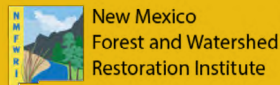


Collaborative Governance Assessment Report FOR THE NORTHERN COLORADO FIRESHED COLLABORATIVE

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Document Development: In 2024, the Steering Committee of the Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative (NCFC) requested support from the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI) to develop a survey to assess perceptions of the collaborative's performance. Previously, CFRI and the other Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI) had been asked by the USDA Forest Service Washington Office to develop and deploy an assessment tool to track collaborative governance within and across all newly authorized and extension projects under the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) as part of the USDA Forest Service's Common Monitoring Strategy. The request from the NCFC provided an opportunity for SWERI to adapt and apply the assessment tool to non-CFLRP landscapes to evaluate whether a given collaborative group is encouraging an effective and meaningful collaborative approach. CFRI led the SWERI in adapting the online, confidential survey SWERI developed for CFLRP project participants for distribution to NCFC participants. The SWERI then collected and analyzed baseline information from the survey and developed this report based on the CFLRP project reporting framework.

Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI)

The Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes include three university-based restoration institutes: the New Mexico Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute (NMFWR), the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI), and the Ecological Restoration Institute (ERI) in Arizona. These institutes were congressionally authorized 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).

Ecological Restoration Institute (ERI), Northern Arizona University (NAU)

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.

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Cover photo credit: Corrina Marshall, 2024 Society of American Foresters field trip

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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 (CSU). 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 SWERI to serve as a bridge between researchers, managers, and stakeholders working to restore and enhance the resilience of forest ecosystems in response 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: NAU 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: CSU 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.

Acknowledgments: The authors would like to acknowledge Hannah Brown and Karissa Courtney for their insightful feedback on an earlier draft and Angela Hollingsworth for designing the layout of this report. We thank Corrina Marshall, coordinator of the Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative (NCFC), for her support in survey recruitment, coordinating and facilitating meetings to discuss the assessment, and to her and others on the Steering Committee for their feedback adapting the assessment. We would also like to thank all the participants for taking the time to fill out the survey. Funding for this white paper was provided by the CFRI and ERI through the Southwest Forest Health and Wildfire Prevention Act. The survey portion of this project and survey administration is supported by funding from the Arizona Board of Regents through the Technology, Research and Innovation Fund (TRIF).

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Executive summary

This report was developed at the request of the Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative (NCFC) Steering Committee to assess the extent to which the NCFC fosters effective collaborative process, and to evaluate perceived performance and durability. The assessment builds on an existing research effort led by the Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI) that focused on the currently-funded projects of the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP). The U.S. Congress authorized reation of the CFLRP in 2009, and while the NCFC is not part of CFLRP, it overlaps with the formerly funded Front Range CFLRP and builds on the overall strategy, projects, partnerships, and lessons learned from that program.

The SWERI developed a collaborative governance assessment as part of the CFLRP Common Monitoring Strategy, a set of ecological and socio-economic monitoring questions and indicators that are required of all currently authorized CFLRP projects. The collaborative governance assessment was designed to address the following questions:

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

To answer these questions for the NCFC, the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI) led the SWERI in adapting the CFLRP collaborative governance assessment for the NCFC by working closely with the NCFC's coordinator and Steering Committee. Responses were analyzed from 44 participants, representing a 16% response rate from the NCFC's broad network of participants.

Using the Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance ([Emerson et al., 2012](#)), the assessment



Photo credit: Ty Aldworth

measured indicators of three key collaboration dynamics: principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action. Results from the survey showed that over 90% of respondents agreed that the NCFC process included a representative set of interests and provided a neutral space for collaboration on shared interests and concerns. A majority of respondents also felt there was consensus on key problems, collaborative purpose, and shared problem-solving strategies. Respondents expressed satisfaction with quarterly meeting agendas, newsletters, and the overall collaborative process. Many felt the process fostered trust, relationships, and mutual respect. Respondents strongly agreed that they were committed to the collaborative process, and a majority reported that they trusted the ability of the NCFC to achieve desired actions and outcomes. Respondents highlighted effective leadership, strong communication, and a clear collaborative vision as motivating participation. There was high agreement that participants worked together to co-generate knowledge and solve problems, were committed to adaptive management, and had some flexibility when forest conditions or the collaborative dynamics changed.

Responses also highlighted several areas for improvement. Only a slim majority agreed that knowledge and information were shared equally among the group and accessible to all members. Many respondents indicated the need for more clarity around how and when collaborative members could inform management actions. Moreover, a large proportion of respondents felt the NCFC did not have adequate time or funding to accomplish needed work.

Survey results indicated that the NCFC started to make progress on a number of process, social, and biophysical performance goals. These included enhancing communication and coordination among participants, improving partners' ability to plan by enabling landscape scale and cross-boundary planning, and increasing the strategic placement of projects. However, results showed that more work is needed to increase public support for proactive fire and to enhance capacity for fuels reduction treatments. The most substantial disruptions to collaborative performance that could impact NCFC's ability to achieve its goals were constraints on prescribed fire use, limited workforce capacity, limited agency capacity to engage with the NCFC, and limited capacity of the wood products industry.

Many suggestions for improvements emerged from the open-ended responses. One theme was to broaden participant representation and opportunities for input, by enhancing geographic representation and increasing

awareness of and access to subcommittee processes and decision-making. A second theme was to strengthen mechanisms for cross-scale collaboration; for example, addressing "meeting fatigue" by improving integration and communication between local and landscape-level efforts. A third theme was to focus on outcome-oriented actions, like increasing emphasis on expanding proactive fire use, enhancing community engagement to build support for fuels and fire management activities, and improving performance tracking and adaptive management. A cross-cutting theme focused on the ongoing need for collaborative capacity and diversified, sustainable funding.

In open-ended comments, respondents reflected on accomplishments, which included increasing coordination and communication among local collaborative groups, developing shared strategies and frameworks, supporting community-connected partner capacity, and becoming a model for collaborative forest management in the western U.S.



Photo credit: Eric Tokuyama

Introduction

[The Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative](#) (NCFC) is a partnership of governmental and non-governmental organizations working across approximately 4 million acres in the northern Colorado Front Range. The NCFC was initially centered in Larimer County, but since 2020 it has expanded to run the length of Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests (ARNF), encompassing the four ranger districts within this forest and aligning with the jurisdictional and watershed boundaries of the partner organizations on adjacent lands. There are numerous collaborative processes happening at multiple scales within and across the NCFC landscape. Local coalitions and initiatives provide venues for collaborative planning and operations coordination at the project, watershed, or county level. Several Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) within NCFC boundaries guide fuel treatment priorities on both federal and non-federal lands while also addressing firefighting capacity and community wildfire resilience strategies, such as defensible space. As the primary forum for large-scale, cross-jurisdictional planning in this landscape, the NCFC brings together representatives from all ARNF districts, Rocky Mountain National Park, and neighboring communities to improve forest health and wildfire preparedness.

The purpose of the NCFC is to prepare the region's landscapes and people to receive and recover from inevitable wildfires in ways that minimize catastrophic impacts to watersheds and communities. The NCFC's mission is to “increase the pace and scale of not only mechanical fuel reduction methods, but also prescribed fire and strategically managed wildland fires across jurisdictional boundaries.”¹ The collaborative's work is organized into several subcommittees. A Steering Committee sets direction for the NCFC's subcommittees and makes decisions related to governance and work planning. These subcommittees include: Strategic Planning and Adaptive Management (SPAM), which supports co-developing a landscape spatial strategy as well as monitoring and adaptive management; Operations (Ops), which works to coordinate cross-boundary actions tiered to the strategy; and a Community Engagement & Outreach (CE&O) subcommittee that concentrates on engaging people and building social consent for the NCFC's mission. Due to limited convening capacity and overlapping participation, the SPAM and Ops subcommittees merged in 2024 to Strategic Operations and Adaptive Management. A Northern Colorado

Fireshed Fund (hereafter “the Fund”) was established in partnership with the National Forest Foundation (NFF) and ARNF and seeded with (but not limited to) funds from the ARNF. An Investment subcommittee is responsible for reviewing and recommending proposals from place-based collaboratives, community-based organizations, and land managers to the Fund. Ad hoc committees and working groups are also used as needed, with the approval of the Steering Committee.

In August 2023, the Steering Committee expressed interest in developing a survey to gauge participant satisfaction with the collaborative process and to solicit input on how the process could be improved. This project was added to the 2024 work plan for the SPAM subcommittee, with project capacity provided by the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI), a science partner of the NCFC. The project offered an opportunity to build on an existing research effort led by the Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI, which includes CFRI) that focuses on the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP). The U.S. Congress authorized the creation of the CFLRP in 2009. The purpose of the CFLRP was to “encourage the collaborative, science-based ecosystem restoration of priority forest landscapes”² through a competitive funding program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service (Forest Service). While the NCFC is neither associated with nor funded by CFLRP, the ARNF was part of the Front Range CFLRP project; the NCFC emerged in 2016, overlapping with the end of the Front Range CFLRP in 2019. Thus, the development of the NCFC has been influenced indirectly by the CFLRP.

The Forest Service Washington Office requested assistance from the SWERI in developing and deploying an assessment tool to track collaborative governance as part of the CFLRP Common Monitoring Strategy,³ a set of ecological and socio-economic monitoring questions and indicators that are required of all currently authorized CFLRP projects. The SWERI incorporated feedback and questions of interest gathered from CFLRP practitioners, coordinators, and subject matter experts during the development of the CFLRP Common Monitoring Strategy. The following questions were then designed to be addressed in the collaborative governance assessment:

1. What are the structural and functional dynamics of the collaborative? Do participants feel the collaborative exhibits characteristics generally associated with healthy, well-functioning, and resilient collaboratives?

¹ Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative (2023). The Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative Charter, p. 3.

² [PL 111-11 CFLRP Authorizing legislation](#)

³ [CFLRP National Common Monitoring Strategy](#)

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

The request from the NCFC's Steering Committee to develop a survey presented an opportunity for the SWERI to expand the application of the CFLRP assessment to evaluate how a non-CFLRP collaborative supports an effective and meaningful collaborative approach to wildfire resilience and forest restoration, with potential for data comparison in the future. Rather than developing an entirely new assessment tool, CFRI leveraged the work of the SWERI to assess collaborative governance within the NCFC. The NCFC survey project lead from CFRI, who was also a member of the SWERI CFLRP research team, worked closely with the NCFC coordinator and Steering Committee to adapt the survey to meet the unique needs of this collaborative while still addressing the four main collaborative governance questions of the Common Monitoring Strategy. The report herein summarizes the findings of this assessment, with contextual information drawn from core documents of the NCFC. The appendices of this report include the survey instrument and the results presentation provided to the NCFC at their first quarterly meeting of 2025.

Assessing collaborative governance and adaptability

The survey was structured using concepts from an integrative collaborative governance⁴ framework ([Emerson et al., 2012](#)), resilience and adaptability literature ([Emerson & Gerlak, 2014](#); [Folke et al., 2005](#); [Gupta et al., 2010](#)), input from the NCFC's Steering Committee, and empirical findings from the first 10 years of the CFLRP ([Beeton et al., 2022](#); [Butler & Schultz, 2019](#); [McIntyre & 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 participate. 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 ([Emerson et al., 2012](#)).

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 & 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 & 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; making sense of collective experience; 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 & 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

⁴ 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).

accomplish tasks and get work done, including 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 & Coleman, 2015). The capacity needs of collaboratives 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, etc. (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?), as well as perceived socio-economic and ecological outcomes. The outcome metrics chosen for evaluation were derived from the goals and objectives of the NCFC and conversations with the Steering Committee.

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 NFF⁵; and 3) a survey administered to Forest Service staff engaged in 2010 and 2012 CFLRP projects (Schultz et al., 2018). We then tailored that list to fit the context of the NCFC in consultation with the NCFC Steering Committee and coordinator. Identifying current challenges or disruptions that partners of the NCFC are grappling with can support strategic investment towards 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.

Approach

The SWERI developed an online, confidential survey using the software program Qualtrics that was initially administered to 15 newly authorized and extension CFLRP projects in 2022 and 2023, and then adapted and administered to the NCFC in 2024. The adapted survey primarily consisted of 69 fixed-response items using a three-, four-, or five-point Likert response scale (e.g., strongly disagree to strongly agree). Most items included a “don’t know/not applicable” response option. The survey also included 3 multi-select multiple choice questions with 5 comment boxes for “other/please elaborate” and 7 open-ended questions, yielding 12 opportunities for text responses (Appendix 1). The survey was developed using concepts from the Integrative Collaborative Governance Framework (Emerson et al., 2012), collaborative resilience and adaptability literature (Emerson & 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 & Schultz, 2019; McIntyre & Schultz, 2020; Schultz et al., 2018).

The SWERI piloted the assessment prior to administration to the full NCFC, by sending the assessment to members of the NCFC Steering Committee (n=6). The SWERI worked with the NCFC coordinator to administer the survey to a broad set of participants (275 were emailed) to capture the variability in perceptions about the collaborative process and progress (Bernard & Gravlee, 2015). The survey was administered to NCFC members between September and November of 2024 through the NCFC email newsletter listserv. Time to take the survey was also provided during the third quarterly meeting of the full collaborative on September 26th, 2024. The SWERI left the survey open for 6 weeks. Updates about response rates were provided to the NCFC coordinator, who then sent periodic email reminders to participants to complete the survey. There were 44 usable responses to the survey, representing a 16% response rate. While 44 responses represent a high proportion of the NCFC’s average participation in quarterly meetings, the large distribution list yielded a response rate lower than the 27% response rate for the national CFLRP study.

The SWERI used the statistical software programs Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and R to conduct all analyses and develop figures. Figures report the percentage of respondents in each response category (e.g., strongly disagree to strongly agree). Open-ended questions were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

⁵ <https://www.nationalforests.org/assets/pdfs/Collaboration-Indicator-Survey-Results-2020-publish.pdf>

Results

The first results section below includes responses to introductory questions related to respondents' affiliations, motivations for being involved in the NCFC project, and level of engagement. Next are findings related to collaborative dynamics (i.e., principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action), along with short descriptions of each collaborative dynamic component in italics to orient the reader. The final sections provide findings on perceived outcomes, disruptions that challenged collaborative progress and performance, and recommendations to improve the collaborative process. For clarity, strong majority results are reported as $\geq 75.0\%$ agreement (agreement includes those who somewhat to strongly agree), notable majority results as $\geq 60.0\%$ agreement, and slight majority as $\geq 50.0\%$ agreement. Results with notable disagreement ($\geq 15\%$ somewhat to strongly disagree) are also highlighted. Each survey item related to collaborative dynamics, outcomes, and disruptions were voluntary and included a “don't know/not applicable” response option. Those who chose not to answer are not included in the number of respondents (n) for each item indicated in the figures below.

Introductory questions

Of the 44 individuals who participated in the survey, the largest groups represented were from non-governmental organizations and local government agencies (Figure 1). These two groups accounted for more than half of all respondents (54.6%; Figure 1). Respondents could select up to three primary motivations for participating in the NCFC. The most common primary motivations included reducing community wildfire risk (59.1%), increasing the pace and scale of restoration and fuels reduction work (52.3%), increasing communication and information sharing (50.0%), restoring forest resiliency (45.5%), and improving relationships and trust (43.2%; Figure 2). Motivations that were not selected by any respondent included restoring fish and wildlife habitat, increasing opportunities for biomass utilization, improving recreational opportunities, and protecting or restoring cultural resources. The “other” motivation option was selected by one person, for which they wrote in “collectively acquire funding.”

Participants were also asked to reflect on their level of engagement in the collaborative. Response options included a spectrum from not engaged to high engagement.⁶ All respondents were engaged to some degree: a strong majority (77.3%) of respondents

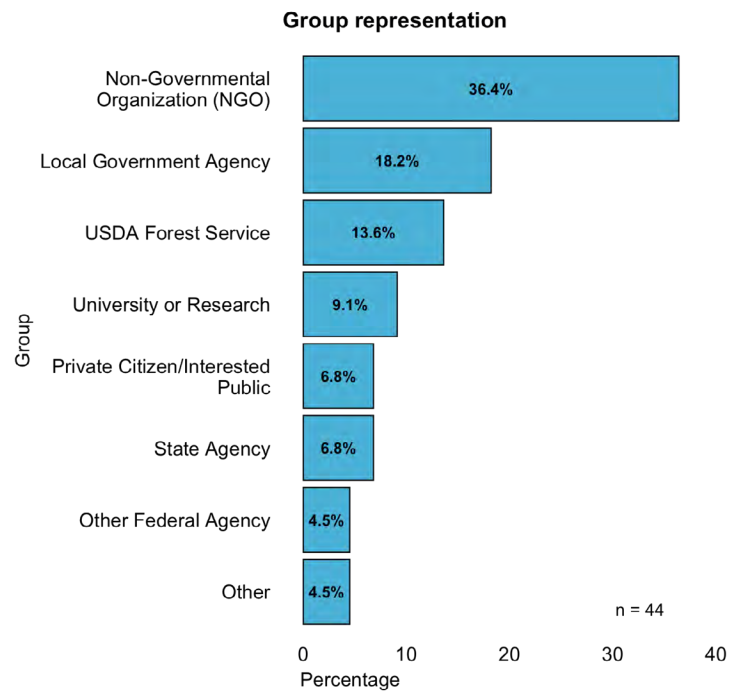


Figure 1: Percentage of respondents who self-identified representation with associated group type.

