

All-Lands Partnerships in New Mexico: Peer Learning Exchange

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RVCC

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Executive Summary

The Forest Stewards Guild, Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC), and Oregon State University partnered to host a peer-learning exchange that addressed strategies for improving the practice of all lands management. The exchange was part of the All Lands Learning & Innovation Network (ALL-IN), a peer-learning effort that supports successful all lands¹ planning and implementation and improves practice through multiple tools, strategies, and resources. Hosted by RVCC, ALL-IN draws from practitioners engaged in communities and restoration across the West.

Participants gathered in Grants, New Mexico, October 29th and 30th, 2018 for the third ALL-IN peer-learning exchange. Most participants were based in New Mexico, but several came from Oregon, California, and Alaska to share their experiences. They represented a wide range of agencies, tribes, organizations, private industry, and expertise including US Forest Service, New Mexico State Land Office, Ramah Navajo, Claunch-Pinto Soil and Water Conservation District, Mt. Taylor Millwork, and Sustainable Southeast Partnership.

Goals of the learning exchange:

- Expand upon new tools & ideas available to improve the practice of all lands work.
- Connect to a community of practitioners and form new peer relationships.
- Improve understanding of the strategies, programs and authorities for operationalizing All Lands work.
- Increase capacity to solve problems.
- Inspire, be inspired, and have fun!

The interaction of people implementing all lands projects in different regions highlighted both consistent themes as well as areas where assumptions and standard practices are very different region to region. Priority themes included 1) the importance of leveraging funds; 2) the role of community-based organizations, tribes, and other intermediaries; 3) collaboration and cross-boundary planning; and 4) leadership and risk-taking. The importance of partnerships was consistently reiterated, specifically the role of tribes and community based organizations serving as crucial connectors for all lands work. The success stories participants shared underscored the power of individuals to catalyze restoration. Supporting these change-makers and fostering new all lands champions is a motivating force behind the All Lands Learning & Innovation Network.

During the exchange, RVCC staff identified several potential products and resources that could be useful to all lands practitioners - they will work with network participants to prioritize and develop resources. RVCC will also co-host another peer exchange in Southeast Alaska in late Spring, in coordination with the Sustainable Southeast Partnership.

¹An all lands approach refers to planning and implementation of activities across landownership boundaries and through engagement of multiple partners and landowners.

Background

Working across public and private boundaries, or on “all lands,” is essential to address the ecological and economic challenges that communities in the rural West face. This value of this strategic approach to land management has been recognized for years, but has rarely been fully realized. Aligning priorities and actions across landscapes and agency jurisdictions is complex. Peer-learning exchanges offer the opportunity for practitioners to discuss both the details of implementation as well as the big issues.

Peer-learning is reciprocal, participatory and adaptive. A peer-learning exchange is not experts talking at learners. ([FAC Net Facilitator’s Guide: Hosting a Learning Exchange](#)) The New Mexico peer-learning exchange was mainly dialogue and discussion. Flash presentations highlighted technical knowledge and expertise in order to advance individuals own work while improving on practice of all lands tools – advancing the field of practice for all. The exchange benefited from the commitment of experienced practitioners who shared ideas and worries honestly and openly.

At the beginning of the workshop, participants were asked to name three words that come to mind when thinking of all lands projects. The group did a remarkable job of coming up with a diversity of words encompassing the complexity and multi-faceted nature of working in partnership across ownership boundaries.



Lessons learned: Flash Presentations

Figuring out how to wield fire in the WUI and across ownerships

Nick Goulette, executive director of the Watershed Research and Training Center (WRTC), shared his experience working with both public land managers and private landowners to use prescribed fire to reduce the threat of wildfire around Weaverville, California. Transferable lessons included the importance of risk-sharing, and the role of solid partnerships that allowed participants to navigate the complexity of stitching together funding and authorities. The WRTC used Stevens Act funding to conduct work on private land with a benefit to neighboring public land, necessitating NEPA on private land. The Watershed Center conducted the NEPA, generating a checklist method (to ensure compliance) that has potential to help other regions adopt similar approaches. The innovative protocol led to concerns that NEPA has become overly complex in the Forest Service, and the need for improved practice and efficiency. Private land NEPA seems to differ by Region, with no clear template or protocol to aid the process.



