



Enhancing Collaboration Ideas Submitted to the WRSC from METI

In the course of doing outreach for the Western Regional Assessment and Strategy, we heard many comments about the need to improve or extend collaboration. Many who are familiar with the community processes active throughout the west believe that increased collaborative efforts will improve on-the-ground results. Read more for some hints on collaboration to meet the goals of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.

What is collaboration? The simple of definition of collaboration is people getting together to solve their common problems. But the term has taken on greater significance in the western US among those working with natural resource management issues. Successful collaborative groups exhibit the following characteristics and practices:

- 1) shared decision making;
- 2) shared learning and teaching;
- 3) shared ownership of group processes;
- 4) agreement on ground rules and conflict resolution methods;
- 5) use and sharing of local and traditional knowledge and resources; and
- 6) broad-based local participation of a diversity of stakeholders.

Why collaborate? Collaboration to achieve community-based restoration and fuels reduction objectives has been one of the few areas of progress towards achieving and maintaining resilient landscapes in the western U.S. Local collaboratives such as the Applegate Partnership (OR), Greater Flagstaff Forest Partnership (AZ), Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition (WA), Wallowa Resources (OR), and others have been able to transcend political and regulatory gridlock to successfully complete fuels reduction and landscape restoration projects on the ground.

This quote from the Greater Flagstaff Forest Partnership describes the value of collaboration well: “We can continue to talk, strive for perfection, and work toward total agreement on every single point, OR we can act, in the realization that time is against us, and that bad things happen in the field while we chatter on the sidelines.”

How do I start collaborating? Begin to form a group by reaching out to be sure everyone who cares is represented. Recruit the key players who must be at the table – those who are critical to getting actions implemented and objectives met because of their authorities, influence, power, or other reasons. Get a facilitator to help plan and conduct your first meeting with access to a collaborative model for discussion and agreement, process ideas to “break the ice”, and energy to initiate a conversation among participants.



How can we improve our collaborative efforts?

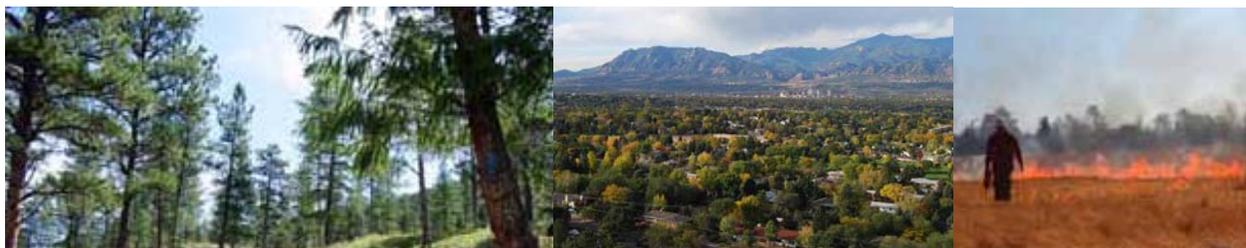
- Collaboration MUST be **inclusive** to succeed, and teamwork is how things get done. **A well-defined method for proceeding through group interactions, a clear path to success, and measurable results** are necessary to support and encourage active collaborative processes.
- Seek **advice from experts** on issues of a technical or scientific nature.
- Collaboration can be a time-intensive process. It requires **patience and acceptance of divergent viewpoints without threat of negative consequences** in order to cultivate and realize the rewards of trust and results on the ground.
- Meetings need to be well facilitated, minutes recorded, and decisions documented with a high level of **transparency**. **Flexible scheduling and means of interaction** are core values of successful collaboratives, as are **accessible communication media** for visualizing ideas put forward to participants.
- Groups use an agreed upon **decision making process** and **provide adequate time** to fully understand all options and their consequences. Changes to the decision making process or other group processes are minimal and documented with a high level of transparency.

Where can I get help? There are many resources available; these are a few good places to start:

- Sustainable Northwest provides assistance to many community-based collaboratives in the Pacific Northwest. Visit them online at <http://www.sustainablenorthwest.org>
- The Red Lodge Clearinghouse has developed a very useful “Collaboration Handbook”. Read it and find other resources at <http://rlch.org/content/collaboration-handbook>

And here are some websites from collaborative groups in various stages of development and with a variety of successes. You may be able to contact them for advice with YOUR effort!

