



The Role of Communities in Stewardship Contracting

FY 2016 Programmatic Monitoring Report to the USDA Forest Service

June 2017



I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why this report was completed

The USDA Forest Service manages 193 million acres of federal public forests and grasslands. Stewardship contracting is an important land management tool used by the Forest Service to steward these lands and advance the agency's mission. Part of that mission explicitly incorporates reference to the benefits of land stewardship to the public. One way the public engages with the Forest Service in managing these lands is through individual land management projects, which are increasingly implemented using stewardship contracts and agreements. To better understand how the public engages with the Forest Service in these projects, this report studies 15 recent stewardship contracting projects to examine interactions between the public and the Forest Service throughout the lifespan of these projects. This report highlights successes and challenges to greater public engagement in stewardship contracts and agreements.

What we found

1. How are non-agency stakeholders engaging with the Forest Service through the development and implementation of stewardship contracting projects?

Non-agency stakeholders participate in many ways from early project conceptualization, to implementation, and monitoring of project implementation and associated outcomes. There is no standardized approach that non-agency stakeholders use to engage in projects and strategies and interactions vary. Five of the case studies feature structured collaborative groups, three of which are Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration (CFLR) projects. Planning oriented engagement in the other case studies resemble traditional public participation (e.g. agency develops the project, has a public meeting and/or field trip, takes comments, and may or may not integrate the ideas of non-agency stakeholders).

2. How do relationships between the Forest Service and non-agency stakeholders change as a result of their engagement in stewardship contracting projects?

In stewardship contracting projects relationships often deepen due to people coming together to work toward improving natural resources on the ground. For the most part, consistent engagement over several years and multiple projects maintains or strengthens existing relationships. In some instances new relationships had to be formed to move projects forward.

Staff transitions at the Forest Service have an important influence on the quality of relationships among people involved in stewardship contracting. Five of the case study projects were negatively impacted by agency turnover at the line officer level. Turnover negatively impacts relationships that are important to implementation and as a consequence, delay projects. In some instances non-agency participants routinely help new agency staff continue the work of their predecessors.

In addition to turnover, the quality of relationships is affected by the transparency, openness and communication by agency staff. The willingness and ability of agency personnel to communicate

the requirements and implications of agency rules and processes to non-agency stakeholders is a critical factor. From the perspective of non-agency participants, effectively engaging and offering useful contributions may depend on their Forest Service partners providing regular communications throughout the project. The ability to contribute also depends on their capacity to engage over what can be several years from initial conceptualization through implementation.

3. What project phases do participants feel are most important for non-agency stakeholder involvement?

Project participants believed that the most important stage for non-agency stakeholders to participate is in early planning (i.e. pre-NEPA), to help define project objectives and activities. Many thought greater participation at all stages is needed. Agency and non-agency respondents alike emphasize that early engagement helps to avoid later problems. Stewardship contractors expressed that their early involvement is important for ensuring that design features match contractor capacity and expertise.

Most non-agency stakeholders were satisfied with their engagement. Projects in which non-agency respondents were unsatisfied with their level of involvement were those that were less collaborative in nature, for instance, those in which the agency developed the project in-house. Several challenges to non-agency engagement were identified including: transparent communications by the agency, available funding (both agency and non-agency), time commitments for collaborative work, and capacity for collaborative approaches among the agency and external groups.

4. How is the diversity of participation related to perceptions of project success?

The vast majority of respondents overwhelmingly attribute success to whether projects were implemented, and not to larger measures of change in ecological or socio-economic conditions. There were a few notable exceptions to this, in which individuals questioned whether projects have been successful—either because it is too early to quantify outcomes, or because projects were downscaled too much, often against the recommendations of some collaborators.

5. How does the involvement of non-agency stakeholders influences the size of projects and their complexity?

Case study projects that are more collaborative increased in complexity and scale. In others, the scale decreased in order to better align with the capacity of contractors. Non-agency collaborative involvement tends to make projects more complex in terms of both interpersonal communications required, and the design and inclusion of more diverse activities in projects. Not all non-agency stakeholders are pushing for more integrated projects. In a few projects, timber contractors, forest industry, and line officers communicate that simple projects resembling traditional timber sales are more desirable. This was not a universally held opinion among these stakeholder groups.



Stewardship Contracting Case Studies:
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Cover photo credit: Members of the Ochoco Forest Collaborative discuss forest restoration on the Ochoco National Forest. Credit: Marcus Kauffman CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

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II. INTRODUCTION

Background and overview on stewardship contracting

The USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) manages 193 million acres of federal forests and grasslands. Over the last decade Stewardship End-Result Contracting (stewardship contracting) has become an important tool for natural resource management and ecosystem restoration on the National Forest System (NFS). As one measure of increased use, over the past ten years stewardship contracting acreage has nearly tripled, and now consistently provides 25-30% of NFS timber volume sold. The 2014 Farm Bill permanently authorized the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to use stewardship contracting authorities for:

- road and trail maintenance or obliteration
- maintenance of soil productivity
- habitat and fisheries management
- prescribed fires
- vegetation removal
- watershed restoration
- control of invasive plants

Stewardship contracting is believed to offer efficiencies and flexibility in meeting these multiple management objectives. These efficiencies and flexibility stem from eight authorities (Table 1).

Table 1. Stewardship contracting authorities.

Best-value contracting	Requires consideration of other criteria in addition to cost (e.g. prior performance, experience, skills, local business) when selecting awards.
Multi-year contracting	Allows for contracts and agreements to be up to 10 years in length.
Designation by prescription	A method of designating trees to be removed or retained without marking them as specified in a prescription. This method is more complex than Designation by Description.
Designation by description	A method of designating trees to be removed or retained without marking them according to a specific description.
Less than full and open competition	Allows for contracts to be awarded on a sole-source basis in appropriate circumstances.
Trading goods for services	The ability to apply the value of timber or other forest products removed as an offset against the cost of services received.
Retention of receipts	The ability to keep revenues (timber receipts) generated by a project when product value exceeds the service work performed and then apply the funds to service work that does not necessarily need to occur within the original project area.
Widening the range of eligible contractors	Allows non-traditional bidders (non-profits, local governmental bodies, etc.) to compete for and be awarded stewardship contracts. Also allows for the agency to enter into stewardship agreements.

Why this report was completed

With the Agricultural Act of 2014 (P.L. 113–79) Congress permanently authorized the USDA Forest Service and the DOI Bureau of Land Management to use stewardship contracting authorities. A component of this legislation requires that the Forest Service annually monitor the role of communities in the development and implementation of stewardship agreements and contracts. This report fulfills this Congressional mandate, examining how the Forest Service engages the public in the various phases of stewardship contracting projects. Additionally, the USFS Handbook stipulates that “*collaboration must be a part of stewardship contracting project planning and continue throughout the life of the project.*” This report informs the agency about how this directive is playing out in the field.

Since the early 2000s, as the use of stewardship contracting authorities has expanded, the range of participating non-agency (i.e. non-Forest Service) stakeholders has grown. Local communities still participate in many projects, yet they tend not to be the primary non-agency stakeholder driving most projects forward today. Rather, most local community involvement now occurs through collaborative work involving numerous non-agency stakeholders including community members and representatives (e.g. county commissioners), or by commenting individually during the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process associated with projects. Still, as evidenced in these case studies, some local communities do take an active role designing or even implementing individual projects.

III. CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

Project selection

The selection of case study projects was based on a simple principle, representing as many project types and combinations of agency-to-non-agency stakeholder interactions as possible within a limited cross-section of projects. In consultation with the Forest Management staff in the Forest Service Washington Office, the project team¹ developed case study project selection criteria to ensure a mix of projects were selected, including:

- A.** Projects represent a broad geographic distribution
- B.** Projects are of small scale (fewer than 1,000 acres) or of a larger scale (more than 1,000 acres)
- C.** Projects are either a stewardship agreement or a stewardship contract
- D.** Projects operate with a standing collaborative group(s) or without a standing collaborative group(s)

With these selection criteria the Pinchot Institute worked with Forest Service Regional Stewardship Contracting Coordinators to categorize projects in their regions active from 2012 – 2015 (see Table 2).

¹ The project team includes representatives from the Pinchot Institute for Conservation, Michigan State University, and the Watershed Research and Training Center.

Five regions were defined:

- **Northern Rockies:** ID, MT, ND, SD, WY.
- **Central Rockies/Southwest:** AZ, CO, KS, NE, NM, NV, OK, TX, UT.
- **Pacific Coast:** AK, CA, HI, OR, WA.
- **Southeast:** AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, VA.
- **Northeast/Lake States:** IL, IN, ME, MI, MN, MO, NH, NY, OH, PA, VT, WI, WV.

Interviews focused on project scope and history, collaborative interactions and community engagement, and overall project outcomes and lessons learned. Interviewees were identified using a snowball sampling methodology to build out the pool of informants aligning with the social networks involved in each project. This was done in a manner that is consistent with IRB human subjects review protocols using an Office of Management and Budget approved interview protocol (see section VI. appendix).

Project review began with interviewing the Forest Service representative, followed by the non-agency stakeholders that were identified by the first agency respondent. Project participants and their roles were verified in each successive interview to map participation. A minimum of three interviews were conducted for each project except in a few instances where fewer people were identified as being involved or if participants were unresponsive to multiple interview requests. Multiple interviews were used to ground truth and triangulate interview data. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

Table 2. Summary of selected case study projects and participants interviewed.

Project name	Region	Agreement or contract	Project size (large is > 1,000 acres)	Collaborative group present?	Stewardship contracting considered for use project prior to NEPA	Number of stewardship projects respondents have been involved with
Lolo	Northern Rockies	IRTC	Large	Yes	Yes	Agency = 5,6 non-agency = 20,2
Nez Perce	Northern Rockies	IRTC	Large	Yes	No	Agency = >20 non-agency = 3
Black Hills	Northern Rockies	Agreement	Small	No	No	Agency = 1 non-agency = 1
Pike-San Isabel	Southwest	IRSC	Small	No	Yes	Agency = 20 non-agency =5,>10
Santa Fe	Southwest	IRSC	Large	Yes	Yes	Agency = >10 non-agency =2,5,3,1
Dixie	Southwest	Agreement	Small	No	Yes	Agency = 5 non-agency =16,12
Lassen	Pacific Coast	IRSC	Small	No	No	Agency = 1 non-agency =40
Shasta-Trinity	Pacific Coast	IRTC	Large	Yes	Yes	Agency = 4 non-agency =2,3,6
Okanogan-Wenatchee	Pacific Coast	IRTC	Large	No	No	Agency = 3,5 non-agency =4,12, 2,>10,2
Talladega	Southeast	Agreement	Small	No	Yes	Agency =8 non-agency =20
Davy Crockett	Southeast	IRTC	Large	No	No	Agency = 5 non-agency =1,7
Chattahoochee	Southeast	IRTC	Small	No	No	Agency = 3 non-agency =2
Chippewa	Northeast	IRTC	Small	No	No	Agency = 15 non-agency =2
Huron-Manistee	Northeast	IRTC	Small	No	No	Agency = 6 non-agency =2,6
Superior	Northeast	IRTC	Large	No	No	Agency = 4 non-agency =7,1

IV. RESULTS: ANSWERS TO FIVE QUESTIONS

While these findings should not be generalized beyond the 15 case study projects, themes identified in the examination of these projects are useful in grounding inferences made about how the Forest Service works with non-agency stakeholders at the field level. To maintain the confidentiality of informants and the integrity of the information they provided, the projects and their participants are not directly identified.

