Examining the capacity and support for a forest-wide collaboration on the Siuslaw National Forest

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Recent interest in public participation in United States National Forest planning process, collaboration, and networked governance have led to an interest in forest-wide collaboration.

The Siuslaw National Forest in Oregon is currently home to five productive forest collaborations. These existing collaboratives operate at small regional scales, to determine the location of timber sales and implement restoration projects. In recent years, collaborative stakeholders on the Siuslaw National Forest have expressed interest in the potential role of a broad scale forest-wide collaborative.

Through approximately 30 semi-structured interviews and multiple focus groups with existing collaboration stakeholders, forest service employees, and members of the public, we explored the community and institutional capacity for a forest-wide collaborative, as well as potential governance structures, on the National Forest. Interview subjects and focus group members were asked to provide possible forest-wide collaborative structures, policy focuses, and potential membership. Our initial findings suggest that Siuslaw National Forest community members support the concept of a forest-wide collaboration, but express concern that a collaboration operating at a broad scale may detract from existing regional collaboration success. Rather than a fully networked structure, participants were more likely to suggest that the existing collaborations be kept separate from a new forest-wide collaboration effort. While small-scale, narrowly focused collaboration has proven useful on the Siuslaw National Forest, interest in a forest-wide collaboration has created a space where stakeholders are beginning to imagine potential structures for networked collaboration on the Forest. Our study provides a practical, real-time case study to elaborate on theories of multi-scalar, collaborative governance, while engaging stakeholders throughout the process of institution-building. By considering the benefits and drawbacks of both small-scale and forest-wide collaborative governance on this National Forest, our findings will feed directly into the process of implementing a forest-wide collaboration.