions and lessons learned from the six forest planning endeavors.

In this section, we present the **key lessons learned**. These are offered as a **further synthesis of the six thematic situations** or major steps in the collaborative process. While each forest planning process may have experienced these lessons in a somewhat different way, being challenged earlier or later by them, or addressed them with somewhat unique responses, they nevertheless provide a template for looking ahead at how to make collaboration more beneficial or productive.

## **Collaborative values, goals, and principles:**

Identifying and stating the primary collaborative values, goals, and principles which will be utilized to guide the forest planning process is an important step. Making them available and visible provides an excellent set of guideposts for all parties in establishing a collaborative framework, and subsequently determining if the process is staying on track. In this area, a number of experiences and findings are especially pertinent:

- Subtle yet significant shifts in attitudes towards and experiences with collaboration have occurred among USFS staff, especially through project-level planning.
- There is a growing familiarity and comfort among USFS staff with the fundamental values and roles of community participation and responsibility in the stewardship of public lands.
- The needs for relationship building, increasing trust, having open and transparent dialogue, jointly solving problems, and other collaborative values and principles are being increasingly identified and addressed within forest planning processes.
- The growing capacity of staff and community members to articulate collaborative values, principles, and practices is a distinct and important asset for the future.

- USFS staff compares and contrasts current collaborative approaches with traditional planning procedures, noting a significant need for change.
- Collaboration is increasingly viewed as “a way of doing business.”
- Collaborative learning is viewed as a key principle of the forest planning process, resulting in part from participation in previous Daniels and Walker trainings.
- Emphasis is being placed on opening up the resource assessment and decision-making process so that all stakeholders more clearly understand where specific plan decision elements come from and why decisions are being made.
- Interaction is being structured to facilitate people learning from one another in ways that build common understanding of critical issues and potential courses of action.
- Collaborative engagement is being designed to show participants how their input has made a difference, or why their input was considered but perhaps did not change part of the proposed plan, and that they have made contributions – they’ve been heard and their input has genuinely been considered.
- There has been a subtle, yet significant, shift in the role of the USFS from arbitrator to facilitator of social learning based on the belief that forest planning today is a “different model.”
- USFS staff believe that cumulative learning and knowledge result in a better forest plan and on-the-ground management.
- Current efforts to build community relationships and evolve more collaborative planning processes are being viewed as long-term investments in improving community stewardship of forest resources.

#### **Social contexts of collaboration:**

Because each national forest conducts its strategic planning within a particular social and historical context, it is important that its effects, opportunities, and constraints be a part of developing overall collaborative process. To look at the surrounding regional and community environment, to assess its orientations and capacities, is in fact a good “first step” in being more collaborative. To jointly assess with community partners the perspectives about public lands can also identify existing relationships and capacities that can be integrated into the forest planning process:

- Several decades of different, and at time conflicting, perspectives about the use and purpose of public lands have bred historic distrust of agency-initiated processes in many locales.
- On many occasions, at the outset of some forest planning processes, the staff find there is a need to make special efforts to rebuild relationships with the community and local governmental leaders.
- Recent partnership experiences and demographic changes in many locales have generated new enthusiasm for working with the USFS.
- The attachments of community members to surrounding forest lands can be a strong asset for collaboration and should be identified in an initial assessment of the community planning context, conducted by the planning team with community participation, if possible.
- Capacity within communities for collaboration in forest planning can be initially low, but develops through the process – learning by doing. As national forest planning increasingly becomes collaborative, the overall cumulative learning from a variety of experience will be shared and disseminated more widely, lessening to some degree the learning curve for everyone.

- The previously developed strengths and capacities for collaboration between communities and the USFS, sometimes called “social or civic capital,” is important to identify early on.
- Consideration of developing “cooperating agency status” or other memoranda of agreement is a worthwhile investment in terms of structuring areas of mutual responsibility and ownership.
- Based on an appraisal of the overall collaborative capacities of the region, appropriate steps can be taken to mutually strengthen or focus them.

**Internal agency capacity for collaboration:**

Each national forest has its own history of being collaborative with the community. These previous experiences typically contribute to the skills and commitments of its staff that might be applied during forest planning. Sometimes, staff members with important partnership skills are brought into a planning team. However the stage is set, if there is a desire to engage the community in a more collaborative manner, it is important to gather a team that can collaborate internally and has the requisite experiences, skills, and commitments to mutually work through the various stages of a forest plan:

- Within each national forest, prior to initiating a forest planning process, an initial assessment should be conducted of internal staff and organizational capacities for collaboration.
- In addition to traditional resource assessment and analytical skills, consideration should be given to assigning staff to roles in collaborative process design, communication, and all aspects of knowledge sharing, documentation, and integration.
- Pre-planning activities are very important to get all the internal commitments and responsibilities arranged, staff roles and assignments agreed upon, information sharing resources allocated, an appropriate schedule of events and timeframes planned out, and all elements supported by a set of achievable collaborative values, principles, and objectives.
- The internal staff and organizational assessment conducted by each national forest may identify key skills, tasks, or functions that could be better performed by external partners or contractors, and in some instances increase the depth of collaboration within the regional community.
- Staff reassignment, transfer, retirement, or special details should be anticipated and planned for to insure process continuity and avoid loss of momentum, which can be especially damaging to a collaborative process.
- It is essential for the forest supervisor to demonstrate commitment to, and leadership for, the collaborative planning process in ways that communicate to the staff that long-term resource support will be made available.
- The need for commitment extends to district rangers as well, and should include district-level staff who can be key participants in landscape study and working group activities because of their local knowledge and relationships.
- Leadership also is required above the level of the forest supervisor for budgetary and morale support reasons, but also to overcome the tendency to believe that plans developed through a community collaborative process will be administratively overturned.

### **Clarity about collaborative and planning process expectations:**

Expectations about intended objectives, actions, performance, and outcomes are extremely important to a collaborative process because of the very nature of the needs and desires to partner, be more mutual, share work, and come to some degree of “substantial agreement.” Being clear about expectations throughout a collaborative process is vital to success. A lack of understanding and agreement on this basic component, particularly in the context of the complex procedural nature of forest plans, can undermine, and at times destroy, the climate of trust and partnership. During the early stages of learning how to formulate “workable” collaboration frameworks and techniques, this can be a particularly challenging objective.

