



Getting Together in Idaho:

A Survey of Six Collaborative Efforts on Public Lands

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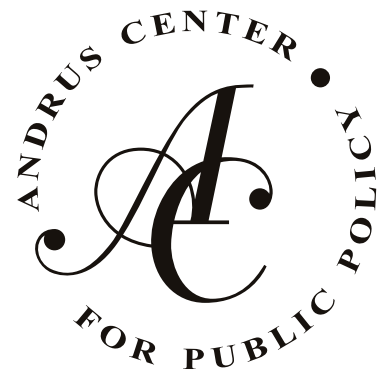


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Introduction

Collaborative groups -- loosely defined as groups of people working together to achieve a common purpose and share resources – are emerging in Idaho and around the West.ⁱ Collaborative groups often form where there are intense and complex conflicts over natural resource management. Often these conflicts spin off into lawsuits, lost jobs and frequently, fractured community relationships. Many people are turning to each other, believing “there has to be a better way.”

Federal agencies, largely the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM), manage about two-thirds of the land in Idaho. On these federal lands, collaborative partners try to work *among* themselves, and *within* the federal laws and decision-making authorities held by agency managers. Several Idaho collaborative groups have worked on federal land management projects in recent years. Others have worked on a combination of federal and/or state and private land, using federal agencies as partners.ⁱⁱ

In the late summer of 2001, we asked 30 participants from six collaborative groups across Idaho to share thoughts and reflections about the collaborative process in which they have been involved. Each received a short-answer survey of approximately 20 questions.

Eighteen participants (60 percent) responded. Because no specific collaborative group was identified in the survey’s cover letter, a few of those surveyed provided information on other collaborative processes in which they have participated. Appendix A explains the survey methods, and includes the survey questions.

The Collaborative Projects

Respondents included participants in the following six collaborative efforts:

Clearwater Elk Initiative and Related Efforts

The Clearwater Elk Initiative includes a variety of federal and state agencies, businesses and organizations working to improve elk habitat in the Clearwater River basin, which encompasses federal, state and private land in north and north-central Idaho.ⁱⁱⁱ

Throughout the early- and mid-1990s, several organizations, agencies and the public were concerned about declining elk numbers in the Clearwater basin. The Clearwater Elk Initiative began in late 1998 following a particularly sharp drop in elk numbers following the severe winter of 1997. The six-million-acre Clearwater River basin encompasses communities such as Lewiston, Orofino, Grangeville, Moscow and Elk City.

The Clearwater Elk Recovery Team (CERT), an open public citizens’ group, coordinates with the various Clearwater Elk Initiative agencies and organizations to help generate ideas for elk recovery. CERT has actively participated as a collaborative working group for the Middle-Black Stewardship Project, encompassing 840,000 acres on the Clearwater National Forest. The

Middle-Black project is one of 28 initial Forest Service projects across the country granted special authority in 1999. Under this authority, goods such as commercial timber can be exchanged for services such as trail improvements or stream restoration, as a way to pay for conservation work on National Forest lands.^{iv} The authority, known “stewardship contracting,” calls for collaborative development of projects to be undertaken.^v

Stewards of the Nez Perce Forest (Meadow Face)

In October 1999, a citizens’ group named the Stewards of the Nez Perce Forest formed to recommend proposed activities in the Meadow Face area. This area lies within the Clearwater Ranger District of the Nez Perce National Forest in north-central Idaho.^{vi} The project area encompasses 27,000 acres in the South Fork Clearwater drainage, about seven air miles east of Grangeville. Like the Middle-Black project, the Meadow Face project is one of 28 initial Forest Service projects across the country granted special authority in 1999.

By regulation, the Forest Service has the authority to formally propose activities on National Forest land.^{vii} In the Meadow Face area, the Forest Service adopted as their proposal a set of activities recommended by the Stewards of the Nez Perce, including timber harvest, prescribed fire, road obliteration and other activities. The proposal is currently undergoing analysis specified by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. This law mandates how proposed projects on federal land should be examined, and the public involved, before a final decision is made.

Henry’s Fork Watershed Council

The Henry’s Fork Watershed Council formed as a different approach to addressing and reconciling watershed issues in the 1.7-million-acre Henry’s Fork of the Snake River watershed in eastern Idaho and western Wyoming. The Henry’s Fork watershed includes or adjoins the communities of St. Anthony, Rexburg and Island Park. The Idaho Legislature chartered the Council in 1994 after the Legislature adopted the 1993 Henry’s Fork Basin Plan.

The chief issues facing the Henry’s Fork basin included irrigation demand, hydropower development and stream flow needs for fisheries and recreation. Consequently, the Basin Plan’s recommendations addressed water quality, fish and wildlife protection, and conservation of irrigation water. The Watershed Council serves as a consensus-building entity to include all parties with interests in the watershed and to help carry out the Basin Plan’s recommendations. (In many collaborative groups, consensus is defined as “agreement among the participants or stakeholder groups.”^{viii} Many, but not all, collaborative groups strive for consensus. Others agree to work together but use voting or other methods to make group decisions.)

Wood River Valley Winter Recreation Mapping Group

A group of five skiers and five snowmobilers, the Wood River Winter Recreation Mapping Group was created in late 1999 to map areas of the Sawtooth National Forest for winter motorized and non-motorized use. The Group began to address escalating conflicts between snowmobilers and skiers that emerged as more and more recreationists began using the area, and as technological improvements allowed snowmobiles access to steeper and more remote terrain. The Group specifically formed following a challenge from Sawtooth Forest Supervisor Bill

Levere (the decision maker) to “. . . come up with a resolution, come up with a map in a year’s time, or I’ll do it for you.”^{ix}

The areas mapped included several thousand acres in the Wood River drainage surrounding the Ketchum/Sun Valley area of central Idaho. The Forest Supervisor adopted the group’s recommendations into a special order specifying which areas were closed and open to motorized and non-motorized winter use. The special order designating specific areas for different types of winter use is being implemented this winter.