Stacking investments to restore landscapes

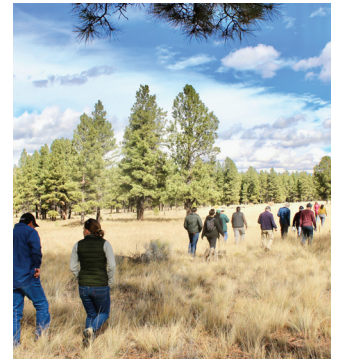
Dee Tarr, District Manager of the Claunch-Pinto Soil and Watershed Conservation District (SWCD), and Ian Fox, from the Cibola National Forest, described their work in the East Mountains (Mountainair and Sandia Ranger Districts on the Cibola National Forest). As in other examples, the importance of individuals was clear. Dee and Ian were catalysts who, without their energy, enthusiasm, creativity, and perseverance, projects wouldn't have reached the landscape scale. Ian rallied support on the US Forest Service side of the fence to match the engagement already happening on private land. Dee helped corral over \$15 million in on-the-ground investments from New Mexico State Forestry, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, and other sources. Work in the East Mountains was iterative, with early successes on one side of the fence creating interest on the other. New Mexico's Collaborative Forest Restoration Program was an essential source of funding. Dee and Ian recommended building one's internal organization at the same time that you are trying to develop work on the landscape.

Workforce training, employment, and business incubation support landscape restoration

Learning exchange participants peppered Marko Bey with questions about his work with Lomakatsi Restoration Project. As Marko explained, Lomakatsi built on a partnership with the City of Ashland, Oregon, the US Forest Service, and The Nature Conservancy focused on fuels reduction and fuel breaks around the city, using a long-term stewardship agreement. As with work in the East Mountains of New Mexico, stacking of investments was crucial. As a non-profit, Lomakatsi was able to bring private philanthropic funding to support work as other resources dried up. Tribal partnerships were also a key element both to grow the restoration workforce and to fund treatment through programs such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs 536 funding. Marko's description of the importance of financial planning across the six project areas resonated with learning exchange participants. Because Lomakatsi has work across six project areas, they are able to balance projects with treatments that may not be as profitable with those that are.

“The people who showed up exemplified the kind of people who are trying to solve these challenges. It was truly enlightening”

*- Bob Christensen,
Sustainable Southeast Partnership*



Recognizing cross-jurisdictional risk and tribal leadership

John Waconda, Restoration Partnership Coordinator with the US Forest Service in Region 3, shared the story of the devastating Cerro Grande fire that impacted the Santa Clara Pueblo in 2000. A prescribed fire on National Park Service land got out of control, ultimately burning 48,000 acres, and removing much of the recreation, commercial timber, and other values of the Pueblo's forests. Traditionally a close knit and more insular community, the event compelled Tribal leadership to reach out to other partners for support in the recovery process, and inspired creative thinking about different community investment strategies. The Pueblo leveraged many other sources of funding (like USGS, EPA, Health and Human Services). Participants discussed the need to explore and tap more diverse funding sources than might traditionally be considered.

Restoration outside of fire-adapted ecosystems: How do we increase the conservation constituency?

Bob Christensen, with the Sustainable Southeast Partnership (SSP) in Alaska, shared his work with the Hoonah Native Forest Project, a multi-year project supported by the Regional Conservation Partnership Program. Given that fire is not an ecological driver in Southeast Alaska, the SSP has had to work with different motivations that compel individuals and communities to get involved in conservation activities - such as authority and justice, economic development, food, and cultural vitality through access to traditional foods. Southeast Alaska and New Mexico are similar with respect to the low value of timber, and the need to account for other restoration outcomes and diverse benefits. Participants agreed that often the value from thinning isn't timber - it's the restored acre, water, and wildlife. This key similarity led to a recognition that all partners need to work hard to advocate for restoration and watershed health as goals, even as timber and 'acres treated' often garner the most attention. Another similarity across landscapes was how partners shared costs and utilized multiple funding sources, such as through bundled LiDAR data acquisition that can reduce the cost-per-acre, which has also worked well in Oregon.

Cross Cutting Themes

The flash presentations and ensuing discussions highlighted a number of cross-cutting themes including:

- Local and tribal workforce development
- Leveraging funding, contracts, and agreements
- Collaborative and cross-boundary planning
- Commitments by leadership
- The role that local organizations, Tribes, and intermediaries play in filling capacity gaps
- Innovation, expertise, and risk-taking
- Finding, demonstrating, and selling the value and benefits of restoration work, specifically the services of water quality and hazard mitigation
- The complexity of multijurisdictional partnerships and investment stacking
- What incentivizes partners to participate in cross boundary projects
- Larger landscapes can provide flexibility to apply funds generated in one area to areas that are less profitable

Enabling Conditions and Limiting Factors

Participants prioritized four key themes for further discussion: leveraging different sources of funding; the role of community-based organizations, tribes, and other intermediaries; collaboration and cross-boundary planning; and leadership and risk-taking. One commonality across these topics was a reassertion of the importance of partnerships. No single organization has enough funding to implement landscape restoration. Planning together can produce efficiencies of scale, produce new ideas, and build community support. At the same time individuals, such as grants and agreements experts, are crucial to moving projects forward.