- It is important to establish a clear road map of the “essential” steps of the collaborative forest planning process, even if some aspects are expected to evolve, to include a definition of the decision space and expectations about time commitments and meeting participation.
- Everyone involved in the collaborative forest planning effort – both agency and community participants – needs to know what the process is expected to accomplish, the desired outcomes, and steps required to get there.
- Central to the establishment of clear expectations is a practical sense of the knowledge, perspectives, etc., being sought from the community participants and partners, and how these will be utilized within the forest plan. What is it that the public is expected to help with?
- Basic ground rules are essential to a well-functioning collaborative process, including rules that guide group dialogue and learning, clear definitions of the purpose of a specific meeting, and guidance about how a forest plan provides strategic direction rather than delineating specific project-level management actions.
- Agency and non-agency staff and participants mostly need to know the answers to these questions: What are we doing? What is my role? What am I supposed to contribute? How will my contribution be used? When will I see how our work is being used in the planning documents?

### **Monitoring and adaptation:**

Monitoring and adaptation are inherent features of collaborative forest planning if it is to become successful. Because the process is so closely tied to developing relationships, improving communication and problem solving, and learning about resource management needs and improvements, there is a fundamental requirement to see what is working and thereby adapt to the emerging questions and knowledge being formed. As the overall structure for collaboration is designed, it is appropriate to take an adaptive orientation to it, perhaps sharing that value with the community, expressing that this is way we intend to proceed, we are envisioning this sort of framework and schedule, and we will improve it as we move forward.

- Put in place a process by which the collaborative process itself is monitored and evaluated.
- Use various techniques to evaluate and monitor the content and substance of the meetings, the data being provided, the group exercises, meeting logistics, etc.
- Provide ongoing feedback as deemed appropriate.
- Take an adaptive approach and attitude about the collaborative process, while continually discussing with the participants the formative structure and components of the forest plan.
- Consider the use of a joint community-agency steering committee to design, monitor, and adapt the planning process as a means to improve the probability of success, check expectations, increase mutual capacities, and foster additional collaborative relationships.

### **Process Design and Implementation Strategies:**

To effectively undertake a collaborative forest planning process, there are many important choices to make about design – that is, choices about the actual mechanics of how collaborative work will be efficiently and effectively accomplished. This requires considerable upfront design work, establishing the means and procedures whereby collaborative involvement, participation, and problem-solving are structured into the planning process. This involves such decisions as where meetings or discussions will take place, what group processes will be used, how specific plan components (such as vision, strategy, suitable uses, and design criteria) will be engaged, and phases and time frames for completion.

- The means by which a vision and desired future conditions will be collaboratively constructed should be clearly defined.
- The overall collaborative process design should address when it is appropriate to utilize place-based or geographic-area groups vs. topic- or issue-based groups.
- Similarly, the structure and organization of the collaborative group processes should clearly outline when it is best to utilize an open public meeting approach where the participants continuously change, versus an established group, such as a “study” or “working” group, that utilizes a sustained membership to accomplish a more analytical set of tasks such as an inventory of suitable uses.
- It is helpful to utilize diverse formats – such as issue presentations, field trips, facilitated group activities, mapping exercises, and web-based documenting and participation tools – to keep a variety of people engaged.
- Specific methods need to be employed to facilitate the integration of data drawn from the community and public with that being supplied by the agency staff; the integration needs to be accomplished in an ongoing and collaborative manner, through such approaches as data summaries on specific resources or landscapes, maps, free distribution of GIS data, interactive websites, and meeting exercises where staff and citizens share information in an interactive problem-solving mode.
- A key challenge is how to strike a balance between having the USFS planning team dominate the process by providing all the information, versus starting with a blank slate on which community stakeholders are asked to provide input and information without an appropriate understanding of current conditions or management needs. (It is anticipated that future dissemination efforts can provide some good working examples of appropriate scientific and community knowledge integration.)
- It can be effective to bring together partners to assist with designing, implementing, and adaptively managing a collaborative process – universities, consultants, NGOs, state and local governments, community partnerships – which can play various roles from neutral convener, to guiding a field trip, to bringing to the table community economic and social data and comprehensive plans about desired growth and future development.
- Collaborative processes require an increased utilization of communication and public affairs resources to notify and inform the community about the collaborative planning process, make specific meetings announcements, prepare meeting packets, provide progress reports to partner groups and organizations, and assist with internal planning team communications and coordination, among other activities.



# A Policy Reflection

It is clear from the stories captured in our research that there is an abundance of experimentation, learning, and continual effort being made by Forest Service staff and community stakeholders in collaborative efforts in national forest planning. Forest Service staff and community stakeholders continue to accumulate experiences with collaborative processes which, in turn, shape their principles and practices. It is no longer a matter of convincing most people that collaboration in general is a good idea; what may be more important is how policies and administrative support are targeted to build capacities and practices for collaboration in forest planning as a particular context.

In light of the new forest planning rule, these experiential stories provide unique insight into the opportunities and challenges facing collaboration in forest planning. By opening up forest planning, the Forest Service effectively allows stakeholders opportunities to shape both the process and the content of forest planning. The collaboration can create a larger community of interest around the forest plan and the future management of the national forest. The persistent challenge is that the process becomes more dynamic and less predictable. Procedural requirements, administrative pressure, and budgets can put forest planning teams in a situation where they may have to make uncomfortable trade-offs between the community collaborative process and simply getting work done.

This brings up a consistent and critical theme arising from our research: the first and foremost challenge in collaborative national forest planning is to fully understand, appreciate, and actively manage expectations. Both Forest Service staff and community stakeholders bring their own experiences, perceptions, and ideas about what a collaborative process should be. Due to the multi-faceted nature of forest planning, many of these expectations may not be realistic. Time and resources need to be expended internally to organize and strategically plan the collaborative process. The need for a “process road map” was frequently cited by individuals interviewed. Furthermore, the planning team leader needs the assistance, support, and communication with the forest supervisor and district rangers, as well as resource specialists. An organization that collaborates well within itself is in a better position to collaborate with others.

The issue of intra-organizational collaboration in national forest planning was clearly expressed by both Forest Service staff and community stakeholders. The chief concern is that community-based collaboration is not as fully supported as it could be from higher levels within the Forest Service. In many ways, community-based collaboration amounts to a sharing of certain kinds of power with community stakeholders – what issues need to be addressed, what types of data and information are considered legitimate, what is the range of potential desired future conditions. Moreover, community-based collaboration is fundamentally about relationship-building – the development and transformation of working relationships with community stakeholders in which they are regarded as partners in stewardship of national forest lands. To create this shared “planning space,” Forest Service staff need to feel confident that their work is fully supported and will not be undermined by higher levels. Especially crucial is the provision of adequate time and resources necessary for relationship-building.

