



Collaboration at a Crossroads

The future of community-based collaboration
around National Forest System Lands in Montana

December 2014



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Executive Summary

For more than a decade, Montanans from all walks of life have come together to successfully tackle natural resource issues, strengthening communities and economies along the way. But today, this legacy is threatened without support from Congress, the Forest Service, and local citizens. This report tells the stories of 15 collaborative groups working together to improve national forest management for the benefit of all, and describes the critical support needed for continued success as natural resource management issues intensify.

Montana's forest landscapes face increasing pressure from severe wildfires, climate change, shifting economies, weed infestations, and expanding recreational use. Citizen leaders across the state—ranchers, loggers, land managers, local business leaders, conservationists, equestrians, hunters, anglers, and motorized and non-motorized recreationists—are finding common ground and collaboratively developing place-based solutions that tackle difficult natural resource management issues such as forestry, public lands grazing, recreation use, land protection and water resource management.

Collaboration is an important tool that can help achieve shared resource management and conservation goals on the ground. It fosters relationships, identifies common ground and when coupled with adequate funding, resources and support, may deliver more achievements on the ground than we are currently getting.

Despite Montanans' significant investment of time and energy getting past ideological positions and developing pragmatic solutions, many of these efforts have struggled to secure congressional support and strong, timely and consistent action by the Forest Service. All too often, Congress and the Forest Service are unable or unwilling to fully implement collaborative initiatives from lack of resources or a lack of consistent leadership.

Without on-the-ground results, the collaborative energy that has preserved Montanans' special places and way of life might dissipate. Montana needs leadership at all levels to ensure the success of the locally-grown collaborative efforts.

Montana's political leadership can:

- Support legislation in Congress that advances collaborative efforts. Congress needs to recognize the importance of collaboratively-developed solutions and ensure that these efforts receive top priority in legislation while creating new incentives for collaborative work.
- Increase the proportion of Forest Service funding that is dedicated to implementing collaboratively-developed solutions and prioritize these efforts for implementation. The Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program has delivered huge benefits to Montana through the Southwestern Crown Collaborative. Increased funding would enable other Montana collaborative efforts to flourish as well.
- Improve compliance requirements for collaboratively-developed projects. Some collaboratively-developed projects are not implemented because of the time and money it takes to analyze them. Improving the analysis process could help ensure that collaborative projects are implemented in a timely manner.

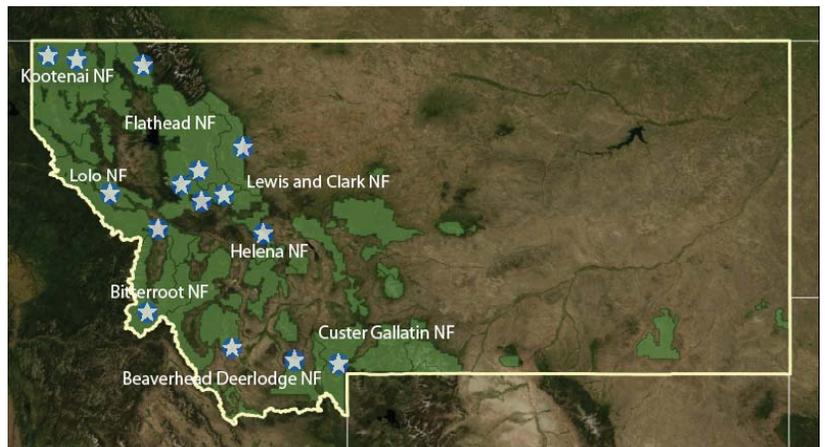


Photo by Anne Dahl, Swan Ecosystem Center

The Forest Service can:

- Increase partnerships with, and embrace the implementation of, collaborative efforts. Broadly supported solutions can help the agency move past gridlock and implement projects on-the-ground.
- Increase the amount of funding for implementing local solutions and prioritize these efforts.
- Provide additional resources to collaborative groups to help them fulfill their mission. Local groups need a stable stream of funding to increase capacity, expand partnerships, conduct research, and build trust before tangible outcomes can happen.

Citizens can:

- Support local collaborative forest management efforts on the ground.
- Advocate that our elected officials support collaboratively-developed proposals and encourage our congressional delegation to recognize the importance of collaboratively-developed solutions and ensure that these efforts receive top priority in legislation.

Collaboration ensures local voices are heard, improves processes with the Forest Service and Congress to get projects approved and moving more quickly, and leads to solutions that are supported by local citizens and best serve the unique needs of their landscapes. These projects strengthen communities, expand forest restoration, increase recreation access, and get Montanans back to work. These collaborative efforts serve as a model for other parts of the country and other public lands resource planning issues, and preserve both iconic places and Montanans' legacy of working together for the future.



Photo by starrettartists.com

Introduction

Collaboration: What's in it for Montana?

"When you've seen one collaborative, you've seen ... one collaborative." —Dan Clark, MSU Local Government Center
Collaboration has become a buzzword in natural resource management across the country, but ask 30 Montanans how they define collaboration and you'll receive 30 different answers. Collaboration is an adaptive, interest-based problem solving approach rather than a one-size-fits-all prescribed method. So while there is no single definition of collaboration, several key elements emerge in successful collaborative efforts:

- Collaboration brings diverse stakeholders together to address a shared problem
- Collaboration builds relationships and trust between individuals and groups
- Collaboration strives for mutually agreeable solutions that serve all stakeholders' interests

This third point is key. Successful collaborative efforts result in each stakeholder being satisfied that they are no worse off—and usually much better off—than they would be under the status quo. This does not mean that everyone engaged in a collaborative effort gets everything they want—most stakeholders rarely do; that is not the goal of collaboration. Rather, stakeholders get enough of what they want to make collaboration worthwhile, as doing nothing usually results in a status quo that does not meet anyone's needs. Collaboration requires developing deep respect and understanding of others' values and needs in the landscape; participants actively support every other participant in getting what they need.

Common goals of collaboration include developing understanding and mutual respect of all parties' interests, creating the opportunity to identify areas of agreement, and implementing widely supported, durable solutions to shared problems. In short, collaboration means people working with people to solve problems.

Increasing adoption of the collaborative model for problem solving reflects a shift in the tone of natural resource conversations over the past several decades, as interest groups move beyond their entrenched positions to recognize the possible gains from cooperative engagement with other interests. While still recognizing differences, the collaborative conversation focuses largely on common ground.

Collaboration at a Crossroads



Photos (from left to right) by David Madison, Gloria Flora, Jared White

Collaboration in Montana

Montana has a long history of citizens successfully collaborating on natural resource issues, and many Montanans seek to expand that legacy and promote the adoption of collaborative solutions as natural resource management issues become ever more pressing.

As Montana's forest landscapes face frequent high-severity wildfires, climate change, shifting economies, and increasing pressure for development and expanded recreational use, stakeholders from all walks of life desire to protect the resiliency of these iconic landscapes and the communities that they sustain. Detailed discussions of local landscapes are allowing citizens to move beyond old antagonisms, recognize areas of agreement, and strive for the mutual gains that better provide for their communities' futures.

Collaboration is a tool to guide these discussions of Montana's future, an opportunity to consider the needs and interests of the timber sector, conservationists, motorized and non-motorized recreationists, hunters, anglers, local business leaders, land managers, and others looking forward at what kinds of landscapes and communities they hope to sustain and promote. It is a tool for building true made-in-Montana solutions—solutions that are supported by citizens and best serve the unique needs of their landscapes.

As local stakeholders continue adopting a collaborative approach, it is important to consider the impact and experiences of existing collaborative efforts. More than 40 collaborative groups currently operate in Montana, building dialogue and cooperative action between state and federal land managers, ecologists, industrial interests, conservationists, and others. This report provides a snapshot of current community-based collaboration occurring in Montana, focusing specifically on citizen-led collaborative efforts that address the management of National Forest lands.

The 15 collaborative efforts featured in this report are all community-based approaches to improving national forest management for the benefit of all interested parties. These efforts all include diverse memberships reflecting the full spectrum of interests, from ranchers, loggers, fire managers, and county commissioners to conservationists, equestrians, ecologists, snowmobilers, wilderness advocates, and sportsmen.

The following snapshots of the histories, goals, successes, and challenges of these efforts provide a sense of the potential impacts, obstacles and needs facing collaboration around national forest management in Montana. The successes highlight on-the-ground results and the challenges shine light on the limitations of collaboration and needed support. Each snapshot concludes with Next Steps and Assistance Needed, road signs on the future of these groups and the support necessary to promote collaborative, mutually agreeable outcomes.



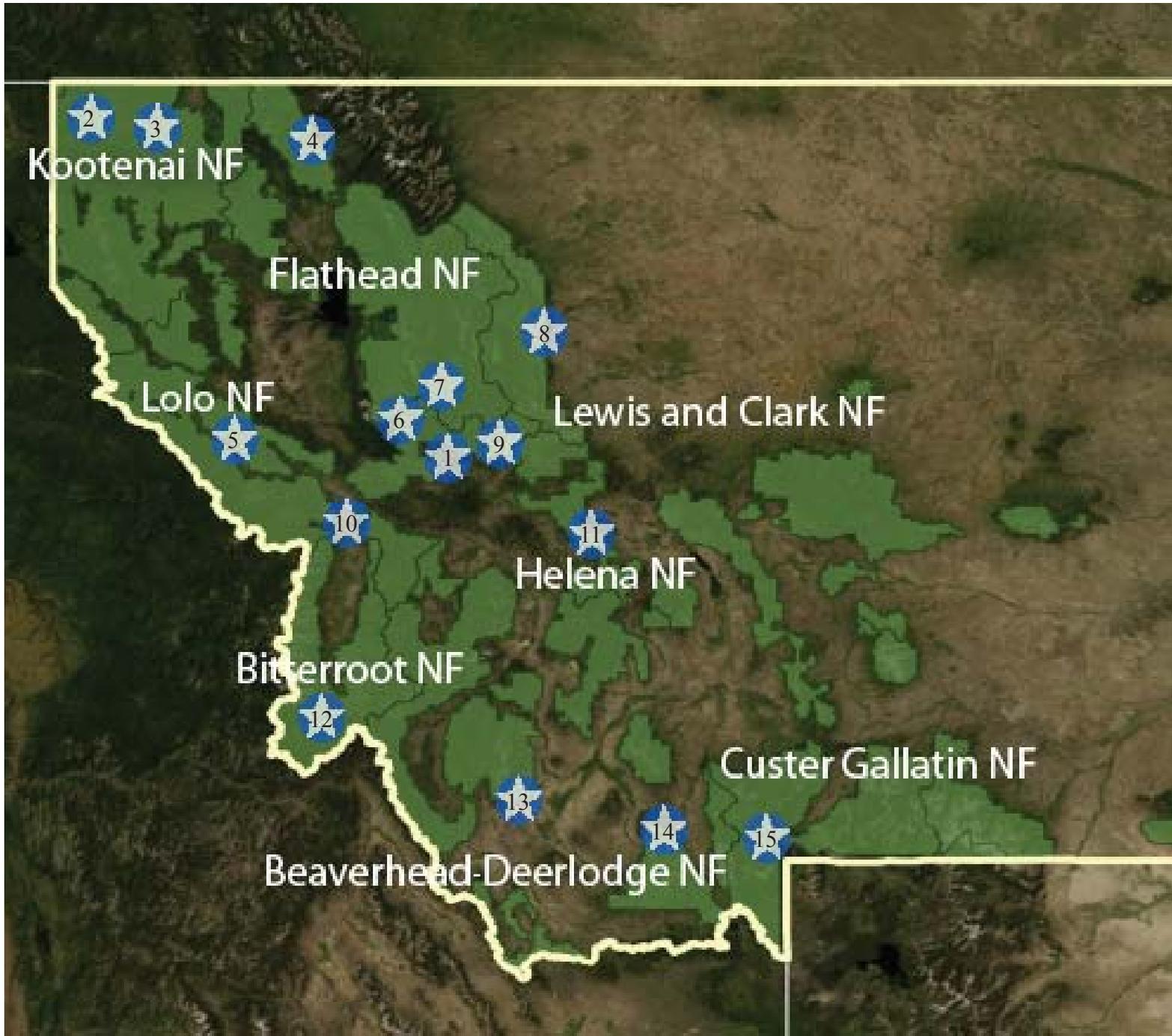
Photo by Steven Gnam Photography

With thanks to the stakeholder interviewees whose firsthand accounts of these collaborative groups made this report possible:

Gordy Sanders, Pyramid Mountain Lumber
 Dale Harris, Great Burn Study Group
 Gary Burnett, Blackfoot Challenge
 Bill Cyr, Montana DNRC
 Jake Kreilick, WildWest Institute
 Matt Arno, Blackfoot Challenge
 Chris Bryant, The Nature Conservancy
 Chelsea McIver, citizen-at-large
 Adam Rissien, Wildlands CPR

Wayne Hedman, Ravalli County RAC
 Kirk Thompson, citizen-at-large
 Al Christopherson, citizen-at-large
 Dennis Milburn, citizen-at-large
 Michael Jamison, National Parks Conservation Association
 Noah Bodman, Flathead Fat Tires
 Marnie Criley, Watershed Consulting, LLC
 Paul McKenzie, FH Stoltze Land and Lumber
 Ed Levert, Lincoln County Fire Safe Council
 Joe Josephson, Greater Yellowstone Coalition
 Steve Caldwell, citizen-at-large

Stacy Bragg, Backcountry Horsemen, ORV
 Barb Cestero, Greater Yellowstone Coalition
 Bruce Farling, Montana Trout Unlimited
 Mark Petroni, sportsman
 Tony Colter, Sun Mountain Lumber
 Gabe Furshong, Montana Wilderness Assoc.
 Robyn King, Yaak Valley Forest Council
 Jerry Wandler, Troy Snowmobile Club
 Joe Perry, farmer
 Gene Sentz, Friends of the Rocky Mtn Front
 Roger Marshall, Swan Ecosystem Center
 Bill Cunningham, licensed outfitter





Community-Based Collaboratives on National Forest System Lands in Montana



National Forest System Lands
managed by U.S. Forest Service



Community-based collaborative

***size of star does not reflect
geographic scale of engagement*

1. Blackfoot Challenge
2. Kootenai Forest Stakeholder Coalition
3. Three Rivers Challenge
4. Whitefish Range Partnership
5. Lolo Restoration Committee
6. Southwestern Crown Collaborative
7. Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project
8. Coalition to Protect Rocky Mountain Front
9. Lincoln Restoration Committee
10. Montana Forest Restoration Committee
11. Elkhorn Restoration Committee
12. Bitterroot Restoration Committee
13. Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group
14. Gravelly Landscape Collaborative
15. Gallatin Community Collaborative



Photo by Rick Graetz

History

The Blackfoot Challenge, a nationally recognized model of natural resource collaboration, evolved from decades of relationship building between private landowners and public land managers in the Blackfoot Valley. In the 1970s, these groups began working together on river access issues, recognizing the need to move beyond old conflicts and cooperatively find mutually beneficial solutions. Through such efforts, an informal Zone of Agreement gradually emerged, identifying where private land owners and public agencies were in agreement and could work together toward shared natural resource protection objectives.

While these efforts improved some conditions in the Blackfoot Valley, in 1992 American Rivers listed the Blackfoot River as one of the country's 10 most endangered rivers. This proved a catalyzing moment as the local community began voicing concerns and ideas during a series of town hall meetings. The landowners and public agencies long collaborating around the Blackfoot River listened to the local input, heard the themes of concern around resource conservation and

protection of the rural way of life, and considered how to make the existing network of public-private partnerships responsive to that concern.

Thus it was that the Blackfoot Challenge officially formed as a nonprofit organization in 1993 in order to amplify existing efforts in innovative land management and public-private conservation partnerships. In 1994 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service signed a Cooperative Agreement with the Blackfoot Challenge, and in 2001 affirmed a Partnership Agreement with Montana Department of Environmental Quality.



Goals

The Blackfoot Challenge coordinates efforts to conserve and enhance the natural resources and rural way of life in the Blackfoot Watershed for present and future generations.

Successes

2013 marked 20 years of successful cooperative partnership efforts under the Blackfoot Challenge. In that time, the group has grown to include the participation of private landowners, federal agency personnel, state land managers, local government officials, and corporate landowners.

In 2013 alone, the Blackfoot Challenge accomplished:

- over 15,000 acres of noxious weed treatment
- 400 acres of forest fuels treatment
- 2,100 hours of livestock monitoring
- 18 livestock fencing systems installed
- 1,200 acres placed under irrigation scheduling
- 32 million gallons of water conserved through cooperative Blackfoot drought response
- Best Management Practices implemented on over 70 miles of roads
- 3,230 individuals reached through education and outreach efforts and events

Challenges

The Blackfoot Challenge remains a viable collaborative entity by maintaining neutrality on divisive issues, but remaining neutral can prove difficult and at times frustrate outside parties as values across the community may lead to estrangement over heated topics.

While the Blackfoot Challenge is outcome-oriented, it requires a strong and often lengthy process to gather partners, approach issues inclusively, and build trust. These necessary components of strong collaboration require ongoing funding which can be difficult to sustain as well as buy-in from parties who may not recognize the value of so much process up front until they are closer to seeing the outcomes delivered.

Next Steps

The Blackfoot Challenge continues to develop partnership opportunities for conservation of natural resources and the rural way of life in the Blackfoot Watershed. With the formation of an Economics Workgroup in 2013, the Blackfoot Challenge seeks to address the ever-increasing need to develop sustainable, diverse economic opportunities that both sustain the region's natural resources and deliver income to provide for the region's future.

Economic questions also carry over to considering the future of water quality and quantity in Montana, an issue state agencies and the Blackfoot Challenge are increasingly exploring.

“How does conservation deliver economics? That’s what we’re really asking now, what’s the economics of conservation. It’s about developing a stewardship economy. Long term, the only way you’re going to have good strong economics is stewarding those natural resources in a sustainable way that sustains the resource and delivers income.”

—Gary Burnett
Executive Director, Blackfoot Challenge

Assistance Needed

The Blackfoot Challenge seeks to build relationships with economic partners to help guide exploration of both how to shore up and increase net returns of existing local economics as well as how to bring in new business development that serves the community and the landscape. Building those relationships requires an increase in organizational capacity.

Executive Board Members:

Jim Stone, Rolling Stone Ranch
Denny Iverson, Iverson Ranch
David Mannix, Mannix Brothers Ranch

Board Partners:

Tim Love, U.S. Forest Service
Randy Gazda, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Craig Engelhard, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Joe Ashor, Bureau of Land Management
Amber Kamps, U.S. Forest Service

Directors:

Brent Anderson, Conifer Logging
Patrick Bannister, Potomac Landowner
Patti Bartlett, Seeley Lake Elementary
Chris Bryant, The Nature Conservancy
Andy Erickson, E Bar L Guest Ranch
Racene Friede, Ovando Landowner
George Hirschenberger, Retired Bureau of Land Management
Todd Johnson, Pyramid Mountain Lumber
Tony Liane, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Randy Arnold, Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks
Jeff McNally, Ovando Landowner
Joel Nelson, Plum Creek Timber Company
Harry Poett, Ovando Landowner

Staff:

Gary Burnett, Executive Director
Matt Arno, Forester
Traci Bignell, Finance and Grants
Molly Brown, Range Rider
Deb Dillree, Office Administrator
Eric Graham, Range Rider
Karen Laitala, Weeds
Jennifer Schoonen, Water Steward
Sara Schmidt, Outreach and Education
Brad Weltzien, Land Steward
Seth Wilson, Wildlife



Photo by Kootenai National Forest

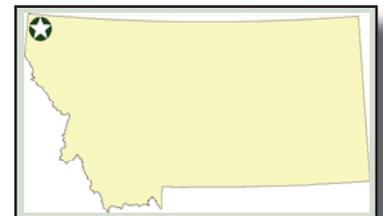
History

This collaborative began out of the efforts of Paul Rumelhart, a local citizen and employee of the Kootenai River Development Council, who saw potential in collaboration and contacted the Kootenai National Forest Supervisor to assess whether such an approach could work on the Kootenai National Forest. An initial meeting in February 2006, organized by Mr. Rumelhart brought diverse groups and individuals together to discuss finding a process for fuel reduction projects in the Kootenai National Forest. Close to 40 individuals from diverse interests attended that first meeting: fire specialists, mill owners, environmental groups, loggers, small business owners, elected officials, educators, economic development directors, natural resource specialists, and local citizens.

By April 2006, 57 members had signed up and agreed to organize the effort as a non-profit organization focused on finding common ground and building trust among user groups in order to accomplish fuel reduction projects on the Kootenai National Forest. The Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition maintains an executive board, general board, and subcommittees. Four regional working groups on the Eureka Fortine, Cabinet, Three Rivers, and Libby Districts support forest management projects at the district level.

Goals

Since 2006, the Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition's goal has evolved from a focus on fuel-reduction in the wildland-urban interface to include collaboration on restoration, timber, wilderness, and economic and ecosystem sustainability on and around the Kootenai National Forest.



Successes

Thus far, the Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition has successfully completed two consensus-based fuels reduction projects with the Forest Service. These projects promoted community wildfire protection and incorporated wildlife corridors on a total of 1,866 acres while producing 14.5 million board feet of timber. Eight of the 15 projects for which the collaborative has supported development have been completed, producing 28.7 million board feet of timber. Six of those eight projects were fuel reduction project timber sales. An additional 14.6 million board feet are anticipated to come from sales not yet finished.

Challenges

The strength of collaboration with the Forest Service in each of the four districts of the Kootenai National Forest has varied with changes in agency personnel. This has made it challenging to develop a shared understanding and process within the Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition for how to collaborate with the Forest Service on restoration projects.

Varied engagement by agency personnel and leadership priorities along with the slow pace of project implementation have contributed to collaboration fatigue among some of the Coalition's volunteer stakeholders. Without consistency or guidance on how to collaboratively engage with the Forest Service, it has been difficult for the collaborative to utilize their energy effectively or have assurance their invested efforts will lead to results.

"You've got to get the biggest critic and biggest supporter on the same team. You can't get any support from either side if you have a homogenous group collaborating; other groups will not support an effort if they think their concerns are not being addressed...you've got to have a lot of patience and the right cast of characters, people that are going to carry forth support to the rest of the environmental community and timber industry (the two extremes that we've had). I'm trying to see this collaboration take place and I'm trying to keep both those interests involved."

*- Ed Levert
Lincoln County Fire Planner*

Next Steps

Over the past several years, the Coalition has been developing silvicultural guidelines for a Common Ground document that will identify existing areas of agreement among Coalition members. The eventual publication of such a Common Ground document, which will include silvicultural, wilderness, and recreation guidelines, is intended to create more efficient communication between the Coalition and the Forest Service during project development.

The Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition remains involved with multiple Forest Service projects. It has given full support to the Forest Service for an upcoming project that will improve big game habitat, restore grizzly bear forage, and increase huckleberry crop by mechanically treating 1,035 acres, producing 9 million board feet of lumber.

Assistance Needed

The Kootenai Forest Stakeholder Coalition would benefit from clearer Forest Service guidance on the role collaboration can play in the Forest Service's processes. That guidance for supporting collaboration could come from top management down to the rest of the organization.

The Coalition also seeks policy direction to decision makers that it's OK to work with collaborative groups and capture their concerns in alternatives. There is a desire for policy to assist in maintaining the integrity of collaborative recommendations through the Forest Service's processes.

Members: Individuals participating in the Kootenai Forest Stakeholder Coalition cover a wide array of interests and formal organizations:

Yaak Valley Forest Council
Eureka Rural Development Partnership
The Lands Council

Cabinet Resources Group
Troy Snowmobile Club
Idaho Forest Group
Stoltze Lumber
County Commissioners
Montana Wilderness Association
Friends of Scotchman Peak

State Senator Chas Vincent
County Foresters
Montana Department of Natural Resources
Troy School District
Kootenai River Development Council
Vaagen Brothers Mill

Three Rivers Challenge | Kootenai National Forest



Photo courtesy of Yaak Valley Forest Council

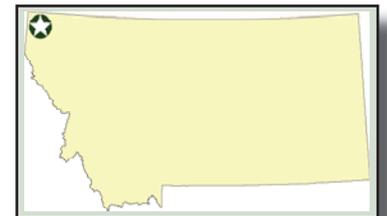
History

In 2005, as forest planning began on the Kootenai National Forest, the Forest Service sought input from diverse public stakeholders. As motorized, non-motorized, and wilderness groups identified their interests, the Yaak Valley Forest Council (a non-profit community organization based in Troy, Montana since 1997) saw an opportunity to focus such efforts into a more structured collaborative conversation. The council worked with all parties to capture management ideas, boundaries, and visions for the future of the Kootenai National Forest's Three Rivers District on a shared map. This collaborative effort became the Three Rivers Challenge.

