

# Collaborative Conservation Workshops



*Boise, Idaho - August 2018*

# Background of Workshops

**I**n August 2018, Partners for Conservation hosted two workshops in Boise, Idaho in order to help landowners and their partners build or enhance collaborative conservation partnerships. The goal of each training was to engage a diverse group of partners from several western landscapes to increase knowledge and potential of broad-based public/private partnerships in achieving durable conservation solutions.

The participants at each session were landowners in key western landscapes along with the non-profit organizations and government agencies that they work closely with to implement conservation in their landscapes and communities. Each participant has faced challenges that could impact their operation's future and recognized the value of collaboration as an effective way to approach natural resource management challenges.

Partners for Conservation is a private landowner-led organization dedicated to public-private partnerships that sustain landscapes for people and nature. Many of the board members and partner agencies and organizations have been actively involved in collaborative conservation efforts within their own landscape. These partners served as "trainers" during the workshop, providing their own perspectives based on years of experience facing challenges and forging successes.

## Basics of Conservation Partnerships

The first session focused on newer partnerships and collaborative efforts that are getting underway. Participants came from Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, and Washington. During the day and a half meeting, topics included:

- Having initial conversations
- Building relationships
- Establishing trust



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- Effective and transparent communication, and
- Discovering the shared vision

Discussions centered around building a strong foundation for collaboration. It was noted that collaboration often starts with a threat, or the 20 percent of an issue where people tend to disagree. However, it was recognized that these threats are a threat to a community's base, the 80 percent of what everyone wants to see - healthy agricultural operations, landscapes, wildlife populations, and communities. Attendees talked about how to work together to develop a shared vision and build trust and strong relationships in order to address the challenge while focusing more on the areas in common where collaboration can begin.

## Facing Challenges in Conservation Partnerships

The second session was a smaller group that were facing challenges within their landscape in their efforts to sustain collaborative conservation efforts. Participants came from California, Colorado, Montana, Nevada, and Utah. Prior to the meeting, attendees were surveyed to identify the specific challenges and roadblocks they face in building effective partnerships. In addition to the fundamentals of building relationships, establishing trust through effective communication, and discovering a shared vision, this group dove more deeply into the three biggest roadblocks they are facing (Getting people engaged and keeping them at the table, working with people or groups that are difficult or working against the solutions, and external communications to raise and maintain awareness) and discussed opportunities to work through those challenges.

# Overarching Themes

## Support for Collaborative Conservation

In both workshops, participants had the opportunity to share ideas on what resources could be helpful to support collaborative conservation work and public-private conservation partnership across all perspectives. The following were resources that were identified by both sessions and by landowner, agency and organization representatives as being useful to local collaboratives.

### Organizational Support

Many of the participants felt that having support with developing organizational structure would be useful. Specific support could include basic information about developing and coordinating a board, seeking funding for conservation efforts, as well as strategic planning and hiring of staff. It was noted that not all collaboratives need or want to have a more formal non-profit structure, however those that do could use additional resources in this area.

### Training

Similar to providing resources for organizational support, it was suggested that providing training to help collaborative efforts would be useful. In particular, it was noted that conflict resolution or facilitation training as well as grant writing would be valuable to help partners work through challenging issues. In addition to in-person training, curriculums in community-based conservation could also integrate online or web-based recorded training to facilitate the engagement of individuals in remote locations.

### Provide a Network

Participants noted that creating and supporting a network of collaborative conservation partnerships would be valuable for local efforts. Part of this could include developing a handbook for community-based

collaboration, providing mentorship or training to support partnerships, offering a newsletter to keep partnerships engaged, etc. As part of this, it was also suggested that help with communications and outreach efforts might be useful to tell a broader story about these collaborative efforts and the landscapes that are impacted.

## Support Paradigm Shift to Collaborative Conservation

Another key theme that developed across both workshops was a recognition that there needs to be an overall paradigm shift to support collaborative conservation within landscapes. Collaboration is often seen as difficult to measure and quantify success, in addition the amount of time required to build relationships and trust within a community can be a challenge within existing time and budget structures for agencies. By creating a conservation paradigm shift, it will help provide the foundation necessary for landowners, agencies, and organizations to prioritize involvement in collaborative efforts. This shift will also allow for the concept of “building a bigger tent” that resonated across all participants.