The experiences and stories of individuals involved in community-based collaboration in forest planning suggest that the Forest Service may need to reorganize how it conducts forest planning and how resources are allocated for forest planning. For example, upfront, “pre-planning” activities need to be taken into account. This intra-organizational collaboration should be recognized as a key enterprise in and of itself. Staff time and effort need to be acknowledged and rewarded, especially the lead role of district rangers and district staff. Involving community stakeholders in pre-planning, process design may help distribute the responsibilities for the collaborative process to those who will be directly involved. Although many forests already engage in these activities, a greater amount of attention is required to integrate these practices system-wide.

The experiences and stories from the field converge with the new forest planning rule in that both regard forest planning as an ongoing, continuous process. Therefore, collaboration needs to be thought of as an ongoing, continuous process, not just an episodic event to involve stakeholders. What this implies is that the Forest Service needs to invest in working with community stakeholders in a more sustained collaborative partnership. This, in turn, requires leadership and resources to sustain. Indeed, the emergent properties of learning, relationship building, and the interplay between forest planning and the broader community context in our study suggest that collaboration is tied to sustainability – sustainable long-term stewardship of national forests is best accomplished through sustained community engagement, learning, and adaptive management.

To spur further dialogue about collaboration in national forest planning and beyond, we put forward the following questions to frame future discussions stemming from our research:

- How might Forest Service directives be amended to emphasize the importance of “planning to plan?” Providing a framework and template of strategies for planning teams to organize and develop a road map prior to starting the plan revision process may improve the readiness of planning teams.
- Is it feasible for budgetary opportunities and alignment to be created to account for the upfront costs of collaboration? Collaboration takes time and often requires external assistance to supplement expertise that is missing in the Forest Service.
- Is it necessary for procurement regulations to change so that planning teams can easily contract with professional third-party facilitators and other forms of external collaboration assistance? Even if financial resources are available, internal procurement policies may stand in the way of the planning team being able to contract with qualified professional facilitators.
- Is it feasible to place a moratorium on personnel changes during the forest planning process? Changes in line officers and planning team members can be highly disruptive and cause a collaborative process to lose momentum.
- How can the Forest Service reciprocate community stakeholders’ time and energy in a collaborative process? Collaboration in forest planning asks a lot from stakeholders while providing little in the form of tangible, immediate returns to local communities. Sustaining people’s involvement in a process that can last two to five years remains a challenge.
- What training and knowledge transfer mechanisms need to be put in place to foster continued and shared learning among USFS staff members with regard to collaborative skills and capacity building? How can USFS-State and Private Forestry community outreach efforts continue to contribute to this ongoing development?

# Appendix A – Case Profiles

*The following descriptions are brief case profiles of the six forest plan revisions, upon which this report is based. The intent of this section is to give a more general background and the collaborative strategy for each case, in order that the reader can become aware of the particular context of each national forest.*

## **BIGHORN NATIONAL FOREST**

The Bighorn National Forest began the plan revision in late 2000. The final plan was released and the Record of Decision was signed in September 2005. The revised plan for this 1.1 million acre National Forest will take effect beginning December 2005.

*The Bighorn National Forest is located in north-central Wyoming's Big Horn Mountain range. The gross area within the proclaimed Forest boundary contains 1,115,161 acres which includes 7,491 acres of state and private land. Three scenic byways cross the mountains, which are located midway between Yellowstone and Mount Rushmore National Parks. The Forest administers over 500 special-use permits including communication sites, reservoirs, easements, power lines, outfitter guides, campground concession operations, and lodges/resorts. More than 28,000 cattle and 21,000 sheep graze on the National Forest under special-use permit. Through the end of 2000, after 15 years of implementation, the Forest has offered approximately 131 million board feet of timber and firewood. The Bighorn National Forest is subdivided into three Ranger Districts located in Sheridan, Buffalo, and Lovell, Wyoming. The Forest Supervisor's office is co-located with the District Office in Sheridan.*

(Excerpted from the Bighorn National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan Preface, dated November 2005 and available at [http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn/projects/planrevision/documents/final/plan\\_preface%20.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn/projects/planrevision/documents/final/plan_preface%20.pdf).)

Collaboration was a central feature for the Bighorn plan revision. The collaboration took the form of a steering committee. Membership included district rangers, forest supervisors or staff officers, a representative from the State of Wyoming, a Forest Service regional office liaison, and the Forest Service Wyoming statewide coordinator. Members of the State of Wyoming working team (State of Wyoming agencies, county commissioners, and conservation district board) participate in the steering committee. The meetings were open to the public, although business is conducted without public input. The purpose of the steering committee was “to assist the plan revision interdisciplinary team by offering strategic advice and expertise, procuring funding and human resources, serving as sounding board for ID team, and making decisions that are outside the scope of the ID team, but not large enough to take to the full Forest leadership team.” (Excerpted from the Bighorn National Forest plan revision website accessible at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn/projects/planrevision/>.)

The purpose of the steering committee was to:

1. Review and approve revision schedule of work.
2. Make decisions for ID team when they are at an impasse or at request of ID team leader.
3. Strategize ID team's next steps when incoming initiatives, policies, regulations, or assignments from above the Forest level impact or conflict with approved work plan.
4. Serve as liaison between the unit the committee member represents and the plan revision ID team.
5. Serve as liaison between committee and Bighorn Forest Leadership Team.

Prior to the formal scoping period in November 2000, the Bighorn planning team met with representatives from the State of Wyoming, and the county commissioners and conservation districts from the four-county Bighorn area. The meeting resulted in development of the revision steering committee. The state and local governments signed a memorandum of understanding with the Forest agency that identified their roles and responsibilities as cooperative agencies. The steering committee met approximately 40 times from 2001 through 2005 to discuss specific direction and analysis in the plan and environmental impact statement, and made recommendations for changes throughout the process. The resource professionals in the Game and Fish Department, State Forestry, and State Trails worked closely with the Forest interdisciplinary team in suggesting changes to the draft plan. (Excerpted from the Record of Decision for the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Bighorn National Forest, November 2005. Accessible at [http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn/projects/planrevision/documents/final/rod\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn/projects/planrevision/documents/final/rod_FINAL.pdf).)

A questionnaire was used at the first steering committee meeting to determine what types of meeting process and format the participants preferred. Small group activities, with reporting out to the large group, received overwhelming consensus. Throughout 2001, the steering committee met with the Bighorn planning team on a series of field trips and constructed "situation maps" to assist in collaborative learning about issues facing the National Forest. The planning team also organized issue presentations from experts outside the steering committee and planning team, such as grazing permittees, motorized recreation users, and wilderness advocates.

