

WESTERN LANDS PARTNERSHIP FORUM MEETING REPORT



Las Vegas, Nevada | January 11-12, 2023

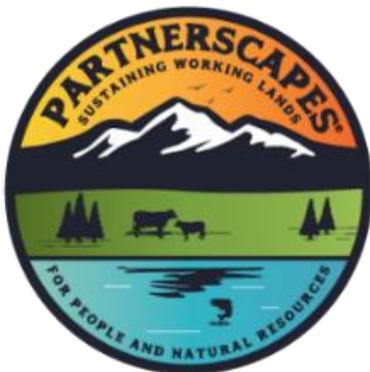


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WESTERN LANDS PARTNERSHIP FORUM REPORT JANUARY 11-12, 2023

OVERVIEW

On January 11-12, 2023, Partnerscapes, together with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) program, hosted the first of a planned three workshop series on issues related to conservation partnerships and collaborative conservation. Over 80 people participated in the forum held in Las Vegas, Nevada. Participants provided private landowner and land manager; federal and state agency; Tribal; and non-governmental organization perspectives. Goals for the workshop included peer-to-peer networking and learning; sharing skills and lessons learned in the delivery of conservation programs and partnerships; assessing needs and opportunities to improve partnership development across private/public lands; identifying gaps and strategies to better equip practitioners to conduct private lands work; and providing input on a framework for networking between practitioners and private landowners.

Steve Jester, Partnerscapes Executive Director, thanked the Planning Team and participants as well as provided background on Partnerscapes and the Private Lands Partners Day (PLPD). PLPD, an annual event held since 2008, is unique in the way it brings together different perspectives including private landowners to network and learn about public/private conservation partnerships and served as inspiration for the Partnership Forum.

Steve recognized that there is some urgency ensuring that partnerships are highly functional as there are a lot of new resources available at the federal level, yet little or no increase in capacity to deliver these resources on-the-ground.

Partnerscapes connects private landowners with partner organizations to improve conservation efforts. The organization is led by landowners who want to conserve and sustain the land for their families and communities, as well as the natural resources and wildlife that inhabit their respective landscapes.

Partnerscapes has found that there are many private lands biologists and practitioners in the field that are interested in building relationships and partnership skills, yet there is not enough training available to them. If they are new to their area, some are struggling to get up to speed quick enough to take advantage of these new resources. Additionally, as the last of the 'Baby Boomer' generation retires, the conservation community is losing a lot of very experienced private lands biologists across the country and there has not been enough overlap with new people coming in.

The Planning Team developed a pre-meeting survey to help guide our workshop planning and ensure the agenda met the needs of the participants. Sixty percent of participants completed the



Photo of participants attending the Western Lands Partnership Forum. Photo by Pat Weidknecht.

survey, which is an outstanding response rate. It was extremely helpful in crafting the agenda and structuring the activities throughout the workshop. We structured the workshop to be highly interactive to provide an opportunity for all participants to share their thoughts and experiences and learn from one another in various ways. A wide variety of perspectives, experience levels and geographies were represented. Results of this pre-meeting survey are found here <https://tinyurl.com/yfrfbxw>.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PRE-FORUM SURVEY RESULTS

The knowledge skills or abilities participants identified as those they would like to develop further or have access to in terms of collaborative partnership work were:

- Developing or supporting multi-perspective landscape scale partnerships.
- Communicating effectively across different perspectives.
- Building new relationships with potential partners.
- Establishing and maintaining trust within or amongst partnerships.

The potential forum activities or content that rated highest among participants were:

- Making new connections with peers and partners engaged in voluntary conservation in the west.
- Identifying gaps and strategies to better equip practitioners to conduct private lands work.
- Exchanging skills and lessons learned around partnership building and delivery of voluntary conservation across public and or private land.

The agenda for the day and a half forum was split into three sessions to support group learning and discussion. Each session was a half day, with panel discussions and speakers to set the stage, followed by facilitated interactive sessions to get feedback from all participants in attendance.

The first session focused on skills, asking the key questions:

- What are the skills that are necessary to be a successful private lands biologist?
- What lessons have been learned from others which are keys to success?

The second session focused on identifying gaps, asking the key questions:

- What is preventing us from reaching our goals for collaborative conservation in the west?
- What strategies or opportunities might help us fill these gaps?

The third session focused on networking and the best elements for a framework that will increase successful networking:

- What are those things that work extremely well in building and maintaining collaborative partnerships?
- How do we share those ideas and help influence the future by increasing our networking opportunities?

SKILLS

The first morning started with a panel discussion, moderated by Steve Jester. Panelists were asked to share a little bit of their own story and then touch on what it takes (approach, attitude, etc.) to build new relationships with private landowners. In addition, what approaches or communication styles can set you back? The panelists included three landowners, all members of the Partnerscapes Board of Directors: Jim Stone, Shelly Kelly and Russell Davis.