Lower Snake River District Resource Advisory Council (RAC)

Chartered by the federal Secretary of the Interior, the Lower Snake River District Resource Advisory Council (RAC) was formed to advise BLM managers on public land issues and concerns. Like similar BLM RACs, this RAC includes 15 members representing specific public land users and constituents, ranging from archeology/history to livestock grazing. The Lower Snake River District includes BLM land throughout a 5.5-million acre area in southwest Idaho. The District adjoins the Nevada and Oregon borders on the south and west, respectively. It also extends east of Mountain Home and north of McCall.

North Kennedy/Cottonwood Stewardship Group

Like the Middle-Black and Meadow Face projects, the North Kennedy/Cottonwood Stewardship project is another of the initial 28 “stewardship contracting” projects authorized by the Forest Service in 1999. A citizens’ group of about 20 members formed in August 2000 to provide recommendations on proposed activities in the 8500-acre North Kennedy/Cottonwood project area. The project area is located in the Kennedy Creek drainage of Squaw Creek, about 25 air miles north of Emmett and 60 air miles north of Boise, in southwest Idaho.

As with the Meadow Face project, the citizen group’s recommendations have been largely adopted as the Forest Service’s proposal. The proposal is currently undergoing analysis specified by the National Environmental Policy Act.

Other

Another collaborative effort noted in the survey responses was a group working on Idaho roadless areas in the 1980s.

Findings

The workings of these collaborative groups, and the reflections of their participants, are many and varied. Despite the diversity, some common experiences have emerged:

- **Collaborative groups work on a *variety* of Idaho’s important natural resource issues.**

The Clearwater Elk Initiative focuses on declining elk habitat and populations, as well as other wildlife and fish enhancing activities, while the Wood River Valley Winter Recreation Mapping Group addresses snowmobiling and cross-country skiing near Sun Valley. The Stewards of the Nez Perce Forest (Meadow Face) and North Kennedy/Cottonwood

collaborative groups are examining multiple issues including water quality and sedimentation, “forest health” (e.g., restoring healthy, often historic, forest conditions), motorized access, and big-game habitat. The Meadow Face project is also looking at habitat for chinook salmon and other anadromous (ocean-going) fish, as well as resident native fish.

For the Lower Snake River District RAC, issues include river management, hydropower re-licensing in Hells Canyon, rangeland health, and sage grouse habitat. In the Henry’s Fork area, accomplishments include an off-stream cattle water system to help alleviate impacts on area fish, and development of maximum limits for stream pollutants, known as “Total Maximum Daily Loads” (TMDLs).

- **Collaborative groups also deliberate about social and economic issues such as creation of local jobs, types of recreation use, and community well being.**

The Wood River Valley Winter Recreation Group began in an attempt to help solve increasing conflicts between skiers and snowmobile users. But as negotiations progressed, one member recognized that current and future community relationships were also at stake, noting, “We live together. We go to church together. Our children go to school together. What kind of example do we set if we walk away from these problems? What kind of community do we want?”^x

As stewardship contracting projects, the North Kennedy/Cottonwood group and the Stewards of the Nez Perce Forest (Meadow Face) include commercial timber harvest as a way to offset the costs of watershed improvements and other non-commercial activities, under the concept of goods for services.

The Henry’s Fork watershed includes various dams, canals and reservoirs used to irrigate much of the 235,000 acres of farmland in the basin, forming a keystone of the area’s economy.

“What kind of example do we set if we walk away from these problems?”

What kind of community do we want?”

Consequently, the Watershed Council’s co-facilitators include the Fremont-Madison Irrigation District as well as the Henry’s Fork Foundation.

Because big-game hunting remains an important autumn activity for many Idahoans and non-residents and an important contributor to many local economies, the Clearwater Elk Initiative addresses the social aspects of hunting and hunting access, as well as the biological concerns associated with habitat. Likewise, the Lower Snake River District RAC includes livestock grazing and land use planning – both social and economic endeavors – as part of their deliberations.

- **Areas addressed by a collaborative group range from small tributary watersheds to an entire six-million-acre river basin.**

For the Clearwater Elk Initiative, one participant notes that, “We work on a very large scale in order to assess effective changes basin-wide It is the cumulative assessment of all projects and wildfires that make a difference at the scale necessary . . . for wide-ranging species such as elk.” By contrast, a respondent working on a smaller area finds that “If you get much bigger, then you begin to get beyond people’s grasp of a vision. If you get smaller, you tend to micromanage.” Despite the varying sizes of project areas, each group’s participants generally believe that the area’s size is appropriate for their issues and situation.

- **Some of the collaborative efforts strive to reach consensus and provide a set of recommendations to federal land managers. Other serve to advise and assist managers, or help implement activities.**

The Wood River Valley group, along with Stewards of the Nez Perce Forest and the North Kennedy/Cottonwood group, strives to achieve a consensus set of recommendations for Forest Service managers.^{xi} (Because federal laws do not allow decision-making authority to be delegated from land managers, the groups themselves cannot make decisions for the areas involved.)

Participants in other groups or projects see their role as advisors or assistants in planning and carrying out specific activities. These include the Lower Snake River District RAC, the Clearwater Elk Initiative, and those involved with activities in the Henry’s Fork watershed.

