

# Monitoring the Collaborative Capacity Grant Outcomes of Oregon's Federal Forest Restoration Program, 2019–2021 Biennium

EMILY JANE DAVIS AND ERIC M. WHITE

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## About the authors

Emily Jane Davis is an Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist at Oregon State University and Co-Associate Director of the Ecosystem Workforce Program.

Eric M. White is a research social scientist with the USDA Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station.

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*The Ecosystem Workforce Program is a bi-institutional program of University of Oregon's Institute for a Sustainable Environment and the College of Forestry at Oregon State University. We conduct applied social science research and extension services at the interface of people and natural resources. Our publications aim to inform policy makers and practitioners, and contribute to scholarly and practical discourse.*

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### Contact us at:

Ecosystem Workforce Program  
Institute for a Sustainable Environment  
5247 University of Oregon  
Eugene, OR 97403-5247-1472  
[ewp@uoregon.edu](mailto:ewp@uoregon.edu)  
[ewp.uoregon.edu](http://ewp.uoregon.edu)





## Executive Summary

Collaborative Capacity Grants (“collaborative grants”) have supported forest collaborative groups to increase restoration efforts on federal forests statewide by enhancing and strengthening their effectiveness. These grants are funded by the Federal Forest Restoration Program (FFR Program) and administered by the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board. The stated goal of these grants is to increase the number, acreage, and complexity of collaboratively planned restoration projects on federal lands by developing or expanding zones of agreement (ZOA). ZOA are collaborative agreements that may focus on a project, Forest Plan allocation unit, forest type, or ecological function. A secondary goal of the program is to build capacity to accomplish ZOA. For the 2019–2021 biennium, grants were awarded to groups working on either ZOA or im-

provements to collaborative governance capacities. Several collaboratives requested extensions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore this is not a final account of all funded activities and outcomes.

## Findings

The 2019–2021 grant cycle provided a total of \$540,281 to 12 collaborative groups engaged on nine national forests and one Bureau of Land Management district in Oregon. The grants also leveraged an additional \$387,661 in documented matching funds or in-kind support from partners. Six groups submitted grants solely to work on ZOA, two solely for collaborative capacity, and four for both purposes.

With this funding, collaboratives helped prepare project-level restoration plans for a total of 859,174 acres of federal forestland across 32 NEPA planning areas between 2019 and 2021. Final NEPA decisions were signed on 16 areas covering over 370,000 acres during this time period, and groups engaged on 16 other planning areas in pre-scoping or environmental analysis stages (decisions not yet signed) covering nearly 490,000 acres.

During the 2019–2021 biennium, a variety of forest restoration and timber sale activities were implemented in planning areas that had collaborative participation at some point from the 12 funded groups. Nearly 40,000 acres were associated with commercial sales. Precommercial thinning, piling of fuels, and pile burning were each implemented on about 25,000 acres of land. A total of about 3,800 acres of broadcast burning was accomplished on collaboratively planned areas, with a dip during 2020.

Approximately 210 million board feet of timber was also sold from planning areas where collaborative groups participated. Those timber sales supported about 486 jobs harvesting or processing timber and 610 jobs per year in other sectors of the economy that support those businesses and their employees. The approximately half million dollars of collaborative capacity grant funds provided during the 2019–2021 biennium supported about five jobs each year of the biennium. Three of those jobs were directly associated with collaborative operations and two were in other sectors of the economy.

Collaborative grants also supported the development or updating of multiple types of new ZOA on topics including upland forest restoration, roads management, managing natural ignitions, wildlife, future planning areas, climate change, fuel breaks, lodgepole pine management, and riparian areas. Some work on ZOA remains delayed by capacity limitations and effects of the pandemic. Several groups addressed their capacity by revising or developing collaborative governance documents including strategic plans and operating principles or manuals that needed to be updated and adapted to increase their ability to foster accelerated restora-

tion. They also conducted community outreach to build broader social support for forest restoration using traditional news media stories, social media campaigns, interpretive signage, story maps, presentations, newsletters, and websites.

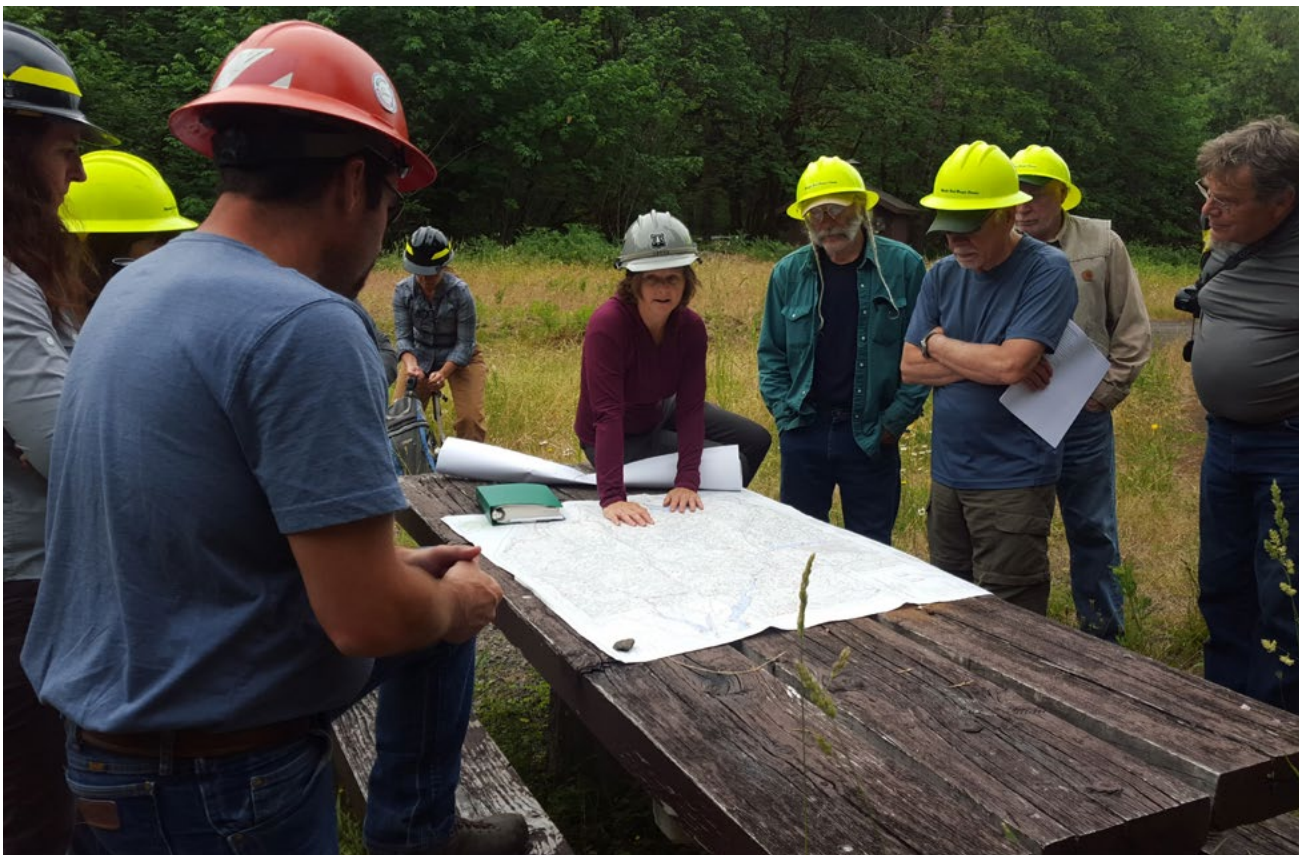
Two groups worked with their national forest partners to submit new Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program proposals in 2020 while one group submitted an extension. These proposals develop significant ten-year restoration strategies and a sequence of future planning areas. Other examples of leveraging opportunities to increase the pace, scale, and complexity of restoration included a successful Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Program proposal, and ongoing collaboration around the use of Good Neighbor Authority.

