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COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES: RESTORING WATERSHEDS AND LARGE LANDSCAPES ACROSS BOUNDARIES THROUGH STATE AND FEDERAL PARTNERSHIPS

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
PUBLIC LANDS, FORESTS, AND MINING

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES: RESTORING WATERSHEDS AND LARGE LANDSCAPES ACROSS BOUNDARIES THROUGH STATE AND FEDERAL PARTNERSHIPS

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 21, 2017

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS, FORESTS, AND MINING,
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES,
Washington, DC.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:01 a.m. in Room SD–366, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Mike Lee, Chairman of the Subcommittee, presiding.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. MIKE LEE, U.S. SENATOR FROM UTAH

Senator LEE [presiding]. The hearing of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining, will come to order.

The purpose of today's hearing is to discuss the success and benefits of collaborative initiatives to restore watersheds and large landscapes. Millions of acres of watersheds and critical landscapes across the country are deteriorating. Invasive species, catastrophic wildfires, and inadequate management have badly damaged these lands and continue to threaten the health of the same lands. These problems are not exclusive to federal lands, of course. Many state and private lands face similar threats. Healthy watersheds are essential to our environment. They are necessary for our economy and to our well-being. They support everything from water quality and wildlife habitat to livestock grazing, timber harvesting, and recreational opportunities for the American people.

We have to find innovative ways to restore these lands to ensure that they can support these vital functions in the future. The haphazard way these lands are managed has proved to be one of the biggest obstacles to restoring them. Too often federal, state, and local lands are managed independently of one another, as if they were in separate universes, with little or no coordination between neighboring land managers. This patchwork of management strategies tends to breed confusion, it tends to create a certain amount of distrust, and it tends to produce less than ideal and even bad outcomes with the land itself.

Thankfully, that is not the end of the story. In some parts of the country, land managers have cooperated with one another to solve these problems, and the results of that kind of cooperation are

quite promising. One solution they have come up with is "collaborative initiatives." These initiatives bring together federal, state, and tribal land managers, as well as private landowners, to cooperate on landscape restoration projects across ownership boundaries so that people do not remain in these independent silos focusing only on that which is immediately within their stewardship.

A good example of such an initiative can be found in my own state, in the State of Utah. In response to the deteriorating condition of watersheds on public and private lands, federal and state officials came together and formed the Watershed Restoration Initiative, or WRI. For over 12 years, the WRI has brought federal, state, and private stakeholders together to resolve some of the state's most vexing land management issues and restore essential watersheds. To date, WRI has completed more than 1,600 projects and restored more than 1.3 million acres of land. Another 287 projects spanning 280,000 acres are currently underway. Like so much else in politics, WRI is successful because it relies on locally-driven, bottom-up solutions. WRI's organizational structure empowers regional teams and not far-off bureaucracy to identify and prioritize projects.

Collaborative initiatives are true state-based solutions to the problems we face. When we let states take the lead, we avoid the partisan bickering and red tape that can bog down projects by the Federal Government. Today we are going to hear about collaborative initiatives that are transforming land management across the Western United States. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, who play important roles in these successful initiatives.

I want to quickly introduce each of you and then we will proceed to your testimony.

First, we are going to hear from Ms. Kristin Bail, Assistant Director for Resources and Planning for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Next we will have Ms. Leslie Weldon, Deputy Chief for the U.S. Forest Service. Then we will hear from Mr. Virgil Moore, Director of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. He is also testifying on behalf of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Finally, we will hear from Mr. Tyler Thompson, Watershed Program Director at the Utah Department of Natural Resources. Tyler and the Watershed Restoration Initiative are doing outstanding work on the ground in Utah.

Thank you all for being here to testify today, and thank you for the great benefit that you confer to federal, state and private lands throughout our country and in the parts of the country where you work.

With that, the Committee recognizes Ms. Bail.

STATEMENT OF KRISTIN BAIL, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR RESOURCES AND PLANNING, BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Ms. BAIL. Thank you and good morning, Chairman Lee.

As you said, I am Kristin Bail. I am the BLM's Assistant Director for Resources and Planning. And thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Bureau of Land Management's efforts to advance the on-the-ground landscape restoration and conservation of natural and cultural resources through collaborative partnerships.

The BLM is extremely proud to partner with states, local governments, counties, tribes and other organizations. The relationships we build with our partners are crucial for our ability to successfully manage the vast public lands and the diverse uses they offer. They help us solve management challenges across jurisdictional boundaries, leverage resources, create new economic opportunities for local businesses and enhance the enjoyment and use of America's public lands.

Nationally, the BLM manages more than 245 million acres of surface land and 700 million acres of subsurface mineral estate on behalf of the American people. The Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA) sets forth the BLM's multiple use mission directing that public lands be managed for a variety of uses such as conventional and renewable energy development, livestock grazing, conservation, mining, watershed protection, hunting, fishing, and other forms of recreation and it requires that various resources be managed on a sustained-yield basis.

BLM-managed public lands encompass an incredible number of unique ecosystems from the high Mesas, deep canyons and spectacular arches of Utah's San Rafael Swell to the glacier-carved gorges of Oregon's high desert. These lands provide forage for livestock, habitat for big game and other species of fish and wildlife, harvestable forest products and rewarding opportunities for all types of outdoor recreation.

The BLM strongly supports locally-driven partnership efforts to ensure that these valuable public land resources are preserved for the benefit of present and future generations. The BLM depends on countless partnerships nationwide to manage public lands and they are instrumental to our efforts to increase public access, facilitate outdoor recreation, control invasive species, reduce wildfire risk, and enhance conservation.

My written statement discusses 15 examples, but right now I would like to highlight two that have been particularly successful at restoring large landscapes—the Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative, also known as WRI, and Restore New Mexico.

WRI is a partnership between the BLM, the State of Utah, other federal agencies, hunting and fishing groups, private landowners and many others that aims to improve water quality and quantity, reduce catastrophic wildfire risk, develop sustainable agriculture and improve forage and wildlife habitat. The BLM, State of Utah, and other partners have provided millions of dollars in funding to accomplish on-the-ground work for projects that provide the most value to local communities. Since 2006, more than 1,800 projects have been completed or are currently in progress which have treated about 1.6 million acres and restored over 400 miles of streams to proper functioning condition. Notable recent projects include removal of pinyon pine and juniper, the installation of guzzler systems and hazardous fuel reduction to improve habitat and ranges for greater sage grouse, mule deer, elk and pronghorn.

Like WRI, Restore New Mexico is a partnership between the BLM, the State of New Mexico, ranchers, industry and other local organizations to restore more than three million acres of grasslands, woodlands and riparian areas across the state that had been degraded by invasive species and woodland encroachment. This ini-

tiative also includes the reclamation of oil and gas legacy roads, pads and other infrastructure that is no longer needed which improves habitat for sensitive species of wildlife and plants.

The BLM has a track record of developing robust partnerships to make land management more effective and responsive to the needs of local communities while maintaining our federal trust resource responsibilities. That said, we know there are ways to further improve our work. The BLM looks forward to working with the Subcommittee and Congress on this important issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony and I would be glad to answer questions that you may have.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Bail follows:]

Statement of
Kristin Bail
Assistant Director for Resources and Planning
Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Department of the Interior
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining

Hearing on *"Collaborative Initiatives: Restoring Watersheds and Large Landscapes Across Boundaries Through State and Federal Partnerships"*

June 21, 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) efforts to advance on-the-ground landscape restoration and conservation of natural and cultural resources through collaborative partnerships. The BLM is proud to partner with States, local governments, counties, Tribes, and other organizations, and we are committed to advancing the important public access and recreation goals outlined by Secretary Zinke in Secretarial Order 3347, *Conservation Stewardship and Outdoor Recreation*. The relationships we build with our partners are critical to our ability to successfully manage the vast public lands and the diverse uses they offer. Frequent communication and close collaboration are hallmarks of the BLM's work across the West. This approach is essential for the Federal government to be a good neighbor to and steward for local communities and is critically important for solving management challenges across jurisdictional boundaries, leveraging resources, creating new economic opportunities for local businesses, and enhancing the enjoyment and use of America's public lands.

Background

The BLM manages over 245 million acres of surface land and 700 million acres of subsurface mineral estate on behalf of the American people. Managing this vast portfolio is a tremendous honor for the employees of the BLM, and our work depends on close cooperative relationships with partners and local communities. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) sets forth the BLM's multiple-use mission, directing that public lands be managed for a variety of uses, such as conventional and renewable energy development, livestock grazing, conservation, mining, watershed protection, hunting, fishing, and other forms of recreation, and requires that various resources be managed on a sustained yield basis. Because of this, Federal lands support the production of goods and services that create jobs and promote economic development in communities across the nation.

BLM partnerships are truly cross-cutting, occurring at all levels of the agency and in key program areas, such as recreation, fire management, and conservation of fish, wildlife, and cultural resources. The BLM's great array of partners – from national organizations, Tribes, community associations, and volunteers to schools and educational institutions, friends groups, youth corps organizations, businesses, and other government agencies – provide invaluable support, helping the agency deliver opportunities to engage the public in conserving, enjoying,

and appropriately using the unique resources and services provided by BLM-managed lands. These partnerships have been particularly effective in efforts to restore ecosystems and landscapes, control the spread of invasive species, reduce wildfire risk, and enhance conservation and recreational opportunities.