Ultimately, the forest planning process was stymied by grizzly bear concerns, leaving the 1987 Forest Plan in place on the Kootenai National Forest. But the local stakeholders' ability to build agreement on management of the landscape marked a considerable success. The Three Rivers Challenge ultimately agreed upon areas to prioritize for timber harvest, wilderness, and snowmobile use.

Goals

The Three Rivers Challenge identified areas of agreement among stakeholders in hopes of moving the Forest Service and local community toward active forest management, securing motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities, and acquiring federal land protections on the Three Rivers District of the Kootenai National Forest.



Successes

The Three Rivers Challenge produced a land management proposal for the Three Rivers District of the Kootenai National Forest that included specific recommendations on wilderness conservation, special management areas for motorized and non-motorized recreation, and increased timber harvest.

The collaborative seeks Congressional support for key elements of their proposal as one of three collaboratively developed community proposals comprising the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, first introduced into Congress by Senator Tester in July 2009.

On the Three Rivers District, the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act would:

- Follow U.S. Forest Service plan for where timber harvest can occur.
- Mandate agency harvest an average of at least 3,000 acres per year as part of a series of broader restoration projects of at least 30,000 acres.
- Create the Three Rivers Special Management Area, which encompasses separate motorized and non-motorized areas.
- Direct the Forest Service to conduct a study of potential ATV routes and implement agreed upon routes.
- Designate 29,500 acres wilderness at Roderick Mountain

“We know what fighting gets us. Lincoln County no longer has any mills and we have no protected wilderness in the Yaak. Fighting all these years hasn’t realized any of our values; it has not given us any certainties. So let’s try the opposite of that and see what that does for us. We are committed because we want to help our community rise up.”

—Robyn King
Yaak Valley Forest Council

Challenges

The legislation that would implement the Three Rivers Challenge vision has stalled in Congress, leaving many collaborative members frustrated that their vision remains unrealized.

Further, translating a collaborative agreement to legislation, that changes as it moves through Congress, can lead to concerns among some collaborative members that the original vision of the collaborative is not fully being implemented.

Next Steps and Assistance Needed

While the Three Rivers Challenge has not formally dissolved, the group no longer holds regular meetings. Much of the collaborative energy and relationship building that underpinned the Three Rivers Challenge has gone into the development of the successful Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition.

The majority of Three Rivers Challenge members continue to stand behind the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, whose passage and implementation is needed to see their collaboratively developed local vision for land management realized.

Supporters: This list includes the names of those individuals who signed on to the original proposal for the Three Rivers District included in the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act:

Doug Chapel, Chapel Cedar Works
Tom Horelick, Logger
Wayne Hirst, RAC member, stewardship contractor
Kurt Rayson, Troy Logger
Loren Rose, Pyramid Lumber
Gordy Sanders, Pyramid Lumber
Jeremy O’Day, Yaak small mill owner
Steve Straley, Troy Fire Department
John Konzen, Healthy Communities Initiative, Commissioner
Governor Brian Schweitzer
Paul Rummelhart, Kootenai River Development
Pat Pezzelle, Flathead Community College
Eileen Carney, RAC member, Education

Brady Selle, Troy School District
Jerry Wandler, Troy Snowmobile Club
Donna O’Neill, Libby Snowcats
Joel Candler, Libby Ridgeriders
Tim Linehan, RAC member, Linehan Outfitting Company
Don Clark, President, Libby Rod and Gun Club
Ben Long, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Montana Chapter
Steve Garrett, RAC member and Troy businessman
Ralph Stever, Troy Fine Arts
Lee Disney, RAC member
HooDoo Pellets
Gary Huntsberger, RAC member
Sandy Matheny, Healthy Communities Initiative, county facilitator
Jim Siefert, Troy businessman
Vince Godby, Shelter Designs
Amy Chadwick, Watershed Restoration Consultants

Robyn King, RAC member
Yaak Valley Forest Council
Bill Martin, RAC member
Cabinet Resources Group
Rick Bass, Yaak Valley Forest Council
Tim Baker, Montana Wilderness Assoc.
Bruce Farling, Montana Trout Unlimited
Paul Shively, Sierra Club
Montana Chapter
Jerry Nichols, Sierra Club
Montana Chapter
Tom France, National Wildlife Foundation
Dale Harris, Great Burn Study Group
Marnie Criley, Restore Montana
Katie Duel, Yellowstone to Yukon Cabinet Yaak Coalition
Eric Love, Trust for Public Land
Doug Ferrell, Friends of Scotchman’s Peak
Scott Daily, Southern Purcell Restoration



Photo by Steven Gnam Photography

History

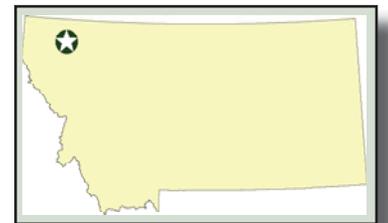
Formation of the Whitefish Range Partnership (WRP) in September 2012 was catalyzed by several individuals with longtime ties to the region. They recognized an opportunity to positively impact the ecological and economic future of their region through a pending forest plan revision process on the Flathead National Forest. These individuals approached the U.S. Forest Service, and after receiving a welcome from the agency, they engaged a wider group of regional stakeholders about developing a shared community vision of the landscape's future.

Twenty nine local individuals from across the land-use spectrum—including motorized and non-motorized recreation, hunting and angling, outfitting, conservation, logging, business, landowners, and sportsmen—agreed to come to the table, and under the neutral facilitation of former Montana Secretary of State Bob Brown, the Whitefish Range Partnership officially began.

Goals

The partnership's chief goal was to discuss and reach agreement on national forest land use issues over a

13-month period, with recommendations to the Forest Service strategically timed to coincide with the start of the Flathead National Forest's forest plan revision process.



The diverse group defined a broad and inclusive set of goals for their consensus-based effort, grounded in U.S. Forest Service forest planning categories. Working by consensus on these goals meant each member of the partnership would support:

- Providing for multiple-use values including motorized and non-motorized recreation, sustainable forestry, wild land restoration, hunting, fishing, and backcountry solitude
- Promoting clean water, connected wildlife habitat, and robust fisheries
- Delineating areas for wilderness designations
- Ensuring the economic vitality of local communities

Successes

Over a 13-month process, the WRP achieved 100 percent consensus on more than a dozen recommendations, presented to the Flathead National Forest supervisor in their final Whitefish Range Partnership Agreement. These included, but were not limited to: increasing suitable timber base by 52 percent, recommending 85,000 acres for federal land protections, accommodating new mountain bike trails, expanding potential snowmobile opportunities, proposing a wildland-urban interface buffer for wildfire management, and framing recommendations around administrative withdrawal (subject to valid existing rights) of mineral leasing and geothermal leasing on federal lands in the Whitefish Range.

Challenges

Over the course of the collaboration, participants' different knowledge bases on national forest planning presented an obstacle, creating the need for education on the scope of public input to the forest planning process. Constituencies new to collaboration had to learn how collaboration works, and lacked resources and knowledge available to those interest groups with more collaboration experience.

While the WRP combines land management recommendations (such as wilderness areas) and project-level recommendations (such as sites for new mountain biking trails), the Forest Service reviews these two levels separately, creating a potential disconnect from the collaborative's consensus-based recommendations. This poses a challenge to those interests most affected by project-level implementation. In recent months, the partnership has reconvened to make NEPA-level project recommendations that are consistent with its established planning recommendations, thus bridging the two levels of input and extending the lifespan of the partnership.

Ultimately, the greatest challenge the WRP's planning recommendations face is in achieving adoption by

appropriate federal channels: wilderness designations and Wild & Scenic River recommendations must be approved by Congress, and specific land-use and travel plan recommendations must be approved and implemented by the Forest Service.

Next Steps and Assistance Needed

The recent formation of a Whitefish Face Working Group (under the auspices of the partnership) allows stakeholders to move forward with the relationship-building and planning aspects of the Whitefish Range Partnership, ensuring follow-through on recommended, on-the-ground, project-level work of seasonal recreation access, mountain bike trail construction, wildland-urban interface fire management, water supply protection, and other issues. The Forest Service continues to support this independent work through a grant providing matching funds.

"In terms of successes I guess I'd say it's too early to judge; there is a success in that we had a consensus and put together the agreement but the Whitefish Range Partnership is not a full success until the Forest Service adopts what we recommended and implements the vision we had. It's success in the short term but I would judge the success of the group in the long term in the effect it ultimately has."

*- Noah Bodman
Flathead Fat Tires*

However, the careful balance of local management and wilderness recommendations in the WRP's Agreement means this collaborative community vision can only be fully realized through efforts by both Montana's Congressional delegation (to secure the recommended land designations) and by the Forest Service (to incorporate the collaborative's recommendations in their forest plan.)

Members:

Bob Brown, Chairman
Rick Anderson, Motorized Recreation
Francis Auld, Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes
Noah Bodman, Flathead Fat Tires
Chas Cartwright, citizen
Allen Chrisman North Fork Compact
Flannery Coates, Owner, Polebridge Mercantile
Cris Coughlin, MT Raft & Glacier Wilderness Guides
Bill Dakin, Columbia Falls Realtor
Tom Edwards, North Fork Compact

Leonard Gray, Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes
Greg Gunderson, Forestation, Inc.
John Frederick, North Fork Preservation Assoc.
Dave Hadden, Headwaters Montana
John Hanson, Montana Logging Association
Annemarie Herrod, North Fork Landowner
Robert Holman, Flathead Snowmobile Assoc.
Michael Jamison, National Parks Conservation Association
Sarah Lundstrum, National Parks Conservation Association

Paul McKenzie, Stoltze Land & Lumber Co.
Cecily McNeil, North Fork Compact
Chester Powell, Winter Sports, Inc.
Debo Powers, North Fork Landowners Assoc.
Amy Robinson, Montana Wilderness Assoc.
Greg Schatz, Backcountry Horsemen
Roger Sherman, The Sustainability Fund
Larry Timchak, Flathead Trout Unlimited
Steve Thompson, WhitePish Legacy Partners
Frank Vitale, Back Country Hunters and Anglers
Bill Walker, North Fork Preservation Assoc.
Larry Wilson, North Fork Landowner



Photo by starrettartists.com

History

The Montana Forest Restoration Committee originally aimed to create forest-level committees on every national forest in Montana that would develop and guide restoration work based on the committee's Restoration Principles. The Lolo National Forest was selected as one of the first areas for implementation due to the extensive restoration opportunities and strong relationships between the committee, local stakeholders, and Lolo National Forest staff.

Members of the Montana Forest Restoration Committee reached out to key stakeholders from around the region to build a diverse workgroup who shared a desire to improve forest conditions through collaboration. By October 2007, this workgroup had officially formed as the Lolo Restoration Committee.

Goals

The Lolo Restoration Committee's goal is to implement the Montana Forest Restoration Committee's Restoration Principles in the Lolo National Forest.

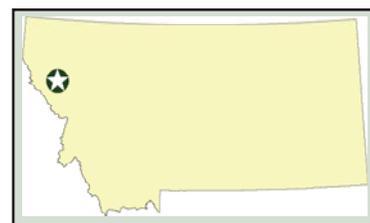
Successes

Many members of the Lolo Restoration Committee consider the relationships built through this effort as the main success. The Restoration Principles have been included by the Seeley Ranger District in project scoping notices, providing common ground for comments by the

Lolo Restoration Committee, though other districts have yet to explicitly address the Principles.

Some committee members actively reach out to individuals and groups who choose not to participate in collaboration, eliciting additional voices', comments, and concerns in a constructive manner.

Members of the Lolo Restoration Committee, through field work with local high school students, were instrumental in testing the recently developed Rapid Forest Assessment, a field monitoring protocol created by non-Forest Service ecologists engaged on two different Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program projects.



While the Lolo Restoration Committee has developed over a half- dozen consensus-based restoration projects for the Lolo National Forest, only two have been seen through to contract since 2007: South Fork Fish Creek Project, a 675-acre fuels reduction and forest restoration project, and Auggie Creek, a 965-acre fuels reduction project. By the time the Forest Service opened the Auggie Creek project to contract, it had become a traditional timber sale rather than a restoration project.

