Collaborative Governance Assessment Report

FOR THE DESCHUTES COLLABORATIVE FOREST PROJECT CFLRP

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SWERI Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes
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Document Development: In FY21, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service (Forest Service) led a collaborative process to develop a Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) Common Monitoring Strategy that will be required for all newly authorized and reauthorized projects under the CFLRP. The Forest Service Washington Office requested assistance from the Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI) in developing and deploying an assessment tool to track collaborative governance within and across CFLRP projects through time. The collaborative assessment is intended to assess whether CFLRP is encouraging an effective and meaningful collaborative approach, and addresses question #12 of the CFLRP Common Monitoring Strategy. We developed an online, confidential survey that was administered to CFLRP project participants. With support from the USDA Forest Service Forest Management, Range Management, and Vegetation Ecology program, SWERI conducted regional webinars to introduce the assessment and identify project-level points of contact, which were followed by in-depth engagement with key contacts to determine recruitment strategies, administration timing, and project-specific questions. In FY22 and FY23, SWERI will be collecting baseline information for all newly authorized and reauthorized projects. SWERI will continue to engage in assessing collaborative health and performance of CFLRP projects. The Ecological Restoration Institute at Northern Arizona University funded survey administration using state funding (Arizona Board of Regents through the Technology, Research and Innovation Fund), which was used as a match to annual federal appropriations to the SWERI.

Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI)
The Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes include three university-based restoration institutes: the New Mexico Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute (NMFWRI), the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI), and the Ecological Restoration Institute (ERI) in Arizona. These institutes were congressionally appointed in 2004 by the Southwest Forest Health and Wildfire Prevention Act (PL 108-317), and the institutes work together to develop a program of applied research and service to help create healthy forests, prevent uncharacteristic wildfires, sustain the resiliency of water supplies to wildfires, and create jobs. The SWERI receive funding from five primary sources: 1) federal appropriations; 2) additional federal funding (e.g., the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act); 3) state appropriations; 4) in-kind support from host universities; and 5) extramural funding such as grants and agreements. The SWERI receive federal appropriations under the Southwest Forest Health and Wildfire Prevention Act administered through the Forest Service. In accordance with federal law and USDA policy, these institutions are prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights Room 326-A, Whitten Building 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, DC, 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice & TDD).

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The Ecological Restoration Institute is nationally recognized for mobilizing the unique assets of a university to help solve the problem of unnaturally severe wildfire and degraded forest health throughout the American West. ERI serves diverse audiences with objective science and implementation strategies that support ecological restoration and climate adaptation on western forest landscapes.

Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI), Colorado State University (CSU)
The Colorado Forest Restoration Institute is a science-based outreach and engagement organization hosted by the Department of Forest and Rangeland Stewardship and the Warner College of Natural Resources at Colorado State University. Colorado State University (CSU) is a land-grant university with a mission to provide teaching, research, public service, and engagement that CFRI strives to uphold. CFRI was established by Congress as part of the Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes to serve as a bridge between researchers, managers, and stakeholders working to restore and enhance the resilience of forest ecosystems to wildfires in Colorado, the Southern Rocky Mountains, and the Intermountain West. CFRI leads collaborations between researchers, managers, and stakeholders to generate and apply locally relevant, actionable knowledge to inform forest management strategies. CFRI's work informs forest conditions assessments, management goals and objectives, monitoring plans, and adaptive management processes.

NAU Land Acknowledgment: Northern Arizona University sits at the base of the San Francisco Peaks, on homelands sacred to Native Americans. We honor their past, present, and future generations, who have lived here for millennia and will forever call this place home.

CSU Land Acknowledgment: Colorado State University acknowledges, with respect, that the land we are on today is the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Ute Nations and peoples. This was also a site of trade, gathering, and healing for numerous other Native tribes. We recognize the Indigenous peoples as original stewards of this land and all the relatives within it. As these words of acknowledgment are spoken and heard, the ties Nations have to their traditional homelands are renewed and reaffirmed. CSU is founded as a land-grant institution, and we accept that our mission must encompass access to education and inclusion. And, significantly, that our founding came at a dire cost to Native Nations and peoples whose land this University was built upon. This acknowledgment is the education and inclusion we must practice in recognizing our institutional history, responsibility, and commitment.

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Executive Summary

The Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI) developed a collaborative governance assessment as part of the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) Common Monitoring Strategy. The collaborative governance assessment was designed to assess the following questions:

1. What are the structural and functional dynamics of the collaborative? Does the collaborative exhibit characteristics generally associated with healthy, well-functioning, and resilient collaboratives?
2. What do participants need or recommend to improve the process?
3. To what extent do participants feel the project is meeting process, socio-economic, and ecological goals?
4. What challenges or disruptions affect collaborative performance and durability?

The SWERI administered an online survey to members of the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project (DCFP, but referred to henceforth as the Collaborative) in fall 2022.

Overall, there was strong agreement on most indicators that the collaborative process was working well and accomplishing goals, although open-ended responses indicated some disagreement. There was strong agreement that a representative cross-section of individuals who have a stake in the issues are involved in the Collaborative, although both tribal representatives and researchers were not represented in the survey responses. A strong majority of respondents agreed that there was a shared understanding of the purpose and key problems addressed by the CFLRP project, although fewer perceived agreement on strategies used to address those key problems. Most respondents' expectations were met in collaborating with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (Forest Service hereafter) through planning and implementation but not monitoring. Respondents strongly agreed that the collaborative process has helped build trust, relationships, and mutual respect. A strong majority of respondents trusted the group to achieve desired outcomes and believed that they and other partners are committed to the collaborative process. A strong majority of respondents indicated that leaders worked well across organizations and entities, helped maintain a common vision, and motivated others to work together. Participants agreed that there are opportunities to co-generate knowledge and share information, work toward adaptive management, and be flexible when there are personnel changes, although there was concern about flexibility in the face of landscape change such as wildfire.

Respondents felt that the Collaborative had adequate technical expertise, facilitation skills, and funds, but not adequate time to accomplish desired tasks. Respondents perceived that collaborative participants are held accountable and protocols are fair, equitable, and used appropriately. Participants largely understood how to give input to the Forest Service and thought the agency was responsive. Most respondents thought that the CLFRP project was moving toward achieving most of the desired collaborative, ecological, and socio-economic goals except for accomplishing more work on adjacent non-federal lands. Factors that facilitated achieving these goals included partners being committed to working together, strong leadership, and facilitation and coordination personnel.

Respondents indicated some areas where there was room for improvement and made pertinent recommendations. The Collaborative has dealt with several disruptions, such as frequent turnover, conflict among participants, limited wood products industry capacity, and the challenge of moving from direction-setting or planning to implementation. Commenters also noted the challenges of loss of trust, the COVID-19 pandemic, changes in leadership in the Collaborative, and inadequate Forest Service staffing. Four key recommendations emerged: 1) increase the Forest Service's capacity for engagement in the collaborative process; 2) embrace a diversity of participating interests and reinforce collaborative protocols to move forward; 3) increase and maintain consistent funding; and 4) increase the utilization of the best available science and science communication.

The SWERI will continue to engage in assessing collaborative health and performance of CFLRP projects, with the goal of gauging capacities and identifying areas for improvement.

Photo credit: Sarah Edwards, DCFP's Outreach Coordinator

Introduction

The Forest Landscape Restoration Act (FLRA) was passed in 2009 and established the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP). The purpose of the CFLRP was to "encourage the collaborative, science-based ecosystem restoration of priority forest landscapes"[1] through a competitive funding program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (Forest Service hereafter). In 2021, CFLRP coordinators, Forest Service personnel, and partners led a collaborative process to develop a CFLRP Common Monitoring Strategy consisting of ecological and socio-economic monitoring questions and indicators that will supplement local project multi-party monitoring plans and will be required for all newly authorized and reauthorized projects.[2]

One core component of the CFLRP Common Monitoring Strategy relates to monitoring collaborative governance.[3] While the CFLRP requires projects to collaborate throughout planning, implementation, and monitoring, 'collaboration' was not defined in the FLRA or CFLRP requirements, nor did the CFLRP provide specific guidelines by which collaborative groups convened and engaged in collaborative restoration throughout the life of the CFLRP project. This has resulted in a multitude of collaborative structures, processes, and practices implemented in diverse social and ecological contexts across the country. Also, collaborative groups are nested within and impacted by changes that occur within their group, external changes in social and ecological conditions, and a fluid institutional environment, all of which require groups to adjust and evolve their structures, practices, and processes (Beeton et al., 2022; Ulibarri et al., 2020). Yet, a systematic approach to monitoring and evaluating attributes of collaborative governance and resilience is lacking. Systemic evaluation could lead to better understanding of what factors promote or challenge collaboration across different contexts, help target what kinds of investments are needed, and where to maintain and enhance collaborative capacity.

To address this need, the Forest Service Washington Office requested assistance from the Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI) in developing and deploying an assessment tool to track collaborative governance. During the development of the CFLRP Common Monitoring Strategy, CFLRP coordinators from the Washington Office elicited feedback from CFLRP practitioners, CFLRP coordinators, and subject matter experts to identify monitoring questions, indicators, and available data sources. With respect to collaborative governance, partners wanted to address the question, how well is the CFLRP encouraging an effective and meaningful collaborative approach? CFLRP practitioners and coordinators expressed interest in documenting collaborative health, function, and resilience, as well as performance (perceived outcomes). CFLRP practitioners and coordinators also emphasized the need for a tool that is straightforward, not time-consuming, easy to administer, and longitudinal. To directly inform the components of the collaboration assessment, we incorporated stakeholder feedback and questions of interest developed while drafting the CFLRP Common Monitoring Strategy. Our objectives were to:

1. Develop a rigorous, systematic, and longitudinal assessment of collaborative governance that is grounded in the science and practice of landscape-scale collaborative forest restoration.
2. Support program-wide evaluation of collaborative progress and performance, and report on findings to Forest Service staff and Congress.
3. Facilitate project-level engagement, reporting, and peer-learning to inform local collaborative work and adaptive management.
4. Contribute to the theory and practice of collaborative governance through the synthesis of findings and lessons learned.

The SWERI administered the collaborative governance assessment—an online survey—to the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project CFLRP, which is comprised of the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project Collaborative (henceforth the Collaborative) and the Deschutes National Forest, in fall 2022. The report herein summarizes findings from the collaborative governance assessment. We have also integrated, where appropriate, information gathered from a worksheet completed by key Collaborative participants on the Collaborative context. See Appendix 1 for a report brief summarizing our findings. We briefly highlight the approach, followed by a baseline assessment of findings and document recommendations from respondents to improve the collaborative process.

Approach

We developed an online survey to assess:

1. What are the structural and functional dynamics of the collaborative? Does the collaborative exhibit characteristics generally associated with healthy, well-functioning, and resilient collaboratives?

[1] PL 111-11 CFLRP Authorizing legislation - https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/110th-congress/senate-report/370/1
[2] CFLRP National Core Monitoring Strategy - https://www.fs.usda.gov/restoration/documents/cflrp/CMS-Fact-Sheet-final-20221013.pdf
[3] Here, we define governance as "the system of institutions, including rules, laws, regulations, policies, and social norms, and organizations involved in governing environmental resource use and/or protection" (Chaffin et al. 2014).

2. To what extent do participants feel the project is meeting process, socio-economic, and ecological goals?
3. What challenges or disruptions affect collaborative performance and durability?
4. What do participants need or recommend to improve the process?

Framework

The survey was structured using concepts from an integrative collaborative governance framework (Emerson et al., 2012), resilience and adaptability literature (Emerson and Gerlak, 2014; Folke et al., 2005; Gupta et al., 2010), and empirical findings from the first 10 years of the CFLRP (Beeton et al., 2022; Butler and Schultz, 2019; McIntyre and Schultz, 2020; Schultz et al., 2018).

Collaboration dynamics – To assess collaboration dynamics, we operationalized the Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance (Emerson et al., 2012). The framework incorporates multiple components of collaborative governance that are grounded in collaborative practice, link collaboration dynamics to socio-economic and ecological outcomes, and promote assessment of collaboratives across settings and time. The components include principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action (Emerson et al., 2012).

Principled engagement refers to ensuring the right people are involved, i.e., a representative cross-section of people and entities who have a stake in the issue. Principled engagement also emphasizes the principles of open and inclusive communication and negotiation, where individuals with diverse perspectives and knowledge work together to identify shared problems, agree on strategies to solve those problems, and agree on the purpose or scope of the collaborative.

