

Key Takeaways from the 2022 Annual Forest Collaboratives Summit

Introduction

On October 27th, more than 30 collaborative leaders and partners gathered in Frisco, Colorado for the annual Colorado Forest Collaboratives Summit. The [Colorado Forest Collaboratives Network](#) was inspired by successes at Annual Forest Collaboratives Summits, hosted in the past by various entities including the Colorado State Forest Service and JW Associates. When we held our four Regional Forums this past September, one of the most common recommendations we received was to continue hosting this annual gathering of forest collaboratives and their partners.

The annual Forest Collaboratives Summit is designed for, and by, collaboratives. If you would like to join our 2023 Summit planning team, please email Katie to sign up.

Agenda

Below is an overview of the original agenda for the 2022 Summit. Extreme weather conditions leading to road closures led to many last-minute delays and cancelations. Thus, our actual agenda strayed quite significantly from what is shown below.

9:00am – 10:00am	Introductions & Sharing Successes
10:00am – 10:35am	Update from the Colorado Forest Collaboratives Network
10:45am – 12:00pm	Statewide Leadership: Updates and Q&A
12:00pm – 1:00pm	Lunch & Survey
1:00pm – 2:15pm	Colorado Forest Health Council: Panel Updates & Listening Session
2:30pm – 4:15pm	Stepping through Stages of Readiness: Moving from Collaborative Planning to Implementation
4:15pm – 4:30pm	Wrap up & Evaluations
4:30pm – 6:30pm	Happy hour

Our planning team was instrumental in creating an engaging day – much gratitude to Ch’aska, Maya, Brett, Laura, Scott, Esther, Becca, and Andrew. We also cannot thank our participants, speakers, and registrants enough – those who attended, as well as those waylaid by unexpected weather events – for the valuable time, energy, and ideas they shared in support of the Colorado Forest Collaboratives Network and this year’s Summit. Also, we are grateful for the financial supporters of the Colorado Forest Collaboratives Network who made the Summit possible: Mighty Arrow Family Foundation, Argosy Foundation, and Great Outdoors Colorado. *Thank you!*

Contact us

If you have questions or comments about this report or the Colorado Forest Collaboratives Network, please contact Katie McGrath Novak, Forest Collaboratives Network Coordinator, at katie.mcgrath@colostate.edu.

Also, be sure to join the Colorado Forest Collaboratives Network mailing list [here](#).

Introductions & Sharing Successes

In all, the extreme weather and a traffic accident forced nearly half of the 65 individuals registrants to miss the Summit, so we had about 37 participants from forest collaboratives and support organizations at the 2022 Summit. To ease communication, we have included a full list of attendees and contact information in Appendix A. **Edit 2/26/24: Please email the CFCN Coordinator for a copy of Appendix A.**

We know that collaboratives play an integral part in getting work done on the ground. To kick off our day, we asked participants to share a success or something they are proud of from the past year or so. We heard inspiring stories of successful landowner outreach campaigns, strengthening partnerships, newly created collaboratives, innovative policy leveraging, and many more. Below are a few successes we heard, and where applicable, the name of who spoke about the success so that you can connect with them should you have questions or ideas.

Policy:

- In the past year, we have seen unprecedented federal investments in forest health and collaboration through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (a.k.a. BIL and IJA, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) and the Inflation Reduction Act.
- Julie Sutor, of Congressman Joe Neguse's office, shared excitement that, at the time of Summit, the House of Representatives had recently passed the [Bipartisan Wildfire Recovery Act](#). The Act 'would increase flexibility in the federal cost share for Fire Management Assistance Grants to bring in additional resources for communities as they rebuild from wildfire damage.' As of January 2023, the Act is still pending Senate approval.
- The Colorado Forest Health Council recommended investments in workforce development to the Wildfire Matters Review Committee, and this recommendation has been included in legislation that was recently introduced in the Legislature. You can learn more about the Forest Health Council on page 4 or by reading their Annual Report [here](#).
- The value of collaboratives is being broadly acknowledged across levels of governance; we are increasingly seeing this reflected in policy language, funding for collaborative capacity, and in US Forest Service conversations. Colorado's General Assembly [SB21-258](#) set aside 25% of the Forest Restoration and Wildfire Risk Mitigation (FRWRM) grant program funds for capacity-building efforts; the first round of proposals for funding from this new aspect of FRWRM was due in October 2022.