1. How are non-agency stakeholders, including local communities and tribes, engaging in the development and implementation of stewardship contracting projects from project genesis through contracting?

Non-agency stakeholders are engaging in many different and diverse ways from early project conceptualization to implementation and monitoring of project outcomes. There is no standardized approach that stakeholders use to engage in projects. Moreover, stakeholders involved in these projects have different ideas of what constitutes the lifespan of a project. Some consider early stage project conceptualization (i.e. pre-NEPA scoping) to be an integral part of projects, while others engaging could not trace the activity they are implementing back to a NEPA document or stewardship contracting project. The 15 case studies examined are diverse and they offer a study in stakeholder engagement (see Table 3).

The most common types of non-agency stakeholder engagement evident in these 15 projects include: early planning/project conception, project planning, participating in NEPA scoping and comments, providing supplemental funding, providing technical expertise, providing local knowledge and continuity, participating in bid workshops, implementation activities, monitoring, and providing management expertise.

Non-agency participants may be in a structured or semi-structured collaborative group or they may participate individually. In some projects non-stakeholder engagement looks very much like traditional public participation (e.g. agency develops the project, has a public meeting and/or field trip, takes comments through NEPA scoping, and may or may not integrate external ideas). While some projects operate with “traditional” collaborative groups it is by no means the norm. In the Dixie, Davy Crockett, and Chattahoochee projects stakeholder engagement has some elements of a collaborative group process, (e.g. a Resource Advisory Committee voting on priority projects), while lacking other collaborative group characteristics.

Table 3. Primary stakeholder engagement pathways/strategies used in case study project.
(agency and non-agency respondents)

	Collaborative group	Part of a CFLR project	Directly engaging individual non-agency stakeholders on technical matters	Traditional NEPA public engagement	Directly engaging potential contractors / hosting bid workshops	Directly engaging with an agreement holder
Okanogan-Wenatchee	x	x				
Shasta-Trinity	x					
Lassen					x	
Nez Perce	x					
Black Hills						x
Lolo	x	x				
Santa Fe	x	x				
Dixie			x			x
Pike-San Isabel			x	x		
Chattahoochee			x	x		
Davy Crockett			x	x		
Talladega			x			x
Chippewa			x	x		
Huron-Manistee			x	x		
Superior					x	

Providing supplemental project funding is an important way stakeholders engage. In the Shasta-Trinity project a local non-profit helped the Forest Service acquire USDA Joint Chiefs' Initiative funding to support the project. Likewise, three projects involved non-agency collaborators bringing in outside funding directly as a match component of a Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) project.

Outside financial resources were also provided in three stewardship agreements, two with conservation organizations and one with a county government. In the Pike-San Isabel project a water utility significantly augmented funding levels for an Integrated Resource Service Contract (IRSC) to support implementation and monitoring. A non-agency participant in this project said, *"One good phrase I've heard...is 'all hands, all lands' and that's because you get to leverage one another's funds, but then also work on multiple different parcels to achieve a larger area of treatment."*

While not universal, most agency personnel interviewed acknowledge and praise their non-agency peers for leveraging resources. *"They help develop cost-effective strategies for implementing projects. I think that's invaluable, quite honestly.... And they....have a big pool of resources they can use and a big pool of expertise,"* said an agency representative.

Funding contributed by non-agency stakeholders is not without conditions. In many instances, these resources are applied to projects that non-agency stakeholders want to see implemented. In these projects additional funding also coincided with additional monitoring requirements for determining the cost-effectiveness of implementation.

Additionally, non-agency stakeholders engage to provide technical and local knowledge, as well as consultation on conservation priorities, (e.g. endangered species conservation). Agency participants may seek this out, especially in places characterized by long-standing relationships. For instance, non-agency respondents explained that after walking the project area with them, Forest Service staff altered treatments in the Pike-San Isabel, Okanogan-Wenatchee, Davy Crockett, Talladega, Superior, and Lassen projects, based on non-agency stakeholder input. In these projects this occurred outside of traditional collaborative processes, e.g. field tours, seeking feedback from potential contractors during project development workshops, and in one-on-one discussions with external silvicultural specialists supplementing agency capacity.

While the agency is often receptive to suggestions from non-agency stakeholders, several respondents noted instances when more involvement was desired but not granted. For example, some participants on the Shasta-Trinity project, express that their recommendations are not fully integrated into project design. Another non-agency stakeholder in the Northern Rockies region said, *“The Forest we are working in, unlike some other Forests you hear about, they are very hesitant to allow someone on the NEPA team, and we have asked about that a couple times....We think it would help provide a better outcome if we were involved in all steps of the process.”* In a few case study projects, agency and non-agency participant understanding of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) appeared to constrain willingness to engage in collaborative work.

2. Have relationships between the Forest Service and non-agency stakeholders changed as a result of their engagement in stewardship contracting projects? If so, how? What factors contribute to the quality of these relationships?

In these case studies relationships often deepen due to people coming together to work toward common goals. More often than not, when respondents state that their relationships did not change as a result of a single project, they explain that their positive relationships are the result of working together over a long period of time, and that a single project does not change this. As explained by a non-agency participant in the Lolo National Forest project, relationships were *“excellent to begin with, and this goes for both Forest Service and the other partners that were involved in this project had been working together on a variety of issues and projects routinely for years, it was a culture of collaboration that the local Forest Service and other organizations fostered.”*

Table 4. Have relationships changed as a result of agency to non-agency stakeholders engaging each other through project work?
(number of agency and non-agency responses)

	Yes	No
Okanogan-Wenatchee	6	1
Shasta-Trinity	1	3
Lassen		2
Nez Perce	1	
Black Hills	2	
Lolo	3	1
Santa Fe	5	
Dixie	2	
Pike-San Isabel	3	
Chattahoochee		2
Davy Crockett	1	2
Talladega	2	
Chippewa	1	
Huron-Manistee		2
Superior	2	1

In these projects consistent engagement either maintains or strengthens existing relationships, for the most part. Positive relationships grow and even improve as a result of interacting in these projects. In some instances new relationships had to be formed and for the most part these new relationships are positive in these cases.

In some instances non-agency stakeholders play the role of diplomat, interfacing between a range of interests, finding points of agreement, and opportunities to move projects forward. Forest Service staff actively seek out such entities, as occurred in the Lolo, Santa Fe, Davy Crockett, and Talladega projects. Non-agency participants also recognize the need for these go-between entities. A non-agency stakeholder on the Pacific Coast said, *“Expecting the Forest Service to know what they ought to be collaborating about and initiating these conversation I think is unrealistic, so I think having a partner or facilitator who understands what the collaborative opportunities are is important....to make sure that opportunities aren’t missed.”*

These diplomats often bring experience and knowledge about Forest Service rules and processes and can play significant roles in explaining agency processes and rules in a friendly and effective manner. Such individuals can be critical within projects and collaborative networks. As one such person in the southeast noted, *“I have 30 years of experience interfacing with the Forest Service....it really takes a lot of fairly technical knowledge of the laws....that can be somewhat of a limiting factor as far as the general public.”*

In terms of factors that contribute to the quality of relationships, a major factor is staffing changes at the District Ranger level. At least a third of these case study projects (5 of 15) were negatively impacted by agency turnover at the line officer level. High turnover rates hamper

relationships and delay projects. In several projects new working relationships needed to be built and trust gained.

In the Talladega project the primary non-agency stakeholder began working with a particular Ranger District because they saw in the District Ranger a like-minded collaborator who could help them achieve their conservation goals. However, when this Ranger moved to a different position the person who took over was less open to external perspectives. When this new Ranger was asked about what the most important roles for non-agency participants to play are, they replied, *“whether or not their mission statement, or their directives that they’re trying to achieve...are meld-able into our desired future conditions.”*

In addition to turnover, the quality of relationships is affected by the openness of agency staff in explaining their decision-making process and why decisions are made. The quality of relationships is also significantly influenced by communication pathways within these projects, and the willingness and ability to communicate agency rules and processes to non-agency stakeholders. A considerable number of agency respondents suggest that one of their greatest challenges with their relationships with people external to the Forest Service is the public’s lack of experience and understanding of agency procedures. This is a source of frustration for many. For example, an agency respondent relayed their largest challenge in engaging non-agency stakeholders is, *“their [non-agency stakeholders] lack of knowledge of Forest Service policy and direction.”*

Managing expectations and clearly explaining the project development process is a major job function for many agency staff. Others resist this or lack the skills and training for effective collaboration. *“We kind of think we already know what the right thing to do is....but I don’t think we have a lot of good internal know-how for how to do that collaboration process,”* asserted a District Ranger in the Northeast region. A representative from a regional non-profit in the Southeast described this inconsistent knowledge of collaboration, explaining that an *“Unevenness of prioritizing communications and relationship development within the culture of the agency is very challenging for non-agency stakeholders and disrupts progress.”* Other non-agency participants praised their agency counterparts for patience and commitment to open and consistent communications.

Given that projects can take many years from initial concept through implementation, involving non-agency participants and enabling them to offer useful contributions may depend on their Forest Service partners providing regular communications throughout the project. Reflecting on communications failures in their projects, non-agency participants in the Okanogan-Wenatchee, Santa Fe, and Shasta-Trinity projects emphasized the need for the agency to be *“clear and open with their objectives,”* and to communicate why decisions are made, especially if they deviate from agreements or decisions that were made through collaborative decision-making earlier on in the lifespan of the project (e.g. pre-NEPA).

3. What parts/steps of the selected case study projects do the agency and non-agency stakeholders feel are most important for non-agency stakeholders to be involved in? For the selected case study projects, are agency and non-agency stakeholders satisfied with the level of engagement in these stages?

As shown in Table 5, project participants believed that the most important project stage for non-agency stakeholders to participate in is the early planning to define the project objectives and to help design project activities. Non-agency participants interviewed repeatedly voiced that it is a waste of their time to engage in projects if the decision is predetermined and/or if the agency is unwilling or unable to make changes. Agency and non-agency respondents alike also communicate that early engagement helps to avoid problems later on. Contractors also expressed that their early involvement is important so that project design features match contractor capacity and expertise.

