

USDA Forest Service

Partnering with the USDA Forest Service



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Chapter 1 DRAFT

Chapter 1 Table of Contents

Introduction	3
1.1 Partnerships is Defined	5
1.1.2 Partnership With Indian Tribes	7
1.2 Collaboration in Partnerships	9
1.3 Reasons to Partner	10
1.4 How Partners Succeed	13
1.5 Partnership Instruments & Authorities	14
1.5.1 Agreement Instrument	16
1.5.2 Funding partners	19
1.5.3 Agreement Authorities	19
1.6 Resources	21

1. Partnering with the USDA Forest Service

What is the USDA Forest Service's role in partnering, and what is partnering with the agency all about?

Collaboration and partnerships are the way of the future in managing the nation's forests and grasslands. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service's fundamental mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. To accomplish this mission, the Forest Service partners with land management agencies across all levels of government, with non-profit and for-profit entities and communities of place an interest. Increasingly, the Forest Service's role is to bring these groups and individuals together to restore, manage and better understand ecosystems and their processes through on-the-ground, community-based projects. A partnered or collaborative approach builds commitment to projects and ownership of the results and helps diverse groups find common interests and leverage resources to get work done.

Recognizing the breadth of agency activities can explain the numerous partnership opportunities available with the Forest Service. The multiple-use approach that managers use to oversee the nation's 193 million acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands to sustain healthy terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and meet resource, commodity, and service needs creates many partnering opportunities. As the largest natural resource research organization in the world, the Forest Service works with hundreds of partners to better understand how well the agency is collaboratively managing its resources and also to foresee impacts and trends within the natural resource sector,

including in the social sciences, economics and biological studies. The Forest Service also works with a multitude of partners in reaching across boundaries to States, Tribes, communities, and non-industrial private landowners, providing technical and financial support to help sustain healthy forests and protect communities and the environment from catastrophic wildland fires. Many partnership opportunities also exist in the work the Forest Service accomplishes through programs in Sustainable Operations and Civil Rights.



The nation's forests and grasslands contain abundant natural resources and related opportunities to help meet the needs of a growing America. Sustainable forest and grassland management ensures the ability to continually deliver vital goods and services, including recreational opportunities, water, domestic livestock forage, energy, wildlife habitat, and wood product supplies, to name a few. But in the future, competing needs will likely create extensive pressure on public lands. Now and in the future, partners are essential in helping the Forest Service collaboratively accomplish its mission.

1.1 Partnerships Defined

The word *partnership* has a precise meaning according to Federal policy. [Forest Service Manual \(FSM\) 1580.5](#) defines a partnership as “a voluntary, mutually beneficial arrangement entered into for the purpose of

accomplishing mutually agreed upon objective(s), related to the instruments and authorities listed in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1509.11, chapter 70.” In this definition, *mutually beneficial* specifically means that each partner shares in the benefits the project provides.

While many partnerships are formal arrangements, the Forest Service also frequently works with partners through informal activities, which may serve as springboards for formal arrangements later. For example, many agency employees participate within community networks to offer educational events and share skills and expertise with local citizens without a documented understanding. These informal arrangements rarely necessitate extensive project planning, paper documentation, or defined legal authorities. This informal cooperation broadens the meaning of partnerships beyond the Federal policy definition and more official arrangements.

Within the Forest Service, partnerships are often broadly defined as voluntary relationships between people, organizations, agencies, and communities that work together and share interests. A partnership may involve one partner utilizing another's unique abilities, or it may constitute a sharing of resources, such as equipment, knowledge, money, or time. Sustainable relationships help both parties accomplish more together than they could alone. The Forest Service regularly works with numerous entities, including businesses, communities, nonprofit groups, other Federal agencies, States, and Tribes. Partnerships can involve both public and private sectors.

Common partner types include the following:

Charitable foundations. Established to provide financial support to various causes and frequently associated with sizable family or corporate trusts, charitable foundations do not commonly contribute directly to Federal programs. More usually they fund nonprofits whose ideals match their own. Some foundations are dedicated to improving social or environmental conditions and seek quality projects to support.

