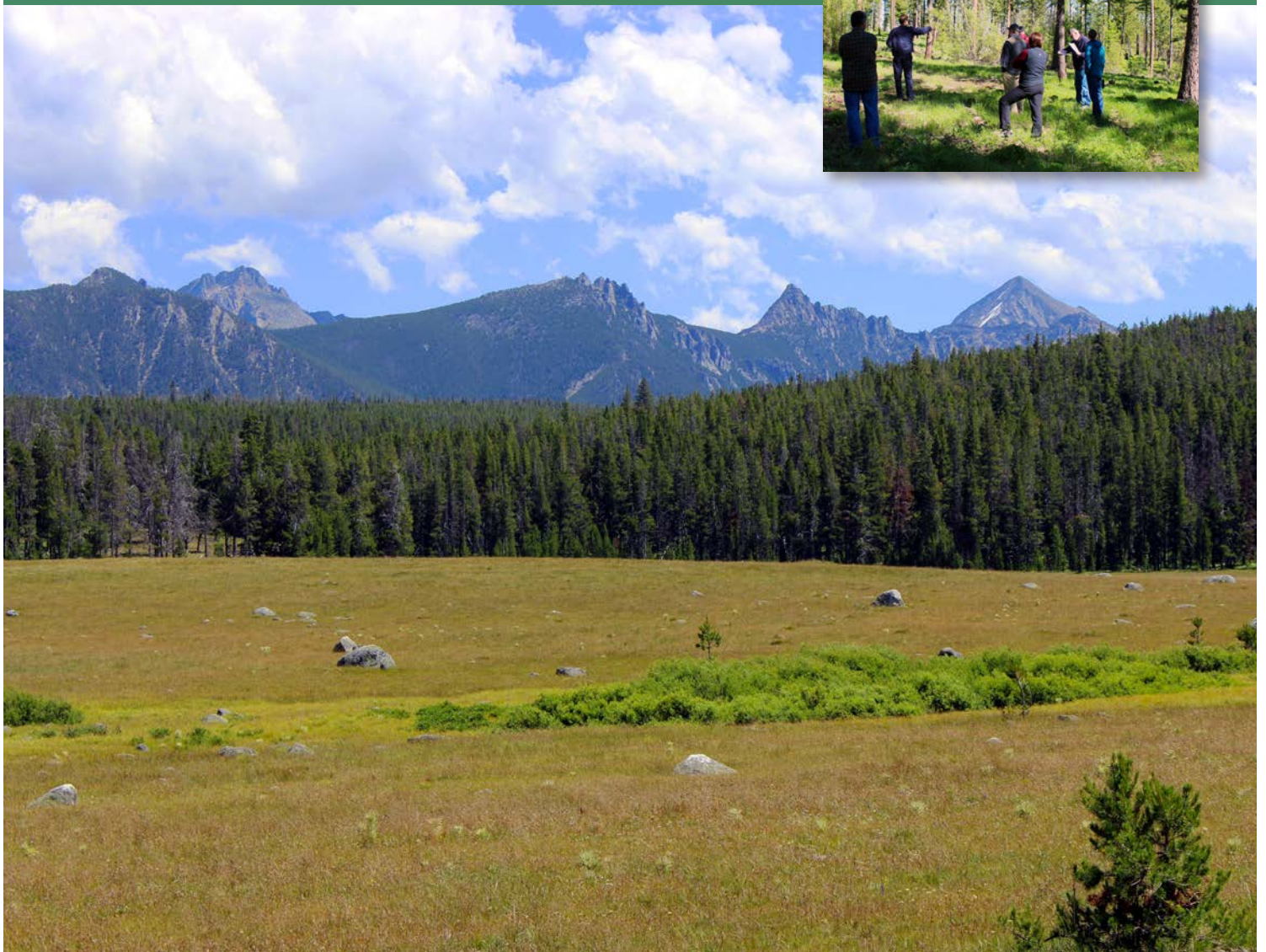


Community-Based Organizations in the U.S. West: Status, Structure, and Activities

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Many rural communities across the U.S. West were profoundly affected by economic and policy changes in the 1990s and early 2000s. Sudden shifts in federal land policies, restructuring of forestry and agriculture industries, and demographic changes led to social conflict and the decline of economic activities that had provided jobs and community identities for decades.¹ In the wake of these changes, rural community members experimented with a variety of grassroots approaches to healing social divisions, creating new economic opportunities, and reinventing their relationships to nearby lands and waters. The best-known outcome of these grassroots experiments is the widespread adoption of collaborative decision-making processes for the governance of public lands. Through such processes, historically conflictive interests build trust and relationships while pursuing land management projects that meet social, ecological, and economic objectives.² Collaboration is now considered an indispensable component of decision-making on public lands and is used in other contexts including mixed-ownership landscapes and in decision-making regarding watershed protection and restoration.