- **Collaborative groups typically meet periodically and as needed, with many groups meeting at least monthly. Subgroups are often commissioned to tackle specific issues.**

All of the collaborative groups surveyed use subgroups to work on various issues. The Lower Snake River District RAC uses six subgroups that address off-highway vehicle and transportation management, river management, resource management plans, sage grouse, fire and fuels management, and rangeland health. The Clearwater Elk Initiative uses teams for communication and education, monitoring, and fund raising and future planning. Another team is the Clearwater Elk Recovery Team, the public citizens’ group that advocates largely, but not exclusively, for big game interests. The North Kennedy/Cottonwood and Meadow Face groups each have subgroups for vegetation and access/recreation, while the Meadow Face group adds a third subgroup for watershed issues.

- **Some collaborative groups emerged to address a recent resource issue or controversy. Others formed in response to specific federal or state regulation or guidance.**

The Clearwater Elk Initiative appears to have formed essentially because of the declining elk situation in northern and north-central Idaho. Specifically, the group formed following the sudden, dramatic elk kill in the winter of 1996-1997. Likewise, the Wood River group

emerged to address increased conflicts between burgeoning numbers of winter recreation users in the Sun Valley area.

Other groups seem to have emerged at least in part to address regulation or guidelines. The Forest Service's pilot stewardship contracting program includes collaborative work as a primary concept. The Meadow Face and North Kennedy/Cottonwood projects formed in response to this stewardship initiative, as did in part the Clearwater Elk Recovery Team, even though all three also appear to have resource conflicts that suggest collaborative work. The Secretary of Interior chartered the Lower Snake River District RAC prior to any citizens' effort emerging. The Idaho Legislature added its official charter to the Henry's Fork Watershed Coalition, but after citizens and agency representatives had begun working together to solve problems in the watershed.

Whether they began in response to a set of issues or a specific regulation, it is clear that each group also emerged due to the willingness of individuals or organizations to come forward and participate, often as volunteers. Many heard of the collaborative effort via newspaper articles, letters, and public meetings or "through the grapevine."

- **Many collaborative groups either designate or elect leaders from within the group. The leaders' roles vary from "point person" to "agenda coordinator" to "the 'glue' to continue working through difficult issues."**

Despite differences in the various leaders' roles, many groups see their leader's role as important. For some groups, the leader serves as facilitator, leading meetings and moderating discussions. For others, a facilitator often operates as a *de facto* leader, keeping the group focused, helping them sort through issues, and sometimes conducting exercises to build group relationships and rapport. Participants from the North Kennedy/Cottonwood and Wood River Valley groups use professional facilitators from outside the group, and both groups find the facilitators' role critical to the group's success. Early meetings of the Stewards of the Nez Perce were also professionally facilitated.

- **Decision makers and resource specialists from federal agencies often attend collaborative group meetings and field trips. They typically provide information, assist with technical details, and gather information from the group. Their role is often -- but not always -- seen as positive and helpful.**

One respondent from the Clearwater Elk Initiative notes that decision maker participation has been very important. He sees the decision maker as providing political support, and giving the go ahead to move forward with projects, communications and education. Others view the decision maker's presence as a commitment to the projects and process. Many see the agency's "information and interpretation" role as important and appropriate. Another respondent senses that agency personnel might have had mixed feelings about the value of citizen input, perhaps because collaborative processes are "uncharted waters" for many government organizations.

Some view the decision maker's role as problematic. One respondent feels that an agency decision maker tried to control the collaborative group. Another believes that the agency "seemed to not take any direction from the group and used the

"The USFS is in full paralysis. Even when a tribe, environmentalists, and hunters and timber folks agree, they have tough time implementing."

group as cover if criticized by the public." A third perceives that the agency representative's input conveyed a bias (perhaps inadvertent) towards traditional management activities such as timber harvest and road construction. This individual also believes that research scientists, in addition to agency personnel, could have helped the group better understand some issues.

- **Collaborative groups have learned much about their "partner" federal and/or state agencies.**

Many participants said they have learned a lot about federal processes. One process involves the public involvement and environmental analysis that must be carried out for projects proposed on federal lands, before the agency decision maker makes a final decision on the project. The National Environmental Policy Act and its regulations largely guide this process, which includes determining the proposal's effects on water quality, wildlife, and other resources. Agency regulations implementing this law provide for appeal of the final decision, and litigation if the appeal is not resolved to the appellant's satisfaction.

Some find these processes time-consuming and difficult. One respondent cites NEPA and its appeal regulations, noting that they "... are cumbersome, very long, and allow uninvolved parties to engage late in the process and 'kill' a project or prolong timeframes if they desire." Some believe that Idaho state agencies, which appear to operate with fewer regulations than their federal counterparts, could do a better job of management. One respondent notes, "State agencies can implement decisions quicker, and at less cost."

Others have learned that federal and/or state agencies cannot and perhaps should not solve problems alone. One respondent believes that each agency has biases that preclude solving specific issues, and that "the answer has to come among people who have something at stake coming together and agreeing."

Still others seem to view the agencies in a somewhat more positive light. One participant has discovered "how badly [the agencies] are treated by county, state and federal politics and politicians." Another notes, "Federal and State managers/leaders must balance political realities with science." A third perceives the Forest Service as "less monolithic than I thought, but that all views within the Forest Service are not represented at the table."