Ecosystem & Landscape Restoration

BLM-managed public lands encompass an incredible number of unique ecosystems, from the sagebrush-steppe rangelands of the Great Basin region to the high mesas, deep canyons, and spectacular arches and spires of Utah's San Rafael Swell to the glacier carved gorges of Oregon's high desert. These lands provide forage for livestock, habitat for threatened and endangered species of fish, wildlife, and plants, harvestable forest products, subsistence use of fish and game in Alaska, and rewarding opportunities for all types of outdoor recreation. To ensure that these valuable ecological goods and services are preserved for the benefit of present and future generations, the BLM strongly supports locally-driven ecosystem restoration efforts and regularly partners with State and local governments, other Federal agencies, and academic institutions to improve the resilience of human communities living near and working on BLM-managed lands.

For example, the Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative (WRI) is a partnership between the BLM, the State of Utah, the U.S. Natural Resource Conservation Service, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), hunting and fishing groups, private landowners, oil and gas companies, private foundations, and public land grazers that aims to improve the health of high priority watersheds. The WRI is a bottom-up initiative, where locally developed regional teams plan, rank, and assist in the implementation of projects to improve water quality and quantity, reduce catastrophic wildfire risk, develop sustainable agriculture, and improve forage and wildlife habitat. The BLM, State of Utah, and other partners have provided millions of dollars in funding to accomplish on-the-ground work for projects that provide the most value to local communities. Since 2006, over 1,800 projects have been completed or are currently in progress, which have treated approximately 1.6 million acres and restored over 400 miles of streams to proper functioning condition. Notable recent projects include removal of pinyon pine and juniper, installation of a poly tank guzzler system, and hazardous fuel reduction to improve Greater Sage-Grouse, mule deer, elk, and pronghorn habitat and ranges. In addition, the BLM has worked with the State of New Mexico, ranchers, industry, and other local partners on the successful "Restore New Mexico" initiative, which has restored over 3 million acres of grasslands, woodlands, and riparian areas across the State that had been degraded by invasive species and woodland encroachment. This initiative also includes the reclamation of oil and gas legacy roads, pads, and other infrastructure that is no longer needed, which improves habitat for sensitive species of wildlife and plants.

In addition to our work to improve watersheds and landscapes in Utah and New Mexico, the BLM has also established partnerships to enhance fish and wildlife habitat. For example, the BLM, in coordination with Arizona's Lake Havasu Fishery Partnership, has helped treat more than 800 acres to improve habitat for fish and install shoreline fishing facilities. As a result of these efforts, Lake Havasu has become a premier fishing lake, contributing significantly the local economy. Similarly, the BLM has partnered with the Nevada Departments of Wildlife and Conservation and Natural Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the

Newmont Mining Corporation on a sagebrush ecosystem conservation program for managing over 1.5 million acres of habitat. A first of its kind in the United States for its scope and scale, the agreement establishes a framework governing Newmont's management of sagebrush habitat. As with the agency's work in Arizona and Nevada, the BLM has partnered with the Wyoming Game and Fish and Agriculture Departments, the Southwest Wyoming County Commissions, the Southwest Wyoming Conservation Districts, and a number of other Federal agencies and organizations as part of the Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative (WLCI). The WLCI is a long-term, science-based collaborative effort to assess and enhance aquatic and terrestrial habitats at a landscape scale in southwest Wyoming, while facilitating responsible development in some of the country's most abundant oil and natural gas reserves.

The BLM's partnerships have also resulted in improvements to subsistence resources and wildlife conservation. In Alaska, the BLM has worked with the State Department of Fish and Game to monitor Chinook salmon abundance in the Unalakleet River as well as caribou, moose, Dall sheep, and other big game species in multiple populations throughout the State. The BLM contributes funding to the State and also participates in its surveys. This partnership ensures that consistent data collection methods are used to produce accurate demographic information, which is then used to make well-informed decisions on subsistence, sport hunting, and habitat management. In Wyoming, the BLM has partnered with State and local governments, other Federal agencies, and a large number of nonprofit organizations and foundations as part of the Wyoming Migration Initiative, which facilitates the study of big game migration across landscapes. The Red Desert to Hoback migration assessment, being conducted as part of this initiative, aims to identify potential risks to migrating mule deer and to provide a roadmap for stakeholders to improve management and conservation efforts.

Invasive Species Management & Wildfire Risk Reduction

Invasive species reduce rangeland productivity, increase the risk of catastrophic wildfire, threaten native plant and wildlife populations and their habitats, and negatively impact recreational opportunities on public lands. The BLM is committed to preventing the introduction and spread of invasive species that threaten local and State economies, the environment, and in some cases human health directly. Many invasive plants, insects, and other types of animals, pathogens, and parasites are already well-established within the United States, and noxious weeds like cheatgrass and salt cedar exist on over 79 million acres of BLM-managed lands, requiring significant effort to control. Changes in land uses and prolonged drought are rendering some habitats, including some of the best-protected, most valuable, and remote natural areas more susceptible to biological invasion. For example, the Great Basin's sagebrush-steppe ecosystem is one of the most imperiled in the United States due in part to the presence of invasive species such as cheatgrass and medusahead. Together, invasive species and the effects of prolonged drought are creating conditions that are leading to larger, more frequent, and more intense rangeland fires across the Great Basin.

Cheatgrass is a non-native annual grass that dries early in the summer and remains highly flammable throughout the fire season, creating dangerous fuel-loading conditions on the ground. A wind-driven rangeland fire in cheatgrass can easily burn thousands of acres in an hour, destroying homes, livelihoods, and habitat. If left unchecked, cheatgrass can invade sagebrush communities after rangeland fires, creating conditions for more frequent, intense fires in the

future. Native plant and animal communities are not well-adapted to these novel fire regimes and can suffer significant declines in numbers and cover. This in turn allows for more cheatgrass growth in following years. For these reasons, this "fire-and-cheatgrass cycle" is a particularly difficult challenge for land managers.

Healthy rangelands are more resistant to certain invasive species. Therefore, working to maintain rangeland plant community integrity and – when necessary – stabilizing and restoring areas after fire is critical to successfully breaking the cheatgrass-fire cycle. The increasing frequency and intensity of rangeland fires and the conversion of sagebrush to invasive annual grasses pose major threats to native biodiversity, ranchers, Tribes, local communities, outdoor recreationists, energy developers, and others who depend on these lands and resources to sustain their livelihoods and quality of life.

The formidable challenges posed by invasive species must be addressed for the BLM and our partners to effectively protect and preserve natural, cultural, historic, and tribal resources; safeguard traditional uses of public lands; facilitate new economic opportunities; and build ecological resilience of plant and animal communities. Just as with our efforts to restore landscapes, the BLM actively partners with State and Federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, industry, and academic institutions to reduce the spread of invasive species through prevention, early detection and rapid response, and control.

With the limited success of traditional mechanical and chemical efforts to treat annual grass invasion over the past 50 years, the BLM is working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service, USFWS, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), and other partners on a new tool to manage these invasive grasses – a naturally occurring weed-suppressing bacteria, *Pseudomonas fluorescens* – to be used as a host-specific biopesticide. Field trials were initiated in 2015 at the Mid-Columbia National Wildlife Refuge Complex in Washington State to test the bacteria's efficacy.

In addition, after the 2013 Yarnell Hill Fire in Arizona, the BLM partnered with Arizona State Forestry and the USFS to provide funding to local fire districts for hazardous fuel reduction projects, including vegetation removal and thinning. This significant regional partnership has funded 16 projects in 13 communities throughout Arizona, treating over 1,300 acres. Similarly, the BLM has partnered with the State of Montana, private landowners, and other Federal agencies as part of the Blackfoot Challenge. This partnership aims to enhance, conserve, and protect the natural resources and rural lifestyles of the Blackfoot River Valley through cost-share initiatives, including reduction of hazardous fuels around residences and conflicts between humans and livestock with carnivores like grizzly bears and wolves. The BLM has also partnered with State, Federal, and local stakeholders as part of the Harney County Wildfire Collaborative (HCWC) in Oregon. The HCWC aims to reach consensus on specific, achievable, tangible, and measurable steps to reduce the potential for and impact of mega-fires in Harney County, including coordinating wildfire suppression activities, preventative measures to reduce the size of wildland fires on public and private lands, and rehabilitation actions.

Concurrent with the BLM's work with partners on wildfire risk reduction, the BLM has collaborated with a wide variety of State and local groups on a number of general invasive

species management projects. For example, the BLM in Colorado has worked with The Nature Conservancy, the San Miguel County Weed Board, and other interested stakeholders since 2001 to remove over 30 miles of salt cedar and restore native vegetation along the San Miguel River.

Finally, the BLM has partnered with State and local governments, other Federal agencies, Tribes, individuals, and other organizations in 75 Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMAs) across the West. CWMAs help interested parties coordinate efforts and share expertise for managing invasive species in a defined area. By addressing invasive species in this manner, the BLM is able to leverage limited resources to counter the impacts of invasive species across the landscape.

