

U.S. Forest Service Public-Private Partnership Strategy

Leveraging Relationships through Shared Stewardship of the Nation's Forests and Grasslands

Executive Summary

The U.S. Forest Service Public-Private Partnership Strategy sets forth a bold plan to invite partners and beneficiaries to share in the care of our nation's forests and grasslands. This new and creative strategy provides a roadmap for expanding the constellation of partners the Forest Service engages with, thereby increasing the potential for exciting new social and capital investments towards our communities, ecosystems and outdoor experiences. The strategy advocates the expansion of partnerships, strategic alliances, and collaboratives throughout the agency; it also addresses systemic needs to ensure the organizational capacity, budget and reporting requirements, and legal authorities necessary to achieve this expansion.

The strategy outlines a specific vision and surrounding principles for public-private partnership work, and organizes objectives under six critical goals to help expand the number, breadth and scope of strategic partnerships for the agency:

- **Goal 1, Key Focal Areas:** Expand strategic public-private partnerships in key focal areas: Water, Healthy Forests, Youth Engagement, and Recreation;
- **Goal 2, Strategic Alliances:** Effectively identify and use strategic alliances towards advanced leverage and accomplishment;
- **Goal 3, Collaboration:** Collaborate broadly with our public towards better decisions and advanced accomplishment;
- **Goal 4, Capacity:** Build and sustain partner and agency capacity towards shared lessons, outcomes and strategy development for public-private partnerships;
- **Goal 5, Budget Initiatives, Measures and Reporting:** Implement budget initiatives and consistently high performing and customer-centric measures and reporting systems; and,
- **Goal 6, Authorities and Laws:** Use all authorities and laws towards effective engagement with our public- and private-sector interests.

Background

Over the past two decades, the Forest Service has accomplished much of its work through partnership and collaboration. In fiscal year (FY) 2010, the Forest Service entered into 8,147 grants and agreements with partners, who contributed \$533.8 million; when leveraged by the agency's \$832.5 million, the total value of these partnerships exceeded \$1.39 billion. In addition, strong relationships with volunteer organizations on average returned 1,933 person-years of volunteer service to the Forest Service each year, valued at over \$88 million. Today, these relationships act as true catalysts towards better connecting the Forest Service to diverse communities and citizens—refocusing relevancy and values through active partnerships and volunteerism.

While significant, these figures do not reflect the full value of benefits achieved through partnerships. Partner contributions and trends towards working together hold promise for more defensible, efficient management decisions and vested public support towards projects and project outcomes. These relationships also empower our employees and partners—capitalizing on and sharing information and skills, fostering continued learning, and creating deeper connections between people and the land.

In recognition of this significance, agency leaders in the Washington Office and executives across the Regions, Stations, and Area recently identified high-profile priority projects within their geographic locations (Appendix

A). These projects are new and innovative—they reflect an expansion of successful smaller scale projects to much larger landscapes; they expand the circle of partners to include a more diverse, and a broadening number of partners; they build on a greater public appreciation of the ecosystem services and benefits that accrue to communities; and, they increase the profile and capitalize on the fundraising ability of our congressionally chartered foundations – the National Forest Foundation (NFF) and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). Agency executives are currently pursuing these partnership projects and actively developing new shared stewardship opportunities.

Current and prospective public-private partnership projects value our lasting partners, while cultivating contemporary relationships, leveraging our relevancy in the shared stewardship of our nation’s forests and grasslands. New and emerging partners are inextricably linked through a mutual dependence on the benefits of healthy forests and headwaters. These contemporary stewardship partners (e.g., water utilities, power utilities, municipal governments, and state regulatory authorities) directly share in the benefits of healthy landscapes. Long-standing partners (e.g., ski areas, recreation service providers, and a host of NGOs) continue their support in these projects—helping the agency reach out to other allies, including outdoor retailers, service providers, community-forestry practitioners, and youth organizations. Likewise, our congressionally established foundations continue to play a critical role in these new projects through focused landscape-level activities, investment strategies and connections to corporate- and philanthropic-sectors.