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It was mentioned on many different occasions that it would be valuable to develop metrics to measure the impact of collaborative group efforts on the community as well as supporting organizations and agencies. The metrics should recognize that collaborative conservation often requires a significant amount of time as well as the evaluation of different deliverables that are achievable by partnerships. Having managers, district offices, state offices of agencies, and organizations believe in and support field staff that engage in collaboration is essential, but it is a definite shift in evaluation of staff performance as well as conservation outcomes. This larger culture change will be important in order to prioritize this kind of work across landscapes.



## *Basics of Conservation Partnerships*

**T**he stated goal of the Basics of Conservation Partnerships workshop was: to engage a diverse group of partners from a sample of western landscapes to increase knowledge and potential of broad-based public/private partnerships in achieving durable conservation solutions. The session sought to increase attendees' understanding of the basics of relationships and partnership building among diverse perspectives in a conservation context as well as improve attendees' confidence in applying basic principles of effective communication and collaboration. The group also discussed how they can be best supported in building skills and

confidence related to conservation partnerships in their landscapes. Finally, this workshop provided an opportunity for attendees to network and learn informally from peers working through public/private partnerships across the West.

To accomplish these goals, the workshop featured a series of panels with speakers representing landowners, agencies, and non-profit organizations that have been engaged on collaborative conservation initiatives within their landscapes. They provided perspectives based on their experiences in initiating relationships, establishing trust, and discovering a shared vision. From these panels developed brainstorming sessions with all workshop participants to identify the process and strategies to help lay the foundation for partnerships.

# Brainstorming Sessions

## Initiating relationships and diverse perspectives - Strategies to overcome communication challenges and maintain trust in conservation partnerships

- *Build a longer table* - Be inclusive of all collaboratively spirited people, this includes focusing on what participants have in common rather than on what is dividing them. As part of this, participants need to create opportunities to break down walls and stereotypes and employ the concept of “neighbor as a verb.” In addition, it is important to identify and engage local landowner leaders who can serve as a trusted influence for important partners.
- *Set the right tone with the meeting* - Plan well in advance on how initial meetings should go because how the meeting is set up sets the tone - this includes not setting the meeting room up so participants feel like they are being talked at rather than with. Finally, a neutral facilitator or coordinator can be extremely helpful to think through and plan the meeting and to ensure that the conversation is respectful.
- *Focus on interests not positions* - In order to engage diverse perspectives and keep the various partners at the table, participants need to set aside assumptions, judgments, and past history. The concept of “walk a mile in my boots” was discussed as was the importance of understanding what other people need from the partnership.

## Establishing relationships based on trust - Requirements and key factors in developing and maintaining trust

- *Go slow to go fast* - Building trust is a marathon, it takes work and time and proper pacing is essential. It is important to show up over time and be engaged in the landscape and community. This includes listening and spending time with people as people before discussing issues. It is essential to develop and use a process that remains consistent.

- *Recognize the triple bottom line* - Trust means that partners have each other's best interests in mind, in particular the triple bottom line of social, economic, and ecological values. In addition, trust requires a value exchange of ideas, tools, resources, etc. so it is important to be of service.

- *Meet them where they are* - Partners must be understanding of other people's experiences, fears, and concerns in order to build trust. Communicate without jargon or acronyms and at a level where all perspectives can understand topics that may be new to them; do not talk down to them and ensure that there is mutual understanding of common terms. Finally, work with those willing to start relationships and then mentor new partners from existing partners.

- *Trust with people versus organizations* - While partners are often at the table representing a group or an agency, it is the people at the table who will build trust. It is important to own your organization and honestly represent your goals. Be clear about your authority and offer no false promises.