Conservation & Recreation

As part of its multiple use mission, the BLM, in conjunction with strong local partnerships, conserves, protects, and restores nationally significant landscapes that are recognized for their outstanding cultural, ecological, and scientific values. These landscapes are part of an active, vibrant landscape where people live, work, and explore. They offer exceptional opportunities for recreation, solitude, wildlife viewing, history exploration, scientific research, and a wide range of traditional uses.

In Colorado, for example, the BLM has partnered with the State Department of Parks and Wildlife to manage the land, plants, and wildlife of the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness Area within the McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area. This partnership has resulted in management strategies within the wilderness aimed at reducing the threat of wildfire to bighorn sheep habitat and vegetation composition. Likewise, the BLM in California partnered with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation in 2016 on the acquisition of approximately 350 acres of land for the Cache Creek Natural Area. The acquisition of this land secured and improved year-round public access and provided multiple recreational opportunities for camping, hunting, angling, and birdwatching, while protecting important cultural, natural resources, and wildlife habitat for the rare Tule elk. California's Tule elk herds have recovered from the brink of extinction, and Cache Creek now has several trophy bull tags available each year. One of the tags is reserved for an "apprentice hunt" for youth hunters.

The BLM also manages public lands to facilitate outdoor recreation. Visitors to these lands enjoy countless types of outdoor adventure – participating in activities as widely varied as camping, hunting, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, boating, whitewater rafting, hang-gliding, off-highway vehicle driving, mountain biking, birding and wildlife viewing, photography, climbing, all types of winter sports, and visiting natural and cultural heritage sites. Recreational experiences are especially important in the growing West, where more than half of BLM-managed public lands are within 25 miles of an urban area. Lands used for recreational activities contribute significantly to local economies. As Secretary Zinke has said, "Outdoor recreation is about both our heritage and our economy." Lands managed by the BLM and other Department bureaus hosted an estimated 473 million recreation visitors during 2016. These visits alone contributed an estimated $50 billion to the economy and supported nearly 426,000 jobs nationwide.

As with other uses, outdoor recreation on BLM-managed public lands is enhanced by collaborative partnerships with local organizations. For example, the BLM in Nevada has partnered with the State Division of State Parks, the City of Caliente, Lincoln County, the International Mountain Bicycling Association, and the American Conservation Experience to develop and build the Lincoln County Partners Multi-Purpose Non-Motorized Trail System, a network of multi-purpose, non-motorized recreational trails suitable for hiking and mountain biking. Phase 1 of the project, now underway, includes constructing 40 miles of interconnected trails – 27 miles on public lands and 13 miles on state park lands. The City of Caliente will build an additional five miles of trails and a bike park on city property. In addition to this work, the BLM in Idaho has partnered with the City of Boise, Ada County, the State Department of Fish and Game, and the USFS to manage recreational, open space, and natural resources in the foothills immediately adjacent to Boise. This partnership, known as "Ridge to Rivers," manages and maintains more than 200 miles of motorized and non-motorized trails (46 miles of trail on BLM-managed public lands) and 22 developed trailheads within the 15,000-acre Boise Front Special Recreation Management Area. The partners all contribute funds to meet these needs, with the City of Boise serving as the lead agency. The BLM contributes resources to maintain and improve existing trails, replace aging equipment, and assist with implementing local planning efforts for the trail system.

Conclusion

The BLM has a track record of developing robust partnerships with State and county governments, area Tribes, the public, and other stakeholders to make land management more effective and responsive to the needs of local communities while maintaining our Federal trust resource responsibilities. That said, we know there are ways to further improve our work. The BLM looks forward to working with the Subcommittee and Congress on this important issue. Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony, and I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

Senator LEE. Thank you, Ms. Bail.
Ms. Weldon.

STATEMENT OF LESLIE WELDON, DEPUTY CHIEF, NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOREST SERVICE

Ms. WELDON. Thank you very much and good morning Chairman Lee. We really appreciate being part of the conversation this morning.

We also want to share with you the work the Forest Service is doing across boundaries through others with collaborative initiatives to deliver the mission for the Forest Service. Collaborative initiatives have helped the Forest Service to deepen relationships that are improving management of watersheds and large landscapes and delivering goods and services to the public.

Collaboration has emerged as a primary principle for delivering the work of the Forest Service, and we achieve our most successful outcomes when we do it with and through others across boundaries and with an eye toward sharing commitment and stewardship. This is a principle that is shared well with states, local governments, industry, NGO's, private landowners and interested citizens who are also at the table. Tribes also play a key role in shared stewardship as well under the Tribal Trust and Treaty Rights Responsibilities held by the Federal Government.

Collaborative outcomes are the foundation for the 2012 Planning Rule and for outcomes described in the Farm bill, Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, Secure Rural Schools (SRS), the Wyden Amendment and other legislation.

Collaborative initiatives are also helping to leverage funds and expertise, boost innovation and speed up the timelines for getting projects done. They're a model for interagency coordination across states, federal and private lands and help us to do more critical work on our nation's forests, deep in shared stewardship with the communities we serve and can lead to more durable solutions to complex issues.

Today I'd just like to highlight a few examples for that, including the Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative, which we'll hear a lot about today, the Forest and Focus Initiative in Montana and our partnership with water providers in Colorado. I'll also highlight some efforts under the Good Neighbor Authority and some other collaborative projects we have.

So as Kristin stated with the Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative, the Forest Service is also a part of that. And according to our local forest supervisors, the over $500,000 that the Forest Service has invested so far on an annual basis, is returning seven times over in collaborative projects across the state on the ground with our forest there. We hope the Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative can be a model in other states for how we can work across federal, state and private land ownerships and harness the power of partnerships on crucial restoration projects.

Montana Governor Steve Bullock's unique forest restoration initiative, called Forest and Focus, is designed to address forest restoration and industry retention, collaboration and partnerships and restoration of tribal, state and forest lands. It is investing millions

of dollars in projects across boundaries to accomplish priority projects including hiring state Forest Service liaisons—positions that focus on forest restoration activities across landscapes. We're grateful for Governor Bullock for the investment he's made of $2 million from the Montana Fire Suppression Account to engage directly with the Forest Service on projects, and he's currently investing in 25 projects statewide which will result in supporting mills and sustaining 3,000 jobs.

In Colorado, the Forest Service has partnered with municipal water utilities, conservation districts, businesses and state partners to support forest and watershed restoration. Collectively, our water provider partners have contributed over $28 million which has been matched by $31 million in Forest Service funding for vegetation and watershed restoration treatments, all of which are serving the water users through restoring watersheds that have been affected by wildfire and preventing wildfire risk against communities.

Under the Good Neighbor Authority, the Forest Service is working with states to treat more acres across our forested landscapes and grasslands. This authority increases our capacity by allowing us to work with states in identifying shared priorities for forest management and to access state agency expertise to accomplish restoration work. We have currently executed 83 Good Neighbor agreements in 29 states with more work coming online.

In conclusion, we are most successful when we work together with state agencies and other organizations to focus on highest-priority needs to benefit land in surrounding communities. We're honored to be stewards of the nation's forest and seek to do this best through working with and through others and across boundaries as the best way to ensure we're of service to the needs for citizens and for those landscapes.

I look forward to answering any questions you have.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Weldon follows:]

TESTIMONY of LESLIE WELDON
DEPUTY CHIEF, NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOREST SERVICE
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS, FORESTS AND MINING
on COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES
JUNE 20, 2017

Collaborative Initiatives: Restoring watersheds and large landscapes across boundaries through State and Federal partnerships

Chairman Lee, Ranking Member Wyden, and members of the Subcommittee, I express my thanks to you for the opportunity to speak today about the work the Forest Service is undertaking with our state, federal, tribal, and non-governmental partners to accelerate the pace and scale of restoration on our national forests so forests remain resilient and provide the benefits Americans need.

Collaborative initiatives are a critical tool the Forest Service uses to deliver these benefits to the American public. Natural resource-focused partnerships can leverage funds, boost innovation, and speed up the timeline for getting projects done; they are a model for interagency coordination across state, federal, tribal, and private lands. In short, these initiatives allow the Forest Service to do more critical work in our nation's forests, enhance our relationships with the communities in which we serve, and often lead to more durable solutions to complex issues.

Today I will highlight a few examples of locally-supported efforts to address community-identified and science-based needs for the restoration of large landscapes. I will focus my remarks on resource and economic successes of the Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative, the Forests in Focus initiative in Montana, and our partnerships with water supply providers in Colorado. I will also highlight our efforts under the Good Neighbor Authority, and share results of 23 collaboratively designed projects across the country.

UTAH WATERSHED RESTORATION INITIATIVE

The Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative, a partnership-based program to improve high priority watersheds throughout the state, is an example of a strong collaborative effort between the Forest Service, other Federal agencies, and local partners. It is unique because it pools funds and project proposals from state and federal agencies and non-profits, so that multi-agency regional teams can rank, select, and allocate funding to projects in watersheds that all parties consider to

be high priority. We give priority to landscape-scale, multi-partner and multi-phased projects in these high-priority watersheds. All five national forests in Utah have had projects approved and partially funded by this Initiative. The Forest Service's Intermountain Region currently contributes $500,000 a year to the Initiative; most projects see approximately five to seven times return on that investment, when combined with state and partner funding.