While collaborative decision-making processes are widely recognized in scholarship and in popular media, less attention has been paid to the grassroots organizations that often play key roles in facilitating those processes. Prior research on these Com-

munity-Based Organizations (CBOs) shows that they may work to catalyze natural resource-based economic development by creating opportunities for local communities to benefit economically from restoration and stewardship projects and organizing to address larger-scale policies and incentives that limit the potential for community-based natural resource management.³ Through their work, CBOs may fill local gaps in the non-profit sector (such as providing various social services), the private sector (such as investing in businesses capable of providing local jobs in sustainable resource management), and the public sector (such as completing environmental analyses necessary to move federal land management projects forward).

Despite the important role played by CBOs in reconciling rural development and natural resource conservation and delivering tangible benefits to rural communities, relatively little is known about where they are, how they conduct their activities, or how they are funded. With this working paper we build on the results of a 2010 survey of Oregon CBOs that found the organizations engaged in a variety of activities but with limited financial and staff capacity.⁴ With the present study we hope to provide a more complete profile of the current status of CBOs in the West, including where they work, what activities they conduct, how they are financed, what kind of staff and volunteer capacity they have, and what kinds of rural businesses they assist.

Approach

We surveyed organizations that met our criteria for community-based organizations (see text box at right) in our study area which included the 11 western states plus Alaska. In total, representatives from 63 CBOs participated in the survey. We asked each participating organization a series of questions on their organizational history, structure, funding, and program activities. A second part of the survey included questions on the organization's use of social networks to achieve its goals; in this paper we focus on results from the first part of the survey only. For more in-depth methods, see Appendix (page 10).

Findings

Respondent position, organizational history, and scale of work

A majority (52 percent) of the individuals who completed the survey were the current Executive Directors of their respective CBOs; the rest were board members, managers, program directors, or held other positions with intimate knowledge of the CBOs' activities. Home office locations of the CBOs that completed the survey represent ten of our twelve target states; we did not receive any usable responses from CBOs headquartered in Utah and we did not identify any CBOs to survey in Nevada. Oregon accounted for the largest number of respondent CBOs (20), followed by California (8) and Colorado (7) (see Figure 1, page 3). There were a larger number of CBOs to survey in Oregon than in other states⁵ and the Oregon response rate was also higher than average (see Appendix, page 10).

The vast majority of CBOs surveyed (76 percent) attained non-profit status between 1993 and 2008. On average, CBOs had been registered non-profits for 16 years at the time of the survey. Only four of the surveyed CBOs had been registered non-

What are CBOs?

A variety of definitions for CBOs exist in the academic literature. For our purposes in this survey, we defined CBOs as:

1. Non-profit organizations, which are
2. based in rural areas, and that
3. conduct practical work on both rural economic development and natural resource stewardship.

This definition distinguishes CBOs from other organizations that do not share all of these characteristics, such as governmental agencies, ad-hoc working groups, economic development districts, agricultural marketing boards, groups that primarily engage in environmental conservation without working on rural development, or organizations that work on rural issues but are based in urban areas.

profits since the 1980s; of these, two were Resource Conservation and Development Councils.⁶ Non-profit status is an indicator of the age of the formal organization, but some CBOs may have been active in performing their work informally or through another organization or partner prior to achieving formal non-profit status.

We also examined the scales at which CBOs work by asking respondents to choose the category that best matches their scale of operation. They reported scales ranging from multiple individual communities to bioregions. The most common scale was watershed, a biophysical rather than political unit (see Figure 2, page 3). This may reflect how CBOs view the communities and issues that they serve. The estimated population contained within these areas, according to the respondents, ranges from 100 people to 1.2 million, with a median of 25,000.