- **Some find that nothing in the collaborative process is easier than they expected. Others find that important process steps are not as difficult as anticipated.**

One respondent notes the collaborative effort “. . . is and was hard and long.” Others find that steps such as getting agreement on the problem, setting initial discussion items, or adapting to agency limitations are not as difficult as anticipated. Another respondent cites the overall level of

“Perhaps that many of the negotiators became friends was surprising and pleasant. We had a few beers and a couple of memorable newspaper quotes.”

support by government agencies and interest organizations. Two participants have found that relationships formed more quickly than expected, which increased candor and accelerated development of collaborative ideas.

One respondent has found mutual respect and humor as unexpected outcomes, writing that, “Perhaps that many of the negotiators became friends was surprising and pleasant. We had a few beers and a couple of memorable newspaper quotes.”

- **Most participants find parts of the collaborative process – such as the time and effort involved -- more difficult than they expected.**

Answers to this question vary widely. One respondent notes the large time commitment and travel, as well as his sense that the collaborative group ended up as exclusive, rather than inclusive. Another finds that “getting a project through the development phase” was difficult. Others note the challenge in keeping members equally informed about the issues before them, and dealing with mistrust among those not involved in the collaborative group. Another finds it hard to work on any issue currently under litigation, while still another mentions the challenge of retaining one’s support for a specific position outside the group meetings.

One group member’s responses highlight several potential barriers to effective collaboration. He finds that “everything was harder than I expected.” He believes that it was hard to “introduce science into the debate,” and that the group was unbalanced. He also says that the group’s changing membership made the collaborative workings more difficult and time-consuming, because long-time group members often had to restate positions and interests and explain previously made agreements for new members. This respondent notes the effort needed to keep members of his own organization informed of the group’s progress.

Finally, one respondent found it difficult to accomplish projects within the guidelines of federal laws such as the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Air Act, and the Clean Water Act, as well as a “gridlocked” federal agency.

- **Participants believe their groups brought forward good ideas for the federal and state agencies to consider. Some ideas relate to specific project activities and concepts. Others relate directly to the collaborative process.**

Some believe that specific recommendations are the most valuable product of collaboration. These recommendations include restoring habitat for salmon and steelhead, combining timber management and prescribed fire to create big-game habitat and reduce forest fuels, and setting rangeland health standards. An agency decision maker is impressed with the group’s ideas for off-highway vehicle management, and fire issues.

Still others find value in the breadth of their accomplishments. One notes that a “full range of ecosystem and social recommendations” had been developed, while another cites establishment of “an entire plan for the north Wood River Valley.”

One respondent feels the best ideas are those that were truly developed collaboratively, compared to ideas negotiated by “dealmaking.” Another believes the best idea generated was simply the concept of a group working diligently to produce a set of recommendations. Similarly, one participant finds a “strong will to work together” the most meaningful concept generated by his collaborative group.

However, for one participant, enthusiasm and pride for the group’s ideas has been tempered by frustration, as he sees projects delayed and changed to accommodate recent applicable court decisions. Another participant echoes these thoughts, noting, “I have been involved in 3 other painful collaborative process projects. To date, not one has been successively implemented on the ground.”

“The truly collaborative ideas have come from the group arriving at a similar conclusion after thoughtful discussion.”

- **Collaborative groups use public meetings, personal contacts, e-mail and Web sites, and other tools to communicate with individuals or organizations not directly involved in the group.**

Three of the collaborative efforts, including the Clearwater Elk Initiative, Lower Snake River District RAC, and Henry’s Fork Watershed Council, have established Internet Web sites, as listed in the endnotes of this report. These sites provide a history of the collaborative project, description of current events and project status, and e-mail and telephone contacts. Some information on the Middle-Black, Meadow Face and North Kennedy/Cottonwood projects is

posted on the Clearwater, Nez Perce and Boise National Forest Web sites, respectively.^{xii} In addition, the Stewards of the Nez Perce maintains an Internet mailing list, open to the public. Through this mailing list, subscribers can learn of the group’s agendas, meeting topics, and may participate in on-line discussions. The Wood River Valley Winter Recreation Group does not have a Web site. However, at least two newspaper or newsletter articles on the group and their accomplishments are posted on the Internet.

Collaborative representatives often conduct field tours, speak to community service clubs such as Rotary and Lions groups, or review documents produced by the collaborative group. Many people not directly involved in a collaborative effort are included on the group’s mailing list, receiving meeting minutes and other materials. For example, the Clearwater Elk Initiative has contacts in California, Washington, Oregon, other parts of Idaho, and states beyond the West. The Lower Snake River District RAC includes public input at RAC meetings.

Each collaborative group disseminates information to those outside the collaborative process and many seek additional public input. The groups’ experience with “outside” involvement varies. One participant notes that, “[The public] provides comment on agenda topics and field trips – they provide thought provoking and diverse points of view . . . which broaden discussion.” A representative from a different group finds that, despite the information provided to various groups and individuals, there has been little if any comment received.

Some respondents appear frustrated with persons who observe and criticize the collaborative effort, while refusing to participate. Examples cited include “highly conservative folks” as well as “extreme environmentalists.”

- **The Federal Advisory Committee Act guides the formation of advisory groups for federal-lands projects. This Act was not seen as a challenge or problem for many collaborative groups.**

The Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), enacted in 1972, “. . . embodies two tenets of democratic government: open access and balanced representation.”^{xiii} FACA regulates how federal agencies use public groups to provide the agencies with advice or recommendations. In general, groups and agencies can comply with FACA by assuring that group membership and participation remain open, and that input generated by groups is provided at the behest of the group, rather than solicited by the agency. Conversely, an agency can violate FACA by calling upon or relying on a specific group for advice or recommendations.

“[FACA was] no challenge – just made us more aware that the game must be played fairly.”