On the South Fork Fish Creek project, the Lolo Restoration Committee's close involvement in monitoring contract implementation led the committee to object to treatments occurring on a unit within the project. Subsequent meetings with the Lolo National Forest and Forest Supervisor on that issue led the committee to develop an implementation monitoring checklist for use on future projects. The committee learned the importance of tracking which of their project recommendations were included in the project Decision Notice and if the agency addressed the key NEPA issues through the mitigation measures found in the contract.

All others projects developed by the Lolo Restoration Committee have remained in planning, been delayed by litigation, or been stalled due to changing Forest Service priorities.

Challenges

Slow progress on projects has been the Lolo Restoration Committee's greatest challenge. For example, the committee energetically engaged with the Center Horse Landscape Restoration Project, a portion of the Southwestern Crown Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) project that would have included commercial and non-commercial tree cutting, prescribed fire, and other management on over 16,000 acres. The Forest Service initiated the project in 2012 but the group still awaits an environmental impact statement, which is at least another year from completion.

Similarly, the Lolo Restoration Committee conducted significant community outreach and generated support for the Marshall Woods Project only to see the project put on hold due to shifting Forest Service priorities and lack of financial opportunity.

This lack of timely response by the agency has led to a decline in membership as well as decreased engagement from current members. As participation has declined, the committee has lost the support of members whose presence as paid staff from outside organizations added capacity necessary to sustaining this otherwise volunteer effort.

While the Lolo Restoration Committee follows projects

from initial design to post-implementation monitoring, it is rare that an agency staff member is in the position to do the same, and that lack of continuity compounds the difficulty of collaboration. In the 4-5 years it can take to complete a project, line officers and the NEPA team may work closely with the collaborative early on, but the completed NEPA document then moves to other agency staff, leadership changes, and existing understanding between the collaborative and agency is lost and must be rebuilt.

Next Steps

The Lolo Restoration Committee remains dedicated to its efforts and continuing good relationships with agency staff on the Lolo National Forest. For example, the committee continues monitoring vegetative treatments on the South Fork Fish Creek project to determine the extent of implemented treatments' restorative benefits.

There is hope that several projects long in the planning phase will go into implementation later this year, whereupon the committee will provide robust and consistent monitoring of contracts.

"The greatest success of the committee has been to get stakeholder groups to get to know each other and create interpersonal relationships and trust... It's always every single time about relationships and that's been by and far the greatest accomplishment of the Lolo Restoration Committee."

—Lolo Restoration Committee member

Assistance Needed

Funding on top of CFLRP to support local collaboratives would enhance capacity of this and other restoration committees. Such funding would help enhance organizational and leadership capacity on the committee.

Shifts in the Forest Service allowing staff to sustain longer-term relationships with collaboratives, or the creation of a Forest Service liaison who could follow projects from start to finish, could help create an institutional space more conducive to productive collaboration. Institutionally-based incentives for completion of collaboratively developed projects might also help generate more on the ground results out of these collaborative efforts.

Members: While individual Committee members may have commercial, multiple-use, or conservation interests, all members bring a particular perspective to the table rather than represent an official position for an organization or group.

Chelsea McIver, citizen-at-large
Megan Birzell, The Wilderness Society
Chris Bryant, The Nature Conservancy
Jim Burchfield, University of Montana
Matt Arno, Blackfoot Challenge
Len Broberg, Sierra Club

Charlie Sells, citizen-at large
Beverly Dupree, Great Burn Study Group
Dylan Brown, Pyramid Lumber
Jake Kreilick, Wildwest Institute
Aaron Olsen, citizen-at-large
Neil Sampson-DNRC



Photo by Lolo National Forest

History

The Southwestern Crown of the Continent, a key ecological landscape, has long been part of restoration efforts from numerous collaboratives including the Montana Forest Restoration Committee, Lincoln and Lolo Restoration committees, Swan Forest Stewardship Committee, Fuels and Weeds Mitigation Task Forces, Crown of the Continent Initiative, and the Multi-Agency Integrated Restoration Strategy.

With the development of the federally funded Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) to fund implementation of landscape-scale restoration projects on National Forest System lands, stakeholders recognized the opportunity to amplify the collaborative network's efforts and secure dedicated project implementation funding across three national forests.

Individuals from across these groups, as well as personnel from the Forest Service, formed the Southwestern Crown Collaborative (SWCC), which applied for and was selected in 2010 as one of 10 forest landscape restoration projects nationwide to receive the 10-year cycle of federal implementation funding under the CFLRP. The SWCC engages in restoration efforts on those National Forest System lands that comprise over half of the 1.5-million-acre Southwestern Crown of the Continent, a subregion of the 10-million-acre Crown of the Continent ecosystem.

Goals

The SWCC implements and monitors fuel reduction and ecological restoration projects within the context of a landscape-scale strategy, supporting the full array of ecosystem services and economic and social benefits in the Southwestern Crown region.



Successes

- As of the end of 2013, the Collaborative had accomplished:
- 35,719 acres of terrestrial and aquatic invasive treatments
 - 9,782 acres of fuel reduction in the wild-urban interface
 - 6,450 acres of vegetation restoration outside of the wild-urban interface
 - 74,549 ccf of commercial products produced
 - 25,853 acres of wildlife habitat restored or enhanced
 - 79 miles of streams restored
 - 206 miles of road best management practice/maintenance
 - 30 stream crossing structures improved
 - 1,338 miles of trails maintained or improved
 - 49 trailheads and campgrounds maintained or improved.

In 2013, work associated with the efforts of the SWCC created or maintained 162 full and part time jobs and contributed an estimated \$5 million in labor income.

Challenges

Sustaining state agency and volunteer engagement in the collaborative has proved challenging. State agency participation has declined since the early years of the collaboration due to workloads and limited staff availability.

The collaborative's Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project funding, while significant, is spent almost entirely on implementation and monitoring, with little left to support partner capacity; currently there are limited options in Montana for finding dedicated funding to support staff time to engage in collaboratively developed projects.

As CFLRP funding is dedicated to project implementation, this leaves the Forest service without necessary funding to complete the NEPA process. This funding gap has created a major bottleneck in efforts under the Southwestern Crown Collaborative.

"It's exciting to have all these different entities engage in the monitoring aspect of the effort. A subset of that is doing socioeconomic monitoring, looking at how these projects benefit local communities, local workforce, and local wood products and restoration businesses. That analysis is super important to us. Unlike some areas of the West, we still have some wood products industries and that is a real key to our success"

- Marnie Criley
Watershed Consulting LLC

Next Steps

With five years of federal funding remaining, the SWCC continues moving forward on projects that support landscape-scale restoration goals.

Assistance Needed

Dedicated funding opportunities to support the capacity of collaborative groups would help the SWCC overcome some of their current capacity constraints and would ultimately increase the pace and scale of restoration activities accomplished on the ground. Supporting member organizations and individuals with compensation for travel, meeting time, and coordinating group logistics would help sustain collaborative member engagement over the long term.

Promoting a more visible profile for the Southwestern Crown Collaborative's successes to date may incentivize continued stakeholder engagement and bring the energy of more county and state agencies into the collaborative, strengthening and diversifying the development of future projects by this group.

Creating a formal avenue by which the Forest Service could work with collaborative groups to do more efficient NEPA analysis would help defray the high costs around project planning and analysis.



Photo by Lolo National Forest

Members: The Southwestern Crown Collaborative's voting membership currently includes the following individuals:

Amber Kamps, U.S. Forest Service
Anne Dahl, citizen-at-large
Cara Nelson, University of Montana
Chip Weber, U.S. Forest Service
Cory Davis, University of Montana
Craig Rawlings, Forest Business Network

Debbie Austin, citizen-at-large
Gabriel Furshong, Montana Wilderness Assoc.
Gary Burnett, Blackfoot Challenge
Jim Burchfield, University of Montana
Joe Kerkvliet, citizen-at-large
Jon Hauffer, Ecosystem Mgmt Research Institute
Keith Stockman, U.S. Forest Service
Bill Avey, U.S. Forest Service
Marnie Criley, citizen-at-large
Jordan Reeves, The Wilderness Society

Melanie Parker, Northwest Connections
Mitch Doherty, Missoula County Community and Planning Services Department
Rich Kehr, U.S. Forest Service
Roger Marshall, Swan Ecosystem Center
Sandy Mack, U.S. Forest Service
Tim Love, U.S. Forest Service
Travis Belote, The Wilderness Society



Photo by Jeff Fox

History

In 2005, wilderness advocates and snowmobilers who had been at loggerheads over land use priorities in the Seeley Lake Ranger District of the Lolo National Forest decided to sit down and talk about their interests in the landscape. Through that conversation, the groups found a mutually agreeable land management solution. Working with the Forest Service, these interest groups formalized their solution into a successful forest plan amendment that recommended wilderness for important mountain goat habitat in the headwaters of the Clearwater River and created new snowmobile opportunities near Lake Elsin.

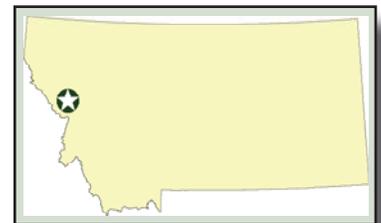
This successful local collaboration ignited a broader conversation around the possibilities of collaboration during the Lolo National Forest's anticipated forest plan revision. These stakeholder groups and Pyramid Lumber began to consider the possibility of developing a much larger shared vision for land management and economic growth in the lower Blackfoot Valley. The Blackfoot Challenge, a nationally recognized collaborative group in the region, helped facilitate this dialogue, which began as the Blackfoot Clearwater Working Group.

As the effort grew and the community's desires to see active forest management, economic development, and federal land protections on this landscape emerged, it became clear that a tenable proposal would include issues such as wilderness designation, which require federal legislation. Thus, the Blackfoot Clearwater

Working Group led to the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project, a locally grown, made-in-Montana landscape-scale legislative proposal to be taken to the state's Congressional delegation.

Goals

The Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project promotes cooperative public-private stewardship across a landscape area, addressing restoration and protection of the region's forests in a manner that promotes recreation opportunities, conservation interests, and the local economy.



Successes

By fostering an open and committed cross-interest conversation, this collaborative found areas of agreement that served a wide range of perspectives, needs and interests. The Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project produced a locally supported, four-part legislative proposal that included: funding for stewardship contracting on the Seeley Lake Ranger District and Blackfoot Community Conservation Area, support for development of a biomass cogeneration facility, permanent protection for 87,000 acres of recommended wilderness on the Lolo National

Forest, and expanded snowmobile opportunities between Seeley Lake and Lincoln.

The collaborative achieved its goal of creating restoration funding opportunities through enactment of the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program in 2009, and inclusion of the Seeley Lake Ranger District under that Program in 2010 as part of the Southwestern Crown Collaborative.

“We picked the location with the greatest opportunity for success and bounced it off of congressional folks; here’s an opportunity to actually crack the nut and do something that then becomes a model of how you could do similar place-based efforts in other locations ... Nobody had done anything for 20 years, and I think it planted the seed and actually started this dialogue of benefits for a variety of interests on a national forest landscape.”

- Gordy Sanders
Pyramid Mountain Lumber

The collaborative sought Congressional support for the other elements of their proposal, which were ultimately included in the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, first introduced by Senator Jon Tester in 2009. On the Lolo National Forest, the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act would designate 87,000 acres of new wilderness and establish a new winter motorized recreation area for snowmobiling in accordance with the vision of the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project, and allow the Lolo National Forest Plan to determine where timber harvest could occur.

Challenges

With the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act in its 3rd Congressional session, the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project has had to invest a great deal of energy and resources into sustaining support for the legislation.

In this timespan, the group has also had to be attentive to new interests taking root in the region in recent years, particularly the emergence of an organized mountain bike presence in the area. Including new groups in long-standing collaborative conversations about local management has been a challenge met thus far by sustained engagement on the part of this collaborative.

Next Steps and Assistance Needed

The collaborative’s members maintain their relationships and are engaged in an ongoing conversation about how to continue to support forest management efforts in the Blackfoot and Clearwater valleys in the 114th Congress beginning in 2015.