JIM STONE'S STORY | ROLLING STONE RANCH, MONTANA

Jim is the owner and operator, with his son Brady, of the Rolling Stone Ranch in Ovando, Montana. Jim's folks gave him the ranch when he was a young adult and now, he has the same vision for his son Brady. His parents always had a vision for generational ranching, which Jim is grateful for. Jim has been working with

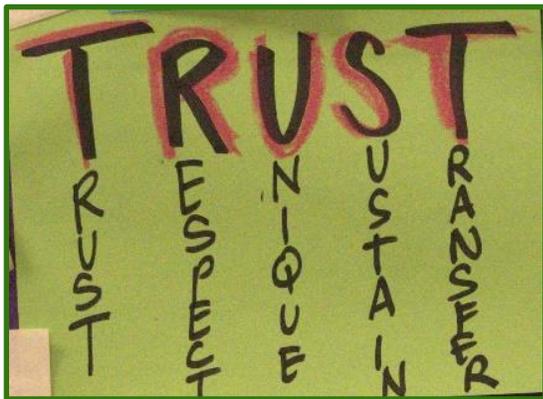
collaborative partnerships for over three decades. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Blackfoot Challenge in the Blackfoot Valley of Montana, a landowner-driven community-based partnership organization that began in 1993. Jim is also the Chair of Partnerscapes, originally Partners for Conservation and started the first Private Lands Partners Day in Ovando, Montana, over 14 years ago. Jim is excited to be hosting the 15th Private Lands Partners Day in October 2023, in Montana.



Jim Stone shares the importance of building trust and states that "it is not about the focal species, it is about the focal people". Photo by Heather Johnson.

Jim shared that while he has been involved in collaborative conservation for many years, none of it could have been possible without the great people that pulled these partnerships together. Greg Neudecker, the Montana PFW program State Coordinator, was one of those key people.

Greg was someone that came to Jim and asked right away “what can we do together?” Nobody likes to be told what to do. Rather, we need to work together. Jim shared that we become successful at partnerships by building relationships. In his backyard, they work through their partnership organization, the Blackfoot Challenge. They create a space to get information, learn and have input. This builds a lot of trust, which is one of the most important keys to success!



Jim also emphasized the importance of finding workable solutions through relationships with conservation practitioners. The tools in the practitioners’ toolbox that can be a real help to landowners especially when we focus on the 80% of things that we agree upon. The other 20% we can tackle after we build trust and credibility, but it is not where we start.

SHELLY KELLY’S STORY | SANDHILLS TASK FORCE, NEBRASKA

Shelly grew up on a ranch. However, there was not room for her to come back to the ranch. So, she went to college, got a degree and went to work for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) as a Range Management Specialist. She is currently working as the Executive Director of the Sandhills Task Force, a

nongovernmental organization (NGO) and starting from scratch to build her own cattle operation.



Shelly Kelly, sharing her story with participants at the workshop. Photo by Pat Weidknecht.

Her advice to new private lands biologists is to find someone close by and ask them about their experiences. Ask them to share the good stories and the tough lessons as well. If you are someone that has a lot of experience already, be willing to share and help others grow and learn. She has seen things from the perspectives of a federal employee, working for a NGO and now as a cattle producer. All of this has taught her to “remove ego and we can do better by the land.” If you find a way to build a relationship and make a connection, that is good.

Shelly shared that we do things for three different reasons. One, we find ourselves having to change to survive. Two, we learn new things because it becomes clear that we can do things better. And three, we are inspired by others to change.

Another take away from Shelly was that it is important to get involved in the things that the landowners are interested in. “If your connection is the wildlife and their



Shelly Kelly shared, "In the ranching community, it's customary for the passenger to get the gate. It's also a good way to show you're eager to help, and you'll earn some street-cred! So, whenever you can, jump out and get the gate!" Photo by Conley Kelly.

connection is the cattle, try to learn their side and where they are coming from." Go to a branding, help with gates. She is a young woman in a male dominated ranching world. She gained respect by learning how to drive and open gates.

RUSSELL DAVIS' STORY | WINEINGER-DAVIS RANCH, COLORADO

Russell Davis is a third-generation cattle rancher on the Wineinger-Davis Ranch, located on the Eastern plains of Colorado. Russell oversees the day-to-day operations of the ranch with his brother and two 4th generation nephews in training.

