

# Collaboration Best Practices for the Conservation Community

Developed by American Lands Alliance and Participants of the National Meeting on Collaboration

*March 2007*

## Introduction

There has been a significant amount of debate within the conservation community over the last few years about if, when and how groups should engage in collaborations with diverse constituencies to protect and restore public lands. Some groups are currently involved in collaborative processes while other groups are trying to figure out how to or whether to engage, especially since collaboration is required by the Healthy Forest Restoration Act and other laws and regulations. Still some groups do not think that conservationists should engage at all. Additionally, concerns have been expressed about the lack of transparency and inclusiveness of some collaborations.

American Lands Alliance held the National Meeting on Collaboration: *Cooperative Quagmire or Conservation Coup?* in November 2006 near Portland, Oregon, bringing together 69 conservation leaders from around the country with a diversity of perspectives on collaboration to try to crystallize this discussion. Participants shared experiences with collaborative efforts, and discussed concerns and opportunities with participating in collaborations to protect and restore public lands. Participants agreed to the creation of guidelines based on the discussions at the meeting and published resources on collaboration. Collaboration Best Practices for the Conservation Community was developed with the input of the National Meeting on Collaboration attendees.

The purpose of the Collaboration Best Practices for the Conservation Community is to: 1) help groups decide whether or when to collaborate; 2) guide the development of effective collaborations; and 3) help groups at the table and those not at the table better communicate with each other.

## **Collaboration – What it is and what it isn't<sup>1</sup>**

### **What it is:**

Collaboration is diverse interests coming together to work toward a common goal. Collaborations may involve negotiations, but the collaborative must have come together around common goals or a shared purpose. True collaborations must be open, transparent, inclusive, accessible, and strive for balanced representation. Collaboration does not preclude advocacy, organizing or litigation by the participants.

### **What it isn't:**

- Collaboration is not a replacement for the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or any other environmental laws. Collaborative processes should complement the NEPA process.
- Negotiated political deals (i.e. public land legislation), behind closed doors deal making, or other processes that are not open, transparent, and strive to be inclusive, etc. should not be called collaborative.

Some conservation groups view collaboration as an illegitimate process that circumvents federal environmental laws, particularly NEPA, and that collaboration stifles the full range of public input by giving more weight to collaborative decisions than those generated through the public participation process required by NEPA.

### **Collaborative Processes Need to:**

- Be open, inclusive, transparent, accessible and strive for balanced representation;
- Uphold the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and all other relevant laws;
- Include representatives of relevant and diverse interests;
- Provide meaningful opportunities for participation;
- Be driven by common goals or shared purposes;
- Follow principles of civil discourse;
- Have honest and clear communications;
- Allow participants to maintain their independence to advocate for their goals in other forums;
- Use participant-developed and agreed-upon ground rules;

---

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from:

Dukes, E. Franklin, Firehock, Karen. 2001. Collaboration: A Guide for Environmental Advocates. Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia, The Wilderness Society and National Audubon.

Daly, Carol. The Collaboration Handbook. Red Lodge Clearinghouse, [www.redlodgeclearinghouse.org](http://www.redlodgeclearinghouse.org).

- Make decisions by consensus (not a super majority) and fully explore issues to reach agreements;
- Be informed by best available scientific and technical information; and
- Actively reach out to a broader audience for input.

### **Suggested Elements of a Collaboration<sup>2</sup>:**

- Use independent facilitators when possible;
- Use science-based approaches (i.e. principles or strategies);
- Commit to long term multi-party scientific monitoring of results to determine whether ecological goals are being met (i.e. water quality, species etc.);
- Be organized and guided by non-agency entities (i.e. conservation groups, local community members or organizations).