- Wallowa Resources (OR) <http://www.wallowaresources.org/index.php>
- Colorado Bark Beetle Cooperative (CO) <http://www.nwc.cog.co.us/index.php/affiliated-programs/colorado-bark-beetle-cooperative>
- Greater Flagstaff Forest Partnership (AZ) <http://www.gffp.org>
- Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition (WA) <http://www.newforestrycoalition.org>
- The Applegate Partnership (OR) <http://www.applegatepartnership.org/index.asp>





Home and Homeland Ideas Submitted to the WRSC from METI

American Indian Tribes and other stakeholders expressed concern during the outreach effort that current management emphasis on the wildland-urban interface (WUI) creates an artificial distinction between “home” and “homeland” that often results in a lower priority for active management of the larger landscape.

Quotes from tribal stakeholders included:

- “The WUI concept is foreign to tribes. Community is not about ‘home’ separate from the land. It’s the ‘homeland’ including food, water, and place for spiritual awareness. Everything is connected, so breaking land management into components is problematic. Pieces can’t be treated separately.”
- “WUI treated separately from the rest of the landscape violates the idea of integrated fire ecology on the landscape. Treating WUI as separate area is artificial. A key point of the Cohesive Strategy is to get beyond WUI mentality – it’s about managing the land. Not just about protecting structures. Healthy land leads to fire-adapted communities.”

Many Tribes rely on revenues from the management of forest and rangelands, and thus have an economic interest in maintaining a healthy and resilient landscape in addition to fire-adapted communities. While this is a widely held value with the Tribes, the concept of actively managing the larger landscape outside the WUI was expressed by other stakeholders as well:

- “Expand the concept of community to be inclusive of all values that contribute to a community, not just structures. Communities are more than a collection of buildings.”
- “Some good work can be done to improve fire protection around communities but our watersheds, and our forests and rangelands beyond those WUI boundaries are really where it starts when it comes to values at risk that are important to communities that provide substantial economic importance. If these communities lose these values that provide economic income into communities then they are in serious trouble to stay economically viable.”

Potential short term actions:

One of the most successful tools for addressing wildfire risk challenges is the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). Communities without plans need to work collaboratively to create CWPPs, and communities that have experienced a recent wildfire need to update plans to deal with their changed



situation. The goal of protecting communities and natural resources from wildfire cannot be accomplished by any one person or entity. Communities must work together to identify and pursue a pathway to success.

Many ideas surfaced during the public outreach effort and many will likely be incorporated into the final Cohesive Strategy. In the meantime, an opportunity exists to share key ideas that can be implemented at this time to help achieve resilient landscapes and fire-adapted communities. For example:

- Expand and continue to use Community Wildfire Protection Plans to plan for work in WUI and the larger landscape, across jurisdictional boundaries. Develop a prototype or identify pilot projects for an expanded CWPP.
- Take a holistic view that values communities and ecosystems, natural and social/cultural resources.

The Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) clearly states that the definition of WUI is to be done at the local level. It further states that federal agencies are obligated to use this WUI designation for all HFRA purposes around a formally adopted CWPP. In defining an expanded WUI or homeland, a community may wish to consider:

- A countywide strategy with a matrix (forest condition class, fire severity risk, historic fire frequency, population, number of structures, community value of structures, linkage to other fuel breaks, priority for availability of federal and state wildland fire fighting resources, etc.) for prioritizing candidate shaded fuel breaks and public lands projects to protect communities and the surrounding values that contribute to community character, viability, and wellbeing.
- Existing successful examples such as in Shoshone County (Idaho). A holistic approach to defining and protecting the WUI has created jobs while providing infrastructure protection. The county's CWPP can be found at:
- http://www.idl.idaho.gov/nat_fire_plan/county_wui_plans/shoshone/2011-Shoshone-County-CWPP.pdf
- Handbook resources from the Western Governors' Associations, National Association of State Foresters, Society of American Foresters, National Association of Counties, and Communities Committee. <http://www.stateforesters.org/files/cwpphandbook.pdf>

Effective community collaboration and full use of existing authorities are key elements for success with this effort. Future communications will identify action items related to these topics.



Fully Utilizing Existing Authorities Ideas Submitted to the WRSC from METI

There are various laws and policies that can appear to be barriers to implementing projects on the ground. Often, however, it is the *implementation* of those laws, authorities, and policies that have delayed or stopped projects. Pursuing constructive reinterpretation of authorities may help streamline agency and collaborative processes.

Use the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) to expedite collaborative planning processes.

