Section 2: Towards Social Agreement
This section details key components of collaborative processes that build social agreement. Facilitators and key leaders in the group may use this section to enhance and/or add to their current tool kit for building social agreement. It provides guidance for effective preparation for field trips and meetings and offers a Menu of Tools for enhancing discussion and moving toward agreement.

**Processes that Support Development of Social Agreement**

Collaborative agreements emerge through dialogue that integrates scientific information and social values. The dialogue occurs in a variety of settings, including field trips, meetings, and workshops. Dialogue culminates in a group decision-making process that clearly outlines, verbally and then in writing, areas of group agreement. While the processes groups use to develop agreement may vary, they typically involve the following key components (not necessarily in this order):

- Build and maintain trust: honoring relationships by interacting with honesty, transparency and respect
- Share values: identifying the existing range of social values and interests
- Get the picture: building shared understanding of the context of aspen in the area and management implications using locally appropriate data and science
- Seek agreement: documenting group agreements and what falls outside them
- Share widely: working across collaboratives to share ideas, best practices and zones of agreement
- Learn and adapt: monitor, learn, and revisit agreements as needed
Through all these processes, it is important to use collaborative approaches that honor ground rules such as respectfully listening to others’ points of views, engaging with honesty and transparency, and embracing a solution-oriented approach. This creates a safe environment in which collaborative members can openly disagree and share ideas and perspectives. Skilled facilitation can help protect the integrity of the collaborative process.

Build and Maintain Trust

Collaboration relies on mutually respectful, trust-based relationships among group members and between the group and the agency. It is good practice to adopt and uphold ground rules that outline practices that support honesty, transparency and respect among members as well as between members and the agency. Documents that clearly spell-out a collaborative’s mission, values, membership criteria, and decision-making and dispute resolution processes provide additional clarity, reducing the likelihood that trust will be damaged through misunderstandings or a lack of procedural ambiguity. Competent, neutral facilitation builds trust by equitably integrating all views and values into a conversation. Informal social events that allow members to “rub elbows” outside of collaborative conversations go a long way toward building relationships and allowing members to see each other as people rather than as positions.

Share Values

It is important to openly explore the range of values and concerns about aspen in the group. To keep track of the values and concerns, good note taking should be employed and information may be synthesized from past field trip and meeting notes, or from the comments that surface in public scoping documents. In addition, a collaborative may wish to gauge their agency partners’ values around aspen, and willingness and ability to use any collaborative input and zones of agreement on aspen before embarking.

During these conversations, it is important to understand not only what an individual supports or opposes (their position), but also why she holds that particular view (underlying reason and interest). For example, if a stakeholder shares a position that no conifers >21” dbh should be cut, you can explore why, and their desired outcome. In this case, it may be retention of large diameter or old growth conifers because old growth conifers increase biodiversity, help with natural processes on the landscape, and were historically present to a larger extent before fire suppression.

Identifying the reasons behind positions clarifies what information and available science to bring into next steps. In the example provided, scientific information about >21” dbh conifers in relation to biodiversity and natural processes on the landscape would be helpful, as would available agency data about numbers of >21” dbh conifers historically present within that particular landscape.

Incorporating available science can help place stakeholder values in the context of scientific understanding. Treating science as a tool to persuade stakeholders to change their values or views may undermine social learning processes and trust. To be effective, collaborative conversations should instead focus on mutual understanding and respect for each other’s values.
Get the Picture

*Build shared understanding of context and available science*

Stakeholders are likely to want a picture of the current situation of aspen on the landscape. Some common questions that stakeholders might have could include:

- How much aspen do we have on this Forest/district? Is that a lot or a little?
- Where is it distributed?
- How has it been managed in the past?
- What condition is it in?
- What challenges its health?
- How has this changed over time/from historic range of variability?

