

Assessment of Early Implementation of the US Forest Service's Shared Stewardship Strategy

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About this project

Led by the Public Lands Policy Group (PLPG) at Colorado State University, researchers at PLPG, the Ecosystem Workforce Program at University of Oregon, and the University of Georgia are jointly conducting a five-year study to understand Shared Stewardship perspectives from agency leadership, state officials, land managers, and other stakeholders in states where Shared Stewardship partnerships exist.

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About the Public Lands Policy Group:

The Public Lands Policy Group (PLPG) at Colorado State University produces original research to inform the practice of natural resource management and advance understanding of policy developments that affect public lands.

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About the Ecosystem Workforce Program:

The Ecosystem Workforce Program is a bi-institutional program of University of Oregon's Institute for a Sustainable Environment and the College of Forestry at Oregon State University. We conduct applied social science research and extension services at the interface of people and natural resources. More information: <http://ewp.uoregon.edu>.

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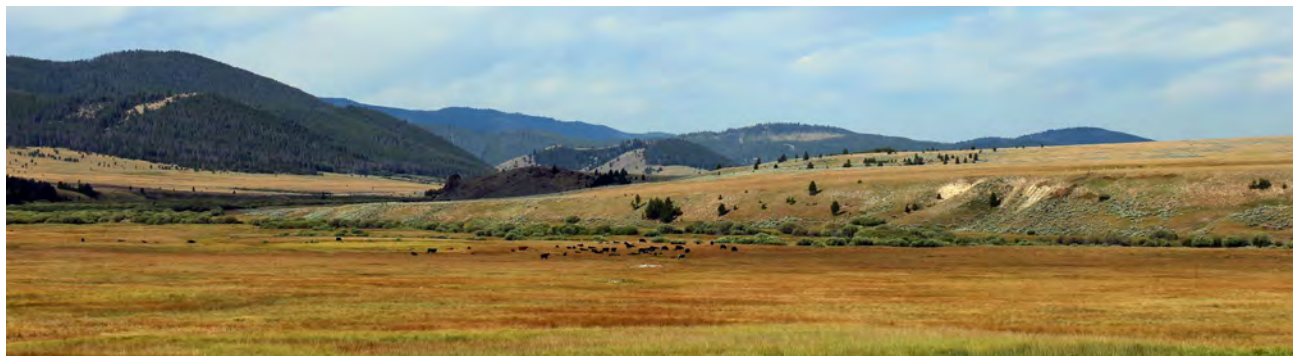
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Common Acronyms:

BLM	Bureau of Land Management
CFLRP	Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program
DNR	Department of Natural Resources
DOI	Department of the Interior
EQIP	Environmental Quality Incentives Program
FAP	Forest Action Plan
GNA	Good Neighbor Authority
JCLRP	Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding

NASF	National Association of State Foresters
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NFS	National Forest System
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
SFAP	State Forest Action Plan
SSAG	Shared Stewardship Advisory Group
USFS	United States Forest Service
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service



Executive Summary

In 2018, in response to calls from Congress to accelerate cross-boundary fire hazard reduction and improve forest resilience, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) published the Shared Stewardship Strategy (USFS 2018). The document emphasizes partnership with the states, Tribes, and collaborative partners in order to identify priority areas for management, coordinate work across jurisdictions, and leverage diverse capacities. Key aspects of the Strategy are as follows: 1) working with states to set priorities, particularly through State Forest Action Plans (SFAPs), share in the ownership of risks presented by fire, and coordinate planning and action; 2) using a suite of scientific tools to model and map fire risk, largely through Scenario Investment Planning processes (Ager et al. 2019), to identify the most strategic places to invest in forest management; 3) utilizing tools such as the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA), stewardship contracts, and categorical exclusions under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to facilitate and accelerate forest management work; and 4) pursuing other related goals, such as working with stakeholders to develop outcome-based performance indicators, streamline internal agency processes, and expand the use of risk management principles in fire management.

In 2019, Colorado State University entered into a challenge cost-share agreement with USFS State and Private Forestry to conduct independent research on the implementation and development of Shared Stewardship efforts. The first phase of our work took place in 2020, when we interviewed agency and state employees and representatives of

partner organizations in states in the West that had signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the USFS to formally pursue Shared Stewardship. Our primary goal was to understand the main factors affecting the early stages of Shared Stewardship efforts across these states, including key actors' perspectives on the Strategy and early planning and development efforts, primary opportunities and challenges, and the types of capacities, mechanisms, and direction needed to move ahead successfully with partnerships and Shared Stewardship implementation.

Approach

We interviewed two groups: 1) national-level actors who were aware of the development of the Strategy or who work for organizations that are active in forest policy; and 2) people who work in states that have signed MOUs, including people who work on forest policy or management for federal or state government, work in partnership or collaboration with the USFS, represent conservation interests, or work in the forest or wood products industry at a regional or state level. We conducted 21 national and 96 state-level semi-structured and confidential interviews across nine states in the West. Our interview questions focused on how the Strategy is developing in different states; perceived challenges and opportunities; new approaches to prioritization, partnerships, and implementation; and institutions (i.e., processes, forums, positions, capacities, policies, or measurement approaches) that support Shared Stewardship.

Our findings offer a snapshot in time of state-level efforts and general trends of progress under the Strategy in 2020. In this Executive Summary, we present the key findings across states and discuss our observations about the future of Shared Stewardship based on our research. See Table A (page 4) for a simplified summary of our state-by-state findings and Table B (page 7) for a summary of findings according to our main research questions. In the complete report, Part 1 presents findings from across all of our interviews, and Part 2 presents summaries of our findings for individual states and for our national-level interviews.

Key findings

Goals and precedents for Shared Stewardship

Priority management needs across states include increasing the pace and scale of work on the ground to reduce fire hazard, protect watershed health, and promote forest ecosystem resilience. People also noted the need to increase capacity within the agency, support and grow the forest products industry and restoration workforce, protect local communities and values, and support local economies. Some interviewees also said it was important to expand beyond vegetation and fire management goals.

National-level interviewees said the Strategy was meant to emphasize collaborative approaches to more effectively address fire hazard and forest health across jurisdictional boundaries. However, they questioned whether partners would be effectively engaged to achieve these goals. Most national-level interviewees supported the general goals of the Strategy but said that its development and roll-out missed opportunities to engage partners from the outset. Interviewees wondered how partners would be engaged and how new approaches would intersect with existing prioritization and collaborative efforts.

Shared Stewardship builds on important foundations for cross-boundary collaboration among agencies, organizations, and other stakeholders. Unique

aspects of state history, government structure, and partnerships set the stage for this effort. Existing approaches for cross-boundary land management, including use of GNA and other policies, were important foundations for Shared Stewardship. Existing state-level funding mechanisms for supporting cross-boundary work were also a key ingredient to support Shared Stewardship approaches.

Progress to date

At the time of our interviews, states were at various stages of moving from conceptual discussions to more tangible efforts. A couple of Washington interviewees said they were still working to move Shared Stewardship from a “state of mind” to a “state of being.” In New Mexico and Oregon, most interviewees felt that the Strategy provided a more formal umbrella and common vocabulary for continuing and expanding existing efforts. In Colorado, interviewees recognized that Shared Stewardship would represent a bigger change that could expand partnerships and the scale of planning and implementation. Interviewees in Utah saw Shared Stewardship as a way to move past years of tension between the USFS and the state stemming from diverse ideological perspectives.

Since the MOU was signed in each state, various states launched new communication efforts, formed state-level advisory committees, and created new positions to support Shared Stewardship. Interviewees in most states said that multi-agency and multi-partner advisory committees had formed or been expanded to inform agency decisions and represent diverse perspectives. Multiple new positions had been created, including a national Shared Stewardship coordinator at USFS headquarters. Utah state agencies and the USFS pooled funding to create three positions in Utah. California was in the process of creating regional advisor positions around the state. In Montana, the state forester added staff to support implementation of the GNA and created a position for a communications person dedicated to Shared Stewardship efforts.

Table A Year One high-level summary*

State	MOU date	Signatories	Key findings	Goals	Governance changes to date
National	08/16/2018 Official release date of Shared Stewardship (SS) Strategy	The SS Strategy was developed by USFS leadership	SS addressed the need to increase cross-boundary, landscape-scale approaches for forest resilience and fire in particular; disconnect between written SS strategy and USFS direction (outcomes vs. outputs)	Mutually identified priorities, joint decision-making & cross-boundary work, USFS to work more closely with state land management agencies	SS coordinator positions at Washington, D.C. Office
California	08/12/2020	USFS Chief, R5 Regional Forester, R4 Acting Regional Forester, Governor, and CA Natural Resources Agency Secretary	SS adds valuable formality to state-federal efforts, need to increase treatment and industry capacity, need clarification as to whether this is a new program or just change in strategy	Formalize and coordinate existing cross-boundary efforts, shared accountability and commitment; treat 1,000,000 acres annually by 2025	SS coordinator USFS position, 4 SS advisory positions planned
Colorado	10/23/2019	Undersecretary for NRE on behalf of Secretary of Agriculture, Governor	Confusion and need for clarification about SS and RMRI; SS leading to greater collaboration and coordination at state level, interviewees want more transparency and inclusivity in setting priorities	Address cross boundary threats, increase joint prioritization, coordinate RMRI and SS	1 position created by Governor to advise on SS, RMRI may merge with state SS leadership
Idaho	12/18/18	Undersecretary for NRE on behalf of Secretary of Agriculture, R1 & R4 Regional Foresters, Governor and Governor Elect, Director of ID Department of Lands	2 priority landscapes identified, GNA critical component of SS, "go big" mentality at state level, a lot of SS information publicly available, and subcommittees making progress	Double USFS acres treated by 2025, build on GNA and existing cross-boundary work	SS Advisory Group with 4 subcommittees, 2 joint funded IDL-USFS SS coordinators on priority landscapes, 1 statewide coordinator, 1 regional coordinator
Montana	04/15/19 Leaders Intent Letter	R1 Regional Forester, Director and Division Administrator of MT Department of Natural Resources and Conservation	Leadership emphasized inclusiveness (no "exclusive" MOU), building off collaboration in wildland fire fighting, need for more capacity/positions to support cross-boundary efforts, but some good new positions and efforts in place	SS as an inclusive process throughout the state, partnerships at multiple levels to do cross-boundary work at scale	MT Forest Action Advisory Committee vehicle for SS, existing DNRC-USFS position supports SS, new SS communication position at DNR
Nevada	11/15/19	R4 & R5 Regional Foresters, Regional Directors of US Fish and Wildlife Pacific Southwest Region, NV Director of BLM, Governor	History of agency collaboration in wildfire response, culture change of SS, need to engage private landowners, first inclusion of DOI agencies in MOU, USFS-driven strategy but with many partnerships, limited timber and forestry capacity	Expand existing cross-boundary work and collaboration, complete 2 SS projects by the end of 2021, increase acres treated by 50% by 2025	SS Executive Committee with main agency leadership, Technical Advisory committee with field staff
New Mexico	11/14/19	USFS Chief, Governor	Well-established example of SS prior to strategy development, iterative process of State Forest Action Plan development with scientific tools and collaborative input; strong leadership is driving expectations and support for SS	Expand partnerships, cross-boundary coordination and collaboration; expand USFS support for collaboration	No new committee developed, matchmaking organization developed to sustain industry during MSO injunction
Oregon	08/13/19	Undersecretary for NRE on behalf of Secretary of Agriculture, R6 Regional Forester, Governor, State Forester	Important to include partners in SS efforts and build on long history of collaborative place-based work; significant budget and capacity issues; formal SS structure, leadership, and direction needed	Continuation of "all hands all lands" cross-boundary focus and existing work, leverage resources, increase risk sharing	R6 USFS Coordinator for SS
Utah	05/22/19	Secretary of Agriculture, UT Governor	SS alternative to Roadless Rule petition, SS project funding application program integrated with WRI, limited forestry capacity, some discomfort with role of state that predates SS	Achieve better working relationships in historically high-conflict environment, cross-boundary work	3 state SS positions, SS implementation through addendum to existing funding application program
Washington	05/08/19	USFS Chief, R6 Regional Forester, Commissioner of Public Lands for WA Department of Natural Resources, Director of WA Department of Fish and Wildlife	Strong foundation through partnerships, collaborative networks, state funding work on federal land, and existing liaison and coordinator positions; direction and clarification needed from leadership; need to include and sustain forest products industry	Formalize existing cross-boundary work, break down silos, increase joint prioritization	R6 USFS Coordinator for SS

* See Part 2 Findings: State-Level Summaries, starting on page 35 of this report for more detailed summaries from interviews in each state.

Interviewees viewed joint prioritization as a key component of pursuing Shared Stewardship. They said there were challenges associated with integrating Shared Stewardship prioritization processes with existing statewide goals or programs. Utah adapted Watershed Restoration Initiative prioritization criteria and selection processes to also select Shared Stewardship projects for funding and implementation. Interviewees in Colorado were looking for clarity about how to align multiple prioritization efforts across the state. In Oregon, interviewees were not sure how Shared Stewardship would be integrated with existing statewide goals and efforts.

Updating the 2020 SFAP in each state presented an opportunity to operationalize Shared Stewardship. SFAPs were a chance for agencies and partners to collaboratively plan across larger spatial extents. Interviewees in New Mexico enthusiastically described a collaborative and iterative process for updating their SFAP. Those in Nevada said that the State Forest, Range, and Water Action Plan also served as a forum for trying new approaches to multi-jurisdiction prioritization. Idaho's SFAP revision process was key to Shared Stewardship and illustrated how existing and new data and decision support tools could be integrated.

Data were critical for making prioritization decisions. People shared a wide range of feedback and potential plans to use the USFS Scenario Investment Planning approach to assist prioritization efforts; some states relied heavily on the approach to inform prioritization, and some created their own approach. Some encouraged more use of social science data and information to inform prioritization efforts, assess social capacity, understand the status of partnerships, and gauge public opinion. Interviewees said that collaborative, transparent decision-making needed to occur in the prioritization process, reflecting local, collaborative input and other considerations.

Long-term monitoring of Shared Stewardship outcomes will be important. People recommended the impacts of the prioritization process be tracked over time to understand the effects for different locations and resource areas, so that prioritization approaches could be adjusted accordingly.

Opportunities and challenges

Interviewees generally saw Shared Stewardship as an opportunity to embrace a more collaborative mindset and expand partnerships. Although the Strategy often builds on existing efforts, people said it added a layer of formality to collaborative work between the state and federal agencies. Many interviewees had specific strategies in mind for expanding partnerships and also said this would require a cultural change that emphasized collaborative work. Interviewees saw a great need and potential for working more closely with other state and federal agencies, Native American Tribes, private landowners, state-specific entities such as state trust lands and Spanish Land Grants, utility providers, water users, and others.

Many interviewees described Shared Stewardship as presenting opportunities to take and share risks across agencies, particularly state and federal land management agencies. Some people described this as working together to identify priorities and face the consequences of forest management and fire outcomes. Others felt it would spread out the risk involved in pursuing new approaches and partnerships.

Interviewees emphasized that leadership is important for the development and longevity of Shared Stewardship. Interviewees consistently described a need for leadership support for embarking on partnerships and trying new things, like building new relationships, that may not yield immediate results. Others described the need for clear communication to enhance transparency and accountability for fostering trusting relationships and partnerships. Interviewees said agency leaders should carefully communicate how prioritization efforts at different levels would work together and affect programs of work.

Interviewees in all states said they need more resources for forest management (e.g., funding, staff or personnel, training opportunities). People wanted more expertise and capacity for writing grants and agreements. They needed information on how to use different funding streams and authorities to do cross-boundary projects. Many interviewees wanted increased guidance and training specifically for cross-boundary planning and collaboration.

Most people were not seeking new or changed policies. Instead, they wanted more direction and clarity about how to use the existing options at different levels. Some said NEPA was a bottleneck; they wanted more capacity and potentially to expand categorical exclusions.

Interviewees wanted individual positions and committees in place to support Shared Stewardship. They said that coordinating roles would be key to the success of the Strategy. Interviewees were enthusiastic about having formal advisory committees help guide Shared Stewardship and having partners and other agencies participate in prioritization processes.

There are many challenges associated with engaging the forest products industry. Challenges include the fact that byproducts from restoration and fuels reduction are typically low in value, and in many states, that the workforce is too small to carry out the necessary work and there is limited industry capacity and market access. Interviewees emphasized that industry members or representatives should be involved closely in the Shared Stewardship process (e.g. sitting on advisory committees, attending planning meetings).

Performance measures or metrics to monitor Shared Stewardship efforts should be developed collaboratively. Interviewees said that developing and monitoring these measures should be a transparent and collaborative process, informed by the state's MOU and by existing plans such as SFAPs. Interviewees also noted that USFS timber targets often impede their ability to pursue other goals. They wanted to develop measures that better reflect desired outcomes and that capture the effects of joint prioritization, collaboration and coordination, and partnership development.

Some interviewees were not sure whether Shared Stewardship was a high-level USFS strategy or a program with funding and added capacity resources and capacity. They also wondered about its longevity and how the agency intended to support it. Despite this uncertainty, most interviewees were optimistic that the basic tenets of the Strategy would persist.



The future of Shared Stewardship

In Table B (page 7), we summarize our key findings for each research question. Below, we offer some additional observations.

State-level efforts under Shared Stewardship ranged from a continuation of existing practices to more significant changes. While many people said Shared Stewardship efforts were a continuation of work that was already in progress, they also said the Strategy lends increased formality to partnerships, particularly between the USFS and state agencies. The Strategy was also the impetus to add new positions, create or expand advisory committees, and share data for assessment and prioritization efforts.

The revision of SFAPs was a ready opportunity to incorporate Shared Stewardship goals into state-level planning. Given the increased role of state-level funding and capacity to implement work across jurisdictions, we expect that SFAP processes will become a more important aspect of Shared Stewardship over time.

An important, unanswered question is how prioritization and collaborative processes at different levels work together. As more emphasis is placed on national and state-level prioritization processes, it will be important for these different efforts to work together in a strategic and coherent fashion with local collaborative efforts and processes under programs like the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program.

