



# Case Studies of Public Engagement and Stewardship Contracting

FY 2017 Programmatic Monitoring Report to the

USDA Forest Service



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## **I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### ***Why this report was completed***

Stewardship contracts and agreements have become an important implementation mechanism through which the USDA Forest Service directly engages the private sector and various segments of the public in the management of the National Forests and Grasslands. To examine how this federal agency engages the public in stewardship contracting, this report features 15 case studies of recent stewardship contracting projects, offering a study on the interactions between agency and non-agency stakeholders (individuals or organizations external to the Forest Service). Broadly representative of the type of restoration work happening on the National Forest System, the projects reviewed in this report are among the most ambitious and complex stories emerging in public lands management and restoration.

### ***What we found***

#### **1. How are non-agency stakeholders engaging with the Forest Service through the development and implementation of stewardship contracting projects?**

Non-agency engagement with the Forest Service varies from traditional methods of public engagement, e.g. public listening sessions and scoping notices, to highly collaborative activities in which agency employees share aspects of their work with external partners. Common ways non-agency stakeholders engage include, project planning in collaborative process meetings, project administration (e.g. as an agreement holder), monitoring, implementation, NEPA scoping, contributing funding, providing technical expertise, and building social license.

#### **2. How do relationships between the Forest Service and non-agency stakeholders change as a result of their engagement in stewardship contracting projects?**

In these case studies, improving relationships are usually not attributable to any single project but most often are the result of engagement in collaborative work over the course of many projects or several years. Participants from projects exhibiting highly collaborative relationships cite improving trust and understanding of different perspectives, coalescing a common vision with others, and increased knowledge and information exchange around ecosystem science and project design elements. Technical knowledge or experience in establishing and implementing stewardship contracts and agreements also affects the quality of relationships.

Success and improving relationships often comes down to a single person within the agency. Listening skills and a willingness and ability to both share information with external parties and receive and integrate data and technical input from stakeholders into project planning and design,

are viewed as being critical ingredients in these projects. An ability to think outside the box and utilize external talent and resources was critical in many places.

In the one instance where relationships degraded, contributing factors include; poor communication internal to the agency and externally with stakeholders, poor contractor performance, breaches in trust, and a lacking of a sense of urgency to fix problems. On the contrary, trust was built in projects featuring consistency in communication and interpersonal relationships. Personnel turnover in both agency and non-agency ranks, and/or failure to convey information from unit to unit within the Forest Service, challenged relationships in some projects.

### **3. What project phases do participants feel are most important for non-agency stakeholder involvement?**

Non-agency Stakeholders desire to be involved as early as possible during project planning, and some go further, wanting to be involved in all phases. Others specify some discrete aspect of their involvement as being most important for their involvement, e.g. providing scientific data and technical expertise for improving project design, monitoring conditions post treatment, monitoring threatened or endangered species habitat, and facilitating collaborative processes. Augmentation of agency capacity for project administration is cited as an important role non-agency participants play—most often in these case studies in the stewardship agreements reviewed, and in instances where agency capacity is limited due to budget constraints. Several agency respondents stressed that limited agency capacity is a contributing factor for why they have pursued collaborative partnerships.

### **4. How is the diversity of participation related to perceptions of project success?**

These case studies feature a diverse range of projects addressing a very broad range of conservation issues, often times by involving an array of stakeholders equally diverse in their backgrounds. In less collaborative projects, participation of non-agency stakeholders was infrequent and/or passive. In these projects, the agency came up with the idea for the project and planned it internally, seeking minimal public involvement though National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) scoping. In more collaborative projects, agency to non-agency interactions are frequent, with project conception originating somewhat organically through frequent communications, sometimes over a number of years. In projects featuring early-stage collaboration, relationships sometimes already existed but people had not worked together on projects previously.

Across the range of project types and ways in which people participate, perceptions of project success appear to be dependent on the role individuals (or groups of individuals) play in projects (i.e. how involved they are). Success is also viewed through a lens of influence, that is, if individuals change the course of projects they often view it as a success. Interestingly, being that

all of these case studies occurred between 2013 and 2016, very few of the valued long-term outcomes identified by participants have had time to play out or be measured. When participants are satisfied with their engagement and with the project overall, they usually express confidence that desired long-term outcomes will be realized. When projects are viewed as successful it is often because participants feel they personally had an impact and that they see implementation occur.

## **5. How does the involvement of non-agency stakeholders influence the size of projects and their complexity?**

In these case studies, respondents are split on whether non-agency stakeholders influenced the size of projects. In projects where participants felt the size was not changed, they communicated varied reasons, such as; size is influenced mostly by what a special use permittee needs or that the project boundary is influenced more by ecological boundaries. Reasons case study projects increased in size: non-agency stakeholders advocated for growing the project to larger scale, stakeholders would not engage unless the agency committed to larger scale projects, non-agency participants increased the capacity for administering and implementing so more work on a larger scale was accomplished, the timber component grew in order to generate funds needed for the areas of mutual benefit and interest identified in the agreement. Reasons projects decrease in size: to fit NEPA categorical exclusion policy requirements, project was parsed back to focus on areas of agreement rather than controversial areas, agency capacity limitations, to keep it manageable for the agreement holder.

A majority of participants in these case studies identified that their project became more complex due to the involvement of non-agency stakeholders, in terms of activities implemented and/or the relationships involved. The diversity of treatments and areas of focus increased. Examples of increased complexity are, increasing complexity in silvicultural treatment design, increasing the types of service projects undertaken, increasing the number of participants in collaborative decision making processes or involved in implementation.



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**Cover photo:** Father and son on the Continental Divide Trail. USDO IBLM/Bob Wick CC BY 2.0

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## II. INTRODUCTION

### *Background and overview on stewardship contracting*

Over the last decade Stewardship End-Result Contracting (stewardship contracting) has become an important tool for natural resource management and ecosystem restoration on the National Forest System (NFS), contributing to:

- road and trail maintenance or obliteration
- maintenance of soil productivity
- habitat and fisheries management
- prescribed fires
- vegetation removal
- watershed restoration
- control of invasive plants

Originally conceived to be a flexible mechanism for the agency to cooperate with private businesses, as well as, state and local governments, and non-profit organizations, stewardship contracting consists of eight authorities (Table 1).

**Table 1. Stewardship contracting authorities.**

<b>Type of Contracting</b>	<b>Results</b>
<b>Best-value contracting</b>	Requires that award selection be based on additional criteria (e.g. prior performance, skills, local business) and not simply on cost.
<b>Multi-year contracting</b>	Allows for contracts and agreements up to 10 years in length.
<b>Designation by prescription</b>	A method of designating trees to be removed or retained without marking them as specified in a prescription. This method is more complex than Designation by Description.
<b>Designation by description</b>	A method of designating trees to be removed or retained without marking them according to a specific description.
<b>Less than full and open competition</b>	Allows for contracts to be awarded on a sole-source basis in appropriate circumstances. This also allows for the agency to establish stewardship agreements with external agencies and organizations.
<b>Trading goods for services</b>	The ability to apply the value of timber or other forest products removed as an offset against the cost of services received.
<b>Retention of receipts</b>	The ability to keep revenues (timber receipts) generated by a project when product value exceeds the service work performed and then apply the funds to service work that does not necessarily need to occur within the original project area.
<b>Widening the range of eligible contractors</b>	Allows non-traditional bidders (non-profits, local governmental bodies, etc.) to compete for and be awarded stewardship contracts. Also allows for the agency to enter into stewardship agreements.

### *Why this report was completed*

With the Agricultural Act of 2014 (P.L. 113–79) Congress permanently authorized the USDA Forest Service and the DOI Bureau of Land Management to use stewardship authorities. A component of this legislation requires that the Forest Service annually monitor the role of communities in the development and implementation of stewardship agreements and contracts. This report fulfills this requirement, examining how the Forest Service engages the public in the various phases of stewardship contracts and agreements. Additionally, the USFS Handbook stipulates “*collaboration must be a part of stewardship contracting project planning and continue throughout the life of the project.*” This report informs the agency about how this internal directive is playing-out in the field.

## **III. CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY**

### *Project selection*

The selection of case study projects was based on a simple principle, representing many project types and combinations of agency-to-non-agency stakeholder interactions within a limited sample. To ensure a mix of case studies, the project team<sup>1</sup> consulted the Forest Management Office in the Forest Service Washington Office, developing case study selection criteria:

- A.** Broad geographic distribution
- B.** Projects size: small (<1000 acres) and large (> 1000 acres)
- C.** Stewardship agreements and stewardship contracts
- D.** Projects with and without “collaborative groups”

Using these selection criteria, 15 projects were selected from a list of all projects active nationwide between 2013 and 2016 (see Table 2). Interviewees were identified using a snowball sampling methodology to build out the pool of informants aligning with the social networks in each project. Data were obtained in a manner that is consistent with IRB human subjects review protocols using an Office of Management and Budget approved interview protocol (see VI. appendix). Interviews focused on project scope and history, collaborative interactions and community engagement, and overall project outcomes and lessons learned.

Project review began with interviewing the Forest Service representative, followed by the non-agency stakeholders that were identified by the first agency respondent. Project participants and their roles were verified in each successive interview to map participation. A minimum of three interviews were conducted for each project except in a few instances where fewer people were identified as being involved or if participants were unresponsive to multiple requests. Interviews

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<sup>1</sup> The project team includes representatives from the Pinchot Institute for Conservation, Michigan State University, and the Watershed Research and Training Center.



were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by the project team with multiple interviews being used to triangulate interview data.

**Table 2. Summary of selected case study projects and participants interviewed.**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Agreement or contract type</b>	<b>Project size (large is &gt; 1,000 acres)</b>	<b>Collaborative group<sup>2</sup> present?</b>	<b>Respondent Experience with Stewardship Contracting  Number of projects per respondent</b>
Bitterroot	Northern Rockies	IRTC <sup>3</sup>	Large	Yes	2,2,3,5,8
Gallatin	Northern Rockies	IRTC	Small	No	1,1,1,4
Idaho Panhandle	Northern Rockies	IRTC	Large	Yes	1,2,unknown
Uncompahgre	Central Rockies/South west	Agreement <sup>4</sup>	Large	Yes	1,3,20
Arizona NFs	Central Rockies/South west	IRSC <sup>5</sup>	Large	Yes	1,2,3,3,5,6,unknown
Cibola	Central Rockies/South west	Agreement	Large	Yes	1,2,2,5
Tahoe	Pacific Coast	IRTC & Agreement	Small	Yes	1,1,1,5,20
Deschutes	Pacific Coast	IRTC	Large	Yes	5,10,10,10,25, unknown
Fremont-Winema	Pacific Coast	Agreement	Large	No	4,6,7,15

<sup>2</sup> Collaborative groups are those possessing a name, an identifiable structure, and definitive work processes by which the group makes decisions or completes work in a collaborative manner. Projects identified as “no” may still exhibit collaborative relationships but lack a formalized group.

<sup>3</sup> IRTC = Integrated Resource Timber Contract; projects in which the value of timber exceeds costs of services.

<sup>4</sup> Agreement = Stewardship Agreement; whereby the agency partners with an external group, such as a state or local government or a non-profit organization, to leverage resources and expertise in implementing stewardship projects of mutual benefit and mutual interest.

<sup>5</sup> IRSC = Integrated Resource Service Contract; projects in which the value of timber is less than the cost of services.

<b>Project</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Agreement or contract type</b>	<b>Project size (large is &gt; 1,000 acres)</b>	<b>Collaborative group<sup>2</sup> present?</b>	<b>Respondent Experience with Stewardship Contracting</b>  <b>Number of projects per respondent</b>
Kisatchie	Southeast	IRTC & Agreement	Small	No	1,1,1
Desoto	Southeast	IRTCs & Agreement	Small	No	1,1,2,3,5
Osceola	Southeast	Agreement	Large	Yes	2,3,6,10
Allegheny	Northeast/ Lake States	IRTC	Small	No	1,6,12
Green Mountain-Finger Lakes	Northeast/ Lake States	IRTC & Agreement	Large	No	1,15,unknown
Chequamegon-Nicolet	Northeast/ Lake States	Agreement	Small	No	2,10

#### **IV. RESULTS**

This report addresses five key questions to distill common lessons learned and crosscutting themes. The case studies are useful in grounding inferences made about how the Forest Service works with non-agency stakeholders at the field level. To maintain the confidentiality of informants and the integrity of the information they provided, the projects and their participants are not directly identified. Project names are changed to the name of the National Forest(s) on which they occur.

- 1. How are non-agency stakeholders, including local communities and tribes, engaging in the development and implementation of stewardship contracting projects from project genesis through contracting?**

The Forest Service employs multiple pathways for engaging with non-agency participants in stewardship contracts and agreements. These strategies range from traditional methods

of public engagement—e.g. public listening sessions and scoping notices—to highly collaborative activities in which the agency shares aspects of its workload with external partners. Respondents described the varied roles non-agency stakeholders play in these case study projects (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Frequently cited roles of non-agency stakeholders in case studies. The size of the font in Figure 1 corresponds to the frequency with which respondents cite these roles as occurring among non-agency stakeholders in the 15 case studies with words or phrases in larger font cited more often.

Table 3 depicts the primary pathways through which the non-agency participants engaged in the 15 case study projects. In a number of the projects featuring formal collaborative groups or exhibiting strong collaborative working relationships, non-agency participants report participation in “every stage” of the project. In stewardship agreements (Uncompahgre, Cibola, Fremont-Winema, Desoto, Osceola, Kisatchie, and Chequamegon-Nicolet) external participants often bring significant funding and in-kind resources. Across these agreements understanding varies regarding tracking and quantifying matching resources in agreement financial plans. Knowledge of agreements varies widely within, and external to, the agency too.

In several projects (Arizona NFs, Desoto, Osceola, Deschutes, Gallatin, Bitterroot, and Tahoe), external participants are focused on monitoring implementation activities and on assessing impacts via long-term effectiveness monitoring. In some case studies external partners, such as state agencies, also provide expertise and labor to monitor National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Endangered Species Act (ESA) regulatory compliance.

**Table 3. Primary engagement pathways identified by non-agency stakeholders in case study projects.**

(Identified by agency and non-agency respondents)

Project	Planning processes	Engaging in Implementation	Engaging in Monitoring	As part of a CFLR project	Individuals engaging as technical experts	Traditional NEPA public engagement	Directly engaging as agreement holder
Bitterroot	x		x	x			
Gallatin						x	
Idaho Panhandle	x		x	x			
Uncompahgre	x			x			x
Arizona NFs	x		x	x			
Cibola		x		x		x	X
Tahoe	x	x	x				X
Deschutes	x		x	x			
Fremont-Winema	x	x					X
Kisatchie		x	x		x		x
Desoto	x	x	x	x			x
Osceola		x	x	x			x
Allegheny		x				x	
Green Mountain-Finger Lakes					x	x	
Chequamegon-Nicolet		x			x		x

Eight of these projects were a smaller component of larger collaborative forest landscape restoration (CFLR) program projects. In these a smaller number of individuals or organizations active in CFLR projects participate in the design, implementation, or monitoring of individual stewardship projects. Inter-personal working relationships and communications within such projects are often separate from the larger framework of CFLR projects, while benefiting from the resources that the CFLR program provides.

**2. Have relationships between the Forest Service and non-agency stakeholders changed as a result of their engagement in stewardship contracting projects? If so, how? What factors contribute to the quality of these relationships?**

In most case study projects (Table 4) relationships between agency personnel and non-agency stakeholders changed for the better as a result of engaging with each other during project work.

Those citing no change in relationships, often do so because they perceive relationships evolving over a long time rather than any one specific stewardship project. Where relationships are strong, it is often due to multiple years of collaborative work, although many acknowledge that the investment of time required to build these sorts of working relationships is challenging. Participants from projects exhibiting highly collaborative relationships cite an improved ability to influence projects, greater trust and understanding of different perspectives, coalescing a common vision with others, and increased knowledge and information exchange directly influencing project design elements.

In three instances (Cibola, Desoto, Fremont-Winema) non-agency participants point to Forest Service personnel who have spent multiple years or decades on the same National Forest, as anchoring relationships, repairing and/or building trust over time, and serving as effective conveyors of information between project participants.

**Table 4. Have relationships changed as a result of agency and non-agency stakeholders engaging with each other through project work?**  
(Number of agency and non-agency responses)

<b>Project</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Do Not Know</b>
Bitterroot	2	2	-
Gallatin	5	-	-
Idaho Panhandle	1	2	-
Uncompahgre	3	-	-
Arizona NFs	6	2	-
Cibola	3	-	-
Tahoe	5	-	-
Deschutes	4	2	-
Fremont-Winema	4	-	-
Kisatchie	3	-	-
Desoto	-	6	-
Osceola	3	-	-
Allegheny	1	1	1
Green Mountain-Finger Lakes	3	-	-
Chequamegon-Nicolet	2	-	-

In the one case study (Gallatin) where relationships degraded factors that led to this included; poor communication between the contracting officer and agency personnel working directly with stakeholders, poor contractor performance, and what non-agency participants perceive to be a breach of trust. Non-agency stakeholders describe the contracting process as a “black box” and complain they have little recourse when implementation of the contract fails. This also proved to be an issue affecting relationships in the Arizona NFs project where non-agency participants perceive failings in the transition between the planning and contracting phases of the project.

### Factors contributing to improved relationships

Non-agency participants often recognize the critical role their agency counterparts play in advancing the work that non-agency stakeholders wish to see. Often it comes down to a single person within the agency who makes projects successful. As a non-agency participant on the Fremont-Winema agreement suggests, *“I think there's been certain individuals who have really reached out to try to work and make this be effective....There's definitely been key individuals who....they just have a commitment to want this to succeed, and that has been a critical component in us being able to be effective.”* Likewise, this respondent’s agency counterpart offered, *“it all comes down to people, and how well you work together and understand each other and trust relationships.”*

Building trust takes time. One agency employee reflected, *“It’s not the first meeting, but the 12<sup>th</sup> meeting when you have built the trust.”* Besides time, personal attributes help too. Listening skills and a willingness and ability to both share information with external parties and receive and integrate data and technical input from stakeholders into project planning and design, are viewed as critical skills for agency personnel. An ability to think outside the box and recognize how to utilize the talent and resources available outside of the Forest Service is a critical determinant of success in several case studies (Tahoe, Kisatchie, Fremont-Winema, Deschutes, Desoto, Chequamegon-Nicolet).

