

FORMATIVE REVIEW OF THE BITTERROOT WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP

**Prepared for the U.S.D.A. Forest Service Community-Based
Large-Scale Watershed Restoration Program**

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Introduction and Summary

The Bitterroot Watershed Partnership (BWP) began in 2001 with a request for a proposal from Jim Sedell and his staff from the U.S. Forest Service Large Scale Watershed Program (LSWP) in the Washington D.C. When Dale Bosworth was Regional Forester in Montana he suggested the Bitterroot be included in the LSWP. Following the fires of 2000, Jim Sedell and the LSWP staff asked agency personnel to submit a proposal focused on the interactions between wildfires and watershed restoration. Staff from the Bitterroot National Forest joined with staff from the Bitter Root Water Forum and others to form a small group that invested an extensive amount of time meeting with local organizations and then wrote a business plan for the project. Approximately 19 public, private, and non-profit organizations originally were members of the BPW. Ten organizations and individuals initially sat on the steering committee.

The Bitterroot watershed covers approximately 2,500 square miles in western Montana. The watershed is extremely diverse. The higher elevation lands include snow-packed mountains and alpine landscapes and forests composed of pine, fir, spruce, and larch. The mid elevations include dry hills, and the lower elevations include farms, ranches and ranchettes, towns, and subdivisions. A major cultural divide seems to exist between the urban and rural areas within the watershed. Missoula, with a major university and somewhat urban feel is the largest community in the watershed, sitting at the downstream (northern) end of the basin. Traditionally resource-based mid-sized communities such as Hamilton and small towns such as Darby sit in the middle and upper ends of the basin. The diverse and changing socio-economic make-up of the watershed has led to considerable controversy in recent years over issues such as forest management, fisheries, instream flows, noxious weeds, clean water, growth, sprawl, and other issues. Although numerous public and civic organizations seek to address these issues, no organization has tried to address them all on a comprehensive watershed-wide scale.

The BWP was organized within this context of multiple, often polarized issues at play, and numerous public and private organizations active in the basin. The original purpose of the BWP was to create a formal structure to identify shared goals and objectives and to define strategies that promote coordination and efficiency in attaining those ends. An important objective was to “promote a ‘boundaryless’ approach to restoration and conservation by coordinating activities on public and private lands” (BWP 2002 Annual Report). The BWP sought to serve the individual and group interests by streamlining activity and avoiding duplication of effort.

The specific objectives of the BWP were to: 1. Restore and maintain the ecological integrity of naturally functioning watershed ecosystems; 2. Foster the development of monitoring mechanisms to be integrated within a watershed management decision-making process; 3. To improve the community-wide understanding and valuation of the benefits of a healthy watershed; 4. To promote existing and new economic structures supportive of sound watershed management practices.

Our review of the written materials of the BWP, combined with phone interviews with Forest Service employees and current and former members of the steering committee and staff, found the following:

I. The BWP Has Generated A Number Of Positive Outcomes:

- The promise of significant sums of money by the Forest Service got people to the table, causing new relationships to form that should endure over time.
- A vision of whole basin, boundaryless management was developed.
- An excellent business plan was prepared.
- A number of successful on-the-ground projects were completed as intended and added real value to the watershed.
- The Bitterroot National Forest has been extremely supportive of the project.
- In sum, despite some major obstacles (see below), everyone we spoke with said the BWP was “a good thing to do” and most desire to stay at the table in some way.