To garner broader public input, the Bighorn conducted scoping meetings in six north-central Wyoming communities between November 2000 and January 2001. These meetings were co-hosted by the counties and conservation districts. Public field trips were also co-hosted by the Forest agency, counties, and conservation districts in the summers of 2001 and 2003 to examine issues and explore potential effects of different alternatives being considered. In January 2003, meetings were held in the six communities to gather comments on preliminary alternatives. The draft plan and accompanying draft environmental impact statement were released in July 2004, with another two rounds of community meetings between July and September 2004. An additional 19,000 comments were received during the public review and comment period.

In addition, the Bighorn staff met with specific organizations to discuss and gather feedback on specific issues and alternatives.

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## DIXIE AND FISHLAKE NATIONAL FORESTS

The Dixie and Fishlake National Forests have been conducting their forest plan revisions with a joint planning team, with team members drawn from the staff of both organizations. The plan revision process will produce two separate forest plans for a total forest land acreage of 3.5 million acres.

*(Dixie NF) is the largest of six national forests in Utah. It covers almost two million acres and stretches over 200 miles of land in the Garfield, Iron, Kane, Piute, Wayne, and Washington counties. There are four ranger districts on the forest with offices located in St. George, Cedar City, Panguitch, and Escalante. The forest is adjacent to the wonders of Zion, Bryce Canyon, and Capitol Reef National Parks, as well as the Grand Staircase-Escalante and Cedar Breaks National Monuments.*

*The Fishlake National Forest is located in south-central Utah, with district offices in Richfield, Fillmore, Beaver, and Loa. The forest encompasses 1.5 million acres in Wayne, Garfield, Sevier, Piute, Beaver, Millard, Juab, and Sanpete counties. The Fishlake National Forest is extensively bordered by public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and is bordered on the east by Capitol Reef National Park. (These excerpts are taken from the Management Direction Package posted on the Dixie-Fishlake National Forests planning website, April 28, 2005. <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/dixie/projects/FParea/HomePage.htm>.)*

The Dixie and Fishlake National Forests placed a high priority on collaboration from the beginning. Discussions were held down to the ranger district level about how staff could be a part of the collaborative planning process, and what their individual skills and capacities were to assist with collaboration. Further discussions were held to establish a set of eight collaborative principles that would guide the process:

- Collaboration belongs throughout the process
- Learning is a primary objective of collaboration
- Collaboration should lead to more integrated understanding
- Collaboration should demonstrate responsiveness and show responsibility
- Collaboration should grow support for the eventual forest plan and its implementation
- Collaboration activities should reflect value of participant's time
- Collaboration work should incorporate the valuable talent and experience of participants
- Collaboration activities should reflect that different individuals need different materials and kinds of interactions to collaborate most effectively

The planning team leaders prepared a comprehensive booklet, titled "A Collaborative Process for Plan Revision," in April 2003, from which the above principles are taken. In addition to providing basic information about a forest plan, its role and characteristics, the publication identifies approximately 20 topics that would be addressed in the forest plan revision, and discusses each one in terms of how they might be addressed by the plan, what questions need to be asked through the planning process, and what analytical tools might be used. (The booklet is available on the Forest agency's website link to the planning process, and is an outstanding introduction to collaborative methods.)

After discussion of the collaborative goals and principles, a collaborative process was designed that would initially focus on obtaining desired future conditions from broad publics. A decision was made to hold what were termed “regional meetings.” These were held in large towns or metropolitan areas in the general vicinity of the two forests – Las Vegas, Nevada; Salt Lake City, Utah; and the two larger towns where the forest supervisor’s offices were located, Richfield and Cedar City, Utah (April-May 2002). A series of meetings were also held in the smaller communities of the region, basically in those communities where a ranger district office was located (August-September 2002). Both the regional and local community meetings provided basic information about what a forest plan does, how various groups used the forest lands, and what future conditions should exist in particular landscapes. The results from the meetings were gathered and processed by planning staff members into desired future conditions, and brought back to the communities for further comment and editing.

The second step of the process focused on a set of key issues, including timber and range suitability, roadless area inventory and evaluation, dispersed recreation suitability, motorized recreation suitability, wilderness area recommendations, and wild and scenic river recommendations. Around each of these topics a topical working group (TWiG) was formed, made up of volunteers who expressed interest from the community meetings and assisted by at least one member of the planning team. While each TWiG set its own objectives, in general they studied resource inventory data about their topic, examined suitability and management strategy questions, and proposed alternatives for problem solving. At the end of approximately a three to six month process, each TWiG made a presentation of their findings to the forest supervisors (Fall 2003).

The Dixie and Fishlake National Forests were assisted throughout the collaborative participation process by neutral facilitation provided through the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution; by meeting convening and participant identification by the Rural Life Center at Southern Utah University; and by the Utah Governor’s Planning Office, which was contracted to complete the socioeconomic assessment. The joint forest planning process also entered into cooperative agency agreements with all 11 county governments in the vicinity of the National Forests, either individually or through two regional councils of government.

Subsequent to the regional, community and TWiG meetings, the planning team began to prepare what was called “a management direction package.” This package was a summary of management challenges, desired conditions by natural or cultural resource, management objectives, strategies for specific issues and landscapes, and a series of design criteria that will be used to guide management actions. This package was made available in April 2005, and contains most of the components anticipated in a draft forest plan for each forest.

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## **GRAND MESA, UNCOMPAHGRE, AND GUNNISON NATIONAL FORESTS**

The Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests (GMUG) are operated under one administrative unit. Management of these forests was administratively combined in 1973. The GMUG covers nearly three million acres across eight counties in the central and southern Rocky Mountains on the Western Slope of Colorado. The GMUG covers a land base of roughly 150 miles in length, with the Forest Supervisor's office located in Delta, Colorado.

*The GMUG is a highly diverse forest. It includes eight designated wilderness areas, five nationally designated scenic and historic byways, five mountain peaks over 14,000 feet, three downhill ski areas, and one of the largest flat-top mountains. The Forest supports a large grazing program and provides the source of water for communities in the Gunnison, Uncompahgre, and Grand Valley communities. Coal, natural gas, and hardrock minerals are abundant on the GMUG. (GMUG Forest website description can be found at: [http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/gmug/policy/plan\\_rev/index.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/gmug/policy/plan_rev/index.shtml).)*

Just prior to initiating the forest plan revision, a four-year effort to revise the forest's travel management plan became quite divisive. In nearby White River National Forest, there had been considerable dissension over the manner in which a "preferred alternative" had been publicly presented. Factors such as these led the USFS Regional and GMUG leadership to place a strong emphasis on a collaborative approach to the plan revision.

