



Oregon's Forest Collaboratives: A Rapid Assessment

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Oregon leads the U.S. in the number and extent of established collaborative groups on national forests. Understanding similarities and differences in Oregon's current forest collaboratives may aid more informed approaches to peer learning, policy, and technical assistance in public and private land natural resource management across the U.S. West.

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Key Findings

- Almost half of Oregon's 24 collaboratives are fairly new (have formed between 2011 and present). Expectations of collaborative outcomes may be high relative to their experience.
- Landownership focus differs by region. Collaborating primarily on public lands issues was more common in eastern Oregon groups, while those in western Oregon tended to focus on all-lands.
- Many collaboratives are engaging in arenas other than planning on public lands. A majority of groups reported being all-lands rather than public lands-focused, and stewardship contracting is the most common dominant activity.
- More than half of the groups had similar organizational characteristics. This suggests that there may be a template or formula for collaborative capacity that is common across the state, regardless of context and other characteristics.

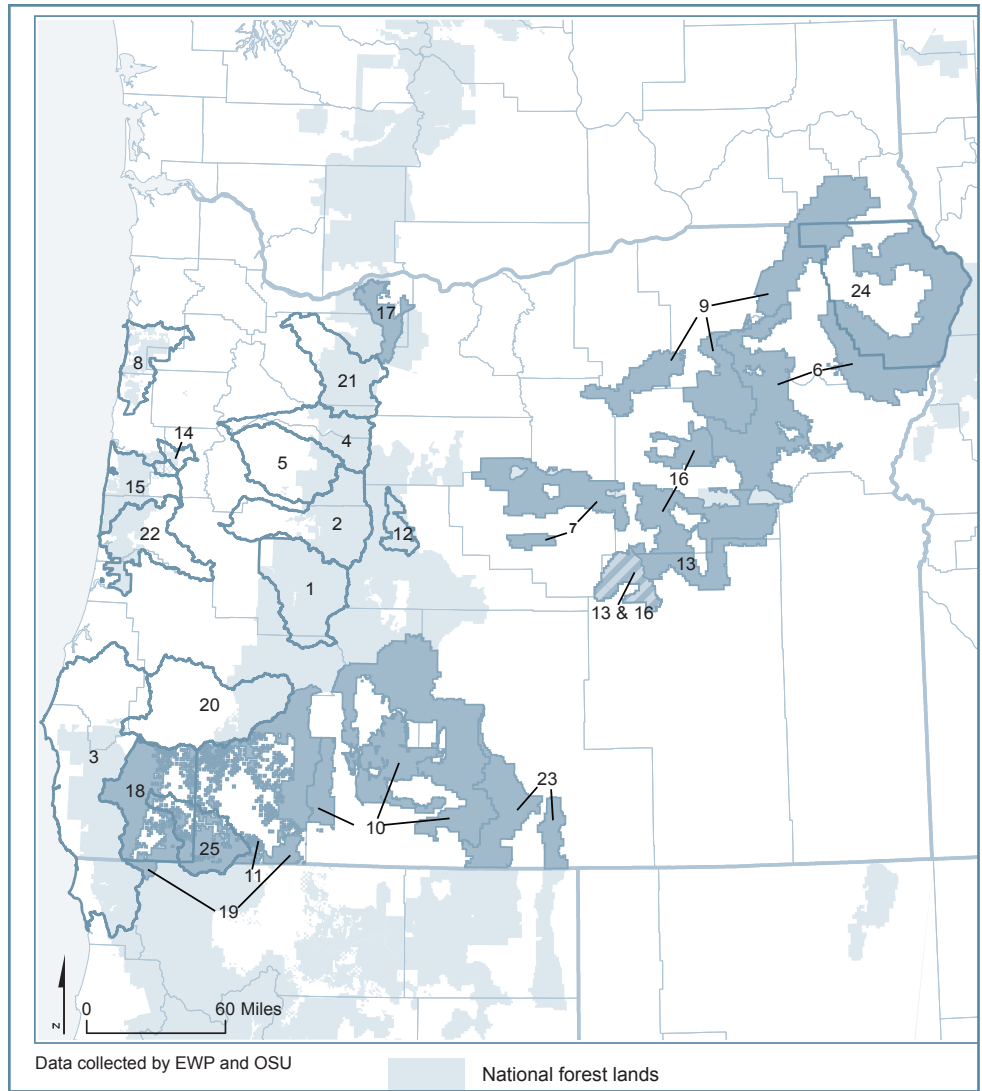


Figure 1. Location of Oregon forest collaboratives, fall 2014.