Shared motivation refers to the interpersonal and relational elements of collaborative dynamics. Shared motivation includes the sub-components mutual trust, understanding, and commitment. It is often referred to as social capital, or the "glue" that holds groups together through networks, norms, rules, and trust that promote collective action (Pelling and High, 2005). This glue is crucial for effective collaboration; social capital is built through investments in social relationships and can be expressed through mutual commitment of individuals and groups to common collaborative goals.

Capacity for joint action comprises four sub-components: leadership, knowledge and learning, resources, and institutional arrangements (Emerson and Gerlak, 2014). Leadership is essential for managing collaboratives, and leaders can fill many roles including convener, sponsor, public advocate, facilitator, and others. They are important for: building trust, sensemaking, bringing people together, initiating partnerships, motivating people to work together, compiling, generating, and disseminating knowledge, developing visions of and support for change, and managing conflict (Folke et al., 2005).

In a collaborative setting, participants should work together to co-create and co-develop shared understanding and knowledge through social learning; knowledge and information should be equally accessible to all members of the collaborative; and learning and knowledge should be used to inform flexible, adaptive management (Emerson and Gerlak, 2014). Social learning occurs through repeated interactions and joint problem-solving among participants. It emphasizes testing, monitoring, and reevaluating participants' assumptions and understanding of ecosystem responses and feedbacks to learn and adapt management actions (Folke et al., 2005; Lebel et al., 2010; Sharma-Wallace et al., 2018). Collaboratives often pool and share resources to accomplish tasks and get work done. These can include funding, personnel, science and technical expertise, facilitation, and coordination.

Institutional arrangements are the processes, protocols, and structures needed to manage collaboration over time, i.e., the rules of the game. Collaborative structures, processes, and protocols should be clearly understood, transparent, perceived as fair and equitable, and include mechanisms of accountability (Emerson et al., 2012; Gupta et al., 2010; Stern and Coleman, 2015). Capacity needs change through time, and the relative amount of these four capacity types is contingent upon the local context — e.g., history of conflict, people involved, purpose and objectives of the group, among others (Imperial et al., 2016).

Perceived outcomes – Our assessment focuses both on perceived "process" outcomes (e.g., did the collaborative process reduce conflict, or increase the ability to plan at a landscape scale?) and socio-economic and environmental outcomes. The outcome metrics chosen for evaluation were derived from several sources: the intent of the FLRA of 2009 and the CFLRP, project proposals, and conversations with local, regional, and national CFLRP coordinators while developing the Common Monitoring Strategy.

Challenges or disruptions that affect collaborative performance and durability – Disruptions—i.e.,

personnel turnover, legal or policy changes, and biophysical disturbances like wildfires or insect outbreaks—can happen at any time. These disruptions may impact collaborative progress and performance, and/or force groups to adapt. We developed a list of common challenges that CFLRP projects and other landscape-scale forest collaboratives reported in: 1) breakout group discussions and focus group sessions at the 2020 SWERI Cross-boundary landscape restoration workshop (SWERI, 2020) and the 2020 Idaho forest collaborative shared stewardship workshops; 2) the 2020 CFLRP Collaboration Indicator Survey administered by the National Forest Foundation[4]; and 3) a survey administered to Forest Service staff engaged in 2010 and 2012 CFLRP projects (Schultz et al., 2018). Identifying current challenges or disruptions that CFLRP projects are grappling with can support strategic investment toward solutions to maintain collaborative performance and durability.

Needs or recommendations to improve the process – We captured respondents' perspectives on needs and recommendations to improve the collaborative process by including open-ended survey questions.

Data Collection and Analysis

We developed a standardized survey in the online survey tool Qualtrics that consisted of 21, mostly closed-ended statements using a Likert scale. SWERI piloted the assessment with and elicited feedback from the Northern Blues All-Lands Restoration Partnership and Northern Blues CFLRP project participants (n=37), as well as participants of the Colorado Front Range CFLRP (n=3) in FY21 (Beeton et al., 2022).

In FY22, SWERI and the Forest Service held regionally focused webinars to introduce the assessment and identify key points of contact for each newly authorized and reauthorized project to help with recruiting participants, scheduling the assessment, and identifying project-specific questions of interest that were appended to the standardized survey, which is outlined in our standard operating procedures document.[5] Drawing on experience from Northern Blues and conversations with the next round of CFLRP projects rolling out the survey, SWERI developed a menu of 15 possible appended questions that the projects could add to the end of the standard survey to capture additional information of interest to the project. These questions addressed collaborative structure, participation and engagement, general expectations, successes, and challenges, and acceptance of wildfire mitigation and management techniques. The points of contact also identified key informants to complete a group interview or worksheet to answer questions about collaborative function that provided context for the interpretation of results. These questions included information on collaborative governance structure, rules for participation, dispute resolution processes, defining partnership vision, methods of collaboration with the Forest Service on planning, implementation, and monitoring, and a brief history of the collaborative. The initial survey results were presented to each CFLRP project to give survey respondents the opportunity to participate in an open discussion and provide feedback for this final report.

The Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project program manager provided support in recruiting participants and administering the survey through the Collaborative listserv in November 2022. The survey was open for 8 weeks to accommodate winter holidays and closed in January 2023. We received 38 usable responses, representing 45% of the email recipients.[6] We used the statistical software program Statistical Software for Social Sciences (SPSS) to document mean responses and variation in responses. Open-ended questions were analyzed using a thematic analysis (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Small sample sizes prohibited further statistical analyses, though this will be possible when more data has been collected.

Findings

Our results are organized as follows. The first section includes responses related to respondents' affiliations, motivations for being involved in the CFLRP project, level of engagement, and the degree to which respondents felt the project was collaborative. We then provide a description of findings related to collaboration dynamics (i.e., **principled engagement**, **shared motivation**, and **capacity for joint action**). We provide a short description of each collaboration dynamic construct in italics to orient the reader. We follow with findings on perceived outcomes, disruptions that are challenging to collaborative progress and performance, and recommendations to improve the process. In Appendix 2, we present results from the appended question set that was developed in coordination with key points of contact affiliated with the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project CFLRP. For scale items (e.g., strongly disagree to strongly agree, progress scales), figures depict the percentage of survey participants that somewhat agree to

[4] https://www.nationalforests.org/assets/pdfs/Collaboration-Indicator-Survey-Results-2020-publish.pdf
[5] https://cfri.box.com/s/hfu5cdk599j5gp5ixphm2qj7gdp4h1ef
[6] Two respondents appeared to have taken the survey twice. All their responses were included because not all respondents opted to include their email addresses and thus it could not be discerned if other respondents took the survey more than once.

strongly agree. This was done for consistency in visualization and ease of interpretation. For clarity, we describe majority or strong majority results as greater than or equal to 60% agreement and slight majority as greater than 50% agreement.

Introductory questions

The majority of participants were private citizens (24%) or represented non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (21%) or the Forest Service (16%) (Figure 1). There were no respondents representing tribes or university or research entities, despite their inclusion on the steering committee, which consisted of representatives from the forest products industry, tribes, local government, state and federal agencies, private landholders, groups involved in environmental issues, community wildfire protection, watershed protection, recreation, and research, and at-large members (DCFP charter). The most frequently reported motivations for being involved in the CFLRP project were to restore forest resiliency (63% of respondents), reduce community wildfire risk (42%), improve relationships and trust (39%), and protect/restore fish and wildlife habitat (32%) (Figure 2). Nearly all respondents were moderately (43%) or highly (51%) engaged in the CFLRP project (Figure 3). Those respondents who reported still being engaged in the CFLRP project recorded an average of just over 7 years of engagement.

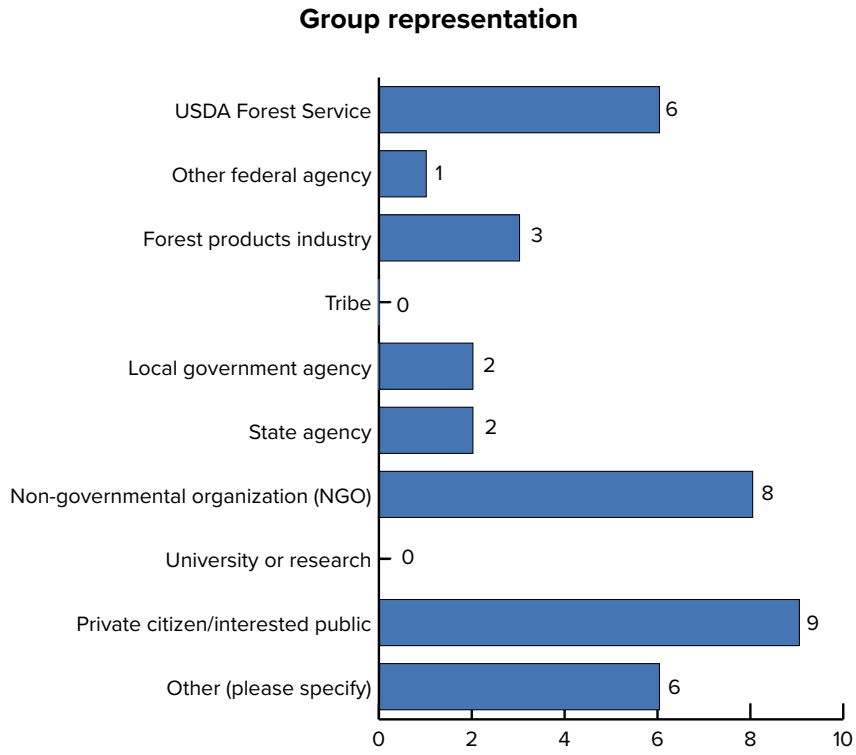

Figure 1: Respondents' self-identified representation with associated organizations.

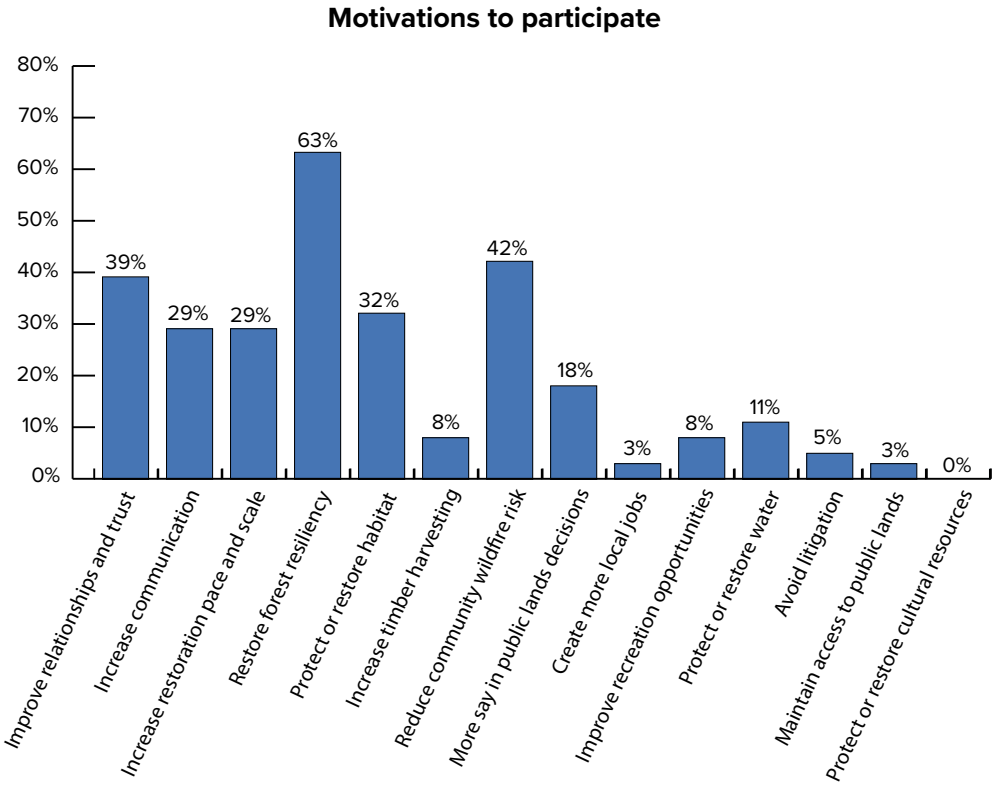

Figure 2: Percentage of respondents who identified the associated motive as reason for their participation in the collaborative. Note – respondents were able to select multiple motives.