In 1992, in anticipation of the upcoming planning process, the local governments in the GMUG area formed the Public Land Partnership (PLP) to encourage diverse and collaborative participation in it. The GMUG and the PLP jointly sponsored a workshop to kick off the plan revision. This workshop was attended by several hundred persons over a two-day period and emphasized the collaborative learning process espoused by Steve Daniels and Greg Walker. These developments contributed significantly to collaborative capacities both within the communities and among the GMUG staff.

The general strategy of the GMUG was based around increasing collaborative planning through five "landscape working groups," including the Uncompahgre Plateau, North Fork, Grand Mesa, San Juans, and Gunnison Basin:

*Between February 2002 and November 2003, 42 landscape working group meetings were held throughout the five GMUG geographic areas attended by 1,035 individuals. Through the course of the LWG meetings, monitoring and evaluations guided appropriate adaptations to the design and content of subsequent meetings. The LWG meeting approach and structure shifted to more effectively encourage collaborative dialogue focused on management concerns and challenges and desired future conditions.*

*The landscape working groups developed a vision statement for the future desired condition of the geographic area and provided recommendations for each specific landscape (with the exception of the Uncompahgre Plateau landscapes). This information is summarized in "Vision, Roles and Contributions from Landscape Working Groups" for each geographic area. Challenges, risks, and barriers to achieving the vision or desired conditions were also discussed.*

(See additional outcomes of the landscape working groups at [http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/gmug/policy/plan\\_rev/lwg/index.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/gmug/policy/plan_rev/lwg/index.shtml).)

The landscape working groups utilized an open meeting process, with overall emphasis in the collaborative process being placed on relationship building. In addition, situation mapping, expert presentations, and panel discussions on historic, current, and future uses were utilized. After the initial working group meetings on the Uncompahgre Plateau revealed that the scope and detail of desired outcomes was unrealistic, an adaptation was made leading to the use of seven management themes. The five major landscapes were divided into smaller units, and the landscape themes were used as an integrating tool to address desired conditions, suitable uses, and need for change. This tool facilitated a blending of scientific and technical information from the GMUG resource specialists with local community place-based knowledge.

Between October and December of 2004, a second round of community meetings was held to review the “preliminary proposed actions.” The GMUG anticipates presenting the “draft forest plan revision” in early 2006.

Further information on collaborative principles, guidelines, and lessons learned is available at [http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/gmug/policy/plan\\_rev/collab/guides/index.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/gmug/policy/plan_rev/collab/guides/index.shtml).

Special attention might also be drawn to “10 Lessons Learned,” prepared by Tony Cheng and Kathy Detmar, December 12, 2003, Summary of Phase 1.1 Landscape Working Groups Process for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forest Plan Revision, unpublished status report at: [http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/gmug/policy/plan\\_rev/collab/lessons\\_learned.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/gmug/policy/plan_rev/collab/lessons_learned.shtml).

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## MEDICINE BOW NATIONAL FOREST

The Medicine Bow National Forest is jointly administered with the Routt National Forest. However, each Forest has its own land and resource management plan. The Medicine Bow initiated their forest plan revision in 1993; however, a decision was made to complete the Routt National Forest plan first, which was approved February 1998. The Medicine Bow resumed their plan revision in October 1999. The final plan was released and the Record of Decision was signed in December 2003.

*The Medicine Bow National Forest lies in southeast Wyoming in the north-south trending Rocky Mountains. The Forest includes approximately 1.1 million acres and is the only national forest in southeast Wyoming. The Medicine Bow includes four units in three distinct mountain ranges. More than half of Wyoming's population lives in the vicinity of the Medicine Bow National Forest. The state capital, Cheyenne, population 50,000, is 50 miles from the Supervisor's Office and 30 miles from the Forest boundary. Populations of other Medicine Bow area communities are: Laramie, 27,000; Casper, 50,000; and Douglas, 5,700. Interstate 80 crosses the Forest. The Forest provides a wide variety of recreation opportunities, which play a major role in the social and economic environment of local communities. Timber harvest and livestock grazing have been historic uses on the Forest since before the turn of the 20th century. Jobs and income from timber harvest contribute substantially to local communities.*

(Excerpted from the Executive Summary, Medicine Bow National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement, dated December 2003 and accessible at [http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/mbr/projects/forestplans/mb/exe\\_sum/exesum.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/mbr/projects/forestplans/mb/exe_sum/exesum.pdf).)

To assist in the resumption of the Medicine Bow forest plan revision, the Institute for Environment and Natural Resources at the University of Wyoming released "Medicine Bow National Forest, Forest Plan Revision: A Situation Assessment" in October 1999. The assessment was "a public involvement instrument to evaluate public involvement processes and help identify concerns about topics to be addressed during the revision process. The assessment was based on confidential interviews with 42 individuals." (Excerpted from the Medicine Bow National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan FEIS, Appendix A, pg. 2.)

In May 2001, Biodiversity Associates, a non-profit conservation organization based in Laramie, Wyoming filed a lawsuit against the Forest Service to block three timber sales. The suit contended that the sales were illegal because the sales were authorized under the original 1985 forest plan which has expired according to the National Forest Management Act provisions that plans be updated every 10 to 15 years. In October 2002, the lawsuit was dismissed by U.S. District Court Judge Clarence Brimmer. However, Judge Brimmer ordered the Forest Service to meet a deadline of December 2003 to complete the revised forest plan (from the *Billings Gazette*, October 3, 2002).

Although the Notice of Intent for the plan revision was issued in October 1999, the Medicine Bow planning team initiated the scoping process in November 2001. With the court-imposed timeline of December 2003, the Medicine Bow planning team was constrained in developing an intensive collaborative process. Nonetheless, it set about conducting numerous public meetings in communities throughout the Medicine Bow area between November 2001 and February 2002. Attendance at these scoping meetings ranged from 20 in the smaller communities such as Baggs and Encampment

to 100-150 in Laramie and Cheyenne. A total of 400 people attended all public scoping meetings. The public comments from these meetings were used to refine issues, create the alternatives, and define topics to be addressed in the environmental impact statement.

During the alternative development process, several organized interest groups came forward to offer alternatives to consider in the environmental impact statement: Recreationists of the Bow (Alternative C), Biodiversity Associates (Alternative F), Rocky Mountain Activists Network (Alternative G), and local timber industry representatives (Alternative H). An additional round of seven open house meetings were held March 2002 to confirm that each revision issue was being addressed in one or more of the alternatives. Approximately 340 people attended those meetings. (Excerpted from the Medicine Bow National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan FEIS, Appendix A, pg. 3.)