Table 5. Which kind of involvement do you believe are most important for engagement of non-agency stakeholders? (Number of agency and non-agency responses. Respondents could state more than one)

	Early involvement (pre-NEPA)	NEPA scoping	Post-NEPA project planning	Implementation	Monitoring	Capacity/expertise	Funding
Okanogan-Wenatchee	4	3					
Shasta-Trinity	4	4	2				
Lassen			2				
Nez Perce	1	1					
Black Hills			2	2			
Lolo	4	4	1	1	1		
Santa Fe	5	5	2	2	3	1	1
Dixie		1		1			1
Pike-San Isabel	1	1			2		
Chattahoochee	2	2				1	
Davy Crockett	2	2					
Talladega	2	2				1	
Chippewa	1	1					
Huron-Manistee	1	1				1	
Superior	2	2	2				

Table 6. Are you satisfied with non-agency involvement?
(agency and non-agency responses)

	Yes	No
Okanogan- Wenatchee	2	3
Shasta-Trinity	2	2
Lassen	2	
Nez Perce	2	
Black Hills	2	
Lolo	4	
Santa Fe	4	
Dixie	2	
Pike-San Isabel	3	
Chattahoochee	2	
Davy Crockett	2	
Talladega	2	
Chippewa		1
Huron-Manistee	1	1
Superior	2	1

Most non-agency stakeholders express that they are satisfied with their involvement. Those projects where non-agency respondents were unsatisfied with their level of involvement tend to be less collaborative in nature, i.e. when the agency develops the projects in-house. Participants in these projects also tended to identify early involvement as the most important phase for non-agency engagement. For the Chippewa project, when asked if they are satisfied with non-agency engagement, the line officer, new to the Forest, said:

No, I think we could have done better. There was really no collaboration externally with this proposal. It was, some of the collaboration was considered during the NEPA process, but you know to really meet the intention of stewardship contracting we ought to be collaborating with partners outside of that NEPA process. That didn't happen with this one.

Several challenges to non-agency engagement were identified by project participants including: issues with transparency in decision-making, issues with funding, time requirements, and capacity for collaboration. With regards to transparency, clear and consistent communications are needed to keep participants informed and engaged. In some projects, (e.g. Shasta-Trinity and Santa Fe) the non-agency input was given through well designed and facilitated collaborative processes pre-NEPA. However, after long NEPA analyses offering little communication and opportunities for engagement, the projects that ultimately hit the ground were not what non-agency participants worked to design. This frustrates and angers participants.

When asked what could improve this situation, a non-agency participant in the Shasta-Trinity project suggested:

Recurring and consistent communications, whether that is through meetings or memos. Consistency. I think on the Forest Service's behalf clear communications of constraints and lessons they are learning along the way, so basically just open communication about what it is they are dealing with that's helping inform their decisions they have to make absent of collaborative process....honest recurrent and consistent communications pre-NEPA, during NEPA, and in the contracting phase need to be communicated.

As for funding, non-agency participants suggest that it can be a challenge for them to participate in collaborative group processes unless they are paid to do so. This shapes who can participate and correspondingly it shapes projects. Because collaboration involves multiple meetings, participation can be skewed towards those who can afford to be there, e.g. professionals from NGO's, government agencies, and retired individuals. Others who would like to participate, such as local community members with day jobs, can find it difficult to do so. Still, in the collaborative group projects investigated, all had some form of community representation.

Two issues related to federal funding also arose. Agency budgets are often uncertain which can lead to project delays or even cancellations. As communicated by an agency respondent in the Chattahoochee project:

Sometimes it's hard to hold up our end of the bargain because we have uncertainties with our funding. The last four or five years has been especially challenging as far as the amount of funding that we can expect in any given year. So sometimes we have to push things back or put things off until another fiscal year or have to back out of things altogether. So that makes it especially difficult to maintain those relationships and accomplish the work.

In these case study projects, the most commonly identified challenge to non-agency engagement in stewardship contracting is simply the time required to do so. Fulfilling NEPA requirements alone took multiple years in some of these projects. The ability to participate is asynchronous among agency and non-agency participants. An agency representative from the Northern Rockies recognizes this, suggesting that *"if we don't get things done we are going to drive a wedge between folks and people are going to start leaving the table at that point."*

The last major challenge identified by participants in these case study projects deals with the agency's capacity to engage organizations and individuals in collaboration. Non-agency and agency participants alike commented that they felt that while they would have liked a more collaborative effort, agency staff do not have the skillset to make that happen. A non-agency stakeholder active in the Santa Fe project offered their opinion, saying *"I think a lot of the people that come up through the agency, just came up at a different time and a different paradigm that doesn't really fit with the way they're trying to do things now. I think we're going through some of those growing pains right now."*

A non-agency participant in the Pike-San Isabel project explained that, “*Forest Service capacity to engage with outside stakeholders, their staffing seems to continue to dwindle and their responsibilities seem to go up so engaging with outside folks is difficult for them to do.*” The District Ranger in the Chattahoochee project said, “*We have challenges internally to implementing projects....capacity issues, where we have not been able to fill critical positions in a timely manner. We have moved more towards zoning employees across units, which is causing us to have to do more with less.*”

4. Non-agency stakeholder participation in stewardship contracting projects is diverse, taking many forms (e.g. robust collaborative groups, working relationships between individuals, etc.) How is this diversity of participation related to perceptions of project success by Forest Service and non-agency stakeholders? Are there differences in how Forest Service and non-agency stakeholders interact based on the form of non-agency stakeholder participation?

Diversity of engagement (see Table 5) and perceptions of project success (see Table 7) do not appear to be related. Respondents overwhelmingly relate success to whether project activities are implemented on the ground, and not to metrics of change in ecological or socio-economic conditions. There was one notable exception to this, one person completing monitoring in the Okanogan-Wenatchee project said they did not know whether the project is successful because monitoring of long-term outcomes is still ongoing. Interestingly, this project was one of the only in which participants also thought that the involvement of non-agency stakeholders did not improve decision making about the project.

Table 7. Is the project a success?
(agency and non-agency responses)

	Yes	No	Don't know
Okanogan-Wenatchee	3		1
Shasta-Trinity	2	1	1
Lassen	2		
Nez Perce	1		
Black Hills	2		
Lolo	5		
Santa Fe	5		
Dixie	2		
Pike-San Isabel	3		
Chattahoochee	2		
Davy Crockett	3		
Talladega	2		
Chippewa	1		
Huron-Manistee	2		
Superior	3		

The individual engaged in the Shasta-Trinity project who claimed it is not successful (Table 7) was also hyper focused on longer-term outcomes that did not materialize; the development of a landscape-scale restoration project and an opportunity for private investment in small log processing infrastructure. This individual did however concede that the project is an improvement in some ways, saying *“it is more acres than they have gotten through NEPA in a long time. They had the successful stewardship contract that was purchased and will get implemented. We helped them raise the money to implement the rest of it....So, it is better than our baseline but did it realize our potential, not even close.”*

There are certainly differences in how the Forest Service and non-agency participants interact based on the forms of engagement. Not all collaborative processes and working relationships are structured the same (see Table 3). Moreover, beyond the structure of engagement, individual attitudes and behavior largely dictate how well people work together in these projects. In some instances, it is not apparent that agency staff value the opinions and contributions of non-agency participants. Likewise, non-agency stakeholders complain about the effectiveness of their agency counterparts. Time is a factor in this.

In some places, the length of engagement deepens relationships, in others, when projects just drag on, lengthy engagement just erodes relationships. Participants identified benchmark achievements that partners can point to as being important for maintaining and improving relationships, and often acknowledge that it is not any one single project that leads to productive working relationships, but rather a series of successes, each building upon the last. As communicated by a non-agency participant in the Lolo project:

This was probably almost a model of keeping entities involved, doing good collaboration. I think probably what we learned is that you have to keep that communication up all the way through the process and you also have to moderate expectations of how much and when collaboration is going to occur.

Another determinant of how stakeholders interact is the project phase in which they come together. If participants are engaged later in the process they have less opportunity to influence the scope and scale of projects. In these projects this was particularly true where stakeholders are engaged after NEPA and the purpose and need of the project is well defined. Participants also expressed variable opinions on whether their engagement in NEPA scoping was sufficient to advance their interests.

Early involvement prior to NEPA (see Table 3) is viewed as the most important stage for non-agency stakeholders to engage. This is true for both agency and non-agency respondents. When asked what is the greatest challenge to their involvement, a non-agency participant from the Pacific Coast region said, *“not being engaged early enough to have a good feel for the direction the Forest Service is headed....and not being able to provide meaningful comments to influence the project....part of the problem is the lateness that the Forest Service decides to involve people.”*

Engaging early strengthens working relationships as project ideas are formed and stakeholders can work with agency staff to incorporate project elements they desire. For the agency, early

stakeholder engagement in project planning and analysis can lead to more efficient NEPA review. *“I think the sooner you can bring those viewpoints forward and develop your package, you're gonna take a lot less time going through that NEPA,”* said an agency respondent in the Pacific Coast region. An agency participant in the Nez Perce project reiterated these points saying, *“Early communication, the earlier the better and then providing sufficient information, field trips. Any time you can engage them in the field to get on the ground and the discussion definitely makes it better. Obviously, the opposite is if you're not doing those things then you're not helping, you're hurting.”*

In some of these projects, early stakeholder engagement and continuity in communications coming from the agency are foundational to project success in very practical terms. For example, in the case of a project in the Northern Rockies that saw litigation, project partners involved in deep collaboration early on felt obligated to defend the project in court filing amicus briefs in support of the project, which appears to have made a difference in moving the project forward. A non-agency participant involved with this project explains this in their response to questions about what is the most important way to involve non-agency stakeholders:

To engage those experts and those interested, potential collaborators early in the process. Not bringing...a fully planned project for review, but to bring them in during those planning stages and you build better projects...You build buy-in, partnerships from folks who really have a stake in the outcome. So that early planning stage and then, in this case, what made this unique is because so many of the partners were invested in the success of this project. They were willing to really stick their necks out during the public review process and the litigation that followed. They were able to really support the Forest Service through that later stage and hopefully ensure that the project was implemented despite those challenges.

5. Is involvement of non-agency stakeholders, including local communities and Tribes, influencing the scale (size) and scope (complexity of activities) of stewardship projects?

In projects that are more collaborative, both project scale (e.g. thinking at broader landscape level) and complexity seem to increase (see Tables 8 and 9). In a few projects scale decreased, a result of right-sizing projects through collaboration. In projects that were very much agency-driven, non-agency stakeholder engagement had no influence on size or complexity. In a few projects, participants also extended the concept of project complexity beyond project design elements to include the complexity of relationships and communications. Bringing in more voices can make interpersonal aspects of project development and implementation more complicated.