We asked respondents to reflect on the degree to which they thought the CFLRP project was collaborative (on a scale from not collaborative at all to very collaborative), which we defined in the survey as:

> *Collaboration occurs when multiple parties come together to address problems that could not be achieved by acting alone. Effective collaboration should typically include: inclusive and diverse stakeholder interaction throughout the process; venues for open communication and negotiation about values, interests, and appropriate management actions; and opportunities for social learning.*

A strong majority of respondents (73%) indicated the CFLRP project has been collaborative to very collaborative (Figure 4).

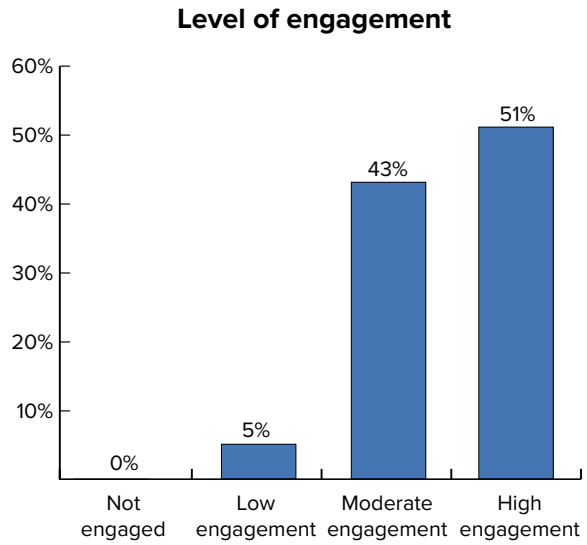

Figure 3: Percent of respondents who rated their involvement in this project as "Not engaged," "Low engagement," "Moderate engagement" or "High engagement."

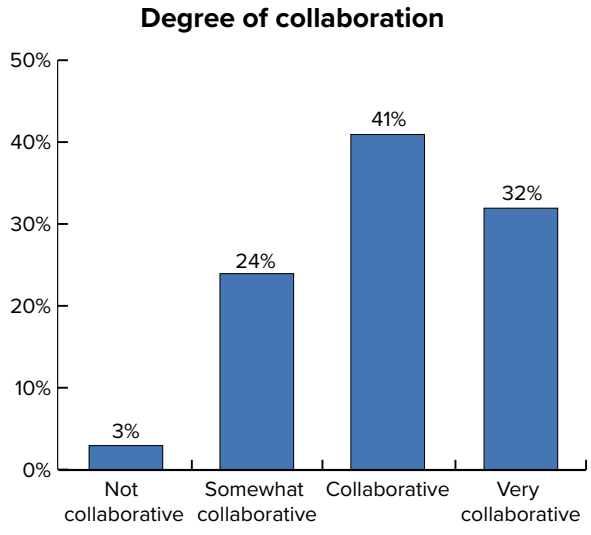

Figure 4: Percentage of respondents who reported this project to be "Not collaborative," "Somewhat collaborative," "Collaborative" or "Very collaborative."

Principled engagement

Principled engagement refers to having the right people involved in iterative and inclusive dialogue to determine shared problems, identify shared strategies to solve problems, and agree to the shared purpose of the project.

A strong majority of respondents (85%) agreed that a representative cross-section of individuals who have a stake in the issues and outcomes of the project are involved (Figure 5). The response rate for the survey was high overall, although no representatives from tribes and the research community completed the survey, so some of those perspectives may be missed. A strong majority of respondents agreed that participants worked together to identify shared interests and concerns (91%), and that the collaborative process created a neutral space for CFLRP participants to openly discuss controversial issues (84%) (Figure 5).

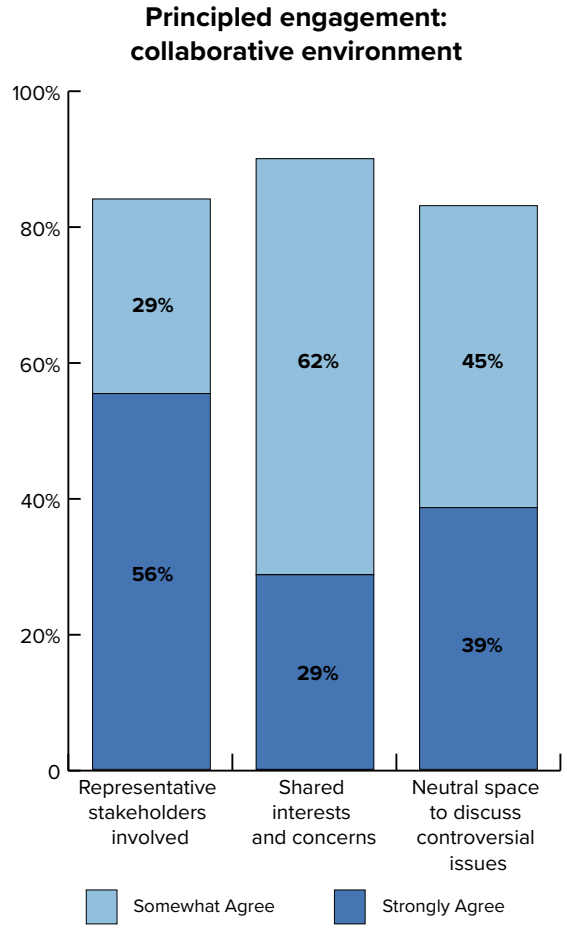

Figure 5: Percentage of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that representative stakeholders are involved, stakeholders have shared interests and concerns, and the collaborative is a neutral space to discuss controversial issues.

A strong majority of respondents indicated that participants had a shared understanding of the key problems that impact their landscape (71%) and the purpose of the CFLRP project (82%) (Figure 6). Half of the respondents (50%), however, thought that participants agreed on shared strategies to solve identified problems that impact the landscape (Figure 6).

Perceptions of collaboration between CFLRP participants and the Forest Service varied by project phase. A strong majority (69%) felt that collaboration met their expectations during the planning phase (e.g., environmental analysis and NEPA) (Figure 7). A slight majority (55%) agreed that their expectations are met during implementation (e.g., post-NEPA and operations), and a minority (40%) thought their expectations are met in monitoring (Figure 7).

Shared Motivation

Shared motivation refers to trust, mutual understanding, relationship-building, and commitment to the collaborative process.

A strong majority of participants agreed the collaborative process helped build trust (88%), personal and/or working relationships (94%), and mutual respect of others' positions and interests (93%) (Figure 8). A strong majority of participants trusted the group's ability to achieve desired actions and outcomes (82%) (Figure 8). There was high agreement that all parties are committed to the collaborative process: 97% agreed they are committed, 93% agreed the Forest Service staff are committed, and 85% agreed other stakeholders are committed (Figure 9).

Capacity for Joint Action

Capacity for joint action includes four components: collaborative leadership, knowledge and learning, resources, and institutional arrangements that support fair governance.

Leadership

Leadership is a critical component for collaborative governance. Leaders are needed to convene partners, communicate a shared vision, and motivate people to work together.

A strong majority of respondents agreed that the Collaborative had leaders who worked well with other people and organizations (87%), maintained and communicated a common vision and direction (84%), and motivated others to work together (75%) (Figure 10).

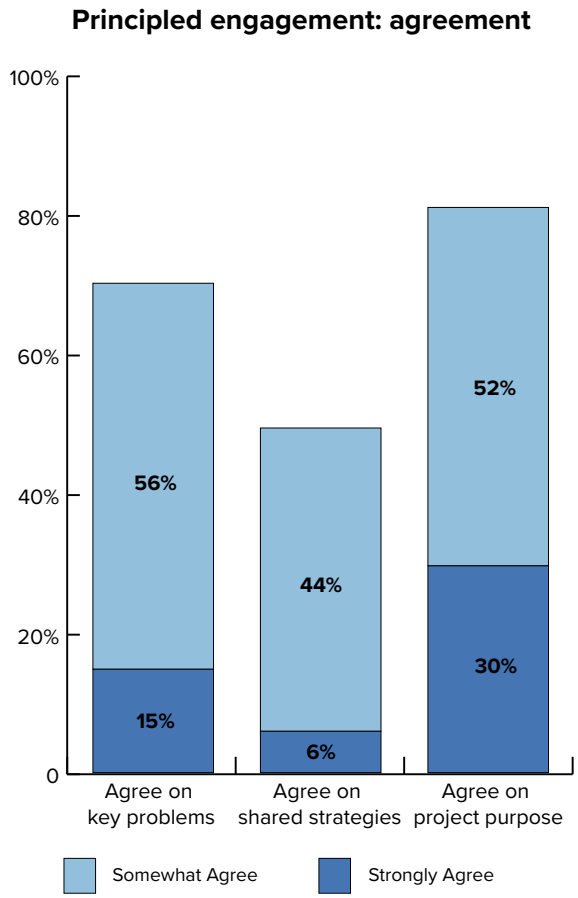

Figure 6: Percentage of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" on the key problems that impact the landscape, strategies to solve problems, and purpose of the collaborative.

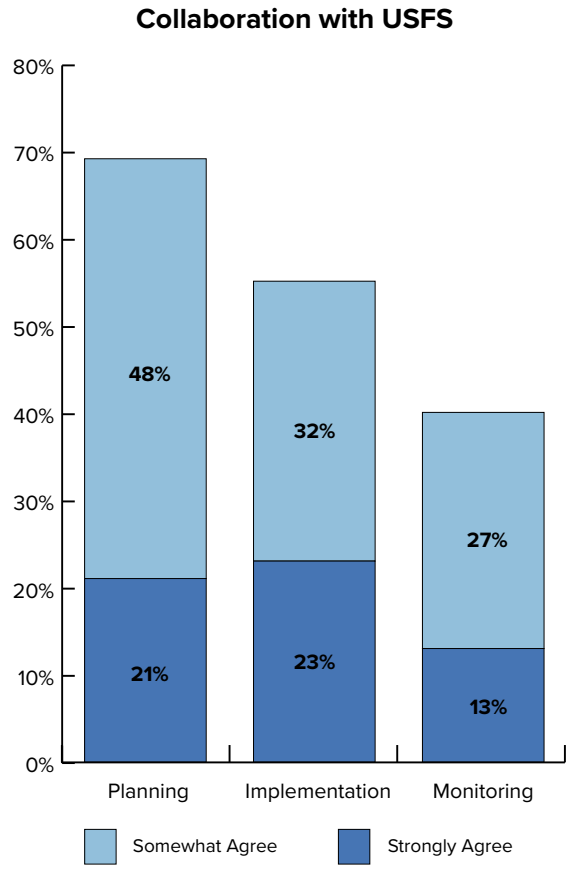

Figure 7: Percent of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that the USFS collaborates during planning, implementation, and monitoring stages.

Knowledge and Learning

Collaboratives should engage in a knowledge generation and social learning process for joint action. Knowledge should be co-produced, equally available to all partners, and be used to implement adaptive management.

A strong majority of respondents agreed that the CFLRP process provided opportunities to co-generate knowledge to learn and solve problems together (92%), and that knowledge and information are shared equally among participants (81%) (Figure 11). A majority also agreed that project participants are committed to informing adjustments to management practices (e.g., adaptive management) (72%) and had flexibility to alter course when the Collaborative changes (e.g., new faces, new priorities) (66%) (Figure 11). A slight majority (51%), however, thought that there was flexibility to alter course when landscape conditions change (e.g., wildfire) (Figure 11).

Resources

To accomplish tasks and get work done, collaboratives often pool and share resources, including funding, personnel time, technical expertise, and facilitation, which, in turn, can support buy-in.

A strong majority of participants agreed that the project had adequate funds (84%), technical expertise (84%), and skills to facilitate collaborative engagement activities (85%). Respondents perceived the most limiting resource to be time, with a minority (48%) agreeing that there was adequate time to dedicate to the CFLRP project (Figure 12).

Institutional Arrangements

Institutional arrangements are the rules of the game. They include processes, protocols, and structures needed to manage collaboration over time. They should be clearly understood, perceived as fair and equitable, and include accountability mechanisms within and between entities.