Although one participant notes that “FACA is always a concern,” most believe that FACA was not a challenge or problem for their group. FACA seems inapplicable to some members of the Stewards of the Nez Perce and North Kennedy/Cottonwood groups, who note that for

the stewardship projects, the pilot program provides its own set of guidelines. Others speak of the constant effort required to keep the group open to all interested parties, therefore avoiding the prospect or appearance of an exclusive group providing advice to government decision makers. One participant believes that the FACA can be seen as “a friend rather than an enemy.” He notes that FACA “works to preclude many unfair circumstances and thank God for it.” On a different note, one respondent believes that FACA has been used by the federal agencies to thwart collaborative efforts, saying “FACA has been used as a threat by a Forest Supervisor in one stewardship process. FACA has been used by a district ranger to denigrate another collaborative group in (another) stewardship process.”

- **Participants recommend several changes they would make for future collaborative projects.**

Three participants from different groups believe there is little, if anything, they would change if their collaborative process were to begin again. For others, several thoughts emerged, including a sense that a collaborative effort is long and time-consuming, with an uncertain outcome. One respondent reflects:

“I would have prepared public partners better that the process is a very long one with no guarantees of success in the end. As it is, the federal agency has put out tremendous efforts to accomplish a meaningful size project. It has taken much longer than expected. The public partners are getting burned out and are spread too thin . . . Frustration is high with the public and agency partners because last-minute obstructionists can come in and curtail a project that literally took years of hard work and many tax payer dollars to complete.”

At least three respondents call for more balance among group participants. One notes that he would *not* get involved if the collaborative group began again with the same players. Another participant concurs with the need for balance, but finds that efforts to get other interests involved have not worked. Specifically, he believes that “some will not participate in [the] process because they don’t want a face on the enemy, and solutions are not in their organizational interest.”

A few, including an agency representative, note that the agency could have been better prepared for the collaborative process. For example, one participant feels the agency could have been better prepared with field data, and planned for the collaborative process to start at the beginning of a field season. These actions could have allowed participants as much “on the ground” time as desired.

Others call for more structure for their collaborative group. One reflects:

“The only thing that comes to mind would be to have a definite structure for the group to prevent a disgruntled sector from taking over and making the group a non-diverse one-issue one. We originally tried to be a loose knit group to be flexible, but in the end it didn’t have the effect we wanted.”

Another calls for rules linking participants to attendance, feeling that “who shows up gets to recommend.”

Other hindsight thoughts include:

- “Establish process which assures use of a third-party facilitator to run the meetings.”
- “This was not truly a collaborative group. It turned into more of an advocacy group.”
- “I would also suggest that [the agencies] pretty carefully determine which projects they want citizens to invest their limited time in – I would tend to save these time-intensive efforts for ‘big ticket’ projects.”
- “Develop groups/create the opportunity for groups to develop in more rural areas.”
- “. . . I would try and make sure that we had more science in the process . . .”
- “I would insist that the agency come to the process with a variety of viewpoints from within.”
- “. . . Modify NEPA [National Environmental Policy Act], ESA [Endangered Species Act], FACA [Federal Advisory Committee Act], Clean Air, Water [Acts].”
- “I would exclude those people who have an opinion without having a clear stake in the issues.”

Conclusions

Although it is difficult to summarize the variety of reflections and experiences presented above, some conclusions and recommendations emerge:

Idaho collaborative efforts vary as much as the issues and landscapes they address. A “one size fits all” approach is not appropriate, given the individual environmental, social and political factors that each considers. However, those who design collaborative efforts might consider ideas such as using a neutral facilitator, designating a group leader or forming subgroups to address specific issues.

The collaborative groups surveyed vary widely in the acreage considered and the issues addressed, but most respondents appear comfortable with the scope of their particular efforts. This suggests that individual groups should have the flexibility to adopt the operating procedures and design that best suits their needs and situations. In fact, this ability to “self-determine” how and where the group works seems key to a collaborative group’s success.

Several groups learned that using a neutral facilitator is important. Funding for facilitators typically has been limited, but new options have recently emerged. The Institute for Conflict Resolution, located in Tucson, Arizona, provides matching funds up to \$50,000 for agencies procuring the services of a trained and experienced facilitator. This Institute is developing a similar program for non-governmental organizations. The Pinchot Institute for Conservation, which provides assistance to Forest Service pilot stewardship efforts, grants up to \$4000 annually to each stewardship group, for support of collaborative efforts associated with these projects.

Agencies should articulate clearly the challenges presented by current laws and regulations, including the timeframes and complexities involved in environmental analysis.

As several respondents noted, procedures specified by the National Environmental Policy Act and other laws, and the associated agency regulations, are complex and difficult to understand. Nonetheless, agencies should continue and perhaps improve upon the ways in which they explain and illustrate how these laws interact, and in what ways they may affect the collaborative process.

For example, the National Environmental Policy Act and associated agency regulations specify processes for public involvement, appeals and litigation. These processes provide all U.S. citizens opportunity for comment and opposition, because federal lands are managed “in trust” for the American public. By contrast, the Endangered Species Act mandates for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service (the federal agencies that regulate fish and wildlife) an oversight role for other federal agencies, with less emphasis on public involvement. Since these agencies determine if or how an endangered or threatened species will be affected by a project, they can strongly influence the design and outcome of a proposal. To avoid a sense of “surprise” or “betrayed trust,” the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management should clearly articulate to collaborative groups the authorities, responsibilities and potential project modification that can result from required consultation with the regulatory agencies.

