

Ritter Landowner Collaborative:

Project History, Organizational Model, and Next Steps

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This report was compiled to provide a clear statement of the Ritter Landowner Collaborative's development and decisions to this date (hereafter "the Collaborative"). However, we acknowledge that there will be change and evolution in the future, which may alter some of the roles and planned activities described. Readers are advised to consider this a living document.

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June 2012: CFF members visit Ritter area and discuss challenges and opportunities.

September 2012 through March 2013: CFF continues study of eastern Oregon issues and composes white paper of recommendations, including collaborative options.

February through March 2013: CFF begins field assessment of collaborative capacity in Ritter area. A core group of ten landowners and 11 organizations expresses support.

April 2013 through December 2014: Grant writing team including CFF, ODF, OFRI, and OSU Extension applies for USFS State and Private Forestry grant for education and technical support with input from landowners and local organizations.

January 2014: OFRI obtains grant funding from American Tree Farm System for resource assessment.

June 2014: Grant obtained from US Forest Service State and Private Forestry (funds to ODF).

August 2014: OSU Extension receives sub-award from ODF to support project coordinator, educational programs, and learning outcomes.

October 26, 2014: Project Coordinator hired with landowner and local organizational involvement.

December 30, 2014: First meeting of full group to discuss interest and next steps for assessment and planning.

January 26, 2015: Second meeting of full group. Decision making model chosen and landowner operations committee elected.

February 9, 2015: Landowner operations committee puts out RFP for forestry services for individual landowner assessment.

1. Project History to Date

Many landowners in the Lower Middle Fork John Day River Basin near Ritter (Grant County), Oregon (Figure 1) have similar interests and challenges. These include enhancing the health and productivity of their lands, and increasing access to technical assistance, stewardship programs, markets and contractors to perform logging, invasive weed control and other services.

The goal of this project is to develop and learn from a new private forestland collaborative comprised of at least 10,000 acres of family forestland in the Middle Fork John Day River Basin. Objectives are to prioritize landscape-level resource concerns, plan needed actions on family forests and then use this coordination to secure future assistance and resources necessary to implement actions.

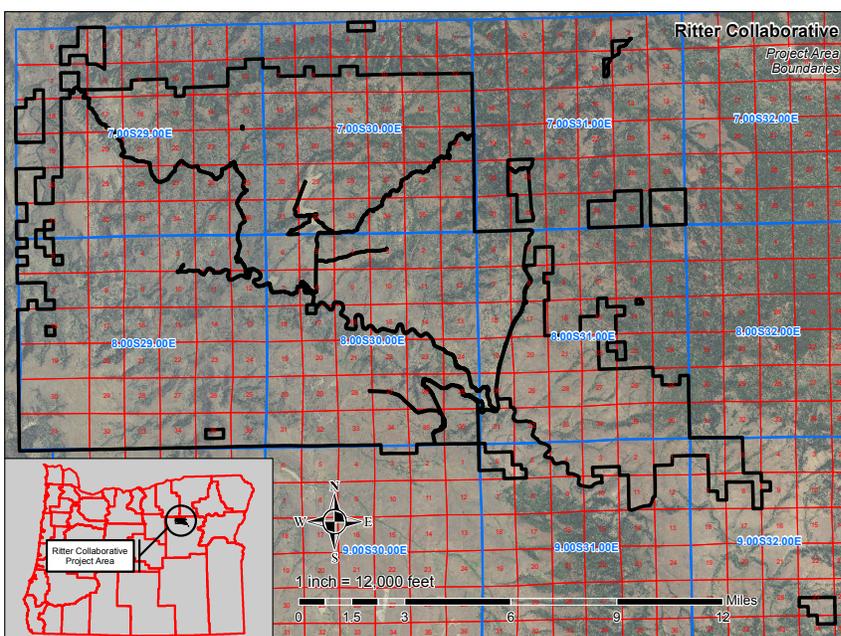


Figure 1. Ritter area, Grant County, Oregon (Credit: Grant County Soil and Water Conservation District)