For example, the Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative helped fund the completion of the Blacksmith Fork Canyon winter range restoration project. This project is unique because it accomplished work across multiple jurisdictions. The project was conducted on National Forest System lands and the adjacent state-owned Hardware Ranch Wildlife Management Area. Winter habitat for mule deer is in decline, especially in the Cache Valley. This project restored crucial mule deer winter habitat and reduced hazardous fuels around private property. Diverse partner organizations contributed nearly $185,000 towards the $206,000 project.

Utah's national forests have approved 26 projects for work during fiscal year 2018. Because of the success of the Initiative to date, the Forest Supervisors of the Utah national forests, in partnership with the Utah Department of Natural Resources, and the Utah Partners for Conservation and Development, have committed to achieving a million acres of watershed restoration on National Forest System lands in the state of Utah. Watershed restoration will be accomplished through a variety of methods, and will result in improved conditions for grazing, wildlife habitat, forest health, fisheries, and recreation.

In addition to existing projects, the Utah national forests will plan new projects and complete environmental analysis to prepare for implementation. We will seek and employ innovative, creative and efficient approaches to project planning such as district-, forest- or state-wide decisions for juniper removal and conifer removal from aspen stands.

We hope the Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative can serve as a model for other states for how we can work across federal, state, tribal, and private land, and harness the power of partnerships to complete crucial restoration projects.

FORESTS IN FOCUS INITIATIVE

Montana Governor Steve Bullock's unique forest restoration initiative, titled the "Forests in Focus Initiative," is designed to address key challenges and opportunities in Montana, including forest restoration and industry retention, collaboration and partnerships, and restoration of Tribal, state and private forests. This state-led initiative is investing millions of dollars in projects across state-federal boundaries to accomplish priority projects, including the hiring of state-Forest Service and county-Forest Service liaison positions that focus on forest restoration activities across multiple jurisdictions.

The large-scale restoration work occurring on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest in Montana is an example of how collaboration and partnerships may lead to more lasting support for restoration and forest management activities. The Forests in Focus initiative provided funding to support the Beaverhead-Deerlodge working group, a local collaborative group consisting of area landowners, timber industry representatives, environmental groups, and county commissioners. This state investment leveraged partner funding, with in-kind services from private parties, non-profit organizations, and local government. The result is a 1,800 acre project that was collaboratively developed and has broad support. The project is currently being implemented, and will increase forest resilience to insects and disease, and reduce the risk of wildfire to local communities. Looking towards the future, this diverse group worked in partnership with the Forest Service to develop a "landscape strategy" document agreeing to restoration needs across the greater landscape.

Governor Bullock has made $2 million available from the state fire suppression account to engage directly with the Forest Service on projects. The state of Montana is investing in 25 Forest Service projects across the state, benefiting national forests and 14 counties. These projects are bolstering restoration outcomes on more than 200,000 acres of forest land, improving recreational opportunities, providing approximately 161 million board feet of timber to Montana's mills, and necessary goods and services to support resource dependent communities, including indirectly sustaining 3,000 jobs.

FORESTS TO FAUCETS PARTNERSHIP

In Colorado, the Forest Service has partnered with municipal water utilities, conservancy districts, businesses, and state partners to support forest and watershed restoration. Outcomes include resilient landscapes, reduced risk of catastrophic wildfires, and minimized erosion and sedimentation in reservoirs. Our watershed partnerships are principally funded through municipal and agricultural water fees – so they provide a financial link between downstream water users and upstream forests. Participating water utilities along the Front Range of Colorado serve over 3.2 million municipal customers and 900,000 acres of agricultural land. Colorado's watersheds are the source of water for 19 downstream states, so these restoration initiatives have both regional and national benefits.

These partnerships are truly cross-boundary efforts, with forest and watershed restoration work accomplished on both public and private lands in critical watershed areas. A key outcome of these partnerships is reduced impacts of wildfire and post-fire floods to critical infrastructure and private property. The proactive forest health and restoration treatments conducted through these partnerships are projected to reduce overall costs in the long run for local, state, tribal, and federal governments. Collectively, our water provider partners have contributed over $28 million, which has been matched by $31 million in Forest Service funding for vegetation and watershed restoration treatments over the last eight years in Colorado.

So far, approximately 50,000 acres treated (hazardous fuel removal, prescribed burns, wetland and riparian restoration, and invasive species treatments), 920,000 trees planted in burned areas, and 80 miles of trails and roads restored, constructed or decommissioned have been completed through these watershed restoration partnerships. This work is conducted by private companies so also supports local economies. In 2016, this work created and maintained over 90 logging, wood processing, and other forest sector jobs.

Another example of working across boundaries is the San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership. The Forest Service is working with the Colorado State Forest Service and Natural Resource Conservation Service to reduce wildfire risk to community water resources in the Fourmile and Turkey springs areas in Archuleta County. Since 2009, the partnership has secured over $1 million for forest restoration and resilience work. In addition, over the last two years, the Pagosa Ranger District and the Natural Resource Conservation Service were awarded nearly $1.3 million to conduct more treatments on private and public land as part of the Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service Joint Chiefs' Initiative. This project is an example of how the Forest Service, working together with the forest products industry, is improving forest health, establishing wood-to-energy opportunities, and creating positive economic outcomes.

GOOD NEIGHBOR AUTHORITY

Using tools such as the Good Neighbor Authority, the Forest Service is actively working with states to treat more acres across our forested landscapes and grasslands. The Good Neighbor Authority allows the Forest Service to enter into cooperative agreements or contracts with states and Puerto Rico to allow the non-federal partners to perform watershed restoration and forest management services on federal lands. To date, the Forest Service has executed 83 Good Neighbor agreements in 29 states to accomplish a variety of restoration services. This authority increases our capacity by allowing us to access state agency expertise to accomplish additional acres of restoration work.

For example, the Oregon Department of Forestry is assisting the Fremont-Winema National Forest to prepare timber sale and hazardous fuels reduction projects. Also, the Oregon Department of Forestry is leading a coordination effort with the Forest Service, local governments, collaborative groups, community members and other stakeholders under the Good Neighbor Authority to develop a statewide restoration priority map and a subsequent program of work. This will help the national forests in Oregon to identify future restoration priorities.

COLLABORATION AT WORK

Twenty-three collaboratively designed Forest Service projects across the country provide a snapshot of the impacts that shared stewardship can have. Together with our partners on these 23 landscapes, we have:

- Created approximately $1.2 billion in local labor income and an average of 5,180 jobs created or maintained each year[1].
- Sold more than 2.1 billion board feet of timber.
- Improved access for sports enthusiasts and other recreational visitors by maintaining 630 miles of trails and constructing nearly 90 miles of aquatic passage to allow fish to move under roads and maintain healthy populations.
- Reduced hazardous fuels to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire on more than 2.4 million acres.
- Maintained or improved more than 16,600 miles of roads.
- Involved more than 200 local partners, and leveraged more than $100 million in partner investments, for work on National Forest Systems lands through grant funding, stewardship agreements, job training for youth crews, monitoring, and more.
- Leveraged more than $230 million in additional public-private partnership funding, including work on private and State lands.

CONCLUSION

We are most successful when we work together with state agencies, tribes, and other organizations, and focus on the highest priority needs to benefit the land and surrounding communities. We are honored to be stewards of the national forests, and we seek to ensure these resources continue to meet the needs of generations to come by finding creative solutions to complex natural resources issues through state-federal partnerships and collaborative initiatives such as the ones I have described to you today.

[1] Labor income and jobs created have been estimated for 2011 to 2016. Other accomplishments include all years from 2010 to 2016.

Senator LEE. Thank you.
Next we will hear from Mr. Moore.

STATEMENT OF VIRGIL MOORE, DIRECTOR, STATE OF IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME, ON BEHALF OF THE ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Chairman Lee, especially for getting this hearing rescheduled for us today so we could be here, and I appreciate the work of the Subcommittee staff in getting that done.

I'm Virgil Moore, Vice President of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and currently Director of Idaho Fish and Game. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies has been around for a while, 1902, and the Association has been involved in almost every piece of major legislation relative to federal agencies, many of them having a collaborative foundation from the very get-go. The Migratory Bird Act was one of those early efforts at collaboration among states and Federal Governments and international boundaries.

Collaboratives come in all sizes and shapes. Some are very large. Some of them are small and very local. Some are topical. They're focused on water. They could be focused on an individual species initially. They could be focused on an output.

But in our, in my experience, I think Senator Crapo, in a comment he made about collaboratives—he's been a huge supporter of that—is "Collaboration breaks barriers. Collaboration brings people together to find common solutions." And my written comments are extensive relative to a number of examples, but I want to talk a little bit about my involvement in collaborative endeavors at the state, regional and national scale.

I found that structured collaboration can be an incredibly powerful and effective way for parties with overlapping interests and authorities to come together at the state and federal level to assist local communities and local entities to get things done, to just flat, get things done. And our working landscapes have to be sustainable both on a federal, state and private basis for those communities that rely on them, whether those communities are national in scope or otherwise. But I also have the perspective as a State Director and as a representative of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, that state authority and sovereignty, relative to fish and wildlife, has to be known and respected in these collaboratives and typically, they are, as we move forward.