Figure 1 Home office location of respondent CBOs

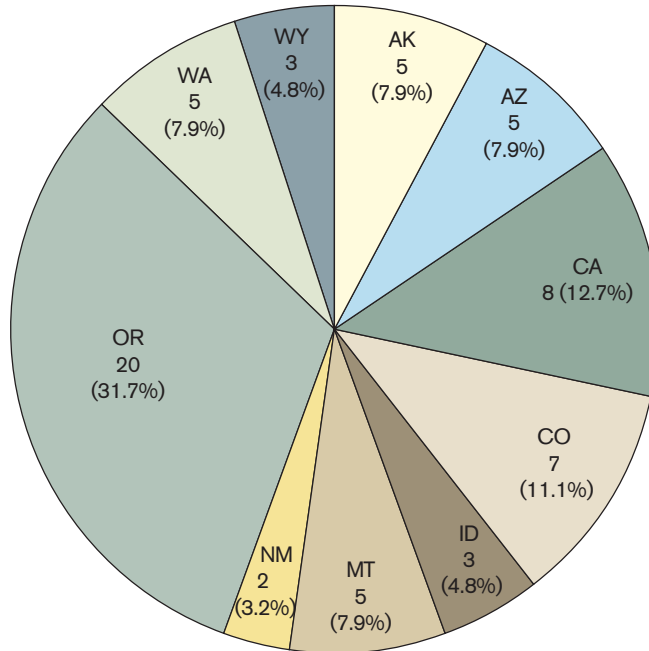
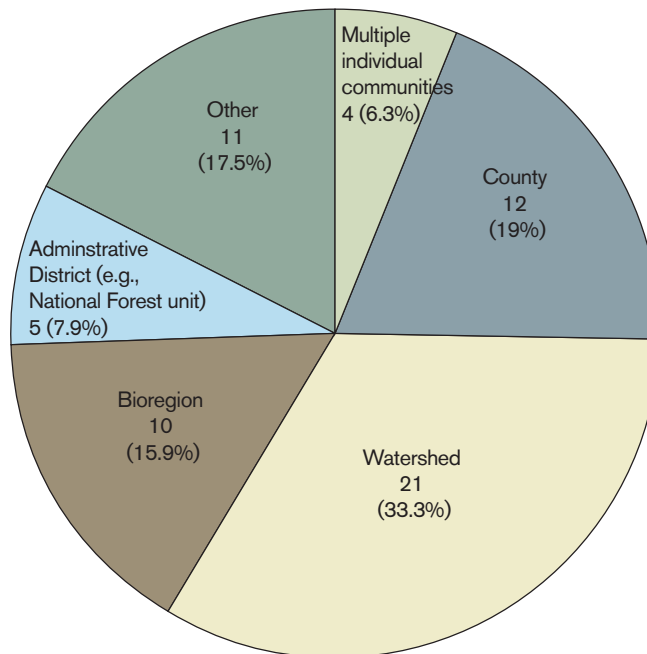


Figure 2 The spatial scale at which respondent CBOs operate



Staffing and financial support

Most CBOs are small. Our respondent CBOs reported a mean of three full-time staff with a median of one (see Table 1, below). 75 percent had two or fewer full-time staff and a majority (62 percent) had either one or no full-time staff. The number of part-time staff averaged four with a median of two. However, volunteers may also be providing important resources to CBOs. The estimated number of volunteers that worked directly with respondent CBOs in the 12 months prior to the survey ranged from three to 2000 with a median of 45 and a mean of 135.

Annual budgets for these CBOs averaged \$504,450, with a median of \$280,000 and a wide range of variability (see Table 1, below). On average, CBOs received 28 percent of their operating funds from federal grants, 25 percent from state grants, 16 percent from private foundations, 16 percent from individuals, 8 percent from contract work, and 7 percent from other sources. Only three CBOs reported relying exclusively on a single category of funding; on average CBOs received funds from 3.5 of the six broad funding categories listed. Nineteen percent of CBOs depended on federal grants for at least half of their operating budget; 16 percent depended on state grants for at least half of their budget.

Area of work and activities

Respondent CBOs reported that, on average, 57 percent of the CBOs' work focused on public lands (defined as federal or state land), 30 percent focused on

non-industrial private lands (family-owned farms, ranches, and timberland), and 11 percent focused on private industrial lands (corporate- or investor-owned farms, ranches, or timberland). Around one percent took place on other ownerships, such as tribal lands. Fifty-two percent of the CBOs devoted at least half of their work to public lands, but as noted above, only 19 percent received half or more of their budget from federal grants.

Figure 3 (see page 5) shows the percentage of respondent CBOs that reported having engaged in four natural resource stewardship collaboration, planning, and implementation activities within the previous three years. All four activities had been conducted by a majority of surveyed CBOs, with participation in and leading of collaborative efforts reported by nearly all respondents. A large majority also reported having implemented natural resource stewardship activities on the ground and having conducted the kinds of environmental analyses (including monitoring) normally completed by government agencies. The latter activity is often important to achieving resource management and economic development in places where agency capacity has been reduced by budget cuts and shifts in spending. Overall, CBOs reported that they dedicated 61 percent of their time to natural resource stewardship activities.

Figure 4 (see page 5) shows the percentage of respondent CBOs that reported having engaged in various economic development activities within the previous three years. It should be noted that many respondents said that their natural resource stewardship and economic development activities

Table 1 Budgets and staffing of surveyed CBOs

Resources	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum
Full-time staff	3	1	0	29
Part-time staff	4	2	0	42
Volunteers	135	45	3	2000
Annual budget	\$504,450	\$280,000	\$1000	\$3.5 million

were often so tightly integrated that it was difficult to separate them analytically. Nearly 80 percent had engaged in formal economic development planning, while less than half reported having conducted workforce training, individual business planning,

business incubation, or direct investment in infrastructure (such as wood or livestock processing facilities or bioenergy plants). Overall, CBOs reported that they dedicated 19 percent of their time to rural economic development activities.