a. Early Development

The idea for a collaborative was first offered to Ritter landowners by the Committee for Family Forestlands (CFF). The CFF is a state-level committee established by the Oregon Board of Forestry to advise on issues and effects of policy on family forest landowners in Oregon. In spring 2012, the CFF came to Grant County on a 3-day tour to talk with local forest owners and agencies to better understand and communicate the challenges facing landowners in Eastern Oregon. Local Grant County landowners described many shared challenges which were often exacerbated by remoteness, limited forest sector infrastructure and capacity, limited scale of activities and poor economic returns of many individual management projects. The CFF observed that many of these issues might be more effectively addressed by a coordinated effort, and concluded that the Ritter area was well suited to test the idea of a landowner collaborative. The Ritter area landowners (a mix of both full-time resident and absentee) were well acquainted with one

another, had mutual understandings and respect, and numerous active management relationships (mostly around cattle movement and grazing). Also, the exceptional variety of natural resources, wildlife and supporting habitats, and Wild and Scenic River status made the John Day Basin of broader cultural and social value, expanding the scope of potential support. In December 2012, the CFF decided to consider the feasibility of developing a US Forest Service State and Private Forests Western Competitive Grant proposal to develop a pilot project, should there be adequate local interest and support.

The local Eastern Oregon representative to the CFF sent a letter to 21 Ritter area landowners in February 2013 explaining the idea, asking if they might be interested in participating in a collaborative approach, and inviting them to meet or discuss by the idea by phone. This was generally well received and a core group of 10 landowners with a cumulative ownership of approximately 10,000 acres expressed cautious interest. In March 2013, via the Eastern Oregon representative, the CFF then invited personnel from 11 local agencies and organizations to a meeting to introduce the idea and see if there was adequate local agency and organizational interest to provide technical and financial support for a collaborative. All 11 agreed that a collaborative was a good idea and were willing to work together to explore ways to advance the effort.

With support from the core group of local landowners and key local organizations and agencies, the CFF developed a proposal for the USFS State and Private Forests Western Competitive Grant program with ODF in summer 2013. The proposal sought funds for educational and technical support for organizational development of a collaborative (\$300,000). An additional proposal to the American Forest Foundation sought funds to develop a project-wide planning tool (\$10,000). Both were granted in 2014.

In February 2014, the CFF established a Ritter Steering Committee to coordinate and lead efforts on behalf of the CFF to get the project off the ground. The Steering Committee was initially comprised primarily of CFF members with ODF and Ritter landowner representation, with the explicit expectation that leadership would progressively shift from the CFF to landowners and that the Steering Committee would eventually move to serving in a more passive, advisory capacity once the Project Coordinator and the Collaborative had established a basic organizational structure and internal decision-making model.

Acting as a caretaker of the project, with frequent consultation, and guidance and feedback from the involved Ritter landowners and local agencies and institutions, the Steering Committee needed to propose a working framework for the project, without determining more of the process or project structure than was immediately necessary. Among those early actions required was selection of a host organization to coordinate the Collaborative's efforts. The grant agreement strongly favored a state agency. Most landowners stated a preference for a non-regulatory agency. After vetting several other organizational options with landowners and local agencies and institutions, the CFF proposed hiring a project coordinator through Oregon State University's Forestry & Natural Resources Extension Program (OSU FNR). OSU FNR agreed to assist in this role. The selection committee for the Project Coordinator position included local landowners and agencies, and all Ritter landowners involved with the project at that time were invited to participate in the interviews of the four finalists, which were held in Ritter. Curtis Qual was subsequently hired as the Project Coordinator. Curt is a retired forester who specialized in coordinating partnerships and collaboration for the USFS, and now runs his own consulting business specializing in natural resource collaboration. He began work on October 26th, 2014.

b. Establishment of the Collaborative

The following sections summarize major meetings and milestones. For more detailed accounts of the accomplishments of the full group and LOC, please refer to the minutes for the respective meetings.