### **When Engaging in a Collaboration<sup>3</sup>:**

- Participants should have sufficient expertise – technical and scientific literacy, negotiation and political skills or work with participants to develop these skills (i.e. negotiation training);
- Participants should be willing to actively engage ;
- Be aware of the resources – staff, time, funding, etc. – that may be required before agreeing to participate.
- Conservation teams at the table ideally should include local, regional and national representation and each needs to assess what diverse resources they can bring to the process;
- Communicate diligently with other environmental groups – including groups at the table, key groups not at the table, and groups that have concerns about the process – to establish goals, sideboards, when to walk, and set a negotiating envelope (opening, target, and bottom line);
- It is critical to inform groups not at the table about the specifics throughout the process and actively seek input;
- Do not give up the ability to use other tools if needed (i.e. appeals and litigation);
- Do not underestimate your power to influence outcomes;
- Consider the implications for setting a national precedent and avoid setting a bad precedent;
- If possible, develop and periodically re-evaluate exit criteria;
- Ensure that the collaborative has established ground rules, decision making process, mission, and goals early on in the process, such as rules regarding authority and representation of the group and subgroups;

---

<sup>2</sup> National Meeting on Collaboration. November 16-18, 2006. American Lands Alliance

<sup>3</sup> National Meeting on Collaboration. November 16-18, 2006. American Lands Alliance

- Identify outside alliances to engage (local, regional, and national) and develop them if none exist;
- Watch out for members of the collaborative drifting away due to too many meetings, busy schedules, etc., which can reduce participation and impact balanced representation;
- Make sure that clear ecological goals are developed and a monitoring process is put in place to assess whether restoration and other goals are being met;
- Go slowly, start small, pace yourself, be patient; and
- Get out in the field with other collaborative members as much as possible.

### **Red Flags to Look for when Considering Entering into a Collaboration<sup>4</sup>:**

- Participation requires organization to compromise fundamental values;
- The key issues require legislative or legal determinations outside the scope of the group;
- There is little or no incentive to solve a problem, meet a deadline, or engage adversaries;
- Fair access to independent expertise to understand or consult on technical issues is lacking;
- Diverse representation is not available, or key individual representatives cannot participate;
- The convening agency lacks commitment to process;
- The resource is too significant, sensitive, or unsuitable for negotiation.

---

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Dukes, E. Franklin, Firehock, Karen. 2001. Collaboration: A Guide for Environmental Advocates. Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia, The Wilderness Society and National Audubon.

## **APPENDIX I**

### **Questions to Consider Before Engaging in a Collaboration:**

1. Does this approach enhance environmental protection?
2. Are you and/or your organization suited for participation?
3. Do you have the time and resources, and is it strategically to your advantage to participate?
4. Do you have a significant amount of interest and leverage to warrant being involved?
5. Do you have any common ground from which to work with other key stakeholders?

Sources: Dukes, E. Franklin, Firehock, Karen. 2001. Collaboration: A Guide for Environmental Advocates. Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia, The Wilderness Society and National Audubon National Meeting on Collaboration. November 16-18, 2006. American Lands Alliance

**For Resources on Collaborative Processes on the American Lands Alliance website, go to: <http://www.americanlands.org/issues.php?subsubNo=1148069142>**

## **APPENDIX II**

### **Key Collaboration Guidelines to Share with Collaboration Partners and Agencies:**

#### **Guidelines for Effective Collaboration**

##### **Collaborative Processes Need to:**

1. Be open, inclusive, transparent, accessible and strive for balanced representation
2. Uphold the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and all other relevant laws
3. Include representatives of all relevant and diverse interests
4. Provide meaningful opportunities for participation
5. Be driven by a common goal or shared purpose
6. Follow principles of civil discourse
7. Have honest and clear communications
8. Allow participants to maintain their independence to advocate for their goals in other forums
9. Use participant-developed and agreed-upon ground rules
10. Seek consensus (not a super majority) and fully explore issues to reach agreements
11. Be informed by best available scientific and technical information
12. Actively reach out to a broader audience for input
13. Use independent facilitators when possible

**Basic Principles for Agency Engagement in Environmental Conflict Resolution and Collaborative Problem Solving are in attachment A in the Office of Management and Budget and President's Council on Environmental Quality's Memorandum on Environmental Conflict Resolution at:**

<http://www.ecr.gov/ecrpolicy/policy.htm> or <http://www.whitehouse.gov/ceq/joint-statement.html>.