Context and Challenges

Partnerships are essential to carry out today’s contemporary conservation missions. Engagement of cooperators, communities, private landowners, non-profit organizations, citizens and private interests are each critical to develop long-range management plans, carry out conservation and stewardship projects, and provide natural resource goods and services. To be effective in this changing world, with declining budgets, staff attrition, and hard-hit economies, the Forest Service must continue to develop effective partnerships where we invite and embrace stakeholder-based proposals, and successfully leverage our resources by working together. To this end, it is important to note where challenges remain, and to build efforts to overcome barriers and facilitate innovation in meeting mutual mission needs.

On-going challenges:

- The agency and many of our partners are faced with an increasing need to adapt to economic changes and pressures—relying on innovation and partnerships to accomplish work.
- Inefficient business processes and complex database systems can encumber efforts at the local level—impacting not only agency staff but also partners’ willingness to develop and maintain relationships with us.
- The continued engagement and support of both new and long-term partners requires substantial time and effort. Establishing and maintaining partner relationships can be a challenge, in part because trust-building requires long-term relationships. Organizational downsizing and restructuring has reduced the capability at the local level to the point where there is no longer the capacity to support increased partnerships, and where efficiency is allowed to supplant effectiveness.
- While our partners can assist with and leverage additional resources towards agency activities, complications within the private sector and associated constraints (e.g., funding availability, capacity, and business requirements) impact our ability to successfully establish and leverage relationships and results.
- Laws and ethical guidance surrounding partnerships can be complicated and limiting, particularly as we explore relationships with for-profit entities, issues of endorsement, and relationships with those organizations we also regulate.
- Relationships emerge through direct connections, and we are in an era when our citizens are increasingly less connected with their natural world and less understanding of the role that forests and grasslands play

with regard to ecosystem services, healthy living, sustainability and the multiple use mission of the Forest Service.

Partnership Vision and Principles

By expanding the current constellation of partners and enhancing processes and policies, the Forest Service can achieve goals of shared stewardship in all lands conservation activities.

Guiding principles for Forest Service partnerships:

- **Build stronger communities and healthier ecosystems**—sharing resources and expertise to achieve sustainable solutions to current and future resource challenges.
- **Empower employees and partners**—capitalizing on and sharing information and skills, fostering continued learning and creating deeper connections between people and the land.
- **Transfer and exchange knowledge and innovation domestically and internationally**—promoting application of such information for the benefit of local communities and natural environments.
- **Create a more effective and efficient organization**—expanding achievements through working together and securing or leveraging new and existing sources of support.
- **Promote an informed citizenry**—to better understand and contribute to America’s natural resource conservation issues.
- **Foster opportunity with an interested public**—shifting problem-solving solutions towards more democratic decisions and civic science;
- **Connect interests and energies**—developing innovative, lasting solutions to complex environmental, economic, and social challenges.
- **Promote diverse engagement of all sectors of society**—reaching out to minority and underserved communities to ensure adequate and equal access to information, resources, and decision-making processes.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1, Key Focal Areas: Expand the number, breadth, and scope of strategic public-private partnerships in key focal areas: Water, Healthy Forests, Youth Engagement, and Recreation.

There is already a great deal of momentum involved with these focal areas—each serving as a critical gateway for broader and deeper public engagement and exciting further public interest in all aspects of the agency. New work should build on current lessons, appropriate scales, and where possible, maximize gains in efficiencies and effectiveness.

- Complete a rapid strategic partner assessment across Regions, Stations, and the Area** to determine scope and scale of partnered efforts, lessons learned, science-based applications and tools, gaps in support and leverage, needs, and issues related to capacity.
- Create Strategic Opportunities in Water and Watershed Management.** Strengthen and establish Forest Service and partner activities through implementation of the Watershed Condition Framework, comprehensive partner assessments, strategic restoration activities, and connection to new publics through communication, education and direct engagement in watershed management. The Forest Service will expand innovative partnerships with water utilities, municipalities, private landowners, and NGOs to promote policies and investments that support watershed restoration and water quality improvement work

in priority watersheds, spotlighting the direct connection between healthy forests and clean and consistent supplies of fresh water.