Figure 3 Percentage of respondent CBOs that engaged in various natural resource stewardship activities in the past 3 years

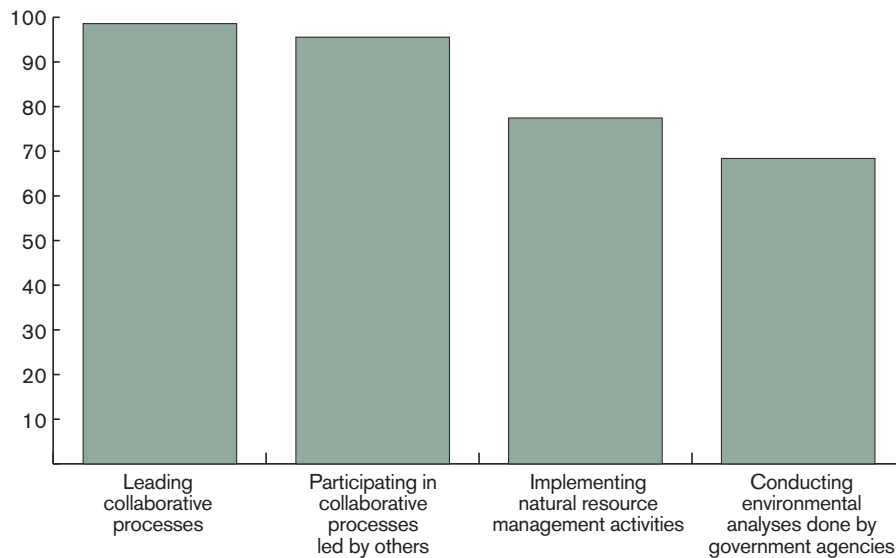


Figure 4 Percentage of respondent CBOs that engaged in various economic development activities in the past 3 years

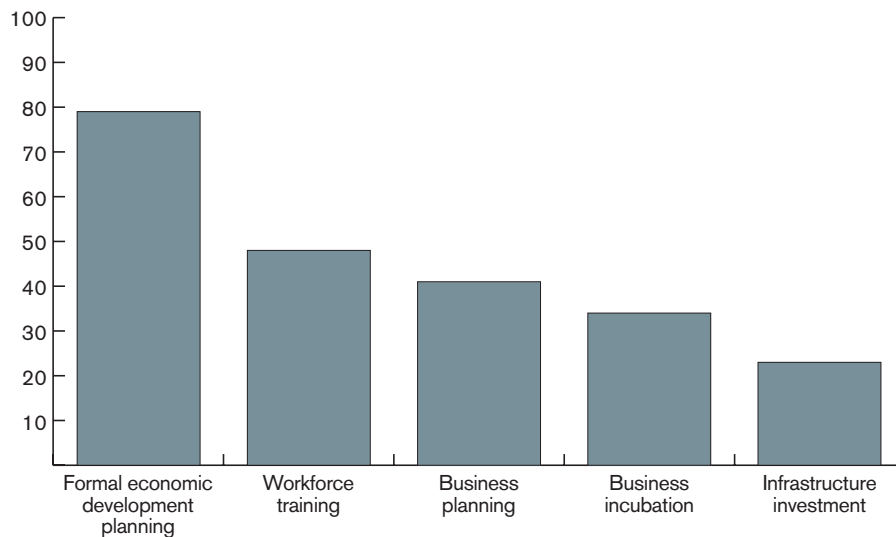




Figure 5 (see page 7) shows the percentage of respondent CBOs that reported having engaged in various policy or institutional change activities within the previous three years. A large majority reported working to pilot new approaches to natural resource management, conducting site tours for elected officials, and participating in policy networks. Of those who reported engaging in policy networking activities, 17 percent did so only at the local scale, 11 percent only at the state scale, 9 percent only at the regional scale, and 9 percent only at the federal scale. The rest (54 percent) reported engaging in policy networking at multiple scales. Overall, CBOs reported that they dedicated 12 percent of their time to policy and institutional change activities.

In addition to these three broad categories of economic development, natural resource stewardship, and institutional change, surveyed CBOs reported additional activities such as youth and community education programs, involvement with recreation development, and engagement with the local arts community. Overall, CBOs reported that they dedi-

cated 8 percent of their time to these “other” activities.

Business assistance

We asked surveyed CBOs about the different kinds of businesses to which they provided direct business assistance. Table 2 (see page 7) shows the percentage of CBOs that said that they had provided direct assistance within the previous three years to each class of business. Overall, 24 percent of CBOs said that they had directly assisted between one and five businesses in the previous three years, 30 percent had assisted six to 10 businesses, 10 percent had assisted 11 to 20 businesses, and 24 percent had assisted more than 20 businesses. 13 percent said that they had not directly assisted any businesses within the previous three years. Surveyed CBOs most commonly provided direct business assistance to restoration and research or data collection contractors, and less commonly assisted manufacturing or processing facilities.