For example, in the Uncomphagre project a Forest Service person new to both the District Ranger position and stewardship contracting, found themselves working with an external partner with significant experience with stewardship authorities and agreements. The Ranger’s willingness to be open to this expertise was the critical factor in making this project happen. The partner brought the technical knowledge needed to establish the agreement. The District Ranger explained:

*No one had done it, so no one had taken the trainings to be qualified. I had to work with my grants and agreements person on the Forest, and she had never dealt with timber harvest and mastication work and all that, so she had to learn that part of it, and then the agreement protocols....Because no one was qualified in the Region to sign it and to move forward. It was very challenging.*

The non-agency respondent explains further that two external stakeholders helped train the agency on the basics of stewardship agreements and helped write and review the documents required to develop the agreement. *“They were very actively involved. Probably more so than normal, but just given the challenges that we had, the lack of experience that we had they helped fill in those gaps,”* said the Ranger.

Lack of knowledge or experience in stewardship contracts and agreements affected relationships in other projects. A non-agency participant in the Osceola project remarked, *“there is a real*

*problem in the Forest Service with just inconsistency and lack of understanding what the stewardship authority can allow for....we are oftentimes the most knowledgeable people at the table about stewardship....It is hard to sit in a meeting with Forest Service staff and they say something and for us to have to correct them.”* A non-agency stakeholder in the Fremont-Winema project suggested:

*The negatives would be lack of understanding or knowledge on how the supplemental project agreements should work. The Forest Service have people that come into the program that really have never done this and so there's a learning curve there where they have to come up to understand what we're doing and how it works....Everything from the administration of the project and the roles and responsibilities and who has responsibilities for each role, that is ongoing.*

In the Kisatchie project, an agency respondent suggested that while higher-level managers within the Forest Service have pushed for the use of stewardship contracting, mid-level managers resist using stewardship contracting. This respondent suggests that the largest barrier to the further use of stewardship contracting and partnership driven projects are people within the Forest Service.

While it had not yet happened, agency respondents in two projects expressed concerns about the possibility of stewardship receipts generated by the project being transferred out of their budgets, even though the handbook articulates that this is not allowable without specifying prior to project design. An agency respondent in a third project suggested that concern over the use or transfer of receipts is a barrier to more agency personnel using stewardship contracting authorities.

Willingness of agency personnel to integrate external knowledge into project planning and design matters greatly for improving relationships. In some projects (Fremont-Winema, Deschutes, Tahoe, Arizona NFs, Uncomphagre) non-agency participants led in crafting complex restoration oriented silvicultural prescriptions, some of which, respondents suggest would have not been done otherwise. In all of these instances, sufficient trust exists to enable non-agency participants to take on this role. A non-agency participant in the Fremont-Winema project said:

*There has been some resistance of, 'Oh, well, this isn't normally how the Forest Service does business.' We are tackling everything from A to Z of what is legally possible. But there has been some initial resistance at times with the partners doing the level of things we are doing, but I think that as we have implemented these things and worked together, we have actually been more effective and gained a broader sense of trust to move these things forward.*

When asked about the quality of relationships within their collaborative group, a non-agency participant in the Deschutes project remarked:

*I think that things are good and things have remained good. I would say if anything, it proves that our system is working well because we faced some really challenging*

*topics...and throughout all of that, there was great communication with the district and with the Forest to set up field trips, to talk about where we were not seeing eye-to-eye or talk about where we were not understanding one another and get out on the ground and verify or double check, talk about things.*

Non-agency respondents recognize the challenges the Forest Service faces in creating the staffing environment needed for the agency to embrace collaborative work. For instance, a non-agency participant in the Arizona NFs project stated that:

*The Forest Service is a very highly professionalized agency with a strong and siloed culture. So breaking through some of the cultural issues is the biggest challenge to implementation....we all are going to have to do things differently; industry and the Forest Service. So identifying the business practices that we need to change, and then getting the change within a highly decentralized, highly autonomous agency is a considerable challenge.*

The Tahoe and Deschutes projects provide examples where pro-active personnel changes made by agency leadership resulted in improvements in collaborative planning and project design. These improvements resulted in improved relationships. Proximity is another factor contributing to strong working relationships. In the Desoto and Chequamegon-Nicolet projects the Forest Service District Office is co-located in the same building or campus with key partner organizations with whom stewardship agreements were formed. In these instances, long-standing personal relationships led to the parties in the agreement—a county government and state agency—recognizing an opportunity to advance shared priorities. Proximity translated to smooth and consistent communications, improving working relationships focused on project planning and implementation.

Consistency in communication and interpersonal relationships builds trust. Personnel turnover in both agency and non-agency ranks, and/or failure to convey information from unit to unit within the Forest Service can setback relationships, consequentially lengthening projects. Failure to convey information to stakeholders in the Gallatin project resulted in the single instance across the 15 case studies where relationships degraded significantly. Whereas in the Cibola project long-standing and consistent staffing helped establish a long-term program of work underpinning a newly developed restoration economy.

3. What parts/steps of the case study projects do the agency and non-agency stakeholders feel are most important for non-agency stakeholders to be involved in? For the case study projects, are agency and non-agency stakeholders satisfied with the level of engagement in these stages?



Respondents were asked which type(s) of involvement in stewardship contracting projects they viewed as most important for non-agency stakeholders. In general, non-agency participants in these case studies expressed a desire to be involved as early as possible during project planning (Table 5). Some go beyond this to express that being involved in all phases of the project are important, while others specify some discrete aspect of their involvement (e.g. the ability to lobby for funding or to bring in relevant science) as being the most important aspect of their involvement. A representative from a conservation group in the Deschutes project said:

*Engaging early, that was most important. The second [most important] comes at the handoff from a signed decision to implementation, because everything, all the discussions that take place during NEPA or before NEPA, are really valuable for finding that common ground and coming up with a way forward. But a lot can get lost in the translation from signed decision and then on to implementation and unit layout design, marking, etc. And a lot of different people, sometimes entirely different sets of people within the agency are involved in those two different phases.... We found being that engaged [in all phases] helps create continuity.*

Another common role for non-agency stakeholders is providing technical expertise and expertise in collaboration. Examples of specific capacity or expertise provided by non-Forest Service project participants includes the provision of scientific data for improving project design, monitoring conditions post treatment, monitoring threatened or endangered species habitat, facilitating collaborative processes, and augmenting Forest Service expertise in silviculture treatment design. “*The silvicultural prescriptions is what ultimately decides what that landscape is going to look like after...I would say that is what is most important,*” remarked a non-agency stakeholder from the Pacific Coast region. The augmentation of agency capacity for project administration was cited as an important role non-agency participants play—most often in stewardship agreements and in instances where agency capacity is limited due to budget constraints. Several agency respondents stressed that limited agency capacity is a contributing factor for why they have pursued collaborative partnerships.

Non-agency participants were asked whether they were satisfied with their involvement and about the type of involvement that they themselves identified to be most important for non-agency stakeholder participation. The majority of non-agency participants are satisfied with their level of involvement in the areas they feel are most important (Table 6).

In many of the more collaborative projects, non-agency participants express satisfaction in that all participants were willing to take the time to work through challenging issues. As a participant in the Bitterroot project put it, “*it slows down the process but it pays off in the end.*” Not all are comfortable with this. “*I just don’t think our agency is set well to collaborate*” said an agency

respondent from the southwest region. A non-agency participant in this same project followed, suggesting that when it comes to collaboration, “*there are sprinters and there are marathon runners; through the length of the process people sort themselves out.*” Another common reason non-agency participants express satisfaction is because they believe their ideas were heard and their suggestions integrated into the project.

A self-described environmentalist in the Idaho Panhandle project commented on their collaborative engagement explaining that other members of the group urged his participation. He describes his conversion from writing lengthy detailed comments during the NEPA process to try and block actions he opposed, to being an active participant shaping projects. Such changes in the views of environmentalists also took place in the Arizona NFs project and the Tahoe project. In the Idaho Panhandle project he explained:

*I think that what happens in practice is NEPA sets up a situation where the relationship is very impersonal, the USFS puts something out for the public to comment on, the public reviews and comments, it is a very different thing to be actually sitting in the room and talking to the agency officials who are developing these projects, I think it is the way of the future because the public at large is tired of the current state of political affairs, they want people to get together and find solutions to these problems whether they be land management or otherwise, they want people to work together. So in terms of natural resource management, land management, collaboration is definitely the preferred method of operation.*

Not everyone involved in these case study projects had a positive experience. Several of the non-agency participants in the Arizona NFs project express frustration that their significant efforts and investments in the planning phase have yet to translate to implementation. Fractures in the Gallatin project were more serious, the reason respondents were not satisfied in this instance was due to an underperforming contractor and poor communications on behalf of the Forest Service. In this case, non-agency participants express they had no way to influence the ultimate outcome, which they viewed negatively, and that they believe cost them financially.

Even in cases where non-agency participants view projects as successful and generally have a very positive view of what they have been able to accomplish using stewardship contracting and in their partnerships with the Forest Service, respondents do cite the complexity of rules and procedures as a possible deterrent from use. An agreement holder expressed:

*They [stewardship agreements] are still very, very complicated, and I know our grant administrator...said a couple of agreements that we have with the Department of Defense are extremely complex and she thought she would never see anything to top them, but she said these stewardship agreements take the cake. They're incredibly confusing, incredibly complex, and so I still think the red tape*

*and the process that is involved with working with the Forest Service is still very, very difficult and complicated.*

This individual also thought that, *“better understanding about stewardship contracting across the Forest Service...would take a lot of the process-oriented red tape out, it would eliminate just inconsistency from one Region or one Forest to another.”*

**Table 5. Which type of involvement do you believe are most important of non-agency stakeholders?** (The number of agency and non-agency responses are indicated for each category. Respondents could identify more than one type of involvement)

Project	Early involvement (pre-NEPA)	NEPA scoping	Post-NEPA project planning	Implementation	Monitoring	Providing capacity or technical expertise	Providing Funding	Other
Bitterroot	1							4, field trips
Gallatin	2				1			
Idaho Panhandle	2							1, building trust
Uncompahgre	1					2, having knowledge of stewardship contracting		
Arizona NFs	6	4	4	4	5	4; 1, expertise in collaboration	4	1, being able to lobby for the project; 1, Bringing in industry
Cibola	1			1	1	1, assistance with NEPA compliance; 1, expertise in collaboration	1	
Tahoe	3					2, technical expertise		
Deschutes	5		3		1			
Fremont-Winema				1		1, expertise in collaboration; 2, expertise in ecological forestry		2, writing the silvicultural Rx
Kisatchie						3		
Desoto	2	1	2		1			
Osceola	1		1		1			1, sharing learned lessons and best practices
Allegheny	1							1, hiring subcontractors

Project	Early involvement (pre-NEPA)	NEPA scoping	Post-NEPA project planning	Implementation	Monitoring	Providing capacity or technical expertise	Providing Funding	Other
Green Mountain-Finger Lakes								1, finding an efficient way for non-agency stakeholder to participate; 1, providing opportunities for public input
Chequamegon-Nicolet	2							

**Table 6. Are you satisfied with non-agency involvement in those areas that you believe to be most important for non-agency engagement?** (Agency and non-agency responses)

Project	Yes	No	Does Not Know
Gallatin	1	2	1
Uncompahgre	3	-	-
Cibola	3	-	-
Deschutes	6	-	-
Kisatchie	3	-	-
Osceola	2	1	-
Green Mountain-Finger Lakes	3	-	-

**4. Non-agency stakeholder participation in stewardship contracting is diverse, taking many forms (e.g. robust collaborative groups, working relationships between individuals, etc.). How is this diversity of participation related to perceptions of project success by Forest Service and non-agency stakeholders? Are there differences in how Forest Service and non-agency stakeholders interact based on the form of non-agency stakeholder participation?**

In less collaborative projects, such as the Green Mountain-Finger Lakes and Allegheny projects, participation of non-agency stakeholders was infrequent and/or passive. In these projects, the agency came up with the idea for the project, planned the project internally, sent out a scoping notification of proposed actions, held a public meeting(s), and received and reviewed comments. Relationships between the agency and their non-agency counterparts are less established. In more collaborative projects, agency to non-agency interactions are frequent, with relationships often built over a series of projects.

In cases like the Idaho Panhandle, Tahoe, Arizona NFs, and Deschutes, the idea for the project originated somewhat organically through frequent communications between non-agency stakeholders and the agency. These projects all included larger collaborative planning processes

over several years involving numerous parties focused on planning activities across several thousands of acres. Non-agency participants appear to have a more advanced understanding of Forest Service procedures and likewise agency representatives have a more developed sense about working with external parties to plan more integrated projects.

In projects like the Fremont-Winema, Desoto, and Cibola, which are all stewardship agreements, collaboration involves fewer parties but agency-to-non-agency interactions also occur over long-time frames via established relationships. Project planning and design processes follow collective decision models with compromises occurring along the way. These projects all feature a complex set of relationships implementing several actions throughout their lifespan including implementation to monitoring contractor performance and project effects. These three projects all have strong and consistent on-the-ground representation from Forest Service personnel who have worked in these places for several years, in some cases decades. Such relationships proved to be critical for forming durable partnerships necessary for implementing multi-year programs of work.

Another type of project involves formative collaborative relationships, whereby a small number of individuals come together, perhaps for the first time, to plan and execute novel projects around areas of mutual interest. Examples include the Kisatchie, Chequamegon-Nicolet, Osceola, and Uncomphagre projects. In these projects, relationships may already exist but people may not have worked together in designing and implementing projects before. In these four instances, a willingness to work together and an examination of where objectives overlapped, led to strengthening in relationships and expanding trust that enables individuals to work through the challenges that inevitably come forward.

Across the range of projects, success is viewed in part from the perspective of the role individuals play in projects (i.e. how involved they are) and their ability to successfully influence the project trajectory and outcomes. Interestingly, being that all of these case studies occurred between 2013 and 2016, very few of the valued long-term outcomes identified by participants have had time to play out or be measured. When participants are satisfied with their engagement and with the project overall, they usually express confidence that desired long-term outcomes will be realized. When projects are viewed as successful (Table 7), it is often because participants feel they personally had an impact and that they see implementation occur. This was a common phenomenon across the diversity of participants in these projects.

For projects with structured collaborative groups, individuals within those groups perceiving projects as being successful may do so because the overall project moves forward and because the process advanced their personal interests. In most collaborative projects when compromise occurs participants may sacrifice a portion of their personal vision. In instances of compromise during the planning and design of these projects, most people still view the projects as successful.

**Table 7. Is this Project a success? (Agency and non-agency responses)**

Project	Yes	No	Does Not know
Bitterroot	5		
Gallatin	1	3	
Idaho Panhandle	3		
Uncompahgre	3		
Arizona NFs	5	7	
Cibola	3		
Tahoe	5		
Deschutes	6		
Fremont-Winema	4		
Kisatchie	3		
Desoto	4		1
Osceola	3		
Allegheny	3		
Green Mountain-Finger Lakes	3		
Chequamegon-Nicolet	2		

In the two projects (Arizona NFs and Gallatin) participants viewed the project as unsuccessful, participants were primarily unsatisfied with either the slow rate of progress on implementing collaboratively planned activities, and/or with the quality of implementation. In both these instances, a related factor is frustrations among non-agency participants with decisions made by the agency in the contracting process and the lack of transparency therein.

In the Gallatin project, non-agency stakeholders were initially supportive of the project and worked with the Forest Service to come to agreement about implementation features in a high-use recreation area of economic importance to the local community. However, when the project moved to contracting the community felt dis-empowered to change the course of the project and that their complaints and concerns were left unaddressed. Moreover, these project participants expressed frustrations that the field staff they were working with and the contracting officer seemed to them completely disconnected. A non-agency participant said:

*I gave it a C-minus. It is not going to make a difference on fuel mitigation. It left us holding the bag....extremely significant negative monetary impact. I would say no it was not a success, because of the lack of rehabilitation that was done....so it's like, ruining the trails to remove the trees that they removed, in an attempt to make it safer. We don't feel like it was properly done. And then the lack of rehabilitation, which we were told was going to be done, nothing done, definitely is a negative, with regards to all of the organizations that manage the trails.*



In the Arizona NFs project non-agency stakeholders are overwhelmingly satisfied with what they describe as being an unprecedented planning effort both in terms of the scale of the planning area and the diversity of participants. Their frustration with the project results from this planning work not translating to the pace and scale of implementation expected. One project participant noted that despite the major success of the planning effort, half way through the timeline for this long-term project only about 5% of the work is accomplished. Some blame the agency for decisions made during contracting; others attribute the slow pace to a lack of markets for low-value small diameter trees.

A community member who has worked to advance forest restoration in the area for the last two decades added:

*The Forest Service and Federal agency partners are the keys to success....We have a very diverse stakeholders group who is focused on success, but we need to feel and see changes in how the culture of the Forest Service, whether through contracting, through acquisition, through stewardship agreements is nimble and responsive to allow for forward progress. I feel they are honest, forthright partners but they need to understand the urgency related to reforming a culture to get this work done. And that reform of the culture is the biggest challenge, but it's also the biggest opportunity if we can get the Forest Service to act nimbly and expeditiously to produce the outcomes [the project] is trying to achieve.*

The ability and willingness of agency personnel to collaborate with external partners to work through challenges and barriers to progress is cited in other projects too. A non-agency participant on the Deschutes project noted:

*I think to the point that a lot of the elements leading up to implementation so far, I would say they were a success; the level of engagement, the willingness and the openness of Forest Service staff to work through the hard issues to go slower at the outset in order to work on more complex issues at the back end and do more work on the ground, do more intense restoration on the ground at the back end, I think all of that was a clear success.*

## **5. Is involvement of non-agency stakeholders, including local communities and Tribes, influencing the scale (size) and scope (complexity of activities) of stewardship projects?**

Respondents were split as to whether non-agency stakeholders influenced the size of projects with 29 responses suggesting that they had and 25 responses suggested that they had not. Table 8 indicates shows these responses broken down by project and also shows the reasons why

respondents suggest that the size was or was not influenced by non-agency stakeholder participation.