For-profit private sector. The business community—those providing goods or services for profit, including corporations, banks, and local or regional businesses—often works with the agency in service or acquisitions via contracts. Corporations often look to support projects that benefit their customers' or employees' home communities. While the for-profit private sector is not precluded

from working with the Forest Service, partnerships involving the business community can generate ethics and endorsement issues requiring additional scrutiny.

Indian Tribes. Indian Tribes, American Indian and Alaskan Native-owned businesses and contractors, and intertribal organizations are imperative to large-landscape conservation—they are stewards of over 55 million acres of land. Indian Tribes share the goal of managing and protecting American lands and natural resources and working cooperatively to ensure that American Indian and Alaskan Native people have full access to Forest Service programs, services, and effective partnerships. Tribes also have treaty rights on a lot of Forest Service land, including national forests, and thus help in natural resource management in many capacities. See section 1.1.2 for more.

Intergovernmental partners. These partnerships include Federal and State agencies, Tribes, and local governments. In an intergovernmental partnership, the common interest can be lands and resources, budget control, relevant expertise, vested interest in the outcome, or an issue that would benefit from the help of multiple agencies to resolve it.

Nonprofit organizations. These entities are affiliated with a specific cause, and their goals and objectives can range from local to global issues. Nonprofits often have limited administrative and support services, so they seek innovative approaches to expand their goals and resources. As added value, nonprofits may offer access to their sometimes expansive networks.

Professional societies. Usually incorporated and tax-exempt, these societies often include members who are highly knowledgeable in their field and frequently include geographical branches to better serve and communicate with their members in numerous localities. All levels of these organizations present possible partnership capabilities.

Universities. These are institutions of higher education and research, which grant academic degrees in a variety of subjects and provide both undergraduate education and postgraduate

education. In partnership with the federal government, universities often collaborate with research, studies, and professional development of students.

For additional information, please refer to this list of [agency partners](#).

1.1.2 Partnering with Indian Tribes

An Indian Tribe is defined as any Indian or Alaska Native (AI/AN) Tribe, band, nation, pueblo, village, or other community, the name of which is included on a list published by the Secretary of the Interior pursuant to section 104 of the Federally Recognized Indian Tribe List Act of 1994 (25 U.S.C. 479a-1). The Federal government and Indian Tribes have a unique government-to-government relationship grounded in the U.S. Constitution and expressed through numerous treaties, statutes, executive directives, and court decisions. Based on this relationship, the Federal government has a legally enforceable fiduciary obligation, or trust responsibility, whereby the United States must protect Tribal treaty rights, lands, assets, and resources, as well as carry out Federal law with respect to American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes and villages.

Currently 566 Federally-recognized Indian Tribes exist across the United States. To best manage the nation's lands and natural resources and ensure AI/AN peoples' full access to agency programs, services, and effective partnerships, it is essential that the Forest Service engage with Indian Tribes through consultation on policies that may affect Tribes. Executive Order 13175 defines consultation as "meaningful and timely input by Tribal officials in the development of regulatory policies that have Tribal implications."

Consultation, coordination, and collaboration are mutually supportive. Together they lead to information sharing, common understanding, and informed decision-making. Presidential Memoranda in 1994, 2004, and 2009 and Executive Orders in 1998 and 2000 as well numerous statutes and policies have affirmed the importance of consultation and coordination with Indian

Tribes. When the Federal government engages with non-Federally-recognized Tribes, consultation is encouraged to the extent practicable and permitted by law.

For additional information, please refer to the following resources:

- [Forest Service Office of Tribal Relations](#)
- [Forest Service Manual 1500- External Relations, Chapter 1560](#) – State, County, and Local Agencies: Public and Private Organizations
- [Forest Service Handbook 1509.13](#) – American Indian and Alaska Native Relations Handbook, Chapter 10 – Consultation with Tribes
- [Department of Interior Bureau of Indian Affairs – FAQ](#)



← 1.2 Collaboration in Partnerships

While the collaborative process is an integral part of many partnerships, collaboration is not synonymous with partnership. In natural resource management, collaboration increasingly refers to a voluntary process where groups with different and sometimes conflicting interests come together to address management issues across a specified geographic region (for example, forest, watershed, or landscape) or on a specific topic (e.g., climate change, restoration, green job

creation). In other words, the goal of collaboration is to build and promote a collective vision for how to meet a mutually desired outcome. Through collaboration, groups that may disagree are able to explore these differences, identify joint interests, and seek common-ground solutions.