Figure 5 Percentage of respondent CBOs that engaged in various policy or institutional change activities in the past 3 years

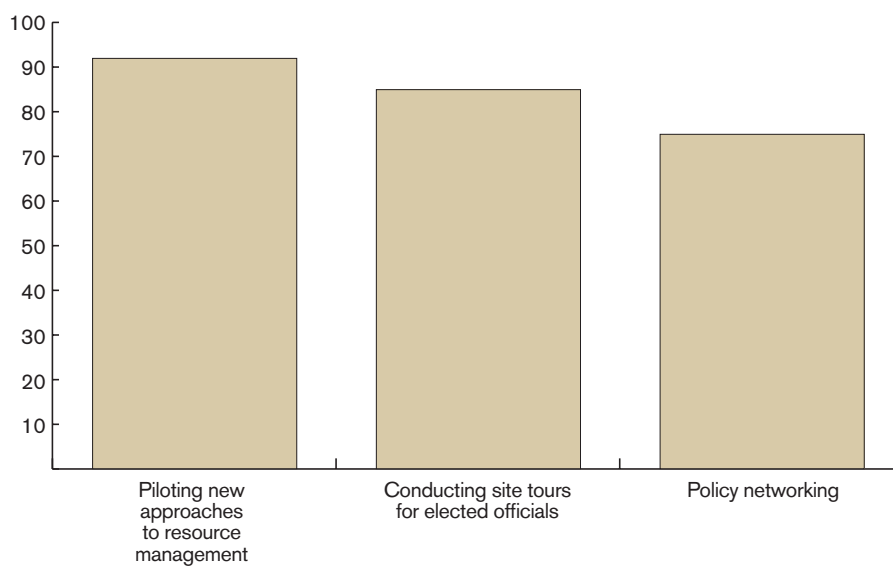


Table 2 Percent of CBOs that provided direct assistance in the past 3 years to 8 common types of rural natural resource businesses

Business Type	Percent of CBOs that assisted business type
Restoration contractors	78
Research / data collection contractors	73
Small logging businesses (1-2 employees)	58
Livestock producers	57
Large logging businesses (3 or more employees)	53
Sawmills	42
Biomass facilities	31
Animal processors (slaughterhouses)	9

Conclusions

This analysis underscores the results of a 2010 survey of similar organizations (see EWP Working Paper 39) that found that CBOs are engaged in a wide variety of conservation, economic development, and institutional change activities in the rural West despite operating on small budgets and with small numbers of staff. The organizations surveyed here all meet our criteria as CBOs, yet show great diversity in size, scope, and capacity. The smallest operate largely with volunteer and part-time staff capacity and very small budgets, while the largest directly employ dozens of full- and part-time staff and have annual budgets in the millions of dollars. The populations they serve range in size from 100 to over 1,000,000. Despite this diversity, some broad similarities tie the work of CBOs together. Virtually all CBOs lead collaborative efforts in their respective geographies, and all engage in additional natural resource stewardship and economic development activities beyond this collaborative facilitation role. Most CBOs are innovating new approaches to natural resource management and are active in policy networks to share successes and identify public policy concerns. They engage in a variety of rural economic development activities,

some of which directly assist individual businesses and some of which are designed to improve the operating context for local rural businesses as a whole.

Previous research has shown that CBOs often fill critical gaps in capacity in rural communities. Many of these organizations were founded to solve critical problems facing rural communities—problems associated with the inability of existing agencies, organizations, and businesses to address fundamental changes in rural economies. CBOs can be seen as key players in catalyzing new rural economies that maintain people's close ties to the land while innovating new ways of generating local benefits from restored and stewarded landscapes. The results presented here will help to illuminate a class of organizations that has, to date, been poorly studied despite their proliferation across the West. A forthcoming publication will detail the ways that CBOs utilize social networks with other entities to accomplish the kinds of resource stewardship, economic development, and institutional change objectives detailed here.



Key findings

- CBOs operate at a variety of spatial scales, most commonly the watershed and county scales. These geographies of action contain anywhere from a few hundred to over 1,000,000 people.
- CBO staff sizes tend to be quite small (normally between zero and two full-time staff members) and their operating budgets tend to be between \$250,000 and \$500,000 annually.
- CBOs draw upon a variety of sources for their operating funds, with federal grants being the most important.
- CBOs work across a variety of land tenure categories, but tend to focus most heavily on public lands, with most CBOs devoting at least half of their work to public lands.
- Nearly all CBOs lead or participate in collaborative governance processes, but their work goes beyond this collaborative role to implementing a variety of natural resource stewardship, economic development, and policy and institutional change activities.
- Overall, the majority of CBO work falls under the category of “natural resource stewardship,” though these stewardship activities are also central to economic development. Common activities for CBOs include economic development planning, implementing natural resource-related projects, conducting environmental analyses or monitoring, piloting new management approaches, conducting site tours for elected officials, and engaging in policy networking at local to national scales.
- CBOs provide direct assistance to rural natural resource businesses, with research and restoration contractors, loggers, and livestock producers as the most common recipients of direct CBO assistance.