**Table 8. Did the involvement of non-agency stakeholders influence the scale/size of the project?** (Agency and non-agency responses)

Project	Yes	No	Explanation
Bitterroot	2	2	Size decreased to address concerns over roads and habitat. Not everyone involved acknowledged this.
Gallatin		4	Size and scale identified by agency to fit NEPA categorical exclusion.
Idaho Panhandle	1	2	The size was constrained by “watershed boundaries and NEPA.” Non-agency participants would have liked to go larger.
Uncompahgre	3		Kept it small to keep it manageable, but the project is larger than it would be due to non-agency engagement.
Arizona NFs	7	1	Non-agency stakeholders credited with driving this project to a very large planning area.
Cibola	3		Non-agency participants increased the capacity for administering and implementing work, so more work got done at a larger scale
Tahoe	1	3	Size determined by ecological attributes. Not larger in scale but grew to be more complex.
Deschutes	3	3	Some stakeholders thought the project was too aggressive, project was scaled back to focus on areas of agreement.
Fremont-Winema	4		Limited by the capacity within the agency so non-agency stakeholders supplemented to make it larger.
Kisatchie	3		The timber component grew in order to generate funds needed for the agreement.
Desoto	1	4	Size mainly influenced by what a special use permittee needed.
Osceola	1	2	Project size determined by the agency, but agreement holder has allowed the agency to increase in scale.
Allegheny	1	2	Project size determined by the agency.
Green Mountain-Finger Lakes		2	Project size determined by the agency.
Chequamegon-Nicolet	2		Capacity of agency and non-agency participants kept it small.

Respondents often identified the scope of projects as changing due to non-agency stakeholder engagement. Table 9 shows that 37 respondents feel that project complexity was influenced by

the involvement of non-agency stakeholders, whereas 16 felt otherwise and one did not know. In most instances non-agency stakeholder involvement led to the project becoming more complex in terms of activities implemented and/or the relationships involved. Notably, in projects with structured collaborative groups, respondents generally recognize the process takes longer than if the Forest Service has planned the project themselves, but that the outcomes are generally viewed more favorably.

**Table 9. Did the involvement of non-agency stakeholders influence the scope/complexity of the project?**

(Agency and non-agency responses)

<b>Project</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Does Not Know</b>	<b>Reasons</b>
Bitterroot	2	2		Some participants felt that the project became more complex due to collaborative engagement.
Gallatin	2	2		Agency respondents suggest that non-agency participants did affect the scope but non-agency participants suggest that not all of these proposed modifications ended up happening and they are not sure they ended up in the contractual language.
Idaho Panhandle	2			The number of service items and their complexity increased.
Uncompahgre	2	1		The diversity of treatments and areas of focus increased.
Arizona NFs	7	1		Non-agency participants pushed beyond basic mechanical fuel treatments into “comprehensive restoration.” More relationships led to more complexity.
Cibola	2	1		Non-agency participants brought a more comprehensive view of what collaboration entails.
Tahoe	4			Non-agency stakeholders helped define more varied treatments across the landscape which increased complexity.
Deschutes	4	2		Greater complexity with more people involved and outside expertise in silvicultural treatment design and how to address sensitive areas.
Fremont-Winema	3	1		Greater complexity with more people involved and outside expertise in silvicultural treatment design.
Kisatchie	3			Lack of knowledge about stewardship agreements meant more time was needed explaining the rules and procedures of stewardship.
Desoto	1	3	1	The project involved some differences in opinion about activities and capabilities of partners but overall the project moved forward with general agreement on scope by all involved.
Osceola	2	1		More partners brought in more expertise, facilitating greater use of prescribed fire management.

<b>Project</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Does Not Know</b>	<b>Reasons</b>
Allegheny	1	2		Non-agency respondents do not think their participation influenced the project in any way.
Green Mountain-Finger Lakes	3			As more partners became involved it became more complex.
Chequamegon-Nicolet	2			The project was made to be simple to accommodate the limited capacity of the counter party in the agreement.

## V. CASE STUDY PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS

The following project descriptions are based on the data gathered through interviews conducted with project participants, and to a lesser extent on project documentation that is available on the internet, which was used as an additional way of verifying interview data.

## VI. NORTHERN ROCKIES REGION

### Idaho-Panhandle National Forest, Idaho.

#### *PROJECT OVERVIEW*

Located in Northern Idaho, this +4,300 acre Integrated Resource Timber Contract (IRTC) has a timber harvest component on just over 1,000 acres, producing +1.3 million board feet of timber. The project uses designation by description, retained receipts, and goods for services. Project development began in 2015 with the NEPA decision signed in 2017. The project has yet to be sold. Respondents speculate that it may not move forward without repackaging due to the amount of work that needs to be accomplished in a narrow timeframe. Stored roads need to be reopened to access the project area while still being in compliance with Grizzly Bear management unit protocols.

The objective of the project is to transition the area back to a forest type that existed before fire exclusion and introduction of white pine blister rust. Silvicultural prescriptions encourage blister

rust resistant western white pine and western larch. Another project objective is to produce receipts for a variety of forest stewardship actions, including:

1. under-burning a small area for site preparation for planting,
2. road storage and road improvements for addressing Grizzly Bear habitat management requirements,
3. layout of additional silvicultural treatments,
4. slash disposal,
5. precommercial thinning,
6. creation of fuel breaks.

Anticipated outcomes for this project include:

1. improved landscape resiliency and resistance to disturbances such as wildfire, drought, and insects and diseases,
2. reduced risk of high-severity fire,
3. modified fire behavior,
4. enhanced fire suppression efforts,
5. protected resource values and private lands,
6. improved aquatic organism passage,
7. controlled non-native invasive plant (“noxious weed”) populations,
8. contributions to the local economy through utilization of forest products,
9. a well-managed road system.

### *THE ROLE OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS*

The primary non-agency stakeholder(s) involved in this project is a local collaborative group. The group began in the last decade as an effort to align the interests of Native American Tribes, local governments, private landowners, and federal land management agencies. A formal group with a facilitator and bylaws, the group operates by consensus for all major decisions. The group has over 30 members and focuses on a broad array of natural resource issues including endangered species conservation, watershed health, forest health and management, and advocating for fiscal resources.

The collaborative group engaged in this project through its forestry subcommittee. The forestry subcommittee is driven by a small number of people including a representative from a Tribe who coordinated the group, a county commissioner who pushed for the project, and a conservation organization that engaged to shape it and help address concerns related to habitat of Grizzly Bears, Canadian Lynx, and other species. Participants identified a forest products company and the Office of a United States Senator as secondary participants in this project.

Engagement of non-agency stakeholders occurred via pre-NEPA planning to help the Forest Service craft the proposed action and alternatives. There were several field trips and meetings to “*hash things out from the start of the project all the way through to the decision.*” The forestry subcommittee generally works with the Forest Service to plan stewardship contracts and timber sales several years in advance, and this project is just one of a few they engaged in at the time. The group did not actively plan silvicultural prescriptions, leaving this largely up to the Forest Service, but did engage in identifying which areas to focus on and the overall footprint of the project, (e.g. which roads to close and which roads to store).

When asked which aspects of projects are most important for non-agency stakeholders to engage in participants suggest trust building and early engagement in collaborative planning and design. A non-agency respondent explained:

*Being in the same room, building trust...Building relationships is really key to having an impact and reaching consensus...when you are in a collaborative setting you have to recognize that other people have values as well, and you should try and recognize those. The outcome should be gainful for everybody. It should be acceptable for everybody. It should be implementable for everybody. The meetings are absolutely the most important thing.*

Respondents are satisfied with their engagement in this manner, recognizing that collaborative decision-making on project design can take a while. Approximately six meetings occurred over 18 months during the pre-NEPA planning phase. Little involvement occurred following this, although as the project has been difficult to sell the collaborators are now involved in discussions with the Forest Service about other ways to package the project.

#### *RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATIONS AMONGST PARTICIPANTS*

The collaborative group has been running for over six years in this area and has become the structure through which relationships function in natural resource management and conservation. The group holds regular meetings, maintains a website, and the facilitator/coordinator is well-networked communicating regularly with interested parties about moving projects forward. The process has built trust and improved social cohesion, helping people from varied perspectives understand alternative points of view and find mutually beneficial solutions.

The central point of coordination (the facilitator for the collaborative) cited the importance of having local Forest Service partners willing to go the collaborative route, saying:

*We appreciate and enjoy a really good relationship with our District, I think what we have developed and worked with our local District might be extraordinary. I appreciate the level that the District staff go through to engage a community that wants to be heavily involved but has to understand [natural resource management*

and policy] and so they have taken the time to do that, especially with the wildlife biologist and the road engineer, because nobody wants a road closed in their back yard and everybody is mad as a bear when they won't let them go to their favorite place...and so it takes a lot of time for the staff to explain the details of the Grizzly Bear recovery plan, guidelines from Fish and Wildlife Service, how we have to look at roads, how much the budget is going to allow us to maintain, where they can leave some huckleberry brush and can allow people to get to it...so it is a hard thing to work through a project of this scope and magnitude, it takes a lot of commitment from both sides, it takes 2.5 – 3 years of meetings and planning and putting your nose to the grindstone and a lot of the volunteers don't get paid for that. It works well, it is an amazing process, and I am privileged to be a part of it.

### *NON-AGENCY PARTICIPATION: EFFECTS ON SCOPE, SCALE, AND PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS*

All of the participants in the collaborative planning process feel that their participation improved the project design. The decision making process directly engaged varied perspectives advocating for both timber production and conservation. The conservation organization participating feels that active participation to shape projects is more effective than commenting during NEPA.

They note that in the past they may have tried to emphasize through written comments certain project modifications intended to improve habitat, but that these never really translated to the ground. Through collaborative planning, they can share their view and communicate directly with the Forest Service and other stakeholders in the project design process, explaining:

*It is kind of nice to have the collaborative process because I can weigh in early because I do not have to craft extensive substantive comments. I find it is better to be involved earlier and to have extensive open dialogue with Forest Service and other members of the community.... I think in a collaborative setting you tend to be able to have more input on the outcome. So a scoping notice will come out, and EA or EIS, I review those documents are still on track with the input I provided on the NFMA side just to make sure something hasn't changed. Typically, I will write just a short one-page letter of support and thank the agency for involving us.*

This respondent did express that, “you don't get everything you want in collaboration,” citing disagreement within the group about a proposal to close a popular access road contributing pollution to a creek. In this instance, the individual lost this argument but was satisfied in “getting 95% of what I was looking for.”

Non-agency participants suggested that they influenced the scope of the project, debating which roads to open, close, store, and decommission. The scale of the project, however, was defined more by the watershed and by the Forest Service than non-agency stakeholders. All participants perceive the project as being successful, but with the ultimate success of implementation yet to come.

## Gallatin National Forest, Montana.

### *PROJECT OVERVIEW*

This project focuses on forest health treatments in a high-use recreational trail network of economic and cultural significance to the local community. The Forest Service had identified areas of dense mature lodgepole pine surrounding the trails to be at risk of stand replacing disturbance from mountain pine beetle and wildfire. The project focused on stand density reduction thinning of approximately 200 acres within a year-round trail systems prized for Nordic skiing, mountain biking, and trail running. The objective was to thin the forest to reduce risks of adverse effects to the recreation experience and adjacent infrastructure, and to return the quality of the trail surface to pre-harvest conditions.

The use of stewardship authorities, particularly retained receipts and goods for services, were a priority for this project. According to agency respondents, the Forest faces litigation ostensibly on nearly every forest management activity. The Forest has only ever designed stewardship contracting projects as IRTCs that allow the agency to produce revenue routed to service work on the Forest. The use of appropriated funding via an integrated resource service contract is viewed as impractical on this Forest. Revenue from the sale of timber was reinvested in service work within that project boundary, including, fuels reduction, weed spraying, and decommissioning a degraded road system.

Discussions related to the need for the project began in 2013 when the concept was first presented to stakeholders. The Forest Service subsequently engaged interested members of the community in 3 - 4 meetings to discuss the proposed action. During these planning meetings it was clear that local non-agency stakeholders were most concerned about the effects of forest management activities on the quality of the recreation experience and made suggestions on design elements that agency representatives agreed to, including; 50-foot buffers on trails to prevent snow drift on groomed ski trails, retention areas, repair to skid trails, and treatment of logging slash. A non-agency stakeholder recalls their participation in these meetings:

*We looked at maps, we highlighted maps, we talked about view areas and all kinds of things. One of the main things that we talked about was the restoration of the surface of the trails, and any roads that were gonna be created were gonna be obliterated and reseeded.*

The project was limited to 250 acres to allow for the use of a categorical exclusion. The agency received significant comments during the public comment period prior to decision document



signing in 2014. A non-agency stakeholder not identified as being a primary non-agency stakeholder subsequently litigated the project; however, the project was sold in mid-2015.

Litigation ended in early 2016 and the contractor began harvesting mid-summer 2016. Progress was slow due to wet weather conditions and the majority of harvesting occurred in fall 2016. This had the project schedule running close up to an annual ski race in November, which may have contributed to the contractor not leaving the ski trail surface in the condition user groups and the community expected post-harvest. As the contractor used the ski trail as a haul road, restoration of the road surface to pre-harvest conditions was called for in the scoping letter, and had been agreed to over the course of the planning meetings with the public.

An agency respondent commented on the rigidity of the contracting instrument and the performance of the Contracting Officer, noting that field staff were restricted from course correction during implementation when it was discovered that the results on the ground were undesirable. The contractor left significant ruts and debris on the ski trails.

#### *THE ROLE OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS*

The main non-agency stakeholders in this project are the local Chamber of Commerce, and a ski education non-profit organization who manages the trail system via a challenge cost-share agreement with the Forest Service that directs user fees toward maintaining the facilities. They participated primarily during the planning phase and in monitoring contractor performance and attempting to correct the project when they realized it was not what they had envisioned or that they felt they had reached agreement on during the project planning meetings prior to NEPA.

During NEPA comments, the main non-agency stakeholders expressed support for the project but did not reinforce what was discussed earlier as they believed that agreement had been reached during the planning meetings. At the same time, the project lead for the Forest Service changed. According to the new District Ranger, the signed decision did not include certain key provisions that would have helped ensure the work was conducted in accordance with those design features agreed to in the early planning meetings with the non-agency stakeholders who had endorsed what they thought was the project they wanted.

As this was their first stewardship contracting project, primary non-agency stakeholders appear to have not been as involved during the NEPA phase as may have been necessary to carry what was agreed to during planning further along the project development timeline. Moreover, as leadership within the District changed no one was there to identify the lack of participation of these primary stakeholders during NEPA public commenting as a potential major problem. Consequentially, the project design elements and control measures (i.e. preparation of a smooth trail surface) did not carry over into implementation. A non-agency stakeholder describes this process:

*I think our participation initially helped to allow the project to begin...But we were not able to get any recourse from the contractors or we weren't able to see the contract and we were basically under the impression that what we were told initially, for whatever reason, that's not how the work ended up going down...Things happened that we weren't aware were gonna happen and we weren't able to stop those things from happening and we've had to suffer financially as an organization now....It'll be two years, probably a three-year ordeal trying to get the trails back to even close to what they were before the project began.*

The District Ranger inheriting the project offers their perspective on the situation, saying:

*They're [the contractor] out there to cut trees and get those to the mill and they do a good job when it comes to that, but ensuring that that trail system gets repaired to a bowling alley smooth setup, they don't understand that...I think there's some internal shortcomings within our agency as far as that goes too. And I tried and tried and tried to get them [others within the agency] to understand the sensitivity of that because I was gonna be the one picking up the pieces after they left. And they were just blind to it...I think it's a failing of the agency honestly.*

#### *RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATIONS AMONGST PARTICIPANTS*

Despite the primary non-agency stakeholders' early involvement and Forest Service staff recognition of the importance and local economic impact of the ski trails, the desired end-result was not achieved and relationships were severely damaged. The community ended up expending significant private resources to repair damage to the trail system and received partial reimbursement from the Forest Service. The incoming District Ranger has spent considerable time attempting to repair relationships but they, like their non-agency counterparts, recognize that any future work together is unlikely to occur due to damaged relations. Non-agency stakeholders with a local ski education organization express their frustrations:

*So we tried to be involved on the beginning stages of it, and I think without our support of the project it may not have happened....The way the project ended up going down was, none of the rehabilitation was done and the timeframe....Put us in a very difficult position as an organization to try and be ready for the events that we rely on in the early winter.*

- Stakeholder 1

*We're gonna be much more reluctant to support any future stewardship projects....Our local office was trying to follow up with the contractor, but he was not able to communicate directly with the contractor, it had to go through the*

*contract administrator. And the contract administrator did not have the interest or the understanding of the project to be able to stop any of the issues that ended up coming up.*

- Stakeholder 2

### *NON-AGENCY PARTICIPATION: EFFECTS ON SCOPE, SCALE, AND PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS*

Non-agency participants express that they did influence the scope marginally, helping ensure that the 50-foot setbacks were included in the project. Yet, the ability to influence implementation was very minimal and it affected perceptions of success. Non-agency participants do not view the project as a success, with one suggesting “*many years of financial and physical labor will be needed to get the trail system back to its usable state,*” and another saying, “*it left us holding the bag for almost \$20,000 worth of heavy equipment contracting...it was all volunteer labor and we are still cleaning up the mess. So from the standpoint of the recreational user, it cost a very small group a lot of money.*” Two non-agency stakeholders also questions the efficacy of the fuel treatments, the very reason the project was conducted in the first place.