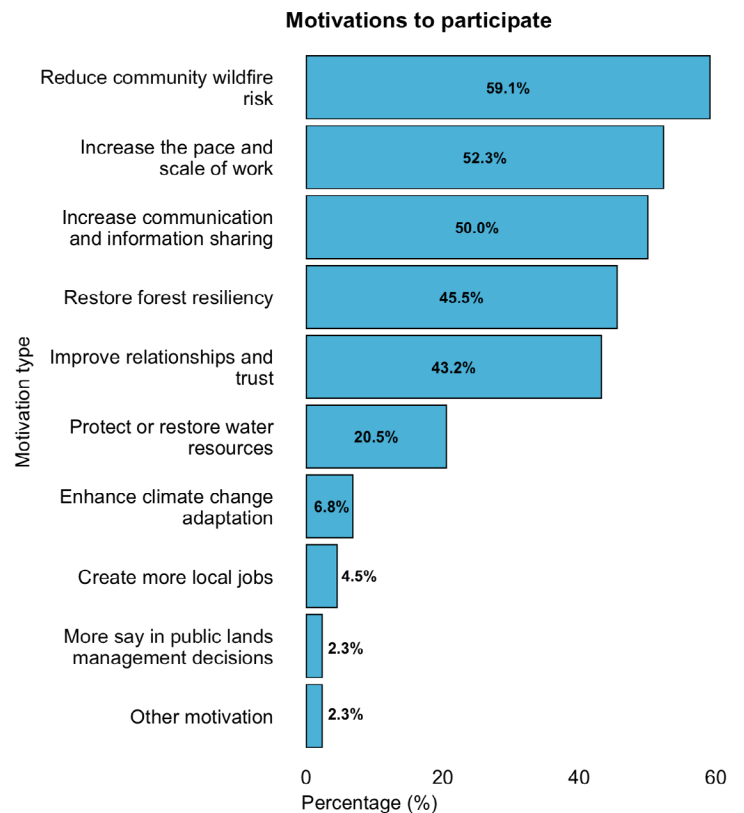


Figure 2: Percentage of respondents who identified the associated motive as reason for their participation in the collaborative (respondents could select up to three).

⁶ Not engaged: not attending meetings, field trips, or other events, and not being well apprised of NCFC activities; low engagement: keeping up with newsletters and activities, but infrequently attending meetings, field trips, or other events; moderate engagement: attending meetings, field trips, or other events but not serving in a leadership or coordination capacity, and/or not participating in subcommittees or working groups; high engagement: attending nearly all meetings, field trips, and other events and participating in subcommittees or working groups or serving in a leadership or coordination capacity.

reported they were moderately to highly engaged in the collaborative, and the remaining 22.7% reported low engagement (Figure 3). Similarly, many respondents were long-time partners of the NCFC, with over half (58.2%) involved in the collaborative for 4 or more years (Figure 4).

Principled engagement

Principled engagement refers to having a representative cross-section of people and entities involved in iterative and inclusive dialogue to determine shared problems, identify shared strategies to solve problems, and agree to the shared purpose of collaboration.

A strong majority of respondents somewhat to strongly agreed that the collaborative process facilitated a neutral space to discuss controversial issues (80.9%; Figure 5). A strong majority also agreed that the collaborative involved a representative cross-section of stakeholders (95.3%) and that participants worked together to identify shared interests and concerns (95.3%; Figure 5).

A strong majority of respondents felt there was agreement among partners about the key problems that affected their landscape (90.0%) and on the purpose of collaboration (92.5%; Figure 6). A strong majority also felt that there was

agreement on the shared strategies to address problems (85.0%; Figure 6).

Principled engagement develops through repeated interactions over time. While standing subcommittees meet more frequently, the NCFC’s full membership meets four times a year, and the Steering Committee wanted to hear whether that frequency was still acceptable to

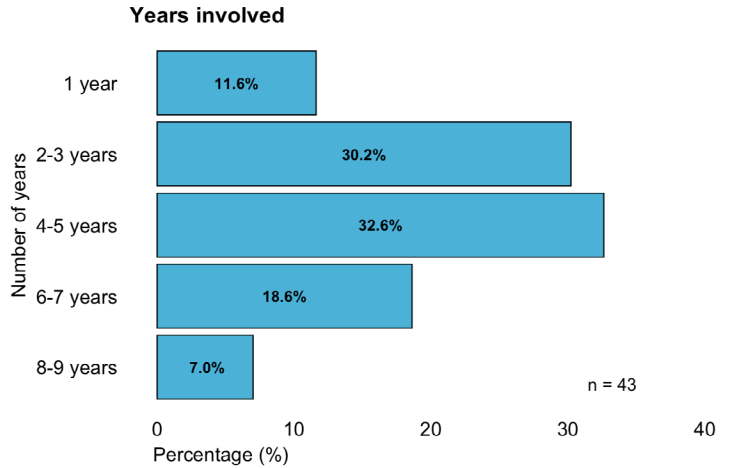


Figure 4: Percentage of respondents who have been part of NCFC for various lengths of time.

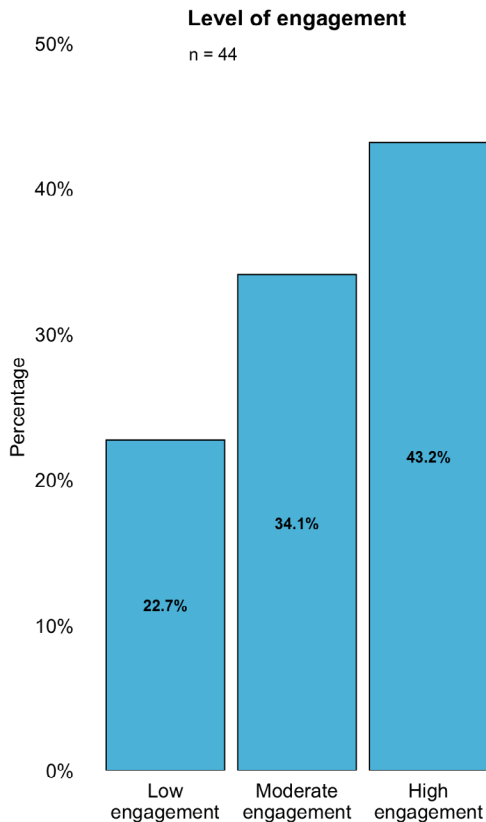


Figure 3: Percentage of respondents who rated their involvement in this project as “Low engagement,” “Moderate engagement,” or “High engagement.”

Principled engagement: collaborative environment

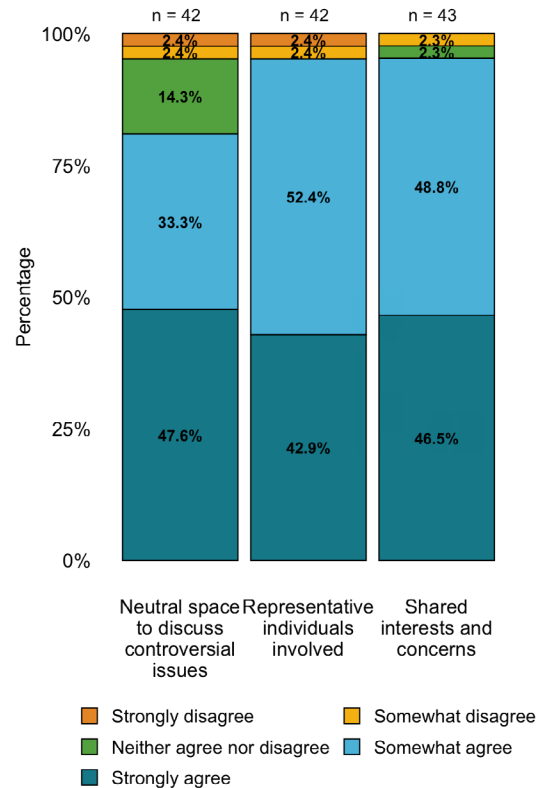


Figure 5: Percentage of respondents who “Strongly disagreed” to “Strongly agreed” that the collaborative process has created a neutral space to openly discuss controversial issues, that a representative cross-section of individuals who have a stake in the issues and outcomes are involved, and that participants work together to identify shared interests and concerns.

participants. A strong majority (82.5%) felt that quarterly meetings were “just right,” while 10.0% of respondents felt more meetings were necessary and the remaining 7.5% felt meetings were too frequent (Figure 7).

The NCFC Steering Committee was also interested in participants’ satisfaction with the quarterly meeting process. When asked if the quarterly meetings provided sufficient time for partners to share local successes, innovations, and challenges, a strong majority (84.6%) agreed that they did (Figure 8). Likewise, strong majorities agreed they were satisfied with agenda topics at quarterly meetings (90.0%) and with the collaborative process overall (92.6%; Figure 8). A strong majority (92.3%) agreed that they were satisfied with the content of newsletters, which is the primary mechanism the collaborative uses for communications with all partners in between quarterly meetings (Figure 8).

Shared motivation

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

A strong majority of respondents somewhat to strongly agreed that the collaborative process helped participants build personal and/or working relationships (95.3%), mutual respect of others’ interests (97.6%), and trust in each other (92.7%; Figure 9). A strong majority also reported they trusted the group to achieve desired actions and outcomes (93.0%), and that they themselves were committed to the process (97.7%; 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 of collaborative governance. Leaders are needed to convene partners, communicate a shared vision, and motivate people to work together.

Respondents had a favorable view of NCFC leadership: a strong majority agreed they had leaders who communicated a common collaborative vision and action (94.6%), motivated others to work together (97.3%), and worked well with other people and organizations (83.3%; Figure 10).

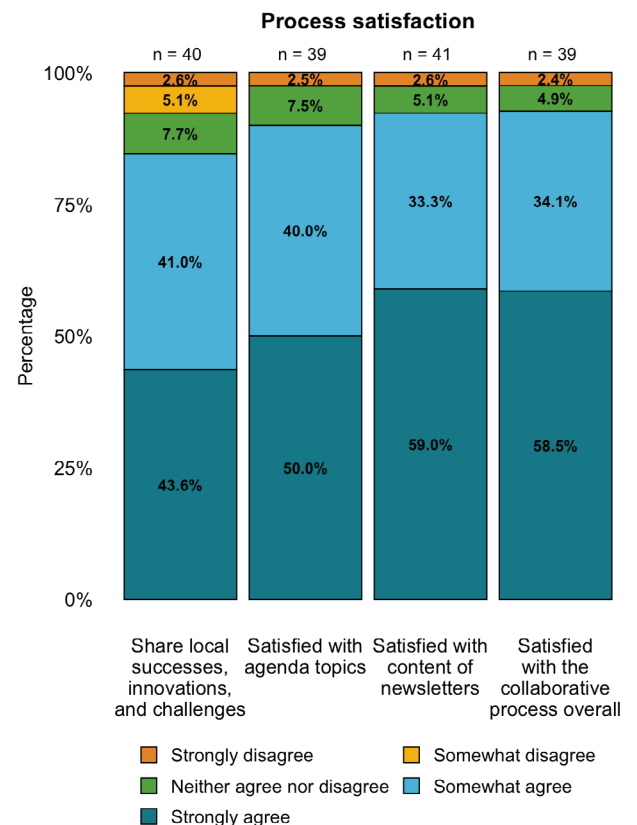
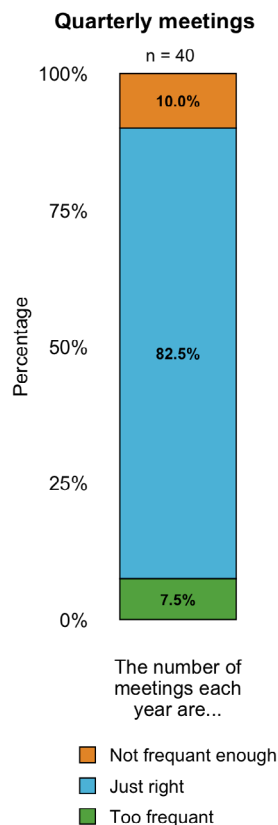
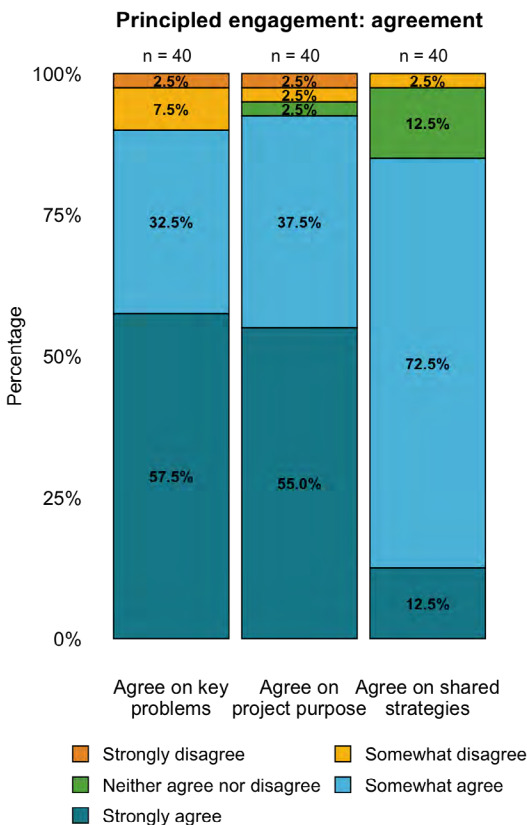


Figure 6: Percentage of respondents who “Strongly disagreed” to “Strongly agreed” that participants agree on the key problems that impact the landscape, the purpose of the collaborative, and the strategies to solve problems.

Figure 7: Percent of participants who feel that the number of meetings the NCFC has each year are not frequent enough, just right, or too frequent.

Figure 8: Percentage of respondents who “Strongly disagreed” to “Strongly agreed” that the collaborative process helped them share local successes, innovations, and challenges, and that they were satisfied with meeting agenda topics, the content of newsletters, and the collaborative process overall.

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 somewhat to strongly agreed that project participants co-created knowledge to learn and solve problems together (86.9%; Figure 11), but only a marginal majority somewhat to strongly agreed that knowledge and information were shared equally among project participants (58.4%). Strong majorities somewhat to strongly agreed that participants were committed to informing adjustments to management practices (i.e., adaptive management; 84.9%), and that there was flexibility to address changing forest conditions (e.g., wildfire effects on a planning unit; 77.5%; Figure 11) or collaborative dynamics (e.g., new people or priorities within the collaborative; 77.5%).

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 respondents somewhat to strongly agreed that their collaborative had sufficient facilitation skills (94.7%) and technical expertise (94.3%) to carry out tasks and complete their work (Figure 12). However, less than half of respondents felt the collaborative had adequate funds (41.4%) or time (33.3%) to carry out and accomplish work (Figure 12). A notable proportion of respondents indicated that there were inadequate amounts of both funding (48.2%) and time (46.6%) to accomplish work (Figure 12).

At the request of the Steering Committee, a question was included to investigate factors limiting participation, and 66% of respondents reported one or more factors that limited participation of their organization in the NCFC (Figure 13). The most cited factor was “too busy in general” (36.4%), followed by “engagement with too many other collaboratives” (22.7%). Three respondents also said they need funding to allow for attendance, and one selected “content not relevant to goals and objectives of my organization.” Six respondents selected “other” factors and wrote-in open-ended responses, which included reasons related to cyclical or periodic availability and being new to the collaborative. One respondent stated that it was difficult for them to get to meetings held in

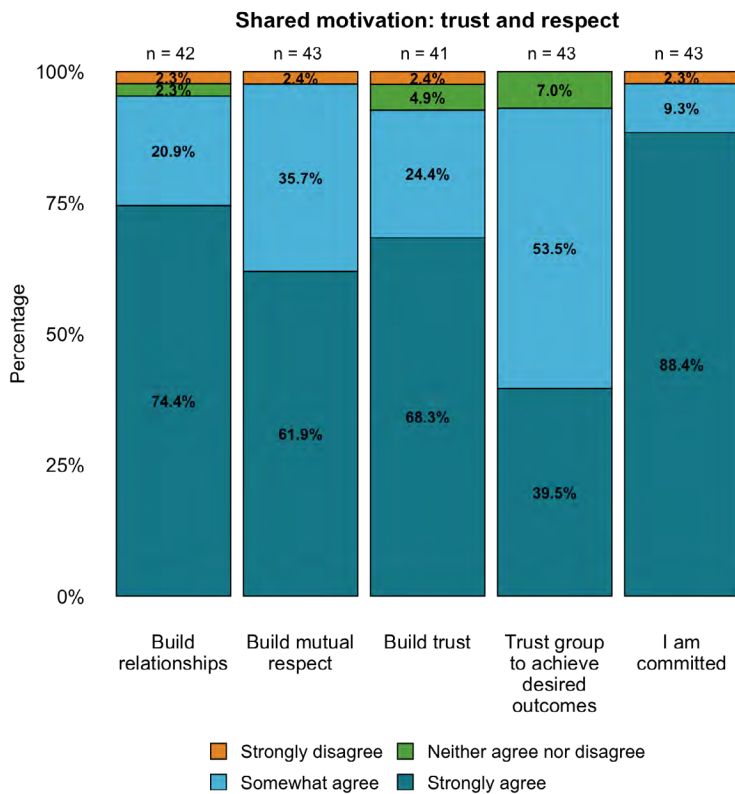


Figure 9: Percentage of respondents who “Strongly disagreed” to “Strongly agreed” that the collaborative process has helped build mutual respect, personal and working relationships, and trust in each other, the extent to which participants trust the group to achieve desired actions and outcomes, and the extent to which the respondent as an individual is committed to the process.

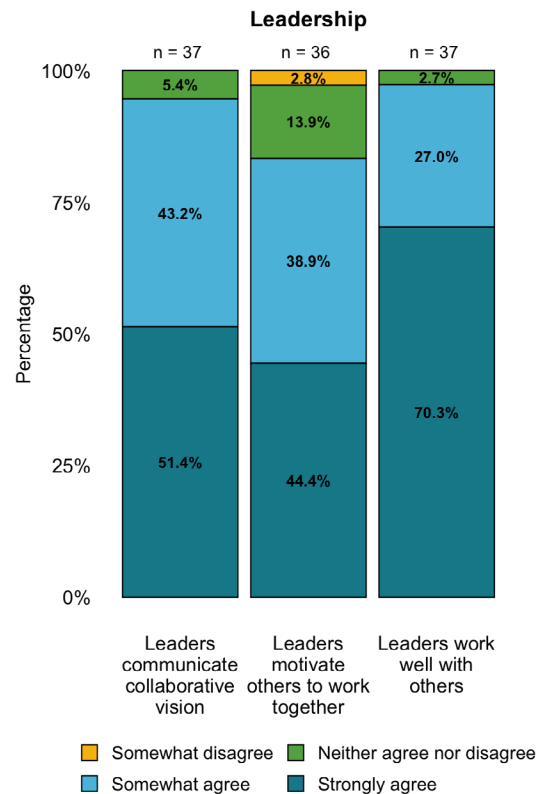


Figure 10: Percent of respondents who “Strongly disagreed” to “Strongly agreed” that the leaders work well with other people and organizations, maintain and communicate a common vision and direction, and motivate others to work together.