Use of this law varies across the nation. Full use of the authority presents opportunities to significantly speed up planning processes through collaboration and effective public engagement; to build accountability, transparency, and trust; and to address a complex variety of landscape treatment and restoration situations. HFRA includes requirements for collaboration, presentation of one action alternative, and the use of an objection process instead of the appeals process to resolve conflicts. This strongly encourages early and sustained engagement.

A few tips on using HFRA:

- Get a current copy of the Handbook for the agency you are working with to understand agency policy and the decision space of managers; work with agency personnel on the intent of the law.
- Work with local field units and regional offices on procedures and where leadership stands on implementation of HFRA; find and share success stories on effective use.
- Implement a pilot project; get outside perspective and be willing to learn from successes and failures.
- Good collaboration takes time; work ahead of project timelines to avoid unnecessary delays.
- Keep the definition of the wildland-urban interface (WUI) effective and manageable.
- Keep your purpose and need clear, concise and reasonably narrow. NEPA requires this, but it is especially important when using HFRA.
- Explain to your public with great detail what HFRA is and is not.

Use “Alternative Arrangements” when dealing with catastrophic events.

Use of this authority to streamline planning processes and still meet legal requirements for action under all three Cohesive Strategy national goals could, under the right circumstances, significantly increase results on the ground. The parameters of its use are clearly stated by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), but federal agencies have taken a conservative approach to its application. Interested publics should inquire with their federal partners regarding a review of current internal restrictions.



A few tips on using alternative arrangements:

- Discuss the current use of alternative arrangements with agency planning staff at the unit and regional level. Explore and document requirements/mandates and involve the Office of General Council in your discussions.
- Encourage agency staff to discuss criteria and conditions with their Washington Office to better understand where the criteria list came from and in what circumstances it has been used effectively (e.g., Minnesota, Texas, Mississippi).
- Discuss how the economic criteria can be more fully utilized as they are by some other agencies (e.g., Department of Defense).
- If confronted with a situation that merits use of an alternative arrangement, cultivate internal (agency) and external champions to move it forward.

Use Categorical Exclusions more effectively, consistently, and with clear direction.

The current use of Categorical Exclusions (CEs) within NEPA planning processes is inconsistent across the nation. There are some units that use the authority extensively and have been recent federal court rulings supporting the use of CEs. The Cohesive Strategy presents an opportunity to bring the needed attention to the issue and encourage or even direct their use across all units in the Forest Service and DOI. The obvious benefits are reduced costs and more timely analysis of the effects of routine projects that have a proven track record of implementation.

A few tips on using CEs more effectively:

- Through inquiries at your local field unit, find out the present use of CEs.
- Review the latest rulings with agency planning and legal staff, and investigate why or if CEs are being used.
- Highlight and share successes from other units that are using CEs successfully.
- Seek out the parameters of CE use and install a quality control mechanism to ensure its success.
- Keep projects using CEs small in scope and pursue an appropriate level of analysis.
- Use all information available and question the need for new data if what you have is recent.
- Look for an “Intent Statement” and keep it focused.
- Ensure that the agency manages project timelines realistically. Remember that the intent is not to do an extensive analysis; CEs are for routine projects with limited effects.
- Establish “cooperating agency” status if it fits the criteria. If not, establish a working group for the unit manager to engage during project monitoring.

Establish and implement an aggressive schedule for reviews of Endangered Species Act conflicts.

Level 1 and 2 review procedures are in place on some units, but they are not used in an efficient or expedited manner. On other units, the process is not in place at all. When working as designed, these reviews expedite the resolution of conflicts with implementation of ESA that land management agencies



can encounter when working with regulatory agencies such as the Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS). When a conflict arises over threatened and endangered species management, reviews elevate the conflict from a local unit to a previously designated interagency team for resolution. If that team fails, it is further elevated to local agency administrators. The point is to resolve conflicts in a timely and consistent manner.

A few tips on implementing ESA:

- Find out where Level 1 and 2 reviews are being used effectively to resolve ESA conflicts. How are reviews working in these places? What principles, direction, and personnel are involved?
- Discuss the status for using Level 1 and 2 reviews with local agency staff and leadership. Volunteer to explore setting up a process if one is not already in place.
- Set up a monitoring program to test the use of Level 1 and 2 reviews.
- Assist land management agency personnel in discussing interagency roles and relationships ahead of time (prior to conflict) with regulatory agencies.
- Insist that the agency implementing ESA (FWS) and the agency that is adhering to its intent (BLM or the Forest Service) establish a review process that does not unnecessarily slow down or negatively impact critical projects.