In order for collaboration to succeed, relationships must be nurtured at all levels of each organization. Partners should be brought into the conversation early so their insights can be fully considered—Forest Service staff can make partners feel welcome and appreciated by realizing the value of their contributions. By interacting with staff, collaborative members can learn about resource management from the agency's point of view. This multi-faceted process builds mutual respect across the organizational divide.

Collaboration typically takes a long time because of the need to increase understanding of each party's different perspectives, build trust, and establish relationships. In contrast, partnerships may move quickly because the parties involved already agree and/or have similar or complimentary objectives. In addition, while a collaborative relationship may be documented through a formal arrangement, often it is not. Finally, as in partnerships, collaborative processes do not transfer government authority—government agencies remain responsible for their actions and retain their decision-making authority even when collaborating with others.

For additional information, please refer to the following resources:

- [Overview of collaboration in the Forest Service](#)
- [Collaboration Toolbox: The resources you need for success](#)
- [Collaboration case studies](#)



1.3 Reasons to Partner

The Forest Service accomplishes much of its work through partnerships and collaboration with many diverse partners. While partnerships contain the valuable component of leveraging funds and other resources in completing critical on-the-ground activities, perhaps the most important benefit

to partnering is the relationship building it brings about. In a time of growing public demands and an evolving model of governance, the Forest Service recognizes its partners' increasingly important role in helping the agency carry out its contemporary conservation mission.

Partnership and Collaboration

Partnerships and collaboration bring people together across constituencies—civic, public, and private. Partnering relationships build communities of culture, interest, and place, instilling a sense of belonging and ownership.

Partnerships and collaboration can build long-term support and short-term momentum for projects. By pooling efforts, partners can add their capabilities to increase efficiency and results while reducing duplication.

Partnerships and collaboration can bring together people from different experiences and perspectives to collectively develop several options from which to select the best solutions.

Partnerships and collaboration can lead to increased public support and improved morale by empowering citizen stewardship of public lands and resources.

Partnerships can contribute directly to the ecological, social, and economic wellbeing of rural and urban communities within a variety of projects, including educational services, recreation improvements, reforestation, research, and riparian area restoration.

Partnerships are relationships that help agencies achieve more than they could on their own.

In summary, partnerships and collaboration offer numerous benefits: leveraging resources to achieve shared goals; generating creative solutions to mutual stewardship outcomes; and improving area ecological, social, and economic wellbeing through positive relationships.

1.4 How Partnerships Succeed

Partnerships often grow out of the naturally occurring bond between a natural resource and a community of place or interest. In the process of building a partnering relationship, initial enthusiasm grows into practiced and routine cooperation. Establishing and building trust, articulating a mutual vision, agreeing to joint decision making, and engaging in positive feedback and problem solving all strengthen developing partnerships. In addition, as in any relationship, the presence of intangible elements such as adequate face-to-face time, discreteness, fairness, integrity, loyalty, openness, promise fulfillment, and receptivity can strengthen a partnership's breadth and depth.

Prospective partners are those who demonstrate an interest and ability to work together. Individuals and their organizations can bring technical and/or financial resources to the table along with energy, enthusiasm, and persistence—all hallmarks of successful ventures.

The larger context within which partnerships develop is critical—community and social networks play a central role in determining the way problems are solved, organizations are run and the degree to which partnerships, collaboration, and alliances succeed. Communities interrelate around common and special interests and values, conflict, financial exchange and trade, and kinship. Large-scale community efforts are most effective when participants understand how collective decisions are made within that community.

Successful partnerships usually exemplify a few basic principles:

Effective Beginnings

- Include people or groups whose participation is crucial to a partnership's success early in the process, which will increase the likelihood of success.
- Discuss potential problem areas early in a relationship, because challenges and conflict are bound to emerge—even in the strongest of partnerships.
- Take time to identify decision-making authorities, understand the distribution of power, and delegate tasks and roles objectively to get a new relationship off to a great start.
- Focus on the future and be positioned to seize opportunity while navigating transitions.
- Negotiate parameters for communication and reinforce the business side of budding partnerships.