Larimer County from their geography on the southern portion of the NCFC landscape (Jefferson, Clear Creek, and Gilpin Counties).

Recognizing the density of collaborative work that happens across the Northern Colorado Fireshed, the Steering Committee suggested an open-ended question asking respondents to list any place-based collaboratives or working groups they actively engage with that are within or overlap with the NCFC landscape. Thirty-six respondents listed 48 distinct entities, 32 of which were place-based collaboratives or working groups (the remaining entities were specific agencies, fire protection districts, and the Wildfire Research Center, a key social science partner in the community fire adaptation space). The average number of groups engaged by a single respondent was 2.6, with a minimum of one and maximum of 7. Groups based in Larimer County received 30 mentions (broken out by Northern and Southern Larimer County); groups based in Boulder County received 28 mentions; groups based in Clear Creek, Gilpin, and Jefferson Counties received 10 mentions; and groups based in Grand County only received 2 mentions (Table 1).

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.

A notable majority of respondents indicated agreement that there were protocols in place to promote accountability among NCFC participants (74.2%), but a much smaller majority somewhat to strongly agreed that there were protocols to promote accountability between the Forest Service and the collaborative (55.5%; [Figure 14](#)). A strong majority also reported collaborative protocols were fair and equitable (87.1%), but only 57.6% felt the protocols were clearly understood by participants ([Figure 14](#)).

A series of questions asked more specifically about accountability between the collaborative and the Forest Service, specifically the ARNF, a key partner of the NCFC given their jurisdictional authority over a large proportion of the forested lands within the boundaries of the NCFC.⁷ A notable majority of respondents somewhat to strongly agreed that the Forest Service was clear

Table 1. Collaboratives that respondents actively engage with that are within or overlap with the NCFC landscape, broken out by sub-landscape.

Sub-landscape of the NCFC	# of mentions	Collaboratives or working groups mentioned
Northern Larimer County	15	North Larimer Ops/Elkhorn Creek, Coalition for the Poudre River Watershed, Buckhorn/ North Fork Poudre Site Conservation Teams, Larimer Recovery Group-Cameron Peak Fire (CPF), CPF Reforestation Group, Larimer Climate Smart Future Ready
Southern Larimer County	15	Big Thompson Watershed Health Partnership, Big Thompson Watershed Coalition, Larimer Recovery Group-Alexander Mountain Fire
Boulder County	28	Boulder County Fireshed, Boulder Watershed Collective, St. Vrain Forest Health Partnership, The Watershed Center, Coal Creek Canyon Collaborative, Boulder County Office of Emergency Management Forum
Grand County	2	Grand County Wildfire Council, Grand Places
Gilpin, Clear Creek, & Jefferson Counties	10	Clear Creek Watershed & Forest Health Partnership, Upper Clear Creek Watershed Association, Gilpin County Mitigation Group, Mountain Metro Wildfire Mitigation Council, Jefferson County Wildfire Commission
Place-based collaboratives further south	3	Upper South Platte Partnership, Coalition for the Upper South Platte
Regional collaboratives	3	NoCo Places, Watershed Wildfire Protection Group, South Platte Basin Roundtables
Broader collaborative learning networks	9	Colorado Forest Collaboratives Network, Fire Adapted Colorado, Colorado Prescribed Fire Council, Western Collaboratives Conservation Network

⁷It should be noted, however, that the survey did not ask questions about the National Park Service or Natural Resource Conservation Service, also key federal partners of the NCFC.

with participants about their decision-making (60.0%), while a small majority said the agency was responsive to collaborative feedback (53.5%). However, fewer than a third of respondents felt they understood when and what collaborative input is useful to inform Forest Service decision-making processes (27.6%; Figure 15). Further, a notable proportion felt that the Forest Service was unclear about how decisions were made (33.3%) and was not responsive to feedback (17.9%), and 41.4% did not understand how to inform agency decision-making (Figure 15).

Much of the work of the NCFC occurs through standing committees, which include the Steering, Investment, Community Engagement & Outreach (CE&O), and Strategic Operations & Adaptive Management subcommittees. An ad hoc working group focused on treatment effectiveness in high elevation forests was also convened to provide a discrete deliverable synthesizing current and locally relevant research on upper montane ecosystems, with the intent of providing actionable science to managers working in those ecosystems. To gather feedback on these key structures, a custom question was developed that allowed respondents to select multiple responses and provide comments. Most (n=24) respondents felt the existing subcommittees were

sufficient and effective (Figure 16). Five respondents indicated that some subcommittees needed additional participation, capacity, and resources, namely the Investment, CE&O, and Strategic Operations & Adaptive Management subcommittees, while three respondents indicated that the CE&O and Investment subcommittees could be modified to better achieve objectives. Three respondents also suggested additional subcommittees to address workforce development, prescribed fire on non-federal lands, and data collection and reporting by representatives of place-based groups (Figure 16). The comments and suggestions are discussed further in the “Recommendations” section of this report.

Perceived outcomes

The survey assessed perceived progress towards collaborative process outcomes and social and biophysical performance outcomes. An initial list of outcome metrics for evaluation were derived from the intent of the FLRA and the CFLRP, and conversations with local, regional, and national CFLRP coordinators while developing the Common Monitoring Strategy. These were then adapted to reflect the goals and strategic objectives of the NCFC, which are different from those of the CFLRP. Notably, the NCFC operates as a coordinating

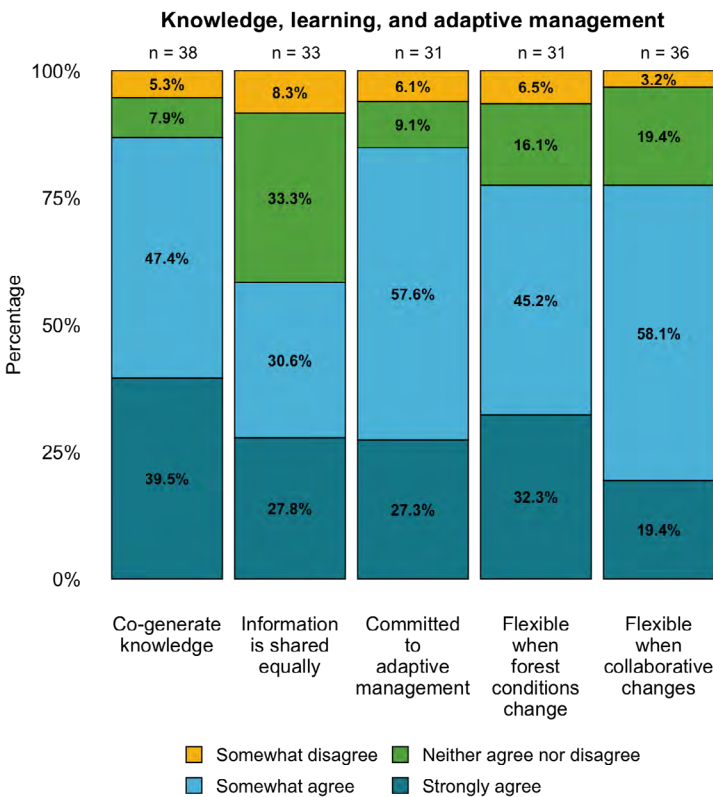


Figure 11: Percent of respondents who “Strongly disagreed” to “Strongly agreed” that knowledge and information is co-generated so that participants can learn and solve problems together, shared equally among project participants, there is commitment to informing adjustments to management practices, and flexibility to adjust when forest or collaborative conditions change.

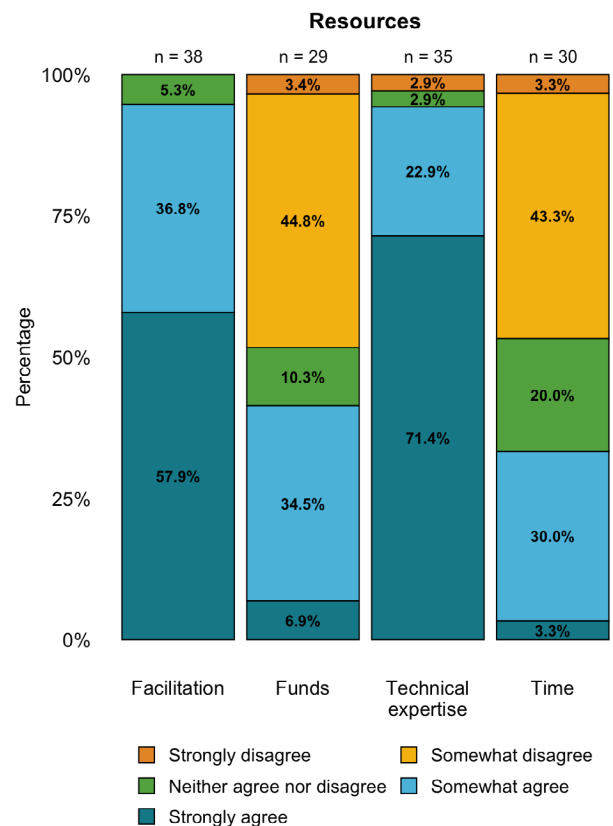


Figure 12: Percent of respondents who “Strongly disagreed” to “Strongly agreed” that the collaborative had adequate facilitation skills, funds, technical expertise, and time to carry out tasks and accomplish work.

platform for many place-based partnerships, and the achievement of some of its goals and strategic objectives relies on and should be credited to the accumulated work of implementing partners.

Collaborative process outcomes

A strong majority of respondents somewhat to strongly agreed that the collaborative process enabled cross-boundary planning (83.3%), enabled partners to plan at the landscape scale (85.7%) and enhanced communication between collaborative participants (100.0%; Figure 17). A notable majority also agreed that the collaborative process enhanced decision-making (i.e., a more transparent, equitable, and fair process; 66.7%), included diverse perspectives (69.7%), and minimized conflict (66.7%; Figure 17). Only 41.7% thought that the collaborative process had minimized litigation, but this metric received only 12 responses, half of which were neutral, indicating lack of familiarity with the status of litigation on the ARNF (Figure 17).

Social and biophysical performance outcomes

A strong majority reported that the collaborative had made moderate to substantial progress on the social performance outcomes of improving partners' ability to engage in planning processes using science-based spatial planning tools and platforms (96.9%), and increasing engagement of community-connected partners in landscape-level planning and prioritization processes (87.5%; Figure 18). A notable majority felt the NCFC had made moderate to substantial progress towards increasing coordination of mitigation actions, emergency response strategies, and recovery capacities (77.2%), increasing pre-project coordination among implementing partners (76%), increasing partner capacity for outreach and engagement with the public about wildfire and community resilience (75%), and increasing or leveraging financial resources

to support implementation (74.2%; Figure 18). A smaller majority felt the collaborative had made moderate to substantial progress towards increasing local capacity for fuels reduction treatments (60%) or increasing public support for prescribed fire as a fuels management tool (54.6%; Figure 18).

Regarding biophysical performance outcomes, a strong majority reported moderate to substantial progress towards increasing strategic placement of restoration or fuels reduction projects (85.2%, Figure 19). A notable majority reported that the collaborative had made progress towards reducing hazardous fuels through treatments like thinning and fuel breaks (72.0%), and a smaller majority reported the NCFC had increased the pace (57.7%) and scale (55.5%) of restoration and fuels reduction work (Figure 19). Perceptions of outcomes for fire use were less positive, with a notable majority reporting that the NCFC had made minimal to no progress on improving the use of prescribed fire (65.6%) or increasing the ability to manage wildland fire for resource benefit (70.6%; Figure 19).

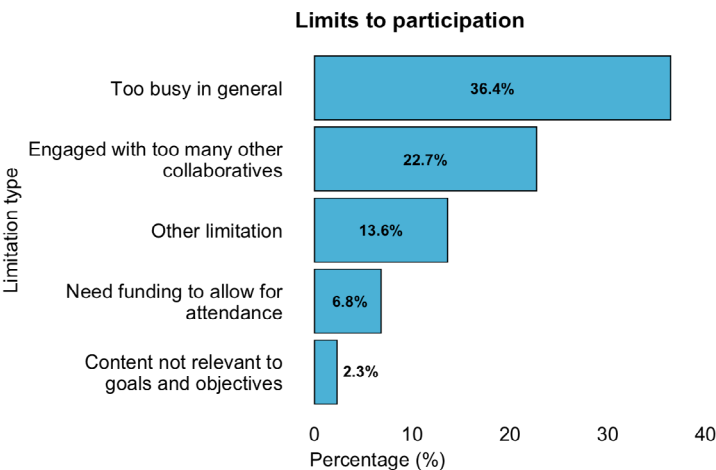


Figure 13: Percentage of respondents who reported who identified these aspects as limiting their ability to participate.

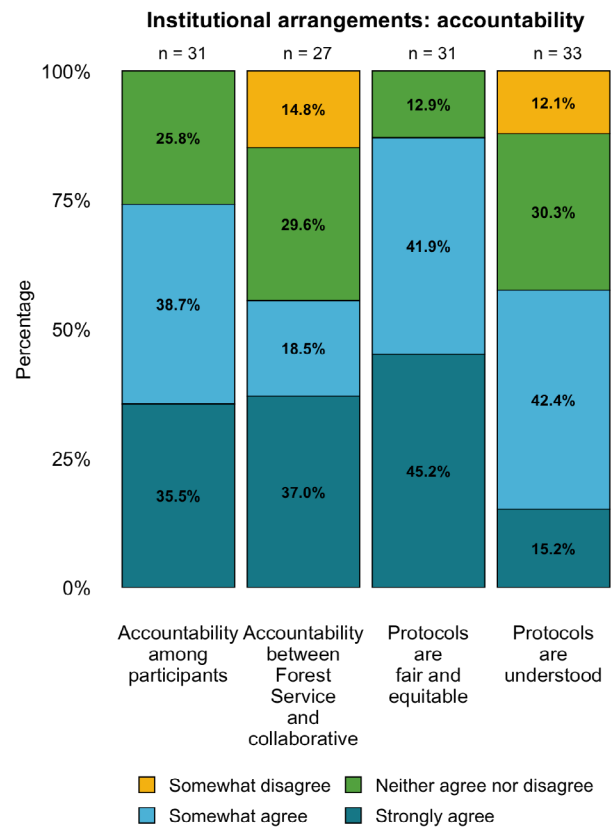


Figure 14: Percent of respondents who “Strongly disagreed” to “Strongly agreed” that protocols promote accountability among participants, between Forest Service and the collaborative, and that collaborative protocols are fair and equitable, understood by participants, and are used appropriately.

Disruptions

At the time of the survey, disruptions that posed the greatest moderate to significant challenges to collaborative progress, performance, and durability were constraints on prescribed fire use (97.0% of respondents found this to be a moderate to significant challenge), limited workforce capacity (94.1%), moving from direction-setting/planning to implementation (87.1%), and limited agency capacity for collaborative engagement (85.3%). Additional challenges included fewer funds than expected or changes in the timing of dispersed funds (80.8%), limited capacity of the local wood products industry (79.4%) turnover in agency personnel and/or project participants (67.8%), and biophysical disruptions (e.g., wildfire, insects, disease, etc.; 66.7%; [Figure 20](#)). Notably, the only challenge that was not identified as a challenge by a majority of respondents was participant conflict.

When asked to identify additional disruptions that have impacted collaborative performance and durability, many expanded on the issues identified above, such as personnel turnover, especially among Forest Service partners. One respondent lamented the constraints on ARNF partners to participate more in the NCFC, stating:

“In my mind, the USFS [Forest Service]” should be a major component of the NCFC meetings but in the past I often see few USFS reps in the room [this past NCFC meeting had exceptional USFS attendance]. In addition, the fact that USFS staff take “details” almost annually is SO FRUSTRATING for partners who are just trying to move the needle.”

Another respondent expressed concerns about limited agency capacity more directly:

“I worry about burnout among key partners. [The Forest Service] has been awesome at devoting significant intellectual capacity to [the] Fireshed, so their ability to partner is also critical...to avoid bottlenecks and performance hangups.”

Several participants emphasized constraints related to prescribed fire use, such as the “inability to pile burn on private lands” due to the high cost of prescribed fire liability insurance. One participant expressed their frustration about the dual challenges of constraints on prescribed fire and limited industry capacity, stating:

“...[T]he main factors I see that will continue to slow things down are lack of prescribed fire use, and nothing to do with the wood. Which are, of course, intimately related. Let’s not dream of making stuff with all this crap wood, let’s just really all try hard to actually burn it. In little piles, in big piles, in wood staves, in broadcast burns, in wildfires, however we possibly can.”