Table B Key findings by research question

Research question	Key findings
How is the Shared Stewardship (SS) Strategy playing out in different states, and what factors are driving choices about strategic partnerships and directions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SS will follow a different trajectory in each state due to varying priorities, existing structures and relationships, and available resources. Interviewees saw this flexibility as a strength. ▪ Leadership is important in each state. ▪ Interviewees said that being open to new partnerships would allow them to identify shared values and leverage resources.
What opportunities and challenges are associated with the Strategy's implementation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interviewees were optimistic that SS would provide formality and impetus to collaborations with agencies and partners to address forest health issues. ▪ Interviewees questioned the longevity of SS and the commitment of the USFS to support it. Non-agency partners and field-level agency staff were unsure that the Strategy would lead to meaningful changes. ▪ There is a need for strong and consistent leadership and a need for clear communication about SS directions and expectations, and there are significant shortages in staff capacity and resources. ▪ Another key challenge was how to support and align the forest products industry with forest management needs.
How is the Strategy leading to changes in prioritization strategies, collaborative efforts and partnerships, cross-boundary planning, and project implementation, compared with business as usual?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interviewees said the Strategy prompted a shift in mindset and increased formality regarding their approaches to prioritization and partnerships. ▪ Many interviewees were taking a more collaborative approach to updating the State Forest Action Plan and using that process and plan to set priorities on lands across the entire state. ▪ New projects were typically in the planning phase; existing projects were oriented toward SS goals. ▪ Most interviewees wanted to strategically expand partnerships with agencies, Tribes, private landowners, investors, and other stakeholders.
How are priorities being set under the Strategy? In other words, what approaches, including different authorities, collaborative forums, and scientific tools, are being used?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ New and existing positions and advisory committees were important for advancing SS. ▪ Interviewees planned to use existing authorities, policies, and mechanisms to accomplish their work, but they wanted more capacity and expertise for entering into agreements and using different policies and funding streams to do cross-boundary work. ▪ Interviewees used existing datasets and scientific tools, often associated with recent forest health assessments, to help inform SS planning. Interviewees in a few states used the USFS's Scenario Investment Planning tool. ▪ Some wanted to see more information about social agreement and capacity integrated into prioritization processes. ▪ The collaborative, science-based joint prioritization process in some states' SFAP update efforts presented an initial opportunity to operationalize SS.
What institutional and organizational changes, including new kinds of capacities, policies, incentives, and measurement approaches, are needed to successfully move forward with principles of SS?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interviewees wanted clearer communication about expectations for doing SS and support from leadership support to take risks, try new approaches, and expand partnerships. ▪ Many felt that truly achieving SS would require broadening the agency's traditional incentives and performance measures to include collaboratively developed metrics. ▪ There is a significant need for more funding and staff to support SS efforts, as well as more training around effective communication and approaches to collaboration and forums for sharing information, examples, and lessons learned.
What political opportunities and challenges will arise with increased state-level engagement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Most interviewees did not expect SS to bring any significant shift in power dynamics or final decision-making power for any jurisdiction. ▪ They hoped that joint prioritization and shared decision-making would be operationalized by giving agencies and partners a more formal and coordinated role throughout planning and implementation efforts. ▪ Some shared some concerns about leaving local partners behind if they are not involved in state-level prioritization efforts or funding decisions.

Leadership changes always present challenges for collaborative land management, as relationships and plans are built and implemented over many years. This is an issue with Shared Stewardship, which has relied on leadership from governors, who change over time, and from federal appointees in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, who change with the presidential administration. Regardless, many people intend to continue and build on the new relationships and processes they have built over the last two years.

Clear leadership and transparent communication are needed to advance Shared Stewardship to ensure that existing capacities, incentives, and processes align with stated goals. We know that local-level capacities, collaborative history, political dynamics, and individuals make a difference in how efforts roll out in different places. These dynamics, all of which are important facets of advancing organizational change, were apparent in our research and should be given concerted attention going forward.

Interviewees wanted more capacity and expertise with using existing policies, rather than new policies. A major challenge for cross-boundary work will be to couple authorities, enter into agreements for resource sharing, and utilize diverse funding streams across agencies. There is a need for more expertise and consistency in these areas, which may mean more people in boundary-spanning positions and more centralization of expertise using cross-boundary agreements and authorities. People also wanted more capacity and funding in general, particularly for coordinator positions and advisory committees to work across different agencies and jurisdictions.

In cross-boundary contexts, the history of collaboration is an important foundation for progress. Existing relationships and trust can affect how quickly processes proceed and whether they are seen as legitimate. Advisory councils are useful for handling new efforts and integrating them with existing initiatives. Building relationships takes time, so where they already exist, new collaborative and cross-boundary efforts are more likely to take off

quickly, but they must be carefully integrated into existing processes.

As Shared Stewardship gets underway, robust communication is needed. It will be important to share examples of cross-boundary efforts, clarify how the strategy will integrate with other prioritization processes, and explain whether Shared Stewardship is a strategic approach or a program that will drive funding allocations. There were many questions and some confusion about these issues among interviewees. People are seeking opportunities for information sharing and peer learning.

Several challenges remain foundational to improving forest management. Interviewees said state and federal government agencies need more funding or new strategies to support industry and get low-to-no value biomass out of the woods. At the same time, a strong emphasis on timber targets did not necessarily align with high-priority work as identified through science-based assessments. In general, while Shared Stewardship efforts seek to leverage existing capacity, a lack of adequate funds and staff capacity for forest management work remains a fundamental challenge.





Introduction

In 2018, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) published a Shared Stewardship Strategy in response to requests from Congress for a renewed vision for improving forest management for fire hazard reduction and forest resilience (USFS 2018). The Strategy emphasized partnering with states, Tribes, and other collaborative partners in order to identify priority areas for management, coordinate work across jurisdictions, and leverage diverse capacities. Specifically, the Strategy involved:

1. Working with states to set priorities, particularly through state Forest Action Plans (SFAPs), share in the ownership of risks presented by fire, and coordinate planning and action;
2. Using a suite of scientific tools to model and map fire risk, largely through Scenario Investment Planning¹ processes (Ager et al. 2019), to identify the most strategic places to invest in forest management;
3. Utilizing tools such as the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA), stewardship contracts, and categorical exclusions under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to facilitate and accelerate forest management work; and
4. Pursuing related goals, such as working with stakeholders to develop outcome-based performance indicators, streamline internal agency processes, and expand the use of risk management principles in fire management.

The Strategy built on previous efforts that were designed to accelerate forest management, coordinate work across jurisdictional boundaries, and prioritize investments to accomplish work at a scale large enough to affect ecological outcomes. Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack emphasized in 2009 the importance of an “all lands” strategy in forest management (USFS 2009). Also in 2009, Congress passed the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP), which invests in collaborative projects on fire-adapted forest landscapes for 10 years at a time, based on a competitive application process (Schultz et al. 2012). A similar program that works across both public and private lands is the Joint Chiefs’ Landscape Restoration Partnership (JCLRP), which started in 2013 (Cyphers and Schultz 2019). The GNA, which was permanently authorized nationwide in the 2014 Farm Bill, allows federal and state agencies to enter into cooperative agreements to restore watersheds and forests on federal lands (Bertone-Riggs et al. 2018). The National Cohesive Wildfire Management Strategy, finalized in 2014, envisioned greater coordination across jurisdictions (WFEC 2014). The Shared Stewardship Strategy was a next step in the effort to promote cross-jurisdictional coordination.

In 2019, Colorado State University entered into a challenge cost-share agreement with the USFS State and Private Forestry deputy area to conduct

¹ Scenario Investment Planning Platform. <https://sipp-usfs.opendata.arcgis.com/>.

independent research on the implementation and development of Shared Stewardship efforts. The principal investigator for this effort is Dr. Courtney Schultz; Drs. Heidi Huber-Stearns and Jesse Abrams are co-principal investigators. The first stage of our work, which took place in 2020 and is detailed in this report, focused on early expectations for Shared Stewardship efforts and how these efforts were developing in each state in the West where the USFS had signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the state to formally pursue Shared Stewardship. In the future, we will research states in the eastern United States and conduct longitudinal work to see how Shared Stewardship efforts develop over time.

We explored the following research questions:

1. How is the Strategy playing out in different states, and what factors are driving choices about strategic partnerships and directions?
2. What opportunities and challenges are associated with implementing the Strategy?
3. How is the Strategy leading to changes in prioritization strategies, collaborative efforts and partnerships, cross-boundary planning, and project implementation, compared with business as usual?
4. How are priorities being set under the Strategy? In other words, what approaches, including different authorities, collaborative forums, and scientific tools, are being used?
5. What institutional and organizational changes, including new kinds of capacities, policies, incentives, and measurement approaches, are needed to successfully move forward with principles of Shared Stewardship?
6. What political opportunities and challenges will arise with increased state-level engagement?

Approach

We interviewed two groups of people: 1) national-level actors who were aware of the development of the Strategy or who work for organizations that are active in forest policy at a national level; and 2) in states with signed MOUs, individuals who work on forest policy or management for the federal or state government, partner or collaborate with the USFS, represent conservation interests, or work in the forest or wood products industry at a regional or state level. We sought a wide range of perspectives nationally and within each state to ensure diverse representation of relevant stakeholders and partners.

For the national-level interviews, we identified agency officials and partners who were engaged with the Shared Stewardship Strategy by reviewing key agency publications, organizational letters of support or opinion pieces, and press releases about the Strategy. We then used a chain-referral approach to identify additional interviewees and to reach a diverse set of partners who were knowledgeable about the Strategy in the early stages of its release and implementation.

For the state-level interviews, we contacted representatives from agencies and organizations who signed that state's Shared Stewardship agreement or MOU (e.g., people from the Governor's office, regional or state-level USFS personnel, people at state natural resources or forestry departments or agencies). We then used referrals and other publicly available information about the Strategy in that state to find other key organizations or groups who were involved in forest policy and management across the state (e.g., Shared Stewardship websites that list key partners or advisory committee members, press releases, media coverage about the MOU signing in that state). Additional interviewees generally had leadership roles in state-level collaborative forest restoration efforts, the timber industry, water utilities, organizations representing or working with Tribes, non-governmental organizations, or other partner agencies. Our interviewees were primarily involved in forest restoration and fire management, which were the priorities for early

Shared Stewardship efforts. However, many other values and land management goals were mentioned in MOUs, and future research could investigate further how Shared Stewardship efforts affect other values, such as recreation or habitat restoration.

Between late 2019 and fall 2020, we conducted 117 semi-structured and confidential interviews (21 national and 96 state-level) across nine states in the western United States. We strove to include all states with MOUs that were complete or signed by May 2020. We excluded Hawaii, as their MOU appeared to be focused on invasive species rather than on forest management. We included California, even though the MOU was not signed until later in the year, because the MOU was completed earlier in the year. Table 1 summarizes the overall breakdown of interviews in each state and nationally. Table 2 summarizes the different categories of participants.

In some states, our interviews occurred a few weeks after the agreement or MOU was signed, while in others they occurred a year later (Table 1). The states were at different stages of developing their Shared Stewardship approaches and integrating them with other processes, such as their State Forest Action Plan (SFAP), which was an important part of operationalizing Shared Stewardship in some states. Other events in 2020 significantly impacted planning, meetings, and implementation opportunities, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, major wildfire

events, and, in New Mexico, an injunction placed on the USFS due to litigation over the Mexican Spotted Owl. These factors prevent us from making direct comparisons about temporal trajectories or timelines for Shared Stewardship development in each state. In short, the information in this report is just a snapshot in time and reflects the perspectives of interviewees when our interviews were conducted. **Findings should be viewed as an overall reflection of early Shared Stewardship efforts and not as a definitive explanation of progress in any state.**

Our interview questions focused on how the Strategy is developing in different states; perceived challenges and opportunities; new approaches to prioritization, partnerships, and implementation; and institutions (i.e., processes, forums, positions, capacities, policies, or measurement approaches) that support Shared Stewardship.

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded for analysis to identify themes in the interviews across hundreds of pages of interview text. We then summarized our findings by state and for our national interviews and present those results as two-page summaries at the end of this report. We sent a draft of each state-level summary to each interviewee for that state so that they could review our analysis and interpretation of the data and pass along any key updates that occurred after our interviews were conducted. Efforts across states continued to progress since the time of our writing.



Table 1 Number of interviews, interview dates, and MOU signing date

National or state-level	Number of interviews ^a	Interview dates	MOU signing date
National	21	December 2019–July 2020	n/a ^b
California	8 ^c	May–September 2020	August 12, 2020
Colorado	12	July–August 2020	October 23, 2019
Idaho	11	February–July 2020	December 18, 2018
Montana	10	January–May 2020	April 15, 2019
Nevada	10	April–July 2020	November 15, 2019
New Mexico	15	April–July 2020	November 14, 2019
Oregon	10	January–March 2020	August 13, 2019
Utah	10	March–July 2020	May 22, 2019
Washington	10	January–March 2020	May 8, 2019
TOTAL	117		

^a Some interviews included more than one interviewee, and some interviewees discussed more than one state. We interviewed more people in New Mexico as part of a preliminary exploration of a deeper analysis in the state.

^b There is no national MOU, but the Western Governors' Association signed the first MOU on December 13, 2018, several months after the Strategy was released in August 2018.

^c We paused the interview process in California due to the impacts of the 2020 wildfire season on potential interviewee lands, project, and availability; since the MOU had been signed only a short time earlier, many non-agency partners had not developed strong perspectives on Shared Stewardship yet.

Table 2 Interviewee breakdown across all 117 interviews

Category of interviewees	Number of interviews	Number of interviewees ^a
Federal agencies	35	39
State agencies	30	35
NGOs, collaborative groups, other partners not associated with the forest products industry ^b	40	41
Partners associated with the forest products industry ^c	12	12
TOTAL	117	127

^a Some interviews were conducted with multiple interviewees present.

^b We did not interview anyone about perspectives from a specific Native American Tribe, although we and many interviewees acknowledge their important role. No Tribe was a signatory to an MOU for this stage of our research, and none of our referrals were to Tribal representatives. Rather, people recommended interviewees from state and federal agencies who focus on Tribal relations or individuals representing Tribes in the forest products industry; these people are counted in the appropriate categories.

^c Forest products industry partners included non-agency individuals in the forest, timber, or wood products industry, as well as representatives of the industry who serve on state or national councils, associations, or advisory groups. Interviewees from NGOs or collaborative groups who focused primarily on forest products were placed in the forest products industry partner category.



Part I Findings: Main Themes Across States

Here, we present overall findings synthesized from all 117 interviews. We provide insights or examples from different states to help illustrate the range of the overall themes. These state-specific examples are not exhaustive. For more details about findings from individual states, please see the summaries in Part 2 of this report beginning on page 36.

Goals for Shared Stewardship

Interviewees said that they needed to increase the pace and scale of work on the ground to achieve their goals. Nearly every interviewee spoke about the need to reduce wildfire risk and mitigate impacts from catastrophic wildfires. They also emphasized the need to improve and maintain forest and watershed health, make habitat improvements, improve ecosystem resiliency to disturbances and climate change, and reintroduce wildland fire or mimic natural fire processes. Interviewees said they had significant funding and workforce capacity limitations, including a lack of funding and staffing to effectively plan and implement projects at the necessary scales. Many participants also discussed socio-economic needs, including protect-

ing communities, infrastructure, and watersheds from wildfire impacts. They wanted to support local communities by increasing forest-related jobs, providing workforce training, and ensuring other benefits from increased forest management (e.g., tax revenue from timber sales). Interviewees agreed that supporting the forest industry, locally and more broadly, through increased investments and innovations was key for sustaining forest restoration work.

National-level interviewees said that the Strategy was developed in response to discussions around the fire funding fix,² related to increasing accountability to Congress for how USFS funds are spent, and finding innovative approaches to address fire hazard and forest health across jurisdictional boundaries. Most national-level interviewees also said the Strategy was a continuation of trends in national forest governance over the last two decades—the key difference being that the Strategy and subsequent state MOUs emphasized state engagement. Some interviewees also noted that the agency is increasingly using science-based decision-support tools to prioritize investments.

² The FY 2018 Omnibus Spending Package included a 'fire funding fix' that provided a new funding structure from FY 2020 through FY 2027 in which Congress can appropriate federal disaster funding to the USFS and DOI for a portion of their wildfire suppression activities. The package created a fire suppression account funded at \$1.011 billion annually, part of a \$2.25-billion budget authority available to USDA and DOI that increases by \$100 million each year until FY 2027 (U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, 2018). The goal of the fix was to significantly reduce the need for agencies to borrow from non-fire programs when they exceed their fire suppression budgets. <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2018/03/23/secretary-perdue-applauds-fire-funding-fix-omnibus>

Most national-level interviewees shared these goals but described the Strategy's development and rollout as USFS-centric. Some felt that this was a missed opportunity to engage partners in developing a Strategy that would focus more on the key role of partnerships. Some national interviewees expressed concern and uncertainty about how existing local partnerships would be affected by formal agreements like MOUs between the USFS and the state that did not include many other partners as signatories. While some at the state level shared this concern and uncertainty, most state-level interviewees thought that Shared Stewardship would provide opportunities to engage partners more formally at the state level.

Nearly all state-level interviewees described their goals for Shared Stewardship as building an ethos and strategy to collectively address interconnected forest management issues and needs, because no single entity or organization had the capacity and resources to address them on their own. Interviewees recognized that meeting these needs requires increasing the pace and scale of forest management and restoration, forming effective cross-boundary partnerships and coordinating across jurisdictions, efficiently using available resources and mechanisms to accomplish goals, and building public support for forest management.

"[Shared Stewardship] creates an opportunity to do something different, not necessarily do business as usual. No one entity can do this work alone. [It's about] how can we identify mutual commitments, mutual goals, share decision space, identify shared priorities, and look at it as a whole, take more of a holistic approach and remove the jurisdictional boundaries—or, you know, recognize that they're there, but make alignment on either side to get at a bigger scale, to do business a little bit different. I think that's very exciting." (National)

Many interviewees saw the potential for more cross-boundary collaboration among agencies, organizations, and other stakeholders to expand existing multi-jurisdictional work. Interviewees wanted to use Shared Stewardship to improve coordination between agencies and partners and to

seek more opportunities to efficiently leverage resources, particularly to increase the pace and scale of fire hazard reduction, watershed protection, and other forest restoration activities.

Interviewees hoped that shared decision-making responsibility and joint prioritization would help states work with the USFS. Many interviewees hoped this shift in relationships across agencies would encourage state, USFS, and other federal agency personnel to try new approaches, expand potential funding opportunities, and invite new partners to the table. Some interviewees in Utah viewed Shared Stewardship as an opportunity to ameliorate long-standing conflicts between the state and the federal government.