### *Bitterroot National Forest, Montana.*

#### *PROJECT OVERVIEW*

The objective of the project is to restore more natural forest conditions to reduce risk of high severity stand replacing disturbance. A related goal was to encourage aspen and western larch and to encourage the vigor of large ponderosa pine trees. An overarching goal was to harvest timber and provide forest products and local economic opportunities. This 6,300 acre integrated resource timber contract was conceived of by the Forest Service to harvest timber on over 1,200 acres. Non-commercial mechanical thinning occurred on over 460 acres with prescribed fire on nearly 400 acres.

Additional stewardship actions consist of dust abatement, rock placement for fisheries improvement, landing & skid trail rehabilitation, slashing, pre-commercial thinning, noxious weed treatment, road decommissioning, cone collecting, shrub planting and construction of erosion control structures.

Planning for the project began with discussions with the collaborative in 2009, public scoping in 2010, and the NEPA decision notice signed in 2013. The project used a variety of stewardship authorities including goods for service, designation by prescription, retention of receipts, and multi-year contracting.

#### *THE ROLE OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS*

Primary non-agency stakeholders included a new collaborative group functioning via a consensus decision-making process that developed recommendations on three of 14 units across the project area. With this project the collaborative group was mainly represented by a small number of individuals primarily playing the most significant role in project development. These included local citizens, a user group focused on off-road vehicle recreation and access, and a local environmental organization. The collaborative group reviewed a small portion of the overall planned activities of the Forest Service through a series of field trips linked to the NEPA process.

As review criteria, the collaborative sought to evaluate proposed actions against the Montana Forest Restoration Principles developed as template principles for collaborative restoration forestry across the state. The group also participated by offering prepared comments during the NEPA process and by installing photo plots pre-treatment in an attempt at monitoring that failed to capture post treatment images.

#### *RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATIONS AMONGST PARTICIPANTS*

Discussions and field trips led to the Forest Service changing project plans. Road closure issues affected relationships and slowed the project but did not negatively affect the project overall. Disagreement over road issues did not trigger attempts to kill the project outright, but rather brought needed focus. However, as the project moved forward the off-road vehicle group splintered off to appeal the project while the rest of the collaborative group supported the Forest Service's plan to limited access for off-road use.

Non-agency participants in the collaborative group suggest that over the course of several projects and the years planning this project a deeper mutual understanding between the Forest Service and the group emerged. Collaborative group members external to the Forest Service developed a deeper understanding of Forest Service rules and procedures. Factors in developing depth in these relationships included regular check ins with Forest Service representatives including the District Ranger, specialists, and sometimes the Forest Supervisor. A non-agency stakeholder explained that this was important to build trust with the group, saying, "*You don't generate trust by walking into a meeting for the first time. You have to have a dozen meetings.*"

Respondents recognize that, despite increasing the depth of relationships, the agency sometimes decides to do things counter to what the group recommends. Non-agency respondents communicate that while this can be disappointing they usually understand why the agency makes such decisions. Clear and consistent communications helps. Collaborators note a sense of cohesion among the group and that this has grown over successive projects despite off-road vehicle interests leaving the collaborative.

## *NON-AGENCY PARTICIPATION: EFFECTS ON SCOPE, SCALE, AND PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS*

Non-agency stakeholders believe that their participation led to improved decision-making, citing that they influenced the scope of the project by encouraging the Forest Service to pull a section of road from the proposal. Non-agency respondents suggest scale decreased from what they had proposed in that a unit of lodgepole pine the group identified as suitable for harvest was not included. All respondents suggest that the project is a success because the project achieved forest management objectives and caused non-agency stakeholders to work with each other and with the Forest Service. One respondent noted that the Forest has a long history of environmental organization opposing projects like this but, that in this instance; one such organization was in full support.

## **VII. SOUTHWEST REGION**

### *Cibola National Forest, New Mexico.*

#### *PROJECT OVERVIEW*

The objectives of this project include: reducing risks for uncharacteristic wildfire; improving resilience of forests to drought and wildfire while enhancing wildlife habitat, improving watershed health by reducing the density of small diameter trees and supporting the local economy by helping to develop the local wood products economy.

Through two master stewardship agreements spanning 2010 - 2027, the Forest Service has worked with a national conservation group with strong local membership in New Mexico to create a program of work and relationships focused on re-establishing a forest industry needed to facilitate restoration forestry. The agreements focus largely on two adjacent watersheds and take advantage of CFLR funds for planning work. Partners anticipate a smooth transition from the first agreement to the second and no stop in workflow.

Since 2010, the partners involved have developed their working relationships by implementing supplemental project agreements (SPAs) in a watershed covered by existing NEPA assessments. The agency is committed to using stewardship agreements as an implementation mechanism because of the ability to leverage external funding and expertise and for additional flexibility in

packaging activities. In 2012, the Forest began leveraging a CFLR project to undertake additional NEPA across 90,000 acres, with the plan being to implement successive SPAs with the same conservation organization. The goal was to build local capacity and a program of work involving consistent thinning, logging, road decommissioning, erosion control, range improvement, and habitat enhancements. A related goal is to provide a predictable and continual material flow for a local mill.

### *THE ROLE OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS*

Non-agency stakeholders express their participation is slanted toward implementation, funding, and monitoring, but for some their involvement also includes NEPA planning, pre-implementation collaboration and capacity building, working on CFLRP proposal (planning and funding), data collection across many acres for environmental assessment, monitoring implementation and regulatory compliance, prepping additional units.

Primary non-agency project participants include:

- A national conservation organization holding the agreement with their principle responsibility administering and monitoring subcontracts. This group was not involved in project planning, just implementation.
- A national forestry and conservation organization with a strong regional presence that served as a liaison to the public and monitoring of socio-economic outcomes,
- A state wildlife agency who provided significant implementation funding and augmented technical expertise for NEPA planning,
- Contractors—-independent loggers, road contractors, Tribal work crews, and a sawmill.

Secondary non-agency stakeholders are tangentially involved in implementation and generally more involved in planning across a larger area. Secondary participants include:

- A national conservation organization with local membership,
- Native American Tribes who completed some of the work,
- A CFLR collaborative group.

The agreement holder functionally manages the work of local loggers, road contractors, and any other contractors needed to complete activities (tree marking, site prep, etc.) in supplemental project agreements on the Forest. The second function of the agreement holder is to acquire match funding both as in-kind resources and cash supporting project implementation. A state wildlife agency provided over \$1.7 million in implementation funding between the two agreements. The established framework of the agreement and the long-standing relationships underpinning it are credited as reasons why this state agency was able to obligate these funds.

At the start of the first agreement in 2010 there was little logging capacity or manufacturing base in the region. “*Our biggest barrier was having to establish that industry that was effective and*

*competent and efficient and gear it towards a small diameter material,”* explained the project lead for the Forest Service. While the restoration planning and workforce was being aligned through the agreement, a New Mexico Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program grant was made to a local wood products business to retool their wood processing line and revamp their business model. It took over two years of consistent effort but a mill was established that consistently accepts small diameter material for the manufacture of wood pallets and companion products (firewood, grindings, bedding material, landscape mulch, and playground material chips).

The facility had previously remanufactured eastern hardwoods into molding prior to the 2008 – 2009 recession and housing decline. According to project participants, the CFLR grant was essential for developing a new business model and to purchasing the necessary harvesting and processing equipment. With successive grants and private investment, the company was able to restructure to utilize local small diameter trees from forest restoration projects, which the agreement holder facilitated through their SPAs. The agreement holder works with the sawmill to coordinate work to minimize shutdown time at the mill. Of the benefits of the agreement structure, a Forest Service representative explained:

*With this agreement we have a little more flexibility to negotiate changes as we adapt...it reduces conflicts of interest and we're able to have more open dialogue and resolve all of those nuances...it definitely improved efficiencies overall, because we have a better vehicle to communicate with each other and adapt more readily than if it was more like a black and white contract...A stewardship contract would not give us the ability to have been able to grow and develop these fledgling businesses and relationships...So for us I think it's really about the stewardship agreement and how it operates has been able to enable us to be where we're at and be successful. I'm not sure a contract would have done that.*

Having a conservation organization working as an intermediary helps avoid any conflict of interest. In this project, agency participants cite stewardship agreement authority as more readily facilitating important adjustments to facilitate thinning projects than traditional contracts. For instance, previously laid out sales were adjusted to better accommodate the type of new equipment being used by loggers. Specifically, some units as originally laid out in a defaulted contract required the contractor to remove a significantly larger amount of non-commercial material which created logistical issues in the supply chain that adversely impacted the economics of loggers and the mill. Restructuring the project as an agreement allowed the agency to move the project along more efficiently.

#### ***RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATIONS AMONGST PARTICIPANTS***

When asked if they thought their participation resulted in improving decision making about the project, all of the non-agency stakeholders replied yes. Partner funding brought outside support

of the project, meaningful collaboration was conducted, and decisions were made as a group. All primary non-agency participants stated their participation resulted in getting the project implemented on the ground because they directly handled the implementation, funded the implementation, or participated in some way that impacted implementation.

All participants stated that communication between the Forest Service and their organization improved and strengthened due to working together on this project. For one participant, their organization had in the past only partnered with the Forest Service for activities like hosting youth trail work crews. Now they are actual partners to the master agreement, making them more like co-workers. Another participant shared that working on this project bred familiarity and improves communication among participants. None of the participants provided examples for the way the communication had changed but insist it had matured through this process.

The Forest Service and the agreement holder have worked well to make changes to how the agreements function. They are learning and experimenting together to improve the financial plan and tracking mechanism in the agreement, account for work items, and help written provisions in the SPA transfer to sale administration. It is these seemingly mundane actions that translate to increasing the pace and scale of restoration. A Forest Service representative explained:

*We've learned over time a better way to write and display so that all of those things are more easily communicated during the on the ground operation administration. The first agreement, we did 16 modifications to because of adding additional funds and just needed to make some changes. And I think with the new agreement, we've established ways that it'll be less clunky, less confusion and just ability to be a little cleaner and see things easier.*

Participants identified the long-term and relatively stable (i.e. not a lot of turnover) nature of relationships as key reasons for the quality of relationships between non-agency and agency stakeholders. Everyone involved is working towards the same goals. All non-agency participants express satisfaction with their level of involvement. They report feeling this way because economic and ecological benefits are accruing, as the project led to restoration of forest infrastructure and ecosystems.

### *NON-AGENCY PARTICIPATION: EFFECTS ON SCOPE, SCALE, AND PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS*

The agency estimates that the annual on-the-ground accomplishments have tripled to 3,000 acres per year since establishment of the agreement. As implementation of these two agreements has progressed, agency participants recognize restoration actions becoming more complex and varied. Activities are expanding well beyond removal of small diameter trees and prescribed fire.



All non-agency participants believed that involvement of non-agency stakeholders influenced the size/scale of the project. One stated that this project allowed for an “all lands,” cross-boundary approach. Others reinforce that the involvement of the local sawmill was critical to the stability of the project. Two participants stated that involvement of non-agency stakeholders influenced the complexity/scope of the project because it allowed for collaborative work and more inclusivity to meet their definitions of restoration. The third participant did not think that non-agency participation necessarily influenced the complexity/scope of the project, but that participation enabled implementation.

All participants agreed that the Cibola project was a success. Their evidence includes acceleration of the pace and scale of restoration on the Forest, creation of a restoration wood supply chain and utilization capacity, local investments made in the restoration economy, and strengthened relationships across multiple levels of governance, Tribes, NGOs, and private industry. The largest unknown about future success is the continued availability of funding to support restoration treatments.

## Uncompahgre National Forest, Colorado.

### *PROJECT OVERVIEW*

This project is a multi-year stewardship agreement with a wildlife conservation organization. The agreement holder described project objective as being, “*to increase the forest ecosystem resilience to anticipated forest disturbances over the next 50 to 100 years such as wildfire, insect and disease outbreaks, big game, wildlife use, and climate change through the management of vegetation density structure, composition, and pattern.*”

The project occurred in the shadow of a larger CFLR program landscape planning effort on the Forest involving numerous partners. The components of the stewardship agreement were split off from the other planned work as a relatively small discrete project emphasizing forest health and winter range habitat enhancements for wildlife species of greatest interest to the agreement holder. The project involved harvesting ponderosa pine and thinning and mastication in approximately 1,000 acres of dense pinyon-juniper stands.

### *THE ROLE OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS*

Primary non-agency participants included the agreement holder and two additional national conservation organization who provided significant experience (20 projects) and expertise in stewardship agreements. All of these organizations provided general training to Forest Service staff new to stewardship agreements generally and then as the project progressed they also provided technical advice to the agency during the design of this agreement. The agreement holder oversees loggers completing work, tracks progress and accomplishments, and provides in-kind match funding. They did not participant in NEPA.

Another primary non-agency stakeholder was a state wildlife agency who provided in-kind match via technical expertise to support project planning and implementation including project implementation oversight, GIS support for outlining project boundaries and identifying priority areas for habitat enhancement and identification of winter habitat for mule deer. Secondary non-agency stakeholders included energy utility and transmission companies with transmission lines crossing the project area, and a CFLR collaborative planning group which included the project in discussions at an annual meeting.

Primary non-agency stakeholders expressed feeling that their involvement had resulted in improving decision making about the project. Their explanations for why included that they were effective cooperators bringing in perspectives from a wildlife/conservation group, examining how specific treatments can benefit wildlife and big game as a whole and still meet the objectives of enhancing a healthy forest and restoration.

Primary non-agency participants believe they helped get the project implemented on the ground. One provided monetary and in-kind contributions and seed for re-seeding. The other explained that these types of collaborative projects add to targets and goals without increasing workloads of the Forest Service helping them meet their goals and objectives without significant extra work.

#### *RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATIONS AMONGST PARTICIPANTS*

Non-agency stakeholders stated that the agency lead did not know much about stewardship agreements but was receptive to their training and advice. This attitude made him more effective in learning how to work with people and how to use Forest Service authorities.

Participants cite this as a critical factor in moving this project forward. All interviewed non-agency participants were satisfied with the level of involvement of non-agency stakeholders in reference to the question above. Their explanations include that for a project of this size and nature just enough people were involved, and that the project served as an ongoing learning process that resulted in additional SPAs.

Both participants provided positive responses when asked about relationships and communication between the Forest Service and their organization. Even though there have been several personnel changes within the Forest Service, the relationship has been good and continues to develop in a positive direction as a result of working together on this project. Communication has improved and the group of people engaged in implementation feels more like a team rather than program managers on different sides. Non-agency participants explain that the way that the agency communicates has not really changed but rather that expectations, roles, and responsibilities are better understood, even though knowledge and capacity for using stewardship contracting authorities is still lacking within the Forest Service.

According to project participants, the quality of relationships is influenced by:

- Building professional trust and knowledge exchange. This provides agency and non-agency participants insight into how things work from the other side, including issues they may not have understood before, red tape, barriers, cultural eccentricities.
- Too few agency personnel benefiting from non-agency stakeholder expertise in establishing and implementing stewardship agreements.
- The knowledge base of the Forest Service about stewardship contracting authorities is lacking. There are different interpretations of the authorities and procedures for their use based on regions/Forests.

Through open communications, it became apparent to agreement holder that lack of capacity was limiting the agencies' ability to put up more timber sales. The agreement holder explained:

*One of the things that we learned from the beginning was that they were hampered with time in setting up timber sales. And so we had the ability to actually go out and get a contractor two separate years to help them in initiating and laying out timber sales, marking and layout. And it wasn't specific to us even getting part of those timber sales back in through the agreement, it was just the ability for us to work with Forest Service and helping them increase their capacity to get work done on the ground. I think that was one of the real out-of-the-box, if you will, thinking of things that evolved from this agreement.*

#### *NON-AGENCY PARTICIPATION: EFFECTS ON SCOPE, SCALE, AND PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS*

Project participants believed that involvement of non-agency stakeholders influenced the size/scale of the project. The project was kept small to keep it manageable. By bringing in outside partners, the Forest Service has been more willing to put funding into this projects to leverage external resources. One participant felt that involvement of non-agency stakeholders influenced the complexity/scope of the project because the project was larger and more complex; working together allows participants to get a lot accomplished with a small amount of money.

When asked about the most challenging aspect of non-agency stakeholder participation in the stewardship contracting projects, non-agency participants provided the following information:

- Establishing stewardship agreements on a Forest and with individuals who have never used the authorities can be complicated by a steep learning curve.
- The lack of value in the resource-base available constrains the ability to trade goods for services.

- Projects like this work best when the Forest Service project manager has knowledge about agreements.

All participants agreed that the Uncompahgre Agreement was a success because the area went from having no such projects active to significant habitat improvements and a sustained commitment to work.

## Arizona National Forests, Arizona.

### *PROJECT OVERVIEW*

Stakeholders in this project area agree that there is a need to address forest conditions at scales commensurate with disturbances occurring in an attempt to reduce disturbance severity. In the mid-1990s, a series of very large and severe wildfires drove people towards large scale collaborative planning. This 10-year 300,000 acre integrated resource service contract (IRSC) is a result of that planning.

Project objectives include developing a program of landscape scale restoration capable of reducing risk of catastrophic wildfires across a predominantly ponderosa pine forested landscape, reestablishing a forest products industry and support rural economies, reintroducing controlled fire, increasing the pace of thinning to at least 30,000 acres per year, and implementing a significant component of +1 million acre NEPA. The project is based on the idea that offering a stable supply of wood will result in investment in wood processing and that new industry would reduce the cost of implementation and the subsidy required to move low quality wood out of the forest. A completed stewardship contract nearby used appropriated payments to pay \$500 to \$700 an acre to complete mechanical thinning. This helped establish a local industry around the area of that contract. However, the same result has not happened within this project.