Institutional arrangements: transparent and responsive

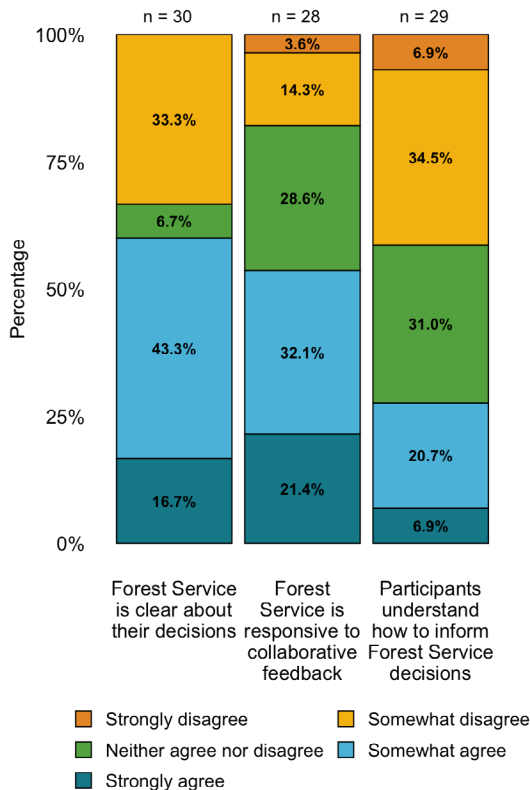


Figure 15: Percent of respondents “Strongly disagreed” to “Strongly agreed” that the Forest Service is clear about what decisions they make and why, the Forest Service is responsive to project participant feedback, and that they understand when and what input is useful to inform Forest Service decisions.

An additional disruption that was identified by respondents was the challenge to disbursing funding for project implementation on non-federal lands posed by “project compliance (e.g., cultural surveys, biological surveys, etc.)” While financial resources are administered by the NFF on behalf of the Northern Colorado Fireshed Fund, the primary source of funding in 2023-2024 was federal and thus subject to compliance measures. The Fund was originally intended to provide both capacity and project grants. However, the costs of contracting to meet compliance requirements would have substantially diminished the amount available for projects, so instead the entirety of the Fund’s resources have been invested

Subcommittees

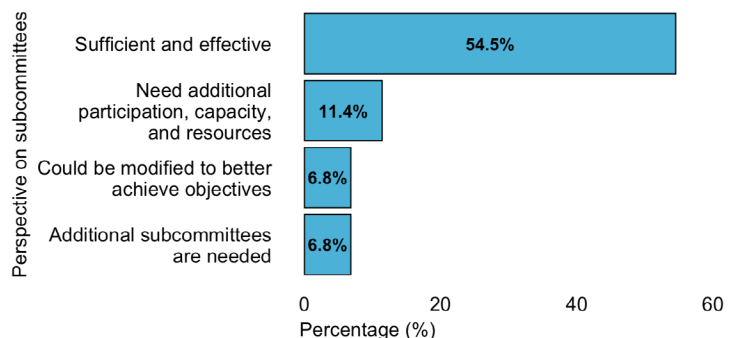


Figure 16: Percent of respondents who believed the NCFC subcommittees are sufficient and effective, need additional participation, capacity or resources, and that additional subcommittees are needed.

in capacity needs such as personnel for the place-based, community connected partner organizations that make up the Fireshed—which the NCFC also views as vital for achieving outcomes on the ground.⁸

Respondent recommendations

Several open-ended questions throughout the survey provided opportunities for respondents to reflect and suggest recommendations to improve collaborative process, structure, durability, and performance. From the qualitative responses, three broad thematic recommendations were identified: 1) increase participant representation and opportunities for input; 2) improve mechanisms for cross-scale collaboration; and 3) increase focus on activities that will lead to, and demonstrate, outcomes. The crosscutting theme of increased capacity is addressed for each recommendation.

Increase participant representation and opportunities for input

One prominent theme was communication and engagement within the NCFC for a variety of interested and affected entities. The NCFC spans a large area from

the Colorado/Wyoming border south to the I-70 corridor, encompassing or touching 7 counties. This makes wide geographic representation both challenging and critical. The collaborative originated in Larimer County and expanded to cover the extent of the ARNF and adjacent lands in 2020. Two respondents felt the Larimer County-centric legacy persisted, with one stating that it was difficult to get up to Larimer County for meetings, and another suggesting: “perhaps more input/ voices from partners in other counties other than Larimer.”⁹

Respondents expressed a desire for increased representation from the ARNF. While agency capacity to engage in collaboration will likely be an ongoing challenge (Figure 20), their continued participation is critical for improving accountability and transparency between the ARNF and participants of NCFC (Figure 15). Increased agency representation beyond ARNF was also recommended, specifically, from the Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control and Colorado Parks and Wildlife, to “provide more comprehensive outcomes and perspectives...[and] enhance discussions around structural and/or WUI factors and the impacts on wildlife.”

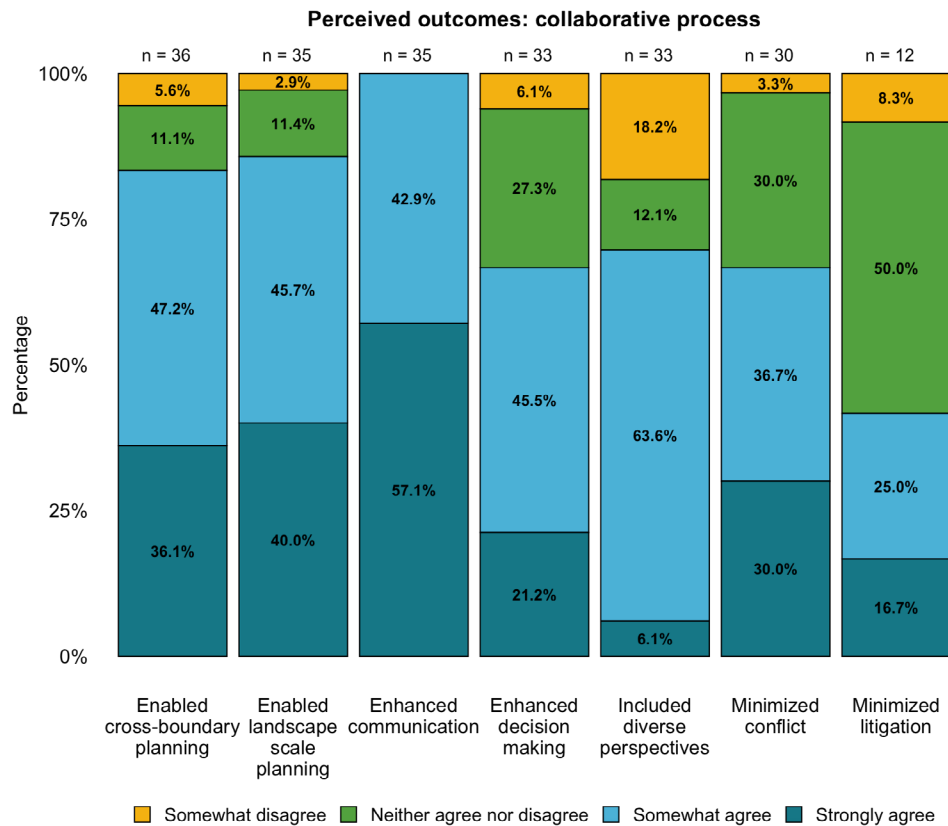


Figure 17: Percent of respondents who “Strongly disagreed” to “Strongly agreed” that the collaborative process has impacted the function and capacity of the collaborative.

⁸ Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative (2023). Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative Charter.

⁹ In 2023-2024, 3 meetings were hosted in Larimer County, 1 in Boulder County, and 1 in Jefferson County; the remaining 3 meetings were virtual.

Some open-ended responses indicated a desire for NCFC leadership to increase opportunities for input and build awareness for the full collaborative membership about the work of subcommittees, with one stating they “[w]ould like to see increased communication from subcommittees’ decisions and topics to NCFC at large membership.” Others suggested communicating about how to engage with subcommittees, how to get on subcommittee meeting agendas, and how to suggest subcommittee issues or projects. A few respondents were surprised they had not heard about the Treatment Effectiveness Working Group and wanted to learn more. This survey result was communicated at the fourth quarterly meeting of 2024, leading to a follow up discussion with the ad hoc working group’s coordinator, who plans to provide more information about this effort in future quarterly meetings and via the NCFC newsletter.

Improve mechanisms for cross-scale collaboration

Many of the open-ended comments pertained to structural considerations to make the NCFC or its subcommittees more effective, efficient, and/or better integrated with collaboration happening at smaller scales. The NCFC landscape encompasses numerous

governmental and non-governmental organizations and collaborative groups working locally on a variety of issues, including, but not limited to, core issues of the NCFC. The NCFC’s charter states that it “operates as a platform for these entities to coordinate how we manage wildfire risk and enhance landscape resilience to wildfire, aiming to collaboratively identify, build support for, and implement these actions in strategic priority areas across the Fireshed.”¹⁰ As illustrated in Table 1 and Figure 13, the landscape is dense with collaborative networks nested at multiple scales, leading to meeting fatigue for some. One survey participant summed up the challenge:

“The explosion of Front Range collaboratives over the last 10 years has overwhelmingly been a good thing, but at this point, there’s a fair bit of redundancy, meeting fatigue, and lack of understanding/ agreement on what a collaborative can practically do at a given scale/geography/jurisdiction. Perhaps I’m unaware of efforts to do this or literature about this, but a statewide push to help us understand the function of collaboratives [at] various scales might bring better organization and efficiency to collaboratives to reduce meeting FOMO, feeling spread thin, and distracted from actually getting work done on the ground.”

Achieving cross-scale collaboration is important to the NCFC, which is reflected in their landscape spatial

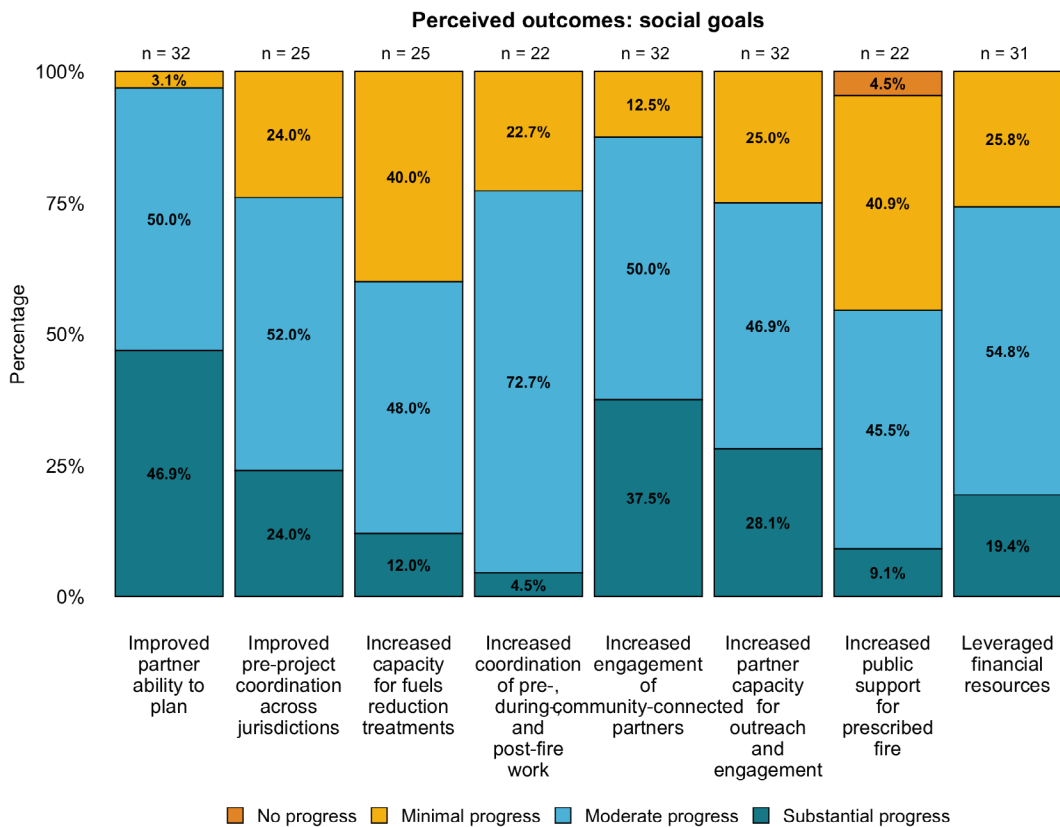


Figure 18: Percent of respondents who reported “No progress,” “Minimal progress,” “Moderate progress,” or “Substantial progress” towards social goals.

¹⁰ The Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative (2023). The Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative Charter, p. 3.

¹¹ The Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative (2024). Principles & Components of the Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative Spatial Strategy.

strategy.¹¹ The strategy is meant to be incorporated into local planning and prioritization and to guide project investment through the Fund. It calls for cross-scale coordination and participation, information sharing throughout implementation, and shared frameworks for adaptive management. The use of shared planning processes through tools like Potential Operational Delineations (PODs) and risk assessments are also highlighted. The strategy implies a scale-based division of roles for the NCFC and place-based partnerships, but one respondent described this relationship more directly:

“I think the NCFC is a great avenue for sharing lessons learned broadly, helping inform place-based collaboratives of policy, supporting policy changes, and providing support to local collaboratives. I think it should stay at the scale it is currently at, where place-based collaboratives have the most agency in conducting cross-boundary planning and collaboration in specific landscapes.”

While the majority of respondents identified the shift from direction-setting to implementation as only a moderate disruption for the NCFC (Figure 20), several responses indicated the sentiment that the “time for results on the ground is now.” The large geographic scale at which the NCFC works means that it may be

difficult for participants to see the utility and outcomes of collaborative engagement. One respondent stated that achieving results required shifting focus to the local level:

“I feel like NCFC is more focused on the general picture, PLANNING (way big on plans and making sure the framework is “correct”), and information sharing. I do think that during the Big Thompson Watershed Health Partnership meetings it is a much better scale to be working with partners to actually strategize where and how we are working on the landscape. This is where I feel like the rubber meets the road in terms of taking action that gets work done on the ground.”

Cross-scale collaboration requires that the NCFC maintain mechanisms for multi-directional information flows and communication channels for feedback on issues and work plans at the larger level, sharing information from place-based partners about the challenges they are facing, and to ensure that the process is informed by work on the ground. Human resources are needed to gather and share information from across the NCFC landscape:

“If fewer meetings and more integration is the goal, we need capacity to regularly join the place-based collaborative meeting AND report back to the larger group on trends, concerns, needs, etc.”

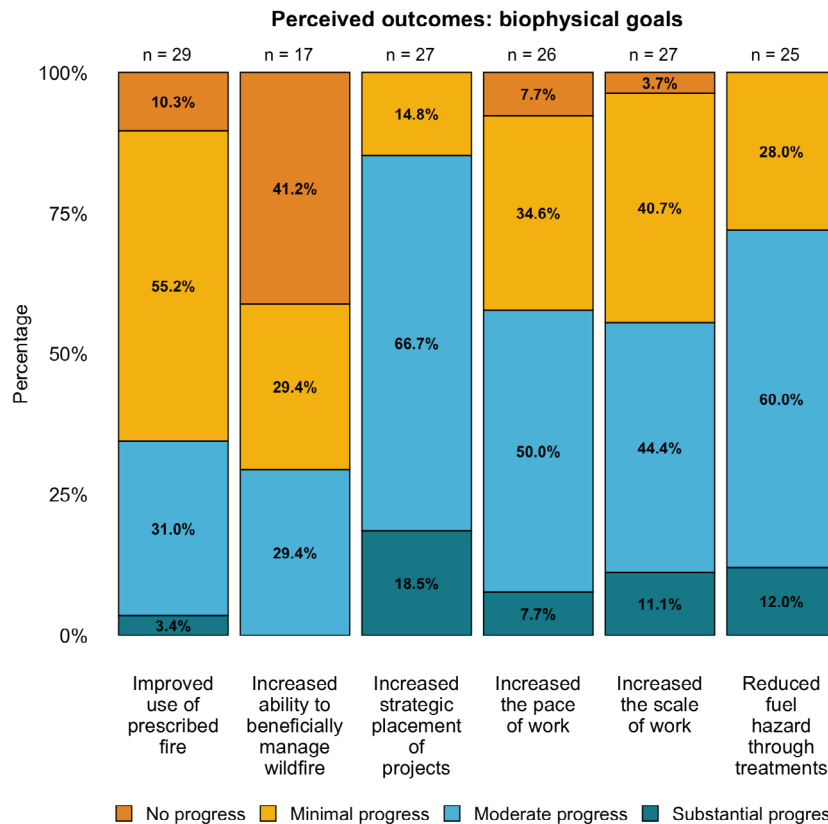


Figure 19: Percent of respondents who reported “No progress,” “Minimal progress,” “Moderate progress,” or “Substantial progress” towards biophysical performance goals.

¹¹ The Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative (2024). Principles & Components of the Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative Spatial Strategy.

The NCFC has a full-time coordinator and received a boost in capacity in early 2025 with the hiring of a Community Education & Outreach Manager (a shared position with the Ember Alliance, with the majority of time dedicated to the NCFC). These positions are key to addressing some of these recommendations for better cross-scale integration, particularly for participation in local meetings, communication, and community engagement.

However, additional resources will be needed to support NCFC-level and place-based work, and the sources that have funded much of the work (primarily from the Forest Service) are being drastically cut back as of the first quarter of 2025. As one respondent presciently noted, “NCFC must increase funding from sources other than the US Forest Service investments. USFS funding will expire and is subject to political influence.” The respondent went on to recommend that NCFC participants collectively contribute to the collaborative.

Increase focus on activities that will lead to, and demonstrate, outcomes

In addition to building support and momentum for place-based entities, survey respondents suggested greater emphasis on activities that would lead to desired performance outcomes, particularly around proactive fire,

community engagement and outreach, and performance tracking and adaptive management.

Proactive fire

As illustrated by Figure 19, most respondents perceived minimal to no progress towards two major goals of the NCFC: improved use of prescribed fire, and increased ability to beneficially manage wildfire. Further, respondents rated constraints on prescribed fire as the most significant challenge to NCFC performance and durability (Figure 20). One participant described the problem as follows:

[the NCFC has] “Still a strong focus on mechanical thinning, generating more piles, etc. and a shortfall in prescribed broadcast burning...There seems to be a naive or willful ignorance of the increasing radiative power and rapid spread of fire, and that the conventional theory of mechanical thinning is based on late 1990s understanding of fire. An honest look at what management activities are truly effective in the face of increased power and spread of fires is necessary, but many orgs keep getting funding just for mechanical thinning. Fire will continue to overwhelm mechanical treatments unless more managed fire is put on the ground. Given this reality that we’re already seeing, NCFC is doing a good job highlighting post-fire recovery and restoration, because that’s the increasing reality.”