Membership of the original Blackfoot Clearwater Working Group:

Al Christophersen, Rocky Mtn Elk Foundation
Bob Ekey, The Wilderness Society
Ron Ogden, Seeley Lake Driftriders Snowmobile Club
John Gatchell, Montana Wilderness Association
Hank Goetz, Blackfoot Community Project
Jack Rich, Rich Ranch Outfitting and Guest Ranch
Gordy Sanders, Pyramid Lumber
Jim Stone, Rolling Stone Ranch

Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Proposal grew beyond the original working group, and engages wide-ranging support from individuals and organizations:

Clearwater Resource Council
Back Country Horsemen of Missoula
Back Country Horsemen of Montana
Professional Wilderness Outfitters Association
Montana Wilderness Association
The Wilderness Society
Sustainable Obtainable Solutions
Greg Gilchrist, Lake Upsata Guest Ranch

Alternative Energy Resources Organization
Missoula Area Economic Development Corp.
Montana Community Development Corporation
Missoula County Commission
Powell County Commission
Lewis and Clark County Commission
Seeley Lake Community Council
Seeley Lake Rural Fire District
Seeley-Swan Fuels Mitigation Task Force
Pyramid Mountain Lumber
The Ovando Snowmobile Club
The Seeley Lake Driftriders Snowmobile Club
The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation



Photo by Gene Sentz

History

The Rocky Mountain Front is a landscape with contrasting legacies of conservation-minded public and private lands management and recurring threats from oil, gas, and mineral development. The Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front (the Coalition) took shape over kitchen table conversations in the early 2000s. While carrying over energy from the Friends of the Rocky Mountain Front group, which had been active in the area since the 1970s, the conversation grew to involve a widening group of stakeholders and issues.

In 2006, this locally grown Coalition successfully worked with Senators Conrad Burns and Max Baucus to develop a legislative solution to halt new federal oil and gas leasing on the Front and allow for the voluntary retirement of existing energy leases. The Coalition also effectively engaged in several travel planning processes on the Lewis and Clark National Forest. Since 2006, the Coalition has continued serving as a diverse and prominent local voice with a landscape-level vision for public lands of the Front.

Goals

The central goal of the Coalition is “to keep the Front just the way it is now,” preserving a rural Montana way of life for current and future generations. The group stands against oil, gas, and mineral development on the federal public lands of the Rocky



Mountain Front managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management while seeking to secure a conservation package including wilderness designations for protection of high-quality wildlife habitat, and assure continued access for current uses (motorized access, hunting, fishing, grazing, water recreation) as well as protection of Front citizens’ livelihoods. To these ends, the Coalition seeks legislative protections through the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act, a bill introduced by former Senator Baucus and sponsored by Senator Tester and Senator Walsh.

Successes

By creating a group process where everyone has a chance to have their say, the Coalition has found compromise along a wide ideological spectrum. The provisions of S364, The Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act, reflect the Coalition's consensus agreements to:

- Establish a 208,000 acre Conservation Management Area on existing federal lands
- Add 67,000 acres to existing wilderness areas in the region
- Require the Secretary of Agriculture to develop a noxious weed management strategy on the Rocky Mountain Ranger District of the Lewis and Clark National Forest and coordinate with the Bureau of Land Management
- Provide surety to grazing permittees that their ability to continue grazing on public lands will not be adversely impacted by the provisions of the bill
- Improve non-motorized recreation trail opportunities in non-wilderness areas

Challenges

While the Coalition involves a wide range of stakeholders, pockets of anti-government sentiment have challenged the Coalition's efforts to engage in the federal political process. The group has faced resource limitations as a volunteer organization trying to stay relevant on Capitol Hill, and the Congressional freeze-up on federal lands designation legislation presents a significant obstacle to the federal land protections the Coalition seeks.

"Conservatism and conservation are both based on the same word: conserve. I think that in forming a collaborative group we've worked with both the politically conservative and the politically liberal, but the one issue all of us agree on: that this is a very special place, one of the most special in all of North America, and we ought to put something together to keep it that way. You've got to work with a lot of different political factions, and if you can stay on the issue you can find a lot of agreement."

- Gene Sentz

Friends of the Rocky Mountain Front

Next Steps and Assistance Needed

As a volunteer-based effort, the Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front is focused on keeping itself going on the ground in Montana and keeping its current legislative proposal alive in Congress. The group needs support for basic administrative functions and continued assistance from organizations with logistical and political savvy. In the big picture though, the Coalition's next step is to secure continued support from the Montana congressional delegation for the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act, and for their Congressmen to secure its passage during this legislative session.

Supporters and Endorsements: Sportsmen

Anaconda Sportsmen's Club
Backcountry Horsemen of Montana
Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, National
Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Montana
National Big Sky Upland Bird Association
East Slope Backcountry Horsemen
Great Falls Archers
Helena Hunters and Anglers Association
Hellgate Hunters and Anglers
Last Chance Backcountry Horsemen
Laurel Rod & Gun Club
Libby Rod and Gun Club
Montana Bowhunter's Association
Montana Sportsmen Alliance
Montana Wildlife Federation
ORION, The Hunter's Institute
Pat Barnes Missouri River Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Ravalli County Fish and Wildlife Association
Russell Country Backcountry Horsemen
Safari Club International, Great Falls Chapter
Traditional Bowhunters of Montana
Trout Unlimited, Montana Chapter
Trout Unlimited, National
Wild Sheep Foundation, National
Wild Sheep Foundation, Montana Chapter

Conservation and Wildlife

American Rivers

Defenders of Wildlife
Friends of the Rocky Mountain Front
Five Valleys Chapter of the Audubon Society
Great Bear Foundation
Last Chance Chapter of the Audubon Society
Montana Conservation Voters
Montana River Action
Montana Wilderness Association
National Parks Conservation Association
National Wildlife Federation
Sustainable Obtainable Solutions
Teddy Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
The Wilderness Society
The Wildlife Society, Montana Chapter
Upper Missouri Breaks Chapter of Audubon Society
Yellowstone Valley Chapter of Audubon Society

Bicyclists

Helena Bicycle Club
Great Falls Bike Club
International Mountain Bikers Association
Montana Mountain Bikers Association

Businesses and Professional Associations

A Hooker's Gallery (Great Falls)
Crary Outfitting (Hunting/Outfitting, Choteau)
Dick's RV Park (Great Falls)
Dropstone Outfitting, (Choteau)
Headhunters Fly Shop & Guide Service (Great Falls)
Helena Outdoor Club

Kenetrek Boots (Bozeman)
Lewis and Clark Retired Educators Assoc. (Helena)
Mark Seacat, Principal, Seacat Creative (Bozeman)
Montana Outfitters and Guides Association (MOGA)
Montana River Outfitters, LLC (Great Falls)
Morning Light Coffee Roasters (Great Falls)
Mystery Ranch Outdoor Gear (Bozeman)
Professional Wilderness Outfitters Assoc. (PWOA)
Randy Newberg, Host, On Your Own Adventures
Seven Lazy P Guest Ranch (Choteau)
Simms Fishing Products (Bozeman)
Sitka Outdoor Gear (Bozeman)
Stoneydale Press Publishing Co. (Bitterroot Valley)
Sweetgrass Rods (Twin Bridges)
Tony Bynum, Professional Photographer
The Front Brewery (Great Falls)
The Trailhead Outdoor Equipment (Missoula)
Trapper Badovinac, Author & Professional Photogr.

25+ Local, State, and Federal staff including:

Gene Terland, former State Director, BLM
Larry Hamilton, former State Director, BLM
Jack Ward Thomas, former Chief of USFS
Michael Dombek, former Chief of the USFS
Dale Bosworth, former Chief of the USFS
Gloria Flora, former Lewis and Clark NF Supervisor
Montana FWP Commission (passed unanimously)



Photo by Travis Belote

History

Seeking to establish restoration committees on National Forests across Montana, the Montana Forest Restoration Committee identified National Forests and Ranger Districts willing and interested in trying a more collaborative approach to developing forest restoration projects. The Lincoln Ranger District on the Helena National Forest was one such area, offering both a manageable scale and the mix of collaboratively minded agency personnel and private stakeholders.

Montana Forest Restoration Committee co-chair Gordy Sanders was instrumental in seeking out those collaboratively minded individuals in the Lincoln region who would bring diverse values to the table. Through Gordy's efforts approaching a wide range of stakeholders, the committee gradually came together and officially formed under an independent charter in September of 2008 with membership drawn from the conservation community, local citizens, timber industry, and recreation along with state and federal agency technical advisors.

Goals

Using the Montana Forest Restoration Committee's Restoration Principles, the Lincoln Restoration Committee develops and promotes citizen-generated restoration projects within the Lincoln Ranger District of the Helena National Forest.



Successes

The Lincoln Restoration Committee developed its first consensus-based collaborative project, the 2,289-acre Stonewall Vegetation Project, in just six months. The Committee has also developed the Dalton Mountain Project, designing about 2,000 acres of watershed restoration and adaptive management project treatments within a 40,000-acre planning area.

Along with project development, the committee has dedicated a great deal of energy to productive engagement with the Forest Service's Blackfoot Travel Plan (Non-winter) process.

Challenges

While the collaborative enjoys a good relationship with the Forest Service, it remains difficult at times to assure that requests by the collaborative for data layers or other information receive timely responses by local agency experts. And that challenge highlights the lack of agreement on the role of this collaborative; some parties seem to view the collaborative as simply a channel of increased communication while at the other extreme some seem to view it as a tool to support existing work.

“Starting a new group, you’re ready for a sprint and it becomes a marathon and you weren’t ready for a marathon. So we learned you should go in to it knowing it will be a long process. I’ve enjoyed the process, and been frustrated too with the pace. But when there’s eventually successes happening then I think it will be worth it.”

- Bill Cyr
Montana DNRC

The slow pace of existing NEPA processes presents another challenge. For example, despite widespread public support, the Stonewall Vegetation Project, which was developed in 2009, still has not gone to contract. The years of delay are not due to litigation; rather, it is being held up by the time-consuming Forest Service analysis and approval process coupled with limited resources. While the restoration committee is poised to assist overtaxed Forest Service staff with field based forest assessments, such an approach is not formally recognized by the agency, which continues to produce exhaustive technical assessments that are less translatable to timely management decision making.

Next Steps

Participation and sense of purpose on the Lincoln Restoration Committee remain strong. In spite of the slow pace of agency review processes, the Lincoln Restoration Committee stands by the Stonewall and Dalton Mountain projects.

In order to make Dalton Mountain Project implementation possible, the Lincoln Restoration Committee is currently engaged with the Blackfoot Travel Plan (Non-winter) process to ensure on-the-ground management opportunities for these future restoration efforts.

The committee is positioned to engage in monitoring for any projects that go to bid or implementation.

Assistance Needed

Collaborative engagement with the Forest Service would be enhanced by a clearer agency approach to who in the agency engages with collaboratives and in what capacity. Formal agency buy in to collaborative efforts would streamline the project development and review processes.



Photo by starrettartists.com

Members: While individual committee members may have commercial, multiple-use, or conservation interests, all members bring a particular perspective to the table rather than represent an official position for an organization or group.

Gary Burnett, Co-Chair, Blackfoot Challenge
KD Feedback, Co-Chair, Helena Attorney
Brent Anderson, Conifer Logging
Jordan Reeves, The Wilderness Society
Dylan Brown, Pyramid Mountain Lumber
Jerry Cain, Landowner
Dwight Crawford, Sun Mountain Lumber

Becky Garland, Citizen Conservationist
Bill Cyr, Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation/Rural Fire
John Goroch, Newmont Mining Corp.Z
Jay Kolbe, MT Fish, Wildlife
Ken Pearson, Pyramid Mountain Lumber



Photo courtesy of the Montana Forest Restoration Committee

History

The Montana Forest Restoration Committee (MFRC) was conceived out of shared frustration at the litigious and conflict-laden atmosphere around management of Montana's National Forest System lands and a desire to find common ground among longtime adversaries on forest restoration opportunities.

When lawsuits were filed on the East Fork Project in the Darby Ranger District of the Bitterroot National Forest, the Forest Service reached out to a professional facilitator for assistance. The facilitator brought nine key stakeholders from across Montana industry, conservation, the Forest Service, the state, and the non-profit sector together for facilitated discussion in August 2006 on what might be done. The group identified forest restoration as the common ground and decided to invite additional participants to the table.

By August 2007, the group had grown to include over 30 members from logging, conservation, state government, the Forest Service, motorized users, outfitters, and others. This balance of diverse interests guides much of the conversation around restoration of Montana's National Forest System lands by working with the Forest Service to implement scientifically sound restoration projects in a timely manner.