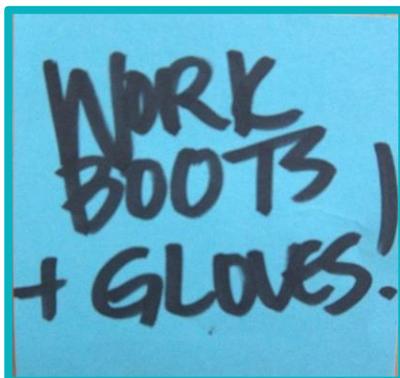
Russell shared a couple of short stories with the group. Russell made the point that how people approach you can make a huge difference in your first impression and how long it will take to build trust and



Russell Davis sharing his story and words of wisdom. Photo by Heather Johnson.

a relationship. His first story was about a mountain plover biologist that showed up on the ranch. They were in the middle of calving in early spring. Russell was very skeptical because the biologist didn't stop by the house to let him know who they were or why they were out there. He had no idea at the time that he had a bird on his ranch called the mountain plover. He was initially very skeptical. His second encounter was with the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) Private Lands Coordinator, Ken Morgan. Ken came to the ranch house. He introduced himself and said he wanted to visit with him and take a drive around the ranch. Ken approached Russell with conversation, communication up front, and willingness to learn about his operation. This helped to build trust. Russell began working with the bird biologists, CPW and the PFW program. At first his community was suspicious about these new ideas he was bringing to the community. He had to rebuild trust with his neighbors and community, which took time and patience. Russell said that "sometimes you have to have the tough conversations." Now, the Karval community has a mountain plover festival and Russell was invited to be on the Karval Community Alliance Board.

Russell's advice to new biologists coming out to the ranch is "show up with work boots and work gloves". This will make a good first impression.



Heather Johnson and Jalene Littlejohn facilitated an activity to gather input from all participants on the top skills required to be a successful private lands biologist.



Jalene Littlejohn, Partners for Fish and Wildlife Regional Coordinator for the Pacific Northwest, Hawaii and the Pacific Islands, facilitating the workshop. Photo by Pat Weidknecht.

SUMMARY OF KEY SKILLS

Trust

The number one skill for private lands biologists to have is the ability to build trust. Trust is hard earned and can be easily lost. Building and maintaining trust takes work, time and care. It is critical to be honest and have integrity. Recognize that sometimes the slower you go, the faster you get there. Patience is key in building trust and requires give and take.

Listen

While it is important to be knowledgeable and willing to share relevant information with landowners, it is critical to be an exceptionally good listener. Take the time to listen to the needs and concerns of the landowner and learn about their side. Value place-based knowledge and landowner expertise.

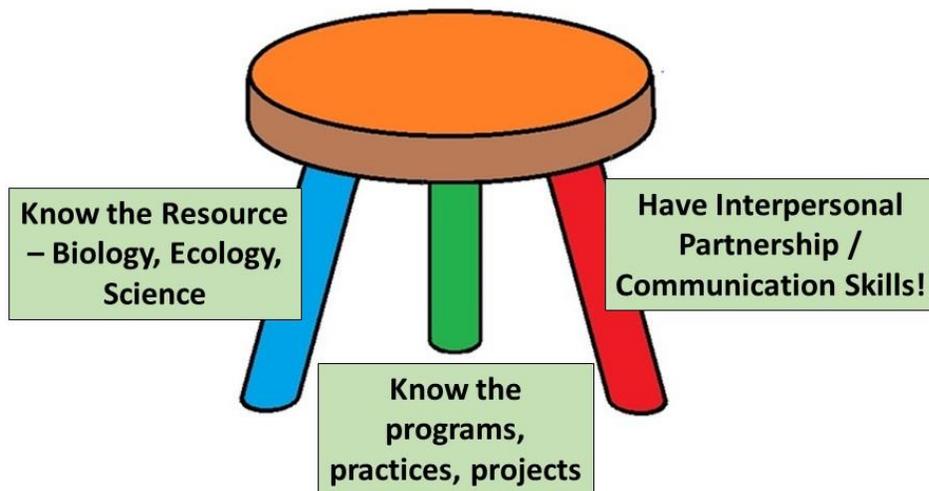
Find Common Ground

Have meaningful conversations and look for those things that you have in common. Start with those first and seek to establish a shared vision.



Be a Part of the Community

Getting involved in a variety of things in the local community can build trust, respect, and friendships. Find out what the landowners are involved in and ask to participate. Be curious, be humble and ask questions. Be proud to be passionate and be your genuine self.



Two-way communication/ conversations

Take communication to the next level. Be prepared to have the tough conversations but be respectful. Think about proper pacing (i.e., be patient and go at the pace that the community is ready for). Allow time for conversation and listen to hear and truly try to understand.

Respect

Be respectful of different ways of doing things and resist the urge to always need to respond. Avoid being judgmental. Ask what is working and what is not and be willing to be adaptive. Have respectful conversations.

Flexibility

While there are side boards to programs and initiatives, and policies that must be adhered to, there is also a lot of opportunity to bring flexibility to the work we do. This can be critically important to bringing landowners, Tribes, and partners to the table.

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program Cornerstones

- Trust
- Respect
- Honesty
- Flexibility
- Friendship
- Two-way Communication



Cassie Doll and Nate Richardson networking at the workshop. Photo by Pat Weidknecht.

Be Humble

Slow down and take the time to get to know the landowners and their families. Ask questions and be willing to be a little vulnerable. Don't be afraid to say that you don't know something. Check your ego!