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## Discovering a shared vision - The process of discovering what we all can agree on

- *Focus on 80 percent we agree on, not 20 percent we don't* - Collaboration often comes from the conflict (20 percent) but the shared vision can often be something bigger that will allow the partnership to weather the changes in focus and emphasis.
- *Create a shared vision "umbrella" large enough for everyone and bring people along* - Identify common values upfront and return to them as needed. Talk to local communities about what they want and build ownership in the process. Agencies need to focus more on supporting local communities and economies, but landowners need to also recognize the agencies' constraints.

- *Ensure accountability of an outcome* - While partnerships take time, it is essential to show movement and get things done. This builds ownership and engagement that will make the effort transferable to other landowners, communities, or landscapes.
- *Treat each other as neighbors* - Collaborative partnerships need to be about building a broader community through civil discourse and getting on the ground together. Partners should be diverse and not operate in isolated systems, and it is critical to have consistent participation from key partners to ensure continuity. Agencies and organizations with high employee turnover are seen as a disinvestment in the community.



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## Roadblocks and opportunities when applying these principles

- *Collaboratives that form in response to threat (stick) versus opportunity (carrot) function differently* - it is important to expand the “why” beyond self-preservation to grassroots democracy.
- *The lack of a shared goal and something to rally around to bring people together, as well as partners having preconceived notions or seeking pre-determined outcomes* - finding that shared vision and common ground is essential, as is reaching goals along the way to show the value, build trust, and grow partnerships. It is also valuable to find ways to involve and engage the public in that shared vision.
- *Having the right person or people convene the early discussions and ensuring neutral facilitation to work through challenges* - identify a key landowner to be a leader in the process but be inclusive of all representative groups. Work through grants or partner funding for a neutral facilitator to keep the meetings moving.
- *The amount of time required, and the vast distances involved when working on broad landscapes in the West* - look for alternative meeting methods, establish work committees, and ensure follow through from all parties.
- *Parties being in silos isolating themselves and creating barriers within and between agencies, organizations, and communities* - work to break down silos and encourage vertical and horizontal integration of support.
- *Federal agency participation that suffers from abrupt shifts during leadership transitions and turnover at all levels* - ensure that those working on the landscape are empowered to engage in the process and will be supported in their efforts because of institutional support for collaborative conservation.

## Additional insights and recommendations from the group include:

- Listen to understand rather than respond; be respectful and expect all partners to engage in civil discourse.
- Be inclusive; get to know people as individuals and ensure all are welcome.

Overall, this group emphasized the **importance of having fun**. These collaboratives are about community - ensure that part of the partnership is coordinating social events where neighbors and partners get together to have fun and commit to the community's shared vision.



“Work towards what you want, not against what you don’t want.”

- Workshop Participant



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## *Facing Challenges in Conservation Partnerships*

**T**he stated goal of the Facing Challenges in Conservation Partnerships workshop was: to engage a diverse group of partners from a sample of western landscapes with a history of collaboration and partnership to share experiences and learn from each other. Specific focuses were on facing challenges in relationships, partnership building, and communication in the pursuit of building durable conservation solutions supported by a broad range of perspectives. The group also discussed how they can best be supported in facing challenges in relationship- and partnership-building efforts in their landscapes. In addition to the planned training, this session provided an opportunity for less structured learning by allowing participants to network and initiate relationships across landscapes.

Similar to the Basics of Conservation Partnerships session, this workshop featured a series of panels with speakers representing landowners, agencies, and non-profit organizations that have been engaged on collaborative conservation initiatives within their landscapes. They provided perspectives based on their experiences in addressing challenges in building effective trust and communication, developing a shared vision, and building capacity and continuity for landscape collaboratives.

“Nobody cares how much you know, until they know how much you care”

- Workshop Participant

## Brainstorming Sessions

Strategies utilized to overcome communication challenges and to maintain trust in conservation partnerships.