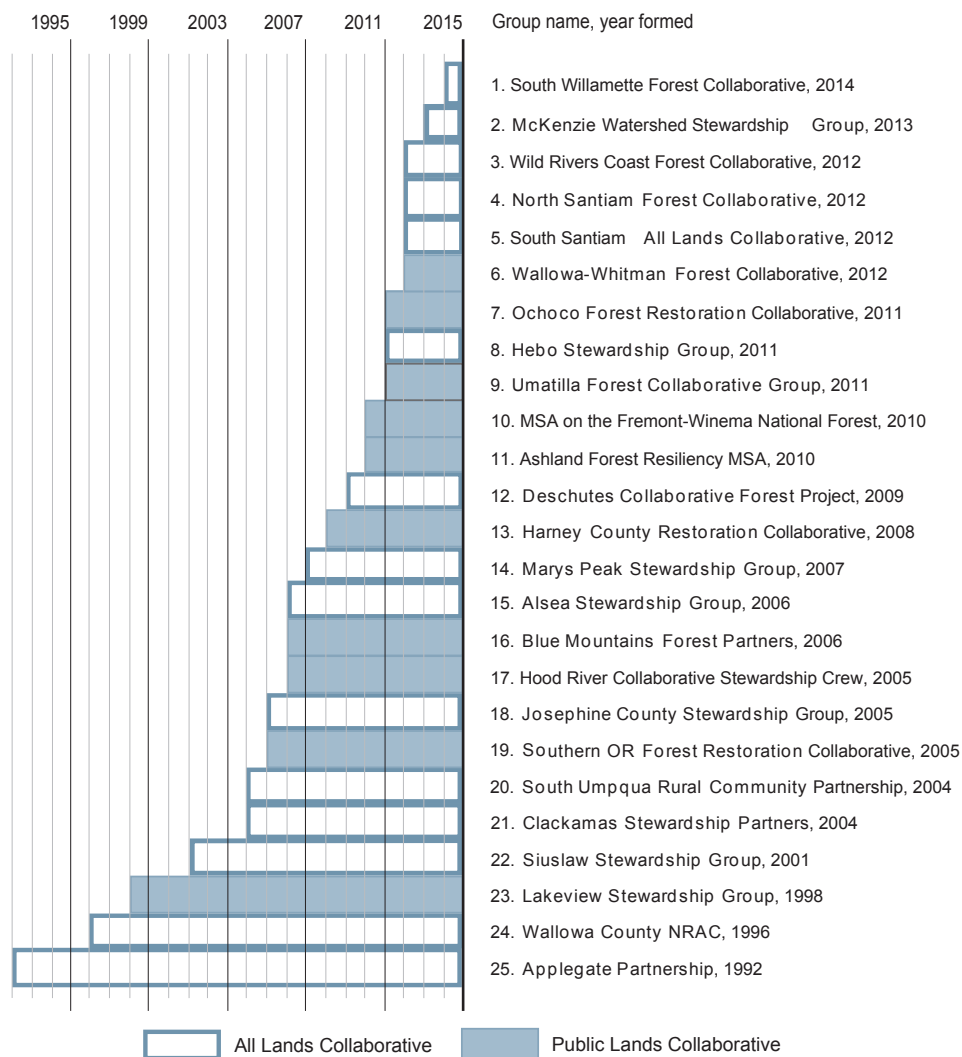
The formation of forest collaborative groups has been especially evident and extensive in Oregon, where 24 collaboratives covered all 11 national forests in the state in 2014 (Figure 1). Collaboratives are stakeholder bodies with defined missions, policies, and procedures that meet regularly and focus on multiple projects and/or on the overall direction of a specific public lands area. An inventory of Oregon's collaboratives suggests that they "provide review and recommendations for federal forest management activities occurring near their communities" that balance ecological sustainability,

economic viability, and social acceptability (Oregon Solutions Inventory 2013, 2).

This report covers the first phase of a study of Oregon's forest collaboratives. Our intent is to understand how well collaboratives achieve their stated goals, and what factors may contribute to successes. In this first stage, we reviewed literature on collaborative organizational capacity to develop a rapid assessment census.