The Medicine Bow planning team also developed memoranda of understanding with the State of Wyoming, Carbon and Converse Counties, seven southeastern Wyoming conservation districts, and the Bureau of Land Management under the Cooperating Agency status provisions addressed in the Council of Environmental Quality's administrative regulations for the National Environmental Policy Act (40 C.F.R. §§ 1501.6 & 1508.5). Forest Service representatives (regional office specialists, district rangers, Medicine Bow National Forest resource specialists, planning team members, Wyoming capitol city coordinator, and the Forest supervisor), and the cooperating agencies formed a plan revision steering committee to guide the process. In fact, the State of Wyoming signed the first cooperative agency status between a state and the Forest Service on September 22, 1999. The state was instrumental in convening the public scoping meetings – scheduling the facilities, providing refreshments, and providing facilitators.

The draft revised plan and environmental impact statement were released December 2002. Beginning in February 2003, the Forest and the cooperative agencies held a series of deliberative meetings to work on plan related resource issues. Together, teams of cooperators and Forest specialists addressed specific direction and analysis in the draft plan and draft environmental impact statement and made recommendations for changes.

Parallel to the deliberative process between the Forest and cooperative agencies, the Forest and the state conducted open house public meetings in 10 communities between February and March 2003. The open houses were organized in a round-robin format with six stations corresponding to the six draft alternatives. Each station had a map, a written summary of the alternative, a flipchart, and a Forest Service staff member to answer questions. Public participants were invited to provide comments on each alternative's map and flipchart – which parts of the alternative they liked and which parts they didn't like. Because the open houses did not have any chairs nor were they organized in a traditional "town hall meeting" format, several individuals who merely wanted to "grandstand" turned around and left the venue. Over 20,000 public comments were received on the draft plan and draft environmental impact statement.

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## **SAN JUAN NATIONAL FOREST – SAN JUAN PUBLIC LANDS CENTER**

The San Juan National Forest is located in southwestern Colorado, and consists of approximately 1,878,000 acres, managed through three ranger districts – the Pagosa, Columbine, and Dolores. The San Juan is unique in that it is a part of a service first arrangement, whereby the Bureau of Land Management's San Juan Resource Area, consisting of approximately 676,000 acres, and the National Forest are managed jointly through an integrated agency staff. (See the San Juan Public Lands Center website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/sanjuan/>.) Roughly speaking, the joint USFS and BLM lands lie in a contiguous band over a distance of approximately 100 miles along the San Juan Mountains. The entire public land base consists of the Weminuche Wilderness, high mountain mixed conifer stands punctuated by numerous 14,000-foot peaks, bounded by western ponderosa pine at mid-elevations, and piñon-juniper woodlands at the lower elevations. The BLM lands lie primarily along the western Colorado border with Utah.

In 1993, the San Juan National Forest undertook a wilderness study of the Weminuche, pioneering the use of a community study group of approximately 25 members that met for over a year. Partially because of the success of the wilderness study group, the collaborative process for the forest plan revision, initiated in 1995, was built around a study group on each of the three ranger districts. These study groups met in 14 monthly meetings up into 1996. After a period of basic orientation about the role and characteristics of a forest plan, and the history and trends of management on the forest, the study groups took up a series of revision topics, including vegetation management and fire, range, recreation and travel management, wildlife, cultural resources, scenic corridors, and water resources.

Monthly meetings consisted of an issue presentation by a resource specialist, describing the current conditions and critical features of a given resource or program, management concerns, and some general direction about the needs for change in that topic area. During the second half of the meeting, study group members were engaged in a roundtable discussion or exercise on several key questions about their desires for resource use and management on the selected topic. Subsequent to each monthly meeting, the informational materials coming from the resource specialists and the conversation and comments from the participants were shared back in writing. Over a period of 12 to 14 months the study group members became increasingly familiar with the resource conditions of the forest, and shared their knowledge and perspectives about management problems and solutions.

At the conclusion of the 14-month study group process, there was a sense that the resource issues that had been reviewed each month needed additional analysis. At this point in the process, working groups were formed around the individual resources or plan revision topics. The working groups were formed from members of the study groups, but there was an opportunity for new members to join the process. The groups met for an additional six to eight months, examining in greater detail their concerns, desired conditions, and suggestions for management. Both during the study group and working group periods, several field trips were taken to exemplary sites of vegetation management, or riparian conditions, or recreation use, etc. Throughout both processes there was considerable shared learning and relationship building that occurred. (The documents prepared through these efforts are available at <http://ocs.fortlewis.edu/forestPlan/contact.asp>.)

Due to the 1998 moratorium on appropriations for forest planning, which were associated with congressional concerns over the proposed new planning regulations, and subsequent budgetary shortfalls in forest planning, plus a 77,000-acre wildfire in 2002 (the Missionary Ridge fire), the community collaboration component of the San Juan Forest plan revision process was delayed until 2004. In the summer of that year, a staff core team was assembled to initiate a landscape-focused approach, which had been previously utilized by the GMUG National Forests. As in the previous study and working group processes, the collaborative process team was made up of San Juan National Forest staff, plus facilitation and coordination staff from the Office of Community Services at Fort Lewis College, Durango, Colorado. The involvement of the college staff has been facilitated by a challenge-cost share agreement, which also included assistance in the preparation of the socioeconomic assessment. (See the assessment at <http://ocs.fortlewis.edu/forestPlan/reports.asp>, completed in 2005.)

Although the later phase of the community collaborative process is not a part of this research project, a few of its features are worth mentioning. It is similar in that it also uses the study group approach, but with the adaptation of focusing on 10 to 12 landscapes on each of the three ranger districts, including the adjacent BLM lands, managed through the San Juan Public Lands Center service first arrangement, as noted earlier. Beginning in January of 2005, and concluding in August, the monthly meetings focused on one to three landscapes per session. Using a “stick-on icon,” participants were asked to document their current uses, their resource and social concerns and opportunities, and evaluations of unique features within the landscape polygon. This sticker process provided each participant with a virtual flip chart for expressing their individual and group values and concerns. A GIS mapping system supported the icon exercises, facilitating a continuous record of issues, desired conditions, and suggestions for management strategies.

The San Juan team also adopted a management themes approach, as pioneered by the GMUG Forests. Through this method, each of approximately 30 landscape polygons is collaboratively assessed and categorized according to one of seven themes, which range from wilderness or inactive management to limited areas to multiple use. Other themes include special designated areas, a recreation emphasis, urban interface and highly permanently developed sites (e.g. ski areas). District staff, community members, and resource specialists participated together in an iterative fashion, mapping each polygon with regard to past management under the existing plan, the themes of current conditions, and desired conditions. The management theme system has been highly effective in facilitating a way for staff and citizens to integrate and share their knowledge and perspectives about the landscapes. (As noted, this latest phase of the San Juan collaborative process is not a part of this research report, but Forest Service representatives are hopeful that some documentation of it can follow the completion of the forest plan and the BLM resource management plan, scheduled for late 2006.)