All survey respondents agreed that there are protocols (e.g., decision rules, charter, memoranda of understanding) in place that promoted accountability among CFLRP

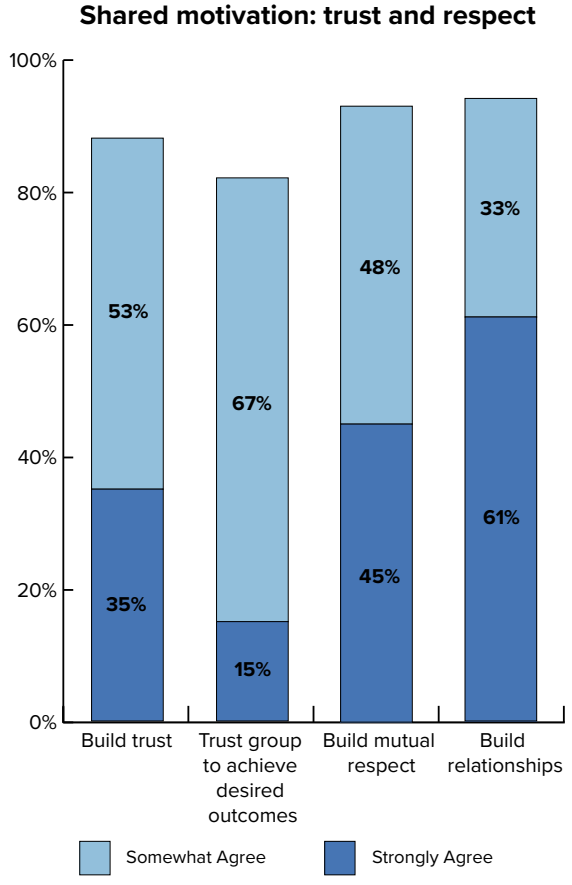

Figure 8: Percentage of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that the collaborative process has helped build trust, relationships, and mutual respect, as well as the extent to which participants trust the group to achieve desired outcomes.

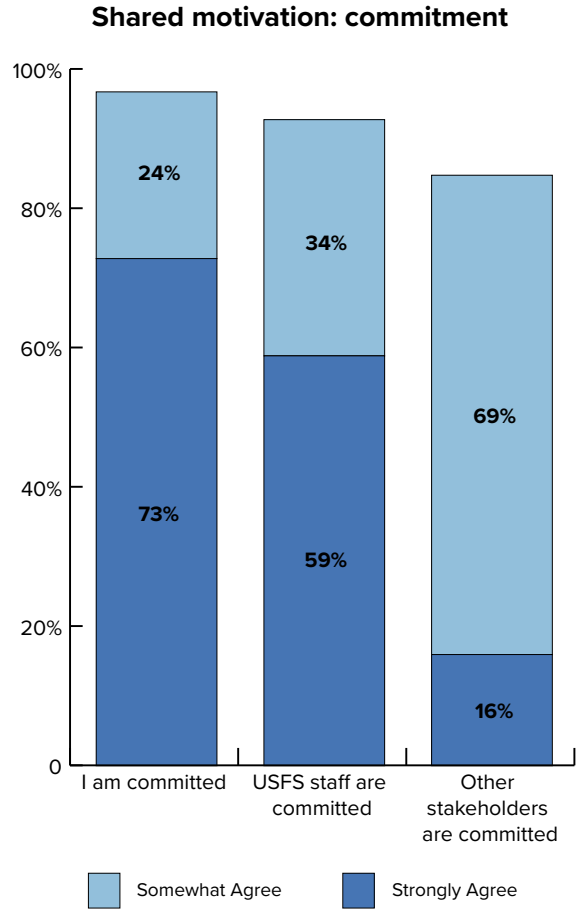

Figure 9: Percentage of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that they, the USFS, and other stakeholders are committed to the process.

participants, and a strong majority (80%) also agreed that these protocols promoted accountability between the Forest Service and CFLRP project participants (Figure 13). Similarly, a strong majority agreed these protocols are fair and equitable (90%), used appropriately (84%), and clearly understood (76%) (Figure 13).

A strong majority of respondents felt that project participants understood when and what collaborative input was useful to inform Forest Service decisions (67%), that the Forest Service was responsive to collaborative input (78%), and that the Forest Service was clear with CFLRP project participants about the decisions they made and why they made them (65%) (Figure 14).

Outcomes

We assessed perceived progress on process, socio-economic, and ecological outcomes for the Collaborative. The Deschutes CFLRP originally received funding in 2010 and was approved for an extension in 2020, so there have been 13 years of funding to influence outcomes.

All respondents agreed that the collaborative process has enhanced communication (Figure 15). A large majority also agreed that the collaborative process has minimized conflict (76%), enhanced decision making (79%), included diverse perspectives (78%), minimized litigation (70%), and enabled landscape-scale planning (76%) (Figure 15). A smaller majority (58%) thought that the collaborative process has enabled cross-boundary planning (Figure 15).

Key points of contact for the survey administration opted to also ask what factors contributed to the success of the CFLRP collaborative process. The most common response was that partners working together in good faith have been key for success (10 respondents). This included respecting others, working toward a shared goal, having open and frank conversations, and being committed to collaboration. For example, respondents noted:

> *[There has been] a real effort by all participants to work together towards solutions. It's not always easy to get on the same page, but over time this group has definitely seen the value of working together on our overall sets of goals vs working individually (and often against each other).*

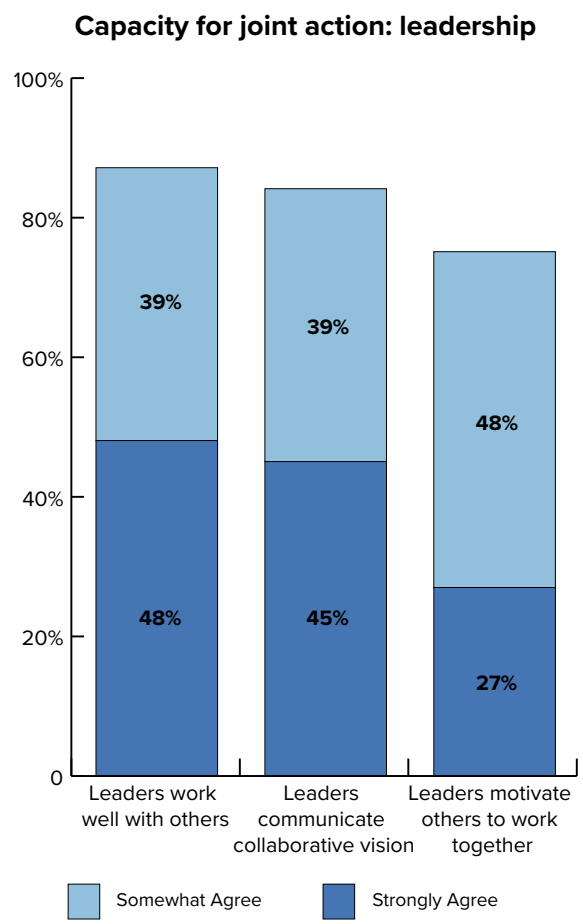

Figure 10: Percent of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that the leaders work well with others, communicate a common vision and direction, and motivate others to work together.

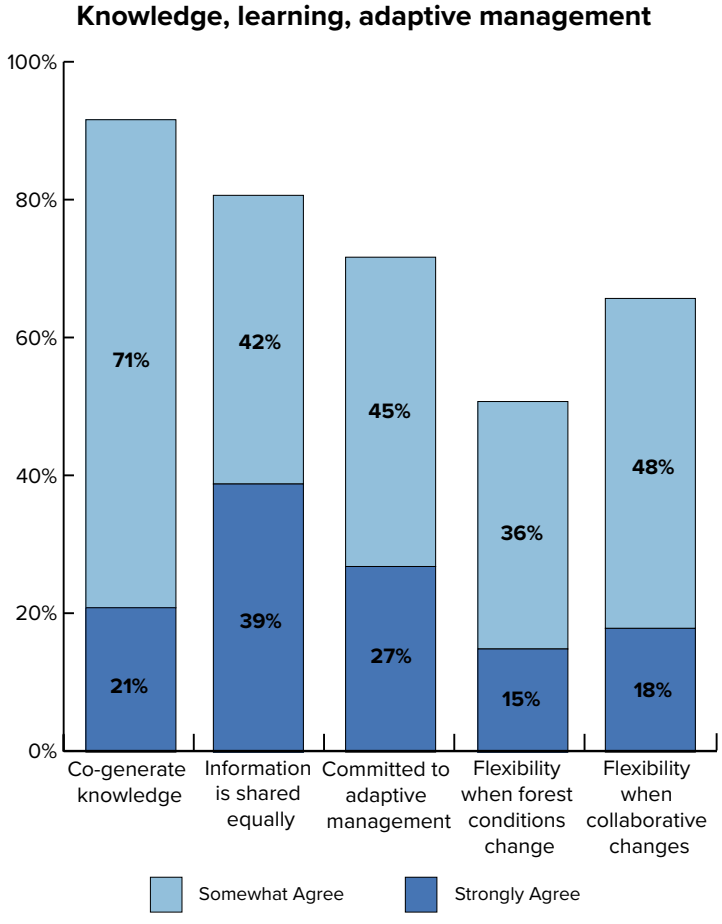

Figure 11: Percent of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that knowledge and information is co-generated by participants, shared equally, and used by participants to adjust management practices.

Pretty good group that respect each other and works well together although there are a couple of outliers that are very vocal on their personal perspectives. I feel that too much time is spent reacting to these comments; however, that is the collaborative inclusion process.

Many respondents also cited strong leadership from both the Forest Service and Collaborative and having the right personnel involved, including a professional facilitator and coordinator, as key to collaborative success. Respondents specifically observed strong leadership from the forest supervisor, district rangers, resource managers, county commission, city council, The Nature Conservancy, and the Collaborative, indicating that several of these leaders provided key grant writing skills. Additional individual respondents pointed out that a clear understanding of how to make recommendations to the Forest Service and bringing in scientists for presentations and field trips to stay updated on the best available science were also contributing factors to the project's success. One noted that they thought the Collaborative was more successful in the past than the present, with more substantive influence on Forest Service projects and outcomes previously.

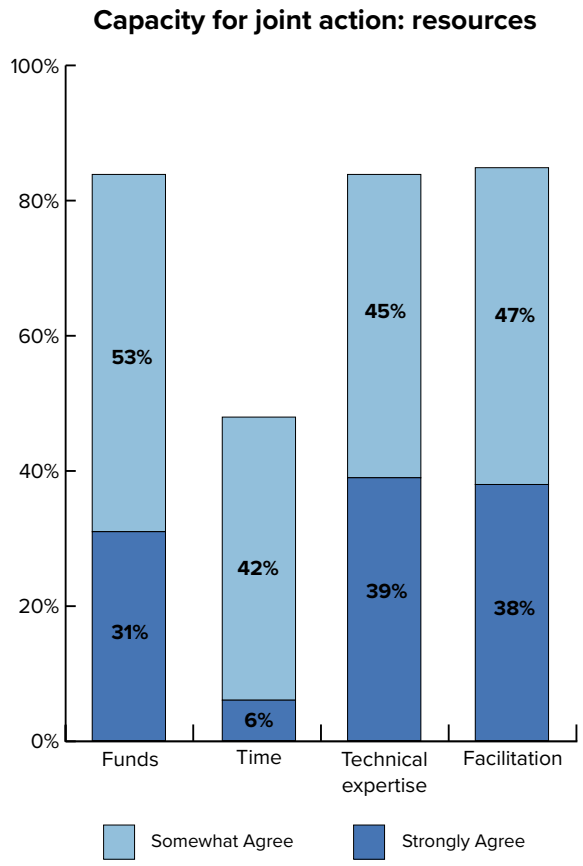

Figure 12: Percent of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that the collaborative has adequate: funds, time, technical expertise, and facilitation skills to accomplish work.

Most respondents similarly agreed that progress was being made in achieving many ecological objectives. A majority agreed that the CFLRP project had made moderate to substantial progress on improving or maintaining the pace and scale of restoration (83%), reducing fuel hazard through treatments (e.g., thinning and fuel breaks) (85%), improving the use of planned or unplanned wildfire (e.g., prescribed or managed fire) (87%), improving or maintaining watershed function (e.g., aquatic habitat, water quality, soil productivity) (77%), and treatment or control of invasive aquatic or terrestrial species (70%) (Figure 16). Smaller majorities agreed that progress had been made on restoring old growth stands (67%) and improving habitat for focal species or species of conservation concern (59%).