We collected data from the facilitators of each collaborative using a questionnaire that elicited basic information on two categories of selected characteristics

that would help us understand similarities and differences between groups (Table 1). First, descriptive characteristics such as regional focus and dominant activities were queried, providing basic information that might affect the outcomes and "successes" one could expect from a given group. Second, we investigated the presence of organizational capacities identified as important to success in previous research and that would be relatively easy to capture and quantify in the rapid assessment approach. In our next phase, we will conduct a survey of collaborative participants statewide and several in-depth case studies.



RESULTS

Land ownership

A majority of groups (14, or 58%) reported focusing on all-lands, defined as mixed-ownership landscapes wherein public and private land had equal importance. Of these all-lands groups, eight were on the west side of the Cascades (West-side), three were in southern Oregon, and three were on the east side of the Cascades (East-side). Ten groups (42%) focused either only or primarily on public lands, and six of these were East-side. All-lands groups emerged at various times from 1992 onward. Groups focused

on only or primarily public lands did not appear until after 2005. This suggests that collaboratives do important work beyond federal forest issues.

Types of work

We asked groups to describe how dominant the following activities were in their group's work: environmental planning (National Environmental Policy Act/NEPA process), USDA Forest Service stewardship contracting, and/or multiparty monitoring. We found that about 42% of groups consider the NEPA process to be a dominant activity. Over half of the groups identified both stewardship

contracting and multiparty monitoring as dominant activities. Primary activity varied by region and land ownership. NEPA was a dominant activity in more East-side and public lands-oriented collaboratives. West-side and all-lands collaboratives reported a stronger emphasis on stewardship contracting. Three of the five southern Oregon groups focused on stewardship contracting and multiparty monitoring, while none reported a dominant involvement with NEPA. Multiparty monitoring was about equally important for all-lands and public lands groups.

Date of origin

We defined a collaborative group's date of origin as when it began meeting as an identified group with a name. This may be an indicator of maturity, which can contribute to collaborative participants' ability to trust each other and operate effectively. Collaboratives likely have emerged for various reasons over time, including in response to local as well as larger economic and policy shifts. The three oldest collaboratives formed prior to 2000. Half of the 10 West-side groups have formed since 2011, and none formed before 2003. All but two of the East-side groups formed between 2006 and present. The greatest increase in group formation occurred between 2011-present, when nearly half of all 24 current collaboratives emerged. Evidence of established group success, peer learning, intentional diffusion of this model by certain actors, and/or the incentive of state funding and support may have contributed to this recent growth.

Organizational characteristics

How a group is organized may affect its efficacy (see Table 1). We ranked responses in each category (501c3 or other incorporation status,

Table 1. List of characteristics examined.

Characteristics	Measurement categories	Justification
Descriptive: Indicators of what the group does, what types of management are relevant, and their level of experience.		
Ownership focus	Public, primarily public, or all-lands	Indicator of what group does, as land management policies and approaches differ across boundaries
Dominant activities	NEPA, stewardship contracting, and multiparty monitoring	Indicator of what group does, provides sense of where they intersect with land management processes and what kinds of expectations may be appropriate for group's outcomes
Date of origin	Reported year of establishment	Indicator of maturity, experience, and duration of relationships
Formal organizational capacities: Indicators of capacity to achieve desired outcomes		
501c3 or other incorporation status	Does not have, interested in, has	Indicator of level of formality and ability to access and absorb resources
Frequency of meetings	0-3 times/year, 4-7 times/year, 8-12 times/year	Indicator of group's level of activity and organization
Presence of regular dedicated facilitator	None, regular but not dedicated, dedicated	Indicator of group's capacity to maintain effective, fair process and have facilitative leadership
Established policies and procedures	None, one, two or more	Indicator of group's capacity for using effective decision-making process
Active standing leadership committee	None, has one that meets infrequently, has one that meets regularly	Indicator of group's capacity to accomplish activities and have diversified leadership

frequency of meetings, presence of regular dedicated facilitator, established policies and procedures, and an active standing leadership committee) on a 3-point scale and aggregated them (Table 2). A higher aggregate score does not imply better performance, but rather the degree to which a group does or does not possess certain organizational characteristics. Lower scores were mostly from West-side and/or all-lands collaboratives. The most common aggregate score was “8”, met by ten groups. All groups scoring “8” had a regular dedicated facilitator, frequent