Learn the Other Side

If you are a biologist, take the time to learn about agriculture and what it takes to run a ranch/farm. Learn about soils, grazing, economics. On the flip side, if you are a landowner, spend time learning more about science and ecology. This transferability of knowledge can help to create understanding and a shared vision.

Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge

It was a privilege to have Tribal partners join the Forum and share their perspectives, as well as others in attendance that work closely with Tribal partners in their landscapes back home. Some of the big take aways centered around Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge and making sure our Tribal partners are included. Some of the keys to success in working with Tribes that rose to the top were respect, caring and building trust. Remember that this is still Indian Country and native people feel just as offended by being “told” what to do on their land. Keep in mind how important it is for people to pass information down from one generation to the next.

Focusing on traditional ecological knowledge can be very powerful and will be essential to our success at landscape-scale conservation. Mother nature will teach us lessons. And the land will take care of itself if we give it what it needs. We want natural balance. Understand the native experience and challenge, especially for smaller tribes that do not have a lot of resources (i.e., rural/remote with no other revenue streams).

GAPS, STRATEGIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The afternoon session focused on identifying gaps that are preventing us from achieving our goals for collaborative conservation in the west. In addition, we took it a step further and identified those strategies we might use to overcome those gaps.

The session kicked off with three panelists that set the stage for the afternoon. Susan Abele was the moderator for the session. She asked panelists to share a little bit of their story and provide their suggestions and ideas for building successful partnerships. Panel members included Bill Sproul, Brenda Richards and Duane Coombs.



Belinda Brown and Alba Lopez-Gonzalez. Photo by Heather Johnson.



Bill Sproul sharing his story. Photo by Pat Weidknecht.

BILL SPROUL'S STORY | SPROUL RANCH, KANSAS

Bill Sproul is the owner and operator of the Sproul Ranch in Sedan, Kansas. He is also on the Board of Directors for Partnerscapes and other local boards in Kansas. Bill shared that when he first got started he approached his decisions from a commodity perspective. The land was a commodity. Now, he approaches things from the standpoint that he is part of a community. The first time he thought about this was when he read the *Sand County Almanac*, by Aldo Leopold. He looks at things differently now and believes every landowner should read this book.

Bill shared that 30 years ago, people didn't invite someone from the government into their home. There was a lot of mistrust. If someone from the government showed up, people were concerned. Now, everyone is working together, and this new collaborative approach is opening doors and building relationships and trust.

BRENDA RICHARDS' STORY | RANCHER, IDAHO

Brenda Richards has a family-owned ranch in Owyhee County Idaho. They run a cow/calf operation where private, public and state lands all play an important role in the economic and ecological success of their operation. She is also the coordinator of the Idaho Rangeland Conservation Partnership which brings together a broad diversity of partners with an interest in rangelands in Idaho. One of the key takeaways that she wanted to share is that it takes all the land and working with its potentials and capabilities to make a public lands ranch ecologically and economically viable in the west. It is important to ask how each piece of land and its management/potential fit into the big picture. If you take one piece out of that puzzle without understanding how it fits back into the bigger picture, you have a whole different story.



Brenda Richards shared that it is important to have some fun. The social aspect of the partnerships is important. "Make a date with your landowner partners." The conversations aren't always the most comfortable to get started. However, you have to start somewhere. Photo by Heather Johnson.

Vulnerability is something we must have. You have to be willing to put yourself out there a bit. You can't build trust without being a little vulnerable. You never know what someone has had to deal with. Therefore, it cannot be cookie cutter. Life and relationships are different for everyone. Ask a lot of questions and show up to events. Ask the landowners about their management practices, and what they think it will take to make things come together as a whole. How you frame your questions is important. Phrase your questions so it makes people comfortable sharing and does not come across as judgmental.

DUANE COOMBS' STORY | RANCHER, NEVADA

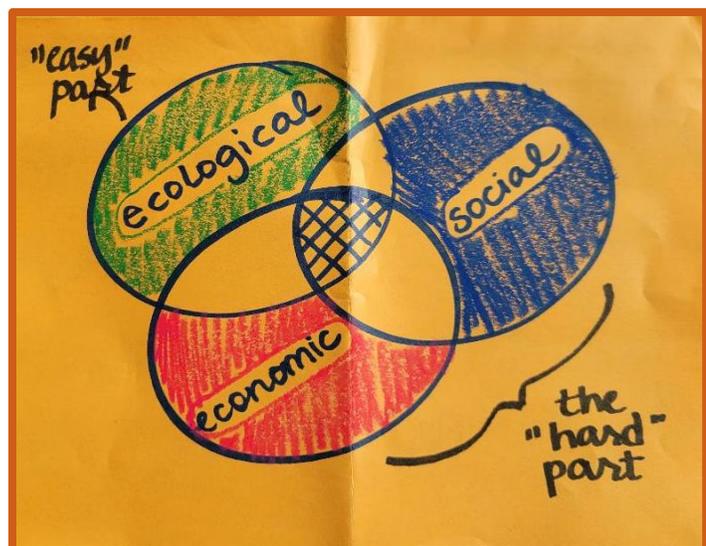
Duane has his roots in Utah but has spent the past 20 years working in Nevada. He was encouraged early on to go to college, which he does not regret - that is where he met his wife. Duane has worked a variety of jobs in both the ranching community as well as with collaborative partnerships. There was good and bad involved with each of those different jobs, and he is currently happy to be back in the ranching business, running his own cows on leased land.