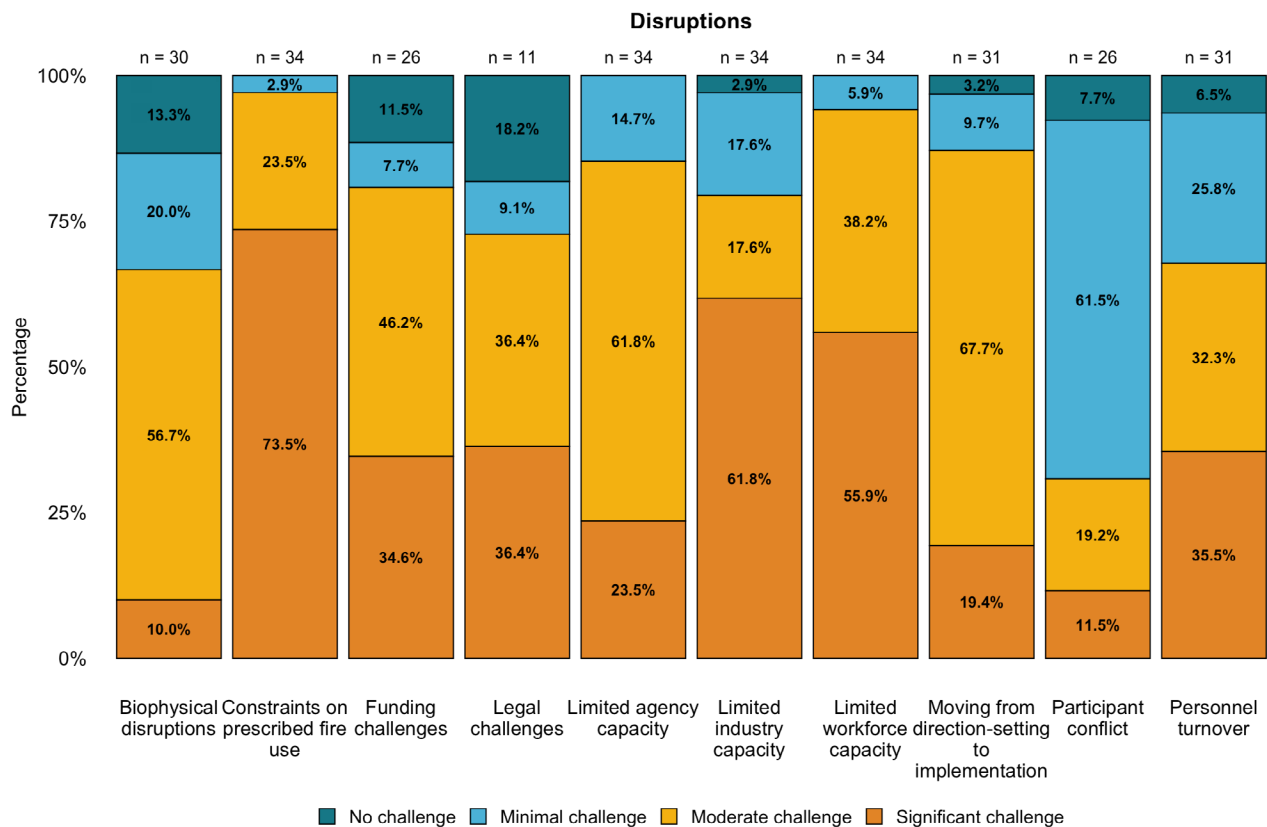


Figure 20: Percent of respondents who reported disruptions posed “No challenge,” “Minimal challenge,” “Moderate challenge,” or “Significant challenge” to collaborative performance and durability.

Suggestions were made to “focus as much time and energy as possible to remove roadblocks to prescribed fire on private lands” by, for example, introducing a new subcommittee explicitly dedicated to fire use and implementation on non-federal land. Such a subcommittee might tackle partners’ “inability to pile burn on private lands,” increase “opportunities for prescribed fire training,” or develop tools such as “legal templates and MOUs for partners to use to support collaborative rx [prescribed] fire.” One respondent suggested greater emphasis on policy efforts like “legislation to support a [insurance] claims fund”¹². While the NCFC as a whole does not advocate for specific policies, leaders do engage in policy work to reduce barriers to prescribed fire through or in parallel with their home organizations or place-based partnerships, and by interacting with entities like the Colorado Prescribed Fire Council and the Wildfire Matters Review Committee of the General Assembly of the Colorado Legislature. Quarterly NCFC meetings frequently feature updates on these efforts, and on policies with the potential to affect the work of NCFC partners.

Another respondent encouraged the NCFC to “[s]tay focused on what needs to happen -- more low- to moderate-intensity fire on the ground in more places. The science is absolutely clear that that’s what’s needed to confer resilience ecologically and socially. Everything else is a distraction.” Desired conditions of the NCFC include more low- to moderate severity fires and reduced likelihood of uncharacteristically large areas of high burn severity through a combination of fuel treatments, including beneficial wildfire.¹³ Prescribed fire alone will not be sufficient to achieve that desired condition. Beyond prescribed fire, multiple respondents urged more conversations about response options to wildfire and increased consideration of safe and effective managed wildfire strategies. One respondent acknowledged that “this is not an easy lift and will be a long-term commitment.” Another framed the challenge as:

“Even if we miraculously increase the pace and scale of treatments, we are still going to be slowly edging our way back to square one if we do not address directly how our highly risk averse culture and practices contribute to this situation in the first place...there are certain times when the risk posed by those ignitions is low relative to the potential risk of another East Troublesome, Cameron Peak, or Calwood incident if we sit on our hands waiting for the ‘perfect’ conditions. How can we support a more proactive form of fire management?”

Community engagement and outreach

Respondents also emphasized that moving towards more proactive fire management demands increased community education and outreach to build awareness of and engagement in wildland fire management issues. The CE&O subcommittee was identified as one needing additional participation, capacity, and resources to be effective. One respondent said the CE&O subcommittee was “a place to share our outreach efforts and sometimes discuss approaches, language, and common messaging,” but that additional capacity would “move the [sub]committee from one that shares and discusses to one that creates outputs collectively.” Another indicated that the subcommittee needed to be modified to better achieve its objectives, encouraging not only deeper engagement, but also more integration with place-based planning and operations discussions. They expressed their desire that the new engagement coordinator would focus on opportunities to bring the community together in-person multiple times a year and across the NCFC’s large geographic region. This type of engagement cannot be replaced by social media or websites and is integral for gauging wildfire response and mitigation needs ahead of the fire season. They suggested: “[w]e should do some kind of gaming out of wildfire response and mitigation needs in every watershed at the beginning of each fire season,” which would enable talking about likely start locations and response in connection with current landscape treatment plans. Others suggested that CE&O could share success stories to that motivate partners and help them brainstorm their own options by celebrating successful prescribed fire and other mitigation work.

Performance tracking and adaptive management

Finally, respondents recommended focusing more attention on measuring and demonstrating performance. One suggested incorporating social science data collection and analysis to measure whether place-based community engagement efforts are having their intended impact. Another respondent pushed for “adoption and application of PODs and risk assessment as the unifying planning, implementation, monitoring, reporting, and adaptive management framework” in order to “explicitly tie together pre-, during-, and post-fire scenarios and management actions across jurisdictions.” As noted above, both PODs and risk assessments already feature prominently in pre-fire planning and have been incorporated into several processes and decision support tools, including a PODs dashboard developed in 2024 to more explicitly incorporate PODs into local collaborative meetings. One

¹² A claims fund, as proposed in Colorado Senate Bill 25-007, would provide a mechanism to address potential damage claims resulting from prescribed fire.

¹³ Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative (2024). Principles & Components of the Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative Spatial Strategy.

participant noted a need for a GIS and data management specialist to “...support place-based groups in sharing their project data, using the dashboards, etc.” Multiple respondents emphasized the need for increased capacity for adaptive management and reporting.

Respondent reflections

Lastly, we asked respondents to reflect on what NCFC accomplishments they were most proud of. Many were proud of each other and of committed participants working at different levels across the NCFC landscape who have co-developed a shared understanding of the problem and vision for the future. The shared spatial strategy and tools for planning and prioritizing work, including the PODs dashboard, were mentioned as points of pride by some respondents. Some were proud of the capacity funding provided to community-connected partners through the Fund, and grateful for NFF’s support in “stabilizing cash flow.” One pointed to the value of the NCFC for enabling the success of a large, multi-million dollar grant jointly obtained by a subset of Fireshed partners. Several were proud that the NCFC had pushed boundaries, even if it hasn’t yet solved the problem:

“I am most proud of the community coming together toward a shared vision. I believe there is still work to be done to make the vision truly holistic, but I am proud of the progress we’ve made, and everyone involved. I think the fireshed is a model that other landscapes should work to emulate.”

Discussion and conclusion

The Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI) adapted a nationwide CFLRP survey to support the Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative (NCFC) in its self-assessment of collaborative governance process, progress, and performance. The survey was developed in coordination with the NCFC’s Steering Committee and coordinator. It was launched in a quarterly meeting with a brief presentation and with time for participants to take the survey, then distributed to 275 people through the NoCo Fireshed Newsletter. The survey was open for six weeks between September and November 2024 and received 44 useable responses, a response rate of 16%. All major participating group types of the NCFC were represented among survey respondents. We assessed whether the NCFC exhibited characteristics generally associated with healthy, well-functioning, and resilient collaboratives; the extent to which the project has made progress on meeting process, social, and biophysical outcomes; what challenges or disruptions affected collaborative performance and durability; and actionable recommendations for improvements.

Overall, there was strong agreement on many indicators that the collaborative process was working well. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that a representative set of interests were involved in the NCFC process, and that the NCFC provided a neutral space where participants worked together to identify shared interest and concerns. A majority of respondents agreed on key problems affecting the landscape, the purpose of collaboration, and strategies to solve problems. There was also high agreement on satisfaction with quarterly meeting agenda topics, newsletter content, and the collaborative process overall.

Indicators also demonstrated a high degree of shared motivation. A strong majority of respondents agreed that the collaborative process has helped build trust, relationships, and mutual respect of others’ positions and interests. Respondents strongly agreed that they were committed to the collaborative process, and a majority reported that they trusted the ability of the NCFC to achieve desired actions and outcomes. A majority of respondents reported the presence of leaders with skills for working with other people and organizations, who communicated a collaborative vision, and motivated others to work together.

Respondents felt the NCFC had adequate skills to facilitate collaborative engagement activities and technical expertise to carry out tasks and accomplish their work. There was high agreement that participants worked together to co-generate knowledge and solve problems, were committed to adaptive management, and has some flexibility when forest conditions or the collaborative itself changes.

There were several areas for improvement. Only a slim majority agreed that knowledge and information were shared equally among the group and accessible to all members. Documenting this learning and knowledge exchange is critical to maintaining transparency, equity, and institutional knowledge ([Beeton et al., 2022](#); [Cheng et al., 2015](#)). Ensuring that participants are aware of and have access to the NCFC’s Box drive, where meeting notes, shared GIS data, and other materials are maintained, could improve the accessibility of information.

Many respondents indicated the need for more clarity around how and when collaborative members could inform Forest Service management actions. A common goal of collaborative engagement in public lands management is for collaborative groups to inform land management decisions. Thus, it is important to understand the allowable decision space, i.e., the range of options that are available to decision-makers and feasible

to implement. However, decision space is often murky and the result of many intervening variables, including legal, financial, physical, technological, political, and socio-cultural considerations. Collaborative groups often lack clear, comprehensive understanding of what actions are possible (and which aren't) and how they might inform decisions. This can be even more complex in an all-lands partnership with diffuse decision authority, such as the NCFC (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). Whenever possible, it is imperative to make explicit the allowable decision space in any collaborative forest restoration effort.

A large proportion of respondents felt the NCFC did not have adequate time or funding to accomplish needed work. Funding will likely continue to be a challenge moving forward as federal resources become more uncertain. NCFC leaders have already begun pursuing the recommendation to diversify funding sources, primarily to support capacity and fuels reduction projects of place-based partners, but also for capacity to support NCFC-level efforts.

Suggestions for improvements were grouped under three broad and overlapping themes: 1) increase participant representation and opportunities for input; 2) improve mechanisms for cross-scale collaboration; and 3) increase focus on activities that will lead to, and demonstrate, outcomes at the landscape level.

While results indicated high agreement that the NCFC engages a representative cross-section of stakeholders, open-ended comments suggested that some key perspectives are missing, particularly from agencies and entities with responsibilities related to wildlife management and wildland firefighting. This parallels a recent finding from a separate study of the Front Range Wildfire Crisis Landscape that wildlife specialists, fire districts, and Indigenous communities constituted missing voices in collaboratives across the Front Range Wildfire Crisis Landscape (Muttaqee et al., 2025, manuscript in preparation). Notably, Tribes were the only participant group not represented by survey respondents; but Tribes have not been participants in the collaborative to this point, and do not currently manage land within the NCFC's footprint. Nonetheless, there may be opportunities in the future to do outreach with Tribes whose ancestral lands overlap with the NCFC footprint.

The large geographic area of the NCFC makes it challenging to ensure broad geographic representation. This is in part addressed currently through attention to membership rules for the Steering Committee (the

primary decision-making entity for the NCFC), such as rotating seats for place-based partners and local representatives, and by providing virtual meeting options for quarterly and committee meetings. Subcommittee leads usually present on progress at quarterly meetings, but respondents indicated that having more opportunities to provide input on the work taking place in subcommittees would be helpful. Committee participation remains an important avenue for place-based partners to shape and influence the direction of the NCFC, but survey results suggest that many participants have constraints on their ability to participate in more meetings. NCFC leadership might consider expanding opportunities for general membership to provide input on subcommittee work plans and projects by adding polling opportunities to quarterly meetings, sharing links to meeting summaries in the newsletter, or by other means.

A related but more nuanced theme was improving mechanisms for cross-scale collaboration. Northern Colorado is home to many place-based forest collaboratives with diverse but overlapping issues and participation. As several participants noted, the 'action happens' at the local-level, and that level is thought to be a better scale for building relationships, trust, and buy-in with community members ([Diaz-Kope & Miller-Stevens, 2014](#); [Koontz & Johnson, 2004](#); [Margerum, 2008](#)). In contrast, the NCFC operates at a geographically larger scale with a focus on broader coordination between organizations. In addition to improving cross-jurisdictional coordination, advantages of collaboration at this larger scale include increased ability to 'fit' the scale of wildland fire behavior; more jurisdictions and partners who can potentially pool resources and knowledge to address shared problems; increased access to interagency leadership and technical expertise; and (if perceived as representative and legitimate) increased visibility and potential for policy influence ([Bonnell & Koontz, 2007](#); [Cash et al., 2006](#); [Heikkila & Gerlak, 2005](#); Margerum & Robinson, 2016).

The literature offers strategies for navigating multi-level collaboration, some of which are already in place. For example, the NCFC has drawn on principles of effective multi-level governance in developing a nested framework to align goals¹⁴ and strategies¹⁵ to foster both autonomy at the local level and structures for coordination across the landscape (Young, 2002; [Young, 2006](#)). Developing structures and agreements for pooling and sharing resources, such as the Fund, can leverage scale to more efficiently access, pool, and distribute resources to

¹⁴ Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative (2023). Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative Charter.

¹⁵ Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative (2024). Principles & Components of the Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative Spatial Strategy.

place-based partners to support their work (Koontz & Newig, 2014). The NCFC also operates at a scale well-suited to foster cross-scale learning and adaptive management (Imperial, 2005; Pahl-Wostl, 2009). Several partner entities in the NCFC act as boundary spanning organizations that support knowledge exchange, translate between local and regional issues, and support joint planning efforts (Cash et al., 2006). These boundary spanning partners have been instrumental in supporting the development and socialization of shared geospatial decision support tools intended to improve coordination and information sharing about planned and completed fuels reduction projects. Recommendations from survey respondents suggest that these entities could also play a stronger role in facilitating downward (and especially) upward communication of issues and concerns. As the NCFC moves into the stage of adapting and sustaining momentum,¹⁶ field trips and science “jam” sessions (workshops focused on sharing locally relevant scientific findings and incorporating them into management decisions) will be valuable mechanisms for cross-scale collaborative learning and co-generation of knowledge.

Survey results indicated that there is still much work to be done to increase public support for proactive fire and increase capacity for fuels reduction treatments, and that the most substantial disruptions at the time of the survey were constraints on prescribed fire use, limited workforce capacity, limited agency capacity to engage with the NCFC, and limited capacity of the wood products industry. To overcome these constraints and achieve performance goals, respondents suggested the NCFC increase its focus on activities that will lead to, and demonstrate, outcomes. Respondents emphasized the need to stay focused on reducing barriers to prescribed fire, pile burning, and proactive management of unplanned ignitions. They also recommended the NCFC continue to support place-based partnerships working to engage landowners and communities around wildfire and forest health issues, and to strive to overcome the challenges of funding fuel reduction projects on non-federal lands. The NCFC was also noted as valuable for supporting social and policy learning. The collaborative should also increase its role in supporting science-informed monitoring, adaptive management, and progress tracking to demonstrate outcomes and build support for the work of partners. To scale up and sustain momentum, the NCFC could increase attention to building workforce capacity, answering questions about treatment effectiveness, improving data sharing and integration across partners, and strengthening connectivity between pre-, during-,

and post-fire activities within its boundaries to prepare landscapes and communities for a future with fire. These recommended activities are all appropriate for the scale at which the NCFC works. However, limited time and resources will require NCFC leadership to be strategic in directing the work of the subcommittees to improve performance and address the challenges and concerns identified in this assessment.

