



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Meeting Notes

Lassen National Forest Partnership in Practice Symposium

Tuesday October 17, 2023

Deb Bumpus – Opening

- The purpose of this meeting is to get everyone on the same page and identify the strengths and weaknesses to help with knowing where partners and LNF's needs match up. Some of the items discussed will be set in stone because of the guidelines we have to follow and with some items there is room for discussion.

Lassen National Forest Foundations of Partnership (Tonya Torst)

- Q: What is a Partnership? A: Individual or entity who volunteers to collaborate with the Forest Service on projects in which they share a mutual benefit and mutual interest. Often involves a formal agreement and exchange of funds.
- Q: What are the laws and limitations? A: Regulated by the Forest Service manual and LNF policies. Line Officers must sign off on any partner work because they hold the ultimate liability.
- Agreements have to go through a Grants and Agreements process with our regional office.
- Congress limits how funds can be used with the agreement.
- Forest Service has to make sure there are no conflicts of interest.
- What are some things that make a successful partnership? Clear objectives, good communication, agreeing upon a scope.
- Something for potential partners to think about- constraints that come with Federal partnership, are you willing to work around it?
- Capacity Limitations – Key challenges: Staff turnovers on both sides which can cause lack of history/work experience.

LNF and Partner Roles and Responsibilities (Russell Nickerson)

Roles and Responsibilities during the West Shore Project in Lake Almanor

- LNF identified team leads for FS and partner that can help with handling issues.
- Partners and LNF talked through the process of building purpose of needs.
- Partners helped create list of things to move forward with and work through.
- Joint team meetings between LNF and partner held for coordination.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

- After scoping, work through comments (partners helped with this), and identified alternatives if needed.
- Both LNF and partners will write specialist reports. LNF will review.
- Final wrap up, EA, final drafting, partners helped greatly with the work.
- Line Officer (DR) reviewed final draft.
- Objection period. Met with individuals who had concerns. Reiterated the intent of the project, as a team. Asked what could be done to move forward.
- Collaborative group opted to put in comments.
- If there are objections for a project – FS has to handle those.
- LNF signs decision.
- Moves into implementation side.
- Partners put service contract out. FS helped.
- FS is always working on timber side of the project to help with marking for layout and boundaries, etc. Contracts for bidding.
- Failed a little on both sides when trying to get to implementation. FS representative should be more involved.
- District Ranger will communicate with contracting officer. Only contracting officer can sign off on timber sales.
- Working on some burning in that area. Looking for new partners to work with morning forward.

Q & A

- Q: Cindy McMurray – Conflict of interest. Is it a conflict for current FS employees to become a member of organization? A: Cannot be involved in anything that involves making decisions or funding decisions. Can be involved in field work, etc.
 - Update from the USFS Ethics Office: FS employees, in their personal capacity, accepting a stipend or mileage reimbursement is considered compensation that gives rise to an employment relationship. FS employees who, in their official capacity, are involved with this organization or matters that affect this organization should not accept this sort of compensation from this entity as they would then be obligated to recuse themselves from any and all FS side matters involving this organization (treated as a covered employment relationship). For those who do not have such duties nor work on matters (including providing input/recommendations to supervisors/peers/subordinates)—they may accept without issue.
 - A FS employee who holds a board or officer-level position with a Non-Federal-Organization (“NFO”) would be required to recuse themselves from any and all Forest Service side matters (not only decision but input and recommendations even where there is no financial nexus) involving that organization for: 1) as long



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

as the position is held and 2) for 1-year after the relationship ends. Also worth noting is where the agency deems there to be an interest in such an organization a FS employee can be designated as “Agency Liaison” or “Agency Representative” to the NFO.

- Second, a FS employee who in their personal capacity volunteers with an NFO and receives a “stipend” or “mileage reimbursement” is receiving compensation. Acceptance of such compensation would be considered an ‘employment relationship’. FS employees with a covered relationship (as an employee of a NFO) would again be required to recuse themselves from any and all FS side matters involving their outside employer for 1) as long as the employment relationship lasts and 2) for 1 year after the employment relationship ends. Thus, a FS employee that accepts a one time only stipend from an NFO on 10.19.2023 could not work on any FS side matters (financial or otherwise) for 1 year (10.20.2024). If the FS employee does not have any official duties involving the NFO, then accepting the compensation does not present an ethics issue.
 - Third, for FS employees who serve with NFO’s in their personal capacity there exists a criminal statute that prohibits them from “representing” (a term construed broadly) that NFO back before employees of the Federal government (any unit of—e.g., EPA, BLM, DOE, DOD, USDA, etc.). FS employees should be very cautious not to attend meetings opposite Federal employees on behalf of third party organizations (NFO’s) or submit Federal grant applications on their behalf, etc. For example, if an FS employee were an active participant in an NFO and attended a meeting on another National Forest on behalf of Backcountry regarding a permit or access issue, their very presence might constitute “representation with the intent to influence government decision making” even if they did not speak, due to the position they hold within the FS. Point being, we want any employee who contemplates representing any person or organization to consult with us first. We have a little latitude with the ethics regulations. However, with respect to title 18 of the United States Code those are criminal matters that belong to USDA OIG and Department of Justice.
- Q: Is there a way at some point to get a chart or discussion on FS roles and who needs to be involved in taking responsibility of implementation? A: Really depends on the activities that are needing to be completed. Specialists will change depending on what side of implementation is being completed.
 - FS Implementation flow chart is in the works. Intent is to have it completed in the following year.
 - SN Conservancy – Roles & Responsibilities – Identification of which roles can only be completed by FS, which can be completed by G&A, partners, etc. Will help with bottleneck of planning and implementation.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

