Ecosystem Workforce Program

COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY AND OUTCOMES FROM OREGON'S FEDERAL FOREST RESTORATION PROGRAM

FACT SHEET 19 • SUMMER 2019

Over the past two decades, numerous federal forest collaboratives have emerged in the state of Oregon. Although they generally do not possess any formal decision-making authority, their efforts are considered important in building social agreement for programs of work on federal forestlands. This study analyzed the use and outcomes of the State of Oregon's investments in these forest collaborative groups through Collaborative Capacity Grants made by the Federal Forest Restoration Program from state fiscal years 2014-2019. Investments were made with the expectation that collaborative groups would increase the pace, scale, and quality of federal forest restoration; and there is a need to understand results from supporting these groups. We examined several types of outcomes from these grants, including collaborative capacity to foster accelerated restoration, acreages and types of activities planned and implemented with collaborative input, economic impacts, and effects of grants on organizational capacity.

KEY FINDINGS

Grant investments

- A $1.4 million state investment in grants leveraged at least an additional $2.5 million in financial and in-kind support from collaborative participants and partners.
- State spending on collaborative grants averaged a total of $238,914 per year. Individual grants ranged in size from $10,725 to $73,715.
- Grant investment was uneven across the state, with the majority of funding (62 percent) awarded to eastside groups.

Collaborative acres planned

- Funded groups collaborated on nearly 1.9 million acres of federal forest land (Figure 1). Of these acres, 836,525 were planning areas or other projects for which a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) decision was made by March 2019. The remainder were still under analysis.
- Projects ranged from a 40-acre timber sale to a multi-forest analysis including 230,000 collaborative acres, with a median size of 27,683 acres.

Implementation of collaboratively planned forest management activities

- The most acres (over 59,000) were treated through commercial sales. There was not an increase in prescribed burning and there was not much watershed-related restoration (under 5,000 acres), which was likely underreported.
- The types and amounts of completed work largely varied by national forest. For some activities, one or a few national forests were responsible for the majority of acres accomplished.
- Many collaboratives also focused on planning non-commercial restoration, but funding and capacity challenges limited implementation of these activities. If outcomes in this area remain limited compared to those in commercial timber sales, this may raise concerns for stakeholders who pursue these goals. The lack of application of prescribed fire is not yet commensurate with the interests of some collaboratives in returning fire to the landscape. More burning may appear as collaborative projects continue to be implemented.
- The challenge of obtaining complete data from Forest Service databases persists, limiting documentation of all collaborative-supported work on federal forestlands. It also remains difficult to accurately attribute causality for Forest Service actions to collaboratives.

Economic impacts linked to collaboratives

- Use of the collaborative capacity grant funds themselves in the course of collaborative group activities supported about 11 jobs annually between state fiscal years 2014-19.
- Timber sales associated with collaborative group involvement supported about 1,019 jobs and $68 million in labor income during this period. About half of these jobs were in the forestry and wood products sector and the remainder were spread across other economic sectors that provide supplies and services to the forest sector.

The role of collaboratives in accelerating restoration

- Groups that had been active for longer and worked on wildfire risk reduction and resiliency had the most acres planned and implemented, zones of agreement developed, and economic impacts evident. They also received the most FFR Program grant funding.
- Many other groups were younger in age and actively collaborating on projects that did not yet have a decision, so comparable impacts may not be realistically expected yet. In addition, the meaning of "accelerated restoration" and the ecological and socioeconomic contexts of national forests varied.
- Regardless of a group's location or age, collaboratives generally contributed to the quality of restoration by bringing a diversity of stakeholder values and scientific information to dialogue.
- Some variables that affected the pace of restoration were not entirely or directly within collaboratives' control, or were outside the scope of the NEPA process. These included interdisciplinary team capacity or priorities, contracting processes, and markets.