Implementation:

- Several collaboratives were excited about their ability to increase the pace and scale of cross-boundary work they had done by strengthening partnerships, leveraging various authorities and funding sources, and creating community buy-in.
- Colorado Springs Utilities has leveraged Department of Natural Resources (DNR) funds, Good Neighbor Authority, and strong partnerships to expand treatments in El Paso and Teller Counties (Jeremy Taylor).

- The US Forest Service, Summit County government, Summit County Wildfire Council, private landowners and others collaborated to complete a 28-acre fuels reduction project near a Wilderness area. Read more about the project [here](#).

Other Innovations:

- Coalition for the Poudre River Watershed continued with a successful [landowner outreach program](#), combined with strong partnerships with Larimer Conservation District, local fire departments, landowners, and the Ember Alliance, and securing funding through the [Forest Restoration and Wildfire Risk Mitigation grant \(FRWRM\)](#), that led to major increases in on-the-ground fuel treatments (Daniel Bowker).
- Bringing collective resources together, building partnerships, and doing community outreach/education about wildfire has helped the Eagle Valley Land Trust accelerate pace and scale of treatments in Eagle County (Eric Lovegren).
- In addition to getting work done on the ground, Dolores Watershed Resilient Forests Collaborative has emphasized collaboration as a process and served as a platform for difficult and meaningful conversations (Danny Margoles).

Supporting Collaboratives:

- Fire Adapted Colorado supported numerous collaboratives this year including by helping Mesa County gain non-profit status, working with Eagle County Wildfire Council as they scaled up their work, and supporting the Roaring Fork Watershed Collaborative (Becca Samulski).
- The Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI) supported Chaffee County with coalescing their goals and working on Community Wildfire Protection Plan, and Lake County has used their tools. CFRI has also doubled its staff in recent years and is still looking to increase capacity (Brett Wolk).

In coming months, we would like to interview collaborative leaders across Colorado to learn in greater depth about their successes and how they got there. Please email Katie if you have a success story to share.

State Leadership – Listening Session

Both Colorado State Forester Matt McCombs and Department of Natural Resources Executive Director Dan Gibbs planned to join us for a session with State leadership but, like many, were thwarted by a last minute and unexpected snowstorm. Graciously standing in for them, DNR's Alison Lerch (Wildfire Mitigation Program Administrator, Colorado Strategic Wildfire Action Program) shared updates from the DNR, and conducted a listening session with the group around the question: *"What would you like the DNR to know about forest collaboratives?"* Alison promised to share what she heard with our state's forest and wildfire leadership.

Local & Workforce Capacity

- Not all communities are staged to receive the amount of funding coming to Colorado. We need to support smaller counties with less capacity and identify potential grantees. (Aaron Kimple)
- Need to increase salaries; housing shortage and cost of living are inhibiting relocation of natural resources professionals to mountain communities. (Eric Lovegren)

Funding

- Acknowledging events like the Marshall Fire, which practitioners are aware could happen again, there is a need for funding to mitigate wildfire risk in grassland communities. Outside of FEMA funding, which comes with a heavy administrative burden, can the DNR consider providing future grants for home hardening? (Meg Halford)
- Acquiring match, and figuring out how to use different pots of money to match one another, can be difficult, especially for large grants. (Audrey Miles Cherney)
- Most grants allow for an up to 10% indirect fee, which is a lot less than the federally negotiated rates for some non-profit organizations. State and federal grants need to be flexible to allow for higher indirect costs without penalty. (Corinna Marshall)