The assessment represents a snapshot in time just prior to a major shift in national priorities in early 2025 with still-unfolding implications for funding, workforce, and capacity of key partners to engage. Yet, there is still a need to collaborate to share resources to achieve goals that cannot be achieved alone. 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 health and performance periodically to encourage durable and useful collaboration. This survey could be readministered periodically in future years if interest and resources allow.



Photo credit: Marya Washburn

¹⁶ Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative (2023). Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative Charter Appendix: Preparing Landscapes and Communities to Receive and Recover from Wildfire through Collaborative Readiness.

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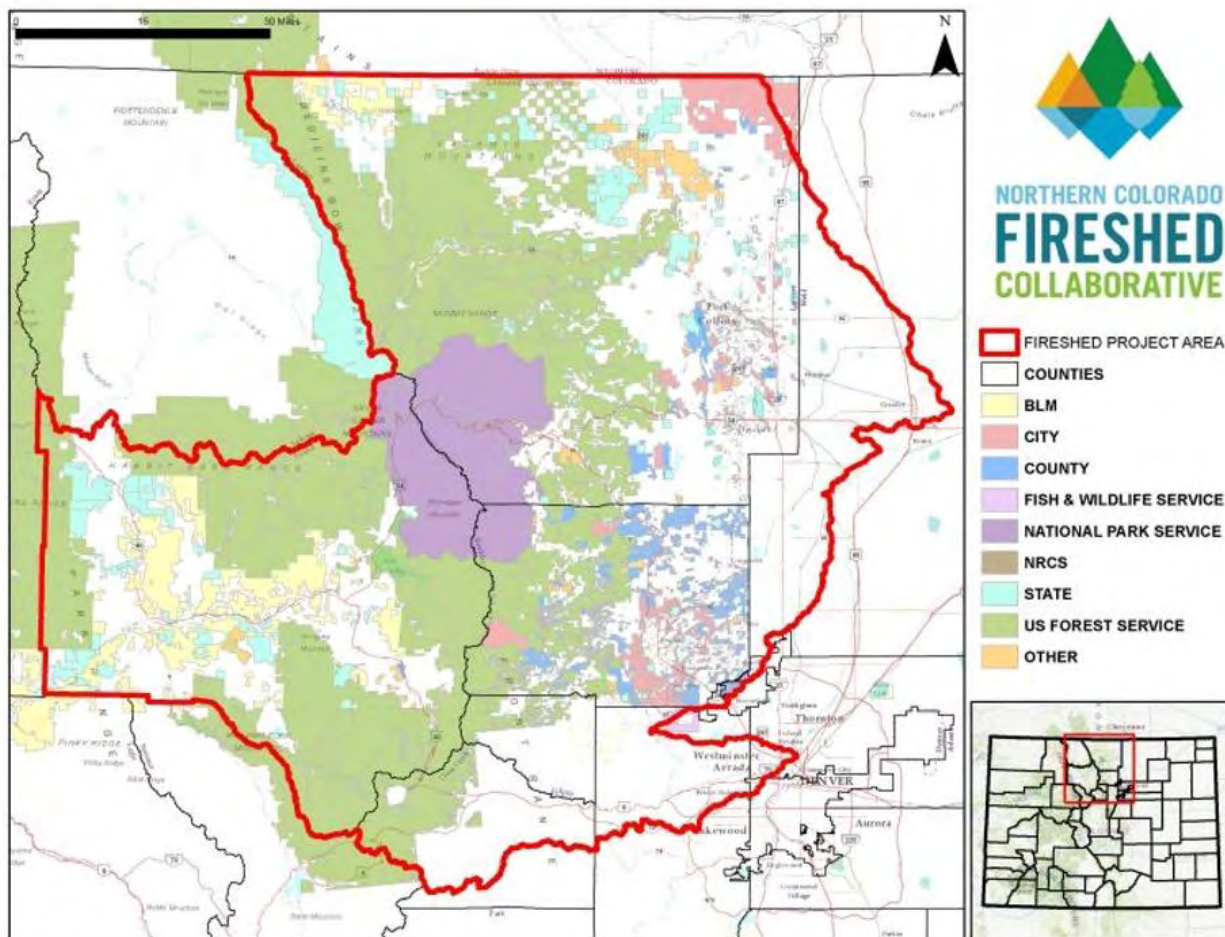
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Appendix 1 – NCFC Collaborative Governance Assessment: Survey instrument

Consent

We are conducting a self-assessment of the Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative (NCFC) to understand the extent to which we support an effective and meaningful collaborative approach to wildfire resilience and forest restoration. The goal of this assessment is to inform our collaborative process and track performance as we progress and evolve. While there are many place based collaboratives and working groups in our landscape, this survey pertains to the NCFC as a whole (boundary pictured below).



For this assessment, we invite your participation in a survey, which will take **approximately 20 minutes to complete**. Please keep in mind that your participation in this research is voluntary, and most questions include a "don't know" option if you feel that you do not know the answer. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw your

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
Forest Service decisions.						
The USDA Forest Service is responsive to NCFC participant feedback.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The USDA Forest Service is clear with NCFC participants about the decisions they make and why.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The NCFC convenes all-member meetings four times a year. The number of all-member NCFC meetings is...(select one option):

- Not frequent enough
- Just right
- Too frequent

The NCFC's subcommittees are 1) Steering; 2) Investment; 3) Community Engagement & Outreach; 4) Strategic Operations & Adaptive Management; and 5) the Treatment Effectiveness Working Group. Select all statements that apply:

- Don't know/ no comments on subcommittees
- These subcommittees seem sufficient and effective.
- The following subcommittees need additional participation, capacity, and resources to be effective (fill in the blank)

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
Enhanced decision-making (i.e., a more transparent, equitable, and fair process).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Included diverse perspectives.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
Minimized litigation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Enabled partners to plan at a landscape scale.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Enabled cross-boundary planning.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What recommendations do you have, or what opportunities do you see, to improve the NCFC's collaborative process and maintain collaborative progress?

The following statements assess cumulative progress towards meeting the NCFC's objectives.

Please indicate whether the NCFC has made progress on the following performance goals (select "Don't know if you don't know; select one for each goal).

	No progress	Minimal progress	Moderate progress	Substantial progress	Don't know
Reduced fuel hazard through treatments (e.g., thinning, fuel breaks).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	No progress	Minimal progress	Moderate progress	Substantial progress	Don't know
Improved the use of prescribed fire.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increased ability to manage unplanned wildfire for resource benefit.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	No progress	Minimal progress	Moderate progress	Substantial progress	Don't know
Increased strategic placement of restoration/ fuels reduction projects.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increased the scale of restoration/ fuels reduction work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increased the pace of restoration/ fuels reduction work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate whether the NCFC has made progress on the following social goals (select "Don't know if you don't know; select one for each goal).

	No progress	Minimal progress	Moderate progress	Substantial progress	Don't know
Improved pre-project coordination among implementers across jurisdictions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increased engagement of community-connected partners in landscape-level planning and prioritization processes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increased public support for the use of prescribed fire as a fuels management tool.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increased local capacity of community-connected partners to conduct	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	No progress	Minimal progress	Moderate progress	Substantial progress	Don't know
outreach and engagement with the public about wildfire and community resilience.					
Increased local capacity to implement fuels reduction treatments.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increased coordination of mitigation actions, emergency response strategies, and recovery capacities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improved the ability of partners to engage in planning processes using science-based spatial planning tools and platforms (e.g., PODs, risk assessment).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increased/leveraged financial resources available to support implementation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Are there additional goals or issue areas you think the NCFC should address?

What NCFC accomplishments are you most proud of, if any?

Challenges or disruptions that affect collaborative performance and durability

Please indicate whether the following disruptions currently pose challenges to the NCFC's collaborative performance and durability (select one for each disruption).

	No challenge	Minor challenge	Moderate challenge	Significant challenge	Don't know
Fewer funds than expected or changes in the timing of dispersed funds.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Legal challenges (e.g., appeals or litigation).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Frequent turnover in agency personnel and/or NCFC participants.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Biophysical disturbances (e.g., wildfire, insects, disease) that impact project planning or divert resources.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Constraints on the ability to use prescribed fire	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	No challenge	Minor challenge	Moderate challenge	Significant challenge	Don't know
Limited agency capacity for collaborative engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conflict among project participants.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Limited capacity of local wood products industry.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Moving from direction-setting/planning to implementation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Limited workforce capacity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What, if any, additional disruptions have impacted collaborative performance and durability?



Conclusion

If you have any additional thoughts about how to improve the NCFC, please share them below.



Please click submit below on the bottom right of your screen to finish the survey and submit your response. If you would like to go back to a previous question, please click the "<<" button on the bottom left of your screen.

consent and stop participation at any time without penalty. When we report and share the data to others we will combine the data from all participants, and no personal identifiable information will be shared. While there are no direct benefits to you, we hope to gain an understanding of what is working well and what challenges to the collaborative process may exist to inform future improvements to the NCFC. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researchers have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize such risks.

Please [click here](#) to review the consent form and learn more about this assessment.

Are you 18 years of age or older, do you consent to participate in this research, and do wish to continue on to the survey?

Yes

No

Introductory Questions

The set of standardized questions that follow should take about 20 minutes to complete. Please answer these questions according to your experience with, and involvement in, the Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative. We are collecting baseline information this year for a longitudinal evaluation based on your perspectives, and we will readminister this survey every 2-3 years to track collaborative progress and performance. Most of the questions are voluntary, and most questions include a "don't know" option if you feel that you do not know the answer.

What years have you been involved with the NCFC? (E.g., 2016-2020 and 2020-present)

In the NCFC, I represent (select one option):

- USDA Forest Service
- Other federal agency
- Forest products industry
- Tribe
- Local government agency
- State agency
- Non-governmental organization (NGO)
- University or research
- Private citizen/interested public
- Other (please specify)

My primary motivations for being involved in the NCFC are (**select up to three**):

- To improve relationships and mutual trust among stakeholders
- To increase communications and information sharing
- To increase the pace and scale of work
- To restore forest resiliency
- To protect or restore fish and wildlife habitat
- To increase opportunities for biomass utilization
- To reduce wildfire risk to communities
- To have more say in public land management decisions
- To create more local jobs
- To improve recreational opportunities
- To protect or restore water resources
- To enhance climate change adaptation
- To protect or restore cultural resources
- Other (please specify)

Select the option that best represents your level of engagement in the NCFC (select one option).

- Not engaged (For example, I do not attend meetings, field trips, or other events, and am not well apprised of NCFC activities.)

- Low engagement (For example, I keep up with newsletters and activities, but infrequently attend meetings, field trips, or other events).
- Moderate engagement (For example, I attend meetings, field trips, or other events but do not serve in a leadership or coordination capacity, and/or I do not participate in work or committees or sub-groups.)
- High engagement (For example, I attend nearly all meetings, field trips, and other events AND participate in work or committees or sub-groups, or serve in a leadership or coordination capacity.)

What is the biggest factor limiting participation of your organization in the NCFC, if any?
(Select all that apply)

- We need direct funding to allow meeting attendance.
- The meeting content is not always relevant for our goals and objectives.
- We engage in too many other collaborative meetings to participate in the NCFC as much as would like.
- Too busy in general.
- Not applicable
- Other (please explain)

Which, if any, place-based collaboratives or working groups are you actively engaged with that are within or overlap with the NCFC landscape? (Please list)

Principled Engagement

The following questions assess perceived representation in participation, and the extent to which people work together to identify a shared understanding, strategy, and purpose

in the NCFC.

Please indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the following statements (select one for each statement).

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
A representative cross-section of the individuals who have interests in the issues and outcomes of the NCFC are involved.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participants work together to identify shared interests and concerns.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participants agree about the key problems that impact our landscape.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
Participants agree about the strategies to solve problems.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participants agree about the purpose of the NCFC.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The collaborative process has created a neutral space where people can openly discuss controversial issues.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Shared Motivation

The following questions assess your agreement on how well the collaborative process of the NCFC has supported trust- and relationship-building, and led to mutual

Appendix 2 – Results presentation



Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative Governance Assessment

Presentation of Results

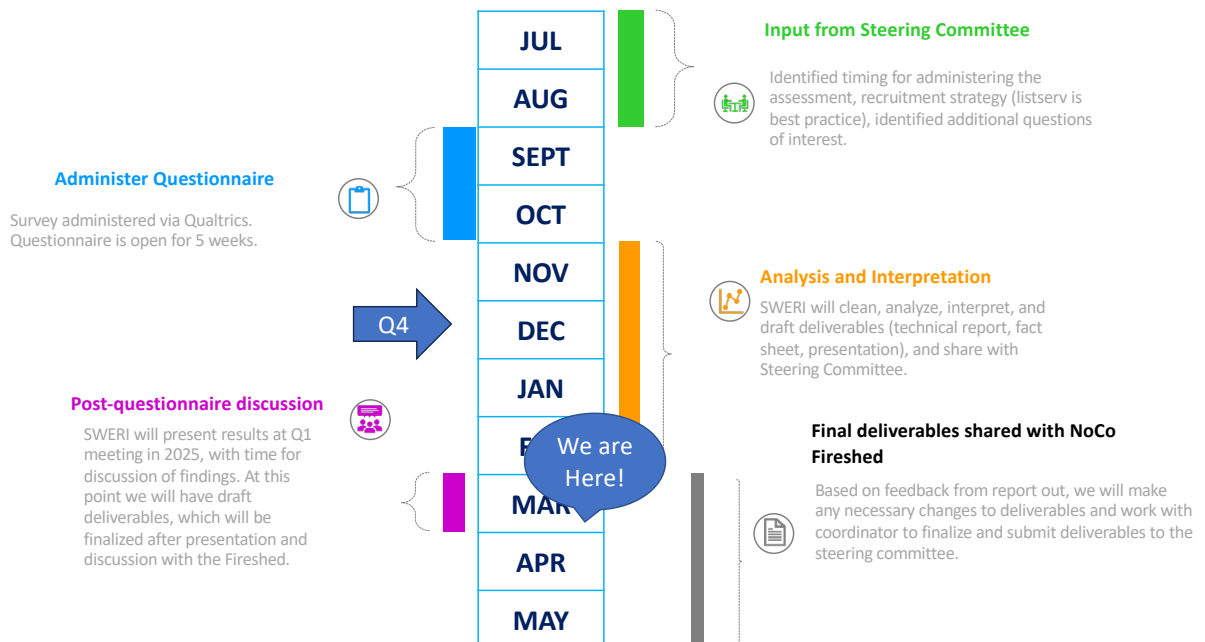
Ch’aska Huayhuaca, Hannah O’Reilly, Tyler Beeton, Niki vonHedemann, Michael Roberts

Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes, Colorado Forest Restoration Institute, Colorado State University, chaska@colostate.edu

March 27, 2025 – First Quarterly Meeting Discussion



Timeline



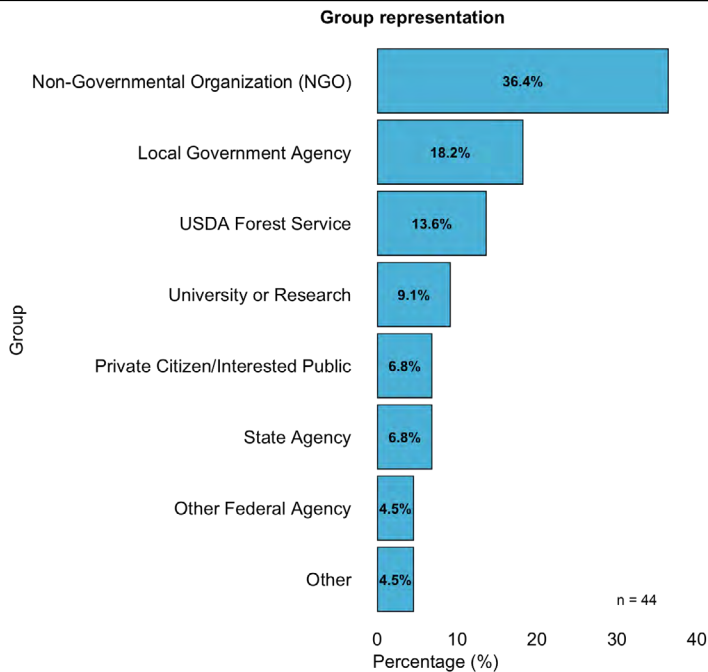
Objectives for today



- Today sharing highlights of key findings:
 - Respondent information
 - Results for collaboration dynamics
 - Subcommittee recommendations
 - Meeting frequency and satisfaction
 - Perceived outcomes, accomplishments, challenges, and disruptions
 - Participant recommendations and themes
- Discussion



Respondent representation

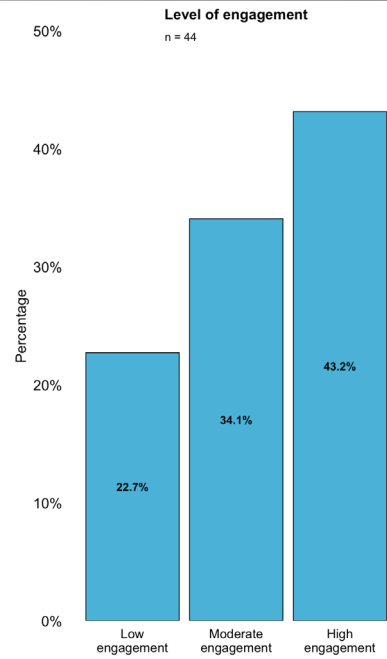


- 16% Response Rate, n=44
- All NCFC participant group types took the survey

Respondent level of engagement



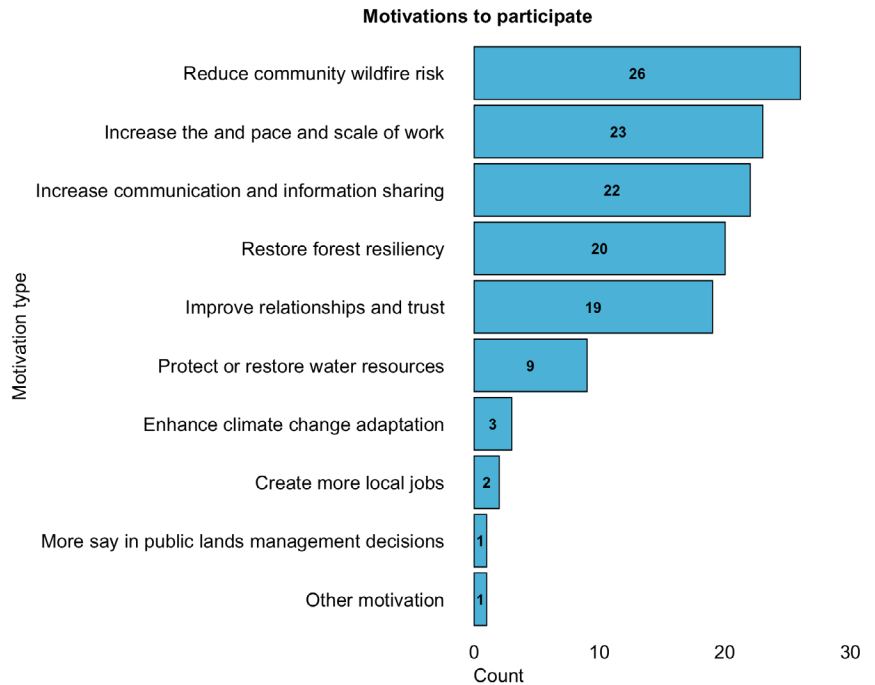
- Most respondents (77%) engage at moderate to high level
 - Low: e.g., I keep up with project notes and activities, but infrequently attend meetings
 - Moderate: e.g., I attend meetings but do not serve in a leadership or coordination capacity, and/or I do not participate in committees.
 - High: e.g., I attend nearly all meetings AND participate in committees or serve in a leadership or coordination capacity.