Sensing and project boundary definition: The Project Coordinator's first action was to meet with individual landowners to obtain a sense of their knowledge of the project, gauge desire to participate, hear concerns, identify project types and plan for the first meeting. Over the course of the next several months the project coordinator met with over 25 landowners. These meetings were the first concrete steps in the planned process to replace CFF leadership with local landowner leadership. During this round of meetings, more landowners began to realize that there was start-up funding and that the Collaborative was emerging as a reality rather than merely a concept. Some landowners who had previously adopted a "wait-and-see" attitude began to express interest in joining. As a result, a decision was made to expand the project area to 104,000 acres to permit as many as 81 total landowners to participate in the Collaborative if they desired, and more holistically represent the private land base along the Middle Fork. It would also more effectively link forest and riparian improvement projects undertaken by the Collaborative to previous, large-scale riparian improvements undertaken on federal, tribal, and The Nature Conservancy lands upstream. The 104,000 acres is considered the Collaborative's project boundary, but not every landowner within this area is currently engaged. At the time of this report, the Coordinator has obtained interest and commitment from landowners covering a total of 55,000 acres, which far exceeds the original goal of 10,000 acres stated in the grant.

Local organizational engagement: The Coordinator convened two local organizational meetings in November and December 2014 for round-table discussions about potential roles and responsibilities for agencies and institutions. The local organizations in attendance were: Grant Soil and Water Conservation District, North Fork John Day Watershed Council, Monument Soil and Water Conservation District, Irene Jerome (a Consultant and Forester who is also representing wildfire protection for Grant County), National Resource Conservation Services, the John Day office of the Oregon Department of Forestry, and Oregon State University's Forestry and Natural Resources Extension staff for the area. The Project Coordinator oriented all to the history of the project, past to present, and the group received a presentation and written synopsis of each organization's capacity and operational capabilities.

First full group meeting: The first Collaborative meeting was held December 30, 2014 at a Ritter landowner residence. 28 landowners and 6 members of supporting organizations attended. At that meeting, landowners took the following steps:

- Identified the need to develop a global forest stewardship plan for the 104,000-acre project area.
- Requested creation of a brief document to identify site-specific property information, land conditions, landowner goals and objectives, project types, and associated prescriptions.
- Selected Grant Soil and Water Conservation District (GSWCD) to create a draft template of a global forest stewardship plan and process for landowners to catalog their site-specific data.
- Asked the Project Coordinator to help identify potential organizational models for the collaborative.

Second full group meeting: A second full group meeting of the Collaborative was held on January 26th at a Ritter landowner residence. 17 landowners and 5 personnel from local organizations attended. This meeting focused on governance and decision making. The landowners chose to:

- Operate on a "consensus-minus-one-or-two" model, with thresholds for dissent. A motion will be carried forward if it is supported by all but one or two of the landowners. If more than two landowners oppose a motion or proposal, the proposal will be discarded, or remanded for

revision if the dissenters feel that it can meet their approval with modification. Dissenters agree to offer realistic alternatives to proposals they oppose. There is one vote per property. Proxies are permitted; in other words a landowner may appoint someone such as a property manager or a non-resident family member to represent their property. It is up to each landowner family to decide who will be their voting representative. To cast a vote, the person must be in actual attendance in person or via conference call.