To address these questions, the following resources are recommended:

- Information about current conditions: *Map of known aspen stands in the project area, district, etc.*
- Information about past and current management activities: *Past management history, relevant allotment information, ungulate population data, species of concern in the area, etc.*
- The appropriate agency specialists: *Depending on the conversation, this may include silviculturists, wildlife biologists, range conservationists, hydrologists, etc.*
- Relevant science: *Research that informs the underlying concerns of stakeholders.*
- Neutral and/or trusted scientists or resource specialists: *These scientists/specialists can assist the group in working through conflicting science and other information, identifying what is most applicable on a particular landscape, and which findings have been successfully replicated or held across time.*

*Integrating science and values*

During and after the available data have been shared, stakeholders should have opportunities to link what they have learned to their values. These forums are most productive when participants agree to not take positions and instead share their desired outcome, underlying reasons and values, and how these relate to what they have learned. It may be helpful to ask stakeholders to share what they have learned that relates to each other’s values, rather than solely sharing what they want to see and the “evidence” that they now feel backs up their interests. For example, Stakeholder A might be asked to recount what he values and want to see happen, and Stakeholder B might be asked to then describe anything that she heard and learned that would help inform Stakeholder A’s interests and meet their goals. Having neutral scientific advisors/specialists present, as well as skilled facilitation, may help keep this dialogue from turning into a “science duel” and/or straying far from the data that were actually shared and the group’s goals.
Aspen Crosswalk Tables – Examples of How to Work with Science and Differing Values

Discussion Points: Integrating Science and Social Values

This discussion explores the balance between two important values: the value for enhancing aspen habitat by removing competition (conifers) and the value of providing diverse habitat for wildlife by retaining conifers within and around aspen stands. Both are ecologically important and science informs both. Rather than becoming a tug of war, collaborative discussion can identify what the group agrees is an appropriately balanced approach.

- What is the primary management objective at this site?
- Are there specific wildlife habitat needs at issue?
- How does placing this site in the context of the larger landscape inform our thinking?
- How many acres do the aspen cover, and what percentage is that of the total project area?
- Can we have an open discussion of economics related to conifer removal and value to industry?
- Define the sideboards:
  - How many conifers can we remove while still improving aspen? (e.g., at what point does removing the last conifers no longer improve aspen?)
  - How many conifers can we leave? (e.g., at what point does leaving as many conifers as possible start to inhibit stand recovery or persistence?)

Example 1: Conifer Removal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Discussion Questions</th>
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| No removal of conifers >21” dbh from within aspen stands. | **Wildlife habitat and diversity:**<br>• The presence of conifers within the aspen stand enhances habitat diversity and benefits wildlife. | • What is the primary management objective at this site?  
  • Are there specific wildlife habitat needs at issue on this site?  
  • How does placing this site in the context of the larger landscape inform our thinking?  
  • What are the sideboards: (a) How many conifers can we remove while still improving aspen? (e.g., at what point does removing the last conifers no longer improve aspen?); and (b) how many conifers can we leave? (e.g., at what point does leaving as many conifers as possible start to inhibit stand recovery or persistence?)  
  • Can we have an open discussion of economics related to conifer removal and value to industry? |
| Concern about role of economics in the decision to remove conifer. | **Priority habitat:**<br>• Aspen stands are a priority for restoration, as they are biodiversity hotspots and provide critical habitat to elk, deer, and other wildlife.  
  • Aspen need moisture, and competition by conifers will impede their longevity. |                                                        |
| Remove all conifers from within aspen stands and thin around the stand. |                                                                         |                                                        |
Discussion Points: Integrating Science and Social Values

This discussion examines the compatibility of diverse values on the landscape within an economic and ecological context. The economics related not only to the value of forage within aspen to cattle ranchers, but also to the cost of fencing and fence maintenance compared to the long-term benefit to aspen stands. Fencing costs raise the issue that not all stands can be fenced, so prioritizing stands for fencing often becomes an important issue. Key questions include:

- What time of year and for how long are cattle in this allotment?
- How is this site related to water-use by cattle within this allotment?
- What are the elk and deer populations and usage in this area (summer/migration/winter range)?
- What is the availability of funds and other resources for fencing and fence maintenance?
- What alternatives to fencing might have similar benefits without the associated costs?
- Would parties be interested in middle ground that meets most of everyone’s needs? Fencing short-term to release sprouts into trees (5-10 years) followed by removal of fencing. This could allow new recruitment of overstory trees and then allow wildlife and livestock access (and intermediate disturbance) to meet both sets of needs.

