

Creeks & Communities:

Building Capacity for Collaborative Stewardship



Lander, Wyoming



Challis, Idaho



Prineville, Oregon



Beatty, Oregon



Madera, Chihuahua, Mexico



Enterprise, Oregon

The National Riparian Service Team is working to implement national level policies regarding ‘community involvement’ and ‘collaboration.’ Agency policy and planning documents advocate these principles, but often do not provide much guidance on what they mean or how to put them into practice at the field level. As a result, managers and staff may recognize the merits of collaboration but remain unable to orchestrate a collaborative project on their own.

In response to the findings of a 5-year program evaluation, the NRST outlined a framework for encouraging the collaborative stewardship of riparian-wetland resources in the Creeks and Communities Strategy. Rather than a prescription or recipe, strategy implementation rests on a set of principles and practices that give structure to the development of a collaborative process while maintaining the flexibility to respond to site-specific factors and conditions. The NRST has implemented the Creeks and Communities Strategy in a number of locations and in response to a variety of issues. The diverse make-up of the extended Riparian Coordination Network (RCN) is giving rise to the ability to form numerous partnerships thereby enabling the NRST to leverage the resources needed to work across public and private lands.

Under the Creeks and Communities Strategy, the NRST and approximately 150 diverse members of the RCN serve as educators, as well as conveners and facilitators. Although the Creeks and Communities Strategy is focused on riparian-related issues, the model can be applied to a diverse range of site-specific resource issues such as sagebrush and forest health issues, including stewardship contracting and wildland fire planning. In response to a request for assistance, NRST and RCN members form support teams to work with people in their location focusing on their issues. Drawing from a wide range of expertise, support teams use coaching, mentoring and classroom instruction to help agency managers and resource stakeholders develop and engage in collaborative problem solving activities. A key component of the approach is a commitment to placing science in the hands of communities in order to overcome the hurdles of power and distrust that typically surround riparian restoration issues.

The NRST spends a large portion of their time traveling to work directly with people on the land, at their location, focusing on their issues. The place-based nature of this approach enables individuals, communities and institutions to build capacity for collaborative stewardship in connection with an existing

on-the-ground activity or issue ('learning by doing'). Throughout all stages of assistance, the NRST/RCN support teams work one-on-one with agency managers to mentor them through the process of orchestrating a collaborative project (e.g., pre-project interviews, draft invitations/advertisements, information management, meeting design and facilitation, follow-up and strategic planning).

In addition to efforts to build capacity in individual field units, the team's interaction with members of the RCN provides an opportunity for building capacity across an international network of Federal, State, Local, Tribal government employees, university faculty and extension agents, representatives from industry and conservation organizations and private consultants. The NRST is currently in the process of designing a network development strategy to: (1) build an understanding of, and commitment to, 'community involvement' and 'collaboration,' and (2) develop skills needed to convene and facilitate such efforts. Team members are working to develop training and coaching/mentoring opportunities in coordination with the BLM and USFS partnership/collaboration/community stewardship programs.

Project website: <http://www.blm.gov/or/programs/nrst>

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