Our ability to manage fish and wildlife and the trust responsibility that comes from that is something that is very important as we move through these. Really though, we can call them collaboratives today, but our history demonstrates long-standing, cultural tradition of people and communities working together to achieve those common objectives that they need for their communities, big and small.

We recognize wildlife is international and that it does cross state boundaries, as well as land ownership boundaries. I think the recognition that in the West, Idaho is 63 percent federally owned—there's another five percent that's state-owned properties—making for a whopping two-thirds of the state in public ownership. That makes those private lands, most of which are very productive agri-

cultural or set at the bottoms of some of these federal and state landscapes where we have the most productive areas—that's why they were homesteaded—extremely important to keeping the functioning of all those together. What I will tell you though is that of all of these ventures and entities that are out there—things like the North American Waterfowl Act that has the joint ventures is one of the more productive—we've got 18 of those nationally across the state.

I've got a whole series of these initiatives that are out there that function on a national scale but some of them, most recently, have been the ones that are most important and those that address things like prescribed fire. Here's one that's really been tough for the Forest Service and for the state where we need to manage large landscapes with fire and those problems extend a long ways. You burn something in Idaho, it gets to Missoula. You create an issue in terms of trying to execute collaborative management in the Clearwater Basin Collaborative in a whole different state and ecosystem. Those are difficult to do but need to be executed. It is these collaboratives that are going to make those possible.

I'll point out the two state collaboratives here real quick, while I'm running out of time—but the Idaho Roadless Plan that Senator Risch, when he was Governor, promoted and the Idaho Sage Grouse Plan that Governor Otter promoted, that I co-chaired, are examples of statewide collaboratives that were very important.

Thank you, Senator Lee.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Moore follows:]

Statement of Virgil Moore, Director, State of Idaho Department of Fish and Game,
On Behalf of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Before the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests & Mining
Hearing on Collaborative Initiatives on Restoring Watersheds and Large Landscapes
Across Boundaries through State and Federal Partnerships
June 20, 2017

Introduction

Chairman Lee and Senator Wyden, thank-you for the opportunity to testify before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources' Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining about Collaborative Initiatives focusing on restoring watersheds and large landscapes across boundaries through State and Federal partnerships.

I am Virgil Moore, vice-president of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (Association) and the Director of Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG). Founded in 1902 to protect the authority of states to manage fish and wildlife within their borders, the Association has been an effective participant in all significant federal fish and wildlife legislation, federal executive branch rules, and related policy since inception of the Association. All 50 state fish and wildlife agencies are members. The Association advocates science-informed fish and wildlife management for sustainable use by hunters, anglers, and all citizens, which is delivered through partnerships with agencies, the federal government, and conservation non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

I open my comments with a quote from Idaho's current senior senator, the Honorable Mike Crapo: "Collaboration breaks barriers. Collaboration brings people together to find common solutions."

In my tenure both with the Association and IDFG, I have been involved in collaborative endeavors at the state, regional, and national scale. I have found that structured collaboration can be an incredibly powerful and effective way for parties with overlapping authorities and interests, such as the State and Federal government, to achieve mutually important work that benefits sustainability of our landscapes to uphold the resources and values which are dependent on those landscapes. My perspective is that state sovereign authority to manage fish and wildlife is dependent on the sustainability of such landscapes. Really, although we call them collaboratives today, our history demonstrates a long-standing, cultural tradition of people and communities working together to achieve common objectives.

In this spirit, the Association of the Fish and Wildlife Agencies (Association) since its' founding has always been committed to an active working relationship with our partners in the federal government agencies. We recognize that wildlife is international, in addition to crossing state boundaries. States have broad police powers and statutory authority to manage fish and wildlife within their borders, including on most federal lands, which Congress has repeatedly affirmed. Because the federal government owns the public land and habitat, and the states manage the fish

and wildlife, cooperation is compelled in order to integrate fish and wildlife population objectives into the federal land/habitat management plans.

The Association was a key player in working with the State Department and what is now known as the US Fish and Wildlife Service to negotiate the Migratory Bird Treaty of 1916 with Canada. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 codified the treaty provisions and gave direction to the Secretary on migratory bird management including the provision of regulating hunting of migratory game birds. The MBTA recognizes that both the states and the federal government share jurisdictional responsibilities for migratory bird conservation.

As Congress enacted federal land management agencies' organic acts in the last century, Congress, at the urging of the Association, preserved the authority of the states to manage fish and wildlife on federal lands, with the exception of congressionally delegated National Parks. The federal land management agencies incorporated that Congressional direction into agency rules, guidance and manuals.

I would like to share some national examples of landscape conservation delivered by solid state-federal cooperation. The backdrop created by these national programs powers delivery of on-the-ground conservation in every state.

Migratory Bird Joint Ventures

Thirty years ago, there was no roadmap for Migratory Bird Joint Ventures. The early partnerships were forged with profound ingenuity to address the continental problem of declining waterfowl populations and rapid destruction of habitat. Today, the regional landscape-based Joint Ventures are collaborative partnerships of government agencies, non-profit organizations, corporations, tribes, and individuals that conserve habitat for priority bird species, other wildlife, and people in support of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Through voluntary, proactive conservation, Joint Ventures reduce the need for additional regulations by undertaking biological planning, conservation design, project implementation, monitoring, evaluation, research, and communications. In the United States, 18 habitat-based joint ventures have a long history of success in leveraging public and private resources and since the first Joint Venture was established in 1987, these partnerships have leveraged appropriated funds at a ratio of over 30:1 and have helped conserve 24 million acres of habitat. Joint Venture habitat conservation harnesses the interest and energy of the participating organizations and provides hunting and fishing opportunities, birdwatching, places to hike, camp, and enjoy nature, and create places where our future generations will be able to enjoy their natural heritage.

The US Forest Service (USFS) is a member of 7 Joint Venture Management Boards, and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is a member of 6 management boards. However, there are opportunities for both agencies to engage with more Joint Venture management boards or technical committees. There are numerous examples of highly successful collaboration, but I will focus on only a few of the more active partnerships. The Eastern Region of the US Forest Service and state partners are working with the Appalachian Mountains and Central Hardwood Joint Ventures on oak restoration and early successional habitat through workshops to train state, federal, and private landowners on management practices to benefit native wildlife, including

songbirds and game birds. The Region is also working with the Upper Mississippi River/Great Lakes Joint Venture to better coordinate migratory bird monitoring protocols and activities across agencies. The Alaska Region of the Forest Service is an active participant in the Pacific Birds Habitat Joint Venture promoting important conservation activities for the incredible migratory bird resource found in that region. The final example, is a self-directed partnership of federal and state agencies, non-government agencies, private land owners, and the Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV) that are all focused on the sagebrush ecosystem.

The sagebrush ecosystem today is approximately half of its original size and it is considered one of America's most iconic ecosystems. It exemplifies a working landscape. This vast landscape covers eleven states and over 173 million acres and provides habitat for sage grouse and more than 350 other species. Public lands managed by the BLM and U.S. Forest Service make up more than half of all sage grouse habitat. The partnership model is based on three ingredients for success: (1) Putting science into practice; (2) Restoring and conserving sagebrush habitat for all users; and (3) Telling the story to garner support to further sagebrush conservation and management. This Sage Grouse Initiative is by far the largest and most active partnership between the Intermountain West Joint Venture, USFS, BLM, and USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service. BLM is providing up to $5 million over five years (2016-2021) to scale up proactive, targeted sagebrush rangeland conservation on public and private lands and leverage other resources through partnerships and collaborative efforts.
http://mbjv.org/

National Fish Habitat Partnership

The National Fish Habitat Partnership, which was formalized in 2006 through the Department of Commerce, the Department of the Interior, and State Fish and Wildlife Agencies has done some extraordinary work across the landscape through 20 regional partnerships established to protect, restore and enhance fish habitat benefitting anglers and our citizens across the country. Since 2006, nearly 700 projects have been implemented under the national partnership reversing and arresting declines in aquatic habitat. In addition to enhancing fish habitat, these projects contribute significantly to water purification for our citizens. Since its inception, the program has leveraged $66 million with nearly $115 million of state, local, and private funds directly benefitting on-the-ground conservation actions. A Secretarial MOU was also signed in 2012 between the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce and the Interior to adopt the partnership program within Department agencies.