One of the things that Duane believes is a gap is the consideration of the financial side of the landowner's operation. We need to consider the financial and social impacts when we are asking a private landowner to participate in a project, a program or a partnership.



"People like those involved in Partnerscapes are a huge blessing in my life. To quote my friend Reese Thompson, did you ever see a gopher tortoise on a post? He didn't get there alone." Photo by Pat Weidknecht.

While landowners are eager to participate in conservation programs, at the end of the day the ranch is a business and needs to be profitable. To pay the bills and pass the operation down to the next generation, it is critical to make a profit. How do we match up our needs. This is not new stuff. Sometimes we get where we want to push. Sometimes we need to wait and be patient and let it happen. That can be the magic.



SUMMARY OF GAPS

Following the panel discussion, we gathered input from all the participants at the workshop to identify gaps, in terms of what is missing in our relationships and partnerships that keeps us from achieving full potential regarding collaborative conservation in the west. Participants first had some excellent conversations at individual tables, and then had a large group discussion, with facilitators helping to capture not only the gaps, but those strategies and opportunities that could potentially bridge those gaps.



Don Wilhelm with the talking stick, sharing his ideas during a table discussion. Photo by Pat Weidknecht.

Funding

There was a lot of discussion about the lack of consistent funding from year to year. That creates challenges in being able to consistently support projects and make long-term commitments to landowners. Another common concern was the lack of flexibility with funding. For example, some of the new funding that is available is tied to specific initiatives and therefore isn't flexible enough to support the priorities in some key landscapes.

Capacity

Lack of capacity to deliver projects on-the-ground came up as a gap by many of the participants. This capacity gap was identified within federal agencies, conservation districts, NGOs and Tribes. Many funding opportunities are for on-the-ground projects and practices with very little going to staffing. There was also concern about the lack of support from supervisors for field biologists to do the required networking, technical assistance, outreach and communication required for collaborative conservation.

Turnover of Staff

It was clear that this is one of the major hurdles to building long-term trust and partnerships. Agencies have not done a good job of creating incentives to employees to stay in the same location. In addition, there is little succession planning. The landowners suffer when they are asked to create relationships or fulfill commitments with people they are not sure will be around to finish out the project.



Group discussion at the workshop. Photo by Pat Weidknecht.

Lack of Consistency

There is a lack of consistency within and amongst agencies. This can be very challenging for landowners. Some areas have done a really good job with strategic planning and coordinating across agencies, while others have not. The lack of consistent timelines on things can be challenging as well.

The PFW program is managed differently from Headquarters to the Regions and each Region is structured differently as well. It is highly effective in some areas and not in others. This gap in consistent program structure is frustrating for landowners and other partners, preventing us from being efficient and effective. This was not unique just to the PFW program – additional comments were made about the lack of consistent approaches across other agencies, such as the USDA-NRCS.

Diversity Equity and Inclusion

We talked specifically about the lack of diversity within our collaborative conservation partnerships in the west. For example, we are missing opportunities to work with Tribal nations. To be highly successful, we need to have these Tribal partners at the table early and often. There is a tremendous amount of indigenous traditional ecological knowledge and we are not gathering this knowledge; therefore, we are missing opportunities to learn from the past and influence the future.

There is still a lot of ignorance and exclusion, and this goes beyond race and color. We need to bring in different perspectives and world views. We have a gap in knowledge-sharing and truly taking the time to understand each other better. There is still a lot of ignorance and exclusion.

Training and Mentoring

There is not sufficient training available to new biologists getting started. Often, the former biologist that was in the focus area moved on and now the new person is uncertain who to turn to as a mentor.

Frequently, the kinds of hands-on training, mentoring, and shadowing opportunities are not supported or understood by supervisors or leaders within the agency. This can lead to frustration and ineffectiveness, often causing additional turnover. This cycle continues and prevents us from reaching our conservation goals.



Malia West taking notes from the table discussion, with Jordan Jokiell reflecting to her right. Photo by Heather Johnson.

Connections/Communication

Additional connections need to be made in some regions, states or focus areas. There is not always a consistent presence in communities to truly build relationships. Additional communication needs to take place to provide outreach and education to landowners about opportunities for both financial and technical assistance.



Reese Thompson sharing his thoughts with Destiny Allgood and Clint Wirick. Photo by Heather Johnson.