In addition to a focus on planning projects, some collaboratives have engaged on implementation. In some instances, this was because collaborative agreements were not resulting in intended outcomes, including examples wherein the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) did not consistently apply those agreements as collaboratives expected. There is not a clear pathway for collaborative involvement in implementation, although a few groups have productive implementation committees that focus on helping design economical and timely implementation projects using stewardship contracting and Good Neighbor Authority.

Collaboratives experienced major changes with the COVID-19 pandemic and historic 2020 wildfire season. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020, all collaboratives shifted their work to virtual platforms, with the exception of a few in-person field trips. Meeting attendance remained largely regular and some groups were able to make needed collaborative governance adaptations. However, online settings may be challenging for some participants, and some groups have delayed work on substantive topics until they could be addressed in person. Several collaboratives are facing uncertainty in the aftermath of large wildfires within or near their landscapes of focus. Post-fire activities redirected Forest Service staff capacity and led to the pause of some collaborative projects.

## Implications

- Expectations of collaborative impact on the pace and scale of planning restoration projects should consider how opportunities, approach, and ability to affect accelerated restoration before or during the NEPA process vary by place and are largely subject to Forest Service discretion.
- Future grants and other FFR Program investments may consider supporting collaborative engagement in post-NEPA and implementation activities, as there is growing interest in these efforts yet no clear pathway for non-agency involvement, as exists during the NEPA process. Broader dialogue amongst collaboratives and agency leadership to better establish options for this involvement across the state may be needed. Future monitoring and expectations of collaborative outcomes should also adapt to account for these roles.
- Cross-boundary, all-lands restoration and wild-fire risk reduction efforts continue to be a primary interest for many land management agencies; collaboratives that are able to engage in developing and implementing strategies and proposals focused on this may find opportunities to expand their impact across larger landscapes as well as obtain additional sources of funding.
- Limited agency capacity, as well as changes in personnel, has been an enduring challenge to most collaboratives in prior biennia and was exacerbated in this grant period by the pandemic and 2020 wildfire season. Although some groups have developed practices for recording institutional memory and onboarding new agency partners, more may benefit from establishing these, particularly anticipatory plans in the event of wildfire impacts on agency staff availability. Future expectations of collaborative outcomes and monitoring will need to continue to account for these factors and recognize when they are beyond collaborative control.



## Introduction

Oregon is home to numerous forest collaborative groups that provide input on federal forest management. These groups exist around the state, and each focuses on an area of public forest land such as a ranger district or national forest. They convene diverse stakeholders for dialogue about their interests and values for forest management priorities. They may offer input: 1) before and during the analysis process required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA process) as Forest Service units plan specific projects, 2) by making recommendations for the use of retained receipts from stewardship contracting, and/or 3) by providing zones of agreement (ZOA), restoration principles, or other statements about management issues beyond the project scale. Groups that solely focus on recommendations around the use of retained receipts (“stewardship groups”) have typically been included as collaboratives in existing inventories. Although there is no official definition of what constitutes a “collaborative,” there are at least 20 such groups generally recognized at this time on all national forests in Oregon and one Bureau of Land Management district.<sup>1</sup>

The primary source of funding for the operations of these collaboratives in Oregon is the Federal Forest Restoration Program (FFR Program). This program was created in 2013 (state fiscal year 2014) with the broad purpose of accelerating the pace, scale, and complexity of restoration on Oregon's federal forestlands. The program is administered by the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) and provides several types of investments and resources to support state-federal partnerships and collaboratives. One component has been Collaborative Capacity Grants (“collaborative grants”), which have supported forest collaborative groups in enhancing and strengthening their effectiveness. The stated goal of these grants is to increase the number, acreage,

and complexity of collaboratively planned restoration projects on federal lands by developing or expanding ZOA. ZOA may focus on a project, Forest Plan allocation unit, forest type, or ecological function. A secondary goal of the program is to build the collaborative capacity to accomplish ZOA. For the 2019–2021 biennium, grants were awarded to groups working on either ZOA or improvements to their collaborative governance capacities. These grants are administered by the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board through a competitive process (see Appendix for eligibility criteria).