A few examples of projects that I would like to highlight include collaborations between our regional partnerships and the US Forest Service and BLM. The Western Native Trout Initiative, under the National Fish Habitat Partnership program is collaborating with the U.S. Forest Service (Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest), the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, and numerous other partners on a large scale, highly leveraged public-private partnership on the Mill Creek Watershed Restoration Project (MCWRP) a multi-year project to improve native fish habitat in Mill Creek just outside of Salt Lake City, Utah. The Mill Creek Project objectives are to remove ten man-made barriers, removal of an unneeded bridge and an abandoned hydroelectric dam, redesign of the stream channel, improved fishing access, redesign of a small lake to include a spawning channel, replacement of seven undersized culverts that are partial fish

barriers, and the development of educational materials for the public about the importance of aquatic and terrestrial resources, including native fish. Project partners include the US Forest Service, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, the National Forest Foundation, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Great Salt Lake Council of the Boy Scouts of America, PacifiCorp, Trout Unlimited Utah Council and Stonefly Society, Flying Cloud Enterprises Inc., Utah Habitat Council Watershed Restoration Initiative, and Salt Lake County.
http://www.fishhabitat.org/

White-nose Syndrome Bat Research

Good state-federal cooperation for key research is producing results for practitioners to deliver on the ground conservation results. A team of U. S. Forest Service Research and Development scientists have developed innovative methods to treat bats infected with deadly white-nose fungus, using chemicals found in soil bacteria. White-nose Syndrome, caused by the fungus, was introduced accidentally into the United States in 2006 and has since led directly to the deaths of over 5 million insect-eating bats in 30 U. S. states and 5 Canadian provinces. Populations of several North American species of bats have declined so precipitously that they have been considered for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act. The USFS research team has worked closely with state fish and wildlife agencies and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service to test methods for treating infected bats in the laboratory. The first group of successfully treated bats was released back into the wild at the Mark Twain Cave Complex in Missouri on May 20th, 2015.
https://www.nrs.fs.fed.us/news/release/wns-treated-bats-released

Sage Grouse Initiative

Collaboration between diverse partners is what's working to save sage grouse as well as the vast sagebrush sea that sustains communities and 350+ species. The Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) is a new paradigm for conserving at-risk wildlife and America's western rangelands that works through voluntary cooperation, incentives, and community support. Launched in 2010, SGI is a partnership-based, science-driven effort which is led by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. SGI applies the power of the Farm Bill to target lands where habitats are intact and sage grouse numbers are highest. To date, SGI has partnered with 1,474 ranchers to conserve 5.6 million acres across 11 western states. While private lands are the primary focus, SGI also serves as a catalyst for public land enhancements such as a recent Bureau of Land Management 5-year agreement working cooperatively across boundaries to benefit both working public lands and wildlife across the sagebrush sea by implementing targeted conservation projects.
https://www.sagegrouseinitiative.com/

Environmental DNA Sampling

In 2014, the U. S. Forest Service launched the National Genomics Center for Fish and Wildlife Conservation, based at the University of Montana in Missoula, to apply new and cutting-edge technologies to the practice of fish and wildlife management. The Center specializes in applications such as environmental DNA, or "eDNA," which uses small amounts of DNA

present in water samples to detect and monitor the presence of rare or invasive aquatic species. Modern eDNA methods are much cheaper and require less effort than traditional ways of sampling fish and other aquatic organisms. The Center also uses new genomics approaches to study population dynamics in terrestrial species of conservation or management interest, including greater sage-grouse, wolverine, and gray wolf. The Genomics Center is currently investigating greater sage-grouse genetic variation, population structure, and population connectivity. This research is providing scientific support for prioritizing conservation actions on the ground for the greater sage-grouse, such as identifying critical habitat and breeding grounds, or leks. Most importantly, the research from the Genomics Center will allow managers to evaluate how disturbances at individual leks influence the overall connectivity of the breeding network. The Genomics Center is analyzing genetic data from several thousand samples, collected from over 800 leks across Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota. This work is being done in collaboration with other federal agencies, non-profit organizations, and eleven state fish and wildlife agencies.
https://www.fs.fed.us/research/genomics-center/

Prescribed Fire Restoration

Good state-federal cooperation is also occurring in the southeast. At Tallulah Gorge State Park in northeast Georgia, the mountainous terrain is so steep that much of it cannot be traversed with equipment, and some areas are too steep to travel by foot. Most of the forest in this area is dominated by fire-dependent Table Mountain pine and pitch pine and includes a number of rare fire dependent plant communities that are conservation priorities. Property lines between the Chattahoochee National Forest and Tallulah Gorge State Park traverse this steep terrain, making use of prescribed fire nearly impossible until recently. Collaboration between the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has taken the pressure off burn managers to keep their fires 'in the lines' and opened up vast areas of the park and the adjoining national forest for habitat restoration with prescribed fire. Burns are now conducted as joint operations between the two agencies with fires traversing USFS and State Park lands. USFS and DNR lend expertise and share burn planning efforts in the year leading up to the burn as well as share fire equipment, personnel and even aviation resources on the day of burns. Whereas a few years ago fire had to stop at the property line, making many burn units simply too risky to attempt, in recent years thousands of acres have been burned by the two agencies operating seamlessly toward the common goal of putting fire back into the landscape surrounding Tallulah Gorge. This model is also being carried on a larger scale within the framework of Georgia's Interagency Burn Team (IBT), whose members include U.S. Forest Service and Georgia Department of Natural Resources among others. The outcome is increased capability to successfully implement prescribed fire on high priority conservation sites throughout Georgia to implement technically challenging burns on many other important conservation sites supporting high priority species and habitats.

Idaho

I'd like to put on my IDFG Director hat and provide you with a snapshot of some Idaho collaboratives. While many of our initial structured collaboratives were focused on U.S. Forest

Service (USFS) forest restoration to benefit multiple resources and values, a diversity of issues are being addressed.

Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative

The Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative (KVRI), of which the IDFG Commission is a member, is a USFS recognized collaborative. Stemming from the 1990s when virtually every natural resource topic was adversarial between one community and governmental sector or another, its focus is the development and selection of land management (timber harvest, fire management, road management) projects. The USFS provides funds to the Idaho Panhandle Forest to facilitate collaborative project development and implementation on the Bonners Ferry Ranger District. It was initiated by a joint powers agreement between Boundary County, the City of Bonners Ferry, and the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho. Membership is very diverse representing several private and governmental sectors of the community. KVRI has been highly successful in removing barriers to communications, increased understanding of multiple perspectives, and engaged problem solving. Some notable successes include the development of a Kootenai River burbot conservation strategy, a wetland restoration "roadmap", and advancement of community awareness to advance grizzly bear recovery while being sensitive to community needs for enhanced land management. KVRI has fostered productive working relationships between state and federal agencies, the Kootenai Tribe, and the community.
https://www.nationalforests.org/assets/pdfs/Overcoming-Collaborative-Fatigue_Perry.pdf

Clearwater Bain Collaborative

The Clearwater Basin Collaborative (CBC) mission statement is "working to enhance and protect the economic and ecological values of the Clearwater Basin of Idaho". With a foundation in the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, the intent was to treat priority landscapes that was at least 50,000 acres, comprised primarily of national forest System lands in need of active ecosystem restoration and in proximity to existing or proposed wood-processing infrastructure. The federal nexus is an MOU between the Clearwater Basin Collaborative and the U.S. Forest Service, Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests.

The CBC, which includes IDFG, is guided by an agreement and workplan that addresses multiple elements, ranging from forest management to rural economic needs, important to the diverse array of parties. The workplan is a comprehensive approach designed to address diverse and often competing interests and formalizes the parties' commitment to work through these issues. CBC approaches its deliberations as a problem-solving body seeking to produce consensus recommendations that address, insofar as possible, the practical needs and interests of all participants. The group works jointly to educate and build understanding regarding participants values and interests.
http://clearwaterbasincollaborative.org/

Rangeland Fire Protection Associations

The power and success of state, federal, and private entities collaborating together to effect multiple use benefits from our federally managed lands has expanded beyond forestry projects. I

point to Rangeland Fire Protection Associations (RFPAs) in Idaho. Prior to 2012, ranchers could not legally fight rangeland fires that threatened their livelihood and sage-grouse habitat even though they could provide swift initial response because of their knowledge of the land and proximity to the fires. A collaborative effort between local ranchers, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Idaho Department of Lands created the RFPAs which also receive financial support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. For the 2016 fire season, there were 250 ranchers that were members of 8 different RFPAs, protecting over 7.7 million acres. Meeting the important principle that collaborations succeed when outcomes fulfill mutual interests, RFPAs allow ranchers to be active participants in protecting the forage needed for their livelihood, satisfy fire manager's safety concerns regarding training, equipment, and communications, support a comprehensive and coordinated approach to fire suppression in Idaho, and enhance efforts to protect sage grouse habitat, a benefit not only to Idaho, but also to the nation.
https://www.idl.idaho.gov/fire/rfpa/

Upper Salmon Basin Watershed Program

The watershed program arose from the "Model Watershed" of the early 1990s, which originated form the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's strategy for salmon recovery, and is currently led by the Idaho Office of Species Conservation. Originally focused on certain key tributaries in the upper Salmon Basin, the areas was expanded to the entire Upper Salmon River Basin in 2000. This collaborative program focuses on projects such as riparian habitat restoration, fish migration barrier removal, and instream flow enhancement in priority watersheds for anadromous fish that result in more resilient watersheds that contribute to Snake River salmon and steelhead recovery and are compatible with local agriculture needs for water and private working landscapes. What could be more controversial than water in a western state – yet since 1993, the program has accomplished 544 restoration projects, many of which are on private land. Unlike many of the federal land-focused collaboratives, partnership with private landowners is essential to this program. Federal managers in the area, such as NOAA Fisheries and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management are members of the program along with IDFG and other state agencies, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, local community groups such as the Salmon Valley Stewardship, and other non-governmental organizations engaged in natural resource issues such as the Nature Conservancy and Trout Unlimited.
http://modelwatershed.org/

Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool (CHAT)

I have provided you with some examples of national and Idaho collaboratives that I think serve as models of success to achieve state and federal priorities focused on-the-ground. I'll pivot and offer a glimpse of another important type of collaboration – shared data consistently presented to ensure better integration of state fish and wildlife information into landscape-scale decisions and planning.