II. Despite the Positive Outcomes, The BWP Faces Many Challenges:

- Although the promise of significant funding brought people to the table, this was not a sufficient reason to engage in the project and because the funding failed to materialize the BWP has struggled to clarify its purpose or even if it should continue to exist.
- Although we could not identify who specifically said the Forest Service would provide significant dollars, almost everyone we spoke with had the impression the agency had made this commitment, which created expectations the agency could not deliver on.
- As with many start-ups, confusion exists over how the partnership can serve its members while building its own funding and organizational base.
- Lack of significant unencumbered dollars left only project-specific funding available to the BPW, which derailed efforts to focus on basin-level boundaryless management.
- The original goal of the Forest Service Washington office in requesting a proposal addressing fire issues has not been achieved because it conflicted with the needs and interests of steering committee members.
- The steering committee is very technically oriented and the project lacks strong leadership and people skilled in managing complex social systems.
- The lack of a full-time coordinator has been a major stumbling block.
- Concerns exist over what watershed management actually entails.
- Due to the constraints outlined above, the future of the BWP is unclear and, at best, it seems to be devolving into a network rather than a freestanding organization.
- Although almost everyone we spoke with is glad to have participated, old relationships have been solidified and new relationships have been formed and should endure, many people question whether the effort has not been worth the benefits.

III. Our Analysis Suggests:

- Although difficult, it still may be possible to achieve the initial vision and goals of the BWP.
- Loss of the BWP may hurt the Forest Service more than the partners.

IV. Recommendations

Because a clear picture of the future of the BWP is difficult to project, it is not easy to offer recommendations. However, because a number of people apparently do want the BWP or some other entity to continue on and focus on the original mission of facilitating basin-level boundaryless management, the following recommendations are offered:

A. Recommendations for the Bitterroot Watershed Partnership

- If the BWP is to survive as a separate entity, it may benefit from producing tangible outcomes, not just coordinating the work of others.
- A skilled leader should be recruited who can focus solely on the BWP while meeting the needs of all of the partners.
- Education and training in group process and organizational change should be provided to steering committee members and staff to help them navigate the difficult waters of partnership-based programs.
- The steering committee should seek on-going third-part reviews and feedback on their progress toward understanding and resolving key intra-organizational issues.
- A full-time coordinator(s) should be hired.
- The steering committee should invest in training and education so that it operates more like a professional team than as an informal neighborhood group.
- If the BWP chooses not to continue as a freestanding organization, it should document and distribute the lessons learned from the process to date and institute a mechanism to keep track of all of the projects and activities occurring in the watershed.

B. Recommendations for the Forest Service

- It may behoove the agency to begin large-scale watershed projects with lower expectations and it is important not to implicitly or explicitly promise what cannot be delivered.
- Future efforts may have more likelihood of success if steps are taken to ensure local Forest employees are fully committed to the project and local capacity exists before launching large-scale watershed programs.
- Tailor the approach used for each large-scale watershed program to local conditions and needs and avoid one-size-fits-all partnership models.
- Be aware devolving funding to the regional level may effectively kill most special projects occurring solely on one or two Forests because of competing demands at the regional level.
- Develop partnerships with other federal agencies to ensure a diverse and long-term funding base for large-scale watershed projects.
- Adopt specific criteria to define the meaning of large-scale watershed management.

A complete discussion of these points is found in the following full report.

I. The BWP Has Generated A Number Of Positive Outcomes:

1. The Promise of Significant Sums of Money from the Forest Service Got People To The Table; Causing New Relationships To Form That Should Endure Over Time.

Almost everyone we spoke with said the Forest Service implicitly or explicitly led local organizations and individuals to believe significant sums of money (possibly up to \$1.5 million) would be available if they came together to form the BWP. The promise of these funds was the trigger that caused the initial steering committee to form. The members included individuals and organizations that held a common interest in restoring the Bitterroot Watershed. Some of the people on the steering committee had working relationships prior to the start of the BPW, but many did not. For example, the Tri-State Water Quality Council, Audubon Society, and Bitterroot RC&D all said they are now working with partners they had never worked with before. As a result, most people we interviewed said many new relationships have been created that should endure and benefit the community and the watershed over time.

2. A Vision of Whole Basin, Boundaryless Management Was Developed.

Following from the first point, the creation of the original business plan stimulated people and organizations from throughout the watershed to join together to develop understandings and visions focused on a whole Bitterroot basin, not just individual subbasins, issues, or projects. In many ways, this was the first time interests as diverse as environmental groups and landowners have agreed on the need to work together to conserve the whole watershed. Many people now seem to have a broader perspective of the type of boundaryless management that may be needed to restore the basin.