Respondent motivations for involvement



- Primary motivation: to reduce community wildfire risk
- Other common motivations:
 - To increase the pace and scale of work
 - Increase communication and information sharing
 - Restore forest resilience
 - Improve relationships and trust
 - Protect and restore water resources



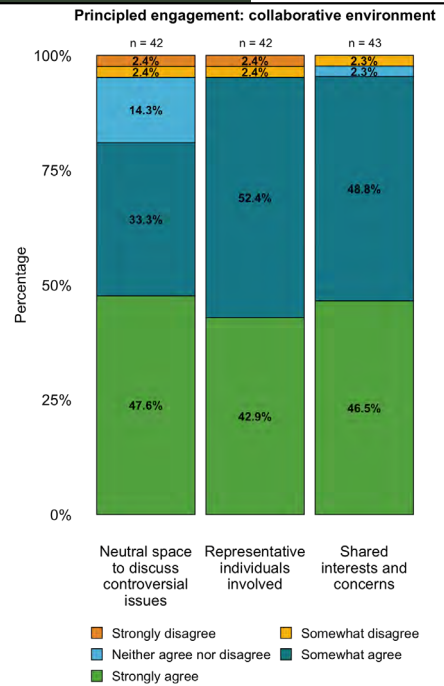
Collaboration dynamics

Principled engagement, shared motivation, capacity for joint action

Collaboration dynamics: principled engagement



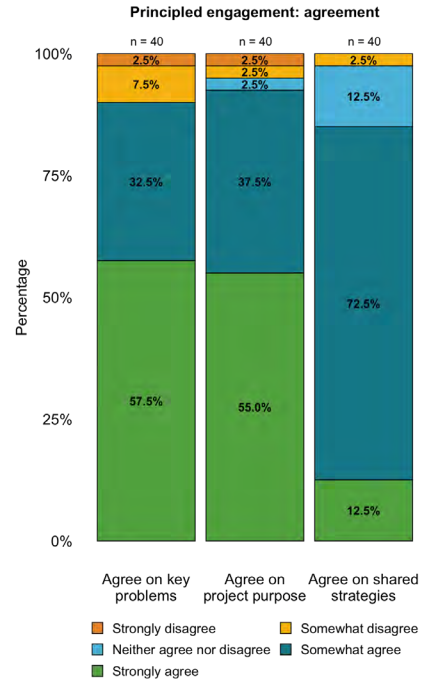
- Somewhat to strongly agree that the NCFC process:
 - Engages a representative cross-section of stakeholders (95%)
 - Participants work to identify shared interests/concerns (95%)
 - Creates a neutral space for discussion (81%)



Principled Engagement: Extent of Agreement



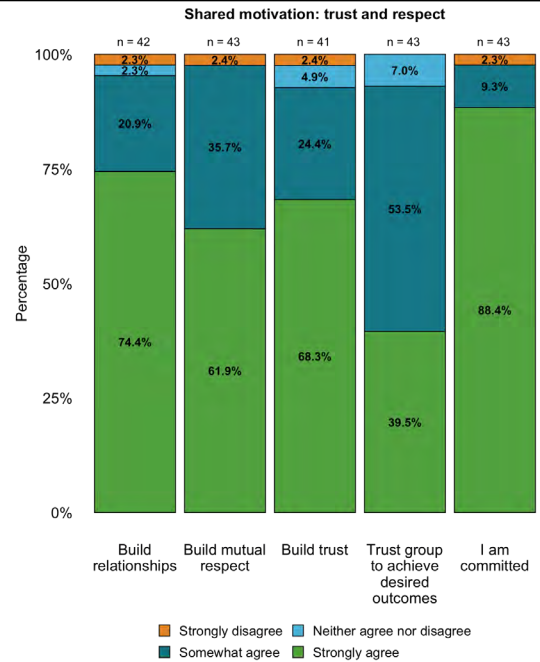
- High agreement that participants:
 - Agree about key problems (90%)
 - Agree about purpose of Fireshed (93%)
 - Agree about strategies used to solve problems (85%)



Shared Motivation



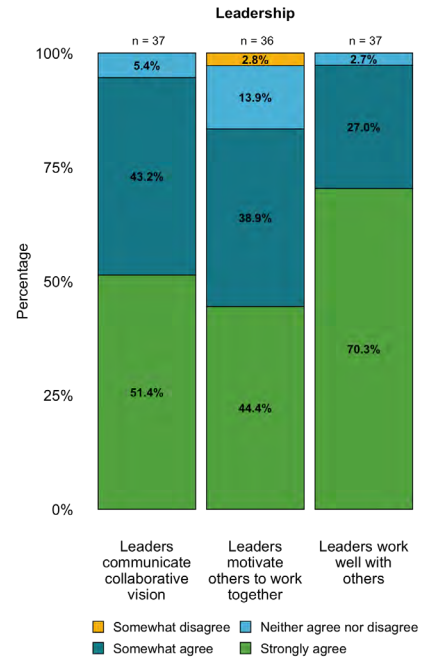
- High agreement that:
 - Process builds relationships (95%), mutual respect (98%), and trust (93%)
 - Individual commitment to process (98%)
 - Trust that we will achieve desired outcomes (93%)



Capacity for Joint Action: Leadership



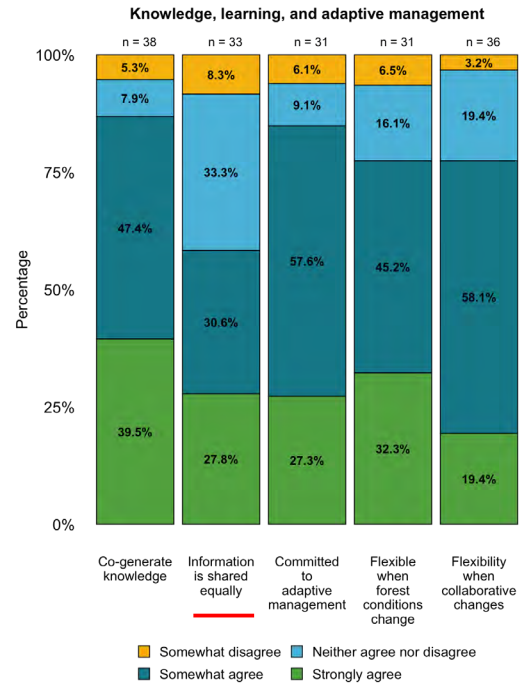
- High agreement that leaders
 - Maintain/communicate a common collaborative vision and direction (95%)
 - Have good skills for working with other people and organizations (97%)
 - Can motivate others to work together (83%)



Capacity for Joint Action: Knowledge, learning, AM



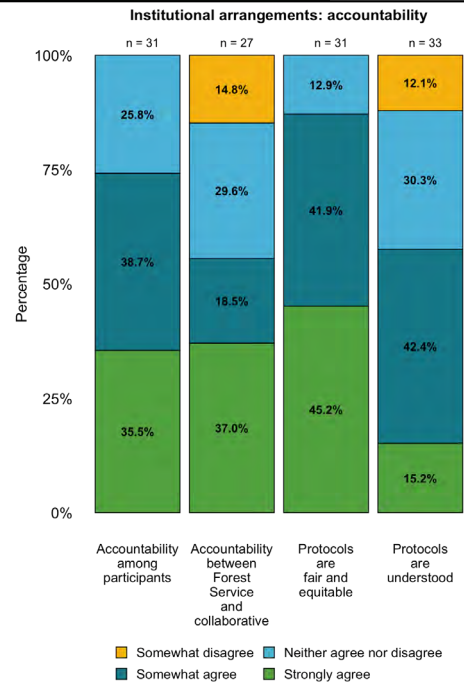
- High agreement that:
 - Participants work together to co-develop shared understanding and knowledge (87%)
 - Learning used to inform adaptive management (85%)
 - Participants can alter course when conditions change (78%)
- But lower agreement that:
 - Knowledge and information are shared equally and accessible to all members (58%)



Capacity for Joint Action: Inst. Arrangements



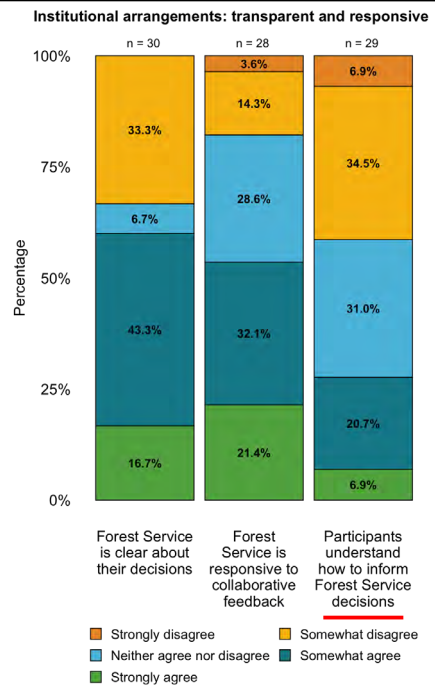
- There are protocols in place that promote accountability (e.g., decision rules, charters, MOUs)
 - *Among* NCFC participants: 74% agree
 - *Between* NCFC and the USFS: 56% agree
- Collaborative protocols
 - Are fair and equitable: 87% agree
 - Are clearly understood: 58% agree



Capacity for Joint Action: USFS Transparency and Responsiveness



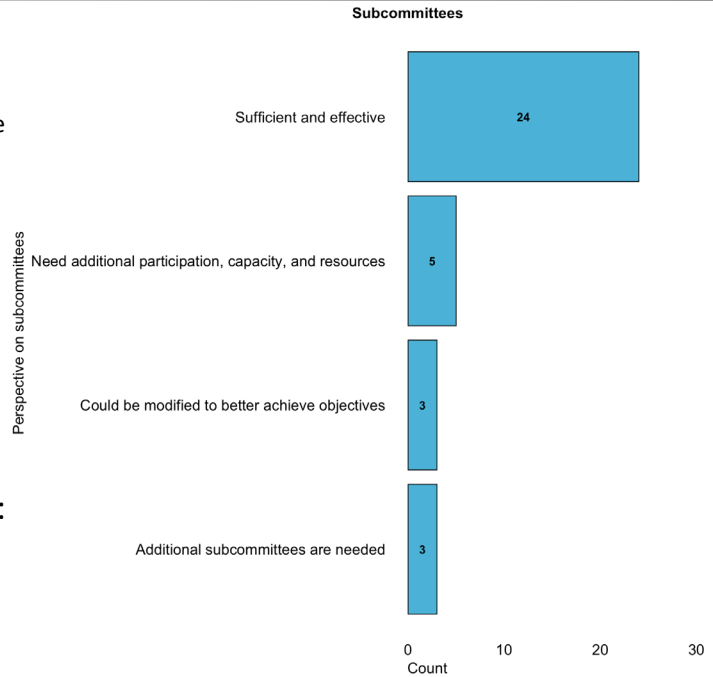
- Less agreement that:
 - The USFS is clear with NCFC participants about the decisions they make and why (60%)
 - The USFS is responsive to NCFC participant feedback (54%)
 - NCFC participants clearly understand when and what collaborative input is useful to inform USFS decisions (28%)
- From open ended responses:
 - Desire for more participation from ARP partners
 - Recognition that capacity to collaborate is limited



Capacity for Joint Action: Subcommittees



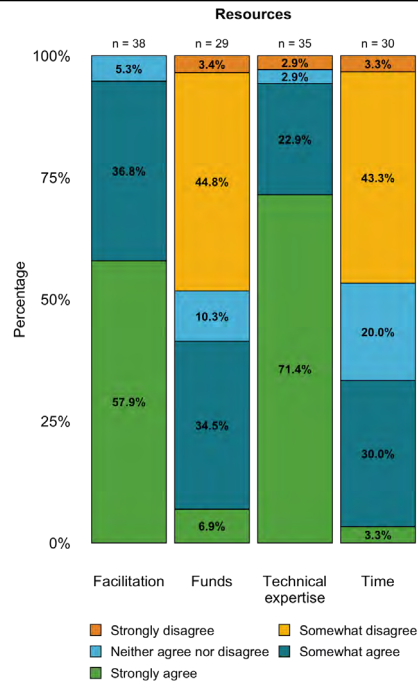
- Subcommittees that need additional participation, capacity, and resources:
 - Treatment Effectiveness Working Group: more outreach
 - CE&O: move from info sharing to joint action
 - SPAM/Ops: more capacity to move projects forward, touch down in sub-landscapes
 - Investment
- Could be modified to better achieve objectives:
 - CE&O: more focus on in-person engagement in all landscapes
 - Investment
- Additional subcommittees needed for:
 - Workforce development
 - Data collection and reporting w/ local reps
 - Non-fed prescribed fire use



Capacity for Joint Action: Resources



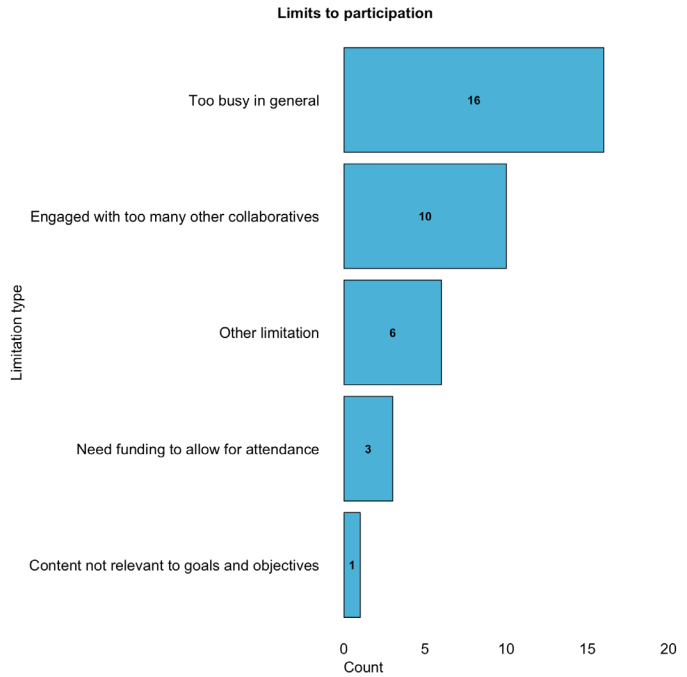
- The NCFC has adequate...
 - Skills to facilitate collaborative engagement activities: 95% agree
 - Technical expertise: 94% agree
 - Funds: 41% agree
 - Time to carry out tasks and accomplish work: 33% agree



Factors Limiting Participation



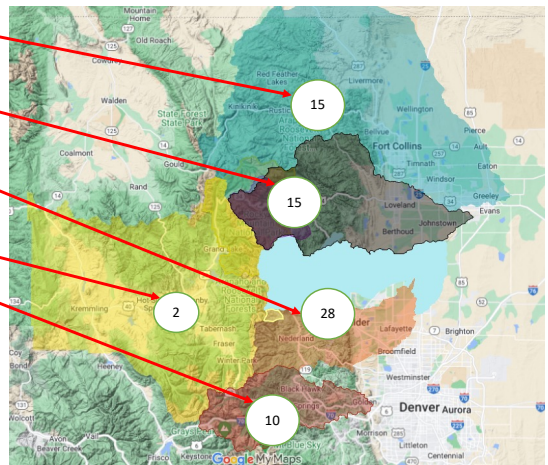
- 66% of respondents reported factors limiting participation of their organization in the NCFC