In 2013, the Western Governors Association (WGA) unveiled an unprecedented and cooperative effort of 16 Western states to provide the public and industry an overview of "crucial habitat"

across the West, called the CHAT. This landscape map developed from state-led data provided a "30,000-foot view" of habitat for pre-planning that could be used for projects as varied as "macro-siting" energy corridors and transmission routes, to comparing fish and wildlife habitat across the West. Significant federal funding and partnership enabled states to come together to fulfil the WGA vision.

The CHAT is now a new initiative of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA). WAFWA and the western states remain committed to providing comparable and cohesive state-based fish and wildlife information across the landscape and to creating a multi-faceted tool providing accurate and objective fish and wildlife information to guide landscape planning decisions of tomorrow. WAFWA is currently working with western states and federal partners, such as a recent grant from the Network of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, to facilitate continued CHAT data integration into land use decisions and explore new cross-state data sharing tools that benefits states and other conservation and management partners.

Structural Success

I point to structural components of the Clearwater Basin Collaborative that beget success. The collaborative is a self-formed and self-governing group with representation from individuals with a diversity of interests and backgrounds. The group operates in accordance with a specific set of protocols, and members are responsible to act in good faith to develop workable solutions that the address the needs of all interest at the table. Part of what makes it tick are committed co-chairs, committed members, and a belief and understanding by all participants that collaboration is the way to move the ball forward in the Clearwater Basin. The group is committed to meeting regularly and operates under a no-surprises principle in the public eye. It holds itself accountable to a workplan and defined objectives. Federal funding supports this structure.

My personal observations about what fosters success generally mirror observations detailed in *Getting Together in Idaho: A Survey of Six Collaborative Efforts on Public Lands* (C. Weiland, 2002).

- There must be strong incentives to bring diverse and competing interests together and to stay committed at the table to create mutual outcomes; there must be strong disincentive to "hijack" the process to favor a particular interest.

- There must be balanced representation of interests that is understanding and respectful of sovereign authorities, including management of public trust assets.

- There must be clear objectives, i.e. is the collaborative designed for recommendations? For decisions and implementation?

- Process must be consistent and transparent and process challenges and complexities must be clearly articulated up front.

- There must be sufficient fiscal and human infrastructure support.

In closing, thank-you for the opportunity to offer information and perspectives about collaboratives on behalf of the Association and Idaho. I would be pleased to answer any questions and I am available for any further inquiry or follow-up from the Subcommittee.

Senator LEE. Thank you, sir.
Mr. Thompson.

STATEMENT OF TYLER THOMPSON, DIRECTOR, UTAH'S WATERSHED RESTORATION INITIATIVE, UTAH DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you, Chairman Lee, for the opportunity to testify before this Committee today about Utah's Watershed Restoration Initiative, or WRI. As an employee of the Utah Department of Natural Resources, I currently serve as the Director of WRI. WRI is one of the West's unique success stories. It ensures that federal, state and local partners can work together across ownership boundaries with unmatched speed and efficiency to improve large landscapes.

Utah's WRI focuses on improving three key things: watershed health and biological diversity, water quality and yield, and opportunities for sustainable uses of natural resources. Now entering its 12th year, the WRI partnership has completed more than 1,600 projects and restored more than 1.3 million acres on federal, state and private lands in Utah. Investment from over 500 unique funding sources now exceeds $160 million. Most of that funding comes from federal and state sources including, on average, more than $5 million annually from the State of Utah, over $7 million annually from federal sources, and nearly $2 million annually from sportsmen's groups.

Like many successful programs before it, WRI developed out of crisis. In the early 2000s, Utah was in the midst of a long-term drought. Across the state, sagebrush ecosystems were in decline as pinyon and juniper trees continued to crowd out understory forage plants necessary for both livestock and wildlife. Aspen was in decline and invasive species, such as cheatgrass, were beginning to dominate large landscapes after more frequent and widespread wildfires.

Utah's WRI has organized itself as a bottom-up initiative with five independent regional teams. These teams consist of regional resource professionals from federal, state and local agencies, as well as sportsmen's groups, environmental organizations, private landowners and other natural-resource-oriented groups. These regional teams identify where restoration projects are needed and what needs to be done. The teams annually rank their project proposals with guidance from WRI administration, which then matches the proposals, in ranked order, to appropriate and willing funding sources until funds are exhausted. The regional teams then help each other implement large-scale restoration projects across ownership boundaries.

For Utah's damaged landscapes, WRI is making a huge difference. Burned areas are swiftly being reseeded with plants beneficial to wildlife and livestock; stream and riparian restoration has improved water flow and quality; sagebrush and aspen ecosystems are being restored, benefiting hundreds of species that rely on them for food and shelter; sage grouse and other at-risk wildlife species are holding steady or increasing in numbers; and Utah's sportsmen are enjoying healthier and more abundant game statewide.

Today, I'd like to highlight a few of the more important strategies that have helped WRI to be successful over the last 12 years.

First. Utah's Department of Natural Resources, or DNR, has taken on the major organizing role in WRI. Through federal authorities, such as the Wyden Amendment and the Good Neighbor Authority, federal agencies have developed assistance agreements with DNR. Those agreements send federal funds to be pooled with other state and non-governmental resources. This allows WRI to fund and complete restoration work across ownership boundaries on a larger scale, at a much quicker pace and for a fraction of the cost. Over the life of the initiative, DNR has routed more than $44 million in federal funds through WRI, without taking a dime in overhead.

Second. The state government system of awarding competitive contracts is much more efficient than the federal system. This allows WRI to quickly implement restoration projects and wildfire rehabilitation by swiftly purchasing seed, completing cultural resource surveys and hiring contractors to complete the work.

Third. WRI encourages regional teams to complete large-scale, cross-boundary, programmatic NEPA work. To advance this effort, WRI has developed a special funding source to help federal agencies complete the NEPA process in areas where restoration is desperately needed but, due to other priorities, federal land management agencies may not have the time or staff to dedicate to the analysis. WRI-NEPA funds are being made available to fund overtime hours for current federal employees or to hire outside contractors to help complete this critical NEPA work.

In summary, WRI tackles landscape scale challenges with a powerful, effective partnership.

Thank you again for the opportunity.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Thompson follows:]

June 20, 2017

Congressional Testimony from

Tyler Thompson

Director

Utah's Watershed Restoration Initiative

Utah Department of Natural Resources

Before the

United States Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests and Mining

Chairman Lee, members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for the invitation to testify before this committee about Utah's Watershed Restoration Initiative.

As an employee of the Utah Department of Natural Resources, I currently serve as the Director of Utah's Watershed Restoration Initiative (WRI). Before accepting this position in January 2017, I spent three years as a restoration biologist in southern Utah and more than a decade as the funding and operations coordinator for the Initiative.

WRI is one of the West's unique success stories. It ensures that federal, state and local partners can work together across boundaries — with unmatched speed and efficiency — to improve large landscapes. Utah's WRI focuses on improving three key things:

- Watershed health and biological diversity
- Water quality and yield
- Opportunities for sustainable uses of natural resources

Now entering its 12th year, the WRI partnership has completed more than 1,600 projects and restored more than 1.3 million acres of watersheds on federal, state and private lands in Utah. The cost of this work now exceeds $160 million. More than 500 unique funding sources have been used to help fund WRI projects over the years. Most of that funding comes from federal and state sources, including, on average, more than $5 million annually from the State of Utah, over $7 million annually from Federal sources and nearly $2 million annually from sportsmen's groups.

Like many successful programs before it, WRI developed out of crisis. In the early 2000s, Utah was in the midst of a long-term drought. Across the state, Sagebrush ecosystems were in decline as pinyon and juniper trees continued to crowd out understory forage plants

necessary for both wildlife and livestock. Aspen was in decline and invasive species, such as cheatgrass, were beginning to dominate large landscapes after more frequent, widespread wildfires.

To address the crisis, leadership from federal and state land-management agencies met with other natural-resource-oriented agencies and organizations from across the state. In 2005, this group formalized the WRI partnership by drafting a charter that outlined future cooperation and leadership in addressing major natural resource threats at a watershed scale.

Utah's WRI has organized itself as a bottom-up initiative with five independent regional teams. These teams consist of regional resource professionals from federal, state and local agencies as well as sportsmen's groups, environmental organizations, private landowners and other natural-resource-oriented groups. These regional teams identify where restoration projects are needed and what needs to be done. The teams annually rank their project proposals with guidance from WRI administration, which then match the proposals — in ranked order — to appropriate and willing funding sources, until funds are exhausted. The regional teams then help each other implement large-scale restoration projects across ownership boundaries.