Monitoring

In some areas, there is a lack of effective outcome-based monitoring. There is often funding for project implementation, but not the funding to support the monitoring efforts. It is hard to find the partners that can support and fund the monitoring efforts and be strategic.

SUMMARY OF STRATEGIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Funding

Work with partners to share success stories and bring added resources to the table. Continue to develop grant proposals and pool resources to meet mutual conservation goals, shared by all the collaborative partners. Provide a strategic framework that can be shared with leadership as well as Congress.

- Share power, money, and credit.
- Bring in more partners for more possibilities.
- Outreach and education to Congress.
- Share success stories on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.



Capacity and Turnover of Staff

Both funding and capacity are two needs that come up consistently across all federal programs. Given it is not always feasible to get additional funding for increased staffing, it is critically important that we use the current staff as efficiently and as effectively as possible. Participants in the workshop provided many excellent suggestions including:

- Continue to focus efforts and be very strategic. Work across agencies to look at holistic planning efforts and share resources for projects that have mutually beneficial goals.
- Incentivize keeping employees in one place, versus having constant turnover. Have overlap with existing staff so there is the transferability of all the knowledge gained.
- Encourage leadership to support networking so that private lands biologists and PFW State Coordinators can build their partnership capacity and skills. Having the current staff maximize their efficiency and effectiveness can reduce capacity needs within federal agencies. Tap into resources in your communities and get involved locally.
- Get to know the Tribal partners in your area and work with them to expand partnerships, share resources and extend your conservation successes at a landscape scale.
- While boots-on-the-ground and projects are key to the success of private lands habitat restoration programs like PFW, keep a percentage of your time dedicated to networking and meaningful conversations. This is key to project success as well.
- Train selecting officials (i.e., those making hiring decisions for new private lands biologists) to select for social skills and not just science.

Consistency

- Build connections between various groups.
- Strategic planning, bringing other agencies to the table during your process.
- Large landscape-scale planning.
- Inter-governmental affairs coordination.
- Consistent organizational structure of the PFW program from Headquarters to all the regions.
- Use social media to network locally, regionally and nationally.



Christiana Manville and CalLee Davenport provide a few "limited edition" fun door-prize drawings throughout the workshop. Photo by Pat Weidknecht.

Training and Mentoring

- Have new biologists seek out new mentors, locally, regionally and even nationally. Use technology to connect with others and be curious! Ask a lot of questions and continue to grow and learn.
- Find ways to do shadows with others. This may involve shadowing one of the local partners in the area or shadowing a landowner to learn more about agriculture and local practices that are successful. It may involve something more formal like a “walk-a-mile-in-my boots” experience where you spend several days working on a ranch or farm to learn more about the industry and how you can be more effective.



Angel Montoya sharing his thoughts with the group. Photo by Pat Weidknecht.

- Find those “magic people” in your community and start conversations with them. Let them help you get introduced to other partners and landowners in your area.
- Use social media to share success stories.
- Use Facebook, Instagram or other social media platforms to network with others, share ideas, ask questions.



Dominic Barrett provides a video that was posted on Facebook after the workshop.

- If you have a lot of experience working with private and Tribal landowners, be willing to share your successes and take new people under your wing.
- Encourage more learning in agriculture (e.g., Ranching for Profit, Soil Health)
- Host more workshops with all partners at the table.
- Get involved in the community. Ask to participate in things like local brandings. Attend events outside of work to get to know people and their families.



Jordan Jokiel, Tyrone Montayre, and Marko Bey sharing ideas at the workshop. Photo by Pat Weidknecht.

Diversity Equity and Inclusion

- Bring Tribal nations, communities, and nonprofits to the table. Be willing to listen and learn.
- Be knowledgeable about the diverse landowners and communities in your landscapes. Be inclusive of them and their ideas as you are hosting workshops, meetings and forming your collaborative partnerships.
- Learn to bring indigenous traditional ecological knowledge into your planning and partnership(s).
- Stay humble and be willing to learn stories from the native people who are the “first best stewards of this land”.

Outreach/Communication

- Continue to tell success stories.
- Transferability of good ideas from one landscape to another.
- Use social media to enhance communication, share successes, and increase funding opportunities.
- Make networking a key part of your job.
- Conduct project site visits (e.g., leadership and congressional staff).

Monitoring

- Reach out to universities about projects.
- Tap into local resources, such as citizens science and traditional ecological knowledge. Bring together the indigenous traditional ecological knowledge with western science to make more informed decisions.
- Look at innovation and place-based science – alternative strategies.
- Bring new partners to the table that focus on monitoring (consider NGO, interagency, Tribal, industry).

NETWORKING

CONVERSATION CAFE

Day two was focused on networking and influencing the future. The forum was started as a “conversation café”, with Heather Johnson as the moderator, and Jeff and Marisa Sather as guest speakers. Jeff Sather is a 4th generation farmer and rancher in the Larslan and Baylor community, 40 miles north of Glasgow, MT. He and his wife, Marisa, raise red Angus/Simmental beef and small grains including wheat, peas, lentils, flax and safflower. They have two boys, ages five and two, and have been mentors now for three years with the Quivira Coalition, helping teach a new generation about agriculture, including regenerative agriculture.