Industry

- Wood utilization needs attention and needs statewide/regional focus. Understanding the wood utilization needs across the state requires an understanding of scale. (Jeremy Taylor)
- The state should use more funding to create opportunities for sustainable wood flow across the state, find local incentives to bring infrastructure to Colorado using a cross-boundary collaboration approach, and understand the economic feasibility of wood utilization. (Jeremy Taylor)

The Importance of Prescribed Fire

- Forestry management and wildfire management go hand in hand. The state needs to integrate planning for fire and forestry, and bring the Department of Fire Prevention and Control, DNR, and the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) together to include fire as part of the management conversation. (Brett Wolk)

Statewide Planning

- There have been a few attempts to allow stakeholders an effective way to engage with statewide wildfire and watershed planning efforts, but to date none have been fully realized. (Mark Shae)

Forest Health Council

The Colorado Forest Health Council is a 26-member volunteer stakeholder body whose role is to provide a collaborative forum to advise the Governor, through the Executive Director of the Department of Natural Resources, and the Colorado General Assembly, on issues, opportunities, and threats to Colorado's forests. Its mission includes improving forest health in Colorado through

integrated, science-based approaches, with a focus on cross-jurisdictional collaboration among federal, state, and local governments, as well as private and nonprofit partners to reduce wildfire risk, restore ecological resilience, safeguard communities and water supplies, mitigate and adapt to climate change, support local economies, and protect recreation areas.

Learn more about the Council [here](#).

Brett Wolk (Colorado Forest Restoration Institute; Forest Health Council member) and Aaron Kimple (Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes; former member of the Colorado Forest Health Council) shared highlights from the Colorado Forest Health Council. Larimer County Commissioner and Forest Health Council Legislative Committee Chair Jody Shadduck-McNally, and DNR's Angela Boag (Assistant Director for Climate, Forest Health, and Energy) were also meant to join this session, but were hung up by road closures and sickness, but they managed to connect with us as the Summit began. Jody, Angela, Brett, and Aaron all shared their optimism that the FHC is positioned to be a valuable advisor to DNR and the Legislature, including on topics critical to forest collaboratives.

Brett and Aaron summarized the Council's [2022 Annual Report](#); the report culminated in five recommendations (in order from most to least votes from Council members) from the Forest Health Council to the Wildfire Matters Committee and Governor Polis:

1. Invest in expanding forestry education in Colorado, namely, by using Department of Higher Education funding to increase capacity of Front Range Community College's highly sought-after Forestry Technology degree program.
2. Invest in workforce development programs such as the Colorado Youth Corps Association and the Department of Corrections' State Wildland Inmate Fire Teams through Colorado Strategic Wildfire Action Program Workforce Development grant and the Forest Restoration and Wildfire Risk Mitigation grant program.
3. Increase the amount and/or consistency of funding for Good Neighbor Authority work using Healthy Forests – Vibrant Communities funds.
4. Invest in local/state agency planning and project management capacity by making resources available to hire staff to plan and manage 'shovel-ready' projects.
5. Create incentives for private industry (logging and grazing) by creating a state cost-share wood products industry internship program, investing more into the Forest Business Loan Fund, and creating more public-private partnerships to reduce barriers to grazing for fuels reduction.

If interested, see a more detailed description of these recommendations on Wildfire Matters Review Committee [here](#). The top recommendation (expanding forestry education) is included in [Senate Bill 23-005](#) that was introduced to the Colorado General Assembly on January 9, 2023.

They recommended this [Colorado State Forest Service Grants Database](#) as a useful reference tool. Also, Courtney Young (DNR's Wildfire Mitigation Program Facilitator) maintains a [Colorado Wildfire Mitigation Funding Compilation](#).

In late 2022, Aaron Kimple vacated his seat representing forest collaboratives on the Forest Health Council as he moved to a new job. Katie applied for the vacant seat and was selected. In coming months, we will be exploring how to represent your voices on the Forest Health Council. Please reach out to Katie with ideas, and stay tuned for updates.