Appendix: Survey methods

The lack of official criteria for defining CBOs and the lack of a central database listing them makes surveying CBOs challenging. To conduct this survey, we created a database of non-profit organizations in the 11 western states plus Alaska that appeared to have the potential to meet our definition of a CBO. The resulting database may not have been included all existing CBOs, but represented the results of an exhaustive search. To build the database, we started with an initial database of known CBOs drawn from meeting attendance lists and participation in the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (a network of CBOs, conservation organizations, and regional and national community forestry organizations). We then added to the database by searching state nonprofit lists for key terms such as “stewardship,” “conservation,” “watershed,” “landscape,” and “rural.” The result was a database of 381 organizations that appeared to have the potential to be CBOs.

We then conducted web research to determine the mission, non-profit status, and contact information for each organization, filtering out those that were not based in rural areas, not a non-profit, or did not appear to include both rural development and natural resource stewardship in their activities. We also excluded organizations whose primary focus was offshore fisheries. We tried to contact all of

the remaining 204 organizations by telephone to schedule a survey; our survey began with screening questions that would help determine whether the organization met our criteria as a CBO (see Table A1 on opposite page). Of these 204 organizations, 87 did not pass the screening criteria and 54 declined to participate or did not respond after three emails and two telephone calls. The total number of usable surveys was 63, representing 53.8 percent of organizations that passed our screening questions, declined to participate in the survey, or did not respond to repeated attempts to make contact. All surveys were administered via telephone by trained student workers with faculty oversight, with the exception of the first four surveys which were administered directly by faculty members. The survey generally lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. The web-based survey management program Qualtrics was used for data entry and retrieval.

The survey included two main parts: the first was a series of questions on organizational history, structure, funding, and program activities and the second included questions on the organization’s use of social networks to achieve its goals. In this paper we focus on results from the first part only; results from the second part will be published separately. We analyzed all results reported in this document using IBM SPSS Statistics version 23.

Table A1 State-level descriptive statistics for the CBO survey sample

State	Organizations attempted to contact	Organizations that screened out	Completed surveys	State response rate
Alaska	19	14	5	100.0%
Arizona	10	1	5	55.6%
California	29	8	8	38.1%
Colorado	23	9	7	50.0%
Idaho	10	3	3	42.9%
Montana	24	7	5	29.4%
New Mexico	10	6	2	50.0%
Nevada	3	2	0	0%
Oregon	51	26	20	80.0%
Utah	2	2	0	N/A
Washington	16	6	5	50.0%
Wyoming	7	3	3	75.0%
TOTAL	204	87	63	53.8%

Endnotes

- 1 Charnley, S., E.M. Donoghue, and C. Moseley. 2008. Forest management policy and community well-being in the Pacific Northwest. *Journal of Forestry* 106(8): 440–447.
- 2 Gray, G. J., M.J. Enzer, and J. Kusel (Eds.). 2001. *Understanding community-based forest ecosystem management*. Binghamton, NY: Food Products Press.
- 3 Abrams, J., E.J. Davis, and C. Moseley. 2015. Community-based organizations and institutional work in the remote rural West. *Review of Policy Research* 32(6): 675-698.
- 4 Davis, E.J., C. Moseley, C. Evers, K. MacFarland, M. Nielsen-Pincus, A. Pomeroy, and M.J. Enzer. 2012. Community-based natural resource management in Oregon: a profile of organizational capacity. Ecosystem Workforce Program Working Paper #39. University of Oregon, Eugene, OR. Available at: http://ewp.uoregon.edu/sites/ewp.uoregon.edu/files/WP_39.pdf.
- 5 The state of Oregon also has a state-supported program of 85 watershed councils, some of which are organized as registered non-profit organizations and work on both economic development and natural resource stewardship. Ten of the CBOs surveyed in Oregon were watershed councils.
- 6 Resource and Development Councils are a longstanding type of rural support organization based in rural areas and focused on rural development and conservation. They were originally authorized in the 1962 Farm Bill and for several decades following they were supported through regular federal appropriations. Congress stopped funding RC&Ds in 2011 and since that time remaining RC&Ds have had to raise their own operating funds. RC&Ds that met our screening criteria were included in this survey as CBOs.