- Form a Landowner Operations Committee (non-decision making body) to handle routine administrative business and advance ideas and recommendations to landowners. They sought and elected 5 volunteers from the present group to serve them with no limit set to their tenure. The Project Coordinator will facilitate and serve the Operations Committee.
- The landowners also voted for the GSWCD to move forward with the development of a process for assessing and prioritizing landowner needs. The need for this process and some relevant tools were described in the original grant, but expectation was that the landowners would refine and choose their own process, tools, and service providers to assist once the collaborative developed. The process that the landowners selected includes:
 1. A Strategic Action Plan, previously named as the Global Forest Stewardship Plan. The Strategic Action Plan is essentially a large landscape resource assessment that paints a picture of the 104,000-acres project area. It describes historical, current and desired future conditions of the land. The plan also contains ecotypes, soils, hydrological, wildlife, botany, social and other data components commonly found in a resource assessment. It will combine all the components of OWEB's strategic action plan template and elements from the Oregon Uniform Resource plan guidelines, including use of the Discovery Tool to delineate individual landowner goals and objectives.
 2. The Discovery Tool, a template which will be used to collect site specific landowner data that identifies a landowner's geographical location in the project area, their land management goals and objectives, project types, mapped project locations, treatment descriptions, as well as mapped previously completed and ongoing project activities and their locations. This data then becomes site-specific information fed into the overall Strategic Action Plan qualifying the landowner for future grant funding opportunities with OWEB, NRCS and others. Although the original grant application language proposed preparing Stewardship Plans for each property within the Collaborative, it is now expected that the combination of the innovative property-level Discovery Tool and landscape-level Strategic Action Plan can eliminate the need for conventional Stewardship Plans. Preliminary discussions with ODF have confirmed that since the types of data relevant to conventional Stewardship Plans will be adequately available within the combined Discovery Tools and Strategic Action Plan, individual Stewardship Plans for all landowners need not be required.
 3. The Project Priority and Tracking Tool, a planning tool currently under development. The intent of this tool is to allow prioritization of projects across the collaborative area in a rigorous and thoughtful manner. It will also allow for accomplishment tracking.

First Landowner Operations Committee (LOC) meeting: The LOC's first meeting was February 9th, 2015 in Ritter at a landowner residence. The first order of business was deciding how to structure leadership within the LOC. A unanimous decision was made to not elect a chair or co-chairs for the group to cooperative relationship of equality rather than establish a hierarchy. Committee members will

share reporting back to the full group, selecting a spokesperson on a case-by-case basis. The LOC also developed alternatives and proposed solutions for the 13 items referred to them by the Project Coordinator and full group at the prior meeting. These alternatives and proposals will be presented at the next full group meeting.

Second LOC meeting: The second meeting of the LOC was held in Ritter on March 16, 2015 at the residence of a landowner. The LOC continued developing and refining the organizational structure of the Collaborative, and reviewed responses to the Collaborative's RFQ for the technical forestry work that will launch the collection of Discovery Tool data that will be incorporated into the Strategic Action Plan and the Project Prioritization and Tracking Tool.

Third LOC meeting: The third meeting of the LOC took place by conference call on April 2, 2015. The LOC discussed next steps in the Strategic Action Planning process. This includes a decision to stay abreast of future opportunities with OWEB, but to not pursue a Focused Investment Partnership project yet without further development of regional partnerships to be as competitive as possible. Curt provided an update on the future contract with Lane Parry Forestry Consulting for Discovery Tool data collection, and an update on the overall funding for the Collaborative to date. The LOC also discussed and planned for the upcoming April 20th full group meeting, and discussed the purpose and need to form a group vision statement.

Third full group meeting: The third full landowner group meeting will be held on April 20, 2015 at a residence in Ritter. The agenda includes meeting with the consulting foresters, discussing next steps in the Strategic Action Plan, approval of a landowner-chosen name for the Collaborative, and discussion of how to pursue future funding opportunities.

Evolution of CFF's Ritter Steering Committee: As the collaborative began to develop, the Landowner Operations Committee members and the Steering Committee members decided that the Steering Committee would thenceforward be known and would act as the Advisory Committee (as of February 15, 2015). The Advisory Committee's role is to provide educational and technical advice, including grant-writing support to the Collaborative on an as-needed basis.

2. Organizational model and roles

It is important to note that the Collaborative is in its formative stage at this time. The full group and the Landowner Operations Committee have had only two meetings each as of this writing. However, the Collaborative has made impressive progress toward organizational design, has selected the structure described below, and is now giving that structure a "test run". It is reasonable to expect, however, that the Group may choose to modify and adaptively manage this organizational model in response to emerging needs and collaborative learning.