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## WHITE RIVER NATIONAL FOREST

The White River National Forest is one of the nation's largest and oldest national forests. Established in 1891 as the White River Plateau Timber Reserve, the forest later incorporated several other reserves to reach its current expanse of 2,270,000 acres. The White River National Forest is located in north-central Colorado west of the Continental Divide. The divide marks most of the forest's eastern boundary, which is about 60 miles west of Denver. Ready access to the forest by residents of Denver and other Front Range communities is provided by Interstate 70, which enters the forest at the Eisenhower Memorial Tunnel. Over the past several decades, the White River has increasingly become a recreation-oriented national forest.

The forest boundary encompasses national forest system lands within nine different Colorado counties: Eagle, Garfield, Gunnison, Mesa, Moffat, Pitkin, Rio Blanco, Routt, and Summit. In terms of recreational visitor days, the White River National Forest ranked fifth in the nation in 1995. The forest has seven ranger districts: Aspen, Blanco, Dillon, Eagle, Holy Cross, Rifle, and Sopris.

Preliminary work to revise the 1984 forest plan began in 1994.

- In 1996, the Forest supervisor published a "Monitoring and Evaluation Five-Year Report." This report found that conditions and public demands had changed significantly since inception of the 1984 forest plan and that a need existed to revise it.
- After a series of open houses and media coverage, the White River National Forest received hundreds of comments from across the nation, but mainly from people who live near the forest. Issues raised by the public and by other agencies were examined by an interdisciplinary (ID) team of planners and resource specialists organized by the forest.
- An "Identification of Purpose and Need" document, issued in August 1996, summarized how public comments and monitoring and evaluation efforts were used to determine what areas of the existing plan were most in need of revision. The interdisciplinary team identified six areas, called revision topics, on which to base the planning process: 1) biological diversity; 2) travel management; 3) recreation; 4) roadless areas; 5) special areas; and 6) timber suitability and allowable sale quantity.
- In July 1997, the forest released an "Analysis of the Management Situation" (AMS), which assessed the ability of the forest to supply goods and services in response to the public's demand for them. The AMS also provided a foundation for developing a broad range of reasonable alternatives to the existing plan.
- In the summer of 1997, the revision topics were presented to the public in a series of 10 open houses held in Aspen, Avon, Carbondale, Denver, Eagle, Frisco, Glenwood Springs, Grand Junction, Meeker, and Rifle. Forest managers solicited comments from the public at these open houses and through media disclosures.
- Forest planners turned their attention to formulating a preliminary array of forest management alternatives that responded to the six initial issues. These alternatives were based on the public comment received as well as on improved knowledge of the forest's resources recorded in its GIS database.

- By July 1998, six alternatives had been developed. A draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) that analyzed the six alternatives was issued in August 1999. Based on public and congressional requests, the original 90-day comment period was extended to May 9, 2001. Nearly 14,000 individual pieces of public input (letters, emails, faxes, public hearing testimony, etc.) were received on the DEIS and draft forest plan.
- After considering public comments on the draft forest plan and DEIS, the interdisciplinary team made necessary changes and revisions, including the formulation of a new alternative, K. (All of the above information, including the background on the Forest, is excerpted from the “Final Environmental Impact Statement Summary for the White River National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan 2002 Revision,” available on the White River N.F. website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/whiteriver/>.)
- The Record of Decision for the White River Forests plan revision was signed on April 2, 2002. However, due to 14 appeals, the Consolidated Record of Appeals was not issued by the Chief of the Forest Service until September 15, 2004. (See at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/whiteriver/>.)

During the extended comment period on the DEIS (August 1999 through May 2001) the Northwest Council of Governments (NWCOG), based in Silverthorne, Colorado, coordinated a response to the White National Forest draft plan on behalf of 26 county and municipal entities. (See January 28, 2000 letter.) “Collaboration” was stated by the NWCOG as being “of utmost interest.” The response also stated that since “collaboration with local governments is a deficiency in all of the alternatives” the NWCOG would not “establish a preference for one of the alternatives over another.” The NWCOG response went on to make the following three major points:

1. **The effects of urbanization (growth) on multi-jurisdictional planning and management must be assessed in collaboration with appropriate local general-purpose governmental jurisdictions and local, state, and federal land and resource management agencies.**
2. **A multi-jurisdictional collaborative process must be established for the identification, planning, management, and monitoring of intermixed and/or adjacent lands of other jurisdictions that are of concern to those jurisdictions.**
3. **A collaborative process must be established to identify goals and objectives for multi-jurisdictional management actions that will strive to sustain community vitality and healthy ecosystems on a regional basis. (Emphasis added.)**

To underscore the issue of rapid urbanization in the region surrounding the White River National Forest, the NWCOG response stated that from 1990 to 1997 it had “experienced an average population increase of 31 percent” as compared with the state average of 16 percent. Along the Interstate 70 corridor these increases were even higher, with three communities, Silverthorne, Frisco, and Basalt, experiencing population increases of 71, 64, and 60 percent respectively. (NWCOG June 28, 2000 response memorandum, p. 3.) Through a detailed analysis of the White River’s previously published Analysis of the Management Situation and the draft forest plan revision, the NWCOG built a case for a deeper focus in the forest plan on intermix areas, or management prescription 7.1.

The response of the NWCOG, on behalf of its member local governments and communities, led the White River to make changes to its draft plan, and in particular to designate 7,800 acres to be managed as intermix in order to "...maintain cooperative relationships with private landowners and other governments with jurisdiction." Additionally, the plan added a monitoring question, stating that "The analysis of the economic and social effects of Plan implementation extend to not only direct, but indirect and induced effects of employment. In addition, the cost of housing will also be analyzed." (NWCOG letter dated June 6, 2002, p.2.)

As a result of the testimony and interactions between the Northwest COG and the White River National Forest, a process was outlined to facilitate the development of a Rural Community Assistance Grant for \$23,600 (awarded April 6, 2000), with an additional matching amount of \$33,210 coming from the member jurisdictions of the NWCOG. This award focuses on the establishment of a "multi-jurisdictional, intergovernmental collaborative project." Through this project the White River National Forest and the NWCOG developed the **Building Bridges Memorandum of Understanding (BBMOU)**, agreed to on April 19, 2002. "The MOU is designed to guide the participating jurisdictions through cooperative communications when projects likely to have cross boundary consequences are proposed within overlay districts of mutual concern to the jurisdictions." (Building Bridges Memo, undated.)