Essential Traits

- Effective partners demonstrate mutual respect, are active listeners, and foster transparency of process.
- Shared agendas, joint decision-making, and mutual benefit constitute a partnership. Funds facilitate the projects.
- The greater the ability of partners to contribute and learn from one another, the greater the potential for long-term success.
- Partnerships should develop solutions with the greatest public benefit while respecting private property rights.

Purposeful Membership

- While partnerships are formed among organizations, they succeed because of individuals.
- A successful partnership usually has a strong leader who champions projects and goals with vision, energy, and enthusiasm.
- Those whom a partnership's goals directly affect are usually the ones most willing and able to work for the partnership.

Well-Founded Methods

- Partnerships often follow a predictable life cycle: start up, an initial high-growth phase, a slower growth phase, and eventual maturity. All parties should manage in anticipation of the inevitable transition to and through these stages while keeping an eye to the partnership's ultimate goals.
- It is important to be realistic in estimating the time required to initiate and implement a partnership.
- Thinking creatively about ways to cooperate with others to achieve common goals allows alliances to spring from sheer happenstance.
- Identifying timelines and milestones to help measure progress is crucial, as is being cognizant of partner attitudes toward these milestones and their ability to meet them.
- Partnerships should be seen as proactive, involving interaction beyond business as usual.

Successful partnering begins when everyone is user- and stakeholder-focused, has a shared vision, and works to establish clear goals, objectives, and outcomes.

1.5 Partnership Instruments and Authorities

Documenting a partnership is an important step in the relationship because it clarifies objectives, describes roles and responsibilities, and ensures mutual accountability. The Forest Service uses many types of formal arrangements or instruments—typically called grants or agreements—to document its work with others. The correct instrument to use depends primarily on the partner, project, type, benefactors, and how or whether the parties exchange funds or other resources. Every formal partnership agreement must have an authority, appropriation, and use the right instrument.

Forest Service staff will navigate the laws that govern the agency, but it remains important for partners to understand the source of any agency limitations and how laws, often referred to as authorities, can support and foster partnerships. Those who have partnered before with another land management agency should understand that while there may be similarities when engaging in a Forest Service partnership, differences may also exist.



1.5.1 Agreement Instruments

An agreement defines how partners will work together and how to manage and provide project resources, clearly defining who will be responsible for what, who will report to whom, how services will be provided, how decisions will be made, and how any possible funding will be allocated. Often the specifics of an agreement are guided by the partners' shared vision, which facilitates the development of reasonable goals, specific targets, and plans. This vision also plays an important role in bridging any differences between partners' organizational cultures. Partnership agreements are governed by numerous Federal laws and regulations, and Local or State regulations, mission statements, bylaws, and good business practices supplement this guidance.

An overview of partnering documents that may be used follows.

Challenge Cost-Share Agreements are available on a year-to-year basis and require recipients to match Federal money with non-Federal funds, labor, materials, equipment, or land and water. These agreements generally result in direct benefit to the Forest Service versus public benefit.

Collection Agreements are used to collect cash contributions to perform specific tasks authorized by law that benefit partners on either NFS land or land adjacent to or with direct impact to NFS land. Partner financial contributions may cover all or part of the work costs. The Forest Service does not use these agreements to receive gifts or charitable contributions.

Cooperative Agreements are used to transfer money, property, services, or anything of value to an outside group for a project of mutual interest and with public interest. Substantial agency involvement is anticipated.

Grants are used to transfer money, property, services, or anything of value to an outside group for a project of mutual interest where substantial Forest Service involvement is not anticipated. Some of the Forest Service's closest partners also award their own grants from funding the agency has

provided them, and bring non-Federal match to increase the overall value of the work being performed.

Interagency and Intra-agency Agreements are used when one agency is providing payments, goods, or services to another agency or when internal Forest Service programs collaborate.

Memorandums of Understanding, often referred to as MOUs, are most commonly used to establish partnerships and document specific responsibilities and/or coordinate efforts among parties, with each partner carrying out its separate activities. Partners agree to work toward mutual goals, perform joint work, or share research results, but no funding is involved.