- Russell & Stephaney can pull together a list of roles and responsibilities. Will provide in November newsletter.
- Q: Is there a list of partners and what their capabilities are?
 - A: Spreadsheet available with partners and their interests who were at Eagle Lake Summit. Stephaney will send out spreadsheet in November newsletter with blank spaces for partners to add to.
- Maiya Greenwood – American Rivers – FS roles in project development. How projects are developed and how the process of developing roles and responsibilities worked?
 - A: Russell talked about the West Shore project specifically. There was a small group in Almanor basin at the time that determined an area and what they wanted to do. They identified the need on the landscape. Russell and partners had conversations on how to pull together what the FS and partners hope to do, to make project goals match up with District goals. They figured out what avenues could be completed with NEPA.
 - Deb talked about National level – USDA works with congress on what the management objectives are. A five-year strategic plan is completed. WO website has Strategic Plan. Regional Forester will put out letter yearly to go over yearly objectives. Watershed health and recreation access have been top priority recently.
- Thad Walker – Butte County RCD – Westshore assisting with marking, etc. How did you bridge the gap on FS marking vs. working with contractor? Moving forward were there more opportunities for partners to get the technical experience?
 - Stephaney has been working on identifying areas on how we communicate with partners on understanding the flow of how opportunities work. Newsletters, symposium, etc.
 - Russell – Current Sierra Institute employee has been working with FS on marking and layout. Getting more experience. Working on building relationship with Partners to find capabilities on what help the partner is able to provide.
- Q: Top one or two things your partner can do for you? A: Partners having NEPA experience helps greatly. GIS, Hydrologist, etc. experience. Understanding roles and responsibilities for both FS and partner. Explore potential opportunities to match partners up with projects.
- Tim Bailey – National Forest Foundation has extensive training (URL Added)
- Blake Ellis – Interested in supporting community engagement on LNF. Where information exists on opportunities for possibly engagement opportunities?
 - Russell – Talking about specific work we have with current partners. Depends on project. Could be more unskilled or training opportunities. Some will need skilled workers.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

- Jessica – Reach out to different Staff Officers on the Forest. They can help with facilitating the discussion with the districts on opportunities. Becoming a volunteer is a great way to start.

LNF and Partner Timelines and Group Exercise (Jessica McMullen)

- Went over the standardized schedule for the LNF.
- Quarterly reviews of POW –(this is a Lassen process.)
- PPF = Project proposal form
- Very important to plan ahead if you want to pursue an agreement with the FS. No further adjustments can be made to current FY agreements after April.
- Q: How do partners manage grant opportunities with the FY timeline?
 - A: Ideally you will have ongoing discussions with the District Ranger, they will be able to communicate if it is a possibility.
 - The timeline deadline for change is mainly for when money is changing hands on current agreements.
- Q: If the partner wants to enter into an agreement with the FS but there is no exchange of money, does it still go through grants & agreements?
 - A: It does still need to go through grants and agreements.
- Q: What are the blackout months of the year that you cannot submit a SPA for approval?
 - A: May-October

Bobette Jones, Nick Bunch, Allison Sanger – Presenting Program of Work (POW)

- Includes flow chart in packet
- Followed by Q&A – Questions are important, but answers will be illustrative and not necessarily a line-by-line answer of each projects.
 - Note takers will capture questions to answer specifically in follow-ups.

Bobette Jones – Overview of POW

- LNF uses the POW this to track projects
- The project is the deliverable and a common objective
 - Considerations of HR needs, funding, contract obligations
- Need to break down the projects into the phases
 - Step one is looking at the scope considering those deliverables
- Timelines developed based on individual phases / stages, including the associated people who are contributing to each phase



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

- Due to field seasons and when information is available, projects tend to stack, but given limitations of staffing, we can and should spread those out throughout the year
- Timing hiring of seasonals and communicating with partners to align with their hiring efforts as well
 - Miscommunications can lead to guessing the capacity needs and possibly missing a need.
- Many projects are multi-year and we need to think more long term with who is available.
- A lot of ambiguity and uncertainty with natural disasters, political climates, and other outside pressures.