As a part of the BB Project a study of the boundary between the White River National Forest and the adjacent governmental jurisdictions was undertaken by Colorado State University. The "boundary analysis," led by Professor George Wallace, identified over 90 potential issues and opportunities of a multi-jurisdictional nature, ranging from watershed protection, to recreation conflicts with homeowners, thistle infestation, critical wildlife highway crossings, ski area expansions, and wildfire hazards. Among these opportunities, eight projects were selected for follow-up action. One of these was vigorously pursued and more or less became the showcase for the merits of the White River National Forest working collaboratively with local communities and governments via the Building Bridges MOU. This was called the Blue River Restoration Project.

*"The project area is a one half-mile stretch of the highly visible and accessible Blue River from the base of Dillon Dam to just below the Interstate Highway 70 bridge. The objective of this project was to retain the river's Gold Medal Fishery status. The vision is that when the project is successfully completed it will serve as a workable model for other such collaborative projects.*

*The Blue River Restoration project was a collaborative effort involving representatives from several jurisdictions, organizations, and agencies. Partners actively contributing to this project included the Town of Silverthorne, NWCCOG Foundation, Inc., Trout Unlimited, US Forest Service-White River National Forest, Colorado Division of Wildlife, Colorado Department of Transportation, Denver Water Board, and Summit County Government.*

*Between November 1, 2002 and November 1, 2003 the working committee raised \$99,898 to match the National Forest Foundation's \$94,750 challenge grant. The design for the restoration project was finalized in May 2003; construction began in early July 2003 and was completed in less than eight weeks. Public education and outreach efforts began immediately with a press conference announcing the National Forest Foundation grant along with the details of the proposed river restoration project. These efforts continued throughout the year with ongoing public relation efforts, press coverage, and a special fund raising event. These education and outreach efforts will continue long after the completion of the project through the placement of several interpretive signs along the edge of the restored Blue River. A video has also been produced for distribution throughout the region and to be aired on the local television station. To measure*

*the success of the restoration project, Colorado Division of Wildlife staff will be working with Trout Unlimited volunteers to survey and collect creel census data over the next year. This data will then be compared to data collected before the project and will also serve as a new baseline for future studies. The Blue River Restoration project was completed on time and on budget, and serves as a model for successful multi-jurisdictional projects.”*

**(Excerpted from the Building Bridges Report to the National Forest Foundation, which provided core funding for the river restoration.)**

**Although the Building Bridges MOU and subsequent implementation projects, which in later years have included fire mitigation-related fuel treatments and planning, occurred in the midst of the White River Forest Plan Revision effort, it illustrates the kinds of collaborative relationships that can be fostered with the community. One could go so far as to say that it offers a model of the sort of collaborative process that would be quite valuable before, during, and after a collaborative forest resource management planning process, whether at a strategic or project level. The following quotes indicate perspectives from key leaders in the Building Bridges Process, pointing out that such multi-jurisdictional relationships are in essence a new way of doing business, beneficial to all parties on many levels. The key message seems to be that the Forest Service need not try to “do it alone.”**

*“The forest [White River] here in this county has long ceased to be a commodity forest. It is now an amenity forest. The problem is all of the values and all of the input/output models that the Forest Service uses are all based on commodities. So, they’re really good at running an economic impact assessment on animal unit months or board feet or skier days or whatever else, but how do you assess value when it comes to ‘views’ and those kinds of things? What Summit County wanted to do is — they really saw a deficiency in the forest plan in the economic impact assessment.” C*

*“One of the things that came in the forest plan which I think is key, which came from the NWCOG effort, is that in [an] intermix [prescription] within the urban-wildland interface, there is direction to the forest managers that they will seek multi-jurisdictional approaches to forest management. Those words weren’t there in the draft, but they are there in the final.” C*

*“The White River, under the supervisor’s direction, has been exceedingly cooperative. I talked about mistrust in our earlier conversations. It’s amazing that we can now sit down in a room full of municipal, county, and Forest Service folks and the mistrust, while not completely gone, sure is diminished on both sides.” C*

*“When you extend this project [Building Bridges] over to Eagle County... there’s so many things that we can’t or shouldn’t do alone. Fuels treatment work is one of those because it transcends the ownership boundaries. That’s an example of improved stewardship through this process. When I think about what’s happening in the Vail Valley Forest Health Project, which is the inter-agency extension in Eagle County, there’s no question you’ll get much better stewardship and decision making regarding what kind of vegetation treatments you want to do and how you get the overall protection you need to of the resources. Building Bridges became part of the Vail Valley Forest Health [Project]... we’re all one now.” FS*

*“I think there’s often a perception on the part of Forest Service that we have to do it ourselves and we’re not allowed to share any of our decision making authority outside of government. I think that notion is dying, but initially that’s a good reason not to partner with somebody, if you don’t want to.” FS*



*“The second thing is the mindset that we can do a better job if we use people other than ourselves, if we expand the group of people that are working on a project outside the Forest Service, because you get the additional perspectives. Certainly the community and the people that are living here locally have a perspective that needs to be heard in any decision that we’re making. In Summit County, 80 percent of land is public. Our willingness to do that is an important part. Being able to think beyond an individual project or activity is important to this process. Because, at least in Building Bridges and subsequent activities we’ve done with the NWCOG, being able to see the larger whole that we’re working on, relationships between one part of a county and another, one land use and another, has been really important.” FS*

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*Forest plan website: [http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/whiteriver/projects/forest\\_plan/index.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/whiteriver/projects/forest_plan/index.shtml).*

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# National Forest-Plan Revision Websites

The following websites have rather extensive information about the forest plan revision processes described in this report. In many cases these sites contain excellent background information, including meeting notes, summary statements of desired future conditions, resource issue inventories and analyses, etc., about the collaborative processes being utilized. We strongly believe that some of the detailed accounts provided on these sites will aid further understanding of the experiences of the six forest planning processes.

Bighorn National Forest

**<http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn/projects/planrevision/>**

Dixie and Fishlake National Forests

**<http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/dixie/projects/FParea/HomePage.htm>**

Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, Gunnison National Forest

**[http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/gmug/policy/plan\\_rev/index.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/gmug/policy/plan_rev/index.shtml)**

Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests

**<http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/mbr/projects/forestplans/mb/index.shtml>**

San Juan National Forest

**<http://ocs.fortlewis.edu/forestPlan/>**

White River National Forests and the Building Bridges MOU

**<http://www.nwc.cog.co.us/Building%20Bridges%20Project/buildingbridges.htm>**

**[http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/whiteriver/projects/forest\\_plan/index.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/whiteriver/projects/forest_plan/index.shtml)**