Given this investment of public funds, and the expectations that collaboratives will aid in FFR Program goals of accelerated restoration on federal forestlands, we have performed biennial monitoring of these collaborative grants since the program's inception.<sup>2</sup> This report provides this monitoring for the 2019–2021 biennium, in which 12 groups were funded. The guiding monitoring questions for this timeframe were:

- What activities were accomplished with these grants?
- What on-the-ground outcomes (recorded restoration and timber sale activities) resulted from collaborative involvement?
- What are the economic impacts of the grant funds, as well as the implemented work linked to collaborative involvement?
- How did these activities contribute to the pace, scale, and/or complexity of federal forest restoration?
- How have any changes (related to staffing, local community context, wildfires, or the COVID-19 pandemic) affected the work of collaboratives through these grants?

<sup>1</sup> Inventories of forest collaboratives can be found at the following sources, but may vary in their inclusion of collaboratives and by publication date:

[https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/fseprd567241.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd567241.pdf)

<https://oregonexplorer.info/topics/forest-collaboratives?ptopic=2>

<sup>2</sup> For more information and to view prior monitoring reports, please see: [http://ewp.uoregon.edu/ODF\\_FFRP\\_Monitoring](http://ewp.uoregon.edu/ODF_FFRP_Monitoring)



## Approach

First, we obtained collaborative capacity grant documentation for the 12 grants awarded through the FFR Program for the 2019–2021 biennium from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's Grant Management System. This included grant proposals, signed grant agreements, progress reports, and billing records. We reviewed these documents for each collaborative funded in this biennium and coded them to identify stated activities, deliverables, and any specific projects (i.e., planning areas) where they were focusing. With this, we created a summary profile for each collaborative.

Second, we sent the summary profile and an interview questionnaire (see Appendix) to the facilitator or coordinator of each funded group. The questionnaire focused on confirming the accuracy and completeness of the profile data, as well as open-ended questions about progress, challenges, and the role of their activities in supporting accelerated restoration. Respondents had the option to complete the questionnaire in writing or through a phone interview. All chose to provide responses in writing. One coordinator was unresponsive after multiple requests. To identify cross collaborative themes, the responses to each question were compiled and compared for similarities and differences across groups.

Third, we used a database that we created during prior monitoring to account for all on-the ground planning areas for which collaboratives had provided input during this biennium while funded by the capacity grants. This included the names, acreages, and decision status of planning areas as of April 2021. This information was confirmed from multiple sources, including the grant documents, questionnaires, and review of the schedules of proposed action for relevant national forest units in Oregon. Collaborative input was defined as a collaborative process including written or other recognized input provided on behalf of a collaborative group to the agency about a planning area following dialogue about planned activities, regardless if full consensus was reached. We then categorized each planning area by its NEPA decision and implementation status: 1) still under analysis, 2) decision signed but implementation not yet begun, and 3) decision signed and implementation underway.

Fourth, for collaborative planning areas identified above where a NEPA decision had been made and implementation was underway, we obtained information about the location and types of implemented vegetation management activities using the Forest Service's Forest Activity Tracking System (FACTS) database. We did not have access to Bureau of Land Management (BLM) data for projects on the Medford district. We focused solely on the types of forest restoration activities considered in

prior FFR Program monitoring efforts. The FACTS data were obtained in early May 2021 and represent the best information on implementation as of that date. Within the FACTS entries, we searched for the names of each planning area in the NEPA document name field, implementation project name field, and sale name field to locate all available entries affiliated with these areas. We then summarized the number of acres where work was implemented for the set of restoration activities of interest by federal fiscal year, which differs from the state fiscal years used in Oregon. In many cases, the vegetation management activities reported here reflect activities in planning areas collaborated on, by these funded groups, prior to 2019.

Fifth, we identified all timber sales awarded between July 2019 and May 2021 in planning areas that had involvement from a collaborative funded in the 2019–2021 biennium. We contacted relevant Forest Service staff on each engaged national forest to obtain information about timber sales from planning areas with collaborative involvement, and compiled them in a database accounting for sale names, date sold, acreage, timber volume, and purchaser. These sales primarily represent planning areas that were collaborated on by the funded groups prior to 2019. We calculated the total volume sold by national forest for the months of the state 2019–2021 biennium. That volume by forest was split into sawtimber and non-sawtimber size using parameters developed for each forest based on their sales for federal fiscal year 2020. Total volume of sold sawtimber and non-sawtimber during the biennium was divided by two to approximate an annual average over the period. The average annual economic activity in Oregon from these timber sales was estimated using standard Forest Service approaches and tools and the economic model IMPLAN for estimating the economic impact of timber sales, including assuming all economic impact occurred in the award year (despite most federal timber sales allowing the buyer several years to actually harvest the timber) and that sold volume was equivalent to harvested volume.

Finally, we calculated the economic activity that resulted from grant dollars awarded to collabora-

tives themselves. We reviewed grant budgets to obtain the amounts of funding in different categories of expenditures in each grant (i.e., staff, travel, materials/supplies, training) as well as matching cash and in-kind contributions made by partners. In some cases, some funding was moved after grant award from travel to staff or contractor time as a result of the pandemic. The average annual jobs and value added supported by collaborative capacity funds was estimated for Oregon using the economic model IMPLAN.

## Considerations and limits of approach

- This is not a comprehensive report of the efforts of all Oregon collaboratives in 2019–2021. Rather, we focus on describing the efforts and outcomes of the 12 collaboratives funded in the 2019–2021 biennium.
- This report does not capture the final and complete accomplishments of these grants for the 2019–2021 grant period. In a typical biennium, funding for this monitoring requires it to be completed before June 30, yet final grant reports from collaboratives are not due until August 30. In this period in particular, several collaboratives requested and were awarded extensions through later dates to help address pandemic impacts. Therefore, activities undertaken after May 2021 are not reflected here and should be captured in future follow up monitoring.
- On-the-ground outcomes linked to collaboratives are not solely due to collaborative engagement; they are also dependent on the Forest Service's authority and capacity to make decisions and implement projects.
- The restoration (non-timber sale) components of collaboratively planned projects also support jobs and income, but we do not estimate the economic activity from this work in this analysis because we lack the data to relate contract expenditures to work implemented during the biennium.



