

Recommendations from Collaboratives to the Colorado Forest Health Council

February 2024

About these recommendations:

These recommendations were developed through a listening session, and a follow-up survey sent out to the Colorado Forest Collaboratives Network. Collaboratives take diverse forms, but can loosely be defined as entities whose functions include one or more of the following: identifying, connecting, and aligning interests and stakeholders; convening processes to co-develop plans and strategies; supporting coordination of cross-boundary implementation; providing a venue for continuous learning and adaptive management. For a list of collaboratives we are aware of in Colorado and their locations, please visit the [Colorado Atlas of Collaborative Conservation](#).

1. Working with collaboratives, create, or expand existing, tools and opportunities for under-resourced communities to start and sustain collaboratives.

Examples include: dedicated funds for collaborative capacity in communities that don't yet have collaboratives; the creation of new documents that support new and growing collaboratives (example: like the Forest Resilience Planning Guide); and developing human resources to provide services and training to collaboratives.

"It takes resources to support collaborative efforts – from vehicle costs to be in person to build rapport with partnering entities, to providing food/snacks ... to fuel the important conversations, to training and conference or travel fees to ensure staff are staying up to date on latest information and research or tools – in addition to all the other costs that are typically difficult to get funded under federal or state allocations." -Survey response

"There used to be collaborative efforts, the Pikes Peak Wildfire Prevention Partners and the Middle Arkansas Wildfire Prevention Partners, that have both dissolved due to inconsistent funding and leadership. Those areas that have been most successful have been able to develop sustained local sources of revenue." -Survey response

Specific actions the CFHC can take:

- Recommend that the state work with collaborative leaders to create a new grant program that gives capacity funding to communities that do not yet have a collaborative group in place, that could benefit from one.
- Renew the 2023 recommendation to expand the capacity-building component of the Forest Restoration & Wildfire Risk Mitigation (FRWRM) grant.

2. Formalize agencies' support for collaboration.

Some collaboratives have found that their relationships with agencies depend on specific personalities and personnel who value collaboration. State agencies should formally support collaboration to ensure that important agency-collaborative relationships will sustain through turnover over time.

Additionally, agency personnel who value collaboration do not always feel that they have the capacity or leadership support to meaningfully engage. Ground-level agency personnel should be given opportunities to pursue professional development related to collaboration, and state agencies should create staff capacity to meaningfully engage in collaboration (not just by adding additional expectations onto already at-capacity employees).

Specific actions the CFHC can take:

- Formal support for collaboration could be modeled after this recent statement from the US Forest Service Region 6: "[Regional Leadership Vision on Working with Collaboratives](#)".
- Create additional capacity for collaboration within state agencies (for example, by adding additional partnership coordinator roles). This could be piloted with one or a few new positions, and expanded with time.

3. Give ample time for collaboratives to prepare grant applications; start preparing people with information sessions and meetings early if the application timeline cannot be changed.

Tight timelines are a capacity burden on already-capacity-limited groups. This is especially difficult when multiple funding opportunities open in a short time span and groups have to make time for back-to-back grant writing. If application timelines cannot be extended, there should at least be plenty of advance communication so that people can be as prepared as possible when opportunities open up.

“So many grants tend to be due in the fall. Advance notice is helpful, or try to schedule grant application deadlines for a time of the year that has fewer grants due.” -Survey response

Specific actions the CFHC can take:

- State entities offering forest health and wildfire mitigation could evaluate the feasibility of spreading applications out throughout the year, and/or could offer trainings several months ahead of grants opening to help applicants prepare as much as possible before the application period opens. This could be done on a trial basis to start, and adjust based on feedback.

4. Continue and expand work to remove barriers to prescribed fire implementation in Colorado in order to make it a more readily accessible tool for practitioners.

Practitioners are finding it difficult to burn on private lands due to a range of issues including:

- Costs and lack of clarity around liability insurance (including: high cost of liability insurance for organizations burning on private lands and for landowners hoping to utilize state fire crews; and a lack of clarity around who is liable in the rare case that a prescribed fire escapes, for how much, and under what circumstances)
- Strict smoke and air quality restrictions causing limited burn windows
- Workforce challenges (seasonal labor, lack of permanent pile-burning positions)
- Need to allow federal agency burners to work on private lands (through the Wyden Amendment, for example) and/or expand support for non-governmental burners

“Lack of opportunity for prescribed fire on private land is especially difficult for increasing the pace and scale of treatment. Without this option per acre costs are elevated and/or more fuels are left on the ground as chips or masticated material, rearranging fuel and decreasing the effectiveness of projects in the areas most susceptible to high damages after a fire.” -Survey response

5. Building on the Colorado Forest Health Council’s successful 2022 recommendation on workforce development, continue to advocate for and expand workforce capacity in Colorado.

Collaboratives have had challenges finding and recruiting qualified foresters and silviculturists. Because many parts of Colorado do not have a thriving timber industry, there is a lack of consulting foresters available to do forest management planning.

“In order to meet our pace and scale goals, we will need additional qualified forestry contractors local. We would love to see an investment in growing those small businesses and processing facilities. This will be a primary barrier for place-based collaboratives to get work done on the ground.” -Survey response