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Today, I'd like to highlight a few of the most important strategies that have helped WRI to be successful over the last 12 years:

First: Utah's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has taken on the major organizing role in WRI. Through federal authorities (such as the Wyden Amendment and the Good Neighbor Authority), federal agencies have developed assistance agreements with DNR. Those agreements send federal funds to be pooled with other state and non-government resources. This allows WRI to fund and complete restoration work across ownership boundaries on a larger scale, at a much quicker pace and for a fraction of the cost. Over the life of the Initiative, DNR has routed more than $44 million dollars in federal funds through WRI, without taking a dime in overhead.

Second: The state government system of awarding competitive contracts is much more efficient than the federal system. This allows WRI to quickly implement restoration projects and wildfire rehabilitation by swiftly purchasing seed, completing cultural resource surveys and hiring contractors to complete the work.

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agencies complete the NEPA process in areas where restoration is desperately needed but, due to other priorities, federal land management agencies may not have the time or staff to dedicate to the analysis. WRI-NEPA funds are made available to fund overtime hours for current federal employees or to hire outside contractors to help complete critical NEPA work.

Fourth: Utah uses the existing WRI partnership to complete restoration, on an emergency basis, following wildfire. Federal programs such as BLM's Emergency Stabilization and the USFS' Burned Area Emergency Response typically focus on stabilization of soils to minimize runoff and sediment flows following burns. WRI partners supplement these federal efforts with additional seed and funding to turn these stabilization efforts into a more complete restoration of watershed health and to extend restoration onto adjacent burned state and private lands. This helps benefits wildlife habitat, water quality and quantity, livestock forage, and reduces the risk of future catastrophic fires. Fire rehabilitation in Utah is now completed across ownership boundaries and at a large scale.

In summary, WRI tackles landscape scale challenges with a powerful, effective partnership. Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.

For more information on Utah's Watershed Restoration Initiative,

Please visit our website:

watershed.utah.gov

Senator LEE. Thanks to all of you for your prepared testimony. We are now going to have some questions and this gives me a unique opportunity, especially if we do not have any other members show up, that gives me more time to ask questions. So I appreciate your willingness to answer them.

Mr. Thompson, let's start with you. Wildfire is obviously a concern in Utah, as it is in most parts of the Western United States. Certainly, it is something that challenges everyone everywhere with the type of land susceptible to wildfires, but we have a whole lot of those lands in the Western United States and especially in Utah. Wildfires burned about 100,000 acres in Utah just last year alone—that is a big deal.

Now our policy discussions often focus, somewhat understandably, on fire prevention efforts and on fire suppression efforts. It is not surprising that that is the case, but it is also important to recognize the significance and the deep importance of wildfire rehabilitation because what you do after a wildfire can determine a lot in terms of the ultimate outcome.

You referenced WRI's work with wildfire rehabilitation in your testimony. I understand the group's efforts on that front have been extraordinarily effective. Can you briefly explain to us how the program works and why it has been successful?

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you, Chairman Lee. Thank you.

Utah's program is unique. We've taken this WRI partnership and we've utilized it to complete fire rehab, as you mentioned. In Utah, we have funding sources that tie into the federal stabilization programs that help us to rehabilitate across ownership boundaries.

In 2007, when we had Utah's largest wildfire, the Milford Flat Fire, we realized as different agencies that we didn't have the time or the resources to complete this on our own, as we had been doing for years. So we came together. We tore down all the burned fences and we used this WRI partnership to pool funds again in DNR. And DNR and WRI came together and put contracts out, got the seed purchased, got the seed mixed, had it tested and we came up with a single strategy and a single seed mix that could be put out across ownership boundaries. This was the only way that we were able to actually complete that restoration.

The federal programs have historically focused on stabilization, and the State of Utah is unique in the fact that it supplements those seed mixes with more forbs and more shrubs so that we can complete a full restoration program. I think that's something that's unique to Utah and I think it's been very successful, and we've been able to tackle these large years where we have hundreds of thousands of acres of fires.

Senator LEE. Thank you.

Ms. Weldon, let's turn to you. You briefly mentioned the Good Neighbor Authority and mentioned that as an effective way to deal with restoration issues and to meet restoration goals because it allows the Forest Service to work with state agencies and to access and benefit from some of the state agency expertise. Are there other areas of federal land management that could benefit from this type of approach?

Ms. WELDON. Yes, thanks for your question.

So we're, with the Good Neighbor Authority, we're really starting with the idea that state forestry agencies and the national forest and private landowners have a lot of shared ownership in outcomes on both sides or all sides of the boundaries.

The example around wildfire is also very important as it relates to reducing hazardous fuels, but we also have examples where we have states—I believe New Mexico was the first, and I believe Oregon—are also working with us for projects that are focusing on wildlife habitat improvement. But even beyond that, there's opportunities for us to look at things like shared management of recreation facilities and that.

So we're in a mode of really exploring into that and want to make sure, as we get confident and good examples early on, that we're actively expanding that to other areas where we could, where we have shared interest in serving the public and through conservation.

Senator LEE. That is good in a time when every penny counts.

Ms. WELDON. Every penny counts, exactly.

Senator LEE. That can be very helpful.

Ms. WELDON. Every penny and every bit of skill and expertise counts.

Senator LEE. Sure. Thank you.

Now, Ms. Bail, BLM has not enjoyed the benefits of Good Neighbor Authority for quite as long as the Forest Service has, but is the BLM, so far, having similar success with it?

Ms. BAIL. Yes, sir. We are currently using the Good Neighbor Authority and are in the process of expanding it in four states. We either have agreements, a grant in development or in discussions. And similar to what Ms. Weldon talked about, you know, there's a lot of opportunity and utility and need for additional arrangements in this regard. And we look forward to continuing collaborative discussions with states where we have shared interests and needs to fully utilize this very important authority.

Senator LEE. Do you have any idea what areas you think might be ripe for that kind of work?

Ms. BAIL. Leslie mentioned recreation, but certainly there are millions of acres of areas in the Great Basin and others that need treatment, you know, pinyon, juniper, treating invasive cheatgrass.

There are many common interests to preventing the spread of that invasive annual grass as well as getting our rangelands more productive and more fire resilient. And so, continuing to work on those on-the-ground efforts, fostering those partnerships and collaborative efforts to look across fences, you know, neighbor-up and really prioritize, as you mentioned, where we have only limited fiscal resources. Let's do it smart, let's do it together, get the most effect for our investment. And these collaborative partnership efforts really help us do that.

Senator LEE. Thank you.

Mr. Moore, this morning we heard about some of the more successful collaborative initiatives. Not all, of course, have achieved equal results and some have even failed. In your experience, what distinguishes those that succeed and perform really well and those that do not?

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Certainly, I think it is having very committed individuals for the self-governing and self-formed groups that are out there. Really what it means though, is people who have individual interest, or their entities have interest, is to come to the table with an understanding that all of those interests have to be accepted and interacted on. What undermines them, the ones that I have seen that have failed over the years, are people that came in with interest and were uncompromising in the approach in which their interest and need was addressed. They had a solution that they wanted on the table for the issue they brought there and they were not willing to find other solutions that met the need of the whole. And being sure that we have the necessary mechanisms in place to protect those collaboratives as they've moved forward with solutions from being undermined unnecessarily by folks that are single-approach in what they do, I think, is very important.

Certainly, all entities have certain rights relative to the processes we have, the public processes we have. But it's been my experience that the ones that have been most durable have been those where the interests have been broad, I mean, everybody is at the table. And when a challenge came to their outputs, whatever that might be, they stood together—state, federal, county, NGO, tribe, you name it, the private landowners—relative to the various administrative challenges, even up to and including court review, and they persisted because they stood together against those few that might be on the outside.

At the same time, the use of federal processes—in particular, NEPA—to stall, delay or interfere with what has been well-thought-out collaboratives is an issue that has to be taken up by the collaborative, the way that Utah has done it with broad-ranging types of NEPA that are programmatic in nature that can get us through those hoops. I do think that we need to reexamine NEPA from the standpoint of can we give local managers more discretion to use their various decision-making authority to get these important things done?

When it comes to fire rehab, we can cut through all the red tape in the world to get things done. When it comes to fire prevention, we don't seem to be able to get through the red tape. When it comes to management for conservation, then we get stalled out. So why can't we use those same mechanisms to get the work done to keep a fire from occurring that it might take to restore from that fire?

Senator LEE. Right.

I have a friend who is fond of saying that when you are holding a hammer, and only a hammer, everything looks like a nail. It sounds like you are saying if people who are willing to recognize that there are tools other than hammers that one can use, one is willing to keep an open mind and if you can keep those people involved in the process, you can find more collaborative solutions.

Mr. MOORE. Agreed.

Senator LEE. Mr. Thompson, given the onerous litigation delays that we hear about with other restoration projects, including some collaborative restoration projects, one of the more impressive and unusual accomplishments of WRI is that it has dealt with very little litigation. How did you do this? How did you avoid it?

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you, Senator Lee.

I think, you know, the way we deal with this in Utah is we bring folks together at the beginning. We build large collaboratives on the ground, at the ground level. We build these collaboratives before we start writing the NEPA. We include all of the different stakeholders as we move through the NEPA process. There's not always agreement. There's not always unanimous consent on the things that we're trying to do, but just the fact that we include those folks is extremely important.

And then we write simplified NEPA documents and I think that's an art that's been lost in the federal agencies. NEPA documents have gotten so large and so unwieldy that they are difficult when it comes to