Example 2: Fencing around Aspen Stands

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<th>Position and Rationale</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Discussion Questions</th>
</tr>
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| Aspen stands should be fenced. | Habitat Complexity:  
  - Aspen stands that have a complex overstory, midstory, and understory are more productive and support more wildlife and food webs. | • What time of year and for how long are cattle in this allotment?  
  • How is this site related to water-use by cattle within this allotment?  
  • What is the elk and deer populations and usage in this area?  
  • What is the availability of funds and other resources for fencing and fence maintenance?  
  • What alternatives to fencing might have similar benefits without the associated costs?  
  • Would fencing short-term to release sprouts into trees (5-10 years) followed by removal of fencing meet both sets of needs? |
| Aspen stands should not be fenced. | Economic Value:  
  - Browse surrounding aspen stands is of economic value to livestock.  
  - Economic cost of fencing versus benefit from fencing.  
  - Plant Diversity:  
  - Disturbance caused by browse leads to increased diversity. |  

Rationale: Fencing prevents ungulate browsing and livestock grazing and ensures sprouts survive to create a multi-age stand. Fencing is expensive and difficult to maintain. Fencing creates problems for ranchers and hunters. Wild ungulate and cattle grazing creates short-term disturbances that enhance plant diversity in the long run.
Seek Agreement

At some point, groups will want to try to capture their dialogue and areas of agreement. An expedient place to start may be review of notes from previous meetings/field trips/workshops and documentation of existing group agreements. Grouping these notes together on a group website or share drive with past resources and presentations or compiling them into a pdf can facilitate easier access and use for stakeholders.

From these notes, a draft written agreement could be developed. One possible approach is to seek group approval for this, obtain their input on desired format, and form a subcommittee of diverse members to collectively draft the document and bring it back for full group discussion. Documentation can take many forms and examples are available upon request from individual collaborative groups. For instance, a group might prepare desired outcomes and management approaches for a specific project area, or it might articulate broader restoration principles for a specific plant association group and the conditions under which these principles could be applied.

In finalizing the agreement document, you will want to ensure that you follow your collaborative processes and decision making principles, clearly capture the agreements and lack thereof in the meeting notes, and have clear shared understanding of when a decision has been made. Ensure the document is finalized with all necessary revisions and made widely available to the group and agency partners.
**Share Widely**

Although each collaborative group works within a specific geography, many issues have regional salience. Rather than reinventing the wheel, it behooves each group to learn from their surrounding colleagues and peers. Cross-collaborative learning may be as informal as an exchange of emails and phone calls, requesting information and/or documents on specific topics. Additional avenues include attending other collaboratives’ meetings, field trips and workshops; presenting at regional events; and engaging in networking opportunities. It can be particularly beneficial to share Zones of Agreement and discuss the processes used that were used to develop them. Ensure that you understand the specifics of others’ agreements: e.g., where they do and do not apply, how they were achieved, etc.

**Learn and Adapt**

It is expected that agreements may change due to emerging science, changes in group composition and trust, location-specific issues in new planning areas, shifts in agency policy or approaches, and/or new monitoring data. Early agreements can serve as foundational building blocks, which can be modified to reflect new interests and understandings. It is important, however, to strike a balance between keeping agreements dynamic and not dismantling them so entirely or frequently that the process of developing agreement becomes less worthwhile to stakeholders. We recommend building a deliberate process for revisiting past agreements and undertaking social learning into collaborative monitoring programs.
Menu of Tools

Field trips to past aspen treatments:
- Review the existing and desired conditions
- Review treatment history
- Observe the current conditions
- Assess level of satisfaction with on-the-ground outcomes
- Identify key points of dis/agreement and lessons learned

Field trips to aspen stands in project planning areas
- Observe existing conditions
- Discuss desired conditions
- Discuss possible treatment options
- Identify the range of social values
- Identify key points of dis/agreement

Invite aspen researchers on field trips
- Inform the above discussion with additional scientific data and expertise
- Expand or clarify agreements where possible

Draft a straw-man list of group agreements for group discussion
- Use field trip and meeting notes to synthesize a draft list of agreements
- Discuss and refine by committee
- Bring to full group for discussion and clarification
- Refine accordingly

Host or attend science-based workshop
- Identify key points where additional science input may provide clarity
- Invite experts to present research or data to illuminate these issues
- Create a forum for discussion and expand or clarify agreements where possible

Written document formalizing areas of agreement
- Document the group’s existing areas of agreement in writing