"On the federal side, I think they're feeling like this is maybe a good move forward where the state won't be fighting them on everything, and they've both got money and boots on the ground. And then for the state, I honestly think that they kind of feel like this is a way for them to keep the federal government in check a little bit." (Utah)

Interviewees did not feel that increased coordination between agencies would significantly shift power dynamics. Most recognized that the USFS still had the final say on USFS lands, and that other landowners would make decisions for their jurisdictions. Many also said that agencies or landowners still have their individual mandates and objectives, and not all of their efforts will fit the Shared Stewardship mold. In one notable exception, interviewees from the Utah conservation NGO community expressed concerns that the timber industry would be empowered and conservation interests disempowered under the state's approach to Shared Stewardship. Other exceptions were in Oregon and Idaho, where some interviewees were concerned that increasing state and federal partnerships could reduce the influence of partners or collaborative groups on decision making.

Many interviewees also stated that generating economic activity was a goal of Shared Stewardship, through increased investments that would sustain the forest products industry and support local economic development. Many state-level interviewees

mentioned the need to keep the timber industry functioning in their state. Some interviewees also pointed out that different aspects of the broader forest products and timber industry (e.g., skilled labor, mills and processing facilities, funding for restoration generated by selling forest products) are key to supporting restoration and wildfire mitigation activities.

In each state, a few people also saw opportunities to expand Shared Stewardship beyond forest and wildfire-centric management to address other cross-boundary issues, such as invasive and endangered species management, wildlife and fisheries habitat improvement, and recreation access and maintenance. They explained that these issues also require multi-jurisdictional attention, partnerships, shared prioritization, leveraged resources, and creativity to achieve desired outcomes.



Cross-boundary efforts that precede Shared Stewardship

Multi-jurisdictional coordination and collaborative partnerships at the state level provided a foundation for Shared Stewardship. For instance, interviewees in Nevada said that agencies had a history of working together on cross-boundary wildfire response and more recently on mitigation efforts, guided by the state's Cohesive Wildfire Strategy. Interviewees in Idaho, Montana, and Washington described the importance of scientific forest health assessments, such as those facilitated by the 2014 Farm Bill, which documented widespread forest insect and disease outbreaks and illustrated the need to work across boundaries to mitigate and respond at scale.³

Interviewees described the importance of prior use of federal authorities and programs such as the GNA, Wyden Authority, stewardship agreements, the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership, and the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program. These mechanisms facilitated communication among agencies and partners and the ability to leverage resources and accomplish landscape-scale projects. In several states, interviewees said that GNA allowed not just funding but also skills and expertise to be shared between state agencies and the USFS. Interviewees consistently mentioned that the history of cross-boundary work and relationships between agencies and partners, which often were supported by these mechanisms, provided the basis for Shared Stewardship.

"New Mexico has done a tremendous job in the past of bringing everybody to the table and actually doing what Shared Stewardship is calling for.... With the big collaborative groups looking at big landscapes and being willing to talk about what ought to be done." (New Mexico)

Existing state-level funding mechanisms for supporting cross-boundary work were also a key foundation for Shared Stewardship approaches. For instance, interviewees in Washington and Oregon said that the state's legislature allocated funds to local collaborative groups for local forest management

³ Designation letter for landscape-scale areas in Idaho. <https://www.fs.fed.us/farmbill/documents/DesignationLetters/Idaho.pdf>.

projects. New Mexico interviewees mentioned that revenue from oil and gas severance taxes and federal funding through the USFS's Collaborative Forest Restoration Program (specific to New Mexico) supported forestry work. Participants in Utah and Montana discussed the significance of state funding for forest restoration projects across jurisdictions. Several California interviewees shared that the state's cap-and-trade program provided important funding for cross-boundary forest management projects.

State land management agencies have different structures that affect Shared Stewardship efforts.

For instance, in Colorado, interviewees noted that the Colorado State Forest Service is housed under Colorado State University and does not report directly to the state's main natural resources agency, which may affect its ability to play a statewide leadership role. On the other hand, interviewees in Montana said that the state's Department of Natural Resources and Conservation has been a leader in advancing conservation efforts on state, federal, and private lands across the state; they attributed this to the agency having multiple bureaus to lead cross-boundary efforts and significant support from the Governor in terms of leadership and resources. In Oregon, interviewees said the state Department of Forestry is facing a financial shortfall and budget cuts that would impact the state's capacity to implement Shared Stewardship work.

Interviewees said that the extent and location of National Forest System lands in their states affect their state-level partnerships.

For instance, interviewees in Utah and New Mexico noted that the USFS owns much of the forested lands, higher value timber, and watershed headwaters in those states. They said that this makes it imperative for the USFS to consider broader and downstream impacts of activities on USFS land and incentivizes the state and other actors to seek greater influence on how those lands are managed. Interviewees in Nevada mentioned that the federal government manages the majority of the state's land, with most of that acreage managed by the BLM. This ownership is reflected in the state's Shared Stewardship MOU, which was the first to include DOI agencies (BLM and USFWS). Interviewees in California not-

ed that their state has a relatively large number of national forests with diverse social and ecological conditions. To manage these forests more efficiently and with regard to local considerations, the USFS divided the state into different Shared Stewardship administrative zones.

Programs that existed prior to Shared Stewardship created unique expectations and opportunities for future cross-boundary work.

Interviewees in states with a strong collaborative history and state-level governance structures that can facilitate cross-boundary work said they expected those efforts to continue under Shared Stewardship. In Washington and New Mexico, existing agency staff positions, strategic plans, and various multi-partner groups or committees have been in place for years, and these groups are expected to continue their communication, coordination, and prioritization roles under the formal umbrella of Shared Stewardship. In Utah, funding was already in place and the existing Watershed Restoration Initiative program was readily adapted to facilitate Shared Stewardship project designation, allowing the state to get a quick start on implementing Shared Stewardship projects. In other states, the effort to integrate existing efforts with Shared Stewardship was creating some confusion at the time of our interviews.

"Utah has what's called the Catastrophic Wildfire Reduction Strategy, which is their take on implementation of the National Cohesive Strategy. And that's been an effective partnership for a long time. So through some of those programs that are already in place, a groundwork was laid that enabled the state to be able to take Shared Stewardship and immediately turn it into success." (Utah)

Existing and potential collaborative partnerships influenced the integration of local-level considerations into Shared Stewardship.

For instance, in Washington and Montana, interviewees described well-developed networks of local forest collaborative groups. Most of these groups had good relationships with local USFS units and state agency representatives and had used existing strategic plans to inform statewide priorities. Interviewees said that the broad stakeholder representation in these groups was key to aligning local needs with state-

wide goals and that these networks would continue to be important. Other states are looking forward to future partnerships. For instance, Nevada and Utah have plans to conduct formal outreach efforts with a wide range of potential stakeholders to inform them about Shared Stewardship goals and to invite them to consider forming partnerships with agencies and other stakeholders to advance local and statewide Shared Stewardship goals.

Progress to date

At the time of our interviews, most states were focused on intentions and conceptual changes, and had not yet achieved tangible progress since their state had signed the Shared Stewardship MOU. Washington interviewees said that they were still working to move Shared Stewardship from a “state of mind” to a “state of being.” In New Mexico and Oregon, interviewees felt that they have been taking a Shared Stewardship-type approach for years but that the Strategy provided a more formal umbrella and common vocabulary for continuing and expanding existing efforts. In other states, such as Colorado, interviewees recognized that Shared Stewardship would represent a bigger change and ideally would lead agencies to think about how to expand partnerships and the scale of planning and implementation. Interviewees in Utah saw Shared Stewardship as a fundamental change in how the state and federal agencies work together, an opportunity to put aside years of tense relationships stemming from diverse ideological perspectives.

Some interviewees said that notable changes had occurred since the signing of their MOU, including increased outreach and communication efforts. Some of these changes increased communication between agency personnel with similar positions in state or federal agencies. Interviewees in Utah and Idaho noted that their states had created Shared Stewardship websites to communicate about opportunities, plans, and accomplishments.

Another notable change was the creation of new positions specifically to support Shared Stewardship. Interviewees said these positions were necessary to enable agencies and partners to work together

efficiently. The USFS created a Shared Stewardship Coordinator position in the Washington, D.C. Office to lead a team to guide and track translation of the Strategy into actions at the state level. In Region 6 (the Pacific Northwest region), an All Hands Coordinator was hired. Utah state agencies and the USFS pooled funding to create three positions in Utah to focus on Shared Stewardship coordination, fire prevention and outreach, and economic development. Idaho designated four Shared Stewardship coordinators. In California, the Regional Office created a Shared Stewardship Coordinator position, and at the time of our interviews the state was planning to create four Shared Stewardship Advisor positions. Many interviewees were particularly enthusiastic about positions that were either jointly funded by the USFS and state agencies (or other entities), or funded by one agency but physically located in a different agency, because these scenarios signified shared resources and joint efforts.

Some states formed specific, multi-agency, multi-partner advisory committees to help inform agency decisions and represent diverse perspectives. For instance, Idaho created a Shared Stewardship Advisory Group (SSAG) with subcommittees focusing on Shared Stewardship principles, opportunities, metrics/performance indicators, and communications. Members of the SSAG included agencies (the Idaho Department of Lands, USFS, NRCS), conservation NGOs, the Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership, forest manufacturing representatives, the Idaho Lands Resource Coordinating Council, industrial landowners, the Governor’s office, and county commissioners. Nevada created Executive and Technical Committees consisting of representatives from the key state and federal agencies involved in Shared Stewardship. The USFS Regional Forester and the State Forester in Montana formed and co-chair the Montana Forest Action Advisory Council to represent diverse stakeholder interests and inform Shared Stewardship. In Colorado, the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative steering committee consisted of an expanding group of local and statewide agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders; interviewees there wanted to see a diverse and transparent group for guiding Shared Stewardship as well.

In other states, interviewees said they would rely on existing groups to inform Shared Stewardship efforts. Those groups may be revised or expanded to include broader Shared Stewardship partners and interests. For instance, Washington interviewees expected the membership of the state's Forest Health Advisory Committee to be revisited, after which the committee would help advise Shared Stewardship efforts. The committee represents broad interests and has clear lines of communication with decision makers and other stakeholders.

At the time of our interviews, Utah was the only state engaged in designating, funding, and implementing specific Shared Stewardship projects. Funding approved by the state legislature was partially matched by the USFS. Interviewees noted that project selection was facilitated by adding a separate Shared Stewardship proposal process to the existing process for submitting Watershed Restoration Initiative proposals.

Interviewees in other states had not seen field-level changes or action, and some people were eager for clearer communication. Many said their state had not yet identified specific priority landscapes or projects. However, in Idaho, interviewees noted that Shared Stewardship efforts had identified two priority landscapes and associated programs of work. In most states, people said that Shared Stewardship plans, expectations, or available resources had not been clearly communicated to field-level staff. Higher-level interviewees from state and federal agencies often felt it was too early to see implementation or action at the field level, but partners and agency staff closer to the field level were eager for direction. Some were frustrated that these discussions were still essentially high-level rhetoric that had not yet materialized in the form of more specific instructions, expectations, or clarity about resources to carry out Shared Stewardship.

“There needs to be more specific direct leadership around this. I would love it if the [Department of Natural Resources] at the state level and the Forest Service were coming in and saying, ‘okay, folks across this geography, this is what we want to see. ... Let’s commit to leaning together, leaning in together and figuring this out.’ So we’ve got those visions moving forward.” (Washington)

Prioritization processes under Shared Stewardship

Interviewees viewed joint prioritization as a key component of sharing decision making under Shared Stewardship. National-level interviewees recognized that every state has different circumstances, needs, agency structures, partners, and opportunities and said they would approach prioritization in each state in a unique way. In some states, interviewees said that key agencies and partners needed to step back and collectively conceptualize what joint prioritization meant before moving ahead. They felt that doing so was an important part of building relationships and lines of communication across partners.

Interviewees also discussed different approaches to integrating Shared Stewardship prioritization processes with existing statewide initiatives. For instance, interviewees in Utah said they were adapting Watershed Restoration Initiative selection processes to also select for Shared Stewardship projects. Interviewees in Colorado were looking for clarity about how to align multiple prioritization efforts across the state, including work under Shared Stewardship, the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative, the SFAP, and the NRCS's process to identify funding allocation zones. In Oregon, it was unclear how Shared Stewardship would be integrated with existing statewide goals and efforts (e.g., the Governor's Council on Wildfire Response), the State Forest Action Plan, or other efforts.

“We had a wildfire council that said we need a 20-year plan. Okay, so they’re going to go off and do that. Then we have a forest action plan. Now we’re going to have a Shared Stewardship advisory committee that’s not going to convene until probably after the Forest Action Plan is approved and needing to go...[It’s] just hard to understand how it all fits together right now.” (Oregon)

Most interviewees mentioned the value of using the 2020 SFAP update process to operationalize Shared Stewardship, because it allows agencies and partners to collaboratively plan across larger spatial extents. Each state was at a different stage in the SFAP update process. We provide more detailed

examples from Idaho, Nevada, and New Mexico in Box 1 (below) because these states had completed significant portions of the update process at the time of our interviews. Interviewees in most other states, except Utah, also planned to use the SFAP to guide Shared Stewardship.

We heard a wide range of views about using the USFS Scenario Investment Planning approach to assist prioritization efforts. Some relied heavily on the approach to inform prioritization, while other states created their own approach. Some national-level interviewees stated that the Scenario

Box 1: Examples of how different states used the SFAP process

Example 1: Idaho. All Idaho interviewees described Idaho's Forest Action Plan revision process as key to Shared Stewardship and an illustration of how existing and new data and decision support tools could be integrated. The Idaho Department of Lands developed the Idaho SFAP in partnership with many other agencies and organizations through a collaborative, science-informed process. Overall prioritization, including for Shared Stewardship work in the state, was mainly based on the SFAP resource assessment of conditions, trends, and threats on all of Idaho's forested lands. The USFS Scenario Investment Planning tool was also used to analyze trade-offs between meeting priorities and targets across landscapes. One interviewee also said that community risks and forest conditions factored into decisions between two priority landscapes.

"I think Shared Stewardship used the Forest Action Plan a lot more than vice versa. I'm pleased to see that we had a good robust plan. I think it was timely that they were redoing [the SFAP] right now.... I think the Forest Service bought into that process...because [the SFAP] did have some good data there." (Idaho)

Example 2: Nevada. The State Forest, Range, and Water Action Plan process served as a forum for trying new approaches to multi-jurisdiction prioritization. The Nevada Shared Stewardship Executive and Technical Committees developed a prioritization "heat map" by asking representatives from key state and federal agencies in the state to submit geospatial data for six priority areas (three wildland–urban interfaces and three wildlands/rangelands). Landscapes with the greatest priority overlap across agencies were designated as areas for focus.

"The [State Forest, Range, and Water Action Plan] is by design and on purpose being redrafted and restructured to be in line with the Cohesive [Wildfire] Strategy and with Shared Stewardship." (Nevada)

Example 3: New Mexico. Interviewees in New Mexico enthusiastically described a collaborative and iterative process to updating their SFAP. The State Forester and USFS Regional Office provided clear direction to use the SFAP to prioritize future efforts across all jurisdictions, based on extensive datasets from multiple sources and partners. Interviewees described adapting the Scenario Investment Planning process to identify overlapping goals and needs across participants and land ownerships. This process revealed that more than 90% of the top 250 prioritized landscapes were on USFS lands; process leaders then asked analysts to "zoom out" to the top 500 priority areas to ensure that non-USFS lands were also represented as priority areas. Several interviewees across agencies and partner organizations expected the USFS planning efforts, such as the five-year NEPA plans, would be directly informed by the SFAP. Interviewees also agreed that it was helpful to have the existing New Mexico Forest and Watershed Health Coordinating Group provide the space for stakeholders to give their input on the SFAP draft.

Investment Planning approach was useful. Some interviewees in Idaho said that the tool was helpful in identifying priority landscapes and exploring trade-offs around different priorities. In Utah, a few interviewees said that the state considered using the Scenario Investment Planning tool, but decided that its data were too broad in scale to aid local planning, and that the water data in particular did not take into account the trans-basin diversions that are important in Utah. In New Mexico, people used the tool to focus less on timber output and more on other aspects of forest management, such as the risks from wildfires to communities and watersheds.

Interviewees said data were important for supporting prioritization and implementation under Shared Stewardship. Most participants said they generally have adequate scientific data from recent assessments conducted by multiple sources (e.g., agency researchers, universities, NGOs) to inform decisions. Several interviewees had faced challenges with coordinating and integrating data from multiple sources into a manageable and accessible database. More scientific data were needed to support social science research and to assess public support and partner/agency perceptions of the effectiveness of the collaborative process under Shared Stewardship. Several interviewees also discussed a need for concise, science-informed guidelines for communication and effective collaboration.

Particularly at the national level, interviewees were uncertain and concerned about how local, state, regional, and national approaches to prioritization would interrelate. Some questioned how the different scales of available data (e.g., the recently released national-level efforts to quantify and map wildfire risk to communities,⁴ regional or state-level fire risk assessments, local Community Wildfire Protection Plans) would affect prioritization at different scales. Several interviewees discussed the difficulty with aligning prioritization efforts at local, statewide, regional, and national scales.

Interviewees also articulated the need for collaborative, transparent decision-making in the prioritization process. In Idaho, some interviewees felt

that the state and national prioritization process guiding their efforts did not necessarily align with local needs, goals, capacities, and key partnerships. In Oregon, interviewees, especially potential partners, were concerned that not enough diverse stakeholders would be included in the prioritization.

We also consistently heard that Shared Stewardship priorities should include not just timber production and fire risk mitigation, but also other values such as water, wildlife, and recreation. Many expected work under the Strategy to be guided by the USFS's emphasis on two flagship targets: timber volume sold and acres treated for hazardous fuels. Several interviewees noted that prioritization processes often sought to maximize timber output and revenue, but they said that focusing on areas with the most valuable timber is often not the most effective way to mitigate fire risk or address other goals.

Some interviewees explained that prioritization decisions should also consider social factors, such as existing relationships, capacity to get the work done, social license for doing the work, and the buy-in and initiative from local communities to take responsibility for the work and risk mitigation. An interviewee in Idaho said that "boots-on-the-ground and the relationships that exist at the local level" serve important roles beyond what scientific data or models can indicate or provide. An interviewee in New Mexico said that focusing on the landscapes at the highest risk from wildfires leaves other places still at risk that may benefit more from those treatments or resources.

"Even though I have put a lot of time and energy into this whole prioritization thing, I've never been a fan of it. I am more a fan of putting money in places where you've got the social element in place. You've got the people asking for the help, and you've got the organizations, the watershed collaboratives that have formed, who are ready to be responsible for making the work happen. And you've got the community understanding that the work needs to happen and all that kind of stuff. I think you can put a lot of efforts into a resource analysis and overlook some really good energy out on the landscape." (New Mexico)

⁴ Wildfire Risk to Communities. <https://wildfirerisk.org/>

Prioritization consequences

One potential consequence of prioritization is having “winners and losers”—having some landscapes, interests, or communities that benefit more from decisions and implementation outcomes of prioritization than others. These concerns revolved around three main themes, which were not necessarily mutually exclusive.