## Overview of collaborative capacity grants

The 2019–2021 grant cycle provided a total of \$540,281 to 12 collaborative groups engaged on nine national forests and one Bureau of Land Management (BLM) district in Oregon (Table 1). The grants also leveraged an additional \$387,661 in documented matching funds or in-kind support from partners.

In this grant cycle, state direction was that collaborative governance-focused applications were the top priority in order to ensure the health and efficacy

of groups in developing agreements and functioning. Six groups submitted grants solely to work on ZOA, two solely for collaborative capacity, and four for both purposes. Within these two types of work, a variety of activities could occur, including collaborative facilitation and coordination, technical assistance, science support, outreach, and communications. Allowable expenditures could be made for collaborative staff wages, contracted services, materials and supplies, travel, and administrative costs.

**Table 1 Collaborative grants in 2019–2021 grant cycle**

Group	Federal forest unit(s)	Collaborative governance focus	ZOA focus	Grant \$ awarded	Leveraged funds and in-kind
Blue Mountains Forest Partners (BMFP)	Malheur National Forest		√	\$65,000	\$30,300
Clackamas Stewardship Partners (CSP)	Mt. Hood National Forest	√		\$16,062	\$3,002
Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project (DCFP)	Deschutes National Forest		√	\$64,370	\$89,107
Harney County Restoration Collaborative (HCRC)	Malheur National Forest	√	√	\$49,990	\$0
Hood River Forest Collaborative and Wasco County Forest Collaborative (HRFC and WCFC)	Mt. Hood National Forest		√	\$44,974	\$66,500
Northern Blues Forest Collaborative (NBFC)	Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests	√	√	\$37,643	\$42,428
Ochoco Forest Restoration Collaborative (OFRC)	Ochoco National Forest		√	\$64,609	\$49,604
Siuslaw Forest Collaborative; now known as Oregon Central Coast Forest Collaborative (OCCFC)	Siuslaw National Forest	√	√	\$71,473	\$5,000
Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative (SOFRC)	Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest and Medford District of Bureau of Land Management	√	√	\$34,760	\$400
Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative (SWFC)	Willamette National Forest		√	\$65,000	\$97,320
Wild Rivers Coast Forest Collaborative (WRCFC)	Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest	√		\$26,400	\$4,000
<b>12 groups supported</b>	<b>9 National Forests and 1 BLM district engaged</b>			<b>\$540,281</b>	<b>\$387,661</b>

## Findings

### Collaborative restoration, timber sale, and economic outcomes

#### Planning acres supported by collaborative input

Collaborative grants have helped prepare project-level restoration plans for a total of 859,174 acres of federal forestland across 32 NEPA planning areas between 2019 and 2021 (Table 2). Final NEPA

decisions were signed on 16 areas covering over 370,000 acres during this time period. Groups also were engaged on 16 other planning areas in pre-scoping or environmental analysis stages (decisions not yet signed) covering nearly 490,000 acres. Planning areas ranged in size and scope, as this varies by national forest. Spatially smaller efforts with more rapid timelines included a fire salvage project of 250 acres and other Categorical Exclusion areas of approximately 3,000 acres. A few groups worked on larger landscape areas between 60,000—92,000 acres with more complex scopes and longer analysis durations. For the 16 areas on which a deci-

**Table 2 Planning acres collaborated on by funded collaboratives in the 2019–2021 grant cycle**

Group	Federal forest unit(s)	Total acres collaborated on during 2019–2021 with decision signed as of spring 2021	Total acres collaborated on during 2019–2021 still under analysis or pre-analysis as of spring 2021	Types of NEPA documents collaborated on in 2019–2021
Blue Mountains Forest Partners	Malheur National Forest	73,605	251,566	EA, EIS
Clackamas Stewardship Partners	Mt. Hood National Forest	NA	NA	NA
Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project	Deschutes National Forest	6,500	NA	EA
Harney County Restoration Collaborative	Malheur National Forest	71,870	NA	CE, EA
Hood River Forest Collaborative and Wasco County Forest Collaborative	Mt. Hood National Forest	27,505	15,450	CE, EA
Northern Blues Forest Collaborative	Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests	28,870	36,000	EA
Ochoco Forest Restoration Collaborative	Ochoco National Forest	15,810	24,965	CE, EA
Siuslaw Forest Collaborative/Oregon Central Coast Forest Collaborative	Siuslaw National Forest	NA	39,440	TBD
Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative	Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest and Medford District of Bureau of Land Management	56,593	65,000	EA, EIS
Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative	Willamette National Forest	NA	54,000	EIS
Wild Rivers Coast Forest Collaborative	Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest	92,000	NA	EIS
		<b>372,753</b>	<b>486,421</b>	

sion was reached in the grant period, the duration of the NEPA process as measured from release of scoping letter to signature of final decision ranged greatly. The average duration was 25 months; the shortest was one month, and the longest was 54 months. Planning timelines vary by decision type, and therefore cannot be readily compared. Groups collaborated on projects with NEPA documents of varying scope and complexity, including more focused Categorical Exclusions (CEs), Environmental Analyses (EA), and more complex Environmental Impact Statements (EIS).

### Implementation of collaboratively planned forest management activities

A variety of restoration activities occurred over federal fiscal years 2019–2021 in planning areas that had collaborative involvement (Table 3). Commercial sales accounted for the greatest number of activity acres over the biennium—about 40,000. Piling of fuels, burning of piled material, and precommercial thinning were each accomplished on about 25,000 acres over the period. Broadcast burning and piling of fuels exhibited some of the greatest year-to-year variation in acres accomplished with the former having the fewest acres during the period in 2020 and the latter the opposite.