3. An Excellent Business Plan Was Prepared.

The business plan written by the initial core group was deemed to be among the best of the fifteen national large-scale watershed programs. Even though the plan was written rather quickly, the vision of boundaryless management remains a priority for many of the partners and the stated goals have stood the test of time and been implicitly and explicitly revalidated a number of times by the group.

4. A Number of Successful On-The-Ground Projects Were Completed As Intended And Added Real Value To The Watershed.

Although the seed money was eventually provided to the BWP by the Bitterroot National Forest was project focused, seven excellent projects were implemented. For example, an assessment and monitoring project was implemented in Three Mile Creek aimed at improving bank stability and riparian conditions and reducing sediment loading. A model tributary project in Skalkaho Creek helped to modify irrigation structures and as it is completed will help restore migratory populations of westslope cutthroat trout. Almost every person we spoke with mentioned the success of these projects.

5. The Bitterroot National Forest Has Been Extremely Supportive Of The Project.

A number of people we spoke with said the Supervisor of the Bitterroot National Forest has been very supportive of the BWP. Even when it did not look like the Washington Office was going to deliver the large sums of money people believed were promised, the Bitterroot National Forest provided about \$60,000 to \$70,000 for projects. Many people also spoke highly of the current Regional Forester, saying he understood the need for landscape level watershed management.

6. *In Sum, Despite Some Major Obstacles (See Section II Below), Everyone We Spoke With Said The BWP Was “A Good Thing To Do” and Most Want to Stay at the Table in Some Way.*

Although the partnership faces rough sledding, as described in Section II, everyone we spoke with said overall the process has been beneficial. Most people also said, even if the BWP does not exist as initially designed or as a formal entity in the future, they wanted to somehow stay in contact with the other steering committee members. People said the expanded network of relationships and increased coordination that resulted from the process was very beneficial and should be maintained.

II. Despite the Positive Outcomes, The BWP Faces Many Challenges:

1. *Although the Promise of Funding Brought People to the Table, Most Engaged For the Wrong Reasons.*

Although the promise of significant funding helped to bring people to the table to form the BWP, the downside of this approach was people were motivated primarily by access to money, not concerns about watershed health per se. Despite the mission statement and goals of basin-wide boundaryless management, money was the carrot that drew the group together, not pressing resource issues. Non-profits, local, and state agencies have been active in local watersheds or other issues for many years saw this as an opportunity to tap into whole new funding sources. Some Forest Service personnel also saw the BWP as a way to tap into additional internal agency funding streams. However, the Forest Service did not deliver on its promised funds. When this occurred, the partnerships primary reason-for-being evaporated. As a result, the BWP has experienced rough sailing and had to rethink its purpose and mode of operations.

2. *The Forest Service Created Expectations It Could Not Deliver On.*

Following from the first point, big expectations were created by the Forest Service’s promise of significant amounts of money. The fact the agency did not come through with the funds left almost every non-federal employee we spoke feeling they had been set up or deceived by the Forest Service. One steering committee member summarized the feelings of almost everyone we spoke with by stating, “The Forest Service shafted us. This has been very discouraging.” Although we could not determine who exactly within the Forest Service was purported to have made these claims, and although people understood nothing was guaranteed, almost every non-federal employee we spoke with said they were led to believe large amounts of money were almost a certainty. The agency appears to have lost a good deal of goodwill as a result of not coming through with the funds people believed were promised.