Forest Health Council meetings are open to the public and have a public comment period at the end of each meeting; we encourage you to attend to learn and make your voice heard!

Zoom links for each meeting can be found at the bottom of the page, [here](#).

- Next quarterly meeting: February 1st, 2023, 9am-1pm MT
- Legislative Committee meeting: January 13th, 2023, 8:30am – 9:20am
- Committee on Leveraging Resources meeting: January 13th, 2023, 12:00pm – 1:00pm
- Following quarterly meeting: April 26th, 2023, details TBD

Stages of Readiness Activity

CFRI has identified four ‘stages of readiness’ based on characteristics that collaboratives tend to have as they grow and develop. While recognizing that collaboratives do not follow a set, linear progression, the stages of readiness can be a useful guiding tool for understanding general experiences and needs collaboratives face. At the 2022 Summit, Ch’aska Huayhuaca (CFRI) and Becca Samulski (Fire Adapted Colorado) (with support from Esther Duke of Coalitions and Collaboratives, who was waylaid by weather conditions), led a session on the stages of readiness. Attendees identified their group’s approximate stage, then engaged in discussion about potential framework improvements and possible metrics for collaboratives at different stages.

Thanks to Ch’aska, Becca, and Esther for their hard work planning and facilitating this session. Below is Ch’aska’s full summary.

Collaborative partnerships can play a fundamental role in preparing landscapes and communities to receive and recover from wildfire by laying the foundation of essential building blocks: identifying and connecting stakeholders, co-developing strategies at scale, coordinating implementation, and science-informed continuous learning. Getting to a point of stability and capacity to play this role long-term requires time and resources. Collaboratives create value in different ways as they develop, and the kinds and amounts of resources needed change over time. During the 2022 Colorado Forests Collaborative Network (CFCN) Summit, the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI) presented a four-stage Collaborative Readiness Framework that situates collaborative development within forest and wildland fire management systems (Figure 1 and Table 2). For each stage, the Framework describes potential characteristics of the focus of work and benchmarks of success that can be applied in numerous ways, such as guiding investments, measuring performance, or collaborative self-assessment and adaptation. It’s important to note that, as inter-organizational or multi-stakeholder arrangements, collaboratives are dynamic systems, and we do not assume any inherent linearity or sequential patterns of progression through stages. Further, collaboratives are often simultaneously working at multiple stages to maintain or improve assets initially activated at previous stages (such as trust).

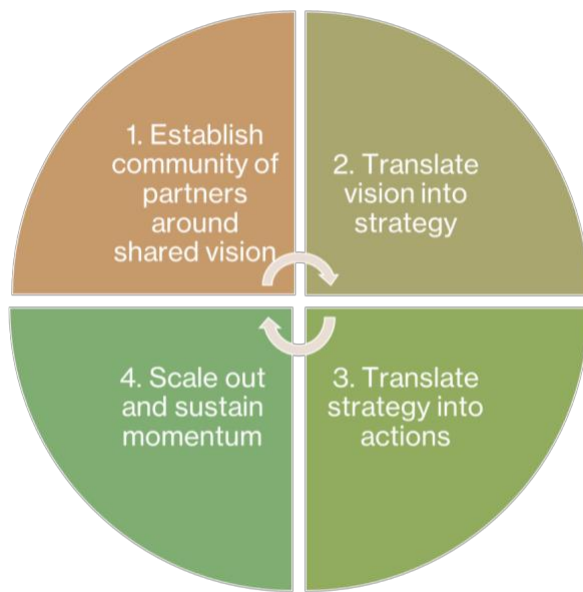


Figure 1. Four Stages of Collaborative Readiness

The purpose of the Forest Summit session was to introduce the prototype Collaborative Readiness Framework and use it to structure some discussion and peer learning to build a better understanding of collaborative capacity needs at each stage. Following the presentation, attendees broke into small groups in an activity led by Fire Adapted Colorado (FACO) to generate ideas about some realistic targets and metrics for showing collaborative development at different stages on a trajectory toward long-term landscape resilience goals, and 15 of the attendees filled out short worksheets to provide some feedback on the Framework itself.