These accomplishments are only those linked to these funded collaboratives and do not represent all activity on a given Forest Service unit in this time period. In addition, acres are counted by treatment activity in FACTS; therefore, an acre can be counted each time it receives a different activity treatment, and numbers of acres across activities cannot be summed across activities for a national forest unit or to the state. Finally, resource area staff within individual units and across units likely differ in the extent to which they fully report their activities in FACTS, so these data likely underestimate some non-commercial activities due to underreporting.

### Economic activity from collaboratively planned timber sales

During the 2019–2021 biennium, there were 30 timber sales affiliated with the collaboratives that were funded. Those timber sales had a total volume of 210 million board feet, with about 143 million board feet of that volume sold between October 2019 and October 2020. On average, those timber sales supported 486 jobs each year of the biennium in logging operations and wood processing and 610 jobs in other sectors of the economy that sell goods and services to those businesses their employees (Table 4). The timber sales contributed an average

**Table 3 Acres of restoration-related activities in planning areas with collaborative input by federal fiscal year**

Activities	2019	2020	2021 <sup>a</sup>	Total
Broadcast burning	2,973	783	3,177	6,932
Burning of piled material	5,045	10,553	10,119	25,717
Chipping of fuels	23	3		26
Commercial sale	16,330	23,322		39,651
Mechanical surface treatment	2,773	4,847	1,615	9,235
Piling of fuels, hand or machine	6,184	19,269	775	26,228
Precommercial thin	5,877	15,898	2,369	24,144
Silviculture prescription	2,404	1,873		4,277
Stand survey	9,253	11,590	1,317	22,160
Watershed-related restoration	78	431		509

<sup>a</sup> Only activities through April 2021

**Table 4 Average annual jobs supported in Oregon by collaboratively planned timber sales during the 2019–2021 biennium**

	Harvesting activities	Processing activities	Total
Direct effects	222	265	486
Secondary effects	136	474	610
<b>Total effects</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>739</b>	<b>1,096</b>

**Table 5 Average annual contribution in Oregon gross regional product from collaboratively planned timber sales during the 2019–2021 biennium (\$ millions)**

	Harvesting activities	Processing activities	Total
Direct effects	17.3	24.1	41.4
Secondary effects	13.7	36.4	50.1
<b>Total effects</b>	<b>31.0</b>	<b>60.5</b>	<b>91.5</b>

\$91.5 million each year to Oregon's gross regional product (Table 5). These estimates rely on the standard accounting assumption that all harvesting and processing activities happen in the year the timber sale was awarded. In reality, harvesting and processing activities are typically spread out over several years post-award and often do not begin in the award year.

### **Economic activity from collaborative grant dollars**

The \$540,000 of collaborative grant funds provided to collaborative groups over the biennium supported an average of five year-long jobs and contributed \$361,000 to Oregon's gross regional product each year of the biennium. About three of those jobs were directly related to collaborative operations and the remaining were in other sectors of the economy that sell goods and services in support of collaborative operations.

### **Collaborative governance activities**

Collaborative governance refers to the operations and structure of collaborative groups, including aspects such as how they guide their organization, operating principles, ground rules, decision making protocols, and outreach and communications processes. Half (six of the 12) funded collaboratives worked on collaborative governance needs, which was the top priority of this grant cycle. For one group (the Siuslaw/Oregon Central Coast Forest Collaborative) this was foundational work to establish a new forest-wide collaborative, including the development of a joint learning process about scientific issues of management relevance, the creation of all necessary governance documents, and a project agreement template; these activities provide a basis for future collaboration by helping set priorities and shared expectations.

A few established groups also worked at a foundational level to build or rebuild strategic focus and strategies for their collaborative work. This is intended to help groups be more responsive to evolving needs in forest restoration and more effective

at their work. One was the Clackamas Stewardship Partners, which completed an in-depth strategic planning process that included revisiting their mission statement to better address the interests of current and potential members, including climate change and wildfire risk. Another was the Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative, which was developing a new strategy to guide their approach to collaboration on federal lands before and during the NEPA process and to increase stakeholder involvement. This group has built successful implementation partnerships, but has needed to revisit and expand its strategy for engagement during planning stages.

In addition, other groups focused on updating their operating principles and decision making processes. These are at the heart of how collaboratives function, and effective decision processes can help groups be more efficient in articulating their perspectives. For example, the Northern Blues Forest Collaborative finalized new operating principles that allowed them to diversify their member base by offering options for levels of engagement that could be inclusive of federally recognized Tribes, and that provided for stronger commitments to the process. They also worked on new partnership structures that would align with their growing focus on larger landscapes and all-lands efforts. The

Wild Rivers Coast Forest Collaborative updated all its governance documents and structures to reflect major changes in group composition and to also offer onboarding pathways for new members.

An additional key governance activity is outreach. This allows collaboratives to remain aware and inclusive of community interests, as well as gain additional social support for their work. It can also increase general awareness of the need for forest restoration. During the COVID-19 pandemic, engagement such as newsletters and growing online presences was a primary focus. Several groups also diversified and innovated in their outreach approaches. For example, the Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative created a package of tools around its work in the Rigdon landscape that included a story map, blog, video, and self-guided field trip. The Harney County Restoration Collaborative developed several news stories about wildfire and prescribed fire, which were shared through local news media, and created interpretative signs that were installed at a popular campground trail. The Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project continued its outreach through social media, by transitioning to educational presentations in virtual settings, and by working with local recreation communities around the timing and extent of restoration implementation impacts on important recreation infrastructure.



## Zones of agreement activities

Historically, “ZOA” referred to broader input that could transcend single projects such that a collaborative might not need to collaborate in detail on every planning area, and could theoretically plan and implement projects more rapidly. In this grant cycle, the solicitation described ZOA as collaborative input that may be articulated for a specific project (planning area), Forest Plan allocation unit, forest type, or ecological function issue.