Additional objectives include studying ecological outcomes, road management, improved wildlife habitat, resilient water resources, increased water storage in the ecosystem, and protected drinking water supplies. Overall there are over 25 restoration actions listed in the contract. Desired outcomes are resilient forests, protected communities, and conditions that enable effective fire suppression response when necessary.

This contract is one component of a larger CFLR project with more than 35 different organizations involved primarily during planning. There is a smaller subset of stakeholders focused specifically on this contract. The structured collaborative process has resulted in significant successes in pre-NEPA and in increasing analysis to the landscape scale with significant public support while blurring historical disagreements. The project has, however, not yet been able to achieve anywhere near the level of implementation that stakeholders expected.

The central barrier to implementation is a lack of existing wood demand due to lack of industry and markets for wood. Additionally, the quality of wood is low meaning that restoration activities are costly. Collaborators have been working on this for over a decade including the planning phase. Five years into implementation less than 10,000 acres of thinning is complete. The agency says that they have been very lenient with the contractor to allow them time to “*get their financing in order to get that infrastructure.*” Meanwhile, non-agency stakeholders, some of whom are industry people very concerned with agency decisions about contract awards, feeling other options would have resulted in more implementation.

### *THE ROLE OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS*

Roles identified by non-agency stakeholders varied, from participating in the planning phase of the collaborative, providing technical advice, participating in the collaborative meetings, providing formal comments via NEPA scoping, implementation activities, multiparty monitoring, connecting industry to the project, lobbying Congress for resources, and more. Length of participation of non-agency stakeholders has ranged from over 10 years to some who have become involved only very recently.

Primary non-agency stakeholders participate via the formal collaborative process with various committees that have been involved over the years. Monthly meetings of the full CFLR group typically feature between 20 – 40 people. For implementation matters specific to this contract, however, less than 10 primary non-agency stakeholders were identified. Primary stakeholders in this IRSC report participating in all phases of the project from early planning through implementation and monitoring. These include an association of counties, a forest restoration research and practice institute within a university, a regional conservation organization, a city fire department, an environmental organization, a national conservation organization, local government officials, and forest industry representatives.

### *RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATIONS AMONGST PARTICIPANTS*

Participants provided varied responses when asked about relationships and communication between the Forest Service and their organization. Some had partnered with the Forest Service in the past and felt that this project further strengthened established relationships, built greater mutual trust, and improved communication. One participant offered that their relationship with the agency had completely transformed from a total standoff to one of trust and respect in which the agency valued this person’s insights.

Based on their experience in this project, non-agency stakeholders offered various perspectives on what things contribute to the quality of relationships between non-agency and agency stakeholders:

- Outcomes—acres cut and/or burned, springs restored, roads closed, or other hard metrics that can be quantified and celebrated as direct result of collaborative efforts.
- Availability and sharing of data from both sides—willingness to share information with each other and to be clear and open about conclusions from the data. This has been a common practice from the beginning of the project and it has built trust.
- Well facilitated collaborative landscape prioritization process that build common visions and trust.
- Creating conditions for listening and being direct with communications.
- Stability of staffing in key positions within the Forest Service—there was turnover that negatively affected relationships.
- Opportunities to communicate directly with Forest Service leadership at the meetings.

Non-agency stakeholders all believe their participation improved the planning process. They were very satisfied with the collaborative planning process overall, citing that it brought in a wide variety of perspectives including political, economic, and ecological. The process was iterative and focused on realistic outcomes related to both stewardship and industry. Without this active collaboration, the process would have been much more lengthy and controversial. Participants express dissatisfaction with the contracting process and rate of implementation.

Certain stakeholders wanted to be more involved in the contract. One expressed disappointment at not being selected as the stewardship contractor, citing that those selected have done a poor job of advancing the project. All agency and non-agency participants express frustration that the implementation phase of the project is not moving forward as envisioned. An agency respondent admitted, *“I didn't make the decision on it, but I'd recommend not to do that again, because we didn't get the private contractors that would actually be able to pull this contract off initially.”*

A non-agency academician acknowledged:

*There's a lot of challenges, and I think one of the big ones is just the hierarchy of the Forest Service. Collaborations or successes are built on personal relationships, but because the [stewardship contract] spans multiple administrative units the Regional Office actually will be the one that signs off on the NEPA documents. So even though the stakeholder group doesn't meet with Regional staff, they sometimes swoop in and maybe run roughshod over collaborative agreements with the local planning team.*

Other non-agency stakeholders also expressed frustrations with the organizational structure and hierarchy within the Forest Service, expressing that they believe it is a barrier to relationship building and communication. Still, through their diligence and the openness of local Forest Service colleagues, the volume and quality of communication changed throughout the collaborative process and participants credit their success in planning to this. Monthly meetings continue and now focus on how to overcome implementation barriers.

A representative from a regional conservation organization reflected:

*I think what's probably the most challenging part is that after we've kind of agreed on all the goals and everything like that, then the Forest Service...had to go through the request for proposal and selection of a contractor process kind of without involving the collaboration. And the result and the selected contractor there hasn't been able, up to this point, to come anywhere near accomplishing the thinning goals that we set out.*

All participants have come to the conclusion that perhaps in places like this where industry is truly lacking, stewardship agreements may be more appropriate to facilitate their implementation vision. These individuals perceive that agreements may provide more flexibility in establishing the type of agency to non-agency relationships needed to get the project going. Struggling through together appears to have been beneficial in some ways. People have an understanding of why progress has been slow, finger pointing is minimal and for the most part, stakeholders just want to help. Local agency participants empathize with their non-agency colleagues. An agency participant remarked:

*We set up some really ambitious expectations and probably unrealistic so that's the thing I think to learn from this when you're looking at the scale of what we've got to just say, "Oh, we're gonna get to 50,000 acres within two years," that was naïve...I think as far as their roles, the planning is still really strong in keeping that moving forward and that definitely provides legitimacy to the process and different values and just definitely gives us an improved end product.*

#### *NON-AGENCY PARTICIPATION: EFFECTS ON SCOPE, SCALE, AND PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS*

Most participants believed that involvement of non-agency stakeholders dramatically increased the scale of the project. The stakeholder collaborative also broadened the project into a holistic restoration approach increasing the complexity of restoration elements. Complexity was increased due to the wide-range of perspectives (industry, environmental, political) influencing the decision-making process, the technical expertise of participants, and the values and expectations they brought into such a large and ambitious project.

When asked if the project is/was a success, responses were mixed. All participants indicated that, in term of collaboration and working together, the project was a huge success. It achieved a NEPA analysis and project design on a scale no one involved had ever attempted. However, project implementation was/is nowhere near what was planned. Most participants were positive that the implementation rate would increase. Participants are viewing implementation of the larger NEPA analyses as a “career project” that will be ongoing for more than 20 years and they expect to be involved for a long time.

Some non-agency participants report being more positive about the current IRSC suggesting that implementation pace is expected to increase soon. Others view the planning as a success but the actual implementation as unsuccessful. The most critical respondent stated:

*Factually, you know take all the emotions out of it. Factually, the planning is a huge success. Factually, the implementation is a dismal failure. And the data that I use to state this is that we produced a million acre Record of Decision. And by now 5 years into it we should have cut 150,000 acres and we have only cut 8,000. That's a 5% completion rate. Just try to think what you would think if the contractor you hired to build your house, 5 years later had completed 5% of the job.*

Agency representatives acknowledge the shortcomings. Instead of turning away from stakeholders, they are working towards engaging them more in implementation by exploring the use of stewardship agreements in the project area.

## **Pacific Coast Region**

### **Fremont-Winema National Forest, Oregon.**

#### ***PROJECT OVERVIEW***

The ecological objectives of this project are restoration of a ponderosa pine forest through commercial and non-commercial thinning to remove white fir and retain an over story of old pine trees. The fir component grew up during a period of fire exclusion. The project aims to reduce risk of high severity stand replacing wildfire, improve forest stand resilience to the effects of climate change, and retain old forest characteristics. Social and economic objectives include training a restoration workforce and exchange of skills between partners for forest management and restoration forestry. Another objective is that a key non-agency stakeholder Tribal organization will implement their forest management plan for lands that were historically intended to be their reservation. Anticipated outcomes include highly effective working relationships between the partners, development of a skilled workforce to enable restoration at a large pace and scale, and improved forest health and composition.

The project is a supplemental project agreement (SPA) tiered from a 10-year master stewardship agreement (MSA) spanning the National Forest. Coming out of a 34,000 acre Environmental Assessment (EA), the SPA includes 1,200 acres of commercial timber harvesting valued at more than \$1 million. Revenue from the sale is being reinvested into future SPAs, specifically layout and marking on additional units and some other service work. As one of many SPAs tied to an



MSA between the Forest Service and a Tribal organization, this project is a small portion of the MSA.

The master stewardship agreement was signed 5 years ago naming two conservation organizations with expertise in restoration science and practice as partners within the 10 year MSA. About 10 years prior to advancing the MSA the Forest Service and the Tribes signed a memoranda of agreement to clarify and establish a working relationship, government to government coordination at the regional level and between resource departments, forest and district, which identified how to work together from a legal standpoint. The Tribes also developed a Forest Management Plan for the former reservation lands. The MSA is implementing aspects of this plan. Moreover, a key individual involved with developing the Tribes' forest plan is now engaged in implementing this stewardship agreement.

Forest Service interest in getting a project going in this area started 20 years ago. At that time, the proposed project was appealed. The EA decision notice was signed in 2014, with harvesting recently completed in 2017. Project participants note that additional harvesting, service work, and monitoring is necessary to complete the project.

#### *THE ROLE OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS*

Stakeholders were engaged in “all phases” which included NEPA scoping, establishing the MSA and project planning for each SPA, implementation, and monitoring. Some of the primary non-agency participants participating during NEPA scoping but their role was largely passive, i.e. they did not come up with proposed action or the alternatives, although the Tribes forest plan for their prior reservation lands may have passively influenced the Forest Service's selection of alternatives.

While the MSA and related agreements with the Tribe established the norms by which the Forest Service would engage with the Tribes, planning during the SPAs was the initial foray into collaborative project design and implementation. Forest Service respondents explain that not everyone within the agency is comfortable with this due to varied perceptions of the accounting of stewardship activities and the silvicultural systems selected. Others within the agency recognize that while the agreement surrenders some control to the partners, the agency lacks capacity and resources to complete projects like this on their own. Another factor in agency personnel perception around the project is the recognition that much of the National Forest is former reservation lands, meaning the Tribes have a unique claim to involvement in their day-to-day management.

Much of the work of the Tribes focuses on working with their non-profit partners and some very well-known forest ecologists to design and layout silvicultural treatments that focus on variable density thinning, individual clumps, and patchy openings. The treatments are not standard

practice for the Forest so external partners brought in different science and practice to shape the future forest. As a non-agency participant explained that, “*normally, the Forest Service would coordinate, design, develop, and oversee all these other aspects. So we were very, very involved in painting this picture of how the project ends up.*”

While the MSA is between the Tribes and the Forest Service, the non-profits are also named in the agreement as this is a well-integrated partnership. “*No one partner really does the whole thing, it is a partnership endeavor,*” explained the administrative lead for the Tribes. The organizations and individuals involved through this partnership are the means through which the partners achieve one of the objectives of the agreement, which is to facilitate employment and training within the Tribe focused on the technical aspects of restoration forestry. Realizing project outcomes depends on accountability and leadership on both sides of the agreement. The agreement is set up to clearly show an agency person responsible for a discrete set of activities paired with a non-agency partner mirroring these roles, establishing mutual accountability. While there are many roles and responsibilities, there are very few people playing these roles on both sides of the agreement.

For example, the District Ranger was paired with the administrative person within the Tribal natural resources department. This individual is the main point of contact when new SPAs are negotiated and he/she manages the Tribal forester, forestry technicians, consultants, and two external non-profit conservation organizations comprising the project team. The lead administrator for the Tribes also worked early on to secure support from the Tribal Council that was necessary to pursue the agreement. This individual was also instrumental in developing the Tribal forest management plan for their former reservation lands.

A representative from one of the non-profit organizations is handling all fiscal matters for the non-agency side of the agreement. Specifically, he/she manages subcontracts and the financial plan for the agreement (e.g. working with the Forest Service in any new SPA to balance the value of timber to be removed with the costs of planned service work, along with accounting for partner contributions such as in-kind contributions, overhead expenses, etc. Field staff for the agency (e.g. sale administrator, silviculturalist, resource specialists) work with the Tribal forester and their crew as they lay out and mark new units ensuring compliance with various rules and policies.

### *RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATIONS AMONGST PARTICIPANTS*

Non-agency participants recognize that success in this project is completely dependent on key individuals working together to make it happen:

*Key individuals who are committed to its success is the single, sole most important factor in these things being successful. Having dedicated individuals that*

*understand the project, the objectives, or why we're working together, and are willing to make it happen. That's the single most important factor.*

Agency staff stated “*doing what we say we are going to do*” is crucial for building trust and encouraging partnerships that worked through glitches as they came up. In this project, such trust building took place over decades based on the personal relationships between individuals. Before this project most of the working relationships between the partners had been in planning discussions. Moving into implementation appears to have changed relationships. One of the leads for the agency who has been on the Forest for 27 years explains:

*It's hard to say, 'cause I've been working with them for so many years. But now that we have well-defined projects that they can be involved with, with specific tasks and roles and responsibilities, yes, I think it has changed the relationship to more trusting and more professional, that we're helping each other out, and that's what a stewardship agreement is supposed to be, it is mutual objectives.*

This individual goes on to explain, “*Previously, it [Tribal participation] was just an input to Forest Management activities through the NEPA process, under the Memorandum of Agreement, following some of those guidelines. This is different and things have morphed and evolved, and I think are getting better all the time.*”

This project is an interesting case study in overlapping layers of governance across a landscape. The Tribes who have been on the land for thousands of years have developed their own vision for the landscape through their forest management plan while the Forest Service through the National Forest Management Act implemented a Forest Plan. From these framing documents, flow cultural norms and traditions, science, and layers of bureaucracy within both governments. This continuation influences interpersonal relationships on-the-ground where management decisions are made. Reflecting on this, the administrative lead for the Tribes, said:

*I think with the Tribes getting involved in stewardship agreements, it is helping bridge the gap between some of our [Forest Service and the Tribes] differences. Definitely not totally, but when you are working with somebody, particularly another agency, right at the ground level, with almost equal ownership in things that you are doing on project like this, we seem to be working pretty well with them. We have had a little glitch here and there, but like I said, each side has identified what they consider glitches and we let each other know about them, and we sit down and work it out.*

Both agency and non-agency respondents suggest that having the right partners involved means less risk of litigation. The agency suggests that both industry lobbyists and environmental groups still provide comments on projects like this, but having the Tribes engaged in managing their former reservation lands and well-respected conservation organizations and scientists has

mollified these voices. A non-agency participant offered that the approach to the partnerships has given the Forest Service a “*higher level of credibility...so there is no appeal of the projects being proposed because the other folks that are out there realize of our knowledge and expertise.*”

### *NON-AGENCY PARTICIPATION: EFFECTS ON SCOPE, SCALE, AND PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS*

The partners clearly feel that the project would not have happened without their involvement and that their involvement led to improved decision making. While the agency expressed some reservation around stewardship agreements suggesting that they are a challenging new way of doing business, non-agency stakeholders felt that the process of creating the agreement has enabled them to be much more involved in project design and implementation, which they believe yields better results.

Agency personnel involved in the project also express reservations about the treatments, which are very different from what they are used to. They also admit that this specific type of restoration oriented silviculture is complex and that they themselves are not experts. They still view the project as successful. Others within the agency struggle with the idea of people external to the Forest Service playing the roles that partners are playing. Respondents cite the economic benefits as a success. The current SPA yielded over \$1 million in forest products to the regional economy and created four new forestry technician positions within the Tribes.

While the scale of the project was established in the EA, non-agency participants suggest that in general projects are increasing in their scale. “*We are now doing projects 10 times bigger than where we were than even five years ago....because of the trust, because of the science, because of the relationships, we've increased in order of magnitude the scale of the projects that we're doing, and we're doing them more quickly from the time of project conception.*”

Participants also believe that the project has become more complex, “*The types of prescriptions we're implementing are more difficult than a spacing-based or just a standard silvicultural prescription. So yes, we've certainly increased the complexity through this partnership,*” said a non-agency forester. Respondents also believe that the project is a success with a self-identified scientist suggesting:

*The project will be a success because it incorporates better science, a higher level of commitment to sustaining the resilience of the forest than would have been accomplished without the participation of the partners. The partners have been able to leverage funding, have been able to incorporate the societal interest and desires, have increased harvest in that area to provide more jobs and diversity of training opportunities and experiences. It's built a stronger relationship between the Forest and the local community.*

## Tahoe National Forest, California.

### *PROJECT OVERVIEW*

Using an Integrated Resource Timber Contract (IRTC) and a stewardship agreement to implement service work, this 1,500 acre project is located in an experimental forest in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. This is an appropriate location as the project itself is an experiment in collaborative design of complex silvicultural treatments intended to reduce fire severity and enhance wildlife habitat for old forest obligates.

Recognizing that something must be done to alter conditions in the region's forests, longstanding adversaries wanted to test a new business model different from the non-collaborative planning to NEPA analysis to objection and litigation model that has characterized vegetative management projects on the region's National Forests for decades. Originating primarily as an array of more traditional fuel reduction treatments, stakeholder input evolved this project into one having greater treatment variability across topographic gradients in an effort to increase forest diversity and enhance old forest habitat.