Marisa Sather is the Assistant State Coordinator with Montana Partners for Fish and Wildlife, based in Glasgow, Montana. She received her PhD in Fish and Wildlife Biology from the University of Montana in 2015, specializing in grassland songbirds. Before that she lived and studied many places including Nashville Tennessee, Middlebury, Vermont and Cape Town, South Africa.

What worked well?

It is particularly important to find good mentors. This was huge for Marisa in terms of getting up to speed quickly in her new focus area. She was also blessed to get to participate in a hands-on learning experience at the University of Montana. It was a course on Landscape Conservation that included a field component. Jim Stone, landowner in the Blackfoot Valley, was one of the instructors for the course. He invited the class out to his ranch in Ovando, MT to give the students firsthand



Jeff and Marisa Sather enjoying the “conversation cafe” with Heather Johnson as the moderator. Photo by Pat Weidknecht.

experience. Greg Neudecker, the State Coordinator for the Montana Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program was also an instructor. Dr. Dave Naugle and this team of experts helped to teach new college students through hands on learning. This was a huge positive for Marisa and she hopes this type of course can be replicated at other universities across the country. A few other things that Marisa said worked very well for her were spending time with landowners. Don't be afraid to invite yourself out to help with brandings or ask to do a job shadow. Her suggestion was to become a student of agriculture. It is important to know the biology, the restoration ecology and the conservation programs. However, it is also important to learn about agriculture so you can relate to the landowners. Know the science, the restoration practices as well as the partnership aspects. That is the three-legged stool that makes a successful private lands biologist.

Things that don't work are sending letters or making cold calls. Marisa and Jeff suggest prioritizing the relationships and really getting to know people. Don't show up with an agency-led agenda. Flexibility

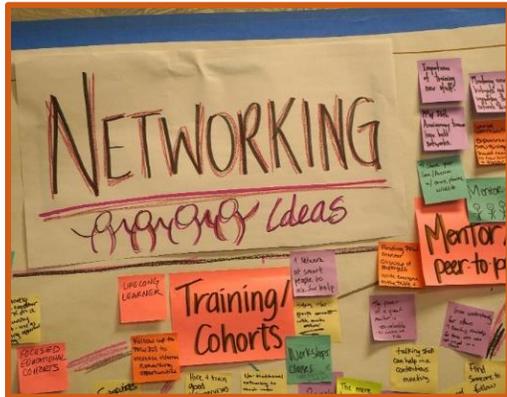
is critical, as well as trying to reduce red tape.

To be successful in your collaborative partnerships working with private landowners you need give up power - truly!! Lead from behind and recognize that you don't know the whole story. Develop roots in the community. Know your stuff biologically so that you can provide useful knowledge and information and show genuine interest. Look for those opportunities to build connections.



Jeff Sather sharing his thoughts and ideas. Photo by Pat Weidknecht.

SUMMARY OF NETWORKING IDEAS



The remainder of the forum was focused on how we can create a framework for enhancing our network opportunities. One thing that resonated with the group was to begin networking locally; then, continue to build out from there. Look around the room and see who is missing and bring those new people to the table. One participant said, "community is where we build real relationships". From there, connect communities with similar issues, needs, resources and opportunities.

Mentoring

Mentoring was one of the things that came up the most during our conversation cafe. There were a lot of suggestions and different ways that people felt mentoring could be accomplished, including both informal and formal mentoring.

- New private lands biologists could shadow experienced biologists. In addition to helping the new biologist to get up to speed on the programs, practices and policy, have the new biologist tag along to meet landowners and get to know the key people in the community.

- Landowners who are new to collaborative conservation may want to travel to another area that has a well-established collaborative partnership and shadow them at an upcoming event. This has worked well for others.



Madi Ellingwood, Susan Abele and Caleb McAdoo sharing networking ideas with each other. Photo by Pat Weidknecht.

- Have overlap from one private lands practitioner to the next so that knowledge, experience and lessons learned don't get lost. Have the previous biologist or coordinator make themselves available to answer questions, share ideas, and set up the new person for success.
- Do not wait for someone to find a mentor for you. Take initiative and be pro-active. Find someone you admire and ask to shadow them and learn from them.

Workshops

Many felt that having additional workshops, such as this Nevada workshop, would be very helpful to continue to share ideas, learn from each other and enhance our local collaborative partnerships and

landowner relationships. There was discussion about larger workshops but also a lot of conversation about bringing these ideas down to more of a local watershed or landscape level.

- Host train-the-trainer workshops to continue to share knowledge and experience with new people coming in.
- Host landowner workshops with “champions” giving presentations about what they have learned. Provide opportunities for a lot of interaction and opportunities to follow up.
- Provide additional workshops and events that create a safe space for people to learn and grow and have their questions answered. Build informal relationships that can continue to be fostered and grow.