Table 8. Did the involvement of non-agency stakeholders influence the scale/size of the project?
(agency and non-agency responses)

	Yes	No	I don't know
Okanogan-Wenatchee	2	2	
Shasta-Trinity		4	
Lassen		2	
Nez Perce	1		
Black Hills	2		
Lolo	1	4	
Santa Fe	4		1
Dixie	1	1	
Pike-San Isabel	2	1	
Chattahoochee	2		
Davy Crockett		2	
Talladega		2	
Chippewa		1	
Huron-Manistee	1	1	
Superior	1	1	1

Table 9. Did the involvement of non-agency stakeholders influence the scope/complexity of the project?
(agency and non-agency responses)

	Yes	No	I don't know
Okanogan-Wenatchee	2	2	
Shasta-Trinity		1	2
Lassen		2	
Nez Perce	1		
Black Hills		2	
Lolo	4	1	
Santa Fe	5		
Dixie	1	1	
Pike-San Isabel	3		
Chattahoochee	2		
Davy Crockett	1	1	
Talladega	1	1	
Chippewa	1		
Huron-Manistee		2	
Superior	2		1

In one project, the scale decreased between early planning and the final NEPA from 30,000 acres to 4,500 acres, and in this instance non-agency participants felt the Forest Service did a poor job managing external relationships and communications concerning why this decision was made. In another instance, an opportunity was identified for the Forest Service to work closer within a collaborative group to define what “increasing the pace and scale of restoration” means on the ground. A non-agency stakeholder commented, “*If we knew what the pace and scale was for the Forest Service we could say where we can be effective and where we can’t be effective.*”

Not all non-agency stakeholders are pushing for more integrated projects. In a few timber-oriented projects, contractors, forest industry, and line officers communicated that simple timber sales and Integrated Resource Timber Contracts (IRTCs) are more desirable, or that IRTC be structured in ways that allow timber contractors to be isolated from the service portion of projects. An agency respondent said, “*They [industry] are definitely not interested in the diversity of things we could do with stewardship contracting, because their business model is not flexible enough for some things.*” However, this was not a universally held opinion among contractors and agency staff interviewed and is somewhat dependent on the structure of local industry, wood markets, forest characteristics, and included service work.

V. CASE STUDY PROJECT SUMMARIES

The following project descriptions are based on the results of interviews conducted with project participants, and to a lesser extent on project documentation that is available on the internet, which was used as an additional way of verifying interview data.

Pacific Coast Region

Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, Washington.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This is a large integrated resource timber contract (IRTC) seeking landscape-scale outcomes tied to a CFLR project. Project objectives as identified by respondents include: increasing forest resilience in a multi-ownership landscape, reducing hazardous fuels, promoting the development of late-successional forest habitats, putting up “*a timber sale or stewardship contract by working with the collaborative,*” and improving local economies and job opportunities. Overall, the project is largely viewed as a success by agency and non-agency respondents.

INVOLVEMENT OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders outside of the Forest Service include a tribal nation, two state agencies, two non-profits, two federal agencies who were consulted during NEPA for ESA issues, and two companies from forest industry. Most non-agency stakeholders were involved in NEPA scoping and reviewing the proposed alternatives, in post-NEPA project planning, and monitoring. A few non-agency stakeholders participated earlier to help develop the broad purpose and need for the project at the landscape level. Some expressed frustration with how broad the objectives were early on and with being brought in at a later stage.

Even though this is part of a CFLR project which by definition is supposed to include collaboration, interviewees suggest that there was not significant involvement of non-agency stakeholders in the design of NEPA alternatives or even in the tacit identification of a proposed alternative. Rather, the Forest Service designed these and shared them after the fact. Yet, early involvement of external stakeholders in project planning and design is cited by Forest Service project participants as being critical to project success and improving the efficiency of the NEPA process.

Despite this acknowledgement, non-agency participants expressed that the greatest challenge in the project, besides agency personnel turnover, was, “*not being engaged early enough to have a good feel for the direction the Forest Service is headed....and not being able to provide meaningful comments to influence the project....part of the problem is the lateness that the Forest Service decides to involve people and just the seemingly lack of interest of the Forest Service wanting to change any of the projects.*”

In this project, late non-agency involvement also impacted the rate of success. The Forest Service had a hard time initially attracting bidders for part of the project area. Interviewees express that this may be due to how it was packaged and requirements for helicopter logging. A state agency forester working on state land nearby suggested that he positively contributed to reshaping the scope of the project with recommendations to unit layout and packaging of implementation activities in a manner that facilitated the contract.

RELATIONSHIPS OF AGENCY AND NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

Almost all participants expressed that relationships changed mostly for the better as a result of their participation in this project. On the negative side, agency turnover affected agency-to-non-agency relationships and project progress. When leadership left, all those communications and trust that had been established suffered.

“It's just there's a lot of turnover in the Forest Service and sometimes, the folks that start the collaboratives on these projects are not necessarily the folks that end up with it. There needs to be a real conscious commitment to continue those relationships and that there is a good pass off when players from the Forest Service change.” Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, non-agency participant

EFFECTS OF RELATIONSHIPS ON THE SCOPE AND SCALE OF THE PROJECT

There was disagreement over whether the project grew or shrank in size. A non-agency stakeholder said, *“I think they started out rather big and the thing shrunk down....at least 30%, if not more.”* An agency respondent felt that the project did not increase in scale due to it being constrained by environmental factors (e.g. ESA considerations) whereas, two non-agency respondents suggest that it increased in size due to implementation activities across boundaries. This speaks to the variance that exists in terms of how different people view what constitutes “the project.” For some it is a landscape level effort, such as a CFLR project, for others it is something smaller, such as a single contract. A representative from a state agency stated, *“Some of our lands are adjacent to Forest Service lands. There is a certain amount of osmosis between what we're doing on our lands and what they do and vice versa.”*

As for changes in scope or in the project's complexity, two non-agency participants believed that it grew more complex due to all the additional communication that needed to occur during project design—because of multiple organizations engaged and due to staffing transitions, but two also expressed that the scope did not change. Another respondent claimed that the harvesting systems grew less complex, which they viewed as being for the better, with some of the more expensive approaches, cable systems, and helicopter yarding, being removed.

Shasta-Trinity National Forest, California.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This project seeks to increase the structural complexity and species diversity of tree plantations established from the 1960s – 1980s, characterized by agency and non-agency participants alike

as having been “abandoned” over the last few decades. The purpose of thinning these stands is to improve forest health, productivity, and resilience in densely stocked plantations susceptible to drought, disease, insect infestation, and uncharacteristic wildfire at a landscape scale. Additional goals are to move these stands toward more natural forest conditions and accelerate development of characteristics of older forests. Overall, the project is largely viewed as a success by agency and non-agency respondents because while mid-stream, it has already accomplished more work than has been accomplished on the Forest in quite some time.

In regard to the project design, non-agency participants also pushed for social and economic objectives, specifically, creating a steady supply of small diameter logs and a long-term contract that can entice investment in wood processing to increase the financial viability of restoration projects. After the purpose and need was defined through a collaborative process facilitated by a local non-governmental organization, a programmatic approach to the NEPA analysis was applied to analyze more than 30,000 acres of plantations. This NEPA process lasted nearly five years. The major turning point for the project came in Endangered Species Act consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Marine Fisheries Service. These agencies were uncomfortable with the programmatic approach and requested more site-specific analysis. Forest Service personnel worked with these agencies and elected to reduce the size of the analysis to approximately 20% of its original size. Now operational after nearly a decade in development, stewardship contracting was a consideration for this project long before NEPA analysis. Implementation is taking place on fewer than 1,000 acres.

INVOLVEMENT OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

This Forest has a long history of conflict characterized by consistent appeals and litigation. In some ways this project represents the first attempt at changing this dynamic by using collaboration. Beginning close to a decade ago; industry, environmental groups, conservation organizations, and local advocates of forest restoration began working with the Forest Service to conceptualize a large campaign to improve conditions within the Forest’s plantations. Through this initial collaboration, the programmatic approach gained momentum, NEPA commenced and collaborative work ceased. A non-agency participant involved in the initial collaborative effort that defined the scope, purpose, and need for the landscape-scale effort relayed that:

Once it went into that box, the NEPA box...it really became a Forest Service project....there really wasn’t any more collaborative work with those original collaborators. Then [a new collaborative group] comes on the scene in 2011-2012 and by then the project was reduced in size and further developed in NEPA. The [new collaborative group] never submitted formal comments or participated in scoping.

All non-agency respondents felt their contributions improved decision making but report dissatisfaction with how the Forest Service communicated during the NEPA process. Some non-agency participants expressed that they tried to contribute constructive comments during NEPA public engagement but that ultimately these suggestions were ignored, which in their opinion was to the detriment of the project. One participant expressed that the Forest Service

did not analyze the use of mechanical treatments on a significant portion of the acres analyzed through NEPA, negatively impacting project economics and the ability to use prescribed fire. To one non-agency stakeholder, this equated to functionally taking two years' supply of small-diameter trees off the table and not meeting the purpose and need they originally developed through a collaborative process that included the Forest Service.

RELATIONSHIPS OF AGENCY AND NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

For non-agency stakeholders involved in the original collaborative effort that envisioned a much larger project, social and economic goals were a priority. One participant interviewed suggested, *“the original goal was really to put enough NEPA shelf stock out there in small wood thinning to then be able to create a 10-year stewardship contract that could help put new infrastructure in...that really didn't come to pass, when the NEPA got scaled back and the timelines really lagged...the opportunity basically evaporated.”* Agency participants recognize that scaling down the project disappointed their non-agency counterparts, suggesting, *“I know that by going forward with a smaller project than what had been originally envisioned, people were disappointed. But it was the best could do at the time.”* Factors that led to this outcome include the length of time from the original idea to NEPA decision and the lack of transparency about decision making along the way.

The project as originally conceived would have been significantly larger than the Shasta Trinity National Forest had been able to implement in quite some time, and even at a dramatically reduced scale it is still bigger than usual. However, for some stakeholders who had successfully secured grant funds to implement the project, the scale of the NEPA and the structure of the implementation actions did not meet their own objectives. Nor did they feel that they could influence the agency at key decision points in the project, specifically NEPA and post-NEPA project design, or even that their contributions were valued.

Lack of clear communications hurt relationships of early collaborators but non-agency collaborators more recently engaged expressed optimism that the Forest Service would eventually grow a culture of collaboration on this Forest as the swell of public involvement grows. Some non-agency participants offered suggestions for things the agency can do to improve collaborative relationships: involving people prior to scoping and maintaining clear and consistent communications throughout the project, especially during extensive NEPA analysis.