However, it is not just the inability to deliver the funds that irks people. Our interviews found many people felt the Forest Service also did not deliver on its commitment to meaningfully participate in the BWP. The original impetus of the large-scale watershed concept came from the Washington Office of the agency. However, the concept was apparently never completely understood or fully embraced by local Forest Service employees and the agency never engaged as promised. For example, the Bitterroot National Forest originally designated a representative to the steering committee, but when this person retired the only individual representing the agency had to represent two organizations and therefore could not represent the Forest Service on the steering committee very effectively. This conflict of interest led this individual to eventually drop off the board (although the individual continues to be actively involved as a non-voting board member). The agency was also never able to sign off on the BWP’s bylaws. Although they cannot be expected to keep track of every detail of local projects, the lack of full engagement by

the Forest Service was underscored by a minimal awareness among some senior agency executives of the current troubled status of the project. One person summarized the feelings of many by stating, “From the beginning the Forest Service did not embrace the mindset of boundaryless management. They were never willing to develop relationships outside of the formal circles.” As with the funding, the Forest Service seems to have lost some goodwill as a result of not becoming meaningfully engaged as full partners in a project it initiated. (It should be noted few other federal or state agencies embraced or invested meaningful time, energy, or resources in the project).

3. As with Many Start-Ups, Confusion Exists Over How the Partnership Can Serve its Members While Building Its Own Base.

Each of the organizations represented on the BWP steering committee have their own priorities, constituents, donors, and funding needs. As with many new start ups, the BWP has experienced a good deal of confusion over how each of the member organizations can benefit from the BWP while also helping the BWP itself to thrive. For example, it has been very difficult for the partners to invest the time, dollars, and resources required to keep the BWP viable while they seek funds and resources for their own organizations. Tension has emerged over how the BWP raises funds without competing with its members’ fundraising efforts. In addition, many people voiced confusion over the role of the Bitter Root Water Forum and the BWP. Many people said although the Forum’s primary focus is water quality and the BWP initially had a much larger basin-level focus, both watershed groups ended up competing for the same sources of funds. People said public agencies as well as funders external to the Bitterroot Valley are confused about the differences between the BWP and the Water Forum. We found lack of clarity over this issue has created spoken and unspoken personal animosities and organizational problems that seem to have seriously wounded the project.

4. The Steering Committee Has Not Reached Out Widely To The Community.

Many people we spoke with mentioned few people within the watershed know about the BWP and therefore broad-based community support is low. This is because the steering committee did not reach out to the broader community. Their initial focus was primarily on dividing up the funds promised by the Forest Service and on coordinating efforts among steering committee members. In addition, each of non-profit organizations represented on the steering committee has their own local constituency and did not want to duplicate outreach and educational efforts. Our interviews found many people feel the public agencies on the committee are not structured to reach out to local citizens. For example, they like to hold meetings during the workday, while the time to meet with private citizens is usually at night. The result is a project few people, other than those directly involved with the BWP, know about or can offer support to.

6. The Restrictions Placed on the Initial Funding Hindered Efforts to Focus on Basin-Level Boundaryless Management.

Because the promised unencumbered large pot of money never materialized, the funds that were made available by the Bitterroot National Forest were tied to specific projects and had to quickly generate results. Consequently, although they appear to be excellent projects, a number of people we spoke with said they have a traditional look to them. That is, they are small scale, site and issue specific. Many of the people we interviewed said the steering committee never had the chance to focus on its initial vision of boundaryless public-private land management. One person summarized this by stating, “We ended up getting more money to do the type of projects we always do. We never had the resources to plan and implement projects aimed at our ambitious

vision.” Many people also said the way the initial funds were delivered created a tension between doing on-the-ground projects and the need for broader planning and time to develop cohesion among the steering committee. As a result, the steering committee never had the time or opportunity to develop the trust, understanding and relationships needed for long-term success. Despite these problems, our interviews found a number of people still thought the vision of boundaryless management was worthy and should not be abandoned. However, the majority of people we spoke with never even mentioned the goal of basin-level boundaryless management, which indicates it may no longer be a primary focus.

7. The Original Goal of the Forest Service Washington Office in Requesting a Proposal Addressing Fire Issues Did Not Match the Needs or Interests of the Partnership.