This project is a collaborative process focused on designing an integrated and silviculturally complex project weighing tradeoffs in treatment design and location with effects on wildlife habitat and fire behavior. All involved came to the table because they saw a need to go beyond noncontroversial fuel reduction projects into more comprehensive restoration forestry to improve old forest habitat for species such as the American Marten and California Spotted Owl. The goal was to reduce wildfire risk and enhance wildlife habitat where it is most important. A related goal for the project is to display complex ecological restoration techniques in the Sierra Nevada Mountains and to reintroduce fire into the landscape as a means to prove that such an approach to forestry can be done on the National Forests. As explained by a project manager for the Forest Service:

*A lot of folks think we just need more money and time to do forest management, but the reality is a lot of the easy work has been done. And I'm not saying that there couldn't be more work to be done in those areas, but the most vulnerable areas are the most vulnerable not because they just haven't been done yet, but because they're super complicated. They take a lot of inertia and a lot of will and a lot of ability to deal with risk associated with doing complicated landscapes. So I would say that there wasn't a whole lot of appetite to do a complicated project like this because we don't get any extra kudos for doing a complicated acre versus an easy acre.*

Perhaps because of this dynamic the project developed over a very long time, 13 years from initial conception to implementation. The initial project planning work began in 2008 and

broadened out in 2010 when an examination of the scientific literature on the ecosystem suggested that a collaborative planning approach could be useful. The NEPA decision was signed in 2013 and some thinning treatments commenced via a stewardship agreement with a university and foundation funding. Due to the project design and forest types, few timber receipts were generated so much of the service component was accomplished through the agreement. A much larger integrated resource timber contract, which was awarded after two failed attempts, has not progressed due to a log glut from the widespread tree mortality in the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

### *THE ROLE OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS*

Non-agency stakeholder engagement occurred mainly on the front-end planning side of this project to help craft the proposed action. Project participants include:

- A regional environmental organization with a long history of litigation, which participated in pre-NEPA planning and helped secure project funding.
- A university managing the experimental forest, which participated in pre-NEPA planning, helped implement service contracts, and monitor results.
- The USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Research Station, which participated in pre-NEPA planning by providing a General Technical Report and technical expertise.
- A state forestry agency—participated in pre-NEPA planning.
- A foundation—participated in pre-NEPA planning and provided grant funding.
- A local watershed council—participated in pre-NEPA planning and facilitated the process. While perhaps possessing less intense views than others, their facilitation was not classically neutral in that they brought their own subject matter expertise into the process, and acknowledge desiring a project to occur.

The stated goal of the collaborative planning process was to lay the groundwork for defining the purpose and need for a proposed action under NEPA. The strategy was to put as much of the collaborative decision into the proposed action as possible. A well-designed and facilitated science-based collaborative process focused stakeholders in their review and debate of the relevance of research findings for management application in the project area. Sharing and discussing such information freely among participants led to improved trust among those choosing to participate in the process.

Stakeholders contributed diverse scientific expertise, values, and perspectives. An important aspect of the collaborative planning process was giving everyone transparent access to the same science which established a common knowledge baseline among participants and removed suspicion about “their datasets.” The data did not become a point of contention. A facilitator moved the process along and focused a diverse group of people on collaborative planning and decision-making. According to a participant from a conservation organization, the expertise and

openness of the Forest Service in designing and implementing the treatments is the “*glue which kept us together.*”

Not everyone involved in the NEPA ID Team for the agency was involved in the collaborative process and there was some mistrust and skepticism among agency personnel about decisions that were made by the collaborative concerning specific ID Team member’s areas of expertise. Some of the ID Team members chose not to participate in the collaborative process. An agency representative explained:

*We didn't necessarily have everybody that would ultimately be involved in the NEPA side of things in the collaboration side of things, so it really took some people out of their comfort zone that non-agency folks were helping make decisions on their particular discipline. It was interesting to have this collaboration with our external folks and make agreements and bring it back into our internal processing, and having to rehash decisions made and agreements made with internal folks that didn't have the capacity to be part of the collaboration at the time....They had plenty of other work to be done...It wasn't that they disagreed with what was being done, it's just because...it was a complicated collaboration and there was complicated agreements that were occurring, they didn't understand how those agreements were being made and so it was a long process to walk them through that, and frankly a little bit of mistrust as well with regards to why those agreements were made.*

Non-agency participants believe that their participation resulted in improved decision-making because it helped evolve the project from a relatively singular focused fuels project to a more complex multi-objective project. The agency project lead agrees that not only did this occur but that it made the project better. The facilitator explained that the collaborative process helped the non-agency participants understand the NEPA process more completely that helped focus their input into something that would be most useful for informing the NEPA work of the agency. Overall, the collaborative framework represented a new way of doing business and a new option for how these diverse and often historically oppositional groups interface with each other.

#### *RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATIONS AMONGST PARTICIPANTS*

All project participants report that their relationships and communications improved because of their participation in this project. Non-agency participants suggest that the Forest Service was very accommodating of the collaborative process and included sufficient time in the field to work through differences of opinion on treatment design. The agency took proactive measures to improve staffing in positions on the frontlines of collaborating with non-agency participants, reassigning staff who were less equipped for this work. All non-agency participants report being satisfied with how involved they were in the process. Non-agency participants express being

thankful that staffing changes on the Forest initiated by Forest Service leadership led to more receptive and accommodating interactions with the Forest Service. Their agency counterpart also expressed gratitude for the relationships they developed and insights they gained through the process.

The environmental group who had rarely previously engaged in collaborative projects was able to influence the design of treatments by working directly with the Forest Service in treatment design. The group proved to be integral to the project design and helped raise funds for implementation.

The sharing of information was a factor in improving relationships. Trust expanded as people worked in a shared decision space where participants were more willing to share information and more receptive to receiving information than they were previously. External stakeholders express that they are more open to pre-NEPA collaborative work since the Forest Service honored the decision making process.

Of the process, a non-agency participant offered:

*We learned very quickly is that the land managers and the scientists, we really didn't have a great working relationship. And this process, by sitting together to try to figure out what a challenge is, helped us create the dialogue, the language that was common between us. And then by opening it up later to this broader group, we created a completely new way to do business. And the key one was developing trust and mutual support for a very broad range of ideas, and then how to take that, which is complicated, and move it forward in a positive manner.*

#### ***NON-AGENCY PARTICIPATION: EFFECTS ON SCOPE, SCALE, AND PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS***

The collaborative process influenced the complexity more than the size of the project resulting in many different treatments based on the physical and ecological characteristics of the basin and a collaborative examination of the science. The Forest Service lead explained that non-agency involvement, “*absolutely effected the complexity, but in a good way. I moaned and groaned when I entered that collaboration process but at the same time, I think the result was a much better project that came out of it. So it made it more complex, but yeah I guess nature's complex so it's not unreasonable to think that we need to develop complex solutions for a really complex problem.*” The project took longer and involved more resources but all feel they got a better result even though major components of the project have yet to be implemented.



## Deschutes National Forest, Oregon.

### *PROJECT OVERVIEW*

This project includes over 1,600 acres of silvicultural treatments across a 6,000-acre project area adjacent to private land including a large recently burned area. The project includes both IRTC and IRSC contracts both of which are roughly 800 acres in size. Two contracts were used due to variability in conditions and to financing of the project elements. The forest has characteristics of both moist and dry mixed conifer forests. Objectives focus on restoring forest types by removing significant volumes of white fir and retaining a ponderosa pine dominant forest, reducing risk of uncharacteristically severe disturbance from wildfire, insects, and disease, providing forest products and reducing wildfire risk to communities in the wildland urban interface. Additional objectives identified by project participants include producing wood products, enhancing wildlife habitat, generating revenue for the Forest Service to fund other stewardship projects, and reducing threats to private land.

The project is nested within the landscape of a CFLR program collaborative project that has been going on for 8 years. Participants in that collaborative include over 35 groups, but in this case study project, nine primary non-agency stakeholders were identified by project participants with a small number of secondary non-agency stakeholders, all of whom participate in the CFLR collaborative. Primary non-agency stakeholders in this project include a consulting environmental scientist, a local environmental advocacy organization, a county commissioner, a national conservation organization, a local government representative, and a retired state wildlife agency professional.

Prior to this project, plans for the area were included in a 2010 EIS. A fire came through in 2012 before implementation occurred which affected forest conditions significantly enough that the entire NEPA analysis needed to be completed again. Stakeholder scoping prior to the 2010 NEPA informed the collaborative process around planning a new project in the same area aimed at repairing some of the damage of the fire and reducing severity of future disturbance in remaining unburned areas. A collaborative planning process involving a series of field trips was used with local stakeholders to inform a proposed action for the rehashed NEPA analysis that occurred in 2013.

### *THE ROLE OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS*

Non-agency engagement in this project occurred in the pre-NEPA planning process, monitoring implementation, and via collaborative discussion of the larger CFLR project. Respondents view the continuum of early engagement in pre-NEPA planning and post-NEPA pre-implementation actions on through to monitoring implementation as being the most important ways non-agency stakeholders engaged in the project. This level of sustained and continued engagement left

participants feeling their concerns were heard and addressed through the design of the project, and that in subsequent phases stakeholder concerns became integrated into agency decisions as the project moved towards implementation.

For example, opinions varied widely on how to address dwarf mistletoe. Regarding this contentious issue, the District Ranger explained that early pre-NEPA planning allowed the group to identify a way forward, and that continued communication with the group around the practicality of implementing their vision enabled the Forest Service to make needed adjustments post-NEPA.

*I think we did four or five field trips to one stand....Rather than using diameter limits....we wound up using a subjective Van Pelt method to identify these trees. So it took us a long time, and I don't think that we really got the basal area and the reduction that we were looking for but we were able to improve the stand. And that one was, that was a lot of discussions in the field, became a big burden on our marking crew to be able to actually get done correctly, and it's resulted in a lot of circling back and just making sure that the collaboratives are comfortable with the work now. Long term this is a huge benefit, but to get to the project it took quite a bit of time.*

Issues such as this, which would have historically halted progress all together, were addressed using early collaborative engagement, allowing participants with varying levels of knowledge and scientific background to get on the same page earlier and work towards a solution. “*That pre-NEPA engagement was, I think, really valuable because it led us to prioritize some areas where the Collaborative could lend a hand, and weigh in on potentially contentious topics and start early on them,*” explained the Ranger. “*It gave us time to work through the science and the social values surrounding some of those topics and emerge at the other side with something at least workable, some compromise or some common ground that was workable,*” they further clarify.

Priorities and zones of agreement around desired future condition that were identified via the larger CFLR collaborative context also informed discussions around project level management priorities. Repeated field trips—from before NEPA on through implementation—were effective in coalescing a common vision. A collaborative member described the process through which landscape level priorities informed local decisions:

*Because our [CFLR] Collaborative represents 35 different community organizations across the gamut, from recreation groups to forest product industry, to tribes, to local elected officials, you name it...because they were involved from the get-go, the agreements that emerged from our process and the science that we*

*brought to the table and the strategies that we thought about, and ultimately crafted, and sent on for consideration by the agency I think gave them a lot of diverse perspectives condensed into one agreed upon vision.....on all of these issues that could have been show-stoppers and where the conversation may not have gone anywhere further without the Collaborative, our engagement with the Forest Service allowed a workable solution, allowed a common ground to emerge, and help us find a way forward.*

The diversity of participation appears to have improved decision making in this project. A technical expert working for a conservation organization explained that their engagement allowed for productive discussions with environmental groups who historically may have litigated a project like this. *“I don’t think there would have been a pathway forward without our engagement,”* explained this individual. They go on to hypothesize that there likely would have been litigation if the extra efforts was not taken to coalesce around a common vision. *“You need to slow down for early engagement in designing a good project, so that you can go bigger and faster overall,”* they exclaimed. That said, many respondents cite symptoms of collaboration fatigue suggesting that the process was lengthy and slow and more difficult for volunteers to participate given their time constraints than for paid employees.

#### *RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATIONS AMONGST PARTICIPANTS*

Most participants feel that the project improved their relationships with the Forest Service. However, this is one in a series of collaborative interactions. Non-agency participants credit Forest Service leadership as investing in the concept of collaboration as a means of getting things done. The agency made proactive personnel changes that also improved relationships with external participants. A representative with a national conservation organization expressed, *“On all of these issues that could have been show-stoppers and where the conversation may not have gone anywhere further without the Collaborative, our engagement with the Forest Service allowed a workable solution.”*

A representative with an environmental organization stated, *“I would just say, as far as the relationship goes, some collaborative projects and stewardship contracts have an end result of losing trust and not being a good experience....this one had the end result of being a positive experience, and a little bit more trust being gained.”* This individual cited trust and communication as contributing to the quality of relationships, suggesting, *“I think with collaborative projects, when there is sincere listening, and collaborating, and compromising....advancing those areas where there is common ground, rather than advancing a project that is a foregone conclusion and just doing collaboration as a formality. That dynamic is where you either build trust or lose trust.”*

For their part, agency representatives offer, *“We still fight a little bit about, I have to make a certain amount of money to get these projects done so there's always a little bit of a push on*

*some of these bigger trees that can actually help float the good work....sometimes we still fight over single trees but it's not as often as it was."*

#### ***NON-AGENCY PARTICIPATION: EFFECTS ON SCOPE, SCALE, AND PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS***

Both agency and non-agency respondents suggest that the trend is for non-agency participants to increase the size of projects but not in this instance. The project was reduced in size to address concerns of some stakeholders and advance areas where agreement could be reached. All participants acknowledge that the project became more complex due to non-agency participation.

An individual identifying themselves as a moderate environmentalist explained, *"It mostly influenced the pace....It slowed it down....there was pretty heated debates and didn't agree on much at that time, that affects the project and slows it down. Yeah, it made it more complex....but going through a collaborative is a lot less complex than going through a lawsuit."*

The District Ranger remarked, *"If these projects have been attempted 20 years ago or 10 years ago, maybe they would have dropped units because they were being too hard or too complex or too controversial."*

Most participants felt that the collaborative process was a success and that the portion of the project that had been implemented was successful too. A non-agency participant offered that, *"The level of engagement, the willingness and the openness of Forest Service staff to work through the hard issues to go slower at the outset in order to work on more complex issues at the back end and do more work on the ground, do more intense restoration on the ground at the back end, I think all of that was a clear success."*

## **VIII. SOUTHEAST REGION**

Desoto National Forest, Mississippi.

## *PROJECT OVERVIEW*

This project is a 10-year stewardship agreement between the Forest Service and a National Guard training facility with a special use permit on the National Forest. The area is one of the remaining intact large blocks of high-quality longleaf pine and provides habitat for numerous endangered plant and animal species in Mississippi. Several long-term relationships govern stakeholder interactions and land management accountability.

Land management actions are heavily influenced by priorities for threatened and endangered (T&E) species conservation within the military training area. A national conservation organization, the National Guard, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Forest Service all play a role in T&E species conservation. This project is an example of collaborative engagement in adaptive management during planning, implementation, monitoring. Partners have embraced the concept of adaptive management in this and are using annual multi-party monitoring data to adjust implementation.

Project objectives focus on ensuring that the area can continue to be used for armored vehicle training and other military preparedness exercises while restoring habitat for non-game and endangered species dependent on the longleaf pine ecosystem. The project involves multiple restoration actions including thinning stands to improve savannah habitat, spraying invasive plants, feral hog control, monitoring T&E species (gopher tortoise, red cockaded woodpecker, black pine snake), endangered species translocation, improving understory habitat via mowing and burning, and constructing a pond for wildlife habitat and fire management purposes that is cited as benefiting wildlife, the military, and the Forest Service.

## *THE ROLE OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS*

Primary non-agency stakeholders include the National Guard, a national conservation organization, a state wildlife management agency, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Non-primary non-agency stakeholders include a university herpetologist, two logging companies, and three service contractors. The phases in which these primary non-agency stakeholders engaged include project planning (pre-NEPA), implementation, monitoring of ESA populations, and annual multi-party performance monitoring. Most engagement occurred during implementation and monitoring.

The roles of non-agency stakeholders included reviewing initial proposals and participating in site visits, providing technical advice, reviewing projects for ESA compliance, monitoring T&E species occurrence, treatment of invasive species, and serving as the environmental officer and project administrator with the National Guard. All of these roles occur in close coordination between primary stakeholders and a central coordinator with the Forest Service who manages projects, manages relationships, and finds and aligns resources for project implementation.

The lead for the Forest Service said:

*If it is supposed to be a partnership, then they need to be involved in the planning. I mean, otherwise you're not gonna meet objectives of both groups. You're just gonna meet maybe Forest Service objectives...So if you're serious about the partnership, you'll have them involved in the planning. I don't necessarily know that they have to be part of the implementation. Sometimes it might have been easier if we've just done everything under these contracts rather than having the agreement...But then that kind of comes in with the match.... a lot of these projects are projects that we had all identified that we needed to do and have been talking about, but there wasn't really a method of funding it until we did stewardship.*

#### **RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATIONS AMONGST PARTICIPANTS**

Administrative co-location by, the Forest Service, National Guard, and the conservation organization helped with the flow of information and review and tracking of project data. This also helps maintain and grow strong relationships. The lead for the National Guard (agreement holder) described the working relationship as “*a combined...agreed upon objective...established by all of us* [the primary agency and non-agency stakeholders],” with each playing some role in implementing the varied activities.

The agency representative elaborated that while it may have been more efficient to do an IRTC with service items implemented by the contractor, rather than an agreement, they would have missed out on an opportunity to strengthen partnerships in land management, to leverage resources, and to ensure that the National Guard has a stake in land management. This is important for this Forest given the Guard’s use of the land for military training.

Agency led field trips to review project implementation and plan new implementation actions are viewed by non-agency stakeholders as an ideal way for them to contribute to projects. All non-agency stakeholders report feeling satisfied with their level of participation and indicate that they influenced the direction of the project. The participants explain that the process improved mutual understanding of the science behind actions and the land management that was necessary, and allowed their comments to have immediate impact. For instance, staff with the US Fish and Wildlife Service reported becoming more sympathetic to the forest management strategies of the Forest Service due to their communications around this project.