Tribes came up as potent but sometimes underappreciated partners. Knowledge about funding sources such as 477 self-sufficiency funding for tribal interns needs to be shared more widely.

Participants identified common limiting factors such as the difficulty of filling positions within federal agencies, leading to staff shortages that in turn limit collaboration, and how new, top-down goals, such as timber targets, are discouraging all lands work. The group mused that given targets come up so frequently, a show me tour highlighting the multiples values of restoration, and the need for different targets, might be warranted.

All Lands Projects—Keys to Success

Emily Jane Davis, Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist at Oregon State University provided a summary from a recent study RVCC and OSU conducted on keys to implementing successful all lands projects: [How Do We Accomplish All Lands Management?](#) The report led to discussion about what resonated in people's local context and experience.

Zuni Mountains Restoration Field Trip

To round out the exchange, participants drove to the heart of the Zuni Mountains Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project. The trip passed through checkerboard of ownerships where New Mexico State Land Office, Cottonwood Gulch Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, the Forest Stewards Guild, New Mexico State Forestry, and others have implemented treatments for multiple objectives.

When the Bluewater Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was completed in 2003, this area did not receive priority it might today. There are important gaps in the NEPA for the landscape and areas that need treatment. These limitations became clear during a recent controlled burn conducted by the Forest Guild and Nature Conservancy. The partners were only able to burn up to the Forest Service boundary because of incomplete environmental analysis, dramatically increasing the complexity and cost of burning. See the report [Burning Across Fence Lines](#) for more information.

The field discussion identified a surprising bottleneck for completing NEPA: archeological clearance. Specifically there are far too few US Forest Service archeologists to approve all the survey work that has been completed. However, no one was sure at what scale the problem lies, and who would have the ability to address it.

As the exchange wrapped up, the conversation turned to future of landscape restoration. Locally, the US Forest Service is committed to supporting partnerships in the Zuni Mountains. If Congress rewrites the CFLR program, there is some risk that a focus on flagship targets would disadvantage landscapes like the Zuni Mountains, which has little valuable timber. This challenge led participants to discuss the importance of building support for the broader benefits of restoration.

Next Steps

RVCC Staff identified several potential products and tools that might be useful to all lands practitioners, including:

- A guide to private land NEPA, including examples of simplified checklists (also heard this discussed as third party NEPA, and what it takes to do it on different ownerships)
- A diagram for all lands management that lays out specific role authorities and funding available to different partners at the table (elements needed/checklist)
- A product that summarizes different types of agreements available - particularly stewardship. This product might explain what a stew agreement is, how it can be used, why it's important, highlight 2-3 innovative examples of application (from NWTF or Lomakatsi) and include a few templates.
- A guidebook to tribal authorities and funding sources, and possibly for money-transferring authorities such as Wyden and Stevens

In addition to developing some of the above resources, RVCC will also host two more peer learning exchanges in 2109, and develop strategies to keep peer exchange participants connected and transferring innovations and knowledge.



“Working across boundaries is difficult. It was inspiring to hear real solutions from people who’ve made it work.”

*- Zander Evans,
Executive Director, Forest Stewards Guild*

Resources

- Brief: All Lands Learning & Innovation Network
- Report – How do we accomplish All Lands Management: <https://www.ruralvoicescoalition.org/s/RVCC-Land-Report-WEB.pdf>
- All Lands Management: The Role of Policy, Practice, and Peer Learning: <https://www.ruralvoicescoalition.org/s/RVCC-ALL-IN-Paper.pdf>
- RVCC Issue Paper: Working Across All Lands: <https://www.ruralvoicescoalition.org/s/All-Lands-Issue-Paper.pdf>
- Report – From Ideas to Action: A Guide to Funding and Authorities for Collaborative Forestry
RVCC Guidebook: https://www.ruralvoicescoalition.org/s/RVCC-Guidebook_Web.pdf

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Page 7: New Mexico State University participant photo, Karen Hardigg, RVCC