Most of the BWP partners are involved with fire issues in some manner. Consequently, despite the Washington office’s original goal of having the BWP focus on the interface between fires and watershed health, the project has predominately avoided fire issues so as not to compete with the priorities or funding streams of steering committee members. In addition to not addressing the original intent, the lack of a fire focus diluted the Bitterroot Forest’s ability to secure internal dollars because many of the internal funding streams are linked to fire issues and the BWP cannot compete for these dollars. In short, one of the Washington office’s reasons for initiating the project has not been addressed.

8. The Steering Committee Is Very Technically Oriented and Lacks Strong Leadership and People Skilled in Managing Complex Social Systems.

Many of the people we spoke with said one of the key missing links is a strong inspiring leader on the steering committee or staff who is focused solely on the Bitterroot Watershed Partnership. It appears a leader is needed who can orchestrate agreements on how to raise funds while meeting the needs of all the member groups. Although various agency, non-profit, and private individuals on the steering committee have served in a leadership capacity at key times, each partner also represents his own organization. No one has the ability to focus solely on the well being of the BWP. One person summarized the views of many by stating, “We did not have a leader who could provide the inspiration and energy to keep people moving forward.”

In addition, a number of people said the steering committee suffers from communication problems and a leader or staff is needed who is skilled in group facilitation, problem solving, and organizational development. Most of the people involved with the BWP are technically oriented. They are not trained to address complex group dynamic issues or social systems. As a consequence, many people said the steering committee has bogged down over certain issues (such as how to prioritize projects and divide up fundraising between the BWP and its members) or, alternatively, avoided issues, because they did not have the leadership and skills required to resolve them.

From our interviews it appears the steering committee did not adopt formal ground rules for how it would operate and make decisions. Although the initial strategic planning process did address the issues, no systematic method was adopted to prioritize projects or resolve key issues. Part of the reason for this was many steering committee members felt a formal prioritization process may have made sense had the BWP received large sums of funding, but in the absence of such funding the strategic plan itself (or a watershed plan) could guide project prioritization (i.e. projects should support the plan’s goals). One person summarized the feelings of many we spoke with about the consequences of not adopting a formal prioritization process by stating, “We

never really worked as a partnership. We had no filter for deciding on projects. Whoever showed up advocated for their project and got it funded.”

It should be noted the steering committee was sufficiently aware of these problems such that it hired consultants to help the group through a strategic planning process. However, many people we spoke with complained the planning process took too long and was not sufficiently focused. As a result, the process never directly surfaced or resolved the core underlying issues that confront the partnership such as how to prioritize projects and sort out the role of the BWP compared with its members’ roles regarding fund raising and other issues.

9. The Lack Of A Full Time Coordinator Has Been A Major Stumbling Block.

A half-time coordinator was hired and worked for almost a year. However, the workload was too large for a half-time person and much of the coordinator’s time had to be devoted to raising funds for her own position. Consequently, some important organization-building tasks fell through the cracks and opportunities were lost. Given the challenges of addressing the complex set of issues and the needs of numerous public, private, and non-profit organizations in a culturally divided watershed, one or more full-time coordinators would seem to be needed to handle the tasks effectively.

10. Concerns Exist Over What Watershed Management Actually Entails.

A number of people from non-profits and other sectors we spoke with voiced concern over the lack of clarity about what watershed management means. Many people said because the “buzzword of the day” is watershed management, and because some of their internal funding streams are tied to watershed line items, the Forest Service now calls almost everything it does on the uplands “watershed projects.” These people said traditional timber treatments, thinning, fire management, and economic development are now often called watershed projects, although most people outside of the agency think watershed management involved activities directly affecting riparian areas, water quality and quantity, soil erosion and the like. One person said, “The agency has bent projects to fit their funding sources and current needs and they spend lots of dollars on these projects but can never measure results from a watershed perspective.” Another person said, “The agency’s projects were confusing and distracting to many of us. The Forest Service should not do any more of these until they develop clear definitions of what large-scale watershed management is.”