Respondents indicated that the CFLRP project progress toward socio-economic goals was more mixed. A strong majority agreed that the CFLRP had made moderate to substantial progress on reducing community wildfire risk (78%) and offsetting treatment costs with restoration byproducts (e.g., woody biomass; 63%) (Figure 17). A smaller majority agreed that there had been progress made in

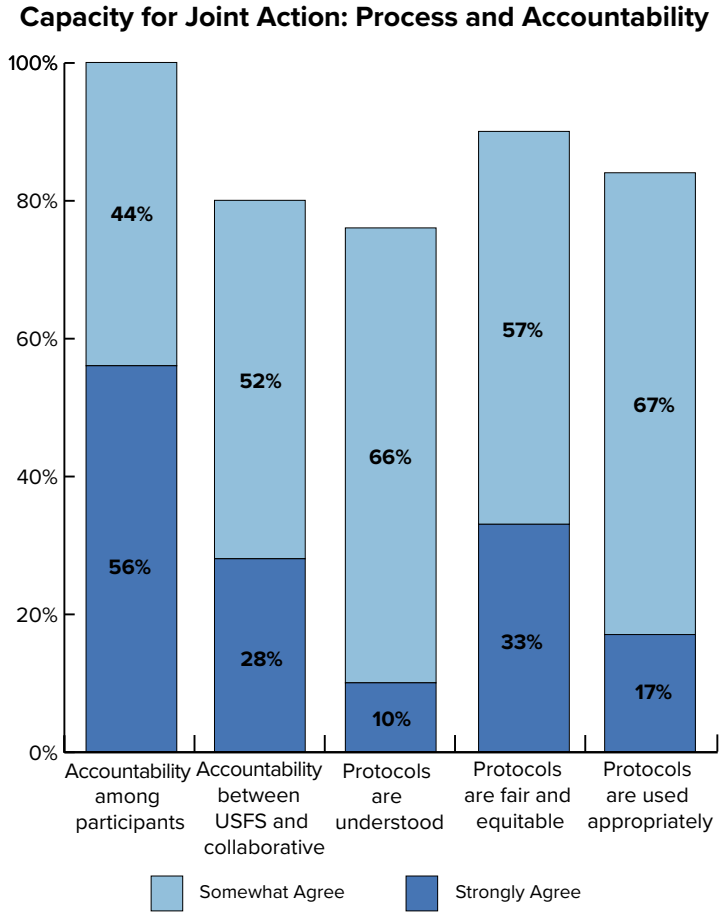

Figure 13: Percent of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that protocols promote accountability among participants, between USFS and the collaborative, and that protocols are understood, fair and equitable, and are used appropriately.

supporting local employment or training opportunities (e.g., forest products industry, youth/citizen science; 52%). In contrast, only a small minority (22%) agreed that the project had been accomplishing more work on adjacent lands under non-federal jurisdiction (Figure 17).

Disruptions

We developed a list of common challenges CFLRP project participants and other landscape-scale forest collaboratives reported in: 1) breakout group discussions and focus group sessions at the 2020 SWERI Cross-boundary Landscape Restoration Workshop (SWERI, 2020) and the 2020 Idaho forest collaborative shared stewardship workshop; 2) the 2020 CFLRP Collaboration Indicator Survey administered by the National Forest Foundation[5]; and 3) a survey administered to Forest Service staff engaged in 2010 and 2012 CFLRP projects (Schultz et al., 2018). Based on that list, for the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project CFLRP, frequent personnel turnover (71% of respondents reported this was a moderate to significant challenge) and conflict among participants (70%) were the most substantial challenges faced at the time of this survey (Figure 18). Around half of respondents also thought limited wood products industry capacity (50%) and moving from direction-setting or planning to implementation (57%) were also challenges (Figure 18).

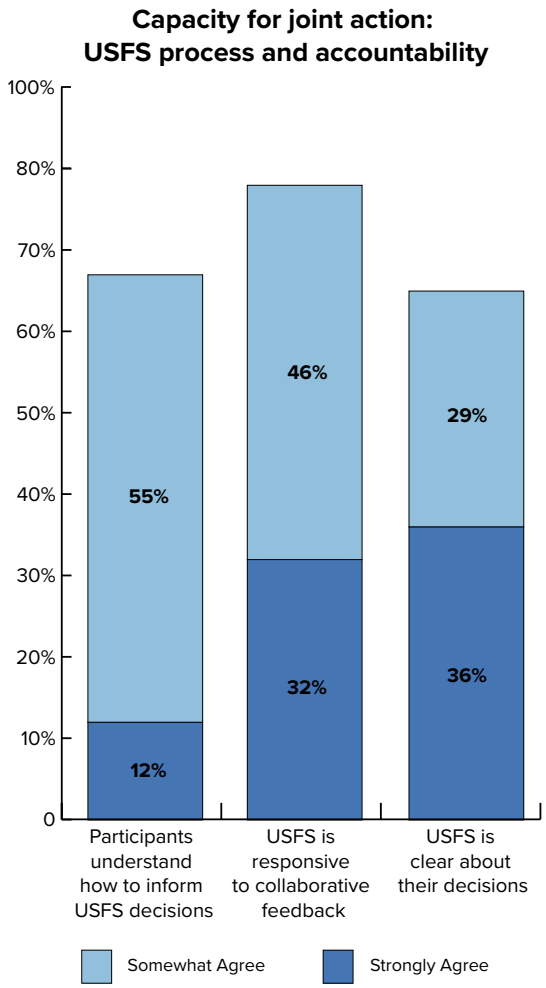

Figure 14: Percent of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that they understand how to inform USFS decisions, the USFS is responsive to feedback, and the USFS is clear about their decisions.

We also asked respondents what additional disruptions have impacted the collaborative performance and durability. The most common responses (5 respondents) were perceptions among respondents that other collaborative members were not meeting respondents' expectations, which had led to a loss of trust and lack of effective collaboration, although respondents did not agree on who was at fault. Two separate respondents noted:

> *The Forest Service logged large diameter trees, which was against our recommendations.*

> *One group has made misleading public statements that have eroded some of our public trust.*

Other disruptions highlighted by respondents included the COVID-19 pandemic (2 respondents), and changes in leadership within the collaborative (2 respondents). An additional 2 respondents commented on the lack of adequate staffing and hiring within the Forest Service, which slowed down the NEPA process:

> *NEPA was not intended to be a multi-year if not decade+ barrier to action. It was meant to provide a process for reflection and public input on 'major federal actions.' The incredible quagmire NEPA has become is a disgrace to the regulation's intent and a major barrier to action.*

Individuals also noted the disruption of wildfires and a hesitancy to shift from planning to action:

> *[There is a] reluctance to make or support decisions for action on projects. Some members [are] very cautious of converting discussions into actions on the ground or in support of Forest Service proposals.*

In response to these challenges, several respondents said that the Collaborative took action. The most commonly received response (5 respondents) was new staffing — new leaders, more NEPA planners, filling open Forest Service planning and analysis positions, restaffing an outreach coordinator position, and new representatives from collaborating interest groups. For example, one respondent noted:

[5] CFLRP Collaboration survey administered by the National Forest Foundation — www.nationalforests.org/assets/pdfs/Collaboration-Indicator-Survey-Results-2020-publish.pdf

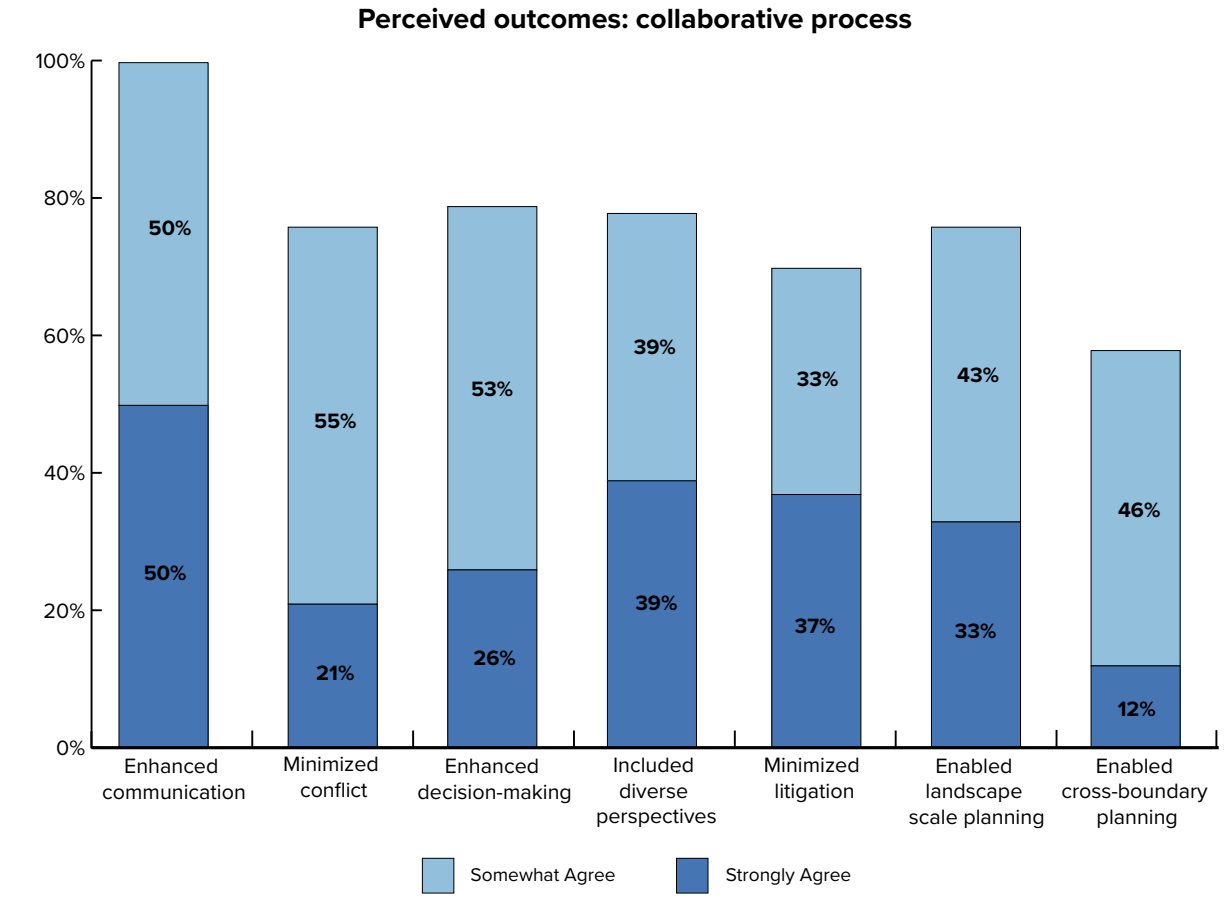

Figure 15: Percent of respondents who either “Somewhat Agree” or “Strongly Agree” that the collaborative process has impacted the function and capacity of the collaborative.

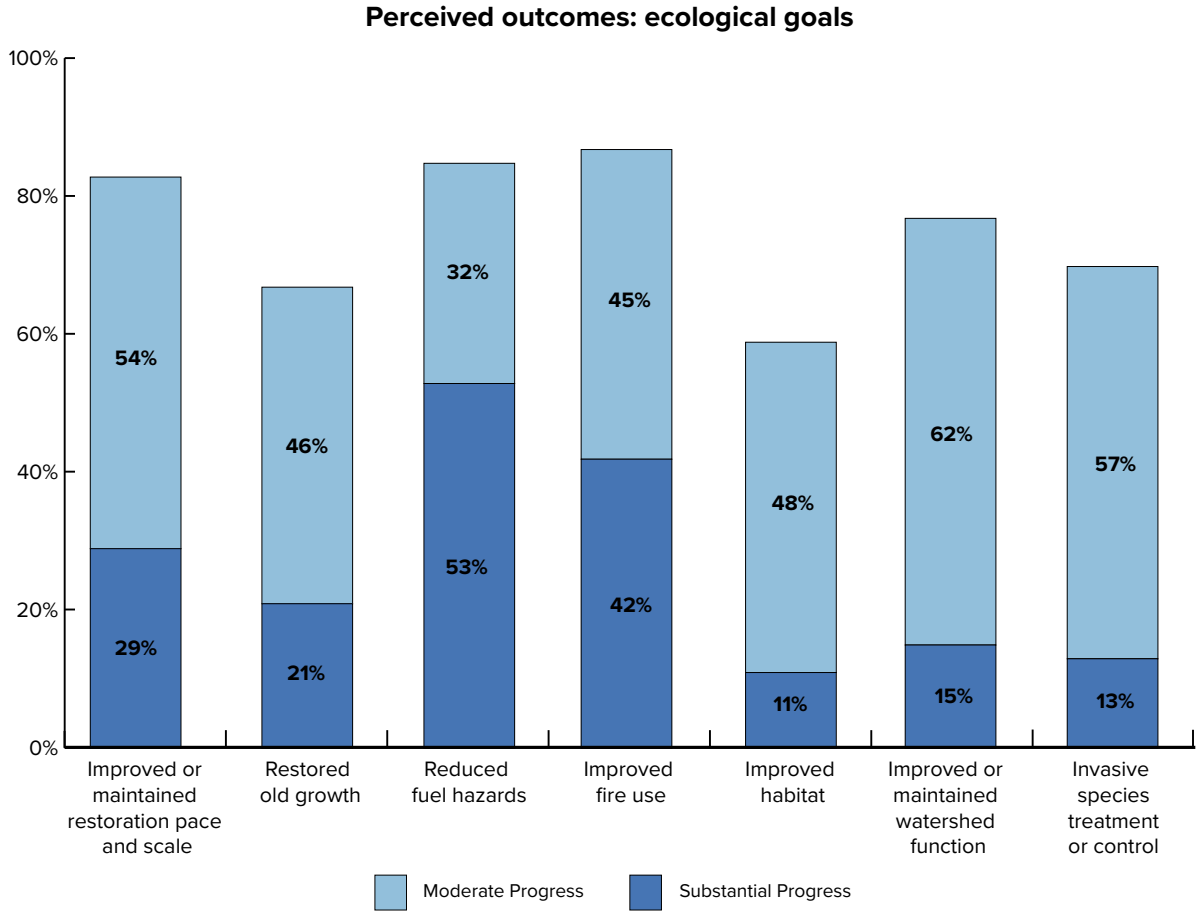

Figure 16: Percent of respondents who reported “Moderate progress” or “Substantial progress” towards ecological goals.