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meetings, an active leadership committee, and more than one policy or procedures document. Even when their aggregate scores differed, the majority of collaboratives had specific characteristics in common. Of all 24 groups, 83% had operational charters, 79% had dedicated facilitation, 79% had mission statements, and 71% had ground rules. But only four of the groups were 501c3s, and only four had administrative procedures. Nine did not have an active standing leadership committee. It appears that collaboratives have focused on process needs such as facilitation and ground rules, but

have not necessarily emphasized organizational development.

CONCLUSIONS

Our research found that Oregon's forest collaboratives differ in several characteristics and reflect the landownership patterns and biophysical characteristics of the regions in which they operate, in terms of their reported ownership focus and dominant activities. For example, groups on the state's East-side were focused on NEPA planning, while those on the West-side focused on stewardship contracting and reported an all-lands rather than solely public lands focus. This suggests that expecting a “one size fits all” collaborative organizational model to function and produce

Table 2. Organizational capacities of Oregon collaboratives.

Group	Non-profit status [501c3] ^a	Meeting frequency ^b	Facilitator ^c	Policies & procedures ^d	Leadership committee ^e	Aggregate score
Lakeview Stewardship Group	0	0	2	1	0	3
North Santiam Forest Collaborative	0	1	2	1	0	4
South Santiam All-Lands Collaborative	0	1	1	2	0	4
Harney Co Restoration Collaborative	0	2	2	1	0	5
Hood River Collaborative Stewardship Crew	0	2	1	1	1	5
McKenzie Watershed Stewardship Group	0	2	2	1	0	5
Master Stewardship Agreement on the Fremont-Winema National Forest	0	2	0	2	2	6
Wallowa Co. Natural Resources Advisory Committee	0	2	0	2	2	6
Alsea Stewardship Group	0	2	2	1	2	7
Ashland Forest Resiliency Master Stewardship Agreement	0	2	1	2	2	7
Clackamas Stewardship Partners	0	2	2	2	2	8
Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project	0	2	2	2	2	8
Hebo Stewardship Group	0	2	2	2	2	8
Marys Peak Stewardship Group	0	2	2	2	2	8
Ochoco Forest Restoration Collaborative	0	2	2	2	2	8
Siuslaw Stewardship Group	0	2	2	2	2	8
Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative	0	2	2	2	2	8
Umatilla Forest Collaborative Group	0	2	2	2	2	8
Wallowa-Whitman NF Collaborative	0	2	2	2	2	8
Wild Rivers Coast Forest Collaborative	0	2	2	2	2	8
Applegate Partnership & Watershed Council	2	2	2	2	1	9
Blue Mountains Forest Partners	2	2	2	2	2	10
South Umpqua Rural Community Partnership	2	2	2	2	2	10
S. Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative	2	2	2	2	2	10

a. 0 = no 501c3 status; 2 = yes
 b. 0 = 2 or less per year; 1 = 3-7; 2 = 8 or more

c. 0 = none; 1 = rotating; 2 = regular/dedicated
 d. 0 = none; 1 = one; 2 = 2 or more

e. 0 = none; 1 = meets infrequently; 2 = meets regularly

similar outcomes across Oregon may be inappropriate. For instance, expectations of collaborative outcomes for restoration may be high, relative to the more limited amount of trust, experience, and relationship-building that younger groups may have, unless they have been preceded by other collaborative projects and efforts. In addition, since focusing on NEPA and public lands may not be as universal an activity as assumed, collaboratives may not be accelerating planning and reducing NEPA timelines

everywhere, or may be achieving this through mechanisms and points of engagement beyond the planning process. In contrast, more understanding of and support for all-lands work appears necessary, as this focus is found across the state in the majority of groups.

The majority of collaboratives did share a similar set of organizational characteristics, suggesting that these may have become a formula or template for collaboration in the state. Future study could examine if these characteristics can

universally contribute to success for collaboratives with different settings and goals. More in-depth examination of each collaborative's activities, participant bases, outcomes, and operationalization of their stated organizational capacities may reveal additional variability that can shed light on what types of investments and expectations may be most effective for these groups.

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REFERENCES

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