11. Due to the Constraints Outlined Above, the Future of the BWP Seems in Doubt and it is Devolving into a Network Rather Than a Free Standing Organization.

As a result of the difficulties facing the project, at the time of this writing, the future of the BWP seemed very unclear and the steering committee appeared to be heading down a path toward becoming an informal network rather than a free-standing organization. Because the steering committee decided to no longer meet regularly, the bylaws were suspended, many members of the executive committee no longer regularly attend meetings, and in general we got the sense many people have lost their energy and interest in the BWP. It is difficult to know the long-term implications of the decision to become a network for the community or watershed. One thing that seems certain, however, is that no organization will hold the vision and help promote whole-basin boundaryless watershed management and restoration.

12. Although People Are Glad To Have Participated, Many Feel the Effort Has Not Been Worth the Benefits.

In sum, everyone we spoke with said overall, the experience was positive, many relationships have been strengthened or developed and should endure, and they are glad they participated in the project. However, a majority of people also said, on hindsight, they question whether the benefits that have accrued, such as expanded and enhanced working relationships and a few on-the-ground projects, have been worth the time and effort invested. If networking becomes its primary role, many people said they would put a small amount of time into the BWP, but not much. One government official summarized these feelings well by stating, “Will anything come of this (BWP)? I doubt it.”

III. Analysis

1. *Although Difficult, It Still May be Possible to Achieve the Initial Vision and Goals of the BWP.* Although almost everyone we spoke with voiced uncertainty over the proper future role of the BWP and many were doubtful it would continue in its existing—or even any—form, our analysis also found solid support for an entity with the mission of achieving basin-level boundaryless management. Most people said no organization within the watershed had basin level boundaryless management and coordination as its mission. Many felt that despite the relationships, enhanced networking and coordination have evolved, without an entity with this specific mission, most activities would soon devolve back to the small-scale issue and site-specific level, which will not be sufficient to restore the basin. One person summarized the feelings of many by stating, “The organization should find a way to stay strong and work together because the work needs to be done at a larger level. Cross boundary partnerships are still a very important approach to conservation. It’s hard. But we need to give it a realistic chance.”

A revised version of the BWP itself or possibly the Water Forum could become the vehicle to promote and coordinate basin-level boundaryless management. Whatever entity takes on this role, it must develop linkages between and bring all of the key players in the basin to the table. Because federally-owned lands cover almost 70% of the basin, the Forest Service in particular must be tightly linked with state, local, and private efforts.

2. *Loss of BWP May Hurt the Forest Service More than the Partners.*

If the BWP disappears, a number of people we interviewed said they thought the biggest loser would be the Forest Service. Non-profit organizations such as Trout Unlimited can achieve their goals by working with groups such as the Water Forum. Local Forest Service representatives also said they have long-standing relationships with many non-profit groups that will endure. However, one of the intents of the BWP was to provide the Forest Service with a forum where it could coordinate with non-profit organizations and citizens it did not normally communicate with on a basin-wide scale. If the BWP no longer exists, many interviewees said people could become skeptical about engaging in future projects with the agency. The result is the agency could find it difficult to pursue meaningful partnerships in the future.

IV. Recommendations

A good deal of uncertainty exists over the future of the BWP. Some people believe the vision of basin-level boundaryless management remains compelling and few of the organizations will ultimately be able to achieve their goals without this type of broad focus and multiple partnerships. Others believe the working relationships that emerged out of the BWP will endure and are sufficient for their needs and if it continues to exist at all, its primary function should be networking. Because a clear picture of the future is difficult to depict, it is not easy to offer recommendations. However, because a number of people apparently do want the BWP, or some entity, to continue on with the focus of facilitating basin-level boundaryless management, the following recommendations are offered:

A. Recommendations for the Bitterroot Watershed Partnership

1. *If the BWP is to Survive as a Separate Entity, It Must Refocus Its Mission on Tangible Outcomes.*

