INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY-BASED COLLABORATION

Lessons learned by the Sonoran Institute

A non-profit organization, the Sonoran Institute works to promote community decisions that respect the land and people of the West. The Institute supports numerous community-based collaborations that address conflicts over the use of natural resources. Drawing on the experience over 125 collaborative projects, the Institute found the following 11 ingredients important for successful collaboration.

Key Ingredients

1. Exhaust traditional approaches. Assess the current social and political state of the issues at hand and determine if all parties involved have the motivation to work together.
2. Build a common vision. Work to forge a single vision built on a passion for place or a community of purpose (caution: it is easier said than done).
3. Recognize the challenges and time involved. Take the time to establish respect and trust among stakeholders, and develop a project that incorporates sound planning, monitoring, and evaluation.
4. Ensure and maintain an open, inclusive, and transparent process. Work to incorporate outside attitudes and viewpoints throughout the process.
5. Identify stakeholders and opinion leaders to ensure representative representation.” Establish strong credible leadership and assemble a group of stakeholders that truly represent the community and issues involved, while avoiding alienation.
6. Provide facilitation and process. Maintain order and focus and set the tone and flow of the process by providing an unbiased and skilled facilitator. Make sure the quietest voices at the table are heard.
7. Develop a common factual basis. Recognize the need for a common base of scientific information. Involve stakeholders in the collection of that information and utilize local knowledge.
8. Ensure flexibility and adaptability. Keep people energized and motivated by remaining flexible and adaptable throughout the process, while sticking to set goals and deadlines.
9. Secure operational funding. Create realistic budgets that include institutional support, develop grant-writing skills, and continually build relationships with the funding community. Don’t forget to say “thank you.”
10. Achieve and communicate results. Nothing succeeds like success. Maintain constant and consistent communication with the community, and outside interests as well (e.g., state and federal agencies).
11. Meet or exceed applicable laws and be accountable. Demonstrate the ability to adhere to environmental law and policy throughout the process and be accountable for the environmental, social, and economic progress and outcome of the effort.

EXAMPLES OF WORKING COLLABORATIONS IN THE SOUTHWEST

Northern Arizona

The Diablo Trust: fostering collaborations through science

Founded by the Bar-T-Bar and Flying M ranches, the Diablo Trust links private and public values under one holistic goal: to create sustainable rangeland management that maintains the tradition of working ranches and provides for economic viability while managing for ecosystem health. Situated east of Flagstaff, Arizona, the Diablo Trust now includes local ranchers, state and federal agencies, scientists, environmentalists, and other interested stakeholders. Working with the Sisk Lab of Landscape Ecology and Conservation Biology at Northern Arizona University and Prescott College, the Trust incorporates research and monitoring into the collaborative process.

Benefits of Research and Monitoring

1. Generates clear measures of effectiveness and progress to evaluate success;
2. Provides equal access of information to all stakeholders;
3. Engages stakeholders in data collection and generation of knowledge;
4. Establishes credibility;
5. Provides scientists with the opportunities for landscape scale studies;
6. Enables the creation of more meaningful, insightful, and useful science.

Southern Arizona and New Mexico

The Malpai Borderlands Group

The Malpai Borderlands Group (MBG) is a non-profit organization led by local ranchers, with participation of state and federal agencies, scientists, the Nature Conservancy, and other stakeholders. Their objective is to restore and maintain the natural processes that create and protect a healthy, unfragmented landscape that will support a diverse, flourishing community of human, plant, and animal life. They accomplish these goals by encouraging profitable ranching and traditional livelihoods that sustain the natural open spaces of the region. Concerns such as restoration of remaining native grasslands and their protection from further subdivision and development, have led the MBG to focus on restoring fire to grasslands and the development of the first grassbank system. The Group now holds conservation easements on 12 ranches with a total of over 75,000 acres of private land protected from development.

Ingredients for Success

1. Creation of a collaboration when political and social climates were ripe;
2. Cooperation with U.S. Forest Service and Stockman’s Association;
3. Establishment of trust among permittees, landowners and ranchers;
4. Ability to adapt to the changing needs of the stakeholders and outside interest groups;
5. Implementation of monitoring protocols and use of restoration tools;
6. Respect from local communities and interest groups through outreach and education.

