Collaboration is the foundation of success for watershed-wide restoration and fuels reduction programs. Community leaders must reach out to a wide range of stakeholders, and maintain a focus on shared values and goals. Collaborators should articulate their individual expectations and contributions, and structures should be developed that allow for appropriate levels of resource sharing and cooperation.

Cast a broad net
The scale of collaboration must match the scale of the issue, which is inherently broad and multi-faceted. Community leaders in each of our case studies emphasized the importance of reaching out to a wide and diverse stakeholder group as projects and plans are developed. They also stressed the importance of an open and transparent process that acknowledges the range of stakeholder motivations and needs, yet maintains a focus on shared values and goals.

There are many ways to develop and institutionalize stakeholder engagement. In Ashland, a citizen commission was developed in the mid-1990s to oversee forest management and inform decisions by the City Council. The commission established a formal venue for public input on City forest management projects, and over the years, its focus has naturally shifted from oversight to advocacy. Collaboration in Ashland has expanded over the last decade to include federal and non-governmental partners, and projects now span the watershed, including private, City and federal lands.

In Colorado, the Coalition for the Upper South Platte (CUSP) maintains a diverse board of directors, with 23 members representing groups that have long, complex relationships with one another.

CUSP has created a table for dialogue for these stakeholders and acts only where there is broad agreement. This approach has resulted in less litigation among groups in the watershed, and enabled more than a decade of forest restoration throughout the region.

Efforts in Flagstaff and Santa Fe have similarly included a wide range of collaborators, including federal and state agencies, city fire departments and water utilities, non-governmental organizations and other established stakeholder coalitions. In these places, local universities and scientists have also provided technical advice and helped develop tools for assessing social, ecological and economic impacts of action and inaction.

Collaboration can also include partners outside the region who have expertise to share. For example, recent efforts in Flagstaff were inspired in part by the payment for ecosystem services (PES) approach in Santa Fe, and community leaders from the Flagstaff Fire Department and the City reached out to partners in Santa Fe for ideas and insights. In all four of our case studies, community leaders...
have also maintained close ties to regional and national programs, including the Fire Learning Network, the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program and many others. This type of networking strengthens and informs efforts, and is a centerpiece of the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network.

As you work to develop new opportunities in your watershed, don’t hesitate to reach out to other community leaders who have had success—most are eager to see their success reflected elsewhere.

**Formalize relationships and agreements**

Formal agreements can help articulate goals, define roles and lay the foundation for resource sharing and project implementation. Agreements play a critical role in collaborative restoration and fuels reduction efforts, especially in later phases when funding sources, workforce and other resources are being identified and allocated.

Specific agreements will depend on the collaborators involved and the nature of project work. In Ashland, there is a long history of collaboration around watershed resources. A presidential declaration in 1897 first recognized the need for protection of the Ashland watershed, and a 1929 cooperative agreement between the USDA and the City of Ashland formalized early efforts to work together; that agreement has been updated, and still exists today as a memorandum of understanding (MOU). Now, partners in the Ashland Forest Resiliency Project maintain a master stewardship agreement, which was initiated by the USFS and enables funds and other resources to flow smoothly between federal, city and NGO partners. The agreement requires all partners to bring funding and new capacity to the table, fueling a vibrant and committed collaboration.

In Flagstaff and Santa Fe, MOUs are also in place among project partners, including the USFS, cities and states. In both cases, restoration funds are managed by the cities but cover expenses for projects on federal and state lands in the watershed. In Flagstaff, the City and the Coconino National Forest maintain two separate MOUs, and develop supplemental project agreements for each activity. They also have an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) with the Arizona State Land Department and the State Forestry Division, as well as an agreement with the Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership, which provides assistance with monitoring, public engagement, tribal relations, volunteer management and financial leverage.

In Colorado, early collaboration of the Upper South Platte Watershed Protection Association (now CUSP) was guided by a set of by-laws and a multi-stakeholder MOU. Through the MOU, collaborators agreed to work together to protect watershed resources, but they decided that the outcomes of their collaboration would be voluntary rather than regulatory. This approach enabled them to focus on shared values and goals, and was an effective strategy given the diversity of interests in the watershed. More recently, a number of additional agreements have allowed CUSP to coordinate and implement projects on private, federal and state lands.

**In summary**

As you work toward a comprehensive vision of watershed protection, seek diversity in your project partners as well as in the structures that enable collaboration. These elements will allow for an adaptive and enduring strategy—one that can stand up to the dynamic challenges of watershed management.

For more information about the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network, visit the website at www.facnetwork.org or email info@facnetwork.org

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