Social Media

Social media is a great way to do outreach and communicate about the success stories and great work within our organizations, agencies and partnerships. It is also an excellent way to network and learn from one another. Social media platforms provide us opportunities to share photos, videos, success stories and lessons learned. This visual, live-time interaction has made it possible to share information quickly, efficiently, and very economically (e.g., many of these platforms are free to participate in). Additional tools have come on-line to have closed groups, that create a safe space for people to share ideas, ask questions and network with people that are working on similar collaborative conservation work. It can be engaging, fun and inspiring! Social media can help us feel connected, even when we are scattered across vast landscapes, often in remote parts of the country.



John Schmidt doing a video piece to share ideas with new biologists. Photo by Pat Weidknecht

Peer-to-Peer Learning

We had good discussions about how important peer-to-peer learning is. We are all on a continuum of learning. We are in different places in our learning, due to those around us who have influenced us and helped us grow. Given that, we all have gifts to offer one another and as peers can help to support each other. While it is very important for private lands biologists who are experienced to help mentor biologists coming in, it is equally as important for landowners to support each other as well. Rather than sign up for formal training courses, we can often learn just as much or more from our colleagues and partners that have years of experience and can give us expert advice that is relevant to our current situation. Being willing to share success stories with one another is a great way to provide that transferability of great ideas from one partnership or landscape to another.



Dave Kimble and Mindy Meade sharing ideas with one another. Photo by Pat Weidknecht.

Community Involvement

There was a lot of conversation about this topic during the entire event. We continued to see this thread between the speakers and amongst the participants during their breakout discussions. We sometimes think that things need to be formal to be considered networking. However, it is often the informal networking opportunities that become the most important and enhance our learning the most. In addition, it can help to build trust, respect and long-term relationships, all skills that we learned earlier in the workshop are keys to success. While getting projects on-the-ground is key, first we need to establish relationships. Then, we need to continue to foster those relationships and stay engaged. This cannot be something we think about “when all the other work is done”. Rather, it needs to be one of the most important things we do. Engaging in community events needs to be part of the job.

Attend Meetings and Events

In today’s world, we often find ourselves stuck behind a computer, being asked to attend multiple Teams or Zoom calls. To be successful at community-based

collaborative conservation, it is important to make personal connections and not just talk – truly have meaningful and engaging conversations. Looking for opportunities to connect with new partners and engage with landowners and Tribal members can build trust and respect, while also accelerate learning.



Mike Disney shares his thoughts and ideas during the workshop. Photo by Pat Weidknecht.

- Set up booths at different events.
- Attend meetings, not always as a speaker or with an agenda.
- Participate in agricultural events, not just science and conservation. Vice versa, invite landowners to science and conservation meetings.
- Learn about Tribal meetings and events in your area. Listen, learn, and bring new ideas back to your partnership.
- Meet your landowners and partners where they are most comfortable. Perhaps meet over food and drink, in a local gathering place.
- Participate in local brandings, or show up to help mend fence, assist with ranch chores. Bring your gloves and be prepared to work and participate.

CLOSING REMARKS

At the end of the workshop, participants were asked to provide some feedback on the workshop. Feedback was incredibly positive from all participants. Participants felt the highlights were the great speakers, networking opportunities, and the format of the workshop (i.e., facilitated conversations, table discussions, sticky notes/walls and interactive sessions).



Brad Milley and Laura Duffy exchanging ideas on networking. Photo by Pat Weidknecht.

Eighty two percent of participants checked that they would like to continue to stay involved with next steps from this event. And every participant in attendance felt they will be able to use the information and lessons learned from this workshop to enhance their local partnerships back home. When asked what resonated most with workshop participants, the response was very different for each participant, suggesting that everyone took different “nuggets” back with them, regardless of whether they were a private landowner, Tribal member, NGO partner or private lands biologist. Everyone at the workshop was both listening and learning but also sharing and contributing. What we realized was that we never stop learning, growing, and finding new ways of doing things.

Many of the strategies we identified to fill existing gaps were also networking opportunities. We saw a lot of overlap and ties from day one to day two of the workshop.



*“And I think, one concept that developed and resonated most with me from this week was the symbolic act of **opening the gate**. The opportunity, and trust, in which a landowner allows a Partner (often sitting in the front seat of their ranch truck) to open a closed gate, to overcome the latches and tension that keep it closed, to drive through together to see firsthand how a property works with the environment, or hurdles it may have, and at the same time to return the gate (often which may be closed) to its original position truly captured a true act of trust and openness brought forth, in another brainstorming comment, ‘Eco before Ego. The health of the future of Agriculture and Conservation doesn't end, or always start, at the field, the gate, the stream, or the prairie... Sometimes, its' future lies somewhere where an honest, open, safe, conversation occurs.” Jake Yancey, from the Tracking Y Ranch. Photo by Pat Weidknecht.*

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