Many people we interviewed said the current direction of the partnership to devolve into an informal network seems unlikely to succeed over the long haul. Coordination is a necessary activity. However, as one person said, “Coordination is a process, not a result.” The success achieved through various projects will be attributed to those that do the projects. Those who facilitated networking and coordination will get little to no credit; even if they helped others do their work. This suggests an entity with a primary focus of coordination and networking is not likely to last very long. If the BWP does not endure, or if another local entity fails to adopt the mission and vision of working at the whole-basin boundaryless management scale, even with better coordination, funding constraints and other issues seem likely to drive projects back to the small-scale, site-, and issue-specific levels. If the agencies, organizations, and citizens concerned with large-scale boundaryless management are to achieve their vision, the BWP, or some other entity, must develop a mission focused on achieving specific outcomes, not just on networking.

2. *Find a Skilled Leader Who Can Focus Solely on the BWP.*

If people decide the BWP should continue as a freestanding organization, it may behoove the steering committee to seek a strong leader who believes in the need for basin-level boundaryless management and does not represent any other organization. This individual could become a steering committee member or paid staff. A leader who can inspire and motivate others while focusing solely on the well-being of the BWP may generate new ideas for how the BWP can serve its members while surviving as a free standing entity.

3. *Seek Education and Training in Group Process, Conflict Resolution and Organizational Change.*

Following from the point above, steering committee members may benefit from training and education in group process and organizational development. Although watershed partnerships exist because of ecological and/or socio-economic concerns, the key to success lies in the ability to understand and manage complex human systems. The steering committee represents a social system that is just as difficult to manage as an ecological system. Many people we spoke with mentioned they became inspired and gained knowledge and skills after the former coordinator returned from the U.S. Forest Service workshops held in Chattanooga, TN, in 2001 and the ‘lessons learned’ workshop in Portland, Oregon, in November 2002. Many said they wished they

had the opportunity to experience the same type of education and training early on. It may behoove the partnership to seek this type of skill building at this time.

4. Pursue Early Third-Party Reviews and Assistance.

A number of people we interviewed said an early formative review assessing the project's strengths and weaknesses, similar to this one, could have been very helpful. The steering committee never received feedback from a neutral third party that could potentially have helped resolve some of the key issues.

5. Hire a Full-Time Coordinator.

If the BWP decides to recommit itself to being a freestanding organization, a full-time coordinator will be needed. This individual should have sound leadership, group management, and organizational skills such as fund raising.

6. Operate Like a Professional Team Rather Than an Informal Neighborhood Group.

One step that could help the BWP in the short term is to adopt clear goals, roles, and rules describing how it will function. Many watershed partnerships operate as 'Saturday morning drop-in neighborhood sports groups.' Whoever shows up sets the agenda, controls the rules, and decides on the role each person will play. High performance teams, such as professional athletic teams, on the other hand, spend considerable time practicing individually and as teams. They develop great clarity over goals, roles, and rules so that no matter who shows up at events, they can operate efficiently and effectively. If people want the BWP to continue in any meaningful form, it may behoove the steering committee to establish clear goals, roles, and rules.

7. If the BWP Chooses Not To Continue as a Free Standing Organization, Document the Lessons Learned and Keep Track of All of the Projects and Activities Occurring in the Valley.

Many people we interviewed said much has been learned from the process of organizing a steering committee, writing a business plan, and pursuing projects. It may help organizations and individuals throughout the Bitterroot Valley to learn about these lessons. Therefore, even if the partnership is to devolve into a network or disappear completely, it could prove very helpful to hold a group "exit interview" of some type to document in writing the lessons learned by all steering committee members and distribute the document widely. In addition, it may prove very useful for some entity to establish some type of electronic database where organizations can post the locations, goals, time frame, and partners involved with projects they are engaged in within the basin. If readily available to anyone interested, this type of system could help avoid overlap and duplication and advance the goal of basin-level boundaryless management.