Because this group of people work together regularly, they did not think communication modes have changed due to this project. At times, communications have struggled across the bureaucratic layers of inter-agency work but partners have worked through such challenges with

optimistic patience and a common-minded focus. The Forest Service lead on this project explained:

*None of it has been so severe that we're not talking to each other or where it's having to go up to higher level where the Forest Supervisor gets involved or anything like that. None of it has been like that. It's been more like I have to be a persistent pest kind of thing. But we'll look at the results of it and we'll all feel good about it. Like I said, it'll be an example of what we did together.*

Participants do not believe that this single project changed relationships but rather that the quality of their working relationships evolved over the past 15 years by working for mutual benefits for the agency and non-agency stakeholders. The availability of tools like stewardship contracting and CFLR have helped, but local agency staff and their willingness to collaborate has been vital to the growth of strong working relationships.

A state wildlife agency person remarked:

*Relationships outside of this project made it more conducive to bring in people when this project started...everybody that knew [Forest Service lead] through working with her through [conservation organizations], when she came to the Forest Service and started working with this project, she knew everybody and she knew exactly who to contact to get more involvement versus just sending a letter to the agency head and hoping it'll trickle down.*

Working together with the Forest Service over time has afforded non-agency participants a better understanding of how the Forest Service operates, helping to find creative solutions (like stewardship contracting and CFLR program funding) to achieve mutually beneficial objectives. Non-agency participants give high praise to their Forest Service colleague, suggesting that success is due to the agency's willingness to work with other stakeholders, inviting people to express their opinions and share their expertise and to get the project going on the ground.

#### *NON-AGENCY PARTICIPATION: EFFECTS ON SCOPE, SCALE, AND PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS*

The involvement of non-agency stakeholders did not influence the size/scale of the project. One participant felt that involvement of non-agency stakeholders influenced the complexity/scope of the project because they were able to provide a little more input on the types of services to be done. The agency suggested that it had become challenging to find ways to fund the project, specifically to find partners capable of contributing resources in a poor region of the country.

All participants suggest that this project is a success and that its “*very ambitious scope*” will be implemented and desired outcomes realized. One respondent emphasized the social outcomes as another indicator of success, citing strengthening partnerships, improved understanding of timber thinning and restoration among all participants, improved military readiness, public recreation benefits for hunters and anglers, and demonstrating to the public that federal agencies are capable of implementing creative and proactive solutions.

## Kisatchie National Forest, Louisiana.

### *PROJECT OVERVIEW*

This project paired an IRTC with a stewardship agreement. The timber component has service work embedded within it (mid-story thinning and putting up fences to control access to pipelines and power lines to prevent off-road vehicle access on the District). Retained receipts are funding a stewardship agreement focused on reintroducing the imperiled Louisiana Pine Snake into the longleaf pine ecosystem. The goal of the agreement as defined by non-agency stakeholders is to “*establish a new self-sustaining population of Louisiana Pine snake in restored habitat on the National Forests. So a part of this is to get the captive population large enough to reach this ultimate goal.*”

Stewardship contracting authorities have been critical to attempting to save this species. The agreement holder explained, “*We would not have been able to do this without stewardship contracting...there was no plan B...it was absolutely essential [to species reintroduction].*” In addition to sensitive species conservation, the project’s timber component is designed to benefit other non-game and game species.

The agreement began in 2015 with the NEPA document signed in 2010. The primary agency contact, a District biologist, explained that the project originally started with a top-down leadership push for “*everyone to have a stewardship*” [contract or agreement]. She said, “*I didn’t see the benefit of stewardship before I did it, but now, I see what the benefits are, and it has worked out tremendously given the project that this has become...we could do things we couldn’t do with KV and things that we’d never get appropriated money for.*”

When first conceived of, the goal was to use stewardship receipts from a timber sale to fund endangered species work (e.g. standard red cockaded woodpecker conservation projects) across the District rather than just in KV boundary areas as permitted under timber sale contracts. The initial intent was for stewardship receipts also to fund feral hog control and installation of fencing around energy infrastructure and eroded motorized trails on right of ways.



This agency biologist is credited with making the connection to a long-term effort to conserve an imperiled species using stewardship contracting. As initially conceived, the project was not about saving this snake.

As the project progressed, the District biologist approached others within the agency and external partners about using stewardship receipts to purchase Louisiana Pine Snakes for reintroduction. In 2015, the original stewardship agreement was modified to begin a program of purchasing the snakes. By entering into an agreement with a zoo, the purchase of a nation-wide captive breeding program's snake population enabled the program to consolidate snakes from more than 20 zoos into captive breeding sites at four zoos, consequentially increasing the productivity of the breeding program greatly. Genetic diversity was also enhanced, something extremely vital to long-term recovery of the species. As a result of this stewardship agreement the captive breeding population is now, for the first time in several decades of effort, large enough to release into habitat on the National Forest.

While partners suggest that the project lead for the agency deserves the credit for the idea, the agency lead credits individuals elsewhere in the agency for endorsing this innovative approach. The agency lead explained:

*Originally there were some people that said no...but then to think about it, you can buy trees, you can buy plants, and this is just as important a component of the landscape so we've used them for these snakes and another District is using stewardship funds for purchasing red cockaded woodpeckers.*

### *THE ROLE OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS*

This was the first stewardship contract for all participants, agency and non-agency. Primary non-agency stakeholders include:

- The agreement holder—a zoo managing a national captive breeding program,
- Two scientists with the USDA Forest Service Southern Research Station who first tested reintroduction prior to using stewardship contracting for larger-scale reintroduction, enabling technology transfer and knowledge exchange,
- A state wildlife agency assisting with quail management in the timber component,
- The US Fish and Wildlife Service who has enabled the snake reintroduction program.

Non-primary non-agency stakeholders are a national conservation organization which advised the Forest Service early in the project and three energy companies who supplied materials and labor for fencing of energy transfer right of ways.

A representative from the captive breed program identified a 2002 meeting of Louisiana Pine Snake stakeholders as the first point where reintroduction was discussed in earnest. Similar

annual meetings of the group followed but there was no mechanism to fund the reintroduction until local Forest Service staff thought to use stewardship contracting.

Working originally with the Southern Research Station, the breeding program has donated snakes to the Southern Research Station for pilot reintroduction. All participants originally thought it was not financially viable for zoos to produce and reintroduce the volume of snakes necessary. However, the purchase of snakes for reintroduction through stewardship agreement changed this. The purpose was to move from a research scale project in which the zoos donated snakes into a larger species reintroduction project in which the Forest Service purchased snakes using the value of receipts from the timber removed as a component of restoring the habitat on the Forest. The payments enabled a scaling up of the breeding program to the point whereby partners anticipate that one-day snakes will be donated for reintroduced across their range. Agency and non-agency participants cited this as being an area of mutual benefit and mutual interest defined in the agreement.

#### *RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATIONS AMONGST PARTICIPANTS*

Bi-annual field trips and field-based meetings focused on reintroductions serve as a way for partners who are geographically dispersed and have not always been philosophically aligned about viable strategies for species recovery to come together. The stewardship agreement itself including both the financial component and stewardship actions has built relationships and consolidated views about the species conservation strategy. People now largely agree that the strategy proposed in the agreement is the way to save this species. *“It takes a lot of trust and honesty between all of us for this thing to work,”* said the agency lead. The agreement holder feels that the relationship with the Forest Service has, *“gone from informal to formal,”* something that they welcome.

Establishing this working relationship was not without challenges. When the agency lead first attempted to explain the mechanics and concept of stewardship contracting and how it is used elsewhere to purchase red cockaded woodpeckers, it was difficult for the zoo to accept the idea. The agency lead recalls:

*When I first proposed this to the zoo I had gone through all the appropriate channels [internally with the Forest Service] and everything was going good and when I told the zoo guy he didn't want to be a part of it...I was shocked I never thought that would be my problem. I had gotten through all of these other internal hoops and I just couldn't believe he was going to turn down the money. I must have not been explaining it well I guess. I told him, "No we're not going to get in trouble for doing this, I am going to get in more trouble for you turning me down." I was floored and I just couldn't believe it...so finally we had a meeting with the Regional Office, I don't think it was that he didn't trust me, it was just that it seemed too good*

*to be true I guess, but finally the zoo came on board and they have been just amazed. It's been a hard concept to explain to other people let alone ourselves...I'll never forget those early meetings we had when we would sit around the table and say "partnerships, partnerships, partnerships" and nobody knew what to do and how to get started. I just tell people you just have to start and it will fall into place.*

### *NON-AGENCY PARTICIPATION: EFFECTS ON SCOPE, SCALE, AND PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS*

Non-agency stakeholders affected the scale of the project making it larger. When the partners realized they did not have the resources to gear up for full-scale snake reintroduction, the agency modified the existing IRTC to include more timber harvesting in part to generate additional receipts. In turn, these resources are invested in activities that were not being funded through other means. Complexity increased as more non-traditional stewardship contracting partners were brought into the process.

Participants view this project as successful. The agency lead expressed, *"We are actually putting snakes on the ground and the zoos are using that money to consolidate the snakes, they have the breeding facilities in place and they produced double of what they produced last year and this was the first year of consolidation. So from their stand point it is doing well and from our standpoint the project is doing well."* A scientist with the Southern Research Station remarked:

*There are differences of opinion in our pine snake group. Many of the stakeholders argue a lot...about what to do. One of the real breakthroughs is this consolidation effort...stewardship contracting is supporting. Without that consolidation there would be no reintroduction effort and without that I would have been very pessimistic about ultimate success [in saving the species] now I am reasonably optimistic that things will turn around...This project may be the reason why when it is listed it could be listed as threatened and not endangered...it's pretty unheard of to do management of species like this before things get critical and it's been pretty fun to be a part of that aspect too.*

## Osceola National Forest, Florida.

### *PROJECT OVERVIEW*

This project which began in 2012 is a large 10-year stewardship agreement with a national conservation organization implementing components of a CFLR project focused on accelerating restoration of longleaf pine ecosystems in a multi-ownership landscape. The project occurs within a half million-acre CFLR landscape where 50% of the forests have been determined to be

degraded to the point where multiple management interventions are necessary. Causes of degradation include fire exclusion, hydrologic modifications, and removal of longleaf pine. In the last two decades, significant wildfires have driven a coalition of landowners across the landscape to focus on all lands management.

This stewardship agreement was planned internally by the Forest Service who then approached a partner about managing the project through an agreement. The agency approached a second partner about integrating the monitoring activities the partner had been doing for the larger CFLR project into the specific stewardship agreement. Objectives of the agreement include restoration of the longleaf pine ecosystem, reintroduction of low severity controlled fire, enhancements of wildlife habitat and conservation of threatened and endangered (T&E) species, and timber production through the removal of off-site pine. Specific restoration actions include timber harvest, thinning, understory restoration through mechanical means and prescribed fire.

### *THE ROLE OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS*

Two primary non-agency participants were conservation organizations owning forestland in the area and possessing deep capacity in science and forestland management. These organizations were involved in project implementation and monitoring. A number of non-primary stakeholders were also identified who worked with the agreement holder in implementing the project (e.g. a youth conservation organization).

The agreement holder is a large national conservation organization whose main role is project administration (hiring contractors for site prep, mulching, tree planting, logging, road maintenance, tracking partner contributions, and sale of the timber). The agreement holder was also involved in project monitoring, although another partner is acting as a 3<sup>rd</sup> party monitoring body, assessing conditions on a variety of restoration projects across the CFLR landscape, including plots located within the restoration treatments of this agreement.

Non-agency participants were not involved in planning the scope of the agreement as this was handled in-house by the Forest Service with non-agency participation in the planning process limited to NEPA scoping. The agreement holder, however, feels that it is important for external groups to be engaged in project planning. They have urged colleagues within their organization elsewhere who are considering stewardship agreements to participate in planning. They explain, *“being involved in planning is really important...in this case the Forest could not execute the plan once approved without having a partner involved...I am satisfied that in the future we would be involved more”*

Non-agency participants felt that their involvement led to improved decision making, citing their monitoring protocol and provision of cost/benefit data for various restoration practices necessary to help the project get to scale and to inform the larger CFLR strategy.

### *RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATIONS AMONGST PARTICIPANTS*

Non-agency participants were generally satisfied with their level of engagement in this project although one participant expressed that they wished they had been engaged earlier in the planning of the project. All participants stated that communication between the Forest Service and their organizations improved and strengthened due to working together on this project. One participant explained that because of their improved working relationship in this project they were able to take on more work with the Forest Service in another project.

The agreement holder said that they believe their organization, a national conservation group, would not be doing stewardship agreements with the Forest Service, elsewhere in the country if it had not been for the lessons learned in this project. *“It basically served as a template for engagement across the 48 states for us,”* explained the agreement holder.

The agreement holder has worked in this landscape with four government agencies and private landowners for a number of years. They suggest that the “open-mindedness” and “quality” of local Forest Service staff has enabled them to work past a lack of understanding of Stewardship Contracting authorities within the agency, which the agreement holder cites as being a major detriment to progress in using these authorities.

Non-agency participants feel that their local Forest Service colleagues had been strong communicators during the project but that overall within the agency understanding of stewardship agreements and stewardship contracting authorities is lacking. Consistent communications allowed them to overcome some of the lack of understanding and establish the Master Stewardship Agreement, which has served as the template for additional projects.

Turnover within the Forest Service including three different agency coordinators in the first six years of this agreement is one negative point that non-agency participants cite. The rapid turnover has caused some challenges with communications. Another negative issue identified by non-agency stakeholders is how the agency accounts for accomplishments (i.e. when timber harvest is accounted for).

### *NON-AGENCY PARTICIPATION: EFFECTS ON SCOPE, SCALE, AND PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS*

The agreement holder pushed for a much larger scale of implementations saying that *“when we started, we basically told them [Forest Service] we won’t do them [stewardship contracting projects] unless they are larger. It’s not worth our time. It takes as long to administer a couple hundred acres as it does a couple thousand...As a result the [Osceola project] became the largest stewardship agreement in Region 8,”* “we have been a really important partner that allowed the

*Forest Service to go to a larger scale.”* The partner also explains that they made the project more complex by bringing in their expertise in prescribed fire.

All participants agreed that the project is a success that has transitioned all partners in the region to implementation at larger scales and with greater efficiency. One non-agency participant questioned how the Forest Service is accounting for their accomplishments, explaining:

*Forest Service data collection or how they keep information is very provincial so it works for their world, their federal government focused world, but doesn't really translate out very well...for instance...say they're gonna do a timber cut and they get a contract on that, and they list it as a completed event if there's a contract, but the contract might state that the person has five years in which to enter the stand and cut the timber. So while it's listed as completed, there's still the same trees that were there before the cut "happened."*

This non-agency participant indicated that this sort of accomplishments reporting might lead to some challenges down the road as successive restoration actions are planned. For instance, they could be all set to burn certain areas but it may not be readily apparent to them whether mechanical treatments on those acres were actually completed.

## **IX. NORTHEAST REGION**

### **Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, Wisconsin.**

#### ***PROJECT OVERVIEW***

The objectives of this small (just over 300 acres) stewardship agreement were mainly economic. A county government entered into a stewardship agreement primarily to support timber management on the National Forest and support the local forest economy, while keeping their natural resource and highway department staff employed throughout the year. The county administered a timber sale (packaging the sale, coordinating everything, soliciting bids, awarding the sale) and did most of the service work themselves employing multiple county staff year round. The county and the Forest Service District Office worked together to design a project that was manageable for the county. Using timber receipts they were able to accomplish marking an additional timber sale that they will administer in a future SPA, brushing a hunter trail, and repairing a section of boardwalk on a hiking/ski trail. Given the limited scope, this project came

together and was completed over a two-year timeframe, setting the stage for follow on work. The county used their own time and some of their equipment as match in this agreement.

### *THE ROLE OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS*

One non-agency participant was identified. He/she was the primary contact working for the county natural resources department. Other departments within the county and contractors worked on the project as non-primary stakeholders. The lead for the county participated in all stages of the project except NEPA scoping and project monitoring. The county is also credited with initiating the project and approaching the agency with the idea. The county natural resource staff shares an office with the Forest Service District.

The Forest Service put the project together and completed NEPA. Post-NEPA the county lead participated in planning meetings, approved the plan, developed the agreement with the agency, and worked with the Forest Service on pre-implementation steps. All implementation was done through the county including marking timber, building boardwalks, roadwork, gate installation, site prep for timber sale, administration of timber sale and monitoring the field operations. The county was not responsible for long-term ongoing monitoring of project outcome.

The county representative believes that their participation improved decision-making because they offered alternative ideas for material sourcing and implementation, although the Forest Service did not utilize these ideas. When asked which kinds of involvement are most important for engagement of non-agency stakeholders, the county suggested that all roles are important and that external participation generally makes projects better through the sharing of ideas.

### *RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATIONS AMONGST PARTICIPANTS*

Having the partners co-located in the same building was helpful in bringing this project together. The individuals in the project have known each other for a long time and were able to channel those relationships into developing and implementing project work.

The working relationship was cordial and productive. The county updated the agency on progress through quarterly meetings. The Forest Service explained:

*Every meeting we'd come up with a list of questions and he would have a list of questions, so we'd go back and get answers for his questions. We tried to be real open and honest with what the requirements were gonna be with this agreement, as much as we knew....communication was key for this to work, because there's a lot of uncertainty. Both parties had, as far as the on the ground local folks, not a lot of experience working with [stewardship] agreements.*

Forest Service participants explained that they tried to set expectations as early as possible to make the county feel comfortable. Agency respondents stated that the most challenging aspect of

this agreement was for their own personnel to rise up the learning curve and get comfortable with stewardship agreements.