Defining a "Zone of Agreement" (specifics on which all parties agree and are willing to move forward) allows the MFRC to identify opportunities where controversy, delays, and litigation can be set aside and on-the-ground work gets accomplished. This Zone of Agreement helped the MFRC distill its collective expertise into 13 scientifically supported forest restoration principles to guide on-the-ground projects.



Goals

All 13 of the restoration principles support the central goal of ensuring that restoration be conducted to accelerate the recovery of ecological processes and to enhance societal and economic well-being, and that restoration involves monitoring and adaptive management.

Successes

Using a consensus-based process, the MFRC has integrated science with community participation on local restoration projects through four locally led forest restoration committees. These local restoration committees put the 13 principles into practice on three Montana National Forests.

The Montana Forest Restoration Committee has achieved recognition at the state and national levels for its successful relationship-building around place-based forest restoration. By finding room for productive dialogue and action on complex issues, the MFRC has served as a learning opportunity and catalyst for other collaborative restoration efforts including the national Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program and the Southwest Crown Collaborative.

“It’s always about being place-based; the folks from there have to be engaged and have to want to make it work.”

*- Gordy Sanders
Pyramid Mountain Lumber*

Publication of the MFRC’s Restoring Montana’s National Forest System Lands resource has brought the group’s 13 restoration principles to a broad audience across Montana, and a series of appendices developed by the group provides timely content additions. Additionally, the group has developed monitoring protocols for project implementation on national forests.

Challenges

Restoration work on national forests requires capacity and commitment from the Forest Service. While the MFRC maintains a positive relationship with the agency, turnover of agency line officers can make it difficult to develop the long-term relationships that are vital to collaboration.

The slow pace of project implementation poses an ongoing frustration. Collaborative members face the challenge of developing realistic expectations of project timelines as well as finding ways to pursue smaller projects and activities that sustain a sense of accomplishment while waiting for larger projects to go through the NEPA process.

While some members point to an observed decline in litigation on national forests that engaged in MFRC efforts, some stakeholders declining to engage in collaborative conversation means litigation remains a barrier to implementation of restoration projects.

Next Steps

The MFRC will continue strengthening its partnerships throughout the state while looking for opportunities to grow and get meaningful work done on the ground. It will continue to offer webinars, field trips, guidance documents and educational opportunities to members and the public.

As the MFRC further promotes collaborative forest restoration projects in Montana, it must continue striving to exhibit balanced and committed responsiveness to the full spectrum of interests at the table.

Assistance Needed

As with many collaboratives, capacity remains a need as all MFRC members are volunteers. Additional assistance needed varies between each forest-level restoration committee, including facilitation expenses, meeting space, and stipends for travel and field trips.

Mechanisms to promote the Forest Service’s prioritization of collaboratively developed projects would help with member retention and promote a greater sense of accomplishment and purpose in meeting.

While individual committee members may have commercial, multiple-use, or conservation interests, all members bring a particular perspective to the table rather than represent an official position for an organization.

MFRC Steering Committee

Gordy Sanders, Pyramid Mountain Lumber
Julia Altemus, Montana Wood Products Assoc.
Al Christophersen/Tom Williams, Elkhorn RC Co-Chairs
Gary Burnett/KD Feedback, Lincoln RC Co-Chair
Matt Arno, Lolo RC Chair
Bitterroot RC Chair
Bob Harrington, State Forester
Mary Mitsos, National Forest Foundation
Chuck Rody, FH Stoltze Land & Lumber

Full MFRC Membership

Brian Kahn, Artemis Common Ground
Dan Thompson, Ravalli County Off Road Users
Julie King, U.S. Forest Service
Julia Riber, U.S. Forest Service
Mark Vander Meer, VanWild
Orville Daniels, citizen-at-large
Tom Williams, rancher
Dennis Milburn, citizen-at-large
Al Christophersen, citizen-at-large
John Gatchell, Montana Wilderness Assoc.
Bill Geer, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Jake Kreilick, Wild West Institute
Tim Love, U.S. Forest Service
Tim Ryan, EthnoTech

Rick Franke, Sun Mountain Lumber
Chip Weber, U.S. Forest Service
Bill Avey, U.S. Forest Service
KD Feedback, Attorney
Caroline Byrd, Greater Yellowstone Coalition
Jack Rich, Rich Ranches
Julia Altemus, Montana Wood Products Assoc.
Gary Burnett, Blackfoot Challenge
Gordy Sanders, Pyramid Mountain Lumber
Chuck Rody, FH Stoltze Land & Lumber
Mary Mitsos, National Forest Foundation
Matt Arno, Blackfoot Challenge
Bob Harrington, Montana DNRC State Forester
Tim Garcia, U.S. Forest Service

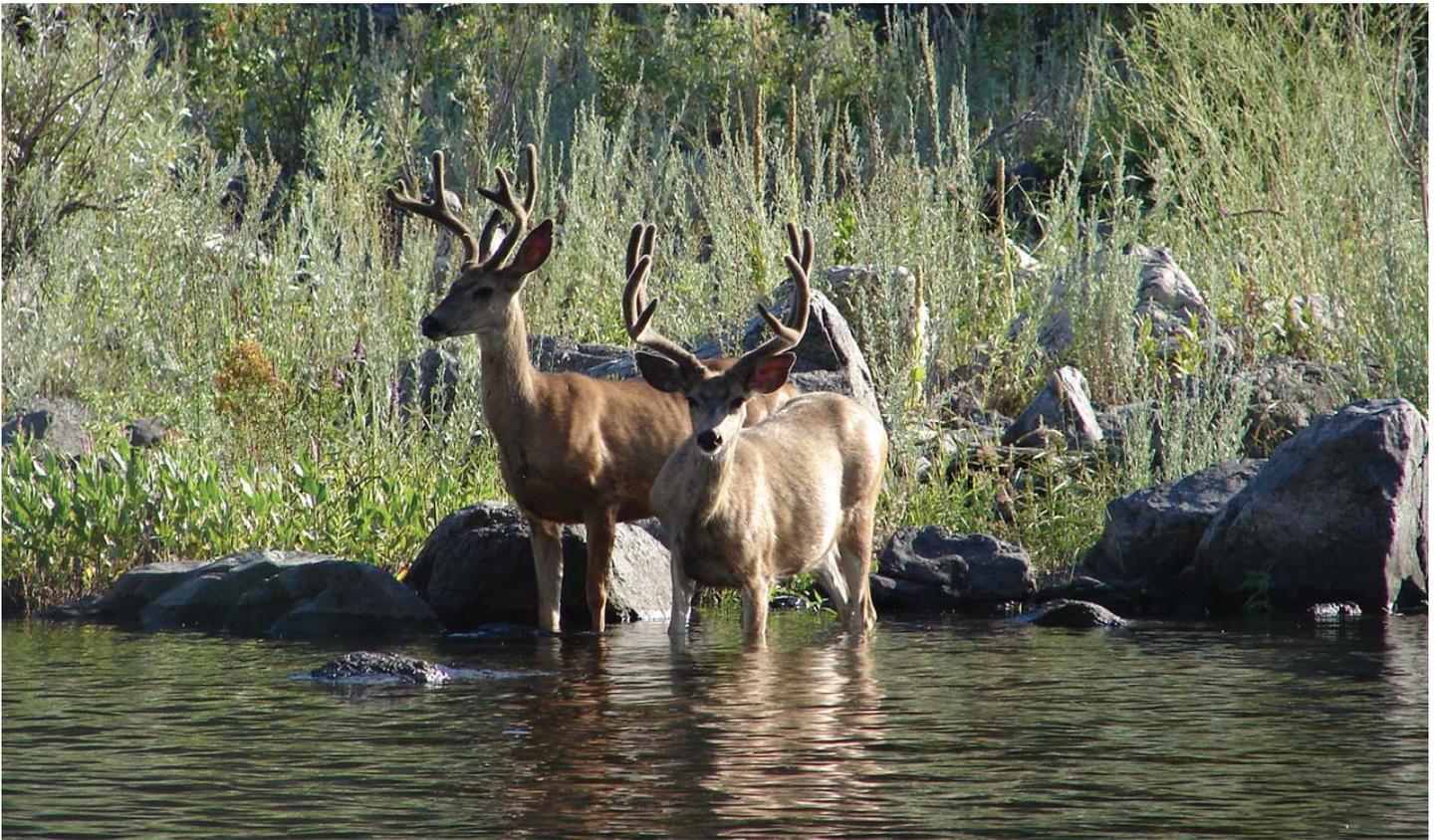


Photo by U.S. Forest Service

History

In 2001, the Elkhorn Working Group was formed as a citizen advisory group to the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks on elk and livestock management in the Elkhorn Mountains. Gradually, a subcommittee made up of members within the Elkhorn Working Group and other interested citizens formed around an interest in developing citizen-generated restoration efforts in the Elkhorn region.

With the Elkhorn Working Group focused on policy issues, the subcommittee's project level interest in restoration needed a different opportunity space. In 2010, members of this subcommittee and interested locals approached the agencies and other stakeholders about the potential for forming a restoration committee to design and support collaborative restoration projects on both public and private lands in the Elkhorn landscape, an area where the Forest Service had been largely inactive and struggled with the same project for over 10 years.

The core group of diverse people that came together around the idea of restoration saw the leadership and support offered by the Montana Forest Restoration Committee as an opportunity to engage more actively on projects. By 2011, the local group had agreed to a shared vision for the Elkhorn landscape, put together a

charter, code of conduct, consensus agreement, adopted the Montana Forest Restoration Committee's 13 Restoration Principles, and became the independent Elkhorn Restoration Committee.



Goals

The Elkhorn Restoration Committee promotes resilient and naturally functioning ecosystems in the Elkhorn Mountains through collaborative restoration efforts in the Elkhorn Cooperative Management Area, which includes Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Montana State lands, and private lands. This area includes the only designated Wildlife Management Unit in the entire National Forest System, as well as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern on Bureau of Land Management lands.

Successes

Instead of diving straight into project design, the Elkhorn Restoration Committee found success in developing a science-based protocol for determining restoration objectives by using Forest Service data and best available

science. While the Forest Service did not drive or guide the group's data assessment, their technical expertise and responsiveness allowed this restoration committee to review and assess existing data. The result is site-specific ecological understanding that will inform the development of future restoration projects.

The Elkhorn Restoration Committee's landscape analysis is truly unique: it brings ecological restoration science to a layperson level, is cost-effective by utilizing existing agency resources, and has been adopted by both the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management for use in the Elkhorn Wildlife Management Unit. The analysis can also be applied to private lands if a landowner is interested in restoration treatments.

“Everybody came to this committee to get good scientifically backed restoration work done on the ground... That's what we've hung our success on and what will cause us to go away if it doesn't get done. Congress has to say if we want our National Forest system to function. There's got to be a system where you have to come to the table to positively contribute, not just not participate and litigate and say nothing's going to work and throw it all out.”

*- Al Christophersen
Elkhorn Restoration Committee co-chair*

The Elkhorn Restoration Committee has used their landscape analysis method to generate recommendations to the Forest Service on future treatments for 20,000 acres of the Crow Creek drainage, where an Environmental Impact Statement is due to begin this fall. The Bureau of Land Management has adopted the committee's landscape analysis method to guide their 10-year planning process on the Iron Mask region of the Elkhorns, and the committee will provide feedback to them throughout that process based on the shared lens of the landscape analysis. A mastication demonstration area has been set up and field trips are ongoing. The Elkhorn Restoration Committee has developed a public Information, Involve, and Educate Strategy that is in its early phases of implementation.

Challenges

While the Elkhorn Restoration Committee has a positive working relationship with the state and federal agencies

in the Elkhorn region, there is still awareness of what can happen when a collaborative works closely with an agency, invests time and effort, only to lose agency support for a project due to litigation from the handful of objectors who have declined to participate in the collaborative or conversation. This has not come to pass on the Elkhorns, but there is attention to trying to avoid this challenge by being as inclusive and transparent as possible in their process.

Next Steps

The Elkhorn Restoration Committee is currently expanding its Information, Involve and Educate Strategy outreach efforts. By speaking with diverse interest groups and the public, the committee hopes to generate thoughtful feedback and support necessary for eventual project development and implementation.

Also, the committee is applying its assessment protocols to the Forest Service's newest data sets, completing a full assessment of the Elkhorn Cooperative Management Unit by landowner and landscape to identify for the agencies and the public what needs to be done to get the mountain range back into a more fire resilient condition.