The collaborative would like to operate at a Forest scale (beyond the CFLR boundary) and settling on a program of work and focus items going forward is important. Those items also need to incorporate the diverse perspectives on the collaborative. With a new facilitator and staffing, things are rapidly improving.

Other responses the Collaborative took to address disruptions and challenges was pursuing additional funding (3 respondents) and increasing engagement and constructive listening with key stakeholders (3 respondents). This increased collaboration with stakeholders included working with the forest products industry and shared learning with the Central Oregon Fire Management Services on how to scale up prescribed fire. Two additional respondents said that disruptions were tackled through revising governance plans, including restructured leadership and sub committees and rewriting the charter to "clarify language about active membership and the consequences for working to undermine the DCFP." Others felt that the Collaborative had not addressed disruptions at all or done enough (3 respondents).

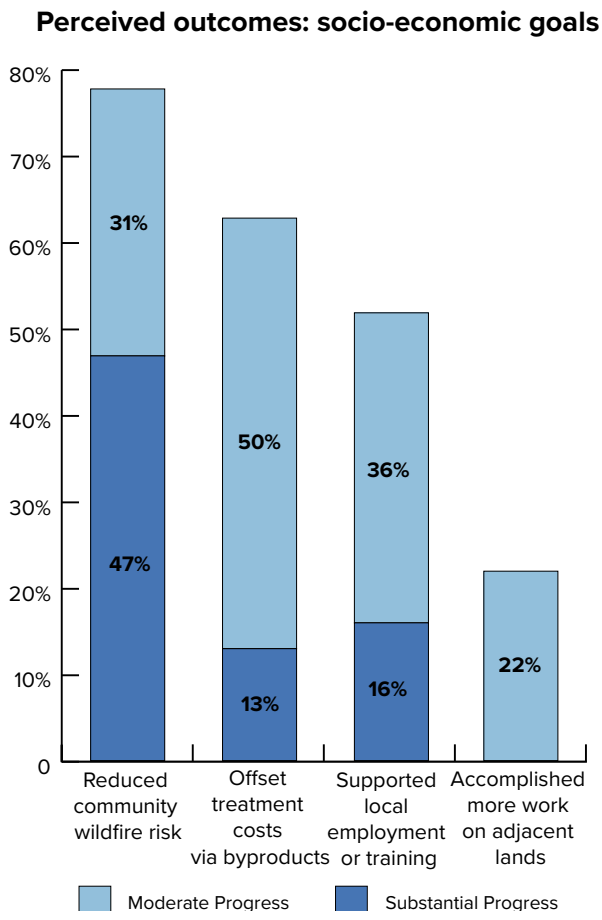

Figure 17: Percent of respondents who reported "Moderate progress" or "Substantial progress" towards socio-economic goals.

Recommendations to Improve the Collaborative Process

We asked participants to suggest recommendations to improve collaborative process, durability, and performance. On average, just over 41% of respondents included answers to open-ended questions throughout the survey. Based on both open-ended and quantitative survey responses reported herein and the Collaborative governance worksheet, we identified four key themes for improvement. These recommendations included: 1) increase the Forest Service's capacity for engagement in the collaborative process; 2) embrace a diversity of participating interests and reinforce collaborative protocols to move forward; 3) increase and maintain consistent funding; and 4) increase the utilization of the best available science and science communication.

Increase stakeholder participation, engagement, and outreach

Respondents suggested several changes in the Forest Service's approach to the CFLRP project that could improve outcomes. The Forest Service experiences frequent turnover, and staff were not as available or informed about the Collaborative's efforts (particularly line officers and resource specialists) as respondents would like to see. Other respondents argued for the Forest Service to aggressively reduce fire risk and add more prescribed fire to the landscape through the expanded hiring of fire-related positions or for the streamlining of NEPA with a clear input process that reduces the length of time to complete. Several comments reflect these suggestions:

Continuity and availability of USFS staff has been a concern. Also, there is a lack of buy-in and understanding at the implementation level in the agency.

The USFS needs to aggressively: 1) Increase utilization of forest products, 2) Rapidly reduce ground and ladder fuels, 3) Prioritize projects close to the WUI, 4) Enhance forest infrastructure for fire resilience, and 5) Hire full-time, benefited and paid fire teams.

One respondent also felt that the Forest Service treated the national CFLR program as an internal agency program and a stronger connection between national CFLRP and the Collaborative would be beneficial (see Appendix 2). Additionally, while most respondents' expectations for collaborating with the Forest Service were met during planning and implementation, only a minority had their expectations met during monitoring. The most limiting resource mentioned in the survey was time to engage in Collaborative activities (Figure 12), so increasing Forest

Service personnel and facilitating existing personnel to more fully engage with the Collaborative could help achieve project goals.

Embrace a diversity of participating interests and reinforce collaborative protocols to move forward

The open-ended responses throughout the survey reflected disagreements among Collaborative participants about whose views were excluded or overrepresented and the perceived willingness of fellow participants to substantially collaborate, and 70% of quantitative respondents thought conflict among participants was a challenge (Figure 18). Several respondents called for reestablishing trust through enhancing respect and better listening to what they considered to be marginalized interests. For example, one respondent emphasized that the Deschutes National Forest experienced high recreation levels, but few recreation interests were represented in the Collaborative in terms of funding and numbers of participating representatives. Another felt that collaborative members simply aligned with their own interests without putting substantial effort into collaboration. While overall ratings of leadership were high (Figure 10), two respondents did suggest changes in leadership to achieve more commitment to collaboration and proactive planning with the Forest Service. There were differing opinions on the need to increase pace and scale of restoration, with some emphasizing the need to accelerate, and another arguing that this push reduced quality and trust (see Appendix 2 for additional appended question responses). Respondents were split in their views of environmental groups' participation in the Collaborative, with some respondents arguing that they were powerful, litigious, and polarizing, while others believed that these groups were ignored and not listened to or respected. For example, when asked for recommendations, respondents noted:

> *The environmental organizations involved don't seem as committed to collaboration as is required. They obstruct*

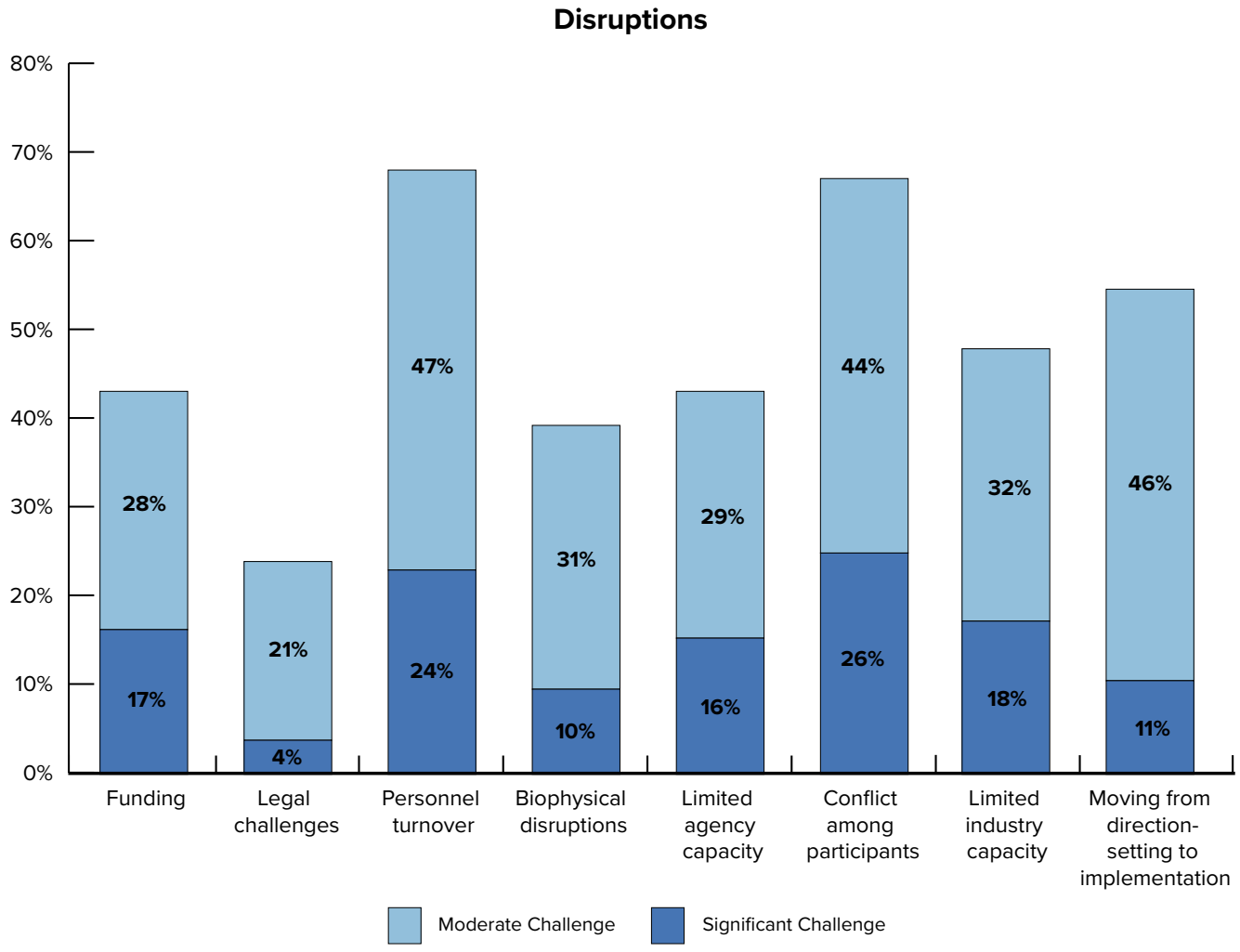

Figure 18: Percent of respondents who reported disruptions posed "Moderate challenges" or "Substantial challenges" to collaborative performance and durability.

the consensus development process, changing positions during the process, then litigating the managements plans anyway! Lack of good faith upsets the entire process. They have also been subverting the process by going to the press for their side of the issue instead of working through the collaborative process.

The environmental community is not listened to or valued.

Others noted the presence of collaborative protocols and how these were being rewritten and reinforced so that they are easier to understand and create a neutral space for speaking. A few respondents argued for the need for the Collaborative to hold key players accountable, including the Forest Service who they perceived to not be meeting priorities outside of logging, or other participants who they perceived to be disrupting the collaborative process:

Make sure people think about and actually use the collaborative protocols. They're kinda background — people signed them ages ago, but I bet not very many people have read them recently. They're supposed to be creating a different kind of space; one in which people can feel safer to speak their piece.

The collaborative is out of touch with the community. It has become a pro-logging echo chamber. Our city council unanimously voted to take a position counter to the collaborative and the collaborative still can't grasp that here is a disconnect. The collaborative has tons of communication but fails miserably to hold the USFS accountable when they fail to accomplish most priorities other than logging. The collaborative has functionally become a rubber stamp for USFS projects. Collaboration in Oregon had its honeymoon period ten years ago, it's no longer working.

Several respondents argued that in previous responses to disruptions, the Collaborative increased engagement and constructive listening with stakeholders and revised governance plans (see "Disruptions" section above). Updated and reiterated collaborative protocols could be the foundation for these discussions on different perceptions of priorities to help push toward more collaborative outcomes.