There is some evidence that the agency tended to treat the relationship more as a contractual relationship rather than an agreement between two partners. The non-agency partner recalled that in one instance they had suggested doing one component of the service work differently [less expensive material that they believed made more sense for the site], but that they heard from the agency, *“this is the scope and this is what you are doing.”*

When asked if relationships between the county and the Forest Service changed as a result of the agreement, the county suggested that they both had and had not. In the local office they had prior familiarity with each other, but the county’s relationships with the Supervisor and the Region may have improved slightly. When the project ended, the Forest Service approached the county about completing another project and they are now working towards this.

Communication changed slightly as the lead for the Forest Service has been able to bring a personal touch to the administrative side of the project by delivering paperwork by hand rather than by mail and, attempting to reduce duplicative communications. The County suggested that. *“Being able to walk down the hall and talk to people and get your questions answered on a daily basis is pretty positive”* but that they still ultimately need to deal with 6 – 8 contacts within the Forest Service to work through different aspects of the project. Some of these contacts are in the District office and some are not. They added, *“Some are off on other assignments – you never know who you will be working with week to week.”*

#### *NON-AGENCY PARTICIPATION: EFFECTS ON SCOPE, SCALE, AND PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS*

The county dictated the size based on their own capacity and interest in keeping all of the work for both the timber sale component and the service component within the county. Project complexity was not influenced by the county except for a desire from both parties to keep the agreement simple. When asked what is most challenging about non-agency stakeholder participation in stewardship contracting projects, the county participant replied he would have liked to be more involved in the design of certain things. For example, they had to build a number of boardwalks. The presented design used materials that they believed had not been well thought out (special order, a needless expense) but their suggestion was not integrated. Overall, both the agency and the county view the project as a success. The county was able to keep staff busy with projects on the Forest year round and the District was able to accomplish projects that would not have been accomplished otherwise, while providing additional timber to the local economy. The parties are continuing with another SPA that is about double in size and product value.



## Allegheny National Forest, Pennsylvania.

### *PROJECT OVERVIEW*

The objectives of this project were to complete three small IRTCs supporting timber harvests for improving forest health and contributing to the local economy, and to use timber revenue to support watershed restoration, wildlife habitat restoration, and treatment of non-native invasive plants. Non-agency stakeholder participation was limited to contractors and subcontractors (loggers and excavators). Ongoing since 2010, the project activities were all planned internally to the Forest Service and receipts supported \$2.3 million worth of service work, \$1.9 million of which was paid for directly with timber receipts generated within the project.

### *THE ROLE OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS*

A contractor interviewed suggested that all of the planning occurred prior to their involvement and that they simply bid on the contract and have been implementing the project. They did not feel that their role in the project contributed to improved decision-making about the project because the sideboards for the project were established before they got involved. Contractors are largely the manpower the agency uses to get work done, with respondents coordinating the work of some subcontractors and their own crews. When asked which kinds of involvement are most important for engagement of non-agency stakeholders, the participant replied vetting and hiring subcontractors to complete work items. The contractors' knowledge of their trade allows them to select quality people to “*get the project done quicker, cleaner, and better.*”

### *RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATIONS AMONGST PARTICIPANTS*

The Forest Service held contractor workshops that the agency believed influenced the scope of the contracts. An agency respondent expressed that “*we could have done better, it was our first one. We didn't really have any pre-decisional involvement as far as NEPA decision.*” The contractor reports that finding subcontractors can be challenging but given their existing networks and business relationships they were able to secure and retain good subcontractors. When asked if relationships between his organization and the Forest Service changed as a result of their participation in the project the contractor suggested that communications were very open and clear, so no difficulties were encountered. It was his first experience being awarded a stewardship contract, reporting that the experience has been positive and that the award and their performance on the project, which reportedly was fine, will help build a track record with the agency.

### *NON-AGENCY PARTICIPATION: EFFECTS ON SCOPE, SCALE, AND PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS*

Because the project was planned entirely internally to the agency, non-agency stakeholders believe they did not influence its size or complexity, while the agency suggest contractors did

have some influence on which areas were ultimately included in the bid package. Project participants believe the project was successful because it generated a steady program of work and revenue to support it.

## Green Mountain-Finger Lakes National Forest, Vermont.

### *PROJECT OVERVIEW*

This integrated resource project includes three separate ITRCs and a stewardship agreement across a large landscape assessment area. Management objectives for the area include recreation, silviculture, forest health, timber production, wildlife habitat, fisheries, water quality, soils, non-native invasive plant control. The landscape assessment process began in 2007 following finalization of the updated Forest Plan in 2006. The intent of the landscape assessment was to scale down the Forest Plan to a subset of the Forest and to plan and implement integrated resource projects. External stakeholders contributing to the landscape-scale planning phase include two state agencies and a national wildlife conservation organization/timber purchaser. According to agency personnel, stewardship contracting was always viewed as the preferred way to implement the projects that the landscape analysis would generate.

While the direct engagement of non-agency stakeholders active in project implementation was narrow and brief, their involvement had a very positive impact on the project and on these organizations. Non-agency participants focusing on one small component of the overall project emphasize project objectives that mattered most to them. These groups stated the objective of the project is the enhancement of public lands, improved recreation access to benefit the community and local businesses, and providing early career opportunities in natural resource management for youth.

The Forest Service held a public field trip early on in the landscape assessment phase, presenting information on resource inventories that were conducted in the project area and providing an opportunity for public input. The Forest Service also led two public field visits in 2010 to discuss implementation opportunities and gain feedback from the public on project design features. The NEPA process was initiated in 2011 with a decision signed in 2013. The stewardship proposal was developed and signed in early 2014 with project implementation proceeding immediately

### *THE ROLE OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS*

Primary non-agency stakeholders identified by the agency are those who participated in implementation, including citizens and their representatives from two towns and a youth conservation workforce program. A number of non-primary stakeholders were also identified as participating during planning field tours and in one-on-one discussions with the agency that informed project design features (state agencies, a wildlife conservation organization, timber

purchasers, and a mountain bike club). Non-primary stakeholders also participated via formal NEPA scoping by providing public comments (landowner associations, a wildlife conservation organization, and several local communities), and during implementation (volunteer labor provided by the mountain bike club).

An agency respondent described minimal public engagement in NEPA, saying, *“I don't really think that we had anything other than maybe a letter that went back to just generally supporting the renewed interest in implementing work on the lands, just generally supporting the plan.”* More proactive and productive engagement occurred through public meetings and implementation. The agency respondent further explained that typical timber sales are relatively simple, and that more integrated projects such as this can add a layer of complexity, *“Sometimes we're involving another third party or a stakeholder; just adds complexity and decreases the administrative efficiency of that arrangement.”* In this project however, adding an agreement was relatively painless as it was supplementing an existing working relationship.

The youth conservation organization participated in implementation through a stewardship agreement funded in part with timber receipts from IRTCs with the partner contribution consisting of non-cash labor and overhead. The agreement focused on service work including hand-felling trees at four existing heritage sites (e.g. historical apple orchards) to stabilize and help restore historical values and to improve wildlife habitat and conducting erosion-control activities on an old trail system that one of the towns and a local mountain bike club wanted to re-open.

### *RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATIONS AMONGST PARTICIPANTS*

Rather than a multi-stakeholder collaborative process, this project used managed public engagement by Forest Service personnel over the project lifecycle from pre-NEPA planning, NEPA scoping, and through implementation. The agency approached the public when they believed the public could best contribute. For instance, the Forest Service worked with town select boards to address concerns over truck traffic on high-use forest roads. These discussions influenced the formulation of an alternative in the Environmental Analysis.

When it struggled to find ways to implement service items, the agency approached the youth conservation organization with whom they had an existing relationship. An agency participant said, *“we have a lot of buy-in and support for the projects....sometimes it's difficult to find ways to involve them [stakeholders] in the implementation to where it's administratively and economically efficient.”*

The agency worked with a trusted and well-networked local community member to help communicate with interested community members. This individual, who had a public service background and a thumb on the pulse of the community, got the word out as implementation

approached and gained support from residents and adjacent landowners. This primary non-agency stakeholder expressed, *“I think adding a familiar face for the locals to feel good about giving input maybe helped to get a more thoughtful bit of information out of the locals and get something to the Forest Service that they could really work with to establish the partnerships.”* This leader and others within the local community heavily supported planning and coordination for re-opening the trail and for improving related recreational activities. This translated to a major point of interface between the Forest Service and the local community that led to the town offering some in-kind physical work and equipment for the activities. This participation culminated in celebration as a highlighted project during National Trails Day.

Non-agency respondents express satisfaction with their level of engagement and with their communications with the Forest Service, citing that their relationships with the agency improved and strengthened, particularly with recreational personnel at the agency. This led to additional implementation opportunities. A respondent with the youth conservation organization commented on their success in working with the agency and the other non-agency stakeholders on the trail improvements:

*Maybe that it's changed the willingness to tap on us as a partner. Where they know maybe perhaps there's some projects that are more feasible here in town because there's local support because a lot of times the Forest Service has... They have grand plans and big documents but they very seldom have resources to bring to the table to implement some of the stuff right away, over a long period of time they do but in the shorter term they do rely on partnerships and outside resources to try to get stuff done as much as they can. So I think it's helped them view us as a viable partner in that sense.*

#### *NON-AGENCY PARTICIPATION: EFFECTS ON SCOPE, SCALE, AND PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS*

The size of the project was not influenced by non-agency stakeholders. Project complexity was. Project plans were revised based on public feedback and provided information. Additional trails were worked on because of the involvement of the mountain biking advocacy group. Respondents also acknowledge that having more voices involved also increased complexity.

All respondents view the project as a success. *“It gives all of these different agencies and organizations and individuals a chance to say, ‘Great, here's a finite project funded through this source. Here's the objectives and here's what each organization or stakeholder has to do to make it happen,’”* said one non-agency respondent. The project also led to new working relationships, *“we're starting to do some more work with the mountain bike club, both with the Forest Service as well as totally separate,”* said representative from the youth conservation organization. They added, *“having the stewardship project as a multi-stakeholder collaborative endeavor made it easier...to achieve the direct aims of the project...facilitate new partnerships to get other projects done completely outside of the realm of stewardship work.”*

## APPENDIX

### Interview protocol Stewardship Contracting Case Studies 2017 AGENCY

The Forest Service is required to report to Congress annually on its use of stewardship contracting authorities. Part of this includes reporting on the role of non-agency stakeholders and communities in stewardship contracts and agreements. The Pinchot Institute and its partners are completing a series of case studies on stewardship contracting projects on behalf of the Forest Service as part of the Congressional reporting process and to inform the agencies' ongoing use of stewardship contracting authorities and its work with communities and other non-agency stakeholders in the stewardship of Federal public lands. We are contacting you to participate in a brief interview about your involvement and/or knowledge of the \_\_\_\_\_ project. This project was selected from a list of stewardship projects nationwide that were active between 2013 and 2016.

**The following informed consent statement must be read to everyone.**

This interview will be recorded and projects will not be identified and respondent names will not be associated with the transcripts or identified in case studies. Once interviews are transcribed, the recordings will be destroyed so they cannot be associated directly with respondents.

Are you willing to proceed with the interview?

First we would like to ask you a few background questions about your experience with stewardship contracting:

- a. How many SC projects have you been a part of?
- b. What is your role in THIS project?
- c. How long have you been involved with this project?
- d. Was stewardship contracting a consideration for this project prior to the NEPA decision?
- e. Would you consider yourself “local” to the project area?

**1.** From your perspective, what are the project objectives and anticipated outcomes of this project?

**2.** In the next group of questions I want to ask are about who participated in (name specific project) and how they participated.

**2a.** Who are the primary non-agency stakeholders in the project (e.g. people who have participated the most)? **If they name an organization, follow up on the name of a**

**person(s). Be sure to get the contact info for everyone on the list of primary participants.**

Are there other stakeholders who have participated at some point? If yes, ask who and how they participated.

**(List primary non-agency folks in the table (SEE NEXT PAGE) below to keep track of who the primary non-agency stakeholders are and to organize responses to 2b and 2c)**

**2b.** For each primary non-agency stakeholder ask about their involvement in project stages. (see list below and in the table).

If the interviewee says that a person or group participated in a phase, ask them to explain how or what they actually did.

*Example:* You listed Tribal Nation X as a non-agency participant in the project. What project stages/parts of the project were they involved in...

How did Tribal nation X participate in NEPA scoping? What exactly did they do?

The following list of example non-agency roles is here to help you probe rather than walk through every stage for every non-agency stakeholder:

- Conceiving of the project idea/approaching the agency with the idea prior to NEPA analysis
- NEPA scoping (i.e. planning and analysis) (Example probes: Did the agency do a schedule of proposed activities notification? Were there public meetings?, field tours?)
- Involved in creating the agency proposal for the stewardship project
- Project implementation
- Project monitoring

**2.c.** For each primary non-agency stakeholder (go through list), do you think their participation:

- Resulted in improved decision making about the project? Please explain why ....
- Resulted in getting the project implemented on the ground? Please explain why....

**2.d.** What types of involvement do you believe are most important for engagement of non-agency stakeholders?

**2e.** You said that you believe that (example: monitoring) is most important. Are you satisfied with the level of involvement of non-agency stakeholders in this project in (e.g. monitoring)? Please explain why or why not.

**3.** The next set of questions are about relationships and communication between the Forest Service and non-agency stakeholders.

**3.a.** Do you think relationships between the primary non-agency stakeholders in this project (**ask this question for each primary non-agency stakeholder on the list**) and the Forest Service have changed as a result of their participation (non-agency stakeholder) in this SC project?

If yes, please explain what factors led to this change and give examples.

**3b.** Overall, has this project changed the way the Forest Service communicates with non-agency stakeholders? Explain and give examples.

- 3c.** Overall, based on your experiences with stewardship contracting what things do you think contribute to the quality of the relationships between non-agency stakeholders and the Forest Service either positively or negatively?
- 4.**
    - a.** Has the involvement of non-agency stakeholders influenced the size/ scale of this project? Please explain.
    - b.** Has the involvement of non-agency stakeholders influenced the complexity/scope of this project? Please explain.
  - 5.** What do you think is most challenging about non-agency stakeholder participation in the stewardship contracting projects? Please explain. Examples?
  - 6.** In your view, is/was (name the specific SC project) a success? Explain why or why not.

**Interview protocol  
Stewardship Contracting Case Studies 2017  
NON-AGENCY**

The Forest Service is required to report to Congress annually on its use of stewardship contracting authorities. Part of this includes reporting on the role of non-agency stakeholders and communities in stewardship contracts and agreements. The Pinchot Institute and its partners are completing a series of case studies on stewardship contracting projects on behalf of the Forest Service as part of the Congressional reporting process and to inform the agencies' ongoing use of stewardship contracting authorities and its work with communities and other non-agency stakeholders in the stewardship of Federal public lands. We are contacting you to participate in a brief interview about your involvement and/or knowledge of the \_\_\_\_\_ project. This project was selected from a list of stewardship projects nationwide that were active between 2013 and 2016.

This interview will be recorded and projects will not be identified and respondent names will not be associated with the transcripts or identified in case studies. Once interviews are transcribed, the recordings will be destroyed so they cannot be associated directly with respondents.

Are you willing to proceed with the interview?

First we would like to ask you a few background questions about your experience with stewardship contracting:

- f. How many SC projects have you been a part of?
  - g. What is your role in THIS project?
  - h. How long have you been involved with this project?
  - i. Would you consider yourself “local” to the project area?
- 1.** From your perspective, what are the project objectives and anticipated outcomes of this project?

**2.** In the next group of questions I want to ask about who participated in (name specific project) and specifically how you and/or your organization participated.

**2.a.** The agency person we interviewed listed the following as primary (e.g. people who have participated the most) non-agency stakeholders in the project (Read the list from the agency interview). Is there anyone you would add to that list? (If so, be sure to get contact information)

Are there other stakeholders who have participated at some point? If yes, ask who and how they participated.

**2b. FOCUS** on the participation of the person you are interviewing and/or their organization.

I would like to ask you a few questions about how you and/or your organization participated in the \_\_\_\_\_ project. What project stages/parts of the project were you involved in.

How were you involved in that stage? What exactly did you do?

The following list of example non-agency roles is here to help you probe rather than walk through every stage for every non-agency stakeholder:

- Conceiving of the project idea/approaching the agency with the idea prior to NEPA analysis
- NEPA scoping (i.e. planning and analysis) (Example probes: Did the agency do a schedule of proposed activities notification? Were there public meetings?, field tours?)
- Involved in creating the agency proposal for the stewardship project
- Project implementation
- Project monitoring

**2.c.** Do you think your participation:

- Resulted in improved decision making about the project? Please explain why ....
- Resulted in getting the project implemented on the ground? Please explain why....

**2.d.** You listed several parts of (name SC project), that you and/or your organization were involved in like (list a few from 2b above).....

- Which of these kinds of involvement that you listed, do you believe are most important for engagement of non-agency stakeholders?
- You said that you believe that (example: monitoring) is most important? Are you satisfied with the level of involvement of non-agency stakeholders in this project in (monitoring)? Please explain why or why not.

**3.** The next set of questions are about relationships and communication between the Forest Service and you and your organization.

**3.a.** Do you think relationships between you and/or your organization and the Forest Service have changed as a result of your participation (non-agency stakeholder) in this SC project?

If yes, please explain what factors led to this change and give examples.

**3b.** Specifically, has this project changed the way the Forest Service communicates with you and/or your organization? Explain.



- 3c.** Overall, based on your experiences with stewardship contracting, what things do you think contribute to the quality of the relationships between non-agency stakeholders and the Forest Service either positively or negatively?
- 4. a.** Has the involvement of non-agency stakeholders (in general, not specifically your organization) influenced the size/ scale of this project? Please explain.
- b.** Has the involvement of non-agency stakeholders influenced the complexity/scope of this project? Please explain.
- 5.** What do you think is most challenging about non-agency stakeholder participation in the stewardship contracting projects? Please explain. Examples?
- 6.** In your view, is/was (name specific SC project) a success? Explain why or why not.