

# CFLRP collaborative governance assessment: Summary of findings for the Northeast Washington Forest Vision 2020 CFLRP

The Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI) developed a collaborative governance assessment as part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (Forest Service) Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) Common Monitoring Strategy.<sup>1</sup> The collaborative governance assessment was designed to evaluate collaborative health, function, resilience, and perceived outcomes of collaborative work. The SWERI administered an online questionnaire to members of the Northeast Washington Forest Coalition (NEWFC), employees of the Colville National Forest, and other participants recommended by key points of contact in summer 2023. We received 17 usable responses (28.8% response rate). Figure 1 illustrates what groups were represented in the questionnaire. The purpose of this brief is to:

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

## Findings

What is working well for the Northeast Washington Forest Vision 2020 CFLRP?

Overall, there was a wide range of responses on indicators regarding the collaborative process and achievement of

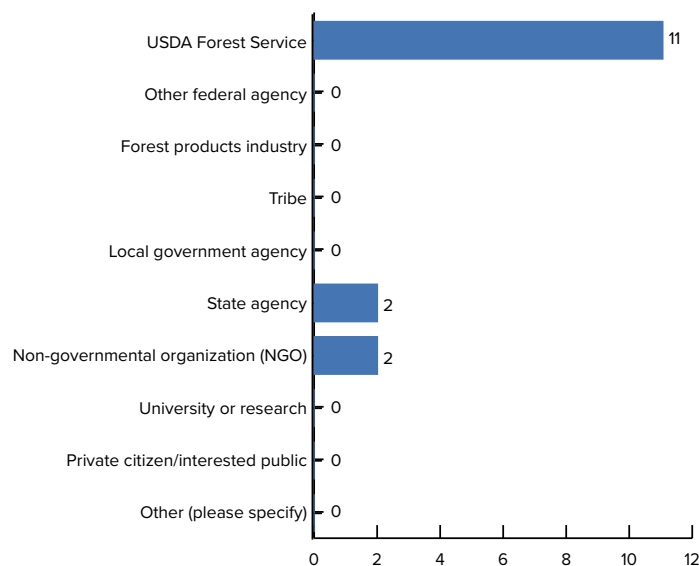


Figure 1: Respondents' self-identified representation with associated organizations.

goals. Half of respondents thought that a representative cross-section of individuals who have a stake in the issues were involved in the CFLRP project, although no respondents identified themselves as representatives from the forest products industry (Figure 1). A strong majority of respondents were from the Forest Service, and thus the quantitative results mostly reflected federal perceptions. Fewer than half of respondents included open-ended comments, which may capture the most passionate viewpoints. Respondents strongly agreed that the collaborative process had built trust, relationships, and mutual respect. Respondents felt that the CFLRP project had adequate technical expertise, facilitation skills, and funds, but not sufficient time. Half of the respondents thought there were protocols in place to hold participants accountable; that protocols were fair, equitable, and used appropriately; and that they understood how to inform

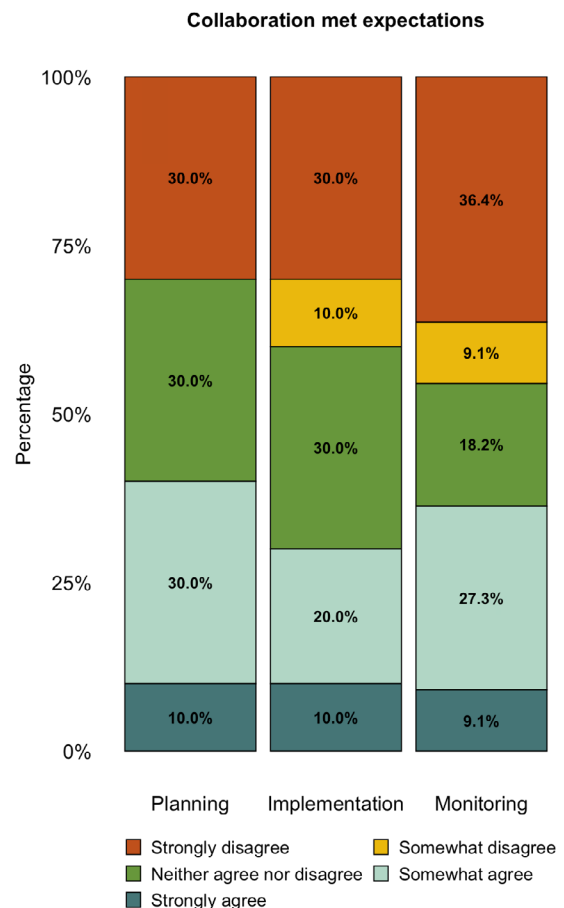


Figure 2: Percentage of respondents that disagree to agree that the Forest Service collaborates during planning, implementation, and monitoring stages.