Almost all (10 of the 12) funded collaboratives worked on ZOA. The type and focus of these ZOA for each group largely reflected their development and age. For example, as the Siuslaw/Oregon Central Coast Forest Collaborative was in the process of forming during this time as a new, forest-wide group, their ZOA process centered on reviewing past understandings from the retained receipts work of the stewardship groups active at smaller spatial scales, as well as the values and views of some stakeholders for recent NEPA projects. This was intended to identify starting points for future areas of agreement and opportunities to improve dialogue and transparency. Other groups including the Wasco and Hood River collaboratives and the Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative focused on project-level ZOA for several planning areas as those moved into or through the NEPA process. Even though project-level ZOA are specific to a planning area, they have offered opportunities for relatively newer groups to gain experience with the collaborative process, and with seeking to find and document areas of agreement that may have application in future planning areas with similar resource conditions.

Several groups focused on specific issues of importance beyond project levels. These included fuel breaks (Wild Rivers Coast Forest Collaborative), Class 4 streams (Ochoco Forest Restoration Collaborative), lodgepole pine (Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project), management of natural ignitions and roads management (Harney County Restoration Collaborative), and beaver restoration (Wasco County Forest Collaborative). A few groups focused on updating or integrating their existing ZOA for

upland forest restoration (Blue Mountains Forest Partners, Harney County Restoration Collaborative, Northern Blues Forest Collaborative), or on identifying a set of future planning areas (Northern Blues, Wasco, and Hood River groups). Issue-based or other ZOA focused beyond project scales have the potential to create planning efficiencies. They allow collaboratives to review science and determine principles and stances on management issues that exist across projects. However, the use of these ZOA for planning efficiencies also relies on the ability and willingness of Forest Service staff to utilize them, and for collaborative members to continue to support them. Several of these ZOA processes have been delayed by the pandemic, which is described in more detail in a following section.



## Collaboratives in an evolving context

Several forest collaboratives have evolved their work as a result of learning over time. One example is an increased focus on implementation. For some, this was because it offered strategic opportunity to increase their impact. For example, the Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative’s implementation advisory committee has continued to work on use of stewardship contracting and Good Neighbor Authority, offering input to help implementation project design to be economical, cost effective, reflective of partner input, and able to draw on existing agreements for the capacity to accomplish the work. This has also helped ensure implementation of diverse restoration activities that are important to the collaborative, such as weed management and roadwork. This implementation committee is also building a master restoration project list for the entire watershed intended to guide strategic lever-

aging of federal and partner dollars for restoration priorities in the future. The Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative entered into the Rogue Forest Partners partnership with other nonprofits and land management agencies in the Rogue Basin to collaboratively implement and monitor several projects (this activity is funded by sources other than the FFR Program).

Other groups are seeking increased engagement on implementation because they found that prior projects on which they had collaborated during NEPA did not result in their intended outcomes when implemented. The Blue Mountains Forest Partners' monitoring program and other dialogue around the ten-year stewardship contract on the Malheur National Forest revealed that pre-award work such as development of prescriptions and contract language as well as unit layout are also instrumental for ensuring collaborative objectives are met. For the remainder of 2021, this group will be focusing on "collaborative implementation" and effectiveness monitoring in the Camp/Lick and Ragged Ruby areas. The Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project encountered challenges during the planning process when draft alternatives for projects on which they had collaborated (Kew and Lex) did not reflect the group's recommendations for dry and moist mixed-conifer treatments. To address this, they convened an intensive series of implementation monitoring field trips and discussions that focused on clarifying details of these draft alternatives and how they related to the group's existing agreements.

During 2020, the Forest Service also decided to undertake a regional-level NEPA process to review and revise the wildlife standards of the Eastside Screens, a policy that limits harvest of trees over 21 inches diameter at breast height on national forests within the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management area. Groups such as Blue Mountains Forest Partners (BMFP) had previously identified the need for different policies around harvest limits, such as age-based rather than diameter-based guidelines, although this is not an area of agreement with some environmental organizations in eastern Oregon. Collaboratives in the Blue Mountains area (BMFP as well as Harney County Restora-

tion Collaborative, Ochoco Forest Restoration Collaborative, and Northern Blues Forest Collaborative) engaged with this process and some provided written input, but this did delay their progress on other grant activities such as ZOA development.

A final shift in some collaboratives' work during this grant period has been related to the NEPA process. Some Forest Service units have increased their use of Categorical Exclusions in order to accomplish planning of priority work from wildfire or insect or disease standpoints. These projects are permitted to undergo a streamlined NEPA process, must be under 3000 acres in size, and must involve collaboration for input. Although these projects may offer opportunity to accomplish NEPA at a more rapid pace, they have less complex scopes and are not as spatially large as areas planned through other types of NEPA processes. Therefore, while they may offer quicker "easy wins", they also may pose tradeoffs for greater spatial or resource impact. Groups that collaborated on CEs during this biennium included the Hood River and Wasco County collaboratives, Ochoco Forest Restoration Collaborative, and Harney County Restoration Collaborative.

### **Pursuing large landscape strategies**

In addition to engaging in project level planning, several collaboratives continued to lay a foundation for future restoration at large landscape scales during their grant periods. Two groups worked with their national forest partners to submit new Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program proposals in 2020 (Northern Blues Forest Collaborative and Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative) while one submitted an extension (Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project). These proposals develop significant ten-year restoration strategies and a sequence of future planning areas to achieve them. Other examples of leveraging opportunities to increase the pace, scale, and complexity of restoration included a successful Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Program proposal (Wasco County Forest Collaborative), and ongoing collaboration around the use of Good Neighbor Authority (Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative).

## Collaboratives in the face of change and challenge

In 2020, all forest collaboratives had to adapt their work in light of the global COVID-19 pandemic. As was common in many sectors, each group transitioned to virtual meetings as in-person gatherings were not permitted, and attempted to maintain regular business to the extent possible. For some, this was an effective time to focus on governance and capacity building activities. However, a few groups reported that the shift to online formats reduced the participation of those with poor internet connections or less technological proficiency. In addition, work on complex topics such as ZOA development generally was delayed as it required intensive dialogue and processing of information; and because ZOA can drive the direction of a collaborative's work for years and were deemed too significant to fully develop without in-person interaction. Some efforts closely tied to the Forest Service's roles were put on hold due to shifts in agency focus and priorities with the pandemic. For example, project development for four planning areas on which the Blue Mountains Forest Partners intend to focus in coming years was largely delayed. The Harney County Restoration Collaborative has slowed its process for ZOA around managing natural ignitions until there can be more in person dialogue about this important topic. Several of the collaboratives requested and were given an extension on their grants with the hope of conducting field tours and in person meetings later in 2021, so further activities and outcomes from the grants are yet to be accomplished.

