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STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS: THE JOINT CHIEFS LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

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In 2017, we studied the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership (JCLRP), a partnership between the Forest Service and Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) designed to promote coordinated, landscape-scale restoration work across public and private lands to reduce fire danger, improve water quality, and enhance wildlife habitat. Through a survey with 196 agency personnel and 62 interviews with Forest Service and NRCS personnel and external partners, we identified the value added by this initiative, strategies for success, and implications for the future.

Findings

Strong majorities reported success at achieving all the primary objectives of the JCLRP and said the initiative allowed them to focus on their high priority work. About 80% of survey respondents said they had increased the pace and scale of restoration in their project areas because of the JCLRP. Over 70% said the JCLRP allowed them to focus on their priority work and reported success in improving vegetation and wildlife habitat conditions; about 60% said they had reduced the threat of fire to local communities and improved watershed conditions.

Over 80% of agency staff and nearly all interviewees, including those with less successful projects, said the JCLRP approach should continue. Staff said they valued the emphasis on public-private partnerships, the requirement to work collaboratively, and the multi-year funding.

The focused, multi-year funding commitment gave projects credibility and purpose, drawing in partners and leveraging funding for the landscape, and adding value beyond the influx of money. Increased funding and prioritization of

landscapes incentivized partner and landowner participation. About 75% of survey respondents said, because of the JCLRP, they had leveraged more funds and were accomplishing more work on state and private lands.

The JCLRP improved interagency partnerships and collaboration with stakeholders. About half of survey respondents said the JCLRP had reduced conflict, and a third said it had decreased litigation. Almost everyone said they had strengthened interagency partnerships and stakeholder relationships. Project collaborators helped the agency communicate more effectively with the public and expanded capacity to get work done.

JCLRP was particularly successful in places with a history of collaboration, willing landowner and community partners, and adequate agency capacity and leadership. Less successful projects reported a lack of coordination and communication between the Forest Service and NRCS, staffing limitations compounded by hiring delays, lack of willing landowners, lack of prior collaborative planning efforts, and problems with some landowner assistance requirements.



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Implications

The multi-year investment in priority locations, with a collaborative and cross-boundary focus, is valuable for leveraging nonfederal 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. Line officer turnover, limited capacity, and poor leadership and communication were the biggest internal factors that undermined project success.

Although we saw variability among projects, our data indicate the JCLRP overall was successful. We found that the JCLRP led to: increased pace and scale of restoration; greater cross-boundary coordination, communication, and relationships; leveraged resources from multiple partners, added capacity and funding for restoration; and a focus on high priority work. The program has generally improved landscape-scale coordination and supported innovations that are likely to be important going forward. Going forward, the agencies could refine proposal evaluation processes to better identify places likely to be successful or those that are in need of support and capacity building.

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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