Forest Service decisions. A majority thought the Forest Service was clear about their decisions and responsive to feedback.

What disruptions and challenges have affected collaborative progress and performance?

Only a minority of respondents' expectations were met in collaborating with the Forest Service in planning, implementation, and monitoring (Figure 2), and overall, most respondents' expectations of the CFLRP project had not been met. A minority of respondents felt that existing collaborative protocols were understood. Open-ended comments indicated that expectations for the Forest Service's commitment were largely not met due to a lack of engagement, confusing objectives, and little public involvement. The CFLRP project has dealt with several disruptions, such as legal challenges, personnel turnover, conflict among participants, limited agency capacity, and biophysical disruptions (i.e., wildfire). In particular, at the time of the survey, there was pending litigation brought against the Colville National Forest by a former member of NEWFC, which caused deterioration of the collaborative relationship. Some respondents commented that the timing of this survey did not capture previous successful collaborative history. Commenters also noted a lack of engagement by the Forest Service with NEWFC, limited diversity in the collaborative, conflicting priorities, and heavy workloads as additional disruptions. Most respondents felt that not enough had been done to address these disruptions, although one noted that the Forest Service had pivoted to building a new collaborative.

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

A majority of respondents indicated that the CFLRP project has moved toward achieving a variety of desired collaborative, ecological (Figure 3), and socio-economic goals, including:

- Enhancing communication and enabling landscape-scale and cross-boundary planning
- Improving restoration pace and scale, reducing fuel hazards, and improving fire use (Figure 3)
- Reducing community wildfire risk, offsetting treatment costs, supporting local employment, and accomplishing work on adjacent lands.

In contrast, only a minority perceived the CFLRP as making progress on minimizing

litigation, restoring old growth, improving habitat and watershed function, and controlling invasive species. Several factors were identified as facilitating forward movement toward goals, including external facilitation, funding, collective interest, and local contractors, although collaboration between the Forest Service and NEWFC had been much stronger in the past.

## Recommendations to improve the collaborative process and performance

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

- Rebuild and create new relationships to return to more active collaboration with open, clear, and bidirectional communication.
- Diversify participation in the collaborative process and invest in stakeholder engagement through cultivating concerted outreach efforts to the public.
- Utilize facilitators and clarify expectations, goals, and protocols.

## Next steps

Results from this questionnaire provided a baseline assessment of collaborative governance among the Northeast Washington Forest Vision 2020 CFLRP. The SWERI will continue to engage in assessing collaborative health and performance of CFLRP projects to identify where capacities lie and areas of improvement to support resilient and durable collaboration.

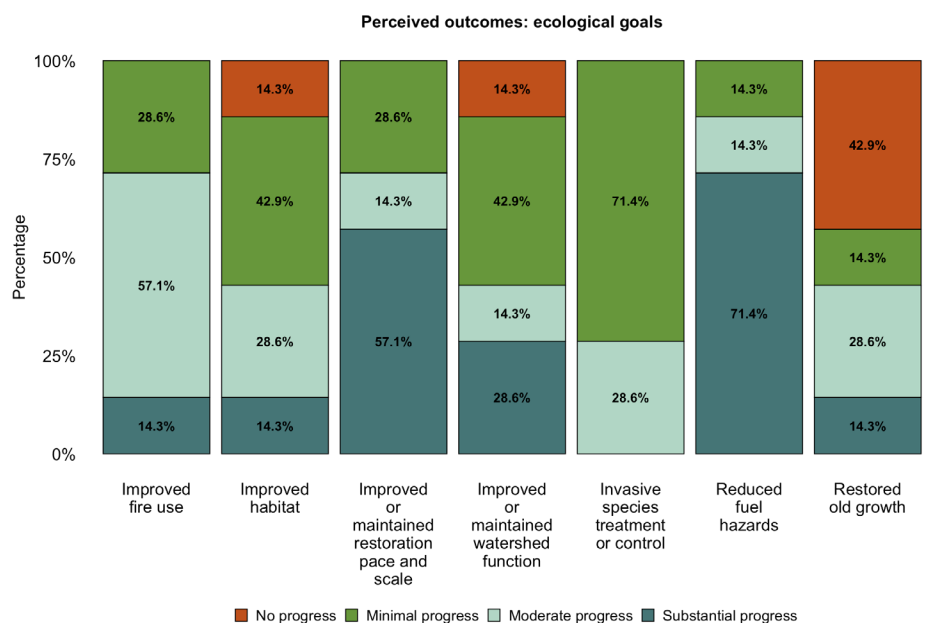


Figure 3: Percentage of respondents who reported no, minimal, moderate, or substantial progress toward ecological goals.