- 1. The “winners and losers” concept “is a reality” of targeted investment.** The prioritization process inherently provides more social, economic, and/or ecological benefits to some areas than others, through focused attention and increased investment. This was a concern for some interviewees, but others talked about the need to invest in areas or landscapes that are likely to have the most beneficial outcomes from investments.

“I suppose there’s the possibility that there’s winners and losers, but for the most part it seems like everybody, or most people, are committed to [using prioritization processes]. We’re using some of the best science out there to help inform this process and to help create this prioritization. So, it seems like most everybody’s in agreement that we can’t do everything everywhere. We really should be focusing on the places where we can have the highest impact, and we’re using the best science to help determine where those places are.” (Montana)

- 2. Landscapes or interests that are not priorities will still receive support.** For instance, interviewees in Idaho understood that the two Shared Stewardship priority landscapes would be their flagship or focal areas for operationalizing Shared Stewardship. However, interviewees believed that many smaller scale areas in Idaho also reflect Shared Stewardship goals, and they felt that local USFS units, communities, and Idaho Department of Lands personnel will continue to invest time and resources into these landscapes and projects.

“We have statewide programs to assist private forest landowners. We have Good Neighbor Authority activities going on [in] four National Forests. We’ve got endowment lands all over the state of Idaho. We’re continuing to do all of our other work.” (Idaho)

- 3. Targeted investments on priority landscapes provide important lessons and examples that apply to other landscapes.** Interviewees felt that focusing attention on a particular area prompts new partnerships and relationships to develop that can serve as the basis for coordination on future projects. Highlighting particular landscapes or projects also provides examples of mechanisms, authorities, or other tools or approaches that could be applied in other landscapes.

“I think as an example, if we could come up with a way to solve the biomass issue, that’s going to help the people across Colorado. Because if you had some solution to that problem, it would increase the pace and scale of restoration work across the state.” (Colorado)

“This [Shared Stewardship priority area] is just an area to try it out... And then hopefully through what we learned within these focal areas and these special project areas, we can take a lot of that knowledge and expand it out through other areas on the landscape. So I think our messaging has been, we’re not taking anything away from anybody else. We’re just focusing more energy within these landscapes.” (Idaho)

Several interviewees at the national and state level also discussed tracking the impacts of prioritization. It will be important to assess and communicate the short- and long-term impacts from investments in collaboration and forest management to inform future prioritization processes. Another potentially important consideration was tracking whether there is pressure to spread investments across landscapes to maintain political and local support. For instance, interviewees in Utah discussed the potential tensions between selecting the highest priority watersheds for treatment and choosing projects that represent different areas of the state, in order to demonstrate local benefits to legislators.



Opportunities and challenges

Partnerships and risk-sharing

Many interviewees saw Shared Stewardship as an opportunity to embrace a more collaborative mindset, improve and expand partnerships, share accountability and responsibility, and enhance coordination. They also saw potential to leverage resources more efficiently to increase the pace and scale of forest management and restoration, increase economic activity, and support the timber and forest products industry. While many focused on government partnerships, others said it was necessary to invest more time and resources in working with private landowners to treat contiguous fuels across the landscape.

Many interviewees commented that Shared Stewardship presented opportunities to take and share risks across agencies, particularly state and federal land management agencies. People described this association as co-investing in mitigation work, celebrating wins together, sharing responsibility when things do not go as planned, and showing a united front to the public and other stakeholders. Other interviewees described sharing risks in the sense of trying new approaches and building new partnerships. This could mean thinking more creatively about how to use different funding sources and authorities to accomplish cross-boundary work.

“Some of that sharing risk...a lot of it is the social political side from the standpoint of celebrating together but also being there and shoulder-to-shoulder in partnership when things don’t go well.” (Montana)

Most interviewees noted the importance of building on existing relationships and expanding partnerships to reflect the diversity of partner interests and broader Shared Stewardship goals. In Montana, New Mexico, and Washington, interviewees mentioned that existing advisory committees/councils included a diversity of partnerships and that their state intended to reconsider membership of these committees on a regular basis to reflect the broader diversity of Shared Stewardship goals in the state. In Idaho and Nevada, interviewees said that newly formed Shared Stewardship advisory committees included a wide range of state and federal agencies and other partners or representatives from broader interests.

Interviewees saw the most need and potential for working more closely with interests who were not currently involved in cross-boundary discussions, including other state and federal agencies, Native American Tribes, private landowners, state-specific entities such as state trust lands and Spanish Land Grants, utility providers, water users, ranchers and others from the agricultural sector, and potential investors. Overall, interviewees saw a need to be inclusive and creative when approaching partner-

ships, and to consistently involve partners in order to align expectations, clarify roles and responsibilities, leverage capacities, and maintain transparency.

Interviewees shared some specific strategies for expanding their partnerships: engaging more with NRCS and local conservation districts, and using national NGOs to facilitate partner engagement. In both Idaho and Nevada, people realized after the MOU was signed that they should increase their work with NRCS to connect more effectively with private landowners and utilize key NRCS programs, such as EQIP, in conjunction with other mechanisms and programs across adjacent lands. A couple of interviewees in California intended to build on existing relationships and expand work through rural conservation districts and counties as a way to connect local resources and partners with broader statewide and regional efforts. A few national-level interviewees suggested getting national groups such as The Nature Conservancy or American Forest Foundation more involved in helping the agency with partner engagement at different governance levels.

A few non-USFS interviewees were concerned that expanding their partnerships with the USFS could open the door to more litigation from national organizations that challenge USFS projects. These people said that working at the local scale without federal partners allows them to avoid attracting litigation and political attention. However, a few people noted that stronger collaboration can deter potential litigation or prevent it from succeeding.

Many interviewees said they would value regular meetings, forums, or workshops at local, statewide, regional, and national levels to share examples about effective approaches and lessons learned. Some national-level interviewees suggested that the main USFS website could provide success stories to feature on state and partner sites. Some interviewees also discussed the need to complete a project that fit the mold of Shared Stewardship, not necessarily a project that treats an unprecedented amount of acres or engages every potential partner, but rather to start “learning by doing” or have a “proof of concept.”

Leadership

Interviewees overwhelmingly said that strong leadership was needed to ensure the longevity of Shared Stewardship and achieve successful cross-boundary partnerships. Nearly every interviewee in Montana and New Mexico said that State and Regional Foresters expected them to embrace and pursue the tenets of Shared Stewardship and that individuals across the agencies had their leaders' support to try new approaches. Interviewees said there was consistent direction to collaboratively develop the SFAP and include priorities across jurisdictions.

People consistently stressed that agency leaders and partners needed to communicate their expectations and intentions around Shared Stewardship. National-level interviewees wanted clearer communication from USFS leadership about the intent of Shared Stewardship, as well as transparency about how increased state–federal coordination would involve partners and affect work in the field. Similarly, state-level interviewees, especially those closer to the field or implementation level, wanted information about how higher-level goals would impact their programs and resources. They desired more guidance about what “counts as Shared Stewardship.”

“It'd be great if there was a clearer definition of even just like a framework of what Shared Stewardship tools are....I think there could definitely be some national level training or support on some priority Shared Stewardship tools.” (California)

Interviewees consistently emphasized the need for a shift in philosophy and the need to receive clear support from leadership to try new approaches. Several interviewees stated that they were given general instructions or guidance to try new approaches, but were not told to what degree their current approaches or job expectations should shift. Others wondered how they would individually be evaluated for their role in advancing Shared Stewardship efforts and what the expectations for their role were moving forward. People wanted support from agency leaders to invest in new partnerships that may not immediately yield benefits. They also

wanted to know what resources were available for new partnership-building efforts.

“And then [what’s important] from a leadership perspective [is] giving staff and line officers and everybody else permission to be creative and permission to accept and take on risk, permission to try things that maybe hadn’t been done before. Permission to let partners who maybe we haven’t worked with before, you know, bring something to the table or have a voice.” (Washington)



Policies and funding options

Interviewees wanted direction about how and when to use different mechanisms, authorities, and policies to achieve their goals. A few wanted more training on how to approach collaboration or the logistics of doing cross-boundary work. Most interviewees were not seeking or expecting more tools or policies, but were seeking more direction and clarity about how to use the existing funding streams and authorities (e.g., Wyden Authority, GNA, the Tribal Forest Protection Act) at different levels.

A number of interviewees described NEPA as a bottleneck that slows down implementation and wanted more training on NEPA planning for staff or partners. They suggested that expanding categorical exclusions under NEPA may help speed up the pace and scale of work. More staff or resources could also more efficiently complete environmental impact assessments under NEPA and conduct required resource clearances. A few interviewees contended that NEPA was not a barrier to implementation.

Structures to support Shared Stewardship

Interviewees said it was important to have positions dedicated to advancing collaboration and communication among agencies and partners. In Washington, state and federal agencies had liaison and coordinator positions in place prior to Shared Stewardship, so there were already formal channels of communication among agencies and partners to support coordination. Interviewees in Washington and Oregon were enthusiastic about the recent hiring of a Region 6 All Lands Coordinator position in the USFS to help coordinate multi-jurisdictional landscape-scale plans. People expressed similar enthusiasm about all of the other new positions created in other states and regions. These positions made Shared Stewardship “seem more real” and provided key points of contact to connect people, agencies, and efforts.

Interviewees were also optimistic about the role of formal advisory committees to help guide Shared Stewardship. Interviewees said that these committees can work nationally, regionally, and at the state level to formally allow partners and other agencies to participate in prioritization processes. Several national-level interviewees said the USFS Shared Stewardship Coordinator and National Forest Foundation efforts were important in supporting and tracking statewide efforts. In Idaho and Nevada, newly formed Shared Stewardship advisory groups or committees enabled key agency members and other stakeholders to formally connect, build on existing partnerships, and prioritize existing efforts and resources. In Montana, New Mexico, and Washington, interviewees said that existing committees or councils would be essential for continuing multi-jurisdictional and partner coordination and collaboration. In Colorado and Oregon, participants said they needed an official forum or committee to guide Shared Stewardship efforts or provide clarity about how existing groups would be used for Shared Stewardship and who would be included as members.

Forest products workforce and industry

Interviewees in most states said that underdeveloped markets and infrastructure for biomass, small diameter material, and other forest byproducts were limitations. Current costs of restoration work are prohibitive, which significantly limits the efficiency and potential of restoration projects. Some interviewees mentioned specific efforts to find innovative solutions. These included working with university researchers, economists, and extension agents to develop potential uses and development options or create new positions to support these efforts, such as a Wood Utilization and Economic Development Coordinator in Utah. Interviewees were eager to learn about potential solutions from other states or regions.

A couple of interviewees in each state said there was a need for a trained workforce to help with on-the-ground implementation. Interviewees in New Mexico saw opportunities for better engaging youth (e.g., conservation corps) and Tribes to enhance economic growth and expand the trained workforce.

A consistent theme among interviews was the importance of having industry members or representatives closely involved in the Shared Stewardship process, by having them sit on advisory committees or attend planning meetings. Interviewees in New Mexico said that industry representatives participated in the Forest and Watershed Health Coordinating Group and the recent All Lands Matchmaking group that was developed after the Mexican Spotted Owl injunction to keep local contractors working on non-federal lands. Interviewees in Washington also described the benefits of close industry involvement and long-term contracts, especially related to the collaborative and productive efforts on the Colville National Forest. Interviewees in Idaho and Montana said that having industry representatives participate on forest health and Shared Stewardship advisory groups and committees was key to aligning restoration needs with workforce and industry capacity and informing future investments in industry infrastructure.

Performance and outcome assessment

Interviewees wanted to collaboratively develop performance measures or metrics to monitor Shared Stewardship efforts. Most states were still in the early phases of developing performance measures at the time of the interviews, so they could not share significant details yet. Many interviewees were curious to see examples of measures, or processes to establish them, from other states. Several interviewees noted that it was challenging to develop locally relevant measures that can be aggregated at the regional and national levels. Some also wanted a national or regional framework or set of guidelines, but they insisted that specific performance measures should be developed on a local or statewide basis to reflect priorities, goals, and opportunities at those scales, as described in the state's MOU. Some interviewees were aware that the USFS was developing a framework to measure the impact of Shared Stewardship more locally or at the state level in a manner that could be aggregated to the national level.

Although interviewees often recognized the importance of the timber program and targets, most said that USFS timber targets often impede their ability to pursue other goals. USFS funding structures inherently favor timber-heavy forests and do not effectively or sufficiently support the pursuit of non-timber-related objectives. Many interviewees stated that the USFS should embrace an outcomes-based approach and suggested placing values on other outcomes besides timber that would reflect forest health, collaboration, and community or public engagement. Some interviewees said that areas with the highest value timber did not necessarily reflect priority areas under the Shared Stewardship model and that focusing efforts on timber operations on those landscapes took capacity and resources away from achieving fire mitigation and other goals elsewhere.

"In my world, it's not acres. It's about making a difference on the land." (Nevada)

“It’s frankly been frustrating as a partner because sure, I’m all about sharing stewardship responsibilities. I get that. But board feet and acres treated are not metrics to determine whether or not we are in fact sharing stewardship. There is clearly a disconnect between a national policy push and what is needed to get done on the ground and how that national policy helps achieve objectives.” (National)

Interviewees discussed some ideas for process- and outcome-oriented measures. For instance, Utah plans to work with a third-party consulting group to hold a series of workshops with agency personnel that will assist with the development of key performance indicators. Utah state and regional Shared Stewardship coordinators have released a set of outcome-based success measures and annual reporting requirements for the Shared Stewardship agreement developed by the State of Utah Division of Forestry Fire and State Lands, Public Lands Policy Coordinating Office, and USFS in line with the MOU. Several interviewees also mentioned efforts by the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition to develop a national framework for implementing outcome-based performance measures aligned with Shared Stewardship (see Santo et al. 2020).

Many interviewees said it would be important to develop measures to capture the effects of prioritization and partnership development. As an example, after we concluded our interviews in Idaho, the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition, Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership, Idaho Department of Lands, and USFS jointly conducted a Shared Stewardship partnership pilot survey in fall 2020 to measure the strength of partnership and the impacts of Shared Stewardship in Idaho. These types of assessments can assist partner engagement efforts.

Interviewees said that developing and monitoring performance measures should be a transparent and collaborative process. They also said it was important to regularly communicate the measures and progress with the public and other key actors. Such communication enhances the visibility of for-

est management needs and activities, and fosters support across stakeholders for increased investments in forests. Interviewees in California suggested a public-facing website with maps and detailed information about forest management plans and accomplishments, to keep agencies accountable and increase public awareness. Interviewees in New Mexico also suggested a Shared Stewardship portal, similar to their statewide vegetation management portal, to display and communicate restoration goals and progress.

Internal agency dynamics

Many interviewees, both within and outside agencies, said it was necessary to create a culture of collaboration within the Forest Service and state agencies. Most interviewees felt this change needed to start with agency leadership and permeate throughout the ranks of the agency and to partners. Even with strong national, regional, or statewide leadership, people said local or field-level units often interpreted expectations differently, had access to varying levels of resources, or included individuals who were simply not interested or willing to try new approaches and work toward higher-level goals. Interviewees said it was important for agencies to incentivize leaders, program managers, and field-level staff to embrace the tenets of Shared Stewardship.

“I really hope that the next administration takes the opportunity to put into place some real structural and cultural changes within the Forest Service that have lasting impact on how we manage public lands. And that would look like having performance measures that are outcome-based rather than output-based. And it would look like really sharing power when it comes to Forest Plan revision, for example, or project planning, which means working side-by-side with partners to develop projects to do the NEPA analysis, to do the data collection and monitoring to adapt. So, it looks like fundamental change on the part of the agency and how the agency meets public demands.” (National)

Numerous USFS and other interviewees said that there was a bottleneck in getting agreements modified and approved, which slowed down implementation. Suggested solutions include adding more staff and increasing education among other staff members and partners regarding expectations and standards for agreements. Interviewees also said staff needed training on the range of available grants, agreements, and other mechanisms, including how to combine funding sources within and across agencies to accomplish Shared Stewardship work.

Outstanding questions and uncertainties

Some interviewees wondered how Shared Stewardship integrated with other USFS initiatives and programs, and whether Shared Stewardship was a high-level USFS strategy or a program. Some interviewees expressed that it was more of a way of doing business, while others had heard some hazardous fuels funding would be allocated to Shared Stewardship projects. Interviewees wondered how long it would endure and what types of investments the agency would make to support it.

“Sometimes people are a little cynical because they think it’s [Shared Stewardship] this flavor of the month. And they just wait it out if they don’t like it.” (Utah)

Although it was unclear how state and federal administration changes would affect Shared Stewardship, most interviewees felt optimistic that the basic tenets would persist. Interviewees generally recognized the need for increased interagency coordination, pace and scale of work, and use of partnerships. Many said that the Shared Stewardship approach was necessary and would persist in some form, even if under a different name. A couple of interviewees actually wanted the Strategy to dissolve in a few years as an indication that the associated practices and assumptions had become common practice.

Interviewees did not generally perceive Shared Stewardship as an attempt to devolve or shift management responsibility for federal lands to the states. While they knew that other people or organizations had those concerns, in most cases they did not see any indications that Shared Stewardship was causing major shifts in power dynamics. At the same time, Shared Stewardship can give states and other partners more say on planning and implementation on USFS and other lands. This was generally seen as an important step toward sharing priorities and responsibilities. Some people still had concerns about the role of states in influencing actions on federal lands, especially in states like Utah where there are long-standing tensions around this issue and partners’ roles in existing processes is less clear.

Finally, particularly in our interviews after March 2020, we consistently heard that COVID-19 was limiting Shared Stewardship progress. Agency and partner organizations had to shift their resources and priorities to address the pandemic, at least in the short term. Many planned in-person meetings or forums were postponed or canceled, and SFAP processes were delayed. Interviewees also expected significant shortfalls in state and federal budgets. For instance, in several states, key land management programs receive funds from oil and gas tax revenue, which were expected to significantly decline.





Discussion and Recommendations

Our research aimed to characterize expectations for Shared Stewardship efforts and how these efforts were developing in western states that had signed Shared Stewardship MOUs. In this section, we summarize our findings related to each research question and provide additional insights and recommendations.

Summary of research questions

1. How is the Strategy playing out in different states, and what factors are driving choices about strategic partnerships and directions?