This document summarizes discussion highlights from this session, and is structured around a set of questions we asked participants:

- How do the elements of this framework resonate with you?
- Roughly what stage do you think your organization or collaborative is currently at?
- Forest Collaboratives: What do you need most at each stage to grow your collaborative impact? (Expertise, capacity, technical support, etc. If we had x, then we could y.)
- Agencies and support organizations: What are the capacity constraints and barriers that, if overcome, would allow you to support and/or effectively engage in a collaborative program of work at different stages?
- What outcomes could you track and measure at different stages?

Did it resonate?

73% of those who filled out the worksheet indicated that the Framework resonated with their experience, stating that it does or could provide a good foundation for strategic design and development of collaboratives; provides good benchmarks; shows intentionality; and is generalizable and flexible. One felt it provided a helpful description of stages, but was concerned about prescriptive applications of such a framework, and pointed out the need to accommodate context and nuances of place-based collaboratives. 20% indicated some confusion about its application to multi-layer collaboration, its application to non-collaboratives, or felt it did not align with their experience.

Self-assigned stages of readiness and capacity needs

We asked respondents to use the Framework to roughly characterize their collaborative or organization. One new collaborative characterized itself squarely in stage 1, but most indicated that their collaborative was experiencing multiple stages simultaneously (one wildfire collaborative between stages 1-2; three collaboratives between stages 2-3; two collaboratives

between stages 3-4; and three collaboratives between stages 2-4. Two entities (a regional information sharing network and a boundary organization) responded that they are concurrently experiencing all stages simultaneously. The Framework was designed with place-based collaboratives in mind, so this may indicate that the stages are not as readily applicable to other kinds of entities or partners.

Based on this self-assignment, representatives from Colorado’s forest collaboratives joined breakout groups to discuss collaborative capacity needs at different stages. Specifically, participants were asked to brainstorm what forest collaboratives need most at each stage to grow their impact. Figure 2 summarizes the notes captured during the activity.