EFFECTS OF RELATIONSHIPS ON THE SCOPE AND SCALE OF THE PROJECT

All of the individuals interviewed for this project expressed that the non-agency stakeholder involvement did not influence the size or scale of the project. Non-agency stakeholders perceive that the Forest Service decision to reduce the size of the project hinged on wanting to avoid *“dealing with cumulative impacts so that they wouldn't cross any thresholds of concern, so that it would be easier to get through [Endangered Species Act] consultation.”* At the time, this was never clearly communicated to those non-agency stakeholders who were involved early to envision a larger project and they were left feeling that the project was not a success because it *“held so much promise and was squandered so miserably.”*

Lassen National Forest, California.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This project is a fire salvage harvest under 1,000 acres along 20 miles of road in an area popular with the public. The Forest Service had offered it as a timber sale but the project went no bid “two or three times” so it was repackaged as an integrated resource service contract (IRSC). Overall, this stewardship contract is viewed as a success by agency and non-agency respondents.

INVOLVEMENT OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

Non-agency participants included several forest product companies, nearby private landowners, and the contractor. According to the Forest Service, forest industry helped them design the project post-NEPA by providing technical advice and feedback to Forest Service personnel attempting to package a program of work that would encourage bids. As explained by an agency representative, this consisted of “*getting input on how we can make the project work, and then getting their input on operations and how to better package the project.*” This was done in bid workshops and field tours within the project area.

Agency representatives admit that the involvement of non-agency persons was very limited, as the NEPA analysis was already complete and because, “*it was pretty straightforward in what we wanted to accomplish....so involvement I don't think was as needed,*” said the agency representative interviewed. This can be contrasted with what a non-agency stakeholder said, “*I don't think that even when you write the letter and give the information....I think that's a technicality of the NEPA. I don't think they pay a whole lot attention to what people say. They have an idea of what they want.*”

RELATIONSHIPS OF AGENCY AND NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

The agency reports that the involvement of the industry in post-NEPA project planning resulted in an improved package of work. The contractors also suggest that they helped the Forest Service save significant resources because they accomplished the work for less than what was initially expected.

When asked about the most challenging aspects of engaging non-agency stakeholders, the agency representative said, “*once we got started on the project....that was when more of the issues arrived, the way we packaged it. And I guess that if we were to do it again, which I hope we never do, but if we had to do this project again, some of the trials and tribulations that we ran across during that project implementation, I would definitely bring those upfront when we took the folks on the ground on the field trip, explain things a little more clearly.*”

EFFECTS OF RELATIONSHIPS ON THE SCOPE AND SCALE OF THE PROJECT

Non-agency participants in this project did not change the scope or scale, but did affect how the activities were packaged.

Northern Rockies Region

Nez Perce National Forest, Idaho.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This project is more than 1,000 acres and was nearly 10 years in the making. Objectives include: fuels reduction, vegetation management, watershed restoration, habitat improvement, road decommissioning, and recreational considerations. The use of stewardship contracting was not explicitly considered at the early stages of project planning. Overall, the project is largely viewed as a success by agency and non-agency respondents.

INVOLVEMENT OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

Primary non-agency stakeholders are a group of motorized recreation access advocates and a collaborative group focused on a single large watershed. Participation from these two groups consisted of NEPA scoping and multiple field tours of the project area. As projects on this Forest move to implementation these partners are usually significantly less involved.

RELATIONSHIPS OF AGENCY AND NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

The collaborative group was in its early development when the project started and by all accounts their interactions and communications with the Forest Service were strengthened. For instance, more regular communication helped equalize understanding of agency jargon and policies, allowing for more constructive communications.

A Forest Service project participant noted that while collaboration has strengthened how they work with external stakeholders in scoping projects, the decision authority for much of what the agency does resides solely within the Forest Service. *“Things can't be delegated off or even influenced [pause] they can be influenced, but the ultimate decision in some of the implementation things are ours, and we have to own that and they need to understand that.”*

EFFECTS OF RELATIONSHIPS ON THE SCOPE AND SCALE OF THE PROJECT

An agency representative involved in this project suggested, *“non-agency participants made the line officer and the ID team aware of their objectives to have a large and integrated project,”* suggesting that stakeholders external to the agency pushed for a larger project that included some of their objectives and this indeed transpired.

Black Hills National Forest, South Dakota.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This project is the first under a 10-year master stewardship agreement between a county government and the Forest Service. Stewardship agreements are a new thing for both parties. The project spans National Forest and county roads. The primary project objective as articulated by the Forest Service representative is to *“facilitate this relationship that we have*

with the county,” around implementing work adjacent to roads related to areas of common interest; weed management and hazardous fuels, to improve public and firefighter safety. A representative of the county cites additional project objectives: create a fuel break along key egress roads in the Black Hills, opening the canopy to allow more snow melt along the roads in the winter time to decrease required maintenance by the county, and to reduce wildlife and automobile collisions by opening up visual corridors.

The stewardship agreement was instituted to formalize the working relationship, to delineate a program of work, and facilitate fiscal efficiency. The project involves removing hazardous trees from a stretch of road. Overall, the project is largely viewed as a success by agency and non-agency respondents.

INVOLVEMENT OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

A natural resource professional from the county worked with the Forest Service to identify appropriate weed management techniques and to coordinate administrative activities between the agency and the county. According to the Forest Service representative for the project, *“this road lent itself to our first kind of a test the waters type project.”* County Commissioners were involved in establishing the master stewardship agreement, but to a lesser degree in the day-to-day implementation work associated with this supplemental project implemented under the master agreement.

The county point of contact has helped shape the project with additional technical knowledge in weed management and by administering the bid process for subcontractors implementing the timber removal and weed management. The Forest Service representative suggests that the administrative support helped move the project along significantly quicker.

RELATIONSHIPS OF AGENCY AND NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

The NEPA analysis was completed by the Forest Service prior to the agreement being developed, and the county was not involved in that part of the project. Forest Service representatives were looking for a straight-forward project to partner with the county on so the decision was made by the agency to work in a place where NEPA was complete and where timber production is a secondary objective. Thus pre-NEPA planning really was not a facet of this partnership.

The agency approached the county with the idea for the project, through *“cursory conversations”* focused on a common objective and began to draft a master agreement based on these conversations. The agreement was initially drafted by the Forest Service and the final agreement based on mutual revisions and legal review. As the agency representative explains, *“we conceived that idea, and pitched it to them, and then they bought in, and that's how it happened.”* On the side of the county, one individual in particular pushed for the County Commissioners to pursue the stewardship agreement.

As the project progressed the Forest Service and main contact at the county have worked more closely together and the relationship grew with more frequent interactions. The Forest Service hosted numerous field trips to the project site with significant public interest. This engagement

has increased the number of individuals interested in the project. Going forward, project participants anticipate that additional projects coming forth from this master agreement will involve more interests in project planning, including wildfire agencies and private landowners within this fragmented ownership landscape.

EFFECTS OF RELATIONSHIPS ON THE SCOPE AND SCALE OF THE PROJECT

The project grew in size as a result of the involvement of the county but did not increase in complexity.

Lolo National Forest, Montana.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This approximately 2,000 acre Integrated Resource Timber Contract (IRTC) is part of a CFLR project, which itself is part of a much larger landscape conservation strategy in the Northern Rockies. The main objectives of this project are to restore habitat for threatened and endangered species—Canadian lynx, grizzly bear, bull trout, and other wildlife species—to reduce road density, and to reduce hazardous fuels near an area with dispersed homes. From initial concept development on to litigation and implementation the project has been ongoing for nearly a decade. Overall, the project is largely viewed as a success by agency and non-agency respondents.

INVOLVEMENT OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

This project has taken place in an area where Forest Service staff engaged a diversity of the public early and often. Agency staff leads express that the best time to bring external stakeholders into the project is early in the concept phase prior to the detailed development and analysis of NEPA alternatives which is believed to primarily be an agency responsibility.

A preferred method of engagement was field tours and several were conducted at the start to help stakeholders visualize proposed activities. Site visits were accompanied by collaborative process meetings driven forward by a collaborative group operating Forest-wide. As the project completes scheduled activities, field tours are bringing people back out to these sites.

Forest Service representatives acknowledge that this type of early engagement improved decision making about the project, suggesting that *“because they were at the table, they brought that [knowledge of the local area and the landscape context] into the project design. And as we developed resource protection measures, we were really acknowledging that longer term plan of how management of the smaller piece of the landscape fit into the bigger landscape picture.”*

The collaborative group is the primary non-agency stakeholder, comprised of loggers, sawmills, conservation organizations, local community members, academic researchers, and staff from state and federal agencies. According to Forest Service staff on the NEPA ID team for this project area, rather than being involved in detailed project design, the primary non-agency

collaborators were largely involved “*more project concept, project location, and project design. Not necessarily into the details of designing what actually occurred under the project.*” Other non-agency stakeholders were involved in the regulatory review process, e.g. Endangered Species Act consultations.

The collaborative process used for this project is directly linked to those processes used across the greater CFLR project. Much of the early collaborative engagement on this stewardship project focused on the application of forest restoration concepts established for all of western Montana in a manner intended to achieve landscape-scale objectives of improved habitat quality and connectivity, as well as improved forest health and resilience. Due to a fiscal connection to the massive 10-year CFLR project, non-agency stakeholders evaluated this individual project based on its tie back to the landscape and collaborative objectives of the CFLR project. Describing their involvement in project conceptual design and resource allocation, one non-agency participant described their role as:

Looking at the project to see, ‘Is the Forest Service providing a good outreach-are they collaborative with the group assembling that, are they just telling us what they want to do, or are they asking us what we think it should look like?’ And that’s really the whole CFLR program is to try to help move toward that collaborative model as opposed to just the communication model.

Another non-agency respondent described their role as being that of diplomat between the Forest Service and various non-agency partners, suggesting, “*a lot of what we do to help the Forest Service is try to bring more people to the table... we try to be very friendly and welcoming.*” A Forest Service representative recognized the value in this, “*that’s how I think non-agency stakeholders can be most beneficial to us; recognizing where community values are; recognizing where there’s zones of agreement and where the priorities on landscape should be for forest management.*” In this project, these strategies for meeting the varied expectations of the diversity of interested stakeholder, did not always work.

As this stewardship contract involves a commercial timber harvest component within an important area for wildlife, not every stakeholder supported the project. Despite the endorsement of state and federal wildlife biologists, some environmental groups questioned whether a commercial timber harvest was an appropriate mechanism to achieve habitat goals. Some of these stakeholders expressed feeling that they had not been engaged effectively, in part because the process was so lengthy and meetings logistically difficult for them to participate in. Others observed that these groups did not regularly attend the field tours. Given the varied positions on some of the more central, yet divisive elements of the project, some participants expressed doubt that any level of engagement would have resolved contested views that surfaced as the project progressed.