It is important for collaborative projects to comply with the processes and studies required by the applicable federal laws. The U.S. Forest Service and BLM can help by bringing especially careful and rigorous environmental analysis to each collaborative project, thereby increasing the chances that a proposed project will successfully withstand appeal or litigation, should either occur.

Careful planning and honest, upfront communication among participants can help reduce the

“I have been involved in 3 other painful collaborative process projects. To date, not one has been successively implemented on the ground.”

time and frustration associated with environmental analysis. However, there appears no easy way to speed up or significantly reduce analysis processes, without changes in law or regulations.

If collaborative efforts are to succeed, we need to find strong incentives, where possible, for bringing participants to the table and keeping them involved.

As noted earlier, one participant believes that some groups or individuals “. . . will not participate in process because they don’t want a face on the enemy, and solutions are not in their organizational interest.” National Environmental Policy Act regulations provide opportunities for comment and involvement by those who are unable or unwilling to participate in

collaborative groups. Consequently, some individuals or groups can and do choose to become involved through one of these alternate routes, perhaps because writing a letter or attending a public meeting is much less time-consuming than participating in a collaborative process, if only from an efficiency standpoint.

If collaborative efforts are to be successful, the issue of “incentives to be at the table” appears to need much more consideration and stronger support than now exists in federal law or current processes. To move this issue forward, perhaps Congress and/or the agencies should consider sponsoring pilot efforts testing different incentives. One respondent has suggested a pilot effort that exempts a collaboratively developed project from the NEPA process. Another participant thought that shortening and simplifying the analysis process might help bring and keep more diverse parties at the table, and might also result in fewer “process steps” that could be appealed or litigated. Another idea is to pursue a pilot collaborative project through the traditional NEPA process, so that other members of the public are consulted and environmental effects are analyzed, but then exempt it from appeals. In short, actual evidence from pilot efforts would provide a “real world” platform from which to more accurately assess what is gained -- and what is lost or traded off -- by participating in collaborative projects.

Agencies, organizations and individuals must begin collaborative efforts with a clear idea of the anticipated time and effort involved in the process. All participants should understand this commitment before the project’s launch. While delays are often unavoidable, all participants should agree to minimize them to the extent possible.

Many participants, including agency representatives, find the collaborative processes to be more lengthy and difficult than expected. The experiences of those who have been “in the trenches” are likely valuable to those considering future collaborative efforts, especially those concerned about the time and effort involved. The duration and difficulty of many collaborative projects are not necessarily “fatal flaws.” However, they should be carefully considered before committing to collaborative participation.

Citizen-involved collaborative efforts on Idaho’s public lands are relatively new and many have yet to realize on-the-ground project accomplishment. To fully evaluate the success of collaborative efforts, we should continue to monitor the groups’ achievements and the consequences of their work.

Collaborative efforts largely remain a grand experiment. Many participants get involved to “make a difference,” whether it’s in the process by which projects are planned; in the ways citizens, organizations and agencies interact; or in the types of projects undertaken and how they are implemented. Participant feedback and reflections are essential in evaluating collaborative success. For example, the U.S. Forest Service recognizes this need and requires reporting on the level of collaboration, and benefits from or obstacles encountered with collaboration, as part of the monitoring of pilot stewardship projects.^{xiv}

Sample questions might include:

- Did participants think the collaborative process was fair?

- Did the collaborative process change the shape of any proposals developed? If so, how?
- Did participants believe collaboration made for a “better” project? If so, how?
- Did Native American tribes participate in collaborative efforts on treaty lands? If so, how did their participation mesh with tribal legal authorities and their “government-to-government” relationship with federal agencies?
- How did any collaborative agreements “become real” in on-the-ground projects? Were there any changes that occurred?

Endnotes

ⁱ “What Do We Mean by Consensus? Some Defining Principles” by Matt McKinney *in*, *Across the Great Divide: Explorations in Collaborative Conservation and the American West*. Philip Brick, Donald Snow and Sarah Van de Wetering, editors. 2001: Island Press, Covelo, CA. p. 35.

ⁱⁱ One project related to the Clearwater Elk Initiative has been identified by the Idaho State Board of Land Commissioners (Land Board) as a pilot project to test “new approaches to federal land management.” The Clearwater Basin Stewardship Collaborative would

“ . . . guide the management of elk recovery efforts by restoring this portion of the Clearwater River basin to ecological goals within the range of historical conditions. One specific goal is to restore a higher percentage of early- and late-successional stages of vegetation than currently exists. The Collaborative Group will include a wide range of stakeholders such as local government, environmental, wildlife advocates, and multiple-use interests. The group will develop annual and five-year plans for managing the project area. The Collaborative Group will involve the public in defining the goals and products expected from the project and in recommending management objectives.” (Source: Breaking the Gridlock: Federal Land Pilot Projects in Idaho – A Report to the Idaho State Board of Land Commissioners by the Federal Lands Task Force Working Group, December 2000.)

The Land Board accepted the Working Group’s report in December 2000, and called for the preparation of draft federal legislation, as well as public comment on the report. During the public comment period, several groups and individuals supported the report. However, others opposed the report, including two Idaho environmental groups -- the Idaho Conservation League and the Wilderness Society. The environmental groups said that the task force “. . . was never representative of all interests and (because) it ignored real natural resource management problems.” The environmental groups also said, “The task force never included representatives from the federal agencies, Indian tribes, non-motorized groups, or independent biologists.” (Source: February 13, 2001 news release by Idaho Conservation League and Wilderness Society, “Conservationists Testify Against Federal Lands Task Force.”)