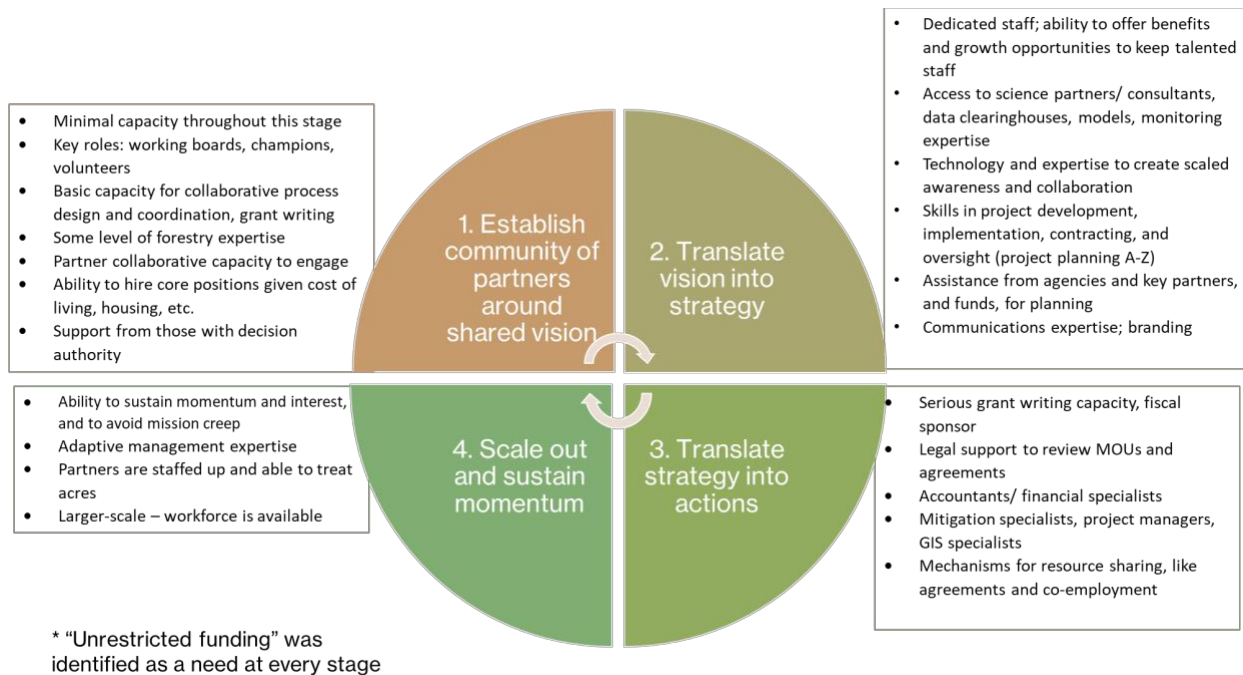


Figure 2. Ideas for collaborative capacity needs at each stage to grow impact

Capacity constraints for agency and support organizations

In breakout discussions about the readiness of agencies and support organizations to engage with collaboratives, there was wide recognition that partner capacity was a necessary enabling condition for collaborative readiness throughout the stages, especially early stages. Table 1 presents some of the barriers and capacity needs captured in the discussion notes.

Table 1. Needs and constraints to engagement identified by representatives of agencies and support organizations that typically partner with collaboratives

Stages 1-2	Stages 3-4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time & money (to have capacity to engage, staff education and training to learn about issues, be technically informed) • Labor and housing market • Messiness associated w/ responding to needs on the fly (crisis-driven collaboration) • Understanding how collaborative’s issues fit into support org’s services and roles, and how supporter expertise aligns with issues • Communicating support org needs to collaboratives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff turnover/ burnout • Shifts in priorities leading to misalignment • Time and capacity to sustain relationships • Resource sharing • Leadership/ support/ sustainability

Tracking outcomes at different stages of readiness

For the last part of the activity, representatives of collaboratives and their partner organizations combined forces to discuss indicators and metrics for tracking collaborative outcomes at different stages. While several ideas were captured in the notes, here we present a few highlights. Stage 1 suggested outcomes and metrics focused on human resources and general collaborative capacity, such as key roles filled, number of full-time employees, presence of a working board, number of volunteer hours, or number of meetings. Outcomes related to trust were also mentioned, such as improved relationships between the US Forest Service and neighboring communities. Few indicators or metrics for stage 2 beyond the Framework’s suggested outputs and benchmarks (Table 2) were captured in the notes. Moving into stage 3, participants discussed outputs of collaborative actions, such as the number/nature of resource sharing agreements, joint grant applications submitted/ awarded, and number of planned projects. Also captured were suggested performance indicators of improved planning and strategizing resulting from stage 2, particularly related to building social consent, such as measuring changes in public perception related to risk and management actions. For stage 4, groups discussed collaborative adaptive capacity outcomes such as nimbleness and ability to weather change using tools like succession plans. One set of performance outcomes discussed for this stage related to resilient landscapes, such as ability to treat harder places, or ability to utilize managed wildfire due to increased use of prescribed fire. Indicators such as changes in modeled wildfire risk, and metrics like number of burn days, were noted.

Conclusion to Stages of Readiness Activity

Several ideas generated during this short but productive session have already been incorporated into an updated draft of the Collaborative Readiness Framework, which is still evolving as we ‘ground truth’ it in other settings. As we continue to refine the Framework, we look forward to diving deeper into indicators and metrics for tracking collaborative outcomes at each stage. A concept paper is currently underway as a joint product of the Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes, and will be shared through the CFCN and other networks when ready. Many thanks to FACO and Coalitions & Collaboratives, Inc. for the support they provided CFRI in developing and conducting this session; to the CFCN and Center for Collaborative Conservation for providing the opportunity; and to the Summit participants for sharing your ideas and engaging in a lively discussion!