Use the Stewardship End Result Contracting Authority to its fullest extent.

Some units pursue only limited use of this tool because they do not have the experience or skill to implement it, leadership direction is not clear, or they perceive the process to be cumbersome and difficult. Other agencies and locations around the West do not appear to have these administrative issues and the authority is more widely used, especially on projects where potential biomass product values are marginal.

A few tips on using Stewardship Contracting:

- Ask agency leadership what is being done to resolve implementation challenges (administrative, contractual, etc.).
- Find and share successful stewardship projects (there are many throughout the nation); mirror successful strategies on your local unit.
- Bring in experts from other units or regions that can assist with your projects and relationships. There are some nationally-funded experts to provide this type of assistance.



Community Protection

Ideas Submitted to the WRSC from METI

During outreach to western stakeholders regarding the Cohesive Strategy, many comments focused on encouraging and assisting communities to accept the risks of and take responsibility for being prepared for wildfires. There are over 70,000 communities at risk from wildfire across the United States. Every year, lives, communities, homes, and other values are threatened and many are lost. Community preparedness and action are critical to reducing and eliminating devastating losses.

One of the Cohesive Strategy national goals is to create fire-adapted communities within which human populations and infrastructure can withstand a wildland fire. This goes well beyond increasing fire protection capacity and the ability to respond to wildfire events. It means taking a proactive approach to assessing wildfire risk to communities, sharing responsibility for mitigating threats and consequences, and taking shared action well ahead of any wildfire occurrence. Being prepared means:

Understanding wildfire threats surrounding a community

- Conduct a thorough risk assessment within the community and surrounding areas. At a minimum, a risk assessment should include an assessment of fuels, weather, topography, and location of values to be protected. Defining high risk areas is an important step in this process.
- Identify the wildland -urban interface (WUI) and intermix. The main reason for identification of the WUI is to focus resources toward the protection of lives, property, and infrastructure. The WUI is not designated to infringe on personal property rights, raise taxes, or raise insurance rates.

Conducting collaborative community planning and identifying focus areas within a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) or its equivalent

- Include as many stakeholders as possible in planning efforts, not just fire protection agencies. Everyone has a stake in making their community safe from wildfire.
- Conduct open houses and public meetings to gather ideas from community members. Rely on other CWPP efforts for good ideas on what to include in the planning effort. Utilize subject matter experts in wildfire planning to assist and provide valuable input and build on existing successful examples – don’t reinvent the wheel.

Implementing community actions to mitigate threats and reduce risks to acceptable levels

- Apply for federal and state grants that can assist communities and landowners financially with accomplishing fuel treatment/mitigation projects.
- Many fuel mitigation projects can also be done with volunteer labor when communities realize how importance this kind of work is to building a commitment to shared responsibility for community protection.



- Don't just focus mitigation work on fuels; put effort into understanding and assessing the ignitability of structures by conducting wildfire structure evaluations. Fire departments and other wildland fire protection agencies can assist in conducting these evaluations.

Engaging landowners and homeowners through public education efforts to increase understanding of wildfire risks and individual roles and responsibilities in dealing with those risks

- Seek incentives to landowners for accomplishing fire mitigation projects on their properties such as tax credits/rebates, insurance rate reductions, free disposal of slash, and grant or cost-share programs.
- Encourage the development of Fire Safe Councils and cultivate champions for making and sustaining fire-adapted communities, neighborhoods, and subdivisions .

Each community has to define its own acceptable level of risk and protection based on the fire environment in which they live. Every community should strive to meet the goal of withstanding a wildfire that threatens life, property, infrastructure, and other values. Fire protection agencies may not be able to protect every person, house, structure, and value when a wildfire occurs; response capacity can be overwhelmed by a catastrophic wildfire threatening a community. So, when there aren't the resources available to provide protection, it becomes critical that proper pre-planning and actions have been taken prior to the wildfire to reduce risk. Pre-planning and mitigation actions accomplished in advance allow fire protection agencies to concentrate limited capability and efforts where the need is greatest and risks have not been reduced.

More and more people in the West are moving into areas that are considered at risk from wildfire. Those who live in these areas need to understand that fire will never be eliminated from the environment. Fire was, is, and always will be a part of the western landscape and ecology. That's why it is important for communities and landowners to learn to live with fire and be well prepared to deal with it before it even starts.