ⁱⁱⁱ According to the Clearwater Elk Initiative Web site, participating organizations and agencies include the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Clearwater and Nez Perce National Forests, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, University of Idaho, Potlatch Corporation, Idaho Department of Lands, Intermountain Forest Association, and Safari Club International.

^{iv} Several additional stewardship contracting projects have been authorized since the initial set of 28 projects.

^v Stewardship contracting authority was provided in Section 347 of the federal Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act of Fiscal Year (FY) 1999.

^{vi} In August 2000, the Stewards of the Nez Perce Forest included individuals representing Concerned Sportsmen of Idaho, Labor and Woodworker Unions, Idaho Conservation League, Clearwater Elk Recovery Team, Idaho Fish and Game, local mills and timber companies, Nez Perce tribe, and local landowners and business owners.

^{vii} Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15, Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook, in Section 05 (Definitions) defines a proposed action as “a proposal *made by the Forest Service* to authorize, recommend or implement an action to meet a specific purpose and need.” (Italics added)

^{viii} “What Do We Mean by Consensus? Some Defining Principles” by Matt McKinney *in*, *Across the Great Divide: Explorations in Collaborative Conservation and the American West*. Philip Brick, Donald Snow and Sarah Van de Wetering, editors. 2001: Island Press, Covelo, CA. pp. 38-39.

^{ix} Cook, Adena. “Snowmobilers and skiers reach agreement in Sun Valley. In, Trail Tracks newsletter, spring 2001. American Trails, Inc. (<http://www.americantrails.org/resources/ManageMaintain/SunValleySnow.html>)

^x Cook, Adena. “Snowmobilers and skiers reach agreement in Sun Valley. In, Trail Tracks newsletter, spring 2001. American Trails, Inc. (<http://www.americantrails.org/resources/ManageMaintain/SunValleySnow.html>)

^{xi} In late 2001, the charter for the Stewards of the Nez Perce was changed to use Roberts’ Rules of Order, rather than consensus, to guide group decisionmaking. With this change, some group members resigned while new members joined the group.

^{xii} Web sites for the various collaborative groups are as follows:

Clearwater Elk Initiative – <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/clearwater/cei>

Meadow Face Stewardship Project – <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/nezperce>

Henry’s Fork Watershed Council – <http://www.henrysfork.com>

Lower Snake River District Resource Advisory Council – <http://www.id.blm.gov/racs/index>

North Kennedy/Cottonwood Stewardship Project – <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/boise>

^{xiii} “The Federal Advisory Committee Act: What You Need to Know,” by Thomas Brendler *in*, Chronicle of Community, Volume 1, Number 1. Autumn 1996.

^{xiv} Subsection (g) of Section 347 of the Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act of FY 1999 calls for establishment of a multiparty monitoring and evaluation process that assesses the individual stewardship contracts, specifically requesting that the Forest Service report on “the role of local communities in the development of contract plans.” In their annual monitoring reports, stewardship pilots must answer questions such as, “Identify the benefits resulting from or obstacles encountered with increased collaboration,” and “Did citizen group involvement affect project acceptance and success?” (<http://www.pinchot.org/pic/cbf/criteria.pdf>)

Appendix A Survey Methods

In the late summer of 2001, 30 participants from six collaborative groups across Idaho were asked to share thoughts and reflections about the collaborative process in which they have been involved. The six groups were selected to reflect different geographic areas across the state, different sizes of the areas involved, and different issues and participants. However, each group had to have at least one federal partner or decision maker involved, largely because federal agencies are often major participants in Idaho. (Nearly two-thirds of the land base is federally managed, chiefly by the U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management.)

The six collaborative efforts selected were:

- The Clearwater Elk Initiative in north and north-central Idaho;
- Stewards of the Nez Perce Forest in north-central Idaho;
- The Henry's Fork Watershed Council in eastern Idaho and western Wyoming;
- The Wood River Valley Winter Recreation Mapping Group in central Idaho;
- The Lower Snake River District Resource Advisory Council in southwest Idaho; and
- The North Kennedy/Cottonwood Stewardship Group in southwest Idaho.

A short-answer survey of approximately 20 open-ended questions was prepared, and reviewed by Dr. John Freemuth, Senior Fellow at the Andrus Center for Public Policy. A cover letter was also prepared, explaining the purpose of the survey and assuring participants that their responses would be confidential. The cover letter and survey questions are included as Attachment 1 of this appendix.

A total of four to six representatives from each group were identified as those to be surveyed. These individuals were selected, based on:

- Their known affiliation with a collaborative group, as expressed through media stories or word of mouth; and
- A desire to include the perspectives of local citizens and those of industry, user-group, and environmental-group representatives.

During late July and early August, 2001, the 30 participants to be surveyed were contacted in person, or via telephone or e-mail, to explain the survey and encourage participation. The surveys were sent by first-class mail on August 17, noting that surveys could be completed in writing, via e-mail, or in person or over the telephone. Those who had not responded by September 20 were e-mailed with a request for participation. By October 8, eighteen participants (60 percent) had completed the survey. Thank you postcards or e-mails were sent in late October to all who participated.

In early January 2002, the final draft report was sent to all who responded to the survey, for their review and comment. This input was used to prepare the final report in February 2002.