In general, the organizational model of the Collaborative is designed to ensure it is landowner driven and voluntary while supporting successful achievement of project goals and providing avenues for support from Cooperating Service Providers as needed. The fundamental components of the emerging Organizational Model are as follows:

Ritter Landowner Collaborative (the Collaborative/full group): Is the full group of participating landowners who wishes to partake in and contribute to the activities and outcomes. This group is voluntary and meets approximately 4 times a year, depending on landowner schedules. Additional meetings may be conducted as needed by conference call. The group maintains communication through

regular emails from the Project Coordinator and educational newsletters every other month. The Collaborative makes decisions only in the full group. Its one functioning committee, the Operations Committee, currently serves as an administrative and advisory body; it is not a decision-making body. To date, the full group of the Collaborative has made decisions about a landscape level resource assessment, organizational structure, project prioritization and types, preliminary design of project planning components, and cooperative service providers to solicit and select for project activities. This list is continuing to evolve as the group matures. The LOC has been tasked with recommending a landowner-chosen name for the Collaborative, and will be proposing the “Ritter Land Management Team” for approval at the next full group meeting on April 20, 2015.

Landowner Operations Committee (LOC): Is an elected committee of Ritter landowners from the full group of the Collaborative. The LOC is not intended to be a decision-making body, but will serve as a filter for issues and proposals and will make recommendations to the full group of the Collaborative for decision making.

Project Coordinator: Serves as a facilitator and coordinator for the Collaborative, and as a liaison between the Collaborative and agencies, institutions, grantors, and contractors. Serves as facilitator and coordinator for the Landowner Operations Committee. Is empowered to engage in coordinating contracts with service providers and orchestrating matrices of organizational support for the Collaborative based upon the recommendations of the Operations Committee and full group.

Advisory Committee (AC): Provides guidance as needed to the full group, Operations Committee, and Project Coordinator. Serves as a liaison with the CFF. Also provides grant writing expertise for future capacity building and project opportunities. The AC is an advisory entity and does not serve in a decision-making capacity. The AC was formerly the Steering Committee, which was formed by the CFF to serve as a caretaker for the project during its conceptual stages. When grant funding was obtained and began to provide solid footing for the Collaborative to develop its own organizational capacity, the caretaking role was turned over to the Collaborative and its new Project Coordinator. In February 2015 the Collaborative and the PSC jointly decided that it was time for the Project Steering Committee to transition into a new role as a Project Advisory Committee.

Agencies, Institutions, Non-profits, Grantors, and Contractors: Serve as “Cooperating Service Providers” to the Collaborative, by providing technical advice, educational support, and guidance through regulatory processes. In some instances these services are provided as part of the routine work that an agency or institution is mandated to provide to all landowners, while in other instances involving more non-traditional work or service, the Collaborative may contract for services. Engagement with service providers is made as needed through the full group and Landowner Operations Committee.

Oregon State University Extension, Forestry and Natural Resources Extension Program (FNR): The FNR program agreed to host the Project Coordinator, providing coordination under leadership of OSU Extension Collaboration Specialist, Dr. Emily Jane Davis and project coordinator Curt Qual, as well as educational programming through FNR Extension faculty.

Committee for Family Forestlands: Tracks and learns from the project as a possible model for private lands management, and provides expertise from the diverse backgrounds of its voting and ex-officio members.

3. Estimated Budget Distribution

Item	Amount	Status	Summary
Model Eastside PVT. Forestlands total grant value	\$300,000.00	Awarded from USFS to ODF	Scope: Technical assistance & education for private forestlands collaborative startup
ODF Salem	\$38,903.00	Budgeted to Salem	Indirect
OSU Extension	\$103,321.00	Awarded from ODF to OSU	Indirect, Project Coordinator costs; includes salaries, benefits, travel & supplies
Grant SWCD	\$35,034.35	Awarded from ODF to GSWCD	GIS - Develop Project Prioritization & Tracking Tool, Discovery Tool data, Strategic Action Plan
ODF stewardship forester	\$15,000	Not yet awarded	JD ODF Stewardship Forester - GPS Photo points, GIS data verification, grant writing
Professional forester contracted	\$65,747.50	In process to award funds to GSWCD to contract with Lane Parry Forestry Consulting	Discovery Tool data collection
Future writing and/or Discovery Tool data collection	\$21,994.15	Not yet awarded	
OSU Extension & Monument SWCD	\$20,000.00	Not yet awarded	Newsletters, site specific field trips, MSWCD logistics coordination for field
Total projected expenditures	\$300,000.00		