Interviewees saw the Strategy's flexibility as a strength. It could develop uniquely in each state based on local and statewide needs, goals, priorities, and available capacities or resources. These differences meant that Shared Stewardship would follow a different trajectory in each state. Interviewees also stressed the importance of strong leadership to drive and support Shared Stewardship efforts and to provide clear direction and expectations about implementation. Interviewees in every state said that they needed to be open and creative to develop partnerships that illustrate shared values and improve efficiency by leveraging resources.

2. What opportunities and challenges are associated with implementing the Strategy?

Most states were in the early states of conceptualizing and operationalizing Shared Stewardship. Interviewees were optimistic that Shared Stewardship provided the formality and impetus to promote collaboration between agencies and partners, not only in wildfire mitigation but also in efforts to enhance recreation and improve wildlife habitat. Most interviewees viewed the Strategy as a move in the necessary direction. However, some questioned how long the Strategy would endure. They hoped that the fundamental tenets of the Strategy would outlast any state or national-level administration or agency leadership changes.

Other key challenges were the need for strong and consistent leadership, the need for clear communication about Shared Stewardship directions and expectations, and significant shortages in staff capacity and resources. Nearly every interviewee noted that limited staff, resources, and time made it hard to meet their current, internal agency-specific goals or position responsibilities. They recognized that implementing the principles of Shared Stewardship would consume significant time and energy, and wanted more resources and incentives to truly embrace new approaches.

Another key challenge was how to support and align the forest products industry with forest management needs. Interviewees wanted representatives from the forest products industry to be included in Shared Stewardship planning efforts to help the industry invest in infrastructure, workforce training, and other long-term needs. Although nearly all interviewees recognized that forest products can support project implementation, they said the highest priority projects generally cannot pay for themselves through timber removals, even under ideal market conditions, and major innovations and new sources of funding will be necessary.

Overall, interviewees were enthusiastic about Shared Stewardship. This general optimism at least in part reflects the nature of most interviewees' positions or roles at the state, region, or national level. Many interviewees were in leadership positions and were tasked with championing programs and efforts to help their organizations, agencies, and communities achieve desired goals. Non-agency partners or agency staff closer to the field level were more likely to express skepticism or uncertainty. As Shared Stewardship efforts persist, tracking these dynamics will be key to informing progress.

3. How is the Strategy leading to changes in prioritization strategies, collaborative efforts and partnerships, cross-boundary planning, and project implementation, compared with business as usual?

Interviewees said the Strategy prompted a shift in mindset in how they approach prioritization and partnerships. They said they needed to more carefully consider where to develop partnerships and leverage resources across jurisdictions to accomplish more work more effectively. Many interviewees described taking a more collaborative approach to updating the SFAP and using that process and plan to set priorities on lands across the entire state. New projects were typically in the planning phase; people also said existing projects represented their

Shared Stewardship goals. Most interviewees also discussed actions or intentions to strategically pursue more partnerships with Tribes, private landowners, investors, and other stakeholders to ensure that diverse interests were represented in their planning efforts and to expand the set of available resources and capacities to get work done.

4. How are priorities being set under the Strategy? In other words, what approaches, including different authorities, collaborative forums, and scientific tools, are being used?

New and existing positions and advisory committees were involved with advancing Shared Stewardship. Interviewees planned to use existing authorities, policies, and mechanisms to accomplish their work, taking a more intentional approach to combining the different tools for multi-jurisdictional and long-term work. These approaches included GNA, Joint Chiefs, CFLRP, Farm Bill exclusions and other categorical exclusions, Tribal Forest Protection Act mechanisms, and existing statewide authorities or mechanisms. Interviewees also said they conducted (or planned to conduct) multi-partner/agency meetings or forums, webinars to share lessons learned, and stakeholder outreach efforts to expand and formalize the communication space, share learning, and expand the diversity of potential partnerships.

Interviewees used existing datasets and scientific tools, often associated with recent forest health assessments (e.g., Washington's 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan) to help inform Shared Stewardship planning. Interviewees in a few states used the USFS's Scenario Investment Planning tool, whereas others relied on tools or approaches that they felt more accurately suited their needs and local contexts. The collaborative, science-based joint prioritization process in some states' SFAP update efforts was an opportunity to operationalize Shared Stewardship.

5. What institutional and organizational changes, including new kinds of capacities, policies, incentives, and measurement approaches, are needed to successfully move forward with principles of Shared Stewardship?

People said they needed clear direction, resources, and incentives, not new policies. They wanted clearer communication about expectations for doing Shared Stewardship and leadership support for taking risks to try new approaches and expand partnerships. Many felt that truly achieving Shared Stewardship would require broadening the agency's traditional incentives and performance measures to include collaboratively developed performance measures. Interviewees also hoped to receive more direction and clarification about using existing mechanisms and policies creatively to accomplish more work across jurisdictions. They wanted to know which tools and funds can be used on which landscapes under which types of ownership, and to know how they can be combined or integrated. Nearly every interviewee noted a significant need across the board for more funding and staff to support Shared Stewardship efforts, as well as more training around effective communication and approaches to collaboration. They also wanted forums for sharing information, examples, and lessons learned.

6. What political opportunities and challenges will arise with increased state-level engagement?

Most interviewees did not expect Shared Stewardship to bring any significant shift in power dynamics or final decision-making power for any jurisdiction. However, they hoped that joint prioritization and shared decision-making would be operationalized by giving agencies and partners a more formal and coordinated role throughout planning and implementation efforts. The one possible exception was Utah, where Shared Stewardship was seen as potentially diffusing historic state–federal tensions, in large part because it gave the state a stronger say about decisions on federal lands than in the past;

whether this dynamic endures remains to be seen. Another potential political opportunity and challenge was shared decision-making. Interviewees generally recognized the benefits of sharing the decision-making space (e.g., increased efficiency, larger projects). However, several interviewees noted that it means sharing risk and the responsibility for decisions, regardless of their outcomes. They also said there may be risks to expanding partnerships, especially if relationships sour and impede future interest in or opportunities to work together.

There are also potential challenges related to prioritization. Prioritization means that some landscapes or priorities will receive less attention and fewer resources. At the time of our interviews, it was too early for interviewees to speculate much about this potential dynamic, but they shared some concerns about leaving local partners behind that are not involved in state-level prioritization efforts or funding decisions. A few interviewees felt that it was risky to inform prioritization primarily on the basis of scientific data and analysis, and wanted to integrate considerations such as social capacity into the identification of priority landscapes.





The future of Shared Stewardship and State Forest Action Plans

State-level efforts under Shared Stewardship ranged from continuing existing practices to making more significant changes to setting priorities or engaging in partnerships at the state level. For example, Oregon largely characterized Shared Stewardship as a continuation of work that had already been underway in the state for years. In other states, like Montana, Shared Stewardship efforts were building on existing initiatives, but there was significant new leadership emphasis on Shared Stewardship and several new positions were devoted to the effort. In New Mexico, Shared Stewardship efforts built on a long history of collaboration and utilized existing forums, with significant new emphasis from state and federal agency leaders on the Shared Stewardship MOU's intent and on sharing datasets to inform the SFAP.

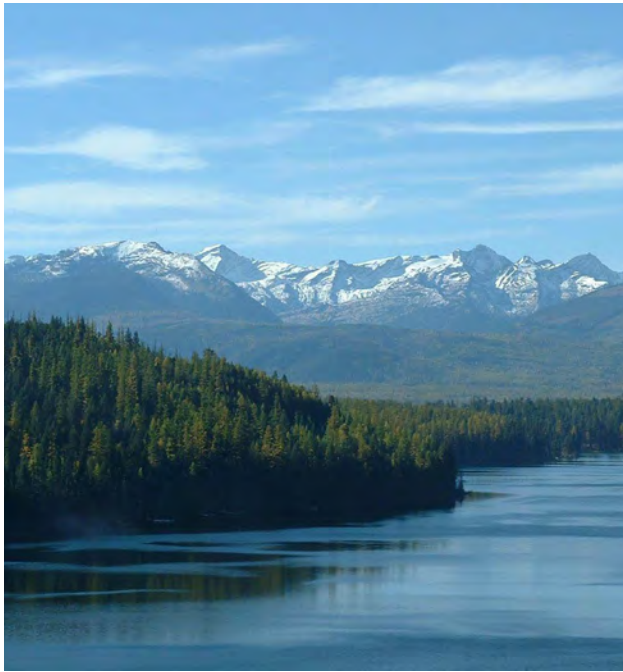
The timing of the Strategy coincided with the revision of SFAPs, providing a ready opportunity to incorporate Shared Stewardship goals into state-level planning. Our interviews revealed that SFAPs were a focal point in many states that were beginning to integrate Shared Stewardship goals into planning processes, and that SFAPs in some states

were already elevated in importance after the 2014 Farm Bill's direction to designate priority areas in SFAPs.⁵ As cross-boundary work is imperative for addressing forest ecosystem health and community safety objectives, and as state-level funding and capacity to implement work across jurisdictions increase, we expect that SFAP processes will become more important over time.

An important and unanswered question is how prioritization and collaborative processes at different levels work together in a strategic and coherent fashion. As part of Shared Stewardship, and in some cases prior to Shared Stewardship, when states have allocated funding for cross-boundary work, people have increased prioritization efforts at the state level, often guided by a state-level advisory group or competitive grant-making process. There is also increasing discussion of a more strategic and science-based prioritization process at the national level. Such efforts would have to work alongside existing efforts under the CFLRP, for example, that also perform prioritization, based on local (e.g., national forest-level) collaborative processes. As more emphasis is placed on national and state-level prioritization processes, in the course of Shared Stewardship, it will be important for these different efforts to work together.

⁵ Insect and Disease Area Designations. <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/farm-bill/area-designations>

We identified several key questions regarding different prioritization and collaborative processes and scales for future research: Will they set different priorities at different scales (e.g., larger versus small landscapes, different resolutions of priority treatment areas)? What kinds of decisions and refinements will need to be made at different levels? How will these be aligned and integrated to prevent them from working at cross-purposes? How will considerations of social capacity and existing collaborative efforts be incorporated? Tracking the impacts of prioritization over time may provide some answers to these and other questions.



Factors affecting future success

Maintaining a consistent direction and steady progress is a consistent challenge for collaborative efforts in the face of leadership turnover. Leadership changes bring new people and new priorities, so they always present challenges for collaborative land management, where relationships and plans are built and implemented over many years. This is particularly an issue for Shared Stewardship. Regardless, many people expressed that they intend to continue and build on the new relationships and processes they have built over the last two years.

Leadership, communication, history, incentives, and capacities always affect the implementation of initiatives like Shared Stewardship (Fernandez and Rainey 2006; Steelman 2010; Kuipers et al. 2014). The scholarship consistently indicates the importance of clear leadership direction about the rationale for changes, support internally and externally for new efforts, and alignment of existing capacities, incentives, and processes with the goals of new efforts. We also know that local capacities, collaborative history, political dynamics, and individuals make a difference in how efforts roll out in different places.

Strong support from leaders, clear communication about Shared Stewardship, and new positions set the stage for state-level progress. In particular, we heard about the importance of people in boundary spanning or knowledge-brokering positions (e.g., coordinators, liaisons). Such positions are important for working with different agencies and across jurisdictions. These people connect across groups by bringing people together and specializing in understanding the needs and processes of different actors in order to find solutions. Such positions are also important for carrying information across organizational levels, such as from the state to the field level, or from the regional office to the national forest level (Wurtzbach et al. 2019).

Increasingly, in cross-boundary and collaborative policy implementation contexts, the history of collaboration in a place also is an important foundation for progress (Bergemann et al. 2019). Existing relationships and trust can affect how quickly processes go forward and whether they are seen as legitimate. Advisory councils can help handle new efforts and integrate them with existing initiatives. Relationships are also critical for planning work across boundaries and can enable new collaborative and cross-boundary efforts to take off more quickly.

Our interviews did not reveal a need or desire for new policies, but people did want more capacity, facility, and expertise with using existing policies. A major challenge for cross-boundary work will be to couple authorities, extend grants and enter into agreements for resource sharing, and utilize diverse

funding streams across agencies. There is a need for more expertise and consistency in these areas, which may mean more people in boundary-spanning positions and more centralization of expertise for using cross-boundary agreements and authorities. Future research can uncover in more detail the policy and administrative challenges and needs associated with doing multi-jurisdictional projects. Interviewees also consistently wanted more capacity to complete NEPA and to utilize categorical exclusions.

Ongoing transparent and clear communication with partners about progress, roles and responsibilities, intended outcomes, and areas of uncertainty are needed. It will also be important to clarify whether Shared Stewardship is a strategic approach (i.e., a “mindset” or “way of being”) or whether it is a program that comes with funding allocations based on prioritization. People implementing Shared Stewardship asked for more opportunities for peer learning, example projects, and information sharing.

Finally, people consistently identified challenges that remain foundational to improving forest management. Interviewees agreed that aligning priorities and sharing capacities are important, but said that they need more funding for staff positions and for implementation if they are to truly accelerate work to the pace and extent needed to affect ecological processes. Many people noted the importance of maintaining or increasing the existing capacity for work in the woods and in the forest products industry. At the same time, a strong emphasis on timber targets did not necessarily align with their high-priority work as identified by partners, often through science-based assessments. Interviewees also said they need more funding or new strategies to get low-to-no value biomass out of the woods. These are persistent issues we have identified throughout our years of research on U.S. national forest management that need major attention. While Shared Stewardship works to align the capacity that exists, there remain fundamental challenges: a lack of adequate capacity, and a need to change organizational structures and incentives so that high-priority work can be done.



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- Wurtzebach, Z., Schultz, C., Waltz, A.E., Esch, B.E., & Wasserman, T.N. 2019. Adaptive governance and the administrative state: knowledge management for forest planning in the western United States. *Regional Environmental Change*, 19(8), 2651–2666.



Part 2 Findings: State-Level Summaries

In this section, we present summaries of our findings from our national and state-level interviews. Summarizing the information in this way allowed us to clearly identify prominent themes for each state and to track how they played out across states. A few considerations are important to note. First, the summaries reflect a snapshot of perspectives about Shared Stewardship at a particular time. Each state was at a different stage in Shared Stewardship efforts when we conducted interviews, and each state has since moved forward in different ways. Second, these summaries are an overview of high-level findings and do not reflect every detail or perspective that we heard. Interviewees were given the opportunity to review their respective state-level summaries to ensure that we captured the main themes from their perspective during our data collection timeframe for that state and they

could provide key updates that we added to these summaries. Third, we interviewed approximately 10 people in each state about Shared Stewardship. While those individuals were intended to represent the key actors, organizations, and interests involved with Shared Stewardship, we recognize that other perspectives or nuances may not have emerged in our interviews.

The national forest footprint we identify at the top of each state summary includes all National Forest System lands in that state (national forests, grasslands, etc). Footprint data are from the Congressional Research Service.⁶ The number of national forests in each state is from the National Forest Foundation⁷ and includes administratively combined units.

⁶ Federal Land Ownership: Overview and Data. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42346.pdf>

⁷ National Forest Foundation: Our Forests. <https://www.nationalforests.org/our-forests>



NATIONAL-LEVEL

Shared Stewardship agreement: The Strategy was released on 8/16/2018. One multi-state agreement, the first MOU under Shared Stewardship, was signed on 12/13/2018 by the Secretary of Agriculture and Chair and Vice Chair of the Western Governors' Association.

Interviewees: 22 people with national-level perspectives between December 2019 – July 2020

History and context

Interviewees said that Shared Stewardship was a response to the 2018 “fire funding fix,”¹ which would free up more funding for forest management starting in 2020. Several interviewees explained that the Strategy would demonstrate to Congress how the USFS planned to efficiently reduce fire hazard on NFS lands and adjacent forestlands. They said the Strategy reflects the recent increase in direction, legislative authorities, and agency programs focusing on cross-boundary work; an increased emphasis on science-based, decision-support tools, especially Scenario Investment Planning,² to prioritize investments in forest management; and encouragement from the Secretary of Agriculture to engage states in prioritization processes. Most interviewees said the Strategy continued trends in national forest governance from the last two decades, the key difference being that the Strategy and subsequent MOUs added formality to existing efforts and gave more emphasis to state engagement. Interviewees noted that the Strategy was primarily developed by high-level agency leaders and its development was not informed by Tribal leaders or other non-agency partners.

Interviewees generally agreed that, at a national level, key forest management priorities are to improve forest resilience and address fire hazard by working at a meaningful scale across jurisdictions. To be successful, interviewees perceived a need for more funding and greater capacity, both within the USFS and state agencies, and in terms of restoration workforce, forest products industry, and markets for restoration by-products. While most interviewees agreed that states and the federal government need to coordinate priorities, leverage resources, and share responsibility for land management, some speculated that the Strategy could

contribute to the devolution of federal lands to states or local entities. Some wondered if the Strategy was primarily intended to accelerate timber harvest, in line with the Trump administration's objectives.

“ I think that the narrative around Shared Stewardship should include communities engaged, jobs, watersheds improved, wildlife habitat, et cetera. That's ostensibly what they're saying that it's going to do. I think the fact that they don't want to put those metrics on top of it right now is indicative of the actual intent for the program. ”

Progress since agreement signing

Some progress has occurred on Shared Stewardship. A Shared Stewardship coordinator position was created in the USFS office in Washington, DC to lead a group to guide and track translation of the Strategy into actions at the state level. The National Forest Foundation created an advisory council to enhance understanding of Shared Stewardship and has hosted multiple webinars as part of a peer-learning series on various topics (e.g., integrating Shared Stewardship with State Forest Action Plans and providing examples of cross-boundary agreements and tools to implement Shared Stewardship). The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) also hosted a national meeting and published a document outlining their vision for implementing the Strategy. American Forests and the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC) were contracted by the USFS to host regional workshops, and RVCC was helping develop collaborative performance metrics.³

Primary opportunities and challenges

Many interviewees identified more engagement with existing collaborative groups is needed. A couple of interviewees suggested that national-level groups like The Nature Conservancy or American Forest Foundation could be more involved in helping the agency guide partner engagement at different governance levels. The 2020 revisions of State Forest Action Plans offer an opportunity to identify joint priorities, but non-USFS interviewees were more concerned about how prioritization at the state level will interact with existing efforts and work by collaborative groups at the state or National Forest level. Some partners were concerned about the Strategy's emphasis on states and the lack of inclusivity and transparency in both the language of the Strategy and its initial implementation.

Another concern was that Shared Stewardship would be so closely associated with the Trump administration that it would fail to outlive his presidency. Interviewees agreed that long-term, cross-boundary land management at scale and through partnerships should continue. However, some felt the agency would need to make substantial changes in how it identifies priorities, measures success, and engages partners.