- C. **Promote Increased Partnership in Healthy Forests and Restoration.** Through innovative partnerships, NGOs, community-based practitioners, committed corporations, foundations, and the Forest Service will implement a shared vision for the restoration of priority forest landscapes – collaboratively, scientifically and across boundaries. Public and private sectors share the broad benefits of healthy, restored forest landscapes, including clean and consistent water supplies, reduced wildfire risk, carbon sequestration, and sustainable outdoor recreation sites. Accomplish this work through strategic exploration of partner and agency capacity, exploration of new partners and public engagement venues.
- D. **Strengthen and Create Pathways for Expanded Youth Engagement.** Encourage youth to spend time in nature to promote health, connections to the land, and nurturing the next generation of land stewards—each essential to the health of our youth, to the sustainability of outdoor businesses, and to the future of our natural resource agencies. Expand innovative partnerships with NGOs, corporations, and foundations to foster the next generation of land stewards by encouraging youth to spend time in nature, promoting health, and building lasting connections to the land. Utilize strategic exploration of partner and agency capacity, education and employment pathways, communication and connection, impact measurement and leadership development.
- E. **Promote Increased Partnership in Recreation and Volunteerism.** Explore new partnership strategies to restore and adapt recreation settings and enhance communities, as outdoor recreation builds the agency’s constituency, promotes public health, and supports local, national, and international business. Explore new partnerships with foundations and committed corporations to restore and adapt recreation sites to meet the needs of a diverse American public for dispersed and developed recreation opportunities. Utilize comprehensive Forest Service and partner need assessments, contemporary communication venues and events, and the implementation of developed plans and frameworks.

Goal 2, Strategic Alliances: Effectively identify and use strategic alliances towards advanced leverage and accomplishment.

Strategic alliances are an important focus for the agency and can include both our traditional and emerging partners. These strategic relationships help us connect to a broadened network of support and leverage—creating increased relevancy to new publics, expanded opportunities for support, and renewed capacity for on-the-ground accomplishments. Among partnerships, strategic alliances tend to be distinguished by long-term involvement and a high degree of mutual benefit and shared ownership of the partnered efforts.

- A. **Promote improved coordination between our two congressionally chartered foundations:** National Forest Foundation and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.
- B. **Strengthen and focus collaboration with the National Forest Foundation (NFF).**
- C. **Strengthen and focus collaboration with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF).**
- D. **Strengthen and expand opportunities with American Indian/Alaska Native National Organizations.** Promote broader use of the Tribal Forest Protection Act and 3rd Indian Forest Management Assessment.

- E. **Strengthen and expand opportunities with our international partners.** These relationships also broaden Forest Service employee skill sets, promote the sharing of innovative technologies, and help us address cross-boundary environmental problems.
- F. **Fully activate our federal, state, and local partnerships,** including partners such as USDA agencies, public utilities, and state transportation agencies.
- G. **Broadly implement new Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with minority-serving institutions and professional organizations.** Pursue learning opportunities and implement several MOUs recently signed between the Forest Service and academic institutions and professional organizations.
- H. **Explore options for establishing new strategic partners.** Perform assessments of new strategic partners and establish investment strategies for those with national promise.

Goal 3, Collaboration: Collaborate broadly with the public towards better decisions and advanced accomplishment.

Community-based collaboration provides an interested public with opportunity for civil dialogue—shifting problem solving solutions towards more open and democratic decisions and civic science-based. In as much as collaboration fosters advanced accomplishment with reduced conflict, it also brings new excitement, creativity and hope into the realm of natural resource management through a shared citizen commitment. These collaboratives have shaped themselves into vibrant monitoring approaches, technological advances, leveraged capital investments, and improved workforce opportunities.