A second major disruption for a few groups was the 2020 wildfire season. This affected the three funded collaboratives on the Mt. Hood National Forest. The Riverside Fire burned across much of the area where the Clackamas Stewardship Partners works, and their next planning area of focus was entirely burned over and removed from the list of future projects. The White River Fire also occurred on the east side of the Mt. Hood National Forest. Most projects on which the Hood River and Wasco collaboratives had been engaging were put on hold as

staff capacity was redirected to postfire activities. In addition, the Slater Fire burned area included a large, high priority planning area where the Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative had planned to focus in the future. For all these groups, the trajectory of future planning areas on which to collaborate remained uncertain at the time of this study. However, the 2020 wildfire season also galvanized new interest and energy. The Clackamas Stewardship Partners used the fire recovery process as a learning opportunity; they held scientist talks and discussed how recovery and restoration in the future can account for climate trends. The Hood River Forest Collaborative began to shift towards ZOA for plantation thinning more broadly, instead of a project-specific focus on a planning area that was delayed. The Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative had been working on community fire preparedness assessments and plans prior to the Labor Day fires, and then experienced a substantial increase in community interest in these activities.

A third dynamic that forest collaboratives continued to face was changes in key personnel, largely within the Forest Service units with which they worked. Several groups described turnover or detailing of key positions that are integral interfaces with collaboratives, including biologists, district rangers, and NEPA coordinators. In addition, an ongoing sense of limited agency capacity to engage with collaboratives was reported. For the groups on the east side of the Mt. Hood National Forest, this was largely related to the staff redirection to post-fire activities. For others, such as the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project, the cause of this reduced capacity was not described, but the effect was that planned efforts for new data collection to inform collaborative work were delayed. A few groups also experienced the departure of key participants due to job transitions, including one facilitator transition (Wild Rivers Coast Forest Collaborative). The enduring reality of personnel changes and limited time for collaboration has been a challenge to the scope and speed with which collaboratives can engage with federal forest restoration.





## Discussion and Implications

This study analyzed collaborative capacity grants made through Oregon's Federal Forest Restoration Program in the 2019–2021 biennium. A total of \$540,281 was provided to 12 collaboratives in this time period for building their governance capacities and/or undertaking zones of agreement processes. We examined several outcomes from funded collaboratives: activities accomplished, restoration and timber sale activities resulting from collaborative involvement, economic impacts of this implemented work and the grant dollars themselves, collaborative contributions to accelerated restoration; and effects of the pandemic, wildfires, and other changes and challenges. Several key themes and implications emerged.

First, collaborative groups continued to facilitate dialogue at project planning stages (i.e., the NEPA process) and offer project level zones of agreement. This project level engagement has led to implementation of restoration treatments and timber sales, and resulted in tangible economic impacts. The size, planning timeline, and complexity of these projects varied across and even within collaboratives. Although some worked on areas over 60,000 and up to 92,000 acres, others worked on much

smaller scales and on Categorical Exclusions of 3,000 acres or less as agency use of that authority has grown. Some projects moved more quickly than others through the planning timeline. Smaller projects may offer quicker “easy wins”, but also pose tradeoffs for greater spatial or resource impact. Expectations of collaborative impact on the pace and scale of planning restoration projects should consider how opportunities, approach, and ability to affect accelerated restoration before or during the NEPA process vary by place and are largely subject to Forest Service discretion.

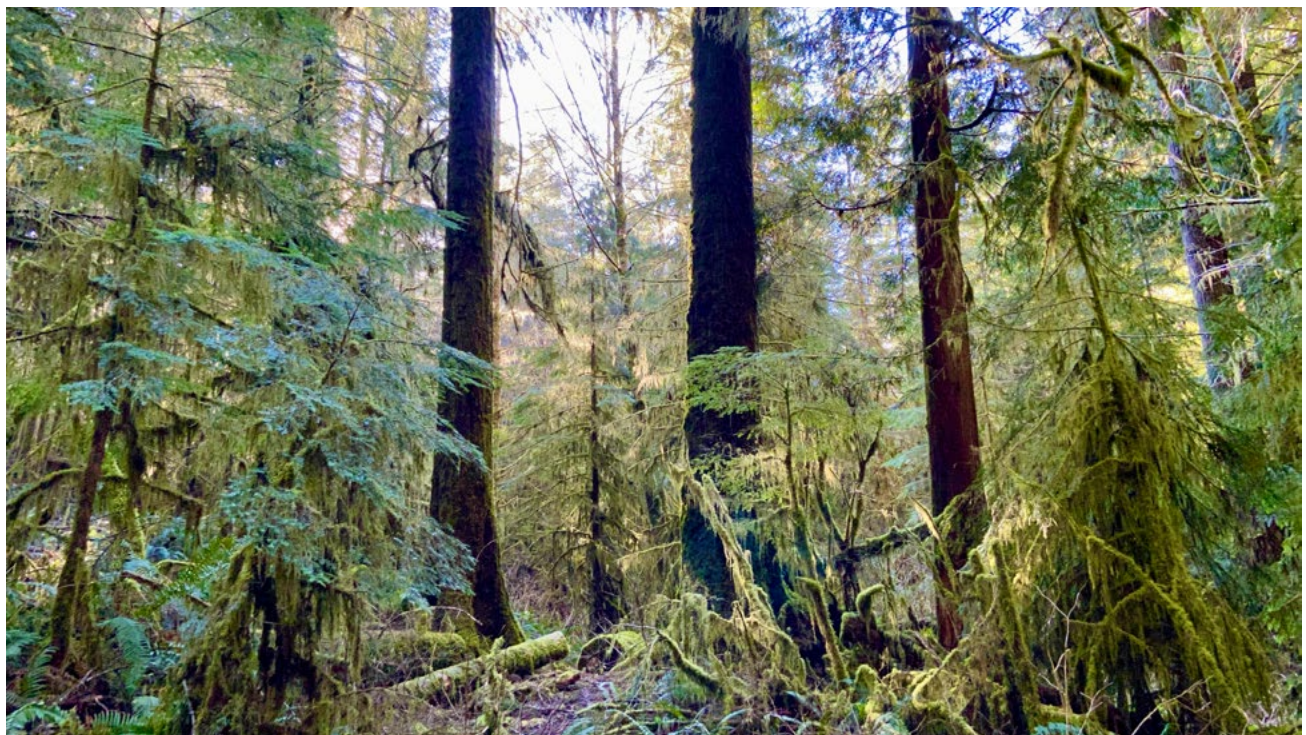
Second, collaboratives also contributed to the pace, scale, and complexity of restoration beyond the NEPA process by collaborating on implementation. This included attempts to engage in pre-award decisions, where their input was used to support economic elements of project design, leverage resources, utilize stewardship contracting and Good Neighbor Authority, and ensure that the structure of contracts reflected their intent. Future grants and other FFR Program investments may consider supporting this type of engagement, as there is growing interest in it yet no clear pathway for non-agency involvement as exists during the NEPA process.

