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SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR FOREST RESTORATION: THE CFLRP AND JOINT CHIEFS PARTNERSHIP

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In 2017, we studied two restoration initiatives: 1) The Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP), which was established by Congress in 2009 to provide 8-10 years of funding for collaborative implementation of restoration projects on priority landscapes, and 2) The Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership (JCLRP), a partnership between the Forest Service and NRCS to promote landscape-scale restoration work across public and private lands. Through a survey with 425 agency personnel and 143 interviews with agency personnel and external partners, we identified the value added by these initiatives, strategies for success, and implications for the future.

Findings

The majority of agency staff reported success at achieving project objectives and said the CFLRP and JCLRP allowed them to focus on their high priority work. Strong majorities said they had increased the pace and scale of restoration, improved ecological conditions, and reduced the threat of fire to communities.

The primary value of these approaches was the multi-year investment in a particular landscape, combined with an emphasis on collaboration. These features incentivized collaborators to invest their time and effort, helped to leverage resources, allowed identification of efficiencies, and supported a coordinated program of work across the landscape, creating value beyond increased investment.

These efforts legitimized collaboration as a way of doing business and, in most places, decreased conflict and litigation. For the CFLRP, for example, 75% of respondents said they had seen decreased conflict, and 61% said they had decreased

litigation. Improved collaboration and interagency relationships were the most common successes under these two initiatives.

Most respondents reported significant progress in addressing the threat of fire in their project areas, although more could be done through application of prescribed fire and maintenance of treatments.

A majority of respondents said they had reduced the potential threats of fire in their project areas but were not able to apply prescribed fire to the extent that they had planned. Almost all respondents were concerned about their ability to maintain treatments without additional funding.

These initiatives conferred some benefits in sustaining existing industry; however, the initiatives generally were not successful in reducing treatment costs through the utilization of restoration byproducts or supporting new wood products markets and facilities. Specifically, the CFLRP did not provide the amount of product or certainty to allow existing industry partners to expand significantly or stimulate new businesses.



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A history of collaboration, strong line officer leadership, the presence of industry capacity, and agreement around restoration goals were critical factors undergirding success. Lack of capacity, staff turnover, poor collaboration/communication, lack of wood products markets or industry, and unexpected disturbances hindered projects from successfully moving forward.

Strong majorities of surveyed agency staff and nearly all interviewees, even those on less successful projects, said these initiatives should continue.

Implications

The multi-year investment in priority locations, with a collaborative focus, is valuable for leveraging non-federal resources and increasing the scale of restoration. Focusing on a landscape draws in partners and makes it more likely that investments will meaningfully affect ecological conditions and reduce the threat of fire. It was beyond the scope of our study, however, to measure ecological outcomes.

The agencies should continue to make changes to their business model to ensure that their organizations are oriented towards the success of priority projects. The agencies should ensure quality leaders and staff capacity follow priority investments. The agencies also could refine proposal evaluation processes to better identify places likely to be successful, or those that are in need of support and capacity building.

An outstanding question is whether more can be done to revitalize industry for landscapes that are priorities for investment but have low-to-no value wood products and minimal infrastructure. Focused investments are best suited to large-scale, contiguous landscapes in need of restoration and where there is currently either modest industry capacity or industry partners who rely on large

amounts of low-value product. These situations necessitate a multi-year, landscape-level focus. In landscapes that are a priority for treatment but lack capacity, either additional industry investment or a focus on supporting service contractors will be necessary going forward.

Investments should be made to build upon successes and maximize return on investment. Maintaining treatments and sustaining collaboration will be critical to ensuring return on investments made to date.



More information

For this and other publications on results of the third-party review of the CFLRP and JCLRP, as well as the full report of results go to:

<https://sites.warnercnr.colostate.edu/courtneyschultz/practitioner-reports/>
and

<http://ewp.uoregon.edu/publications/working-papers>.

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