B. Recommendations for the Forest Service

1. Start with Lower Expectations and Don't Promise What Cannot Be Delivered.

One lesson can be learned from the experience of the BWP is the Forest Service should avoid raising expectations (implicitly or explicitly) by promising funds and resources it is not 100% sure can be delivered. Many people we spoke with said the BWP would be much better off today if the Forest Service had just offered seed money to help them get started. Larger dollars could then be provided in the future once the organization was solidified. Even then, the palpable feelings of resentment we heard in so many interviews underscores that the agency should at all costs avoid promising anything—small or large—unless it has complete certainty it can deliver on those promises.

2. Ensure Local Forest Employees are Fully Committed and Local Capacity Exists Before Launching Large-Scale Watershed Projects.

Our interviews found a good deal of skepticism among local organizations and citizens about the Forest Service's commitment to the BWP. Certain staff members, such as the individual who helped organize the original steering committee and developed the business plan and the Bitterroot Forest Supervisor, are clearly committed and have done whatever they can to help the project succeed. However, the agency has a natural tendency to focus its attention on the lands under its responsibility, and with a limited budget and staff that are already stretched thin, it is far from certain how wide the commitment to the BWP is within the agency. The Washington office of the agency may benefit by taking extra steps to ensure local Forests have the staff, resources, and understanding needed to meaningfully engage in large-scale watershed restoration projects before initiating major new projects.

3. Avoid One-Size-Fits-All Partnership Models.

If the Forest Service is to pursue projects similar to the BWP in the future, one lesson that could be learned from this experience is to avoid prescribing a one-size-fits-all partnership approach to every situation. The Forest Service wanted a new entity organized in the Bitterroot that would allow it to engage private and state interests in basin-level management. While the model of creating a new organization may have worked in other locations, due to the number of organizations that already existed, the limited amount of funding available, and the limited number of local people that will actively engage in such efforts, it may have been wiser to work through existing organizations to achieve its goals. Knowing the type of entity to establish or work through requires extensive site-level investigation. While labor intensive, this approach may lead to a much greater likelihood of success in the future than a one-size-fits-all approach.

4. Devolving Funding to the Regional Level Effectively Kills Most Special Projects.

A number of people said once the decision was made to delegate funding for the large-scale watershed projects to the regional level, funding for the BWP was effectively dead. Each National Forest has needs and each forest supervisor has unique responsibilities. It is therefore very difficult for a Regional Office to allocate a large pot of funds to one or two forests alone for a special project. If specific high-profile projects are to be launched, they will probably require special funding from the Washington office.

5. Ensure a Diverse and Long-Term Funding Base for Large-Scale Watershed Projects.

Following from the previous point, the fallout caused by the failure of the Forest Service to deliver on the funds people felt were promised could have been tempered if the agency had rounded up multiple funding sources prior to the start of the project. For example, had a pool of funds from EPA, National Refuge System, and other USDA programs been organized to support the BWP, the loss of Forest Service funds may not have generated such negative impacts. Further, funding commitments from other public agencies would have ensured more buy-in and support for the BWP and provided a stable source of long-term funding. This could have helped the project through the hard times it is now experiencing. A number of people we spoke with said cultural change in small communities such as exist within the Bitterroot Valley takes a long time. A 2- to 5-year project is not likely to achieve the type of change needed to ensure basin-level boundaryless management. Efforts must have a time horizon of 5-10 years or more. This time scale requires a long-term funding commitment. Only multiple funding sources can provide this. Although the Forest Service should be a key leader whenever National Forest lands are involved in a project, the more the agency follows its own suggestion of working in

partnership—in this case partnering with other agencies to sponsor and fund large-scale watershed projects--the greater the likelihood of long term success.

6. Adopt Specific Criteria to Define Large-Scale Watershed Management.

The concerns we heard from a diverse group of people over the Forest Service's apparent loose use of the term 'watershed management' to characterize many different types of projects suggests the agency may benefit by clearly defining which projects fit the classification and which do not. The failure to clarify the type of projects that can be included in large-scale watershed management programs is certain to increase the skepticism about the agency among some of the public.