Most recognized how these concerns play out will depend on existing collaborative efforts in states, State and Regional Forester leadership, and existing relationships among agencies, partners, and Tribes. Many emphasized USFS leadership needs to provide clearer communication about the intent of Shared Stewardship and to provide transparency about how any increased state-federal coordination would involve partners and affect work in the field. Several people suggested a national website could be a helpful resource that would show progress in different states, along with success stories or examples. In addition, intentional outreach to collaborative groups, they said, would help build credibility and buy-in for the Strategy. People were not sure whether the Strategy should bring its own funding to show agency commitment or whether it should remain just a strategy and mindset.

Most interviewees felt that the Strategy would be guided by the Trump administration's emphasis on

two “flagship targets”: acres treated and timber volume sold. To really engage in Shared Stewardship, however, most interviewees recognized a need to track outcomes related to partner engagement and improvements in forest conditions should be included. Several people noted the challenge of having locally relevant measures that can be aggregated at the national level. Multiple interviewees stated that a narrow focus on timber targets can interfere with strategic placement of treatments and partnerships, particularly in a resource-limited environment.

“It's terribly uncertain how a new assessment process driven by the state, and a different set of stakeholders convened by the governor in the state, would overlap with existing collaborative-based agreements that are already in place.”

Research takeaways

The Strategy's development did not include the agency's many partners, leaving some partners concerned about how they would be involved going forward and about the intent of the Strategy, particularly in light of the Trump administration's focus on timber targets and state-level leadership. Interviewees agreed about the need to enhance cross-boundary, landscape-scale approaches, which is both the main opportunity of the Strategy and a complex challenge. Primary challenges around the Strategy's implementation are multi-level collaboration within the governance system, the role of targets and performance measures, and the need for leadership and communication.

Key websites for more information:

[USFS Shared Stewardship website](#)

[National Association of State Foresters Shared Stewardship Overview](#)

¹ USDA press release: Secretary Perdue Applauds Fire Funding Fix in Omnibus. <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2018/03/23/secretary-perdue-applauds-fire-funding-fix-omnibus>

² Scenario Investment Planning Platform. <https://sipp-usfs.opendata.arcgis.com/>

³ 2020 Final Report: Implementing Outcome-Based Performance Measures aligned with the Forest Service's Shared Stewardship Strategy. Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition and University of Oregon Ecosystem Workforce Program.



CALIFORNIA

Shared Stewardship agreement: MOU signed 08/12/20 by the USFS Chief, R5 Regional Forester, R4 Acting Regional Forester, California Governor, and the CA Natural Resources Agency Secretary.

Interviewees: 11 people between May – September 2020

National forest footprint: ~21 million acres across 20 forests in Region 5 (and portions of Regions 4 and 6)

History and context

Interviewees stressed how the exponential growth of catastrophic wildfires, longer fire seasons, droughts, and increased threats to infrastructure and human populations make it vital to increase the pace and scale of forest treatments across California. Treatments to protect communities are the priority. In addition, several interviewees said it was necessary to maintain funding, increase technical and staff capacity, sustain collaborative relationships, and maintain investments to support the forest products industry.

California's Climate Investments Cap-and-Trade Program, revenues from which contribute to greenhouse gas reduction projects, is a key backdrop in the state that supports cross-boundary forest management, according to several interviewees. Since 2016, funds from this program have enabled CAL FIRE (the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection) to award tens of millions of dollars annually in grants for forest health and fire prevention projects.¹ In 2020, the USDA Forest Service Regional Office was awarded a \$2.6-million grant to plan and implement a joint USFS-CAL FIRE Shared Stewardship program focused on scaling effective implementation partnerships and supporting forest restoration collaboratives.^{2,3}

In the past few decades, collaborative and cross-boundary efforts to address forest management needs have increased. Interviewees discussed how the Governor's Forest Management Task Force, California's Forest Carbon Plan, Master Stewardship Agreements with key partners (e.g., Mule Deer Foundation, the National Wild Turkey Federation, Great Basin Institute), and the GNA all have helped set the foundation for Shared Stewardship in California. A couple interviewees also mentioned a 2017 MOU signed between USFS Region

5, CAL FIRE, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), and Sierra Pacific Industries to coordinate fire risk mitigation efforts and conserve wildlife habitat.⁴ Later, additional state and federal agencies, Pacific Gas and Electric, and landowners joined as signatories. This MOU has led to thousands of acres treated.

“*[Shared Stewardship] maps out a clear roadmap for the state and the feds to partner on, but it also provides that roadmap for the timber industry to partner with us, for the nonprofit community to partner with us, for local counties. It essentially creates a level of transparency and consistency in our approach.*”

Progress since agreement signing

The Shared Stewardship MOU specifies a commitment to scale up treatment to one million acres annually by 2025 (500,000 on USFS lands, and 500,000 on state and private lands). Interviewees said that the goal of Shared Stewardship was to better coordinate and formalize existing efforts through shared accountability and commitment to cross-jurisdictional work. Many hoped that Shared Stewardship would mobilize on-the-ground work. COVID-19 and the severe 2020 fire season significantly impacted the signing of their MOU and Shared Stewardship progress in general. Many groups (e.g., state agencies, NGOs, industry representatives) are involved with Shared Stewardship thus far. Interviewees identified the need to better involve Tribes, insurance companies, the California Air Resources Board, and smaller landowners.

A Shared Stewardship Coordinator position was created within the USFS to support more vegetation management through partnerships with the state and local NGOs. USFS and CAL FIRE are working with NFWF to place four Shared Stewardship Advisors across the state in 2021 to advise USFS, CAL FIRE, and partners on how to effectively use Shared Stewardship tools, connect funding mechanisms and implementation authorities, and help prioritize and coordinate projects.

Interviewees said the process of setting priorities may rely on scenario planning tools to identify priority areas with a focus on community protection. These efforts have not been finalized. NGO/Partners and Industry interviewees emphasized that local-level priorities must be considered.

Primary opportunities and challenges

The main opportunity in California is enhanced collaborative efforts with land management entities and the general public. Interviewees said Shared Stewardship will carry forward existing goals to work across jurisdictions but offers a more unified front and greater formality to this vision. Some interviewees said that Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) and counties should be involved to increase engagement at the local level. Several interviewees also felt that Shared Stewardship could improve wildland fire messaging with the public. Some said that the joint prioritization process underlying the Strategy is an opportunity to discuss outcomes beyond the traditional focus on board-feet and acres treated; instead, outcomes such as fire behavior (e.g., wildfire severity, number of wildfire events), recreation access, and the broader impacts of collaboration may be more useful. Interviewees were confident that the growing commitment and support for landscape-scale partnership efforts in California would endure beyond the 2020 election and changes in U.S. executive branch leadership.

Most interviewees said a major challenge is having the staffing and financial capacity to implement projects beyond the planning stage; dealing with biomass, like hauling costs and limited markets, is another challenge. Some interviewees felt that the commitment in

the MOU to treat a million acres per year failed to address the industry workforce and funding needed to accomplish this goal. Though state-level funding is a major facilitator of forest management in California, interviewees said that sustaining financial and human capital was a concern. Also, several non-USFS interviewees said that shifting the culture of the USFS to better embrace partners' skill sets and capacity from other organizations could prove challenging. A few interviewees thought that groups which oppose active forest management might also oppose accelerating forest management work. Some wanted greater guidance and transparent direction about Shared Stewardship from higher-level or national leadership.

“ I think every Californian in the general public knows that we're all connected. There's not anybody who hasn't evacuated or [doesn't know] someone who's lost a home or family member... Shared Stewardship is an opportunity to do what we need to be doing and [what] we've already been doing, but further names it so that we can increase its efficiencies. ”

Research takeaways

Shared Stewardship presents an opportunity for demonstrating a clear, unifying front to California's investment in cross-boundary forest management. Many details have not yet been determined in California. The use of state funds on federal lands was a cornerstone of forest management in California before Shared Stewardship and will continue to be very important. Continued transparency and accountability are needed to increase the pace and scale of work in the state.

Key websites for more information:

[CAL FIRE Forest Health Grant Program](#)

[California's Climate Investments Cap-and-Trade Program](#)

[USFS Region 5 Shared Stewardship](#)

[USFS Region 5 Partnerships](#)

¹ CCI Appropriations from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund as of October 2019.

² [CAL FIRE Forest Health Grant Awardees 2019/2020](#).

³ A recent CAL FIRE Forest Health Grant notice reports that the 2020/2021 state budget does not include grant funding from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund.

⁴ Agreement signed to protect wildlife, reduce wildfire risk. <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r5/news-events/?cid=FSEPRD555602>.



COLORADO

Shared Stewardship agreement: MOU signed 10/23/19 by the Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) on behalf of the Secretary of Agriculture, and the Colorado Governor.

Interviewees: 13 people between July – August 2020

National forest footprint: ~14 million acres across 7 forests in Region 2

History and context

Interviewees said priority forest management needs include protecting homes and watersheds from wild-fire risk through cross-boundary coordination and treatment, maintaining forest and watershed health, and adapting to climate change. Several interviewees mentioned the importance of increasing industry capacity for forest restoration and sustaining the state's recreation economy.

Collaborative cross-boundary planning and implementation are not new to Colorado. Large fires and their impact on watershed and water infrastructure in the early 2000s led to the creation of partnerships between water utilities and federal land managers, as well as the formation of place-based collaborative groups to accelerate fuels reduction and forest restoration. According to several interviewees, Shared Stewardship builds off a legacy of efforts, including the Upper South Platte Watershed Protection and Restoration Project, the Four Corners Sustainable Forestry Partnership, and the Good Neighbor Authority, which was piloted in Colorado.

The Colorado Forest Health Advisory Council, which includes representatives from state and federal agencies, industries, NGOs, and other interests, advises the state forester on forest health issues. A few interviewees believed that because the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) is housed under Colorado State University and does not report directly to the Colorado Department of Natural Resources (DNR), it has a limited capacity to take a statewide leadership role. Interviewees said cooperation and coordination needs to improve between different land management agencies and municipalities on their approach to forest management.

Most interviewees discussed the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI), which developed from a partnership between the USFS and the National Wild Turkey Federation prior to Colorado's Shared Stewardship MOU. Its goal is to provide targeted investment on a high-priority landscape (or several) to promote collaboration and sustain industry. Several interviewees said that RMRI was developed and introduced without broad partner involvement, while others said that inclusiveness had improved or that partners were involved at the appropriate time. Since conducting the interviews, we learned that the USFS and CSFS leadership have agreed that the RMRI landscapes are an example of Shared Stewardship.

“ We’re actually sitting down around the table. Shared Stewardship has kind of codified a trend that we’ve already seen on local levels, of counties and forest districts coming together to identify each other’s needs, layout, and be honest about those conversations. [To discuss] what they can bring to the table, or simply what they may not be able to do. And then look for ways to jointly solve some of these problems. ”

Progress since agreement signing

Interviewees saw Shared Stewardship as codifying the increasing emphasis for more cross-boundary collaboration. Colorado DNR staff members are actively participating in RMRI and also taking a leadership role developing Shared Stewardship. A RMRI steering committee was created to help guide RMRI projects in focus landscapes.

We heard mixed perspectives about the inclusivity and transparency in Shared Stewardship, RMRI, and other prioritization efforts. Interviewees hoped that Shared Stewardship efforts would lead to some clarity about the integration of national, regional, statewide, and local planning and prioritization processes. They wanted to see more transparent dialogue and efforts to demonstrate efficient and joint prioritization. Some interviewees wanted a collaborative committee or governing body to oversee Shared Stewardship activities to add accountability, increase transparency, and support Shared Stewardship goals.

Interviewees mentioned initial examples of coordination in Colorado to support RMRI project goals. For example, a couple people mentioned that statewide habitat restoration and wildfire risk mitigation grant programs might align their priorities with RMRI landscapes. However, they were uncertain which of the three RMRI landscapes would receive targeted investments and how those landscapes align with Shared Stewardship priority areas or areas identified in the State Forest Action Plan (SFAP).

We learned after our interviews that the state and USFS are both prioritizing the RMRI landscapes for support. A prioritization map created for the SFAP now forms the basis for the Shared Stewardship prioritization exercise. A technical group composed of staff from USFS Region 2, CSFS, and Colorado DNR has been gathering spatial data layers to represent the other values, including social vulnerability and recreation, that are not contained in the SFAP map. The intent is to use these layers, in conjunction with the SFAP, to form a Shared Stewardship Prioritization Map that will be shared with leadership and stakeholders in early 2021.

Primary opportunities and challenges

Interviewees said that Shared Stewardship in Colorado provides an opportunity to share accountability and decision-making responsibility. However, people noted that some partners still defer to the USFS to avoid any risks associated with the outcomes of decision making. Interviewees recognized the value of current partnerships and collaborative groups, and they hoped that other key stakeholders or agencies would become more involved in Shared Stewardship activities, including the NRCS, BLM, Tribes, and representatives from the recreation, agriculture, energy, and carbon sequestration interests and industries.

Interviewees stressed the need for flexibility in their approach to Shared Stewardship but said that clearer communication, support for risk taking, and strong leadership across the USFS, state agencies, and partner organizations was needed to align expectations and enable new approaches. Interviewees emphasized the importance of developing performance measures that reflect desired social and ecological outcomes and local and statewide priorities under Shared Stewardship and RMRI.

Some interviewees wanted more scientific information (e.g., social scientist input on the Strategy's implementation and assessment), increased funding, improved industry technology and infrastructure, and positions dedicated to supporting Shared Stewardship. There was agreement that stimulating industry and local economies was necessary to achieve Shared Stewardship goals. Interviewees wanted to better utilize existing authorities, streamline NEPA processes, align regulatory and agency mandates, and train staff to understand and implement the available cross-boundary resources and mechanisms (e.g., GNA).

“The Shared Stewardship signed agreement was really a catalyst for the state stepping up more...And they're actually adding more positions out there to help out. They really stepped up because of this agreement and the focus on it. I think it's a very positive thing.”

Research takeaways

Various cross-boundary management efforts are happening in Colorado across scales and partnerships. Aligning those efforts with clear communication, strong leadership, coordinated prioritization processes, and empowered governance structures will be imperative for moving ahead efficiently. Improved transparency around Shared Stewardship and RMRI is needed to align expectations about these efforts and share how and when different entities and partners will be involved.

Key websites for more information:

[Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative](#)

[Colorado State Forest Action Plan](#)

[USFS Region 2 Shared Stewardship](#)

[Atlas of Collaborative Conservation in Colorado](#)



IDAHO

Shared Stewardship agreement: MOU signed 12/18/18 by the Undersecretary for NRE on behalf of the Secretary of Agriculture, R1 & R4 Regional Foresters, ID Governor and Governor Elect, and the Director of ID Department of Lands.

Interviewees: 18 people between February – July 2020

National forest footprint: ~20 million acres across 9 forests in Regions 1 and 4

History and context

Interviewees identified insect and disease mortality and catastrophic wildfire risk as priority, cross-boundary forest management needs in Idaho, particularly in the wildland–urban Interface. Some interviewees also described a need to support the timber industry in the state, not just for the local and state economy, but to increase the pace and scale of efforts to address forest health, wildfire protection, and related goals.

Interviewees described Shared Stewardship as building off recent collective work between USFS and the Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) to address these priority needs. They described the insect and disease infestation designations (facilitated by the 2014 Farm Bill) and the initiation of the Good Neighbor Authority (in 2016) as key to developing cross-boundary work and relationships. Some interviewees also cited CFLRP, Joint Chiefs, and All Hands All Lands as important efforts that set a foundation for Shared Stewardship. Interviewees also credited the multiple forest collaborative groups in the state as long-standing partners for addressing forest health–related issues, along with other partners, including counties, Tribes, and other stakeholders, who became more involved in recent years. In addition, they explained how the Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership (IFRP) supports forest collaboratives across the state by providing resources and routine engagement.

Some interviewees described how the Idaho Forest Action Plan (FAP) revision in 2020 by IDL and some collaborators helped shape Shared Stewardship in the state. They explained that the 2020 FAP Resource Assessment and USFS' Scenario Investment Planning, in conjunction with input from the Governor's office, informed the identification of priority landscapes for Shared Stewardship.

Progress since agreement signing

According to our interviews, Shared Stewardship goals in Idaho include having the state and USFS work with other stakeholders to identify land management priority locations and outcomes and collaborate on mutually agreed upon projects in priority landscapes. Interviewees said Shared Stewardship will focus on increasing the pace and scale of forest work across the state, with a goal to double the annual acres treated on national forests in Idaho by 2025. Some interviewees considered Shared Stewardship a novel approach, while others felt that it simply advanced cross-boundary work that predated the initiative.

“ I think internal to Idaho, we have to see a commitment from the state and the Governor's office to not only put the resources out that are necessary but also to support collaborative approaches to the work. [They need to] support a really robust program but also [support] robust monitoring and documentation and transparency, and [make] a commitment to ecological benefits that are not just board feet. ”

Since signing the Shared Stewardship agreement, interviewees said Idaho has identified two priority landscapes, created an Advisory Group and subcommittees, and created a plan and website for communicating about Shared Stewardship. The landscapes identified by IDL and USFS include one in northern Idaho and one in southern Idaho, both deliberately selected in part because of the aforementioned pre-existing GNA work. Currently, Idaho has four Shared Stewardship coordinators: one statewide (hired by IDL), two joint IDL-USFS positions (one in each of

the two priority landscapes), and one regional position working to improve communication between the USFS Northern and Intermountain Regions.

Interviewees described how partners informed the Idaho Shared Stewardship Advisory Group (SSAG), which will guide Shared Stewardship implementation. The group includes diverse partners interested in forest management, such as IDL, USFS, NRCS, the Governor's office, counties, IFRP, NGOs, the forest products industry, Idaho Lands Resource Coordinating Council, and industrial forest landowners. A few interviewees mentioned that although not all organizations were represented on the SSAG, many were able to work through partner organizations on the SSAG to connect to Shared Stewardship prioritization and planning.

Primary opportunities and challenges

Some interviewees described Idaho as a leader for Shared Stewardship, due to the state's fast pace toward implementation, and noted pressure to "get it right" and serve as a model for other states. They hoped that Shared Stewardship would extend existing work and partnerships and support the local timber industry. They acknowledged that doubling the acres treated was an ambitious goal but possible. State and USFS interviewees were more optimistic about Shared Stewardship opportunities, while their partners were more wary and said they were unsure what their roles would be.