Pursuing restoration projects on private lands will help the Elkhorn Restoration Committee start generating success, showing its results, and developing momentum for restoration without getting bogged down at the get-go by the challenges, including time-consuming and expensive analyses as well as the threat of litigation, that jeopardize public lands management projects.

Assistance Needed

Funding will be a key element of seeing projects implemented and effectively monitored, whether on private ranchlands or public forests.

At the state level, the Elkhorn Restoration Committee seeks awareness of the group's existence and recognition of the spectrum of issues they are collaboratively addressing.

The committee hopes that Congress will find ways to manage litigation so that the Forest Service is able to move beyond the gridlock and invest its resources in on-the-ground restoration projects.

Members: This committee is composed of local citizens with diverse interests all centered on the Elkhorn Mountains: hunters, anglers, ranchers, backcountry horsemen, wildlife enthusiasts, woods workers, landowners, motorized recreationists, fisheries, forest and fire management, backcountry and wilderness values, local businesses, and local government.

As all members share an interest in wildlife, ecosystem function, sound ecology, and community economics, participants are not listed with additional interest group affiliations.
Tom Williams
Doug Abelin
Anne Carlson
Al Christophersen
Dennis Milburn

Lois Olsen
Karole Lee
Mike Sedlock
Steve Marks
Mike Vashro
Gail Vennes
Brian Kimpton
Brian Kahn
Franklin Slifka



Photo by starrettartists.com

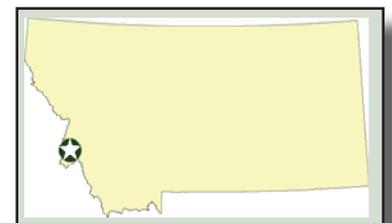
History

Since the timber wars of the 1970s and 1980s, the Bitterroot has been a landscape steeped in conflict, where disputes over forest management and the closing of local sawmills created deep divisions between local conservationists and timber interests. It was in this context that the Montana Forest Restoration Committee had the ambitious goal of introducing the collaborative forest management model. They hoped that a new form of dialogue might foster more open communication between timber interests, the conservation community, and the Forest Service.

Members of the Montana Forest Restoration Committee approached collaboratively minded individuals in the region, particularly from within the timber and conservation communities, about the idea of forming a local committee to discuss restoration opportunities on the landscape. By November 2007, under professional facilitation, 17 individuals from across the spectrum of interests had formed the Bitterroot Restoration Committee.

Goals

The Bitterroot Restoration Committee's goal is to implement the Montana Forest Restoration Committee's Restoration Principles through developing on-the-ground projects in the Bitterroot National Forest.



Successes

The Bitterroot Restoration Committee's major success has been in cultivating an ongoing civil dialogue across a spectrum of interest groups, who previously stood deeply divided, and improving communication with the Forest Service. Since the founding of the Bitterroot Restoration Committee, there have been no appeals or litigation of timber sales on the Bitterroot National Forest by any conservation groups.

The first project the Committee designed was Darby Lumber Lands, where in 2008, committee members drafted a Zone of Agreement (specifics on which all parties agree and are willing to move forward on) for how to restore key areas and promote ecologically sustainable recreational opportunities. The Forest Service used those recommendations, as well as their own evaluations, to draft an initial proposed action. By 2013, the Forest Service was completing on-the-ground analysis. Seeking manageable gains, the Committee commented on the Forest Service's draft proposal and focused on 640 acres for specific restoration recommendations. The project is currently waiting for a final Environmental Analysis decision.

The Bitterroot Restoration Committee also submitted recommendations on existing Forest Service projects, such as Three Saddles, a proposed 2,000-acre project including commercial timber harvest, non-commercial thinning, prescribed burning, and road decommissioning. After Three Saddles withstood an appeal by motorized recreation, restoration elements remain and this project is now out for bidding.

The Forest Service's current consideration of future environmental analysis for a formal Westside Forest Project, a several thousand acre wildland-urban interface fuels reduction effort, came out of discussions initiated by the Bitterroot Restoration Committee.

Challenges

While the Bitterroot Restoration Committee follows the Montana Forest Restoration Committee's 13 restoration principles, the Forest Service's lack of formal agency guidelines on restoration contributes to ongoing tension between a more traditional forest products-driven perception of restoration and a stricter conservation ecology perception of restoration.

Lack of funding within the Forest Service presents a major challenge, as restoration activities rarely pay for

themselves. As an example, the Shirley Mountain (a 325-acre ponderosa pine restoration project) achieved consensus but was dropped by the Forest Service due to the weak timber economics of the project.

In the past several years there has been a great deal of turnover in Committee membership for a variety of reasons. The result has been difficulty maintaining continuity and energy in work group efforts.

Next Steps

The Bitterroot Restoration Committee continues to develop local project proposals and support their existing proposals that are under Forest Service review. By sustaining simultaneous involvement in multiple projects, the committee hopes to maintain momentum in spite of the start-stop nature of the agency's review processes.

"I was watching our community, which had upwards of two major sawmills and a minor one reduced to no mills. It was at an intense and bitter time. It is certainly something to see the formation of Bitterroot Restoration Committee where you have all these diverse interests at the table discussing, and eventually discussing in a very civil fashion. The civility that has come out of the Restoration Committee is far and away the most important thing ... You can't say everything has worked out perfectly, but there has been a lot of improvement."

—Wayne Hedman
Ravalli County RAC

Assistance Needed

There is a need for increased funding to the agency to increase staff capacity, support project analysis, and allow for implementation of restoration activities.

Members: While individual committee members may have commercial, multiple-use, or conservation interests, all members bring a particular perspective to the table rather than represent an official position for an organization or group.

Marcia Hogan, Facilitator
Jeremy Amberson, Integrated Ecological Restoration, LLC
Chris Clancy, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Wayne Hedman, Ravalli County RAC
Ralph Johnson, citizen-at-large

Van Keele, Friends of the Bitterroot
Dyrk Krueger, Enhanced Forest Management
Paul Moore, Montana DNRC
Laura Merrill, citizen-at-large
Ron Porter, Porterbilt
Kirk Thompson, citizen-at-large



Photo courtesy of Karen DiBari

History

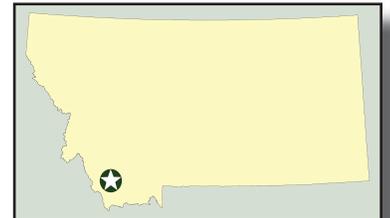
The Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group is currently the only forest-wide collaborative on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, but collaboration is not new in this part of Montana. Back in 2005, mutual dissatisfaction with a revised forest plan brought timber interests and conservation advocates together to create an alternative Forest Plan proposal. While their submitted alternative was not adopted by the Forest Service, the groups' desire to positively inform management decisions on their local national forest continued.

Discussions over the next several years highlighted to some involved the need for a citizen-based advisory group in place on the forest, a group that would function entirely separately from legislative efforts such as the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act (FJRA). In 2011, with FJRA stalling out in Congress, timber and conservation interests that included both opponents and supporters of FJRA once again began discussing how to get active forest management happening on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest. The National Forest Foundation agreed to convene and facilitate a small group conversation about forming a community based collaborative on the forest. This small group organized and invited a broad cross section of interests and users to join a working group. It was out of this effort that the 15-

member Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group officially formed in October 2011.

Goals

The Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group seeks to develop agreement around priority areas and approaches for restoration on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest and to help facilitate timely completion of projects at the local level.



Successes

The Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group has spent two years developing their collaborative process and working to find areas of shared understanding on key ecological issues in the landscape. Through meetings and consultation with the Forest Service, Ecosystem Research Group, and others, the working group continues to build areas of agreement on how to proceed with forest management issues, particularly on the specifics of lodgepole pine and landscape restoration. Arriving at a shared understanding of problems as well as a

shared desire for timely solutions has been a success for this group. They have assisted the Forest Service in developing a decision process for projects in key fish watersheds and are poised to start developing proposals for local on-the-ground projects, possibly including a small parcel within former Forest Service efforts in the Boulder Project area as well as fisheries restoration opportunities around Selway Meadows.

Challenges

Stakeholder diversity is a major strength for this collaborative, and yet differing backgrounds initially presented an obstacle to finding shared understanding for forest management. It required a great deal of the collaborative's time and energy to develop shared areas of agreement through group learning.

"We're all able to come to a common understanding of how to go forward on management of forests. We came to agreement on lodgepole pine restoration work that needs to be done. We all want to see more work done on the forest...and having a shared problem is itself a success."

—Tony Colter
Sun Mountain Lumber

Other challenges to this collaborative are the budgetary and staffing cuts that have occurred over the past 20 years on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest. These capacity limitations threaten the feasibility of implementing future projects proposed by the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group, and the frequency of litigation on the forest further stymies project efforts and drains Forest Service resources.

Next Steps and Assistance Needed

Having built a strong collaborative, the Beaverhead-Deerlodge is developing projects for implementation, which will require impact analysis and implementation by the Forest Service. With the region's agency staff currently spread thin, there is concern that collaborative energy might gradually dissipate if there is a sustained lack of on-the-ground results. This collaboration will not bear fruit unless Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest funding and Forest Service staff capacity increase.

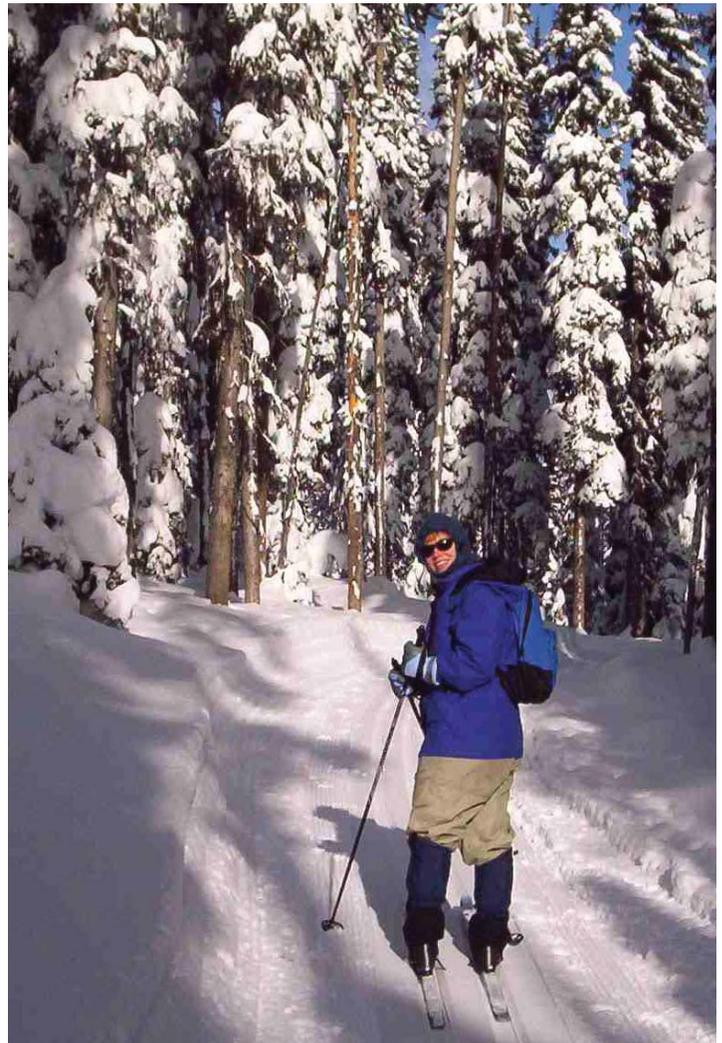


Photo courtesy of Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest

Membership:

The Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group is a citizen-based committee of people who represent key interests, geographic balance, and knowledge of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest. Members represent timber, county commissioners, agriculture/ranching, non-motorized and motorized recreation, conservation, hunting and fishing, outfitters/guides, and citizen interests:

Barb Cestero, Greater Yellowstone Coalition
Tony Colter, Sun Mountain Lumber
Tom Rice, citizen-at-large, Beaverhead County Commissioner
Maureen Connor, citizen-at-large
Chris Marchion, Montana Wildlife Federation, and Anaconda Sportsmen's Club
Peter Nelson, Defenders of Wildlife

Paul Olsen, Trout Unlimited
Ciche Pitcher, forest permittee, Discovery Ski
Sam Samson, citizen-at-large
Rick Sandru, agriculture and multiple uses
Dave Schulz, Madison County Commissioner
Mark Thompson, motorized recreation; mining
Joe Willauer, fishing guide
Leonard Wortman, Jefferson County Commissioner



Photo courtesy of Barb Cestero

History

For more than eight years, conservation leaders, timber interests, the Forest Service, ranchers, and others have engaged in discussions on how to improve management of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest through cooperative efforts. Through these discussions and a series of field trips, the idea of forming a collaborative to develop restoration projects for improving the health of the Gravelly landscape gained traction.