Ecosystem Workforce Program Publications on Community-Based Organizations:

This is one of several EWP publications profiling and detailing the work of CBOs. Other relevant working papers include:

Davis, E.J. 2014. "Stewarding forests and communities: The final report of the Dry Forest Zone Project." Ecosystem Workforce Program Working Paper #48. Spring 2014, University of Oregon. Available at: http://ewp.uoregon.edu/sites/ewp.uoregon.edu/files/WP_48.pdf.

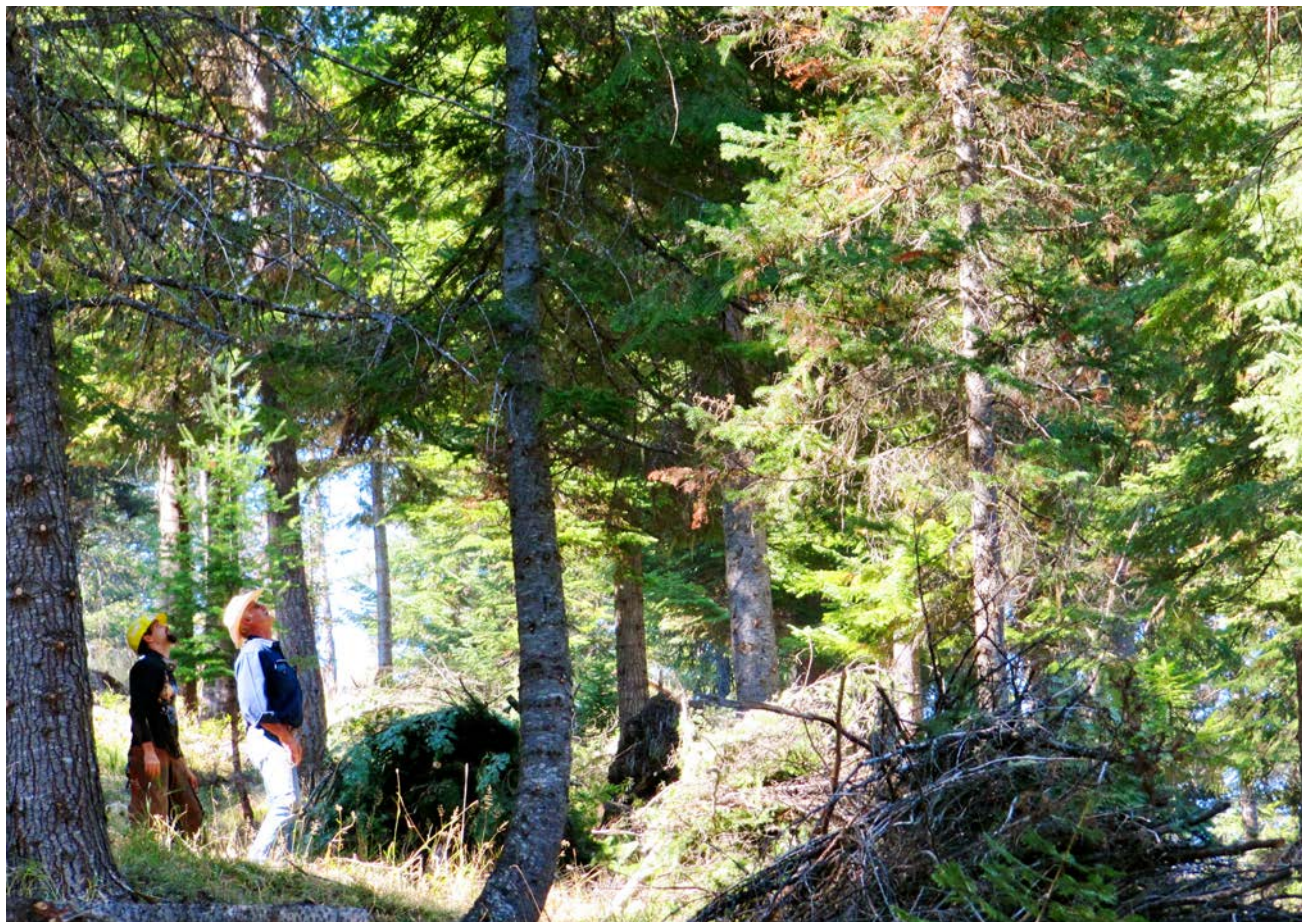
Davis, E.J., C. Moseley, C. Evers, K. MacFarland, M. Nielsen-Pincus, A. Pomeroy, and M.J. Enzer. 2012. "Community-based natural resource management in Oregon: A profile of organizational capacity." Ecosystem Workforce Program Working Paper #39. Summer 2012, University of Oregon. Available at: http://ewp.uoregon.edu/sites/ewp.uoregon.edu/files/WP_39.pdf.