Partners consistently noted that leadership needs to clearly address concerns about how collaborative groups and stakeholders would engage in Shared Stewardship, and must commit to robust monitoring, showing transparency, and achieving ecological benefits. Some interviewees said that stakeholders were concerned about the state signing agreements and about setting goals without having all interested parties present. Some interviewees thought the SSAG could allay these concerns by bringing more stakeholders into the Shared Stewardship planning and process. Several interviewees explained that the SSAG was formed partly from a need to articulate a broader set of goals for Shared Stewardship, which the working group was addressing. Since the interviews, we learned collaborative efforts have since been made to survey partners to measure the strength and impact of partnerships and inform future engagement.

Interviewees also identified challenges around prioritization, capacity, and the timber industry. A few interviewees worried that prioritization could direct resources and capacity to "winning" areas at the expense of "losing" areas. Some interviewees were not satisfied with the decision-making and inclusion processes, nor with what they perceived to be mismatches between local-level field work with partners and state- and federal-level decision making on Shared Stewardship priorities for the state. Interviewees said that forest products in areas that were highest priority for treatment were not commercially viable. In addition, there are concerns over the allocation of limited USFS staff members and resources to both Shared Stewardship and other prioritized work. They also noted a general lack of resources and capacity to increase the pace and scale of forest health work.

“ If there's not a clear, transparent, well-funded, robust program dedicated to doing Shared Stewardship in the way it's been proposed, I think a lot of groups...are going to very quickly cry foul and...undermine the program essentially. ”

Research takeaways

Idaho's Shared Stewardship efforts have an established structure that features the SSAG, public-facing communication about Shared Stewardship work, and a readiness to advance work, guided by the Idaho Forest Action Plan and other tools. Some interviewees noted that there was a potential mismatch between locally identified project needs and prioritization and decision-making at state and federal levels, particularly in light of ambitious timber volume goals. Some also thought GNA was a good foundation for state-federal agency work, but they were less clear on how other partners might be engaged.

Key websites for more information:

[Idaho Department of Lands Shared Stewardship Overview](#)

[Idaho Shared Stewardship Priority Landscape Map](#)

[USFS Region 1 Shared Stewardship Implementation](#)

[USFS Shared Stewardship Case Study](#)



MONTANA

Shared Stewardship agreement: SS Leaders' Intent Letter signed 4/15/19 by the R1 Regional Forester and the Director and Division Administrator of MT Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

Interviewees: 14 people between January – May 2020

National forest footprint: ~17 million acres across 10 forests in Region 1

History and context

Interviewees identified forest health issues like fire hazard, insects, and disease as the primary concerns in Montana forests. Most interviewees emphasized more work must be accomplished on the ground, at landscape scales, and across boundaries to make a difference. In addition, many spoke about the need to maintain workforce and industry capacity to do forest management work, and for land management agencies and branches within the USFS to coordinate their efforts better.

Existing collaborative efforts include the Montana Forest Collaboration Network and Montana Watershed Coordination Council. The state has also been awarded CFLRP and Joint Chiefs' projects, one of which, Wildfire Adapted Missoula, will be a pilot landscape for Shared Stewardship efforts. Over half a million acres of former industrial timberland across the state are now managed by the USFS and The Nature Conservancy. Interviewees noted the importance of non-commercial product removal on those lands and elsewhere (e.g., near expanding wildland–urban interface areas) to manage fire hazard.

Since 2013, Governor Bullock has emphasized forestry issues in his Forests in Focus initiative. The updated version from 2018, Forests in Focus 2.0, outlines a vision for collaboratively identifying priority areas for treatment and implementing priority work, as described in the 2020 Montana State Forest Action Plan (SFAP). The State Forester leads the Forestry Division in the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). There are several bureaus within the DNRC, including a new bureau devoted to work conducted under the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA); another bureau, Forestry Assistance, works with USFS State and Private Forestry and the NRCS to fund work

on private lands. State funding has been appropriated over the last decade for work on federal forests in high-priority areas. Interviewees said this funding was a kind of state-level stimulus after the 2008 recession to support the Montana forest products industry. Interviewees anticipate these allocations will likely continue and align with the 2020 SFAP process.

“ I think a lot about risk and risk reduction for wildfire. And so, how do we measure that in a different way, other than a board on a truck or an acre treated? Because, to be honest, neither one of those really tell the story. ”

Progress since agreement signing

Interviewees said Shared Stewardship is adding formality to efforts that were already underway. It remains important to jointly identify priority areas for forest management, conduct cross-boundary work, share resources, and maintain an inclusive process. The Governor and State Forester, working with the Regional Forester, signed a letter of leaders' intent, rather than an MOU. Interviewees said the leaders wanted to signal that Shared Stewardship was an additional invitation to work together, and that it would build upon existing work and collaborations, versus simply being a state–federal partnership. The USFS Regional Forester and State Forester formed and co-chair a Montana Forest Action Advisory Council, a group representing many different stakeholders, to lead the 2020 revision of the SFAP under the framework of Shared Stewardship. Since our interviews the SFAP has been finalized, with the Montana Forest Action Advisory Council identifying nearly four million high-priority acres for forest restoration and management activities.

In 2014, the USFS created a DNRC–USFS liaison position to serve as a cross-boundary coordinator to improve communication and advance new tools like the GNA. Although this position no longer exists, the Regional Office now has a cross-boundary coordinator to support Shared Stewardship. The DNRC also added staff to support implementation of the GNA and other positions, including one staff member dedicated to Shared Stewardship communication.

Interviewees said that the process of setting shared priorities will be reflected in the SFAP process. The Regional Office also developed an out-year planning tool to identify priority landscapes and consider priorities in the context of wildland–urban interface boundaries and forest products infrastructure. One interviewee said that the SFAP and USFS teams worked together to share datasets and analytical approaches at unprecedented levels to ensure alignment for future collaborative land management. Several others suggested that these efforts have not been finalized or trickled down to the local level yet, and that local collaborative groups and agencies still needed to step down state-level priorities through more local planning.

Primary opportunities and challenges

Most interviewees said Shared Stewardship will bring a more collaborative mindset to conduct prioritization and share resources better. They said that existing collaborative efforts, leaders' emphasis on collaboration and inclusivity, and positions that specifically support Shared Stewardship form a valuable foundation for increased cross-boundary coordination. They described statewide collaborative networks plan to host joint meetings to increase communication among stakeholders, and land managers plan to host meetings to connect field staff across agencies. Several interviewees also noted the benefits of sharing risk across agencies—including both prioritizing areas and bearing responsibility for forest conditions—even when the agencies have different mandates.

Most interviewees said there was not enough agency capacity to accelerate work, citing insufficient agency staff and funding for work, not enough industry and restoration workforce capacity, and too few agency staff members who know how to utilize different legal authorities, funding sources, and datasets across juris-

dictions. A couple people also noted that some USFS staff feel discomfort about the effects of prioritization for different local units, and with sharing decision-making, staff, and funding across boundaries, although it was not viewed as a significant issue.

People said they appreciated the flexibility from USFS leadership to define Shared Stewardship in a way that works for Montana. Several interviewees noted, however, that while timber revenue often supports some restoration efforts, a strong focus on timber targets from agency leaders or the Executive Branch, can interfere with local planning and priorities and interrupt long-term collaborative efforts. Interviewees did not mention a need for more policies. They wanted more capacity to do cross-boundary work, including time to build relationships and dedicate positions with appropriate expertise in communications, contracting, and policy tools.

“*It's a continuation of what we were already working on with our federal partners—with the Forest Service—but I think it definitely brought it to a new level.*”

Research takeaways

Montana has a clear interest in, readiness for, and emphasis on supporting cross-boundary coordination, bolstered by the signing of the leaders' intent letter. Interviewees emphasized the need for skills and positions to support cross-boundary work, better utilize existing policies, and maintain open communication. Challenges include limited funding and industry capacity to conduct work.

Key websites for more information:

[Montana DNRC Forests in Focus](#)

[Montana Forest Action Plan](#)

[USFS Region 1 Shared Stewardship](#)

[Montana Forest Collaboration Network](#)



NEVADA

Shared Stewardship agreement: MOU signed 11/15/19 by the R4 and R5 Regional Foresters, Regional Director of US Fish and Wildlife Pacific Southwest Region, NV Director of BLM, and the NV Governor.

Interviewees: 13 people between April – July 2020

National forest footprint: ~6 million acres across 2 forests in Region 4 and a portion of 1 forest in Region 5.

History and context

Interviewees said priority concerns in Nevada include wildfire risk, rangeland health, pressures on wetlands and water supply, invasive species, and other habitat-related concerns. They noted that the state and federal agencies have worked together for years coordinating wildfire mitigation and response efforts, guided by the state's Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy, and have good relationships. Existing programs and partnerships also helped set the foundation for Shared Stewardship, including agency-specific conservation programs aimed at cross-boundary work, the Eastern Nevada Landscape Coalition, the Nevada Collaboration Conservation Network, the Governor-appointed Sagebrush Ecosystem Council, and the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act, which allows for the sale of some BLM land in the Las Vegas area and designates the funds from the sale for environmental improvement projects.

The majority of land in Nevada is managed by the federal government, primarily the BLM. Interviewees said this led to diverse engagement of federal agencies and their state agency partners (e.g., Nevada Department of Wildlife, Nevada Department of Agriculture, Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Nevada Division of Forestry), and Nevada's was the first MOU to include DOI agencies (BLM, USFWS). They said that most of the limited forestland is managed by the USFS, while most of the wetland areas have private owners or are managed by state and federal wildlife agencies. The dearth of timber industry has left limited funding for restoration work. Interviewees noted that other industries, such as ranching and recreation, are vital to local economies.

Progress since agreement signing

Interviewees referenced Shared Stewardship as an umbrella mechanism that can formalize multi-jurisdictional work, leverage resources, and increase the scale of planning and implementation. Most interviewees acknowledged that Shared Stewardship was in the early, preliminary phases in Nevada and has not yet been integrated into agency programs or operationalized at a local level. However, two committees have formed to advance Shared Stewardship: an Executive Committee of the leaders of the primary state and federal agencies, and a Technical Advisory Committee selected by the Executive Committee that consists of agency staff members.

“ *This is about sitting down with the state together as equal partners, determining how we're going to make these decisions and then making them together.* ”

These committees have collaboratively developed overall goals for Shared Stewardship and identified priority areas to jointly focus land management efforts. They identified landscape priorities using the State's Forest, Range, and Water Action Plan and additional science-based resource information from state and federal agencies. The committees jointly created a prioritization map using GIS-based information that identified overlapping priority landscapes in wildland-urban interface landscapes and remote wildlands or rangelands. Although there were some concerns that ecologically important lands did not rank as priorities because they were not considered productive

or were not developed, interviewees said they appreciated the transparency of the process and expected other landscapes to be considered in future efforts.

A notable recent accomplishment since the interviews were conducted is that the Technical Advisory Committee, with support from the Executive Committee, identified two initial multi-agency Shared Stewardship projects in the priority areas. The Technical Advisory Committee is evaluating how they can restructure projects that were planned by individual agencies to better meet the goals of Shared Stewardship.

Primary opportunities and challenges

Interviewees hoped that Shared Stewardship would formally encourage partners to share resources and find other ways to work together efficiently, to ease the challenges that all face regarding budgets, capacity, and resources. Several people wanted to see a permanent Shared Stewardship position to facilitate communication and efficient coordination. Interviewees said they generally have access to ample and reliable scientific data, but need better ways to share and merge datasets.

Shared Stewardship was still viewed as a USFS-driven endeavor. Potential partners had not been engaged yet, but interviewees expected more formal stakeholder outreach efforts to occur soon. They recognized Nevada needs to work more with Tribes, the cattle industry, military installations, the Department of Energy, the NRCS, counties, private landowners, and others. For example, the NRCS was not an initial signatory party on the MOU, but they were retroactively added into the Executive and Technical Advisory Committees.

Interviewees believed existing tools such as GNA and state authorities that facilitate multi-jurisdictional work could be used more effectively. A couple of interviewees noted that GNA was less effective due to a lack of timber in Nevada and said there were unique challenges in utilizing GNA with the BLM compared with the USFS. They recommended modifying the structure of GNA so that agreements could more easily be developed with the BLM, and making it easier to share funds across projects and agencies. More than half the interviewees discussed the need to streamline the NEPA process, expand categorical exclusions, and add staff to help with the process.

Interviewees wanted to learn more about how to work with other agencies and organizations, to develop more programs similar to Utah's Watershed Restoration Initiative to pool resources and prioritize projects, and to see examples of how other states were approaching Shared Stewardship. Most interviewees referenced goals to complete two selected pilot projects by the end of 2021 and to increase acres treated by 50 percent in 2025. More specific performance measures had not been developed yet, though several people mentioned the need to move beyond acres treated and include process-oriented measures, and to track other outcomes such as the value of outdoor recreation, water quality, and reducing the impacts from catastrophic fire.

“ I think there's still a sense that this [is] the Forest Service's effort at this point and we've been brought in. I hope we change that, that it looks like we're all in it together and we're all equal players for the most part, but I don't think we've been able to really socialize that yet. ”

Research takeaways

State and federal land management agencies are excited about coordinating more consistently and sharing resources to accomplish common goals. Interviewees saw the State's Forest, Range, and Water Action Plan revision process and the identification of priority landscapes as key first steps in working together. Interviewees wanted to know whether any additional funds and resources for doing Shared Stewardship would materialize, and they hoped that agency leadership would provide clear communication and increased capacity.

Key websites for more information:

[Nevada Division of Forestry](#) (see link to Nevada Forest, Range, & Watershed Action Plan)

[Nevada's Wildland Fire Cohesive Strategy](#)

[Bureau of Land Management, Nevada](#)

[USFS Region 4 Shared Stewardship](#)



NEW MEXICO

Shared Stewardship agreement: MOU signed 11/14/19 by the USFS Chief and the NM Governor.

Interviewees: 16 people between April – July 2020

National forest footprint: ~9 million acres across 6 forests in Region 3

History and context

Interviewees said the primary forest management needs across New Mexico are improving forest and watershed health, mitigating wildfire risk to communities, reintroducing wildfire as an ecological process, managing climate change impacts on forest resiliency, sustaining the state's forest products industry, and supporting rural economies and cultures. They agreed there is a need to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration across all land ownerships. This ongoing need, they said, is reflected in a wide range of collaborative efforts and partnerships among agencies, organizations, and other landowners.

Interviewees said New Mexico has a strong foundation for Shared Stewardship. For example, the state's Forest and Watershed Health Plan and Forest Restoration Principles were constructed by federal and state agencies in collaboration with local collaborative groups and NGOs. For over a decade, these planning frameworks have guided restoration efforts and characterized zones of agreement among agencies and other stakeholders. The New Mexico Forest and Watershed Health Coordinating Group is a permanent fixture that connects agency leaders and partners. Interviewees pointed to existing programs like New Mexico's Collaborative Forest Restoration Program and the Rio Grande Water Fund as examples of collaborative, cross-boundary work in New Mexico. Most interviewees also discussed the history of using state funds to work on federal land.

Interviewees noted that New Mexico has unique land ownerships and histories. For instance, a few interviewees noted that the USFS manages the majority of the high-priority watersheds and productive forest lands across New Mexico, so it is important for the USFS to work with adjacent and downstream land-

owners. Interviewees also spoke about the social and cultural diversity across the state, noting that New Mexico is home to 19 Pueblos, three Apache Tribes, and the Navajo Nation, as well as people with diverse political views, environmental advocacy groups, an active outdoor recreation community, and communities that rely on the land to sustain their livelihoods.

“*Co-prioritization is the main thing that's come out of Shared Stewardship and actually putting our money where our mouth is with the Forest Service and saying, we're going to do this together.*”

Progress since agreement signing

Interviewees described Shared Stewardship as providing a common vocabulary and formalizing the State's history of partnerships and landscape-scale planning. Interviewees said that USFS and state agency leadership were supportive of shared priority setting and collaboration. They hoped that Shared Stewardship would lead to agencies providing more direction and incentives for trying new approaches and expanding local partnerships. A few interviewees noted that the strategy could also invite new partners to engage more formally than they had in the past, especially Tribes, Pueblos, Nations, land grants, private landowners, and other agencies (e.g., BLM and NRCS).

Interviewees consistently said that New Mexico's 2020 Forest Action Plan (FAP) would guide forest management priorities across all lands. Most interviewees described the State FAP prioritization process as collaborative and science-based, setting the foundation for shared decision making across all land ownerships. During this process, which began before the MOU was signed and continued afterward, agencies and partners

compiled local data about wildfire risk, watershed health, and forest health indicators, then worked iteratively with USFS researchers using an adapted Scenario Investment Planning approach to identify priority landscapes. Interviewees said that state and USFS leaders purposefully used planning scales that designated a diversity of land ownership types as priority landscapes in the State FAP.

Every interviewee mentioned the 2019 injunction that halted active management on USFS lands due to a lawsuit over the Mexican Spotted Owl. This injunction led to the formation of an all-lands “match-making group” with representatives from the USFS, state agencies, NGOs, industry representatives, and others. The match-making group met on a regular basis to identify “shovel-ready” projects on non-federal land to sustain the forest and wood products industry. Since our interviews, we learned that this group is transitioning to become a standing committee of the Forest and Watershed Health Coordinating Group and will continue the work of coordinating projects and capacity around the state. Interim working groups, convened at the national forest and state forestry Forestry District levels, were also working to refine focal areas within priority landscapes and identify needs to advance project-level planning.

Primary opportunities and challenges

Overall, interviewees felt that Shared Stewardship would persist due to broad partnerships, clear communication, and the demonstrated benefits of collaborative approaches. Several existing agreements, authorities, and policies can facilitate Shared Stewardship. Common examples provided by interviewees included a state-level master agreement for cross-jurisdictional resource sharing, various Farm Bill authorities, the state Forest and Watershed Restoration Act, and the Reserved Treaty Rights Lands program. However, interviewees discussed challenges associated with navigating the details and stipulations of these different tools. One challenge is demonstrating public benefit, which allows the use of state funds on private lands without violating the state's anti-donation clause.

Most interviewees said more funding, staff, and workforce training are needed for successful planning, implementation, leveraging of resources, and collaboration regarding Shared Stewardship. They said top priorities are sustaining the restoration economy and

supporting local businesses and contractors. In order for this to occur, interviewees felt that New Mexico needs to develop markets for small-diameter and woody biomass material. Most interviewees expressed concerns that efforts to meet the USFS timber-based targets did not align with forest management needs and opportunities in New Mexico.

Interviewees said that Shared Stewardship discussions occurred mostly at a high level and did not focus on specific actions or resources for implementing Shared Stewardship. They said that Shared Stewardship performance measures were likely to align with strategies and goals outlined in the Forest Action Plan and existing performance metrics, such as those required by USFS State and Private Forestry. Several interviewees also discussed plans by the state to launch a portal, similar to the New Mexico Vegetation Treatment Mapping website, to help track and communicate Shared Stewardship efforts.