- *Face-to-face is best.* Participants recognized that it is very hard to build trust over emails or phone calls, often it is the personal meetings or visits to operations that help maintain the connection. Partners need to connect with people where they are, to set aside time to get together in person. In addition, building events that aren't formal “meetings” helps to personalize the interactions.
- *Agencies/partners are not a monolith.* It can be easy to “profile” participants based on past experiences or there may be biases and assumptions about who you are dealing with. Partners need to evaluate the nuances of the group and step back to really understand what they need and want to bring them along with you.
- *Include people so they have a stake in the process.* Bringing in a variety of participants allows the discussion to develop so that there is broad input. In addition, meeting facilitation or setting up meetings so that all partners feel empowered to engage can help. Tactics can include getting comments on note cards, asking agency or NGO participants to just listen to the concerns of landowners, etc.

- *Ensure participants have or are honest about their decision-making ability.* Sometimes the people on the ground interacting with the partners may have authorities above them that will be making the decisions. It is important for these participants to be honest about what they can and cannot do, to manage up the line to build trust in the process with their leadership, and support their efforts within the partnership.

- *Work with the trusted entities.* Find the agencies, organizations, and individuals that already have developed trust within a community, such as conservation districts, university extension services, engaged organizations, or landowners. Over time, the partnerships and collaborations that are built may become the trusted entities.

## How partnerships have sought to discover, develop, and document a shared vision in their work.

- *Work to be inclusive but recognize you might not get everyone.* You might not always get everyone to the table, but it can be helpful to invite everyone to the table. Collaboration requires being inclusive and being honestly sincere about participation from a wide audience. By establishing ground rules, and proactively working to engage everyone in a positive manner or welcome them even if they seem unwilling to come to the table, partnerships can help spread the shared vision to a broader group. Sometimes a paid facilitator or mediator can help work through what may seem to be insurmountable challenges.

- *Recognize the past but move forward.* Often there is a history of dissent and distrust – the 20 percent of conflict – and that can sometimes seem to be the focus even when there is typically 80 percent where most can agree. There is a difference between people that don't feel that they have a voice, and those with principles that are fundamentally different or who are focused on being disruptive.

- *Lack of success can come because of a lack of a shared vision.* When discussions continue to stalemate, it could be because there never really was a shared vision to begin with. Sometimes partnerships have to refocus by ensuring the shared vision truly is shared among all participants, not just those that are talking the loudest.

## Challenges of capacity and continuity or succession in partnerships.

- *Figure out how to do as much as possible with what you have.* Capacity is always a challenge. Measuring success can be a challenge with collaboratives, but there needs to be a way to assess progress so that partners can continue to leverage their work. Often this ability to evaluate progress will lead to additional capacity funding to keep moving things forward.

- *Have a strong core group, with others actively engaged in the process.* The continuity of an effort often depends on having a focused, active group of individuals leading the work. However, this can lead to burnout when only a small number of people are carrying the heavy load. Ensure that there is equitable distribution of work load, and actively work to engage a broader group to participate in the partnership.

- *Write things down and maintain records.* With changing leadership in agencies, as well as agency or NGO staff retiring or moving away from the landscape, continuity can be a challenge. Making sure that the efforts, roles, and responsibilities are well documented and then actively sharing that information with new partners will ensure continuity.

- *Transition is inevitable, embrace the new perspectives.* Every time there is someone new you have to bring them along, but it also can provide a powerful new dynamic on the success or lack of success of the partnership. In addition, when staff that has been actively engaged in collaborative efforts moves up in agency or organization leadership, it can be looked at as cultivating the future leaders and changing the overall culture.



Joe Milmo, USFWS



Jeremy Roberts



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## Top Three Challenges

After the brainstorming sessions, the participants identified key challenges/needs associated with continuing conservation partnerships. Participants then dot-voted to select the top three and spent time identifying potential strategies to address these challenges/needs.

### 1) Working with people or groups that are difficult or working against the solution

- Set a series of ground rules (e.g. not active litigants or far extremes that are fundamentally opposed) and group norms, with very clear rationale. Always ensure that group decisions come back to the ground rules.
- Establish clear visions, goals, and outcomes so that everyone agrees to be in the same room together. Recognize there may be less tolerance for lots of meetings between paid and unpaid participants.
- Recognize that collaboration may not be the right approach for every situation, and that things can go badly and make the situation worse.
- Determine if there are compatible interests or potential for a shared vision, people collaborate because they see their shared vision in the end result.
- Use facilitation and conflict resolution skills that can help deal with difficult people, do pre-work to help manage the challenge and conflict and find the right messenger or a neutral third-party to help buffer conflict.