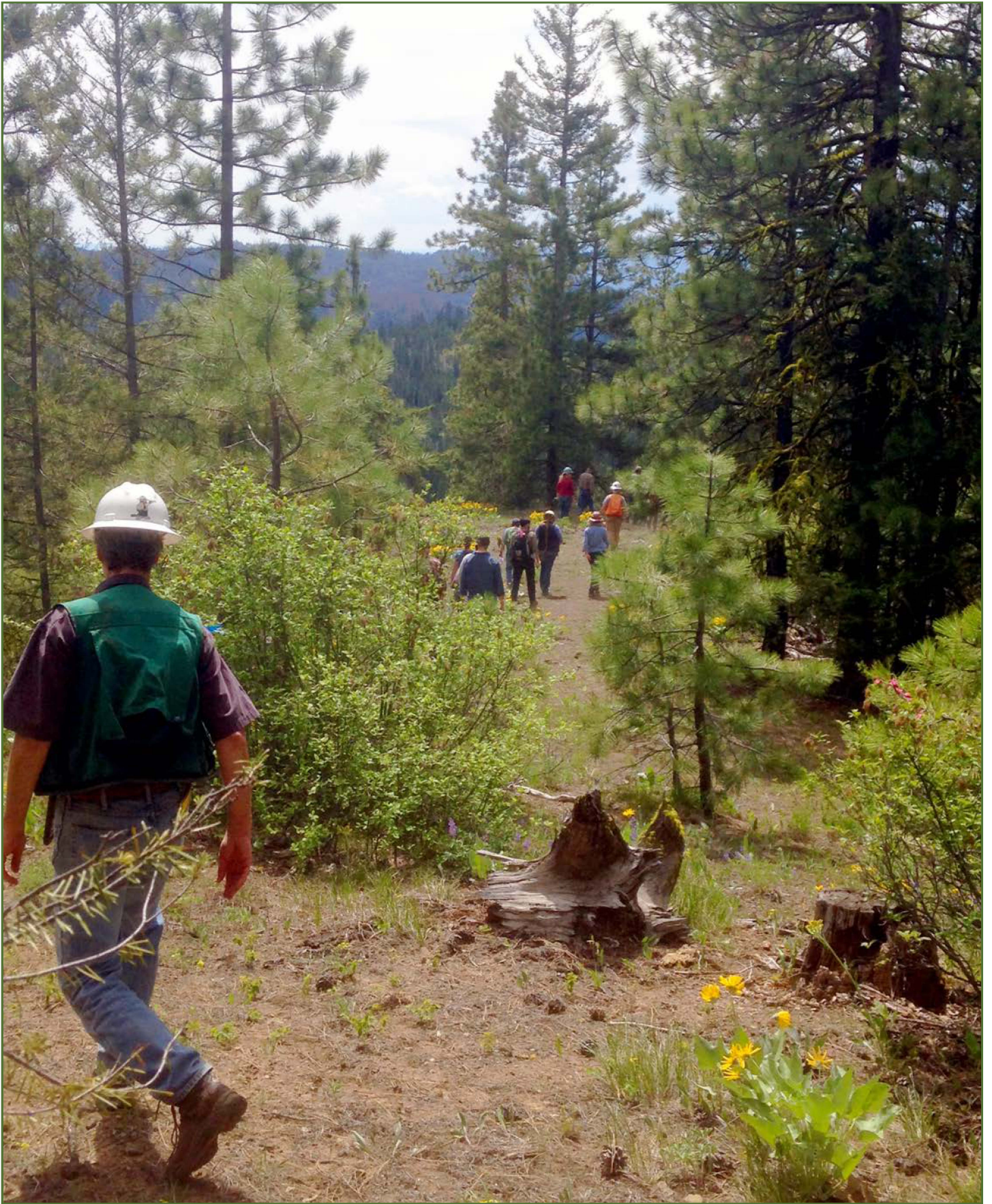
Davis, E.J. and C. Moseley. 2012. "The social and livelihood benefits of USDA Forest Service agreements with community-based organizations." Ecosystem Workforce Program Working Paper #38. Spring 2012, University of Oregon. Available at: http://ewp.uoregon.edu/sites/ewp.uoregon.edu/files/WP_38.pdf.

Moseley, C., K. MacFarland, M. Nielsen-Pincus, K. Grimm, A. Pomeroy, and M.J. Enzer. 2011. "Community-based natural resource management in the western United States: A pilot study of capacity." Ecosystem Workforce Program Working Paper #27. Spring 2011, University of Oregon. Available at: http://ewp.uoregon.edu/sites/ewp.uoregon.edu/files/WP_27.pdf.

Also see the following peer-reviewed publication:

Abrams, J., E.J. Davis, and C. Moseley. 2015. Community-based organizations and institutional work in the remote rural West. *Review of Policy Research* 32(6): 675-698.





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