“ *[Shared Stewardship] is becoming part of the vocabulary of how we talk, how we write proposals and talk about things internally and communicate our efforts.* ”

Research takeaways

Leadership in the State's Forestry Division and the USFS agreed on supporting Shared Stewardship and had a joint prioritization process for the FAP update. Communicating intent and expectations among agencies and partners will be critical to success. There are opportunities to expand and formalize partnerships beyond the state agencies and USFS. The state needs to increase capacity (e.g., training, staff, funding) and develop more restoration-oriented performance measurement systems to effectively pursue Shared Stewardship in New Mexico.

Key websites for more information:

[New Mexico State Forest Action Plan](#)

[New Mexico Forest and Watershed Health Program](#)

[New Mexico Vegetation Treatment Mapping](#)

[USFS Collaborative Forest Restoration Program in New Mexico](#)



OREGON

Shared Stewardship agreement: MOU signed 08/13/19 by the Undersecretary for NRE on behalf of the Secretary of Agriculture, R6 Regional Forester, Oregon Governor, and the State Forester.

Interviewees: 14 people between January – March 2020

National forest footprint: ~16million acres across 12 forests in Region 6

History and context

Interviewees most commonly identified forest restoration and fire hazard reduction as top priorities for forest management in Oregon. They described the “massive challenge” of the forest health crisis, which necessitates an increased pace and scale of restoration and improving forest resilience across all lands. Some also mentioned the need to address potential disconnects among different stakeholder groups about Oregonians’ values and priorities for forestland.

Interviewees described Oregon’s decades-long history of place-based work by forest collaborative groups, including cross-boundary work through Joint Chiefs, CFLRP, GNA, the Wyden Authority, and the state’s Federal Forest Restoration (FFR) Program. This history is foundational to Shared Stewardship efforts across the state. The FFR Program, which was created in 2014, increased shared forest restoration work between the USFS and Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) and aimed to enhance forest resilience and increase economic opportunity on federal forestlands. Through Oregon state legislature funding, a total of \$10.6 million has been invested in the FFR Program (FY 2014–2019), in addition to at least \$4 million of additional cash and in-kind contributions.¹ Interviewees also noted that other partners (e.g., forest collaboratives, NGOs, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, and other state and local organizations) are addressing needs such as program administration, collaborative capacity building, technical assistance, and monitoring.

Progress since agreement signing

The Oregon MOU describes Shared Stewardship as a “logical evolution” of the relationship between ODF and the USFS, which interviewees echoed. They described opportunities to advance current efforts to

work across boundaries, by sharing risk and leveraging resources. Most interviewees explained that the setting of shared priorities for Shared Stewardship was intended to be informed by Oregon’s Forest Action Plan and the work done by the Governor’s Council on Wildfire Response in 2019. Interviewees hoped that diverse groups, including state and federal agencies, county government, NGOs, industry and others, would participate in Shared Stewardship, just as diverse groups engaged in the Governor’s Council.

“*[Oregon hasn’t] even convened a roundtable for Shared Stewardship. We haven’t talked about who is involved there...[or] what our final product is, where we go with it, who is the steward of that product...So, we’re building the plane while we fly it...*”

Interviewees described little to no progress in planning and implementation of Shared Stewardship in Oregon for wildfire risk reduction at the time of the interviews and noted that it did not appear very different from the state–federal work that was already underway in the state. One noteworthy action under Shared Stewardship that some interviewees highlighted was the hiring in March 2020 of an All Lands Program Manager for Shared Stewardship in the USFS Pacific Northwest Region, in cooperation with ODF.

State and federal interviewees hoped that Shared Stewardship work would be underway soon. Partners were less optimistic, and were wary about the strategy’s future, citing a lack of clarity about the role for non-signatory partners and collaborative groups, and how the broad definition and goals of Shared Stewardship would contribute to existing efforts in the state. Some interviewees noted that Shared Stewardship could

formalize processes for partner engagement or create opportunities for new funding. Some also noted that Tribal representatives were not included to date. Interviewees mentioned that ODF is facing a financial shortfall and budget cuts that will likely significantly impact state funding and capacity for implementing Shared Stewardship. Some interviewees said ODF's actions would be critical in determining whether Shared Stewardship could work in Oregon and whether it would be innovative or an extension of business as usual.

Primary opportunities and challenges

Interviewees said Shared Stewardship can advance existing cross-boundary work and collaborations to get more work done on the ground, but its future is uncertain. Interviewees said capacity was the biggest challenge, specifically the need for sufficient personnel, adequate training, and appropriate resources to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration. This included expertise in environmental analyses, administration of contracts and agreements, and workforce capacity for increased forestry work or mill handling ability. Some interviewees explained that capacity needs varied across national forests, but that sharing resources was key to Shared Stewardship. Many also noted the importance of engaging stakeholders in planning and decision making processes.

Interviewees were unsure how Shared Stewardship would be integrated with Oregon's deep history of stakeholder involvement, which provides much of the capacity to work collaboratively. Some interviewees believed that, so far, many key partners had not been involved with Shared Stewardship discussions in the state. Some emphasized the need to maintain a clear space for public participation. Some said partners had concerns about Shared Stewardship efforts potentially eroding collaboratives' established relationships and roles in the state. At same time, some interviewees thought these collaborative venues would not necessarily be appropriate to implement Shared Stewardship work. For example, if collaborative groups were working locally and the strategy work was at a state-wide level, there would be a scale mismatch.

Interviewees identified the need for a state-level forum to guide Shared Stewardship implementation, and prioritization, similar to past efforts like the Governor's Council and the Federal Forest Working Group. Such a forum could increase clarity and timeliness of com-

munication. They also emphasized the need to avoid parallel efforts in the state by leveraging Shared Stewardship into existing work and to invest in more wild-fire hazard mitigation work, with less emphasis on existing agency targets. Interviewees also said that USFS national leadership should clarify whether additional resources would be available to build capacity and scale up efforts, and that regional USFS and state leaders should clarify how local efforts and partners would be integrated with Shared Stewardship.

“ *One of the reasons that I think the Shared Stewardship conversation is even happening is because the collaborative groups have been so successful, and where they're successful, great forestry is happening...Whatever we do in Shared Stewardship, it's got to be in the collaborative model, because that's the way people are expecting their public lands to be managed these days.* ”

Research takeaways

Oregon has a strong preexisting history of cross-boundary work. Having strong preexisting relationships and restoration work underway can create both opportunities and challenges for new approaches like Shared Stewardship, particularly when some additional trust-building might need to occur. The strategy may be hindered by a lack of information about new activities, decision-making processes, and partner involvement. Understanding where and how to integrate new tools or approaches within a landscape where there are preexisting partnerships can require more nuanced approaches by the state and USFS than a landscape without this preexisting capacity. Fortunately, an area with strong partnerships like this has great potential to leverage and amplify landscape-scale restoration efforts, once they are integrated.

Key websites for more information:

[Oregon State Forest Management Plan Revision Website](#)

[Governor's Council on Wildfire Response](#)

[Federal Forest Restoration Program](#)

[USFS Region 6 Shared Stewardship](#)

¹ ODF FFRP Monitoring. http://ewp.uoregon.edu/ODF_FFRP_Monitoring



UTAH

Shared Stewardship agreement: MOU signed 05/22/19 by the Secretary of Agriculture and the UT Governor.

Interviewees: 10 people between March – July 2020

National forest footprint: ~8 million acres across 6 forests in Region 4

History and context

Interviewees noted that the majority of forestlands in Utah are on USFS land and contain critical watersheds that supply both urban and rural parts of the state. These forests have been affected by multiple severe fire seasons since 2012 that in some cases threatened watersheds and built infrastructure. Priority needs in Utah include decreasing wildfire hazards for watersheds and communities, addressing disease and insect outbreaks, and supporting rural economic development.

Interviewees discussed several cross-boundary efforts developed in Utah before Shared Stewardship. Utah's Watershed Restoration Initiative (WRI), created in 2006, pools diverse funding sources for cross-boundary projects in rangeland and woodland watersheds. In 2013, the state led the development of the Catastrophic Wildfire Reduction Strategy. Interviewees also said that prior to Shared Stewardship, many elected officials at county and state levels actively worked to transfer federal lands to state or private ownership and petitioned the federal government for exceptions to the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Some interviewees said, although these elected officials may no longer be active at the state level, their influence remains strong. Many interviewees mentioned the idea that Shared Stewardship was adopted in part as an alternative to advancing the Roadless Rule petition, especially in light of the perceived emphasis in Shared Stewardship of some planning and implementation in roadless areas, according to multiple interviewees.

Progress since agreement signing

Interviewees identified the goals of Shared Stewardship efforts in Utah as ameliorating state–federal conflict, improving interagency coordination, increasing

state influence over federal land management, increasing the pace and scale of activities to reduce fire risk, protecting watersheds, and generating economic activity. Interviewees believed Utah was able to quickly start implementing Shared Stewardship activities because its organizational infrastructure, including the WRI, was in place prior to the signing of the MOU and because the Utah legislature provided support for such work.

“ On the federal side, I think they're feeling like this is a good move forward where the state won't be fighting them on everything, and they've both got money and boots on the ground. For the state, I honestly think that they feel like this is a way for them to keep the federal government in check a little bit. ”

Interviewees said the state allocated several million dollars in 2019 and 2020 to implement Shared Stewardship projects, with the USFS providing funding at equal or greater levels to the state. In addition, funds dedicated to WRI came from a variety of public and nonprofit sources. The funding was allocated to multiple Shared Stewardship projects in 2019, including fuel reduction work in a roadless area on the Manti-La Sal National Forest. Combined state and federal funds were also used for three new positions specifically tied to Shared Stewardship, which are focused on Shared Stewardship coordination, fire prevention and outreach, and economic development.

Several interviewees described how state and USFS personnel identified shared priority landscapes using a science-based analysis. The key factors considered were the importance of drinking water, hazardous fuel conditions, and values at risk. State and USFS representatives also developed a process for funding Shared Stewardship work. Eligible projects must be located in the top 20% of priority watersheds, be developed in partnership with the state, and help address key Shared Stewardship goals (e.g., protect communities or important water resources from wildfire, across boundaries or on multiple jurisdictions, and at appropriate scales). Interviewees also said that those responsible for Shared Stewardship are working closely with Utah's WRI to implement Shared Stewardship projects.

Interviewees said that, in Utah, Shared Stewardship began primarily as a partnership between the state and the USFS; these leaders reached out to additional stakeholders, including utilities, sporting groups, environmental groups, the outdoor recreation industry, and local governments, through a series of calls organized by a consulting group and assisted by a professional facilitator. Next, a "convening" meeting was held in October 2020 with a wider cross-section of actors who helped identify concerns and opportunities regarding Shared Stewardship and to answer participants' questions.

Primary opportunities and challenges

One of the greatest opportunities identified by interviewees was the possibility of reorienting a traditionally antagonistic state–federal relationship (in general and especially during challenging fire seasons) into a more cooperative relationship that can make progress reducing wildfire hazard. The financial support by the Utah legislature and matching funds from the federal government were seen as signs of a more constructive approach to National Forest management. Some interviewees also felt that Shared Stewardship could increase forest-based economic activity, though others felt that the quality and accessibility of wood slated for removal might not be sufficient to support a wood products industry in the state. Three principal challenges identified were 1) concern that statewide political support for Shared Stewardship could decline over time if benefits were not realized across diverse Utah geographies; 2) concern among some conserv-

ation advocates that Utah embraced the initiative in order to empower state actors who have an anti-federal lands/anti-roadless area agenda for national forests; and 3) the need for a more diverse suite of participants to carry Shared Stewardship forward from its beginnings as a state–federal partnership.

“The Catastrophic Wildfire Reduction Strategy...[has] been an effective partnership for a long time. So through some of those programs that are already in place, a groundwork was laid that enabled the state to be able to take Shared Stewardship and immediately turn it into success.”

Research takeaways

Utah was able to quickly implement Shared Stewardship activities due to years of previous investments in complementary programs and procedures. Federal land management has long been politically controversial in Utah, and no state has been more active in pursuing the divestment of federal lands within its borders. In this context, Shared Stewardship is also seen by interviewees as a highly political endeavor. The fact that the state and federal governments are pooling funds and working together on shared priorities was seen by some as a significant positive step; others felt that it represented the state influencing federal lands management. Even those who felt less threatened by the agreement recognized that it is necessary to demonstrate tangible results to a broad range of Utah stakeholders and political representatives across the state in order for Shared Stewardship to succeed. It may be challenging to reconcile these efforts with a programmatic focus on the top 20% of at-risk watersheds.

Key websites for more information:

[Utah Shared Stewardship website](#)

[Utah's Watershed Restoration Initiative](#)

[Catastrophic Wildfire Reduction Strategy](#)

[USFS Utah Shared Stewardship Case Study](#)



WASHINGTON

Shared Stewardship agreement: MOU signed on 5/8/2019 by the USFS Chief, R6 Regional Forester, Commissioner of Public Lands for WA Department of Natural Resources, and the Director of WA Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Interviewees: 14 people between January – March 2020

National forest footprint: ~9 million acres across 8 forests in Region 6

History and context

Interviewees said priority needs for forest management center around forest health and resiliency: addressing the risks of catastrophic wildfires, curtailing insect and disease outbreaks, managing drought, and adapting to climate change. Most interviewees acknowledged that needs vary on the west and east sides of the Cascade Range, depending on forest types. Several interviewees said it is important to support rural economies through active forest management, infrastructure improvement projects, and investing in the outdoor recreation industry.

Interviewees said that Washington state has been strategically planning to address cross-boundary forest health issues and wildfire risk for several years. They said recent catastrophic wildfires have increased public and legislative support for mitigating fire hazard, and have led to several statewide and regional collaborative, science-based planning efforts, including the 20-year Forest Health Strategic Plan and the Wildland Fire Protection 10-year Strategic Plan. Interviewees said these plans were created through a collaborative process that predated Shared Stewardship, indicating that the agencies have already agreed to work toward shared goals. These previous efforts also led to programs and committees that include diverse stakeholders from multiple jurisdictions. The committees are facilitated by state agencies and include the Forest Health Advisory Committee and the Wildland Fire Advisory Committee. Members of the committees include representatives from NGOs, Tribes, forest industry representatives, collaborative groups, and various state and federal land management agencies.

The state legislature has been funding cross-boundary forest restoration and fire mitigation projects on private, state, and federal lands since 2017. A portion of

those state funds are distributed through competitive grant programs to forest collaborative groups across the state. Interviewees said that the Good Neighbor Authority is an increasingly important mechanism for sharing resources and expertise across agencies and doing cross-boundary work.

“ *Shared Stewardship is a tool to let state priorities help drive the active management and planning.* ”

Progress since agreement signing

Interviewees said that Shared Stewardship adds formality to the efforts that were already taking place. They described it as an ethos, a state of mind, and a codification of what they were already doing.

Interviewees felt that the history of inclusive forest management advisory processes in Washington, facilitated by a decades-old network of forest collaborative groups, had led to representation of most stakeholders and interests in Shared Stewardship efforts. Several interviewees mentioned that closer collaboration with Tribes is needed, and new partners, such as utility and private companies, should be invited to augment financial investments. Interviewees said the USFS is informally tracking existing and potential partnerships, including the mutual benefits of those partnerships and potential opportunities to leverage resources. The state is also revisiting the membership of the Forest Health Advisory Committee to ensure that it integrates diverse statewide needs and perspectives. Some state agencies are also engaging with local collaborative groups more intentionally than prior to Shared Stewardship. An important step was the USFS Regional Office's hire of a regional All Lands Program Manager in March 2020 to coordinate cross-boundary efforts.

Interviewees saw state and USFS leadership alignment on overall goals for Shared Stewardship, though they have not provided clear enough directions about priorities and available resources to accomplish the Strategy at the field level. Several interviewees viewed the State Forest Action Plan revision process as an ideal opportunity to operationalize Shared Stewardship and align existing plans and strategies across the state.

Primary opportunities and challenges

Interviewees saw Shared Stewardship as an impetus for enhancing coordination, aligning priorities across jurisdictions, and leveraging resources. They recognized that communicating outcomes of investments in forest management will be crucial in order to maintain engagement and support from collaborative groups, other stakeholders, partners, and the state legislature. Interviewees felt that Shared Stewardship performance measures should be developed collaboratively and in alignment with local and statewide goals, and should consider ecological outcomes around forest and watershed health, as well as measures of the development of collaborative processes.

Some interviewees felt that Shared Stewardship would increase the state's ability to set priorities on USFS land. However, many other interviewees did not believe Shared Stewardship would noticeably change prioritization processes or roles, given that it is largely a formalization of previous efforts.

A couple of interviewees wondered whether more state involvement would affect the integrity of USFS implementation of the laws and policies that guide the National Forest System. A few others said that partnering with the USFS increased the likelihood of litigation from regional or national organizations, compared with collaboration with more local partners, such as private landowners. Most interviewees said that a culture change within the USFS approach to partnerships and targets is needed to instill the Shared Stewardship mentality throughout the agency.

Interviewees said that clear communication and support across agencies and partners, from leadership to the field levels, is needed to sustain Shared Stewardship. They said they need more capacity to move forward—notably funding, staff, and training around collaboration, project management, and implementation, as well as leadership direction and support to

try new approaches. Investments to sustain industry capacity and supply, including workforce training, are also key needs, and agency policies and mechanisms need to support long-term industry engagement. Interviewees did not mention a significant need for more policies, authorities, or tools to support Shared Stewardship, but, rather, wanted more direction, long-term planning, and coordination around utilizing existing mechanisms and NEPA categorical exclusions. All interviewees were interested in learning how Shared Stewardship is playing out across the state, region, and country through forums, workshops, or other spaces.

“ We’ve had a signed agreement for maybe almost a year now. [I’m] not necessarily seeing a whole lot different under Shared Stewardship that we weren’t already doing with Good Neighbor Authority, the collaboratives, the State’s [20-Year] Forest Health Strategic Plan, and the normal cooperative work environment that I think a lot of the stakeholders here in this state have already been working under for a number of years. ”

Research takeaways

There is a strong foundation for doing Shared Stewardship in Washington state. Along with clear support from leadership, there are well-developed networks of active collaborative groups, healthy relationships across agencies, a history of sharing resources and working across boundaries, and agreement about the overall needs and goals for forest management. People appreciated flexibility to apply Shared Stewardship in Washington state, but they desired more direction from leadership about priorities and possible investments and how those would affect goals and resources at the field level.

Key websites for more information:

[2020 Washington State Forest Action Plan](#)
[Washington’s 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan](#)
[USFS Region 6 Partnerships](#)
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