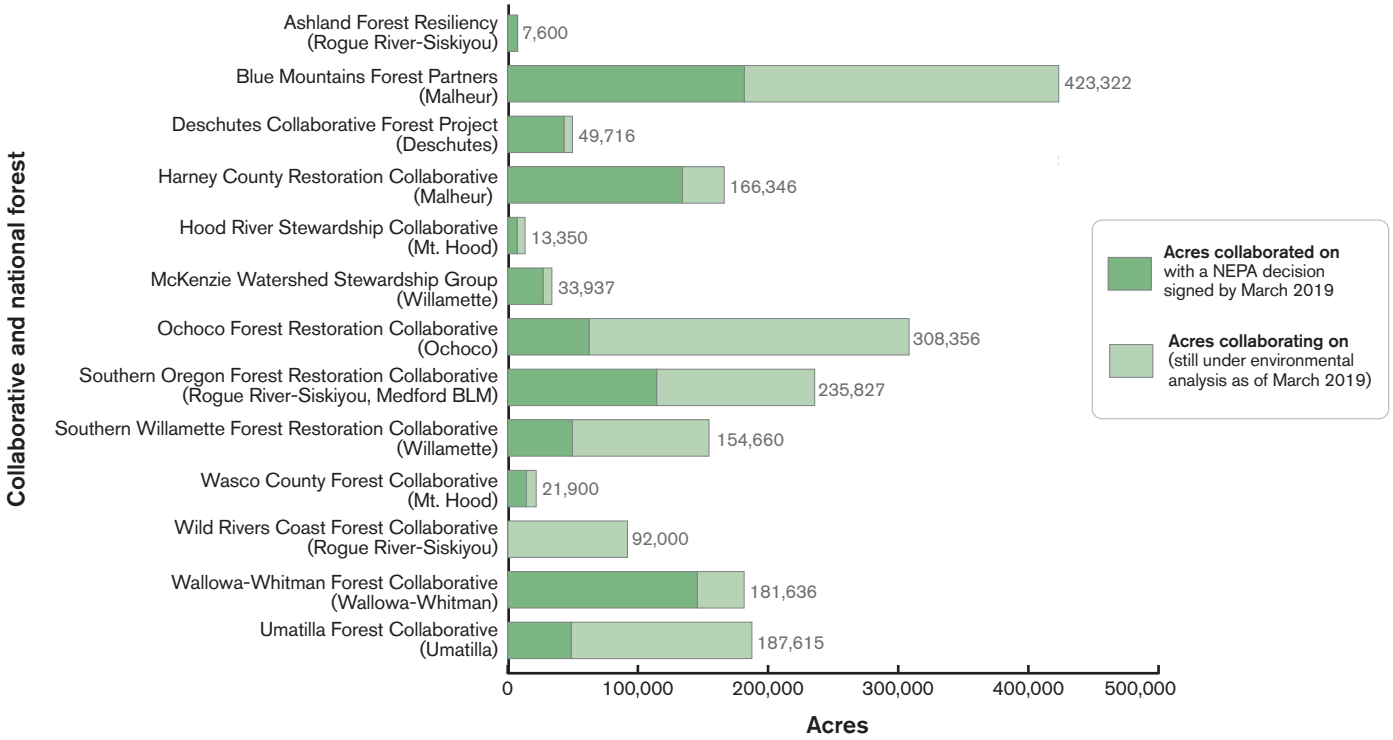
Creation or growth of new collaborative capacities from grant funds

- Grant funds were used to support the creation of four new groups covering 1.8 million new acres, which may lead to future restoration outcomes as these groups grow.
- Several groups used grants to develop stronger or more efficient governance structures including new approaches to inter-collaborative organization.
- Several collaboratives undertook outreach to increase support for forest restoration. These included communications about prescribed fire, story maps, and a biomass summit.

Challenges

- Challenges that affected the capacity of collaboratives to achieve their goals included transition in Forest Service personnel and short-term detailing, and the effects of wildfires on implementation of collaboratively designed projects.
- A challenge for Forest Service personnel was the time investment to partner with collaboratives, particularly in locations with limited interdisciplinary team capacity.

Figure 1 Acres collaborated on by groups receiving FFR Program collaborative capacity grants,* FFY 2014-2019



** These acres are those that collaboratives worked on with FFR Program grant support. Other acres may have been accomplished but could not be linked to the FFR Program's investment.*

For more information: A working paper with full results from this study, as well as other resources on FFR Program monitoring, is available at: http://ewp.uoregon.edu/ODF_FFRP_Monitoring.

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