Disagreement around the objectives and need for this project emerged and this eventually materialized into a legal dispute led by “serial litigants” not affiliated with the collaborative process. Litigation is still ongoing with a number of environmental groups filing suit and legal

briefs in an attempt to stop the project. On the opposite side, most members of the collaborative group and several other organizations filed briefs in support of the project, including two national conservation groups, the county government, forest industry, and state agencies. Litigants contend that the initial NEPA analysis failed to address cumulative impacts to threatened and endangered wildlife and that the Forest Service did not follow all the necessary procedures related to the National Forest Management Act and Endangered Species Act. Other non-agency participants doubt these claims and express disappointment that groups resorted to these tactics, but say that it has only galvanized their resolve to work on projects like this one.

During the legal review, one official member of the collaborative group broke off to side with the litigants. An agency participant reflected on this saying:

I think they [the break off group] felt that they did not participate enough in the collaborative process that they should've been more involved in the design and the details of the project and therefore, at the end did not support it as much....It shows that, even though you think you have consensus and their support, there's always a potential for these individual interests to move away from the consensus table.

RELATIONSHIPS OF AGENCY AND NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

In western Montana, a common vision and desire for landscape-scale conservation appears to be driving people to work together on individual projects. In this one, the commitment to work together was propelled forward in the use of a regionally defined set of restoration principles as a means to framing project objectives and design. The funding from the CFLR program is recognized as an important element of keeping people at the table, because they see the potential for their goals to be accomplished.

Others less philosophically aligned view a trend in collaborative governance as a threat to their interests and in this project this resulted in resorting to strategies to slow this momentum down. Many project participants identified relationships between the agency and the external stakeholders as hinging entirely on effective communications. These communications sometimes happen more effectively through middlemen organizations and sometimes the use of this strategy limits relationships from developing. Participants identified the main challenge to building relationships is the need to constantly keep open and consistent communications going throughout the lifespan of the project. As one participant said, consistent communications between the agency and external partners “*offers a chance to, when you do have a departure, a chance to talk it through before you go too far. Like into litigation.*” Some identified that it is difficult for volunteers to participate on a regular basis.

EFFECTS OF RELATIONSHIPS ON THE SCOPE AND SCALE OF THE PROJECT

The project size was defined by the partners early on. All participants interviewed about this project said that it was made more complex by the relationships involved. More people engaging meant that communications were required to be broad, open, and consistent. The nature of the management objectives, which themselves were driven in part by collaborative

engagement by many stakeholders made this a complex project. Both agency and non-agency participants pointed to the difficulty in maintaining communications and relationships when people involved have varying interests, expectations, and levels of education. Just finding a common lexicon is a challenge.

Southwest Region

Santa Fe National Forest, New Mexico.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This is a 10-year Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantity Integrated Resource Service Contract (IDIQ IRSC) focused on thinning tens of thousands of acres and reintegrating fire into a 100,000 acre landscape. The idea for this project was driven forward by the Forest, a national conservation organization, and another federal land management unit adjacent to the Forest. These partners were spurred on by trends in declining forest health and resilience and several large high-severity stand-replacing wildfires that have occurred within the southwest U.S. over the last decade. Overall, opinions are mixed on whether or not the project is viewed as a success.

The main objective is to restore the fire regime in the predominantly ponderosa pine forest. Related objectives include watershed improvements, fish habitat enhancements, restoring aspen stands, and decommissioning more than 100 miles of roads. One participant described the objectives succinctly as, "*To make the forest and watershed more resilient to wildfire, drought, and climate change.*" The long-term IDIQ IRSC structure was intended in part to help stimulate new investment in small diameter log utilization, which has been all but non-existent in the area.

INVOLVEMENT OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

As part of a CFLR project a large collaborative group having over 20 entities represented is driving this project forward. Membership includes national and regional conservation organizations, a tribal nation, federal land management agencies, federal scientific agencies, state natural resource agencies, the forest industry, environmental groups, and academia. Each group came with their individual interests, expectations, and expertise—road decommissioning, fish habitat enhancements, returning fire to the landscape, economic opportunities, and more. The main phases of this project that this group has been involved in include scoping, planning, implementation, and monitoring. Monitoring of ecological and socioeconomic attributes is a large component, as collaborators seek to institutionalize adaptive forest management within this landscape.

Planning for the stewardship contract coincided with the start of the 10-year CFLR project, a significant portion of which needed to go through a NEPA analysis covering a very large area. This analysis took four years to complete and much of the collaborative engagement in this

stewardship project concerned the pre-NEPA project framing and NEPA scoping. Other areas of non-agency engagement include implementation activities and monitoring, the latter two of which have more recently become a primary focus of many non-agency stakeholders. Due to the diversity and depth of involvement, a number of non-agency stakeholders also bring significant funding and in-kind resources to help implement and monitor the project.

When asked whether the involvement of non-agency stakeholders resulted in improved decision making about the project one non-agency participant remarked, *“well, I think, maybe if there was a different interpretation of FACA, the Collaborative, and NEPA, the Collaborative could have maybe helped design a project that was accomplished faster....and, with less heartburn by everyone....And I understand the delicate balance that line officers have to make, that they're not in violation of FACA, but I think that several things could've been done different.”* This same person told of their experience working with another federal agency through NEPA on another federal ownership adjacent to the National Forest project. The goal was to accomplish NEPA simultaneously to facilitate seamless cross boundary implementation, but the Forest Service's NEPA took longer.

RELATIONSHIPS OF AGENCY AND NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

Over the course of this project, changes in local agency leadership affected relationships with non-agency stakeholders. A non-agency participant explained:

“So the proposal period was very well facilitated, and they gathered lots of input, and there was a week of meetings, they were largely consensus-building meetings. And that was really good. There was a change of leadership right when the project was awarded at Sante Fe National Forest, and the project changed a little bit. The previous leadership, I think, wanted to be more of a meet at the table kind of member, then when that change of leadership happened, the new leadership, which is now, and that new leadership is ending, but the new leadership, I think, wanted to be leading the project more, and have Collaborative along for the ride, is my observation.”

The trust and working relationships that had been built up over several years had to be rebuilt with a new individual. While the new line officer expresses a willingness to collaborate and an understanding of how to do so, the fact that new trust relationships had to be established appears to have impacted working relationships. Everyone interviewed for this project acknowledges this, even the agency person in question. Non-agency participants are now on the cusp of needing to build relationships with a third agency lead as the Forest Service is about to go through another staffing transition.

Not only are relationships impacted, but these transitions affected the workflow from planning to implementation. For instance, after the NEPA was approved the first task order was not the sort of activity that most non-agency stakeholders identified as a top priority through collaborative discussions with the previous line officer.

EFFECTS OF RELATIONSHIPS ON THE SCOPE AND SCALE OF THE PROJECT

This project was driven to be a very large cross-boundary project in part because non-agency stakeholders wanted it this way. External partners came together for the CFLR proposal and this has carried through NEPA on to implementation. *“I think when you involve all of these people you have to go large-scale. I mean if you go small scale some of these people are going to drop out.... [non-agency engagement] definitely influences the complexity because everyone comes with their different focus and this ended up being a complex and large-scale EIS because of that,”* said an Agency participant. Non-agency participants explained that their participation expanded the project to include meadows, soil erosion, and road decommissioning.

Dixie National Forest, Utah.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This project is a stewardship agreement on more than 1,000 acres with a wildlife conservation organization. Other stakeholders include a watershed restoration program helping to fund the project. Project objectives include forest health and regeneration in aspen, ponderosa pine, and mixed conifer forest, and also reducing surface and ladder fuels. Overall, the project is largely viewed as a success by agency and non-agency respondents.

INVOLVEMENT OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

This project does not have an extensive collaborative process associated with it. Rather, individual entities have defined roles and reasons for coming together to leverage resources. County Commissioners supported the project and commented on NEPA, which *“helped with public perception.”* The watershed restoration program evaluated the project for funding relative to other priorities and provided funding and organized field tours of the project area that attracted a lot of interest regionally. A Forest Service staff member explained, *“They put a panel together. The panel annually reviews proposals submitted by the various partners. The panel votes and ranks those proposals and funds those ones that score the highest.”*

The wildlife conservation organization that holds the agreement was involved in developing silvicultural prescriptions, mechanisms for fencing aspen, project implementation, and monitoring. The agency acknowledges that, *“they came up with some cost-efficient approaches to keep the costs down, but to get the work done.”* The agreement holder was interested in this area because it is a priority area nationally for the game species they work to conserve.

RELATIONSHIPS OF AGENCY AND NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

The Forest Service is but one entity participating in the watershed restoration funding pool, so in some respects other entities participating in this funding pool help decide how federal and state resources are to be prioritized in projects. The agency person expressed sincere appreciation for the perspective, expertise, and resources their non-agency partners brought into the project, suggesting that these groups made the implementation tasks and implementation strategies more cost-effective.

EFFECTS OF RELATIONSHIPS ON THE SCOPE AND SCALE OF THE PROJECT

Agency personnel do not feel that the project scope or scale was affected by non-agency involvement. However, a non-agency respondent felt the project became more complex and grew in size due to non-agency engagement because the watershed restoration initiative brought resources and priorities into the project that might not have otherwise occurred.

Pike-San Isabel National Forest, Colorado.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This project is more than 700 acres and its objectives are to reduce the risk of high severity fire occurring in a municipal drinking water source watershed for Denver, Colorado by removing hazardous fuels. The project also intends to reduce fire threats to a community. Partners pulled together following a large severe fire which had the potential to significantly impact Denver's water supply. Overall, the project is largely viewed as a success by agency and non-agency respondents.

INVOLVEMENT OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

The primary non-agency stakeholders are a municipal water provider who helped fund the project and prioritize sites for implementation. All respondents acknowledge that the funding provided through the water provider's rate-payer billing program is essential for projects like this to move forward. Linked to this funding is a restoration effectiveness monitoring program designed and implemented by university-affiliated scientists. A representative of the water provider suggests, *"it's very important for [the water provider] through this partnership and through the monitoring to show that there is a return on the investment."*

RELATIONSHIPS OF AGENCY AND NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

Non-agency participants suggest that the process of working together to prioritize and plan treatments with the agency and use monitoring data to support adaptive management has allowed them to build public buy-in for this type of work in the watershed. A representative from the water provider states that a stream of projects has improved relationships, suggesting that relationships improve over time and not necessarily because of interactions from any single project. Learning about how to improve contracts is incorporated into new projects. As the respondent asserts, *"it's because of these successful projects that highlight the need to partner and to move forward with implementation."*

However, a respondent from the agency was unsure of when and at what project stages non-agency stakeholders were engaged. A non-agency stakeholder hinted that this misunderstanding of the depth of engagement by non-agency stakeholders is due partially to the fact that agency capacity *"continues to dwindle while their responsibilities seem to go up, so engaging with outside folks is difficult for them to do."*

EFFECTS OF RELATIONSHIPS ON THE SCOPE AND SCALE OF THE PROJECT

Effective personal relationships enabled this individual project to be implemented on National Forest lands while adjacent private lands are also treated. The “all lands” nature of this work added to the complexity and diversity in the treatments in the project. The agency attributes the increased scale to the fact that the municipal water provider is contributing significant resources for implementation and monitoring.