- Set clear sideboards, if there are places/issues that an agency or individual cannot go, partners need to be very clear about that from the beginning.
- Bring people along, without upfront communication things can fall apart. Learn more about what those people's concerns are, see what their issues or goals are, let them know the intent or goal to achieve a solution. Manage expectations and short-term goals.
- Add an "at this time" - you might not be able to get the small percent that are working against you right now, but they might come around. Celebrate that when it happens.

### 2) Getting people engaged and keeping them at the table/Building a shared vision that is large enough and the right scale and scope

- Engage a trusted third-party negotiator/facilitator to help manage the collaborative process but not direct it. If this is not an independent contractor, that individual has to compartmentalize their role as a coordinator. Whoever the coordinator is, they must have the best interests of the collaborative as their goal not the goal of the agency or organization. When you have a good strong coordinator, make sure they are supported in appropriate form (salary, support for planning, mentorship, etc.).
- Do a good job communicating the reason for the meeting and continue to communicate the process to the group. Set up good meetings, think about frequency, format, and venue. Make sure things are enjoyable - good food always helps!



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Jeremy Roberts



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- Include measurable outcomes as part of the vision and mission – partnerships have to be getting something done to keep people at the table.
- Make sure you are engaging people in the way they want to be engaged and communicating in the right way to the core partners (this may include not using emails for correspondence or PowerPoint presentations in meetings).
- Work to find relevancy for the collaboration at larger scales on bigger issues while avoiding taking positions that divide the collaborative.
- Always maintain respectful communication/interaction.

### 3) External communications to raise and maintain awareness

- Identify what you are trying to accomplish/goals, this could include agency awareness and support, additional funding, broader public support or awareness, and sharing to a network of collaboratives.
- Determine target audiences such as the general public; local, state or federal agency staff (local staff as well as their supervisors); senior leadership of agencies or organizations; universities and professional societies (including Cooperative Research Unit students, The Wildlife Society, Society for Range Management, etc.); moderate conservation/environmental organizations; and service organizations (4-H, FFA, Extension, etc.).
- Determine messages for target audiences to meet desired outcomes including overall rural sustainability (potential audiences: public, elected officials); connection to agriculture and understanding food systems (potential audiences: youth, public);

sustainable agricultural management/animal welfare and the concept that good ranching = good wildlife (potential audience: public); and the importance of collaboration (potential audience: agencies, organizations, government officials).

### *Potential Tactics*

- Host site tours, “walk a mile in my boots” – getting boots on the ground experiences with the public, decision-makers, or educational interests can help connect and engage an active public.
- Integrate outreach through a collaborative network by working with other landscapes and other interests to convey the paradigm more broadly.
- Create connections to universities – this can help meet research and monitoring needs of landowners/ landscapes as well as build the long-term shift in future land and wildlife managers who have a foundation in collaborative conservation.

## Other Challenges

The issues that did not rise to the top three but were part of the overall themes from the discussion were:

- Creating collaboration, new business model for monitoring and other activities
- Communications internally to keep the conversation going
- Right messengers and right methods for communicating
- Balancing the need to get things done with building the collaborative effort
- Evaluating new models of succession within agencies and partners
- Investigating new funding opportunities/ maintaining funding



Partners for Conservation

P.O. Box 1876

Blanco, TX 78606

512-663-7596

[info@partnersforconservation.org](mailto:info@partnersforconservation.org)

[www.partnersforconservation.org](http://www.partnersforconservation.org)

Report written by Jodi Stemler Consulting LLC.,  
[www.stemlerconsulting.com](http://www.stemlerconsulting.com) and designed by  
MajaDesign, Inc., [www.majadesignvt.com](http://www.majadesignvt.com).