Broader dialogue amongst collaboratives and agency leadership to better establish options for this involvement across the state may be needed. Future monitoring and expectations of collaborative outcomes should also adapt to account for these roles.

Third, a further way in which some collaboratives contributed to accelerated restoration was by participating in proposals for large landscape restoration strategies through the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program and Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Program. They provided essential support for proposals that require strong collaborative involvement to compete. Cross-boundary, all-lands restoration and wildfire risk reduction efforts continue to be a primary interest for many land management agencies, and collaboratives that are able to engage in developing and implementing these strategies may find opportunities to expand their impact across larger landscapes as well as obtain additional sources of funding.

Finally, 2020 was unprecedented for all groups given the restrictions from the pandemic, and for many groups, large wildfires also affected their focal areas or other parts of the national forests on

which they work. These events caused a mixture of opportunity and challenge for collaboratives. All were able to continue their operations online and some accomplished necessary collaborative governance and outreach work intended to provide more strategic foundations and social support for future forest restoration. Groups also saw increased interest in some aspects of their work as a result of the widespread impacts of the Labor Day wildfires. However, uncertainty and shifting priorities from both the pandemic and wildfires often meant the redirection of agency staff, reductions in their capacity to partner with collaboratives, and the slowing or cancelation of future planning areas. Limited agency capacity, as well as changes in personnel, has been an enduring challenge to most collaboratives in prior biennia as well. Although some groups have developed practices for recording institutional memory and onboarding new agency partners, more may benefit from establishing these, particularly anticipatory plans in the event of wildfire impacts on agency staff availability. Future expectations of collaborative outcomes and monitoring will need to continue to account for these factors and recognize when they are beyond collaborative control.



## Appendix

### 1. Collaborative Capacity Grant program criteria

**Source: Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board**

<https://www.oregon.gov/oweb/grants/Pages/forest-collaboratives.aspx>

This solicitation is open to established local collaborative groups engaged in forest restoration and/or stewardship on federal forests in Oregon (forests managed by the U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management).

To be eligible, collaborative efforts must show evidence of a baseline capacity to sustain collaborative dialogue among diverse perspectives. The following must exist at the time of application. Documentation must be submitted for a collaborative to be eligible for a grant under this solicitation.

1. 501(c)3 status or signed agreement with a fiscal sponsor. If a collaborative group does not have 501(c)3 status, applicants must have a signed agreement with an eligible fiscal sponsor. This can be a non-profit community-based organization or unit of local government, including tribal governments. Applicants must be based in Oregon.
2. Statement of Commitment signed by collaborative members/participants (including a Declaration of Commitment).
3. Established collaborative process that has been endorsed/approved by the collaborative membership. At minimum, this should include:
  - a. Mission statement that focuses work on public lands.
  - b. Decision-making protocol.
  - c. Documented calendar/schedule that outlines meeting frequency and structure.
4. Leadership structure and process to show how organizational decisions are made, including but not limited to a standing leadership committee or administrative committee.

## 2. Interview/profile questionnaire used

**Each collaborative coordinator received a customized profile that contained information specific to their group.**

In gathering this information, I'd really like your honest feedback about how these activities are proceeding and where you see both successes and challenges.

1. On-the-ground acres: First, I'd like to confirm the names and acres of the planning areas, stewardship contracts, or other identifiable on-the-ground projects that your group has worked on in 2020–2021 and/or anticipates working on through the end of 2021. "On-the-ground" refers to specific acres of Forest Service/BLM land that you have had dialogue about, that your collaborative would agree are "collaborative projects." These are planned vegetation management projects. The planning areas listed here are based on your grant reports and my review of your website. Please let me know if I am missing anything.

Project name	Type of project	Number of acres for area involved	NEPA status of this area or project as of March 2021	Please describe your group's input and/or agreement on this project during the grant period only (2020—anticipated through summer 2021)
Projects listed for this collaborative				

2. Other activities: Now, I'd like to talk about other non-project specific activities that you are undertaking with your FFRP grant in 2020–2021. I've listed them below as I've found them in your grant paperwork. For each of them, please provide any comments you have on how you see this activity relating to pace, scale, and/or quality of restoration; or anticipate it will in the future.

Activity	How does or do you anticipate this activity will increase pace, scale, and/or quality of restoration? Please explain.	What else would you share about progress on this activity?
Activities listed for this collaborative		

3. Can you please describe how the pandemic has affected how your collaborative operates?
4. Did you/are you planning to move your travel and meeting supply dollars to salary given that travel was not possible?
5. Is there anything else that really affected your capacity (positively or negatively) during this time period? (E.g., wildfire, major FS position turnover, facilitator change, new members, challenges from community).
6. Is there anything else you would like to share about how your groups have been functioning or about how you've used the FFRP grant?