Northern New Mexico

The Rowe Mesa Grassbank, The Quivira Coalition

Inspired by the work of the Malpai Borderlands Group, the Rowe Mesa Grassbank (RMG) demonstrates how grassbanking can help restore national forest system lands in northern New Mexico. Five core partners include; The Quivira Coalition, the U.S. Forest Service, Northern New Mexico Stockman’s Association, New Mexico Cooperative Extension Service, and the current permittees. The goals of the RMG are to improve the ecological health of public grazing lands, strengthen the economic and environmental foundation of northern New Mexico’s ranching tradition, and demonstrate that ranchers, conservationists, and agency personnel can work together.

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The Quivera Coalition

Conservancy, and other stakeholders. Their objective is to restore and maintain the natural processes that create and protect a healthy, unfragmented landscape that will support a diverse, flourishing community of human, plant and animal life. They accomplish these goals by encouraging profitable ranching and traditional livelihoods that sustain the natural open spaces of the region. Concerns such as restoration of remaining native grasslands and their protection from further subdivision and development, have led the MBG to focus on restoring fire to grasslands and the development of the first grassbank system. The Group now holds conservation easements on 12 ranches with a total of over 75,000 acres of private land protected from development.

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CONCLUSION
Although collaborations have their challenges and critics, we have presented the knowledge and evidence of several groups’ efforts that reaffirm that the collaborative process can be successful in developing long-term solutions for rangeland management. Drawing from the experiences of these collaborations, we noted several common ingredients that have contributed to their success. Not only must collaborations bringing together a diverse and representative group of stakeholders, they must also recognize the amount of time, effort, and funding that is necessary for creating and sustaining a successful collaborative process. Resonating from each of the above examples is the importance of gaining the trust of the stakeholders and outside interest groups by maintaining an open and transparent process that incorporates research and monitoring protocols in which to evaluate their goals. Collaborative groups have found that the process of collaboration is constantly changing and they are continuing to discover new methods of achieving landscape-scale conservation goals; thus encouraging an adaptive management approach to foster mutual learning among stakeholders. Therefore, it is important to remember that no one model will work for any given collaborative group and that each group may need to tailor collaborative models to fit their specific goals or region. We observe that collaborations tend to strengthen the relationship and communication among participants, build social capital, and provide a more diverse approach to management of our private and public lands.

REFERENCES
Front banner image: Greg Goodwin

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Questions and comments can be directed to the Ecological Monitoring & Assessment Program & Foundation at (928) 523-0716.
More information about the organizations represented in this publication can be found at:
Sonoran Institute: http://www.sonoran.org
Malpai Borderlands Group: http://www.malpaiborderlands.org
Quivira Coalition: http://www.quiviracoalition.org
The Diablo Trust: http://www.diablotrust.org
Sisk Lab of Landscape Ecology and Conservation Biology: http://www.ema.nau.edu/sisk
Ecological Monitoring and Assessment Foundation and Program: http://www.ema.nau.edu
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CONSTRUCTION 1931

Building Collaborations for Rangeland Conservation

WHY COLLABORATE?
With increased pressures from population growth and resource use, the role of community-based collaborations has become essential in addressing the complex issues of sustainable rangeland and forest management. A collaborative approach works to identify common public values and strengthens communications among stakeholder groups. It offers an alternative to procedural stalemates, lawsuits and unilateral lobbying and has the real potential of enabling more efficient and effective land management. By integrating local knowledge, economics, and a community approach into the management of natural resources, community-based collaboration represents an important tool that can have significant conservation impact across landscapes of the West.

CURRENT CHALLENGES
Examples of barriers that often hinder the collaborative process and discourage participation including:
• Lack of trust and understanding among stakeholders;
• Insufficient time and funding necessary for the collaborative process to succeed;
• Entrenched leadership and cultural barriers within agencies and groups;
• Alienation of outside parties not involved in the collaboration.

WHAT IS COLLABORATION?
A process by which perceived adversaries enter into civil dialogue to collectively consider possible solutions.
It involves the idea of shared power and the collective responsibility for achieving and documenting results.
Participants respect outside opinions and values and recognize that others may have a legitimate concern.

Cooperation, not rugged individualism, is the quality that most characterizes and preserves the land...and provides the chance to create a society to match its scenery.
--Wallace Stegner

Jean Palumbo
NAU and Prescott College research team presenting their research and monitoring projects at a Diablo Trust monthly meeting on Anderson Mesa, AZ.