Southeast Region

Chattahoochee National Forest, Georgia.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This project has been ongoing for more than five years and was considered for stewardship contracting prior to the NEPA analysis being conducted. The objectives of this project are to restore open-canopy forest habitats, reduce risks of Pine Beetle infestation, and combat non-native invasive species. Overall, the project is largely viewed as a success by agency and non-agency respondents.

INVOLVEMENT OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

Primary non-agency stakeholders in this project include a university, two national conservation organizations, a rare plant conservation organization, and a state agency. Involvement of these individuals occurred during early conceptual planning, NEPA scoping, implementation, and monitoring. The collaborators were mainly focused on scientific analysis and monitoring associated with sensitive plant species, and for applying vegetation management practices in a way that facilitates restoration of early seral habitats and helps to ensure the continued existence of rare plants. A common interest in these objectives brought people together. From the agency perspective, non-agency participants focused on “*providing the technical support and also the best available science as far as the rationale that was needed to make the decision, the NEPA decision.*”

RELATIONSHIPS OF AGENCY AND NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

A non-agency stakeholder explained that the project “*deepened and enhanced our relationship and communication [with the Forest Service] and our successes.*” When asked what contributes to the quality of relationships, a representative of the Forest Service said:

So I think what contributes the greatest is just full engagement, I guess, from the top down, of being responsive to one another. Not just us being responsive to them, but them being responsive to us...Accomplishing things on a smaller scale and showing results annually, year in and year out, encourages everybody involved to stay engaged and see the project through to completion.

Positive views on these interactions were also held by non-agency participants who were effusive in their praise of their agency counterparts at the National Forest.

EFFECTS OF RELATIONSHIPS ON THE SCOPE AND SCALE OF THE PROJECT

When asked how non-agency stakeholder engagement impacted the scale and scope of the project, the Forest Service lead for the project said, *“I would say it probably definitely influenced the scope. We probably ended up including activities that we didn't consider. We probably considered additional areas across the landscape that probably weren't initially considered. I'm almost certain of that.”* Non-agency participants echoed this sentiment.

Davy Crockett National Forest, Texas.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This is a large Integrated Resource Timber Contract (IRTC) that has been ongoing for nearly a decade since the idea was first conceived. Project objectives include longleaf pine ecosystem restoration, road restoration, and stabilization of a dam. The primary non-agency stakeholder is the local Resource Advisory Committee (RAC). Overall, the project is largely viewed as a success by agency and non-agency respondents.

INVOLVEMENT OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

Non-agency participation occurred in this project through the local RAC which reviewed the initial project concept and made recommendations as it would with other project types. One organization sitting on the RAC relayed that their recommendations to maintain conservation values by modifying proposed harvest units were incorporated into the final project design. Project participants report that the RAC affords a structured relationship for the Forest Service to work with non-agency stakeholders, and agency respondents appear to be comfortable with this approach, suggesting that it is improving the projects put forth.

RELATIONSHIPS OF AGENCY AND NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

One non-agency participant from a conservation organization noted that previously on the Forest there was considerable controversy over forest management, but that:

Once that public collaboration became a primary objective with the Forest Service....it became a vehicle to resolve conflict. So we saw a huge step forward with the initiation of public collaboration and it was a commitment by the Forest Service that they were not only willing to listen to the public but they were willing to compromise and to incorporate other values.

For the agency, this type of steady and predictable entity has proven to be an important partner which has built trust. Disagreement over project scope has a place and a process for resolution.

EFFECTS OF RELATIONSHIPS ON THE SCOPE AND SCALE OF THE PROJECT

The size of the project was not affected by non-agency engagement but some of the prescriptions were changed in order to accommodate stakeholder values (e.g. not harvesting stands with unique wildlife habitat values).

Talladega National Forest, Alabama.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This is a stewardship agreement with a regional conservation organization, that while fairly new to stewardship contracting as a group, has people on staff who have deeply engaged in stewardship contracting throughout the Southeast over the last decade. Project objectives are to restore longleaf pine to advance the conservation and recovery of the red-cockaded woodpecker, a federally listed species under the Endangered Species Act. The project is using timber harvesting and prescribed burning to achieve these goals. Overall, the project is largely viewed as a success by agency and non-agency respondents.

INVOLVEMENT OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

The regional conservation organization approached the Forest Service with the idea for the project because the area is especially important for species they value and that are aligned to their mission. Moreover the leader for this organization has been involved in at least 20 stewardship contracting projects and saw an opportunity on a district on the Forest to make a difference. This external group brought grant funding to the project to help facilitate project planning and a diversity of implementation actions. The agreement holder also works with the timber industry on timber thinning work and with another conservation organization to manage prescribed burns in the area.

RELATIONSHIPS OF AGENCY AND NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

The position of the line officer changed during the lifespan of this project. The ranger who the agreement holder first approached about this project left and the replacement was less excited to work with external groups. This did not go unnoticed with a non-agency stakeholder who said:

If the people on the district don't want to do it, it is time to say thank you very much and go somewhere else. You can't fight it. What you have to do on that district is you have to wait for someone to leave. It has gotten better, a lot better, orders of magnitude better on a national scale but it is because people have had a good opinion of stewardship and then they get transferred elsewhere and they start doing it elsewhere and bring that good experience with them.

This respondent recalled their experiences working with Forest Service staff who really wanted to work with external groups, and others who did not. Based on their experience their recommendation for working with the agency is to not try and force a relationship if it is not there. They advised that if the individuals within the agency are not going to rise to the occasion it is not worth a stakeholder's time to try and make it work.

In this project, a Forest Service respondent identified that a tangible opportunity for them was accessing skilled workers to complete restoration actions. “*One of the biggest reasons why we do stewardship is the manpower issue. So we can bring in partner resources,*” said a Forest Service respondent. Through this and other projects, non-agency stakeholders bring trained natural resource workers.

For their part, a Forest Service respondent suggested:

We've had to establish a level of trust to have the open level of communication that we can work through the issues. Since we do have similar goals but have slightly different ways of getting there sometimes, we have to be able to have an honest dialogue throughout the process.

The agency staff also speculated that on their Forest and largely throughout the southern region there are few partners who are aligned with the agency’s mission and can carry the message forward with external groups. The agreement holder also highlighted that they offer this unique opportunity to the Forest Service saying:

I think it helped the Forest Service that there was someone other than the Forest Service involved. The community down there in Alabama is a pretty timber-friendly community, you don't have a lot of lawsuits but it never hurts to have a partner who is a non-profit who is not the Forest Service supporting a project like this.

EFFECTS OF RELATIONSHIPS ON THE SCOPE AND SCALE OF THE PROJECT

The involvement of non-agency stakeholders did not alter the scale but complexity was identified as increasing due to the agency requesting that the agreement holder put in additional botanical plots to monitor the effects of herbicide treatments and prescribed burning.

Northeast Region

Chippewa National Forest, Minnesota.

Note that for this project no non-agency stakeholders were interviewed due to repeated lack of response to requests for interviews.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This project includes a diversity of activities: repairing impoundments to fish passage, watershed improvements, improving forest health and diversity, and improving and decommissioning roads. The project was split up into several different activities and non-agency stakeholders were not involved in project planning or design in an integrated fashion. Because of this, the agency respondent explained that non-agency stakeholders involved likely do not even know that it is a stewardship contract.

INVOLVEMENT OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

Non-agency stakeholders were not significantly engaged in development of this project. The District Ranger suggests that early collaboration with non-agency stakeholders is very important but that they “*don’t have a lot of participation in the community, so it is mostly internally driven.*”

The line officer said:

I think we could have done better. There was really no collaboration externally with this proposal, it was, some of the collaboration was considered during the NEPA process, but you know to really meet the intention of stewardship contracting we ought to be collaborating with partners outside of that NEPA process. That didn’t happen with this one.

There are, however, new efforts on this ranger district to engage non-agency stakeholders. For instance the Forest Service is trying to build a relationship with a local tribal nation. The line officer reports participating in tribal council meetings by presenting proposed projects to seek their feedback and identify areas to work together, but this did not happen on this project.

RELATIONSHIPS OF AGENCY AND NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

Working relationships are described as non-collaborative. On this Forest the agency has historically used passive forms of public engagement to meet its needs, and agency participants acknowledge that this is not in keeping with the intention of collaboration under stewardship authorities. More recently the agency has increased active public engagement activities, like proactively meeting with stakeholders in an attempt to engage them in project planning.

EFFECTS OF RELATIONSHIPS ON THE SCOPE AND SCALE OF THE PROJECT

When asked whether the involvement of non-agency stakeholders has influenced the size or scope of this stewardship contracting project, the line officer again reaffirmed that this was not a collaborative project and that non-agency stakeholders did not influence the scope or scale.

Huron-Manistee National Forest, Michigan.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This is an integrated timber resource contract (IRTC) that involves tree removal and watershed improvements by stabilizing erosion near a river and improving trail crossings over streams. The primary non-agency stakeholder is a motorized off road vehicle recreation club that has been working with the National Forests in the region for a very long time.

INVOLVEMENT OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

As the main non-agency project participant the motorized recreation organization represents both a user group and a source of skilled labor. This group provided volunteers who contributed to some activities related to the service side of this project, moving stone for streambank

stabilization. Some of their membership also owns and operates heavy equipment which is a service they volunteer to the Forest Service in other projects.

RELATIONSHIPS OF AGENCY AND NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

The project is in a fairly remote area and agency turnover is high. *“It seems we’re always helping new people get up to date on what’s going on,”* said a non-agency participant. The recreation organization is a long-standing entity with members who know the area and its forests well. When new agency personnel arrive at the Forest, leadership from the recreation group meet with them to bring them up to speed with resource needs and the relationships between the agency and partners in the region.