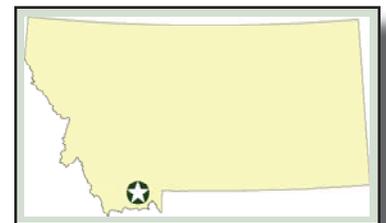
In May of 2012, conservation leaders and local landowners invited more than 50 individuals from diverse backgrounds to a group meeting where they asked whether there was interest in forming a collaborative to move restoration forward on the landscape. The full group said yes and a subset volunteered to form a working group, thus beginning the Gravelly Landscape Collaborative (GLC), named for the Gravelly Landscape, much of which falls within the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest. The GLC is a professionally facilitated, consensus-based group where membership is kept very open and informal.

The GLC looked at the Gravelly Landscape to determine where there was the most potential opportunity on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest for developing landscape-scale projects that could generate maximum ecological and societal benefits, and settled on the Greenhorn Focus Area of the Gravelly Landscape. Located in the northern end of the National Forest, this area connects Forest Service with Bureau of Land

Management and Department of Natural Resource and Conservation lands.

Goals

The Gravelly Landscape Collaborative aims to use best available science and local expertise to develop and advance projects to benefit forests, fish, rangelands, wildlife habitat, recreational values and local communities of the Gravelly.



The collaborative aims to develop and implement a suite of projects on the landscape scale, recognizing that combining many smaller projects (such as removing conifer encroaching on rangelands, restoring native fish populations, or salvaging timber from pine beetle kill) into one cohesive, consensus-based proposal increases the social value and technical efficiency of generating on the ground results.

Successes

As a relatively new group, the GLC has not yet implemented any projects, but it has engaged local stakeholder groups in developing a matrix of potential management activities at the landscape scale, and is working to generate broad support for moving into project-level efforts over the next several years.

Challenges

Funds from the state and seed money from the Forest Service's private forestry program helped this collaborative through its formative years, but budget cuts and limited staff capacity on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest present obstacles to future project implementation. The immediate challenge the Gravelly Landscape Collaborative faces is securing commitment from the Forest Service to devote the resources necessary to undertake the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis required for implementation of collaboratively developed projects.

Five landscape-level projects within the Beaverhead Deerlodge National Forest are currently on hold due to litigation, and some within the environmental community do not support a collaborative approach to federal land management, leading to a continued risk of additional litigation.

Next Steps

The GLC will continue developing their landscape-scale proposal for the Greenhorn Focus Area of the Beaverhead Deerlodge National Forest and eliciting feedback across the community. While the group is poised to engage in field data collection (vegetation work, road inventory, sediment monitoring, etc.) they are holding off on such work until they have received more concrete support from the agency.

"Our biggest success has been bringing a lot of diverse players together in looking towards a common goal of bettering the landscape of Greenhorns whether for fisheries, wildlife habitat, forest health, or other aspects. This has been an organized attempt with very diverse interests to see what we could improve and do better"

*- Mark Petroni
sportsman and retired U.S. Forest Service*

Assistance Needed

While the GLC currently seeks technical and financial resources for conducting landscape analysis, their chief concern is securing a commitment from the Forest Service that their projects are placed in the queue for timely review and analysis.

"There is more social value and it's more efficient to be sewing activities together on the same landscape. The reason I think it's not beneficial for this collaborative approach to work on the small project scale is when you do it piecemeal you don't have people buying into each other's interests. In piecemeal work, people don't learn what each other's interests are or what the tradeoffs are for each other's interests"

*- Bruce Farling
Montana Trout Unlimited*

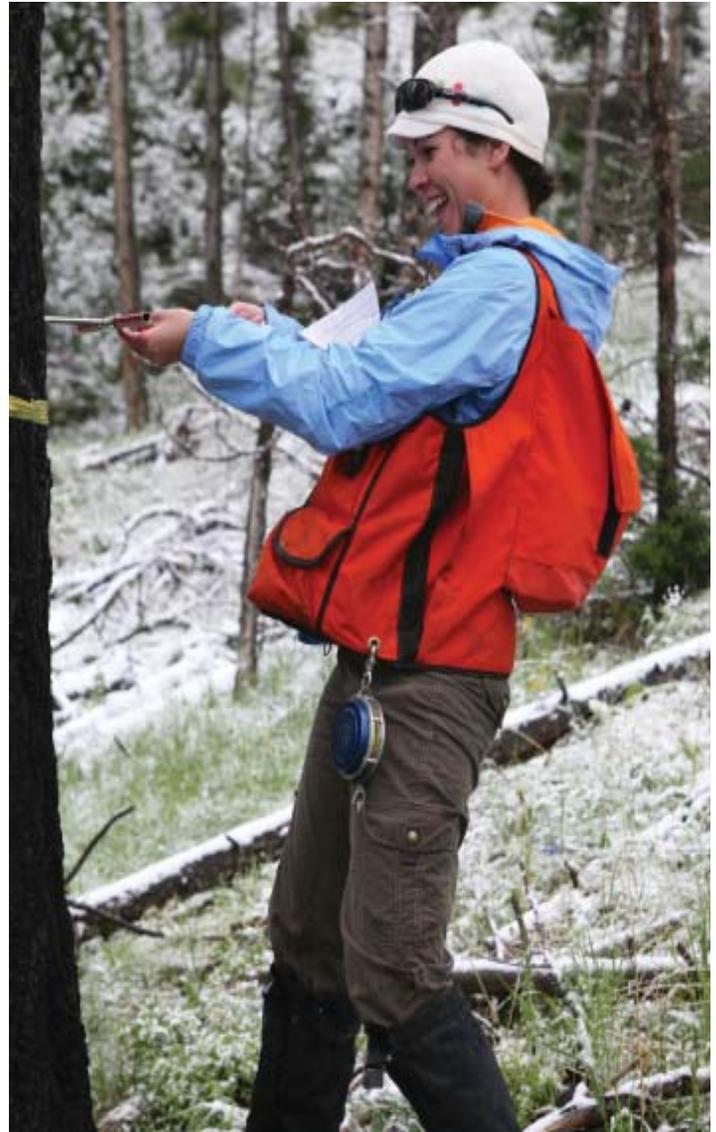


Photo courtesy of Barb Cestero

Members:

Bruce Farling, MT Trout Unlimited
Barb Cestero, Greater Yellowstone Coalition
Sue Heald, resident, retired district ranger
Joe Helle, sheep grazing permittee in Gravellys

John Anderson, rancher
Mark Petroni, sportsman, retired district ranger
John Crumley, cattleman, president of Madison Valley Ranchlands Group
Dan Crismore, Ruby Valley sportsman

Nathan Korb, The Nature Conservancy
Kris Inman, Wildlife Conservation Society
Steve Flynn, Sun Mountain Lumber
Aaron Paulson, Snowcrest Ranch Manager



Photo by Anne Rockhold

History

Momentum for the formation of the Gallatin Community Collaborative came out of a 2011 court ruling that the Forest Service's 2006 Travel Plan Decision for the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area of the Gallatin National Forest did not adequately protect the area's wilderness character according to the 1977 Montana Wilderness Study Act. Following that ruling, the Forest Service convened a community meeting in Bozeman in February of 2012 to assess whether there was sufficient local interest in a citizen-led collaborative forming to engage on planning for the Wilderness Study Area. At that meeting, 86 percent of the more than 400 attendees responded "yes" to a clicker poll asking "do you feel the timing is right to engage in a collaborative effort." Support for forming a local collaborative was overwhelming, but enthusiasm was matched by significant and longstanding distrust between interest groups.

The Forest Service asked Montana State University's Local Government Center to guide the fledgling effort. The Local Government Center convened an Exploratory Committee of 15 diverse local individuals to develop recommendations on how to proceed. That committee spent a year assessing the potential for a community collaborative and laying groundwork for an inclusive, transparent process with an open, self-selecting

membership. After a series of five community meetings in October, the first full Gallatin Community Collaborative meeting was held in November of 2013.

Goal

The purpose of the Gallatin Community Collaborative is to gather community input of diverse perspectives in a collaborative process that works toward a broad, adaptive, and durable resolution of agreed-upon public lands issues around the Custer Gallatin National Forest.



Successes

The Gallatin Community Collaborative has developed into a unique and highly inclusive community collaborative, and it has come a long way in establishing respectful listening and communication among its 204 listed members. The past six months of sustained high-energy engagement from participants across the recreation spectrum is a considerable success. While this group has yet to address substantive issues, it has passed bylaws and has begun to develop a list of public lands issues to resolve by consensus.

The group has set a provisional December 2015 deadline to complete and submit its recommendations to the Forest Service, coinciding with the anticipated beginning of required Travel Plan Management for the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study area and the Forest Plan revision on the Custer-Gallatin National Forest.

"I came into this collaborative feeling it needed to be community-based and accessible to everybody at multiple levels... If you make the process community-based it will make it better for Congressionals and Forest Service and give people the opportunity to get in, make comments, and feel they are part of the process."

—Stacy Bragg
*backcountry horseman, motorized recreation,
5th generation Montanan*

Challenges

So far the Gallatin Community Collaborative's broad membership has proven very inclusive and accessible, but made it challenging to foster the communicative relationships, trust, and defined geographic scope that can emerge from a smaller, more focused effort. Without committed relationship building across interest groups, old antagonistic perceptions between groups and individuals may continue to pose a significant hurdle.

In a collaborative this large and diverse, facilitation and a strong emphasis on process are vital. However, the major time commitment that was required of participants by the facilitation style early on as well as slowness in getting to issues deterred some stakeholders from staying involved during those key learning stages.

As more stakeholders return to the table for issue based discussions, there will be a challenge in building productive conversation among all participants, both those who engaged in group learning and those who did not or were unable to.

Next Steps

The Gallatin Community Collaborative is ready to start diving into substantive issues and map-based discussions of the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area. As the group transitions into identifying specific issues and exploring options, it is contracting a new professional facilitator who will provide consistent assistance for the duration of the effort.

Looking to the future, some members see the Gallatin Community Collaborative as an effort that could continue moving forward after 2015 on other public lands resource planning issues.

A success on the travel plan revision process could set the stage for future community collaborative work on management of the Custer-Gallatin National Forest, including development of the forest plan revision.

Assistance Needed

In the near future, the Gallatin Community Collaborative needs to continue fundraising to sustain its process. They have \$41,000 of funding in place for meeting and facilitation costs over the next 12 months but anticipate needing another \$15,000 to reach their provisional deadline of December 2015.

Down the road, the Gallatin Community Collaborative's recommendations for travel planning on the Wilderness Study Area will rely on the Forest Service's response and potentially Congressional action if group recommendations involve altering legal designations of federal lands.

Membership: The Gallatin Community Collaborative's current membership list includes all individuals that have registered or put their name on the sign in sheet at a full GCC meeting since November 2013.

While these individuals have been grandfathered in as members, the group's bylaws state that if a member misses two consecutive meetings of the GCC they are no longer considered a "full participating member".

The collaborative's Governance Committee expects that the membership list will dwindle significantly to 30-50 regularly active Members plus a handful of other individuals that attend periodically.

Conclusion



Photo by Jared White

Montanans are working together more closely than ever to improve forest management, strengthen communities and economies, and conserve habitat. But without additional action from Congress, the Forest Service, and local citizens, these collaborative efforts may be stymied, throwing Montana back to the days of gridlock in the woods.

Montana's ever-changing forest landscapes need our attention and citizen leaders across the state have worked hard to finding common ground by developing place-based solutions to forest management issues that have vexed the state for decades.

Despite these solutions, however, many of these efforts have struggled to secure the support of Congress and the Forest Service. Without this support, or in the face of divisive, top-down proposals, these collaborative efforts may wither on the vine and the collaborative energy that has preserved Montanans' special places and way of life might dissipate.

Montana needs leadership at all levels to ensure the success of the made-in-Montana collaborative efforts. We hope this report serves as a call to action to ensure that our state's leadership will step up to the plate to advance these collaborative efforts for the benefits of all Montanans.