- A. **Implement the US Forest Service 2011 Empowering Collaborative Stewardship Initiative** (currently under development) to enhance our capacity for community and citizen engagement.
- B. **Recognize, map, and value community-based collaboratives.** Identify collaboratives that are working well, determine which collaboratives can be enhanced, develop additional collaboratives, and provide contemporary analytical tools (e.g., GIS platform solutions) to develop strategies and assess results.
- C. **Establish and implement a national “Community Capacity Land Stewardship Grant Program.”** Enhance conservation and economic resiliency by building community and local-business capacity to participate in landscape-level restoration activities, mitigation and adaptation strategies for a changing climate, and economic development opportunities within an all-lands setting.
- D. **Further advance successes within the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program.** Support implementation of selected projects; communicate accomplishments to expanded audiences; maintain learning networks; develop national indicators and outcome reporting; and, continue close work with the CFLRP Advisory Panel.
- E. **Capitalize on strategic national meetings** and ensure Agency and Department leadership is present and engaged. These meetings also help us advance strategic direction and activities, coordinate across broad areas of shared interests, leverage shared resources, and develop shared communication efforts.

- F. **Increase community awareness of opportunities for active partnerships between the Forest Service and Job Corps**, using Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers to focus on local community partnerships.
- G. **Effectively engage with Tribes through the use of the USDA Tribal Consultation Policy**. Develop different forums for exploring common resource goals with tribal members so we can base partnerships on those interests and at the same time respect tribal consultation policy.

Goal 4, Capacity: Build and sustain partner and agency capacity towards shared lessons, outcomes, and strategy development for public-private partnerships.

A critical part of any strategy is ensuring that there is adequate capacity to sustain efforts over the long term. By exploring staffing needs, communication and learning pathways, and information access and flow, our overall strategy will be stronger and more resilient to internal and external pressures.

- A. **Establish a Leadership Forum** to include joint prospecting of innovative partnerships for the agency, building upon mutual interests and passions.
- B. **Create new peer-learning opportunities** for requested topics of high interests and need, supporting a broader sharing of knowledge, experiences, stories and lessons.
- C. **Create new or modified on-line resources in support of partnerships and collaboration** to facilitate internal and external exchange of ideas and knowledge among partners, establish communities of practice (CoP), and provide examples of innovation through secure, transparent use of standard information, datasets and technology.
- D. **Use creative media, marketing and communication tools** to develop models for sustained public information campaigns to relay the importance of our partnered work.
- E. **Increase Social Science Technology Transfer** to partners inside and outside of the Forest Service.

Goal 5, Budget Initiatives, Measures and Reporting: Implement budget initiatives and consistently high performing and customer-centric measures and reporting systems.

To create a sustainable future, we need clear direction and positive criteria that guide our actions and shape the outcomes that we seek. By evaluating our current activities against such criteria, we can improve the breadth and depth of our partnership relationships. New accountability measures and reporting systems will improve integration of partnerships and collaboration in everyday activities, create incentives for partnership work, recognize and reward innovation in partnerships, and provide more robust and meaningful reports on the agency's progress. The agency will establish investment strategies that leverage appropriated dollars and ensure that budget allocation and program direction best enable and encourage current and prospective partnerships, transforming these processes and fully integrating public-private ventures as standard business practice for the agency.

- A. **Enable the regions/stations/area (R/S/As) to track and report partnership successes**. The Forest Service monitors and reports its work in partnership through a variety of databases, including: I-Web, which tracks the number of formal agreements in place and can yield information to summarize contributions of our agency and that of the partners; Wildlife, Fish, and Rare Plants Management System

(WFRP), which tracks both monetary and non-monetary contributions down to the individual units and project; Conservation Education’s National Information for Conservation Education (NICE) Database; and, Recreation’s Volunteers and Partners Database. Linking these and other databases to better capture both the monetary and the in-kind contributions associated with formal and informal partnerships will help us better “tell the story” of each individual partnership and the cumulative impact of this important work.