Increase and maintain consistent funding

Although 84% of quantitative respondents thought there was adequate funding for work, several respondents in open-ended comments argued that the Collaborative could use more and consistent funding. One respondent suggested finding public/private partnerships to accelerate the pace and scale of the Collaborative's work, where another emphasized funding scientific expertise support (see next recommendation) and outreach to multiple local communities. Another respondent argued that the Collaborative should have more significant input in determining which specific projects utilize the CFLRP funds. Similarly, when asked to reflect on how previous collaborative challenges were addressed, several respondents noted that increased and consistent funding helped (see "Disruptions" section above). Several comments reflect these suggestions:

Provide funding for the collaborative at a level where it can focus on functioning instead of fundraising.

Fund technical expertise for collaboratives to engage in landscape prioritization, tradeoffs assessments and strive towards true adaptive management cycles.

Increase the utilization of the best available science and science communication

Other respondents suggested increasing the use of updated scientific information and implementation monitoring to inform future project actions and garner public support. Respondents argued that increased engagement with scientists and better science communication to collaborative members, stakeholders, and community members would better inform the management accomplished and the rationale behind it. This engagement with the best available science and researchers would help set up systems for prioritizing areas for restoration and enable the collaborative to move toward adaptive management. One respondent recommended:

Engagement of researchers to develop strategies that incorporate monitoring into adaptive management and consider tradeoffs in resource values at multiple scales in attempt to prioritize restoration implementation across landscapes.

Other Recommendations

One respondent noted the challenges of the pandemic that decreased field trip frequency and reduced the strength of relationships. They argued that there was new energy in the Collaborative that should continue to be harnessed.

Another noted that they were new to the Collaborative and would have appreciated a standardized "onboarding process" to better understand the Collaborative and the CFLR program.

One respondent argued that the Collaborative leadership should move the group toward functioning at a much broader, landscape scale:

The DCFP struggles to plan and engage at a landscape scale and instead focuses site-specifically (even stand and tree level) — a troubling perspective when the ask of the agency and other land managers is to analyze and manage at a more impactful and broader scale.

This sentiment was reflected in the minority (22%) that agreed that the project has been accomplishing more work on adjacent lands under non-federal jurisdiction (Figure 16).

Discussion and Conclusions

The Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI) deployed an online survey to the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project CFLRP, which includes the Deschutes National Forest and the DCFP Collaborative in fall 2022 to assess collaborative health, function, and resilience, as well as perceived outcomes of collaborative work. Specifically, we assessed: whether the CFLRP project exhibited characteristics generally associated with healthy, well-functioning, and resilient collaboratives; the extent to which the project has made progress on meeting process, socio-economic, and ecological outcomes; what challenges or disruptions affected collaborative performance and durability; and actionable recommendations to improve the collaborative process from respondents' perspectives. The assessment serves as the collaboration assessment for the CFLRP Common Monitoring Strategy (question #12).

Overall, there was strong agreement on most indicators that the collaborative process was working well and accomplishing goals, although open-ended responses indicated some disagreement. A strong majority (73%) of respondents thought the CFLRP process was collaborative overall. There was strong agreement that a representative cross-section of individuals who have a stake in the issues were involved in the Collaborative, although both tribal representatives and researchers were not represented in the survey responses despite the high overall response rate and their inclusion in the Collaborative's steering committee. Including a broad swath of participants can help strengthen the Collaborative's adaptive capacity by encompassing a diversity of interests, perspectives, capacities, and proposed solutions from a variety of partners and creating redundancies, making collaborative functioning more resilient (Beeton et al. 2022; Folke et al. 2005; Gupta et al. 2010).

Respondents strongly agreed that there was shared understanding of the purpose of the CFLRP project and key problems impacting the landscape, and that there was a neutral space to discuss difficult issues. A strong majority of respondents' expectations were met in collaborating with the Forest Service in planning, but a smaller majority's expectations were met during implementation, and only a minority's expectations were met during monitoring. Respondents also overwhelmingly agreed that the collaborative process helped build trust, relationships, and mutual respect. A strong majority of respondents trusted the group to achieve desired outcomes and believed that they and other partners were committed to the collaborative process. Open-ended comments indicated that the success the Collaborative has experienced so far was grounded in mutual respect and willingness to collaborate, although some respondents expressed concern that conflict between participating interests affected recent collaboration. Mutual commitment, especially among those with decision-making authority, is critical for collaborative durability. The Forest Service retains decision-making authority in treatment planning and implementation on Forest Service-managed land. The agency also gives substantial discretion in decision-making to local units; thus, it is often up to Forest Service unit-level line officers to make or not make collaboration a priority by providing staff, resources, etc. (Beeton et al. 2022).

There was high agreement that most aspects of capacity for joint action were strong. The perception of leadership was largely positive, with a strong majority of respondents indicating that leaders worked well across organizations and entities, helped maintain a common vision, and motivated others to work together. A strong majority of respondents also perceived knowledge co-production positively, agreeing that there were opportunities to co-generate knowledge and share information, work toward adaptive management, and be flexible when there were collaborative personnel changes. A strong majority of respondents felt that the Collaborative had adequate technical expertise, facilitation skills, and funds. There was also strong agreement that collaborative participants were held accountable and protocols were fair, equitable, and used appropriately, although some commented that protocols could be reinforced to reduce conflict. Participants also largely understood how to give input to the Forest Service and thought the Forest Service was responsive and clear in their decision-making.

A strong majority of respondents indicated that the CFLRP project was moving toward achieving most of the desired collaborative, ecological, and socio-economic goals, with a few exceptions. A smaller majority (58%) thought that the collaborative process has enabled cross-boundary planning, and only 22% thought that the project had been accomplishing more work on non-federal

adjacent lands. Comments also indicated a desire to move forward with large landscape-level planning and implementation. Just over half of respondents (52%) thought that progress had been made in supporting local employment or training opportunities. Several factors were identified as facilitating goal accomplishment, such as partners working together with commitment to collaboration to achieve shared goals, strong leadership from both the Forest Service and the Collaborative, and having professional facilitation and coordination.

Respondents indicated some areas where there was room for improvement. The primary limiting resource for the Collaborative was time, with only a minority agreeing that there was adequate time for participating. Expectations for collaboration with the Forest Service have not been met during the monitoring phase for most respondents, and some suggested adding a monitoring work group. Respondents were split in their perception that there was flexibility to alter course when landscape conditions change (such as after a wildfire) and that there was agreement on strategies to solve mutually identified problems.

The Collaborative has dealt with several disruptions, with most respondents indicating that frequent personnel turnover and conflict among participants were the most significant challenges. The majority also found that limited wood products industry capacity and moving from direction-setting or planning to implementation were challenging. Turnover in particular can undermine relationships and trust, slow progress, and lead to lost institutional knowledge (Beeton et al. 2022; Coleman et al., 2020). Collaborative engagement is often not part of primary job duties for agency staff; when combined with vacant positions and multiple, sometimes conflicting, mandates and priorities, agency staff may not have the capacity to engage to the extent that stakeholders expect or desire (Beeton et al. 2022). The impact of high turnover can be alleviated through redundancies and overlapping job duties to create continuity (Beeton et al. 2022). Qualitative comments also indicated that other collaborative participants were not meeting respondents' expectations, leading to a loss of trust, although respondents did not agree which parties were at fault. Others cited the COVID-19 pandemic, changes in leadership within the Collaborative, and inadequate staffing within the Forest Service as challenges. Several respondents said that the Collaborative took action to respond to these disruptions, namely changes in personnel and adding positions within both the Forest Service and Collaborative, pursuing additional funding, increasing engagement and constructive listening with key stakeholders, and revising governance plans.

Four key recommendations emerged from participant responses. First, respondents suggested increasing the Forest Service's capacity for engagement in the collaborative process. This includes informing new staff about the Collaborative process, increasing hiring (particularly related to NEPA and prescribed fire positions), and streamlining NEPA with a clear understanding of Collaborative input. Second, the Collaborative should embrace a diversity of participating interests and reinforce collaborative protocols to move forward. Both open-ended comments and quantitative responses indicate that some perceived conflict among participants who thought that others were not committed to collaboration or that certain interests were excluded. Collaborative protocols were being reevaluated at the time of the survey and could be reinforced to facilitate meaningful collaboration. Third, there should be an increase and maintenance of consistent funding. While a strong majority thought funding was adequate, the open-ended comments indicated that consistent funding could provide more support for needed positions and that past funding had supported collaborative gains. Fourth, respondents argued for increasing the utilization of the best available science and science communication to inform future project actions and adaptive management cycles and garner public support.

This report provided a baseline assessment of collaborative health and performance among the Collaborative. Collaboratives are dynamic — they continue to adapt and evolve as needs or priorities change, and in response to internal and external disruptions (Imperial et al., 2016). Thus, it is important to continue to self-assess collaborative progress, durability, and resilience, so that groups can identify what is working well, what may need some work, and what support and/or guidance is needed to address challenges to maintain performance. The SWERI will continue to engage in assessing collaborative health and performance of CFLRP projects. There will be multiple opportunities locally, regionally, and nationally for peer-networking and learning events to share successes and challenges and learn together about how to encourage healthy, durable, and resilient collaboration.

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Appendix 1. CFLRP collaborative governance assessment: summary of findings

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CFLRP collaborative governance assessment:
Summary of findings for the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project CFLRP

The Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI) developed a collaborative governance assessment as part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (Forest Service) Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) Common Monitoring Strategy.1 The collaborative governance assessment was designed to evaluate collaborative health, function, resilience, and perceived outcomes of collaborative work. The SWERI administered an online questionnaire to members of the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project, the official collaborative of the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project CFLRP, in the winter of 2022-2023. We received 38 usable responses (45% response rate). Figure 1 illustrates what groups were represented in the questionnaire. The purpose of this brief is to:

- Summarize high-level findings from the collaborative governance assessment; and
- Document participants' recommendations to improve collaborative performance and progress.

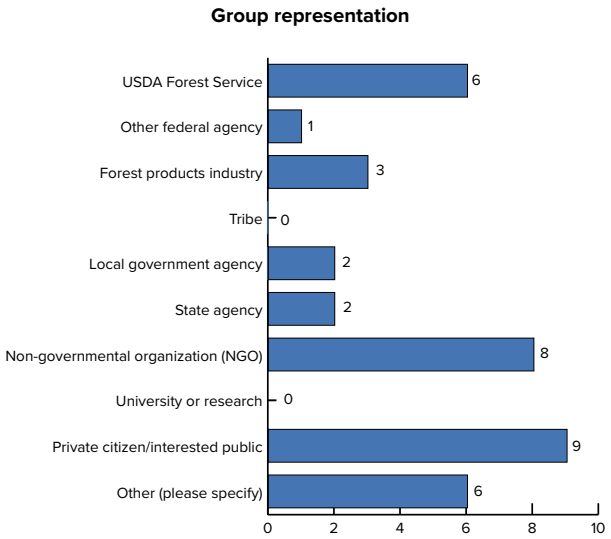

Figure 1: Respondents' self-identified representation with associated organizations (n=15).

Findings

What has worked well for the Deschutes CFLRP?

Overall, there was strong agreement on most indicators that the collaborative process was working well and accomplishing goals, although open-ended responses indicated some disagreement. There was strong agreement that a representative cross-section of individuals who had a stake in the issues were involved in the Collaborative, although both tribal representatives and researchers were not represented in the survey responses (Figure 1). Most respondents thought their expectations were met in collaborating with the Forest Service through planning and implementation, although not in monitoring (Figure 2), and that the agency was responsive to input. Respondents strongly agreed that the collaborative process has helped build trust and relationships. A strong majority of respondents perceived of leadership positively and agreed that there were opportunities to co-generate knowledge, work toward adaptive management, and be flexible when there were personnel changes. Respondents felt that the Collaborative had adequate technical expertise, facilitation skills, and funds, but lacked adequate time. A strong majority of respondents perceived that collaborative participants were held accountable and protocols are fair, used appropriately, and clearly understood. Respondents were split on their perceptions of agreement on shared strategies to solve identified problems on the landscape or that there was adequate flexibility in the face of landscape changes like wildfire.