Attachment 1 to Appendix A

Cover Letter and Survey Questions

August 17, 2001

«Title» «First_Name» «Last_Name»
«Job_Title»
«Organization»
«Street_Address»
«City», «State» «Zip_Code»

Dear «Title» «Last_Name»:

The Andrus Center for Public Policy, located at Boise State University (BSU), strives to advance education, scholarship, information and understanding about public policy issues, and to focus on environment and natural resources. Former four-term Idaho governor and Secretary of Interior Cecil Andrus founded the nonprofit and nonpartisan center in 1995. (More information on the Andrus Center is located on the Internet at www.andruscenter.org.) In 2001, the Andrus Center received a grant to study locally based decision-making and collaboration on natural resource issues in Idaho. We are trying to develop a better understanding of the interests, opportunities, successes, and needs relating to community-based collaboration in our state. We hope you will take part in our research so that we can learn more about needs in your own community. The results of our study will be made available to all the individuals that participated, as well as to the citizens of Idaho.

The word “collaboration” (loosely defined as a group of people working together to achieve a common purpose and share resources) is being heard more and more around the west. We’d like to examine the issue in Idaho with the goal of providing communities, citizens, interest groups, and government agencies with more information on what Idahoans believe regarding the use and effectiveness of collaboration to solve difficult issues in our communities. This project will provide people around the state with a better sense of what’s working and what’s not in Idaho collaboration, whether or not more tools to facilitate this process are needed and how you’d like to have them made available to you. The Center’s Senior Fellow John Freemuth is directing the project, with research by Visiting Fellow Cyd Weiland, and BSU graduate student Lauren McLean.

Because you have participated in a collaborative effort, we are asking for your help with our project. We are very interested in your thoughts and reflections about the collaborative project in which you participated, and we ask that you take a few minutes to complete the attached short survey. Over the last few weeks, Cyd Weiland has contacted you by telephone, voice mail or in person, to request your participation and find out how you would like to complete the survey (i.e., via hard copy or e-mail, by telephone, or in person). Your responses are confidential, and you will receive a draft copy of the study this fall for your review before a report is finalized. If you have questions, please contact Cyd at (208) 345-8906 or by e-mail at cweiland@att.net.

We thank you in advance for your thoughts, reflections, and most of all, your time in helping us with this project. We know this is a busy time of year, and we sincerely value your help.

(Ms.) Cyd Weiland
Visiting Fellow
Andrus Center for Public Policy

John Freemuth, PhD
Senior Fellow
Andrus Center for Public Policy

Enclosure

Survey: Collaboration on Public Lands in Idaho

Name: _____

Date: _____

Name of Collaborative Project You Participated In: _____

Please use a separate sheet of paper, if needed to complete your answer.

Please return in the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided, or mail to: Andrus Center for Public Policy, Box 852, Boise, ID 83701, ATTN: Cyd Weiland. Contact Cyd at (208) 345-8906 or e-mail cweiland@att.net if you have questions!

1. Describe briefly the issues and geographic area that your group is involved with.
2. What is the role of the collaborative group?
3. How is your group structured? In other words, do you always meet as one body, or do you have subgroups working on specific issues?
4. How often does your group meet?
5. How did your collaborative effort get started?

6. Does your group have a designated leader? If so, what his/her role? How important is it to the group's functioning?

7. Does a federal-agency decision maker, such as a District Ranger, Forest Supervisor, or BLM Area Manager, participate in your group? If so, how? Is this person's role helpful to the group?

8. What (if anything) in the collaborative process has been easier than you expected?

9. What (if anything) in the collaborative process has been more difficult than you expected?

10. From your perspective, what have been the best ideas your group has brought forward for the federal and/or state agencies (for example, the Forest Service, the BLM, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, etc.) to consider?

11. What has your group learned about the federal and/or state agencies involved?

12. At what geographic scale is your group working? Does it feel too big, too small, or just right?

Getting Together in Idaho: A Survey of Six Collaborative Efforts on Public Lands

Cyd Weiland
2001 Visiting Fellow
Andrus Center for Public Policy
February 2002

Summary

Collaborative groups – loosely defined as groups of people working together to achieve a common purpose and share resources – are emerging in Idaho and around the West. Collaborative groups often form where there are intense and complex conflicts over natural resource management. On federal lands in Idaho, collaborative partners try to work *among* themselves, and *within* the federal laws and decision-making authorities held by agency managers.

In the late summer of 2001, 18 participants from six collaborative groups across Idaho shared thoughts and reflections about the collaborative process in which they have been involved. The six groups included the Clearwater Elk Initiative and related efforts (including the Middle-Black stewardship project), the Stewards of the Nez Perce Forest (Meadow Face), the Henry's Fork Watershed Council, the Wood River Valley Winter Recreation Mapping Group, the Lower Snake River District Resource Advisory Council (RAC), and the North Kennedy/Cottonwood Stewardship Group.

Based on the participants' responses, it is clear that Idaho collaborative efforts vary as much as the issues and landscapes they address. Some of the collaborative efforts strive to reach consensus and provide a set of recommendations to help federal land managers. Others serve to advise and assist managers, or help implement activities. Many participants have learned much about their "partner" federal and/or state agencies. Most find parts of the collaborative process – such as the time and effort involved – more difficult than they expected, and some face frustrations such as unanticipated delays and unbalanced group representation. Despite the challenges, many find reward in the willingness and persistence of their groups in working together to seek agreement.

Collaborative efforts on Idaho's public lands are relatively new and many have yet to realize on-the-ground project accomplishment. To fully evaluate the success of collaborative efforts, we should continue to monitor the groups' achievements and the consequences of their work. At the same time, we can learn much from what these groups have already experienced. For example, we need to find strong incentives, where possible, to bring collaborative participants to the table and keep them involved. In addition, agencies, organizations and individuals must begin collaborative efforts with a clear idea of the anticipated time and effort involved in the process. Also, agencies should clearly articulate the challenges presented by current laws and regulations, including the timeframes and complexities involved in environmental analysis.