- B. **Establish program guidance, direction, and expectations for partnership leverage in FY 2012 and beyond.** Providing clear guidance to programs, through budget direction, will be critical to carry out cooperative endeavors.
- C. **Establish direction to set measurable goals for partnership leverage in development of the FY 2013 agency request for National Forest System, State & Private Forestry, Research & Development, and International Programs.** The expectation will be to leverage funds and capacity with partners to create a “multiplier-effect,” increasing return on investment and work on the ground.
- D. **Establish incentives and program requirements to encourage large-scale public-private partnerships.** As the Forest Service further implements the “all lands” concept of natural resource management, there is driving need to invest and build new capacity towards large-scale partnership efforts. The broad and diverse scale of such projects promotes the engagement of the full spectrum of partners and the potential leverage of investments for both the federal government and the private sector.
- E. **Encourage new competencies and elements within the Performance Management System.** Evaluate the 27 collaborative leadership competencies identified by OPM and ensure their inclusion in internal personnel actions.

Goal 6, Authorities and Laws: Use all authorities and laws towards effective engagement with our public and private-sector interests—adjusting business practices, as appropriate.

Establishing partnerships and using them to their greatest potential has not always been a simple matter for the Forest Service and its partners. Challenges have resulted, in part, from a diversity of partnership authorities, varying interpretation of these authorities, and time-consuming processes for formalizing partnership agreements. We must better educate Forest Service personnel and our partners on available authorities for partnered work and illustrate various options for engagement and leverage.

- A. **Conduct a contemporary review of authority usage and barriers to effective relationships,** building on previous efforts and studies (internal and external).
- B. **Complete Lean 6 Sigma process for G&A, actively engaging field Line Officers,** as part of an on-going effort towards continuous process improvement (CPI). The goal in the current phase is to validate the strategies identified in the process, and then test for efficiencies gained.
- C. **Develop new tools and resources to enhance learning and information exchange,** including guides, learning networks, and informational resources.
- D. **Explore expansion and enhancement of authorities and policies** that would advance our work in partnership.

APPENDIX A

Ten High-Priority Projects to Advance Public-Private Partnerships

The following ten projects, highlighted by WO and Region/Station/Area leadership, represent new and innovative efforts that catalyze significant advances for the Forest Service within the realm of public-private partnerships. Please note that these projects are not presented in a priority order; the agency intends to pursue each of these projects to the fullest extent:

- **Rocky Mountain Watershed Protection Partnerships**– To continue outreach to municipal water providers and pursue additional investments in the protection of water supplies, expanding along the Colorado Front Range.
- **Wasatch Watershed Legacy Partnership**– To broaden the partnership base of ski areas, water utilities, municipal governments, and outdoor retailers to direct investments in restoration and recreational improvements along the Wasatch Front.
- **Alaska Cruise Line Conservation Campaign**– To institute voluntary contribution mechanisms to enable Alaska cruise line customers to fund stewardship, restoration, recreational improvements, and youth-oriented programs within the landscapes they visit.
- **California Ecological Restoration with Power and Water Utilities**– To work with power and water utilities across California to fund ecological restoration and reduce wildfire threat in critical headwaters and along utility transmission lines.
- **Carbon Sequestration and Reforestation on National Forests**– To direct investments in reforestation by corporations interested in greenhouse gas emission reductions through biological carbon sequestration within legal and policy constraints.
- **National Fish and Wildlife Foundation – Youth Engagement** – To work in partnership with foundations, federal agencies, outdoor retailers, and others to connect youth to nature and to build employment pathways in natural resource fields.
- **Recreation Restoration, Adaptation, and Ski Area Campaign**– In partnership with the National Forest Foundation, to expand voluntary contribution mechanisms for customers of ski areas, outdoor retailers, service providers, and reservation systems to help restore the landscapes they visit.
- **America’s Longleaf Restoration Initiative**– To partner with foundations, federal agencies, state governments, private landowners, and others to direct investments in the restoration of the longleaf pine/wiregrass ecosystem.
- **National Forest Foundation Treasured Landscapes, Unforgettable Experiences Conservation Campaign**– To actively engage with the National Forest Foundation and site-specific utilities, corporations, outdoor retailers, and organizations to significantly invest in watershed protection, restoration, and recreation on 14 Campaign sites.
- **Urban Waters Federal Partnership**– To partner with federal agencies and others on seven pilot projects across the country, seeking new investments in urban waters and community revitalization.