Photo credit: Sarah Edwards, DCFP's Outreach Coordinator

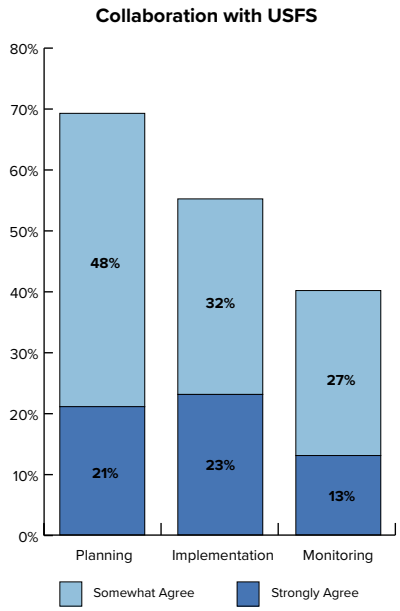

Figure 2: Percentage of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that they understand how to inform Forest Service decisions, the Forest Service is responsive to feedback, and the Forest Service is clear about decisions.

What disruptions and challenges have affected collaborative progress and performance?

The Collaborative has had to deal with several disruptions, particularly frequent turnover, conflict among participants, a limited wood products industry capacity, and the challenge of moving from direction-setting or planning to implementation. Commenters also noted the challenges of loss of trust, the COVID-19 pandemic, changes in leadership in the Collaborative, and inadequate Forest Service staffing. In response to these challenges, the Collaborative and Forest Service have improved staffing, pursued additional funding, and increased engagement with key stakeholders.

Progress toward desired process, socio-economic, and ecological outcomes

A strong majority of respondents indicated that the CFLRP project was moving toward achieving a variety of desired collaborative (Figure 3), ecological, and socio-economic goals, including but not limited to:

- Enhancing communication and decision-making and including diverse perspectives.
- Improving wildfire use, reducing fuel hazards, and improving or maintaining the pace and scale of restoration.
- Reducing community wildfire risk.

A strong majority, however, largely did not see accomplishment of more work on adjacent non-federal lands. Several factors were identified as facilitating achieving goals, such as partner commitment to working together in good faith, strong leadership, and involvement from the right personnel, including a professional facilitator and coordinator.

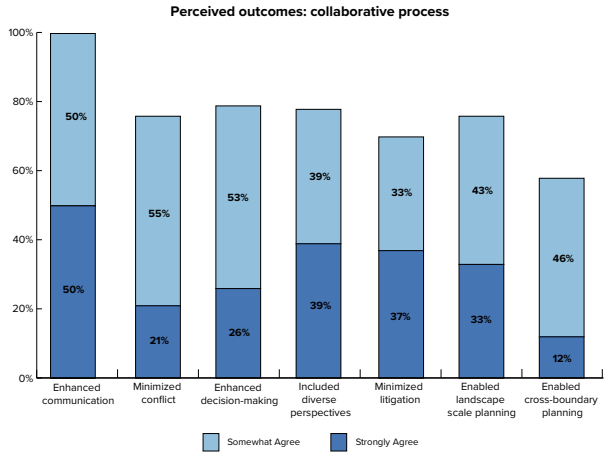

Figure 3: Percent of respondents who either "Somewhat Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that the collaborative process has impacted the function and capacity of the collaborative.

Recommendations to improve the collaborative process and performance

Respondents provided a number of recommendations to improve the collaborative process and performance, including:

- Increase the Forest Service's capacity for engagement in the collaborative process through mitigating the effects of high turnover, streamlining input processes, and increasing capacity, particularly through hiring positions related to wildfire and NEPA.
- Embrace a diversity of participating interests and reinforce collaborative protocols to reduce conflict and move collaboration forward.
- Increase and maintain consistent funding.
- Increase the utilization of the best available science and science communication to Collaborative members, stakeholders, and the broader community.

Next steps

Results from this questionnaire provided a baseline assessment of collaborative governance among the Deschutes CFLRP. The SWERI will continue to engage in assessing collaborative health and performance of CFLRP projects, the goal of which is to identify where capacities lie and areas for improvement to target investments and activities that support resilient and durable collaboration.

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IRB approval – This work is approved by the Institutional Review Board at Colorado State University (#2679) and Northern Arizona University (#1809777-3).

Appendix 2. Appended questions

The results to the following questions reported here were developed in coordination with local CFLRP project staff, coordinators, and partners affiliated with the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project CFLRP. These questions were not part of the CFLRP Common Monitoring Strategy.

The Collaborative was interested in better understanding respondent participation and preferred governance structure. A strong majority (62%) participated in over 8 project meetings in the past year, with another 35% attending 4-7 times (Figure A1), indicating that nearly all survey respondents were relatively active participants in the CFLRP project.

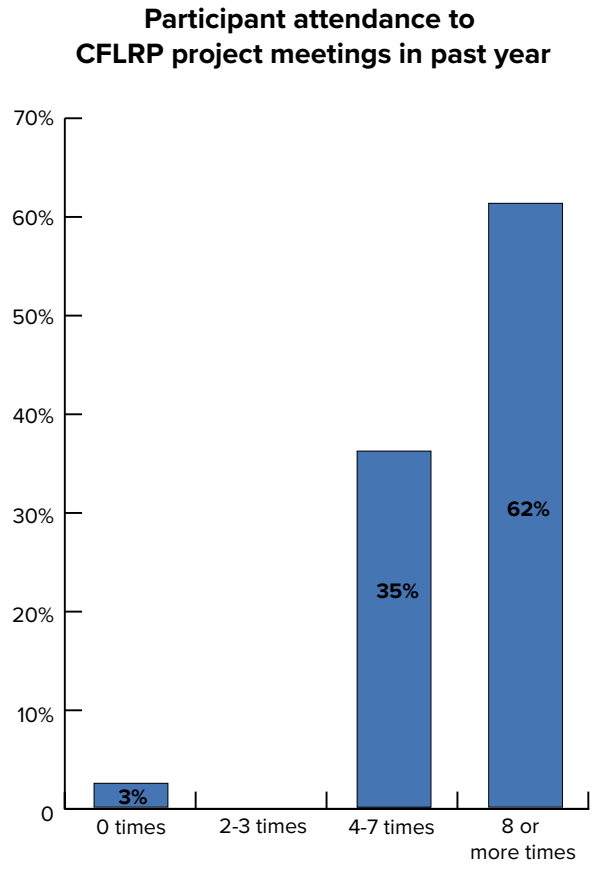

Figure A1: Percent of respondents who reported attending CFLRP project meetings or activities in the past year by number of events attended.

Opinions on preferred work group structure were varied. The most common response (11 respondents) was that work groups were sufficient and effective (respondents could select more than one option). However, 8 respondents thought that work groups needed additional participation, capacity, and resources, an additional 8 thought that work groups could be modified to better achieve objectives, and 7 thought more work groups were needed (Figure A2). Respondents who thought additional work groups were needed recommended monitoring, recreation, wildlife, habitat fragmentation, and Zones of Agreement groups. An additional respondent believed that work groups needed more diverse community participation.

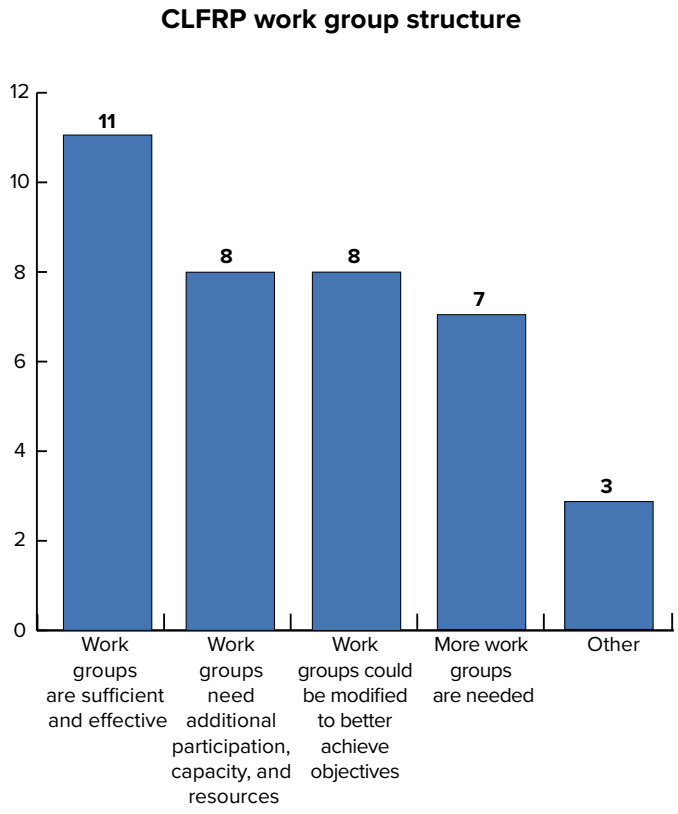

Figure A2: The number of respondents who reported a preference for work group structure.

Respondents were also asked how the CFLRP collaborative process has or has not met their expectations. Respondents (17 total responses) were mixed in their overall evaluation of the collaborative process, with some stating that their expectations for engaging in landscape-level restoration and managing for multiple project objectives had not been met, while others argued that collaboration has succeeded in pushing forward reforestation activities and wildfire mitigation:

> *The DCFP did an incredible amount to advance social license for active restoration. They were outstanding at incorporating best available science and educating the publics. They also did very well in the mid-later part of the first 10 years in developing consensus level recommendations for FS consideration. The DCFP and FS partnership were very strong for a period of time and many external groups came to central OR to learn about how stakeholders with varied interests came together to overcome their differences.*

> *It was successful for a number of years, where projects were truly collaborative and results matched. Those years*

are gone. The collaborative is now often a rubber stamp of forest service plans with micro influence tinkering around the edges. It is on a well-funded but failing trajectory and needs a course correction that doesn't just push more of the same.

With regards to specific changes needed, the most common response (4 respondents) was that stronger partnerships are necessary, and various interests could be better included. Respondents varied, however, in which interests they thought should be included or prioritized (e.g., industry, wildlife health, or environmental perspectives), and yet others disagreed and thought that multiple perspectives were already taken into account. For example, respondents stated:

The process has not met my expectations in that there has not been any increase in the volume of timber products sold by the agency since the project started. In fact, the average volume offered per year has decreased since the project's inception.

Multiple perspectives are taken into account, and [the] focus of Steering and Subcommittees is based on multiple collaborator values, resource management needs and somewhat on scientific information.

[There is a] tendency towards polarization by both industry and environmental interests when they don't have everything go their way.

Other respondents encouraged changes in the Forest Service's actions (3 respondents), including moving faster in all stages of the restoration process, better engagement of its implementation staff, and connecting the Collaborative itself to the broader CFLR program. Respondents reflected on their expectations:

Failure of the USFS to adequately ensure that implementation staff is informed and on board with Collaborative objectives. Failure of agency to face up to issues around increasing the pace and scale of needed prescribed burning.

The DCFP actually doesn't have a strong connection with the national CFLR program, and I think that would be beneficial. It seems that there is a view the FS is the only entity that should engage on CFLRP shared learning, monitoring, and reporting (it is considered more of an internal agency program separate from the collaborative). This is a problem.

Others pointed out challenges in receiving and allocating funding (3 respondents), arguing that the Collaborative should have more of a say in which projects get the CFLRP money, that work should not only be market-driven but be supplemented by public funding (federal, state, and county), and that ebbs and flows in funding have affected the project's work.

Other individuals noted challenges such as those listed in the disruptions section above: the COVID-19 pandemic reducing in-person meetings and engagement and the difficulty in moving from planning to consensus around actions.

Lastly, respondents were asked what changes would help the CFLRP be more successful; these suggestions have also been incorporated into recommendations above. Three respondents argued for listening carefully and respecting the groups involved in the Collaborative, specifically environmentalists and those who value non-logging outcomes.

Shut down the pace and scale obsession until quality control and trust is achieved. Accountability to ensure that all values at the table see follow through in projects, not just logging outcomes. The collaborative has become an echo chamber that is disconnected from much of the community. Forcing the pro logging views of the collaborative onto the community through ramped up outreach isn't going to help, only results and change will right the ship.

Several suggested changes had two respondents each: holding accountable those who disrupt the collaborative process, working with scientists to prioritize areas for restoration, moving toward adaptive management, ensuring the science underpinning actions taken is understood, increasing funding in a consistent manner to cover paid positions and outreach, and streamlining the NEPA process with a method for timely input.

Constant funding to cover multiple paid positions to keep the sub-committees moving forward and funding for outreach that is ample enough to cover multiple avenues in reaching the multiple communities that live in our area.

Individual respondents suggested other changes: increasing knowledge of the Collaborative among Forest Service line officers and resource specialists, standardizing the process of onboarding new members into the Collaborative, installing new DCFP leadership to establish proactive planning with the Forest Service, and increasing the emphasis on implementation monitoring.

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