



## 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>