There are numerous organizations and websites that are ready and available to provide the needed assistance or information to help communities with planning efforts. Use these resources to get started:

- **FireWise communities** have many publications and information on training, guidelines, and how to get in touch with others who are in the process of developing or have completed a community plan. <http://www.firewise.org>
- **The Fire Safe Council** website has links to all of the national public and private organizations who are members of the Council, how to find local councils and education tools, how to run a council, and more information for homeowners. <http://www.firesafecouncil.org>



Using Economic Principles to Achieve Ecosystem Objectives Ideas Submitted to the WRSC from METI

During outreach to western stakeholders regarding the Cohesive Strategy, many stakeholders expressed the need to maximize return on investment and use economic principles to achieve environmental objectives. Both ideas are central to achieving the restoration and fuels treatments needed to support resilient landscapes, fire-adapted communities, and effective wildfire response.

In order to make a difference in the large task of creating and maintaining resilient landscapes, we will need to look beyond the traditional resources of public agencies to the even larger resource of the economy. As one stakeholder put it, “there are not enough resources in the Treasury to do the job, but there are in the economy.” There are two basic ways to maximize return on investment – reduce the cost of the investment and/or increase the returns. Sometimes those returns will come partially from sale of products or from exchanges of products for services. That’s all well and good, but what can we do right now, right here to get a start?

Do everything possible within existing authorities. There is much that can be done using Stewardship End Result Contracting, cost-share agreements, partnerships, and other authorities and tools. Through collaboration, we can work together to get more done than any one stakeholder can do alone. Many times the barriers to using new or different authorities are embedded in agency culture and various objections to change. We will always be working in an environment where people hold a range of attitudes about risk for a variety of reasons.

Don’t do unnecessary analysis, planning, and documentation. One way to reduce costs is to do enough planning to meet legal requirements and satisfy stakeholder desires for engagement without imposing “analysis paralysis.” Some stakeholders expressed a desire to do away with NEPA, but in reality there are ways to work within the spirit of the law to avoid situations where it takes longer to plan for a project than it does to implement it.

Pursue projects that take advantage of natural fire barriers, recent disturbance events, and past investments. It makes sense to tie fuel treatment and fire suppression activities into natural barriers such as rivers and lakes, rock slides, roads, and so on, to make investments more effective on larger landscape scales. We should also take advantage of recent disturbance events, especially those that reduced fuel loading, as well as past investments and projects. Too often invest in fuels treatments and then do not maintain them, but it is a lot easier to keep the reduction treatment functional than it is to start over again.



Be innovative with regard to new products, uses, and treatment techniques. With more collaboration, more innovative ideas will come to light – along with people willing to invest to try their ideas out. Being open to the new and unusual may just identify a real improvement.

Make sure that investments are effective. One example from the outreach of an *ineffective* investment was the spreading of straw to prevent erosion after a fire. It was pointed out that the first rain usually washes this straw away – changing a protective measure in one location into a problem in another. One solution suggested was to use livestock to walk on the area to “stitch” the straw into the soil where it would continue to hold that soil in place. Opportunities can be sought to understand, document, and share successes and failures from investments before, during, and after fire so that mistakes are not repeated and good ideas flourish.

Continue to stress that real cost savings in fire and fuels management may come from comparing the cost of fire suppression with the cost of fuels treatment. It is almost always less expensive to prevent cost outlays than it is to spend money in emergency situations. This is most applicable where recurring fire is most predictable – and much of that area is in the West.

An Option for WFLC

In the long run, the way to get at the use of economic principles (efficiency and effectiveness) in a serious way (specific proposals as well as raising awareness) would be to hold a symposium (or series of symposia) hopefully chartered from WFLC and populated by economists, industry representatives, bankers, stakeholders of every kind, and agency people as well as others. The purpose of the symposium would be to answer the following two questions in each of three ways. The two questions are:

- 1) How can stakeholders better use economic principles to achieve the goals of the Cohesive Strategy?
- 2) How can stakeholders better maximize return on investment?

Answers to each of the questions would be categorized by:

- a) It would take legislation,
- b) It would take a change in policy or regulation, and
- c) It can be implemented right now.

We know we have been around the block on this stuff for years and know long term stewardship contracting, for example, is important to a guaranteed product supply necessary to encourage industry investment, etc. We would like to see the development power of the Forest Products Lab set loose on finding/developing products for small diameter mixed species; and forest engineers on removal techniques that are cost-effective. This kind of committed effort might be a way not only to gain a recommitment to the importance of economics but getting the right people together might generate something significant.