Other collaboratives we engage with



- **North Larimer Ops/Elkhorn Creek, CPRW, Buckhorn/ North Fork Poudre SCTs, Larimer Recovery Group-CPF, CPF Reforestation Group, Larimer Climate Smart Future Ready**
- **Big Thompson Watershed Health Partnership, Big Thompson Watershed Coalition, Larimer Recovery/ AMF**
- **BoCo Fireshed, Boulder Watershed Collective, St. Vrain Forest Health Partnership, The Watershed Center, Coal Creek Canyon Collaborative, BoCo OEM Forum**
- Grand County Wildfire Council, Grand Places
- CCWFHP, Upper Clear Creek Watershed Association, Gilpin County Mitigation Group, Mountain Metro Wildfire Mitigation Council, Jefferson County Wildfire Commission
- Place-based collaboratives to the south: Upper South Platte Partnership, Coalition for the Upper South Platte (3)
- Regional collaboratives: NoCo Places, Watershed Wildfire Protection Group, South Platte Basin Roundtables (3)
- Broader collaborative learning networks: Colorado Forest Collaboratives Network, Fire Adapted Colorado, Colorado Prescribed Fire Council, Western Collaboratives Conservation Network (9)



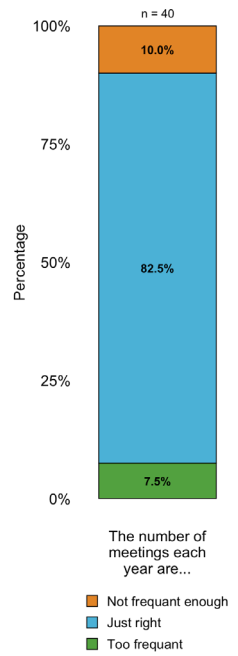
Count = Number of mentions in response to: "Which, if any, place-based collaboratives or working groups are you actively engaged with that are within or overlap with the NCFC landscape?" (n=36)

Meeting Frequency



- 82% like the current quarterly meeting frequency

Quarterly meetings

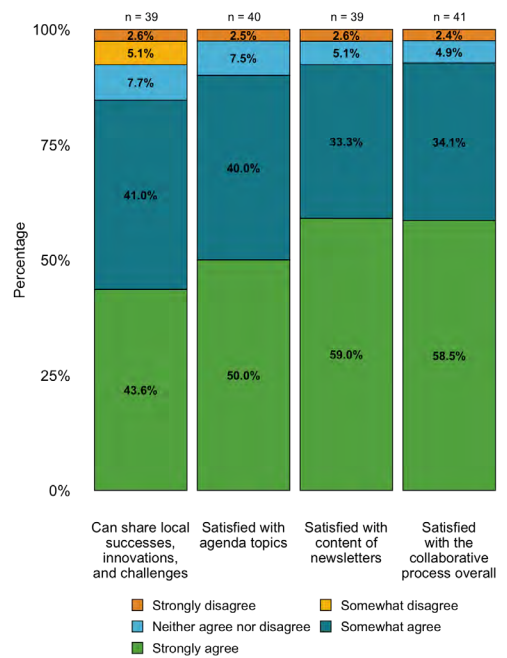


Satisfaction



- High agreement for satisfaction with:
 - Collaborative process overall (93%)
 - Newsletter content (92%)
 - Agenda topics (90%)
 - Opportunities to share (85%)

Process satisfaction

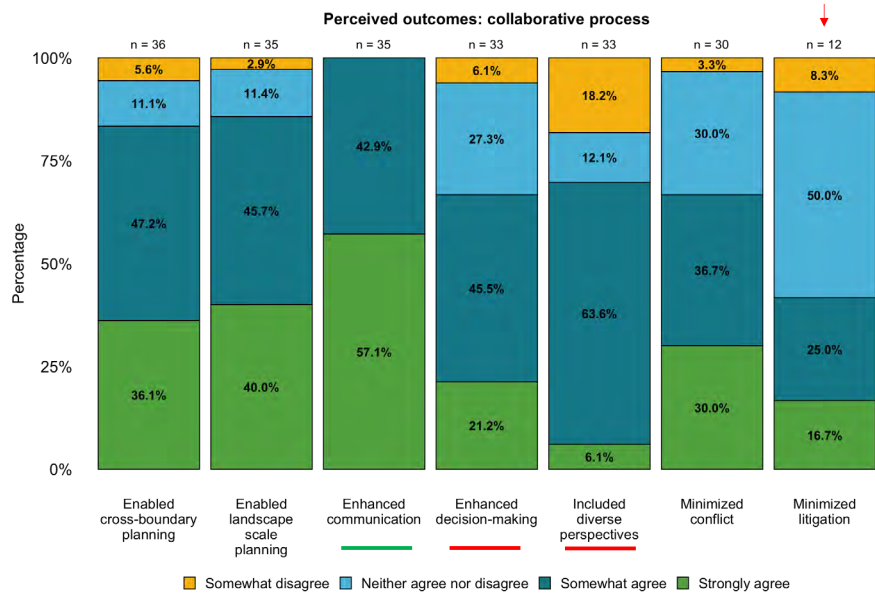


Perceived Outcomes & Challenges

Process and Performance

Perceived Outcomes: Collaborative Process

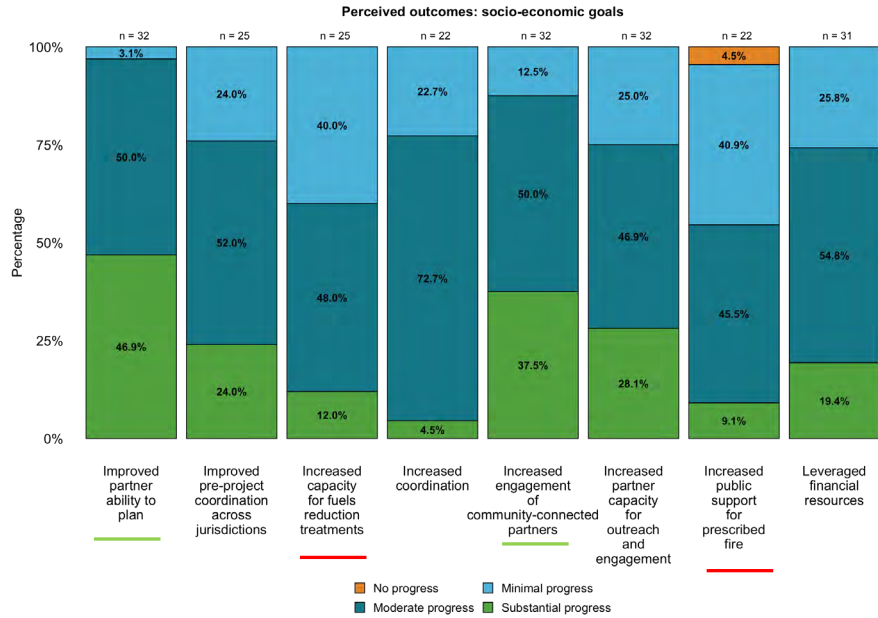
- Process has:
 - Enhanced communication (100%)
 - Enabled landscape scale and cross-boundary planning (86%, 83%)
- Keep working on:
 - Including diverse perspectives (70%)
 - DFPC, CPW
 - Enhancing decision-making, i.e., a more transparent, equitable, and fair process (67%)



Perceived Outcomes: Socio-economic goals



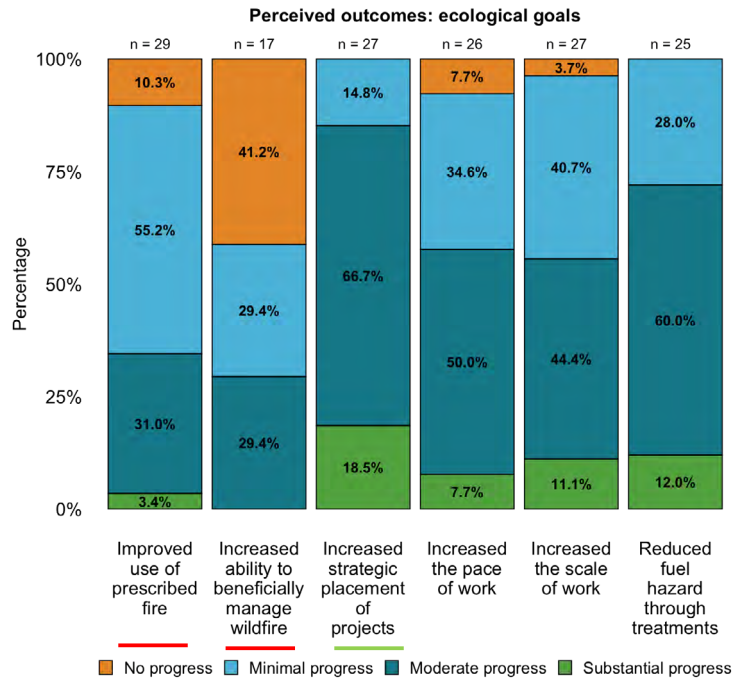
- Made progress on:
 - Improved partners' ability to plan (97%)
 - Increased engagement of CCPs (88%)
- Need to work on:
 - Increasing capacity for fuels reduction treatments (60%)
 - Increasing public support for Rx fire (55%)



Perceived Outcomes: Performance Goals



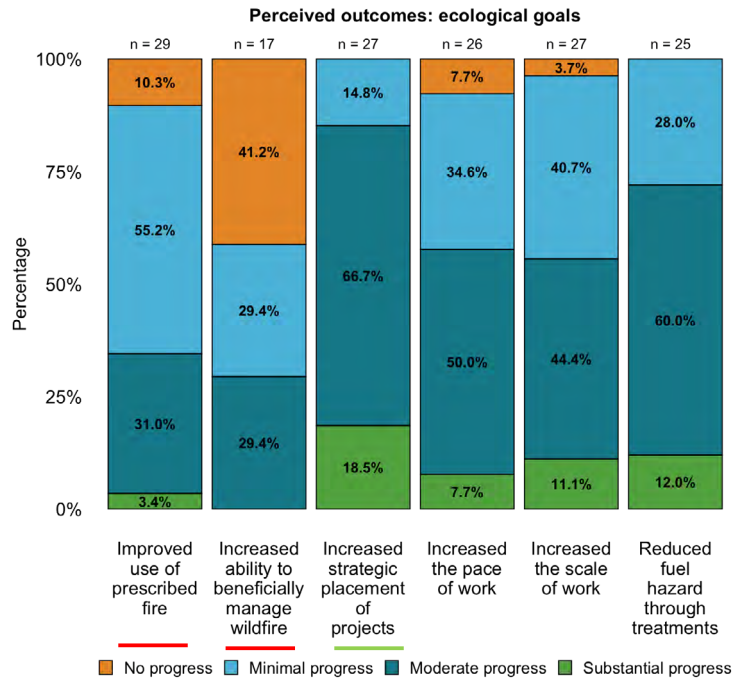
- Made progress on:
 - Increasing strategic placement of projects (85%)
- Need to focus on:
 - Improving use of Rx fire (34%)
 - Increasing ability to beneficially manage fire (29%)



Perceived Outcomes: Performance Goals



- Made progress on:
 - Increasing strategic placement of projects (85%)
- Need to focus on:
 - Improving use of Rx fire (34%)
 - Increasing ability to beneficially manage fire (29%)



Accomplishments



What NCFC accomplishments are you most proud of, if any?

- Increased capacity of partners through the Fund
- Committed participants who have co-developed a shared understanding of the problem and vision for the future
- Risk-informed, PODs-based strategy and the PODs Dashboard
- Successful joint grant applications
- Model for large-landscape forest collaboration



“The NFF funding has been incredible to support our projects and stabilize cash flow”

Participant Recommendations

To improve collaborative process, structure, durability, and performance

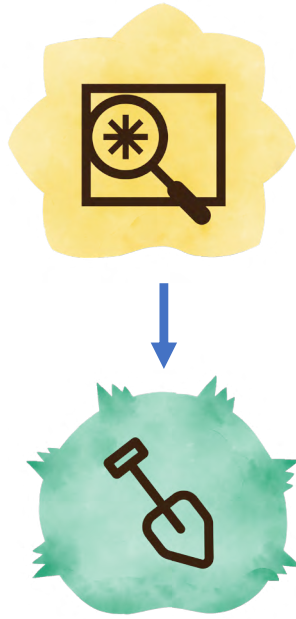
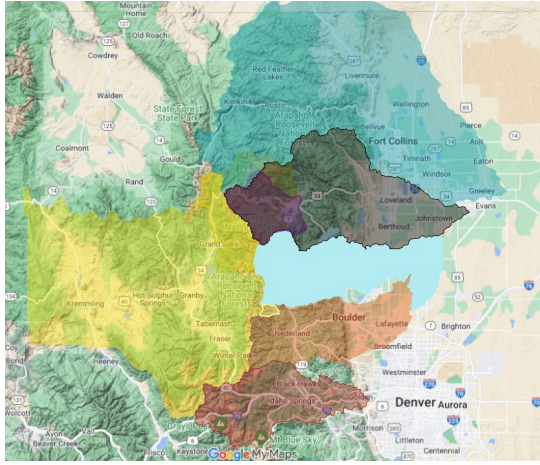
Representation and opportunities for input



- Increase representation:
 - Geographic representation
 - Agencies – Division of Fire Prevention and Control, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, more ARP representation
- Provide opportunities input:
 - Subcommittee decisions and work plan topics (for general membership)
 - More opportunities for general membership to suggest committee workstreams/ issues to tackle



Improve mechanisms for cross-scale collaboration



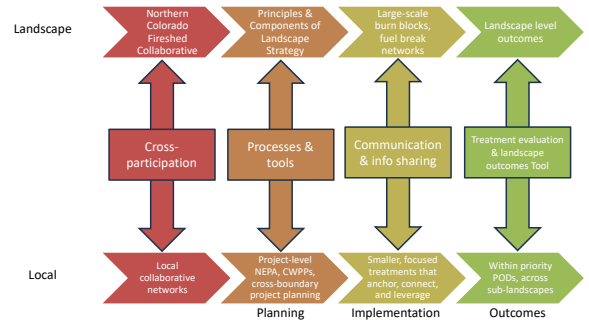
“The explosion of Front Range collaboratives over the last 10 years has overwhelmingly been a good thing, but at this point, there’s a fair bit of redundancy, meeting fatigue, and lack of understanding/ agreement on what a collaborative can practically do at a given scale/geography/jurisdiction”

“...the time for results on the ground is now.”

Improve mechanisms for cross-scale collaboration



- Improve ability to “telescope” between scales to achieve greater efficiencies and increase impact:
 - Fireshed-scale functions: landscape strategic framework, learning and info sharing, policy work, data sharing and management, motivating and supporting partners
 - Place-based partnerships translate strategy into focused actions and get work done on the ground
 - Strengthen bottom-up information sharing

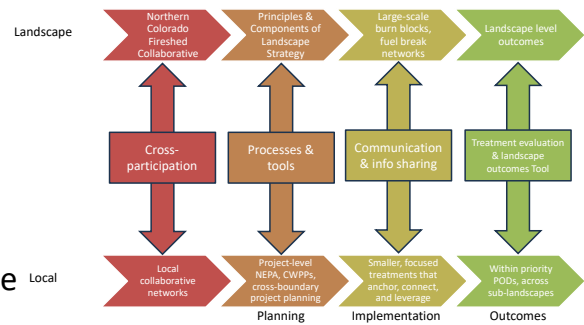


“NCFC representatives could be more involved in other place-based collaboratives and work to understand their missions and how NCFC could plug in or provide benefit, resources, or capacity to those groups. The smaller place-based collaboratives are often more action oriented than NCFC as they are smaller and more focused, so I think it would be good for NCFC to connect with those groups to build a more collaborative environment between the full fireshed and the many sub groups.”

Improve mechanisms for cross-scale collaboration



- Improve ability to “telescope” between scales:
 - Fireshed-scale functions: landscape strategic framework, learning and info sharing, policy work, supporting and motivating partners
 - Place-based partnerships translate strategy into focused actions and get work done on the ground
 - Takes capacity and resources to strengthen linkages: to participate, connect and share information across scales; to move committee work and co-developed tools forward; to measure and report on outcomes →



“If fewer meetings and more integration is the goal, we need capacity to regularly join the place-based collaborative meeting AND report back to the larger group on trends, concerns, needs, etc.”

“NCFC must increase funding from sources other than the US Forest Service investments. USFS funding will expire and is subject to political influence.”

Focus on activities that lead to, and demonstrate, outcomes



- Keep pushing for more prescribed fire, particularly on private lands
- Support proactive management of unplanned ignitions
 - Additional or expanded subcommittees and working groups for prescribed fire and treatment effectiveness
 - Policy work to reduce barriers and constraints
 - Rx fire trainings and workforce development
- Keep finding opportunities to connect pre-fire planning and incident response; post fire recovery

“Stay focused on what needs to happen -- more low- to moderate-intensity fire on the ground in more places. The science is absolutely clear that that's what's needed to confer resilience ecologically and socially. Everything else is a distraction.”



“There will rarely be 'perfect' opportunities to reintroduce fire to the landscape by way of unplanned ignitions, but there are certain times when the risk posed by those ignitions is low relative to the potential risk of another [major fire]...if we sit on our hands waiting for the 'perfect' conditions. How can we support a more proactive form of fire management? That is the conversation we need to have more explicitly and more often.”

Focus on activities that lead to, and demonstrate, outcomes



- Support place-based community engagement and outreach to increase public support for and engagement in proactive fire
- Show results through monitoring, performance tracking and reporting
 - Biophysical monitoring/ modeling of project performance
 - Social science to support outcomes of community engagement
 - Story telling

"The Fireshed should have a major presence at all watershed collaborative community meetings, tours, etc. We should do some kind of gaming out of wildfire response and mitigation needs in every watershed at the beginning of each fire season."



"A more explicit adoption and application of PODs and risk assessment as the unifying planning, implementation, monitoring, reporting, and adaptive management framework. It's the only framework that can explicitly tie together pre-, during-, and post-fire scenarios and management actions across jurisdictions."

Questions and Discussion



- Do these results (still) resonate with you?
- Do any recommendations mentioned seem feasible and desirable in the near-term, and what could be addressed down the road? What help would be needed?



"I am most proud of the community coming together toward a shared vision. I believe there is still work to be done to make the vision truly holistic, but I am proud of the progress we've made, and everyone involved. I think the fireshed is a model that other landscapes should work to emulate."

SWERI Southwest Ecological
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