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STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS: THE COLLABORATIVE FOREST LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PROGRAM

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In 2017, we studied 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 larger than 50,000 acres. Through a survey with 229 agency personnel and 81 interviews with equal numbers of Forest Service personnel and external partners, we identified the value added by this initiative, strategies for success, and implications for the future.

Findings

The majority of agency staff reported achieving project objectives and said the CFLRP allowed forests 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. A majority of respondents reported success at meeting all CFLRP goals, except reducing treatment costs through utilization of restoration byproducts.

People said the most valuable aspect of the CFLRP was the long-term funding commitment to a priority landscape. This feature incentivized collaborators to invest their time, helped to leverage resources, and allowed for a coordinated program of work across the landscape, adding value beyond the influx of money.

Over 90% of agency staff and nearly all interviewees, even those on less successful projects, said the CFLRP should continue. Agency staff valued most the multi-year commitment of flexible funding and the requirement to work collaboratively.

The CFLRP legitimized collaboration as a way of doing business and, in most places, decreased conflict and litigation. In the survey, 75% of respondents said they had seen decreased conflict and 61% said they had decreased litigation. Almost everyone said they had strengthened collaborative relationships, and about half of projects said that they had found efficiencies in moving through NEPA, in part because of collaborative agreement.

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. Eighty percent of survey respondents said they had reduced the potential threats of fire in their project areas because of CFLRP. Projects were not able to apply prescribed fire to the extent they had planned and almost all respondents were concerned about their ability to maintain treatments.

CFLRP projects supported existing industry; however, the approach did not provide the amount of product or certainty to allow industry partners to substantially expand or stimulate new businesses.



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For most projects, the CFLRP did not lead to reduced treatment costs through utilization of restoration byproducts or support the development of new wood products markets and facilities.

A history of collaboration, strong line officer leadership, the presence of industry, 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.



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 efforts. 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 agency should ensure quality

leaders and staff capacity follow priority investments; staff turnover and lack of capacity were the most significant internal barriers to success.

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. Our findings indicate that CFLRP might be best suited to places with 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 some areas without capacity, either additional industry investment or a focus on supporting service contractors will be necessary going forward.

Investments should be made to build on the successes found under the CFLRP 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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