Nick Bunch – Program of Work

NEPA POW

- This is an internal communication tool to help guide our work flow
- Forest priorities lined out, but also included are projects that didn't make the top 10 list and projects that are planned for the future (out year)
 - Left-side are projects still in the theoretical phase with a developed proposed action. Opportunities for partners to consider and assist with developing
 - Priorities are an administrative list as the starting point. External circumstances mean a need to be flexible, tying back to the POW, but not considering it a rigid process
- We are working on all projects concurrently, even the outyear projects where surveys are needed to get us to the next phase.

Implementation POW

- Shifting to larger broadscale projects that aren't easily implementable within a few years, rather looking to more long-term projects
 - Larger fundings becoming available requires us to have larger projects ready for implementing.
- Districts are only a piece of the larger picture. Within the Region, the focus is on the zones, which is bigger than the forest. While Nationally, the agency is looking at what is the Region putting forward in terms of accomplishments.
- Need to capture all the projects that are available for work, not just the work actively being completed.
 - Ultimately work towards managing not only the vegetation POW, but also the engineering and recreation programs.
- Quarterly program that helps with communicating timeline adjustments.



NEPA POW process

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

- FLT = Forest Leadership Team, comprising Forest Supe, District Rangers, Staff Officers and select other program managers
- IPMT=Integrated Program Management Team (main program-driven management team, supports working groups like the IPOWT)
- IPOWT = Integrated Program of Work Team (NEPA)
- Also have an Implementation Program of Work Team
- North Zone = Comprises the 6 northerly forests
- Line Officers are the Decision Makers on the forest = Forest Sup and District Rangers
- Implementation will begin once there's a signed decision; however, the planning and developing of what the sequences might be can occur during the survey efforts and concurrently during the NEPA process.
- National priorities on both sides of black & green, which is the Lassen's approach
- Zone priorities do focus on what the targets and regional objectives are, not to say all other work is not considered, but emphasis and priority funding will be given to the projects that help meet those objectives.

Breakouts at Tables for POW Process

Feedback:

- Step 1A – Public meeting facilitated by partners & FS to review project
- Subcommittee to review draft proposal ideas
 - Reporting back to subcommittees and communication / guidance
- Looking at the capabilities of the partners and what gaps they can fill
- Rationale and justification from FS on where projects are ranking
 - Provide feedback to partners on quarterly adjustments
- Ranger's priorities might change based on funding or change in staff. Or there could be events that change priorities.
 - Creates difficulties for even getting through step one
- Units are chronically understaffed, despite wonderful project ideas
 - Partners could help by filling in those gaps
 - Communicate and not get frustrated when things change, your individual priority may not be a priority of the rest of the Forest Service
- Need to deal on a landscape scale; can be challenging for smaller organizations to adjust to changes when on a smaller project scale
- Identifying pool of capacities to pull from for work on the landscape
- How to build off existing projects on the landscape
 - Working cross-boundary and cross-district. Working with partners across political boundaries
- Streamlining fire qualifications for RX projects
- IPOWT ranks FS capacities, but is also a checkpoint for partner capacity



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

- Need to maintain a list that updates quarterly or annually from the partners
- If there's a reassessment in the POW, advanced communications with partners.
 - Recognition that a reordering of FS POW is also a reordering of the partners POW.
- Creating redundancy when working with staff turnover and new ID Team member causing a restart of a project
 - Challenging when there are detailers or turnover and projects stall
- Pre-project presentation to members of the IPOWT
 - Shark Tank style meeting, either in-person or submission period
 - Forest could be in a position for brokering partners if multiple submissions for same land / actions
- Funding mechanisms identified
- DR to provide letter of support to ensure a project moves into PPF phase
- Opportunity to go back and elaborate on the plan and possibly look for opportunities for re-ranking
- Feedback from FS on how to make a project idea more attractive to FS
- Existence of collaborative or partnership on how a scope is set to even get to the first step on the process flowchart
- At what point does the Forest or Partner seek funding for a project?
 - Opportunity to look at the process and inform one another more efficiently
- Commit implementation to partners in order to attract and maintain long-term relationships
- Desired conditions, linked to activity cards in more visually appealing format, due to NEPA documents not being read by the public.

Deb's Closing Comments

- Contact information for FS individuals provided.
 - Send questions that come up over the next few days
- We want to continue this communication
- It's good to hear how you operate in the eyes of other people, from the folks we represent to see if we're hitting the mark
- November 17 is a key date, we're in a continuing resolution until then.
 - We represent the public, we won't provide comments on political situations, but if no budget is passed, you may not hear from us for a little while.
- Conflict of Interest question from earlier: A FS employee can serve as board members, officers, or any funding conversations
 - Where the money comes from, if from a federal grant, cannot be given to a federal employee
- Please share information with partners that are not present, we want everyone involved
- Thank you for showing us how us changing our priorities affects you all.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

- We all have to be flexible in knowing that we are going try our hardest to work together.

Comprehensive report with notes and meeting recording will put out in the November newsletter.