Table 2. Summary of Stages of Collaborative Readiness components and benchmarks

Stage	Focus of Work	Potential Benchmarks
1. Establish a community of partners around a shared vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess situation context and identify key stakeholders (e.g., jurisdictional leadership, science partners, community members, or other community-connected partners) • Conduct outreach and engagement with key stakeholders • Articulate the problem and composite vision to address risk, safe response, and recovery from inevitable wildfires • Forge intent and document commitment to work together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder assessments, documentation of participation and interests represented • Indications that key science partners have been identified for consultation or are in place among participants • Key paid positions filled or contracted out (e.g., coordinator, facilitator) • Written statements communicating shared understanding of a clearly defined problem and composite vision • Codes of conduct • Written agreements (e.g., a collaborative framework) with evidence of support and commitment from entities with decision authority over the resource
2. Translate vision into Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use science-based risk assessment and scenario analysis platforms to formulate a landscape strategy informed by values, local knowledge, and realistic expectations about outcomes • Collaboratively develop and deploy public outreach and engagement • Co-develop principles, best practices and operating procedures for treatment design and implementation • Co-develop an adaptive management strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboratively-developed risk assessments and maps representing areas for action • Outreach and communication plans • Shared best management practices • Project data sharing - who's working on what where? • Co-developed monitoring plan • Linkage between collaboratively developed strategy and NEPA requirements
3. Translate strategy into action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate implementation schedules to take advantage of geographic proximity and economic efficiencies to reach scale • Pool and share implementation resources and costs • Secure and direct financial resources for equipment, workforce training and organizational capacity to support implementation and monitoring • Test out the monitoring and adaptive management plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed projects tied to a strategy • Jointly developed/ submitted funding applications • Agreements to share resources • Monitoring reports summarizing the effects of actions, socio-economic assessments, progress reports on collaborative performance, self-evaluation forms, etc.
4. Scale out and sustain momentum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-develop and adapt 5+ year program of work • Institutionalize expectations of collaborative practices, performance, monitoring, and adaptive management to endure changes in personnel within the partnership • Foster broader systemic readiness by working to address factors like workforce, biomass utilization, policy issues, and the collaborative capacity of partner organizations and agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalized document(s) articulating collaboration principles and expectations, including contingency plans in the event of personnel turnover, additional funding, elimination of funding, changes in political administrations, and other disturbances • Articles of incorporation • Updated or revised governance documents • Updated or revised strategy documents and plans; references to these documents in partner plans • Documentation of ongoing co-learning processes, such as adaptive management workshops, fieldtrips, annual reports, or joint publications • Results of summative or longitudinal evaluations of collaborative performance

Evaluation & Feedback

Below is a summary of what we learned from our event evaluation survey. We appreciate your valuable feedback.

What went particularly well? Our most common piece of feedback was that people found it very valuable to gather with, and learn from, collaborative leaders and partners from across the state. We also heard that people valued the opportunity to interact directly with Forest Health Council representatives and DNR leadership, that the conversation was engaging, and that the Network providing travel assistance was key to supporting their attendance. Here are a few direct quotes from our evaluations:

- *“Great balance of pace and depth”*
- *“Excellent day of learning. Connecting with other collaboratives, thinking through stages [of readiness], and hearing creative solutions, were all highlights”*
- *“Great opportunity to network with folks from different regions that I don’t typically get to talk to.”*
- *“Forest collaborative leaders showed up, engaged, and met one another with plenty of time for networking”*

What could have been improved? The greatest challenge we faced with this Summit was the extreme weather event the morning of. Attendees recommended that we prepare for extreme weather by providing a virtual option, planning for speakers to commute up the night before the event, and/or picking locations and times of year when snow events are less common. We also heard that some of the interactive sessions lacked clarity of objectives, and that we could have closed the event with clearer next steps. We have noted the planning and clarity recommendations, and we hope that our Regional Forum and Summit summaries have provided a better sense of next steps.