Participating Agreements are used when the Forest Service and its partners wish to perform work from which they will accrue non-monetary mutual benefit. Activities in these agreements are generally limited to forest history materials publication; forest protection; interpretive associations; manpower/job training; prescribed fire; pollution abatement; Resource Advisory Committee support; and watershed restoration and enhancement.

Joint Venture Agreements pool resources in support of agricultural research activities of mutual interest. Parties must share costs.

Stewardship Agreements and Stewardship Contracts are used to achieve mutual objectives and land management goals on the national forests that meet local and rural community needs. Designed to promote closer working relationships with local communities in a broad range of activities that improve land conditions, these instruments allow Federal agencies to contribute to sustainable rural community development and restore and maintain healthy forest ecosystems.

Volunteer Agreements are used to secure services of individuals or groups without compensation although some incidental expenses may be reimbursed. Volunteer agreements are separate from the grants and agreements process within the Forest Service.

← 1.5.2 Funding Partnerships

Each year Congress allocates Federal dollars to the Forest Service to help prioritize the agency's focus and activities. Even though the Forest Service is part of USDA, it receives its budget through the Subcommittee on Appropriations, Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. Budgetary considerations impose limitations on partnerships and affect which partnerships can be pursued and what funding can be used for a particular purpose (often referred to as "primary purpose."). For more information on the budget, visit the [Forest Service national website](#). This webpage includes budget justifications and special exhibits on the work the agency does with its partners.



1.5.3 Agreement Authorities

The authority for the Forest Service to partner is mandated by Congressional legislation. Several national laws have significant influence on the agency's mission, budget, and partnering activities.

[Food, Conservation and Energy Act \(Farm Bill\)](#). This bill, Congressionally-passed every five years or so and dealing with agriculture and all other affairs under USDA's purview, also has huge implications for USDA's budget for grant and partnering programs.

Cooperative Funds Act of June 30, 1914. This act authorizes the Forest Service to accept cash contributions from a cooperator to work on Forest Service projects that benefit the national forests.

Cooperative Funds and Deposits Act of December 12, 1975. This act authorizes the Forest Service and a partner to perform work from which they would accrue mutual non-monetary benefit in the areas of cooperative pollution abatement; cooperative manpower, job training and development programs; development and publication of cooperative environmental education and forest history materials; and forestry protection.

The Economy Act of June 30, 1932. Section 601 of this act authorizes one Federal agency to requisition work, services, supplies, materials, or equipment from another Federal agency.

Granger-Thye Act of April 24, 1950. Section 5 of the Granger-Thye Act authorizes the Forest Service to perform work to benefit a cooperator when the work is related to the administration, protection, improvement, reforestation, and the like of State, county, municipal, or private land within or near NFS land. The authority also allows work to occur on NFS or Forest Service-administered lands when the party requesting Forest Service services occupies or uses that land. The type of work being completed must be work that the Forest Service can otherwise do for itself on NFS lands.

Interior and Related Appropriations Act of 1992. This act authorizes the Forest Service to cooperate with others in developing, planning, and implementing mutually beneficial projects that enhance agency activities. It requires that the partner provide matching funds or in-kind contributions.

Wyden Amendment (Watershed Restoration and Enhancement Authority). This authorizes the Forest Service to enter into cooperative and participating agreements with willing Federal, tribal, State, and local governments, private and nonprofit entities, and landowners for three purposes: (1) the protection, restoration, and enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat and other natural or cultural resources on public or private lands; (2) the reduction of risk for natural disaster where public safety is threatened; or (3) a combination of both.

1.6 Resources

- [Grants and Agreements Guide for NFS Program Managers](#) – *(Only Forest Service employees have access to this.)*
- [National Forest Foundation: Conservation Connect Web site](#)
- [U.S. Forest Service Office of Tribal Relations: Start a Partnership with the U.S. Forest Service or Obtain Federal Financial Assistance: A Guide for Tribal Governments](#)
- [U.S Forest Service Partnership Resource Center Web site](#)
- [White House Interagency Policy Committee on Community Partnerships: Building Partnerships: A Best Practices Guide](#)