Stewardship contracting has not taken off on this Forest and neither has collaborative engagement in project development. The agency lead for the project explained that, *“It would be nice to have some of them [non-agency stakeholders] coming in on these proposals or coming in to these meetings and having ideas and stuff that they maybe want us to do.... it’s just the way that we’ve approached stewardship over the last few years and it’s still trying to figure out how to make it work right.”*

On the contrary the motorized recreation group is commonly known to have potential detrimental effects on trails and water resources. They realize this and feel that a commitment to maintaining trails and natural resources *“keeps us on a pretty good side of them [the Forest Service] by doing what they need to have us do and working with them.”* As such there is a built-in incentive for this user group to seek out opportunities to work with the agency. They have labor and equipment to offer the Forest Service, too. As communicated by a representative for this organization:

Usually there is not a lot of money available to take care of these kinds of things so unless we help doing it it’s not gonna get done. This volunteerism is so important to maintain these types of things, I don’t think the federal government would have enough...or want to put enough effort in to maintain it. It would simply be too costly for them. So that’s the biggest thing we bring. That’s what keeps this partnership surviving as it has for the last 50 years.

EFFECTS OF RELATIONSHIPS ON THE SCOPE AND SCALE OF THE PROJECT

Perspectives were split on whether non-agency engagement increased the size. The complexity was increased in that some implementation actions needed to be modified during the middle of the project.

Superior National Forest, Minnesota.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This is a large Integrated Resource Timber Contract (IRTC) generating stewardship receipts to accomplish costly service work while providing improved habitat for moose and employment opportunities to local contractors.

INVOLVEMENT OF NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

This project area is in a very rural area where forest industry is the predominant stakeholder. Most of their involvement in this project is focused on project planning and implementation. Planning is largely limited to casual conversations with Forest Service staff about the scope of projects, specifically the timber components, which matter significantly to the industry. Likewise, the Forest Service is motivated to package projects that accomplish multiple objectives and make the best use of their available resources, so designing projects that appeal to industry is important. As reported by the line officer, agency engagement has focused on: *“operators that do the work on the ground, rather than interest groups or other people that would care about the outcomes, or what people would be interested in during NEPA. So I think in this project we were... It was one of the first ones that we did and we weren't sure what collaboration meant exactly.”*

RELATIONSHIPS OF AGENCY AND NON-AGENCY STAKEHOLDERS

The agency has a positive working relationship with industry. Annually the Forest invites the interested public to a planning session in which all of the proposed projects are discussed. This is an opportunity for industry to provide feedback to the agency that helps them design projects that meet mutual objectives, especially in areas like this project site that are of marginal timber value. Still the agency identified challenges in trying to engage external parties in these projects:

Most of the folks that I've invited in on talking about the projects, the preliminary stages, they seem very engaged, very positive, but it's like pulling teeth to get them to turn a proposal in or to bid on a contract. Some guys say it's because you have to write a proposal if you wanna get a contract, there's a few more motions than normal compared to a timber sale. But especially the older folks, I don't know, I think their computer savvy might hold them back on some of that.

EFFECTS OF RELATIONSHIPS ON THE SCOPE AND SCALE OF THE PROJECT

Opinions were mixed on whether the size of the project changed due to non-agency participation but most either did not know or did not think non-agency involvement had affected the scale. As for scope, most respondents did think that the scope changed based on feedback from contractors during the planning stage.

VI. APPENDIX

Interview protocol Stewardship Contracting Case Studies 2016 AGENCY

The Forest Service is required to report to Congress annually on its use of stewardship contracting authorities. Part of this includes reporting on the role of non-agency stakeholders and communities in stewardship contracts and agreements. The Pinchot Institute and its partners are completing a series of case studies on stewardship contracting projects on behalf of the Forest Service as part of the Congressional reporting process and to inform the agencies' ongoing use of stewardship contracting authorities and its work with communities and other non-agency stakeholders in the stewardship of Federal public lands. We are contacting you to participate in a brief interview about your involvement and/or knowledge of the _____ project. This project was selected from a list of stewardship projects nationwide that were active between 2012 and 2015.

The following informed consent statement must be read to everyone.

This interview will be recorded and projects will not be identified and respondent names will not be associated with the transcripts or identified in case studies. Once interviews are transcribed, the recordings will be destroyed so they cannot be associated directly with respondents.

Are you willing to proceed with the interview?

First we would like to ask you a few background questions about your experience with stewardship contracting:

- a. How many SC projects have you been a part of?
 - b. What is your role in THIS project?
 - c. How long have you been involved with this project?
 - d. Was stewardship contracting a consideration for this project prior to the NEPA decision?
 - e. Would you consider yourself "local" to the project area?
1. From your perspective, what are the project objectives and anticipated outcomes of this project?
 2. In the next group of questions I want to ask are about who participated in (name specific project) and how they participated.
 - 2a. Who are the primary non-agency stakeholders in the project (e.g. people who have participated the most)? **If they name an organization, follow up on the name of a person(s). Be sure to get the contact info for everyone on the list of primary participants.**

Are there other stakeholders who have participated at some point? If yes, ask who and how they participated.

(List primary non-agency folks in the table (SEE NEXT PAGE) below to keep track of who the primary non-agency stakeholders are and to organize responses to 2b and 2c)

2b. For each primary non-agency stakeholder ask about their involvement in project stages. (see list below and in the table).

If the interviewee says that a person or group participated in a phase, ask them to explain how or what they actually did.

Example: You listed Tribal Nation X as a non-agency participant in the project. What project stages/parts of the project were they involved in...

How did Tribal nation X participate in NEPA scoping? What exactly did they do?

The following list of example non-agency roles is here to help you probe rather than walk through every stage for every non-agency stakeholder:

- Conceiving of the project idea/approaching the agency with the idea prior to NEPA analysis
- NEPA scoping (i.e. planning and analysis) (Example probes: Did the agency do a schedule of proposed activities notification? Were there public meetings?, field tours?)
- Involved in creating the agency proposal for the stewardship project
- Project implementation
- Project monitoring

2.c. For each primary non-agency stakeholder (go through list), do you think their participation:

- Resulted in improved decision making about the project? Please explain why
- Resulted in getting the project implemented on the ground? Please explain why....

2.d. What types of involvement do you believe are most important for engagement of non-agency stakeholders?

2e. You said that you believe that (example: monitoring) is most important. Are you satisfied with the level of involvement of non-agency stakeholders in this project in (e.g. monitoring)? Please explain why or why not.

3. The next set of questions are about relationships and communication between the Forest Service and non-agency stakeholders.

3.a. Do you think relationships between the primary non-agency stakeholders in this project (**ask this question for each primary non-agency stakeholder on the list**) and the Forest Service have changed as a result of their participation (non-agency stakeholder) in this SC project?

If yes, please explain what factors led to this change and give examples.

3b. Overall, has this project changed the way the Forest Service communicates with non-agency stakeholders? Explain and give examples.

3c. Overall, based on your experiences with stewardship contracting what things do you think contribute to the quality of the relationships between non-agency stakeholders and the Forest Service either positively or negatively?

4. a. Has the involvement of non-agency stakeholders influenced the size/ scale of this project? Please explain.

b. Has the involvement of non-agency stakeholders influenced the complexity/scope of this project? Please explain.

5. What do you think is most challenging about non-agency stakeholder participation in the stewardship contracting projects? Please explain. Examples?
6. In your view, is/was (name the specific SC project) a success? Explain why or why not.

Interview protocol
Stewardship Contracting Case Studies 2016
NON-AGENCY

The Forest Service is required to report to Congress annually on its use of stewardship contracting authorities. Part of this includes reporting on the role of non-agency stakeholders and communities in stewardship contracts and agreements. The Pinchot Institute and its partners are completing a series of case studies on stewardship contracting projects on behalf of the Forest Service as part of the Congressional reporting process and to inform the agencies' ongoing use of stewardship contracting authorities and its work with communities and other non-agency stakeholders in the stewardship of Federal public lands. We are contacting you to participate in a brief interview about your involvement and/or knowledge of the _____ project. This project was selected from a list of stewardship projects nationwide that were active between 2012 and 2015.

This interview will be recorded and projects will not be identified and respondent names will not be associated with the transcripts or identified in case studies. Once interviews are transcribed, the recordings will be destroyed so they cannot be associated directly with respondents.

Are you willing to proceed with the interview?

First we would like to ask you a few background questions about your experience with stewardship contracting:

- f. How many SC projects have you been a part of?
- g. What is your role in THIS project?
- h. How long have you been involved with this project?
- i. Would you consider yourself "local" to the project area?

1. From your perspective, what are the project objectives and anticipated outcomes of this project?
2. In the next group of questions I want to ask about who participated in (name specific project) and specifically how you and/or your organization participated.

2.a. The agency person we interviewed listed the following as primary (e.g. people who have participated the most) non-agency stakeholders in the project (Read the list from the agency interview). Is there anyone you would add to that list? (If so, be sure to get contact information)

Are there other stakeholders who have participated at some point? If yes, ask who and how they participated.

2b. FOCUS on the participation of the person you are interviewing and/or their organization.

I would like to ask you a few questions about how you and/or your organization participated in the _____ project. What project stages/parts of the project were you involved in. How were you involved in that stage? What exactly did you do?

The following list of example non-agency roles is here to help you probe rather than walk through every stage for every non-agency stakeholder:

- Conceiving of the project idea/approaching the agency with the idea prior to NEPA analysis
- NEPA scoping (i.e. planning and analysis) (Example probes: Did the agency do a schedule of proposed activities notification? Were there public meetings?, field tours?)
- Involved in creating the agency proposal for the stewardship project
- Project implementation
- Project monitoring

2.c. Do you think your participation:

- Resulted in improved decision making about the project? Please explain why
- Resulted in getting the project implemented on the ground? Please explain why....

2.d. You listed several parts of (name SC project), that you and/or your organization were involved in like (list a few from 2b above).....

- Which of these kinds of involvement that you listed, do you believe are most important for engagement of non-agency stakeholders?
- You said that you believe that (example: monitoring) is most important? Are you satisfied with the level of involvement of non-agency stakeholders in this project in (monitoring)? Please explain why or why not.

3. The next set of questions are about relationships and communication between the Forest Service and you and your organization.

3.a. Do you think relationships between you and/or your organization and the Forest Service have changed as a result of your participation (non-agency stakeholder) in this SC project?

If yes, please explain what factors led to this change and give examples.

3b. Specifically, has this project changed the way the Forest Service communicates with you and/or your organization? Explain.

3c. Overall, based on your experiences with stewardship contracting, what things do you think contribute to the quality of the relationships between non-agency stakeholders and the Forest Service either positively or negatively?

4. a. Has the involvement of non-agency stakeholders (in general, not specifically your organization) influenced the size/ scale of this project? Please explain.

b. Has the involvement of non-agency stakeholders influenced the complexity/scope of this project?

Please explain.

5. What do you think is most challenging about non-agency stakeholder participation in the stewardship contracting projects? Please explain. Examples?

6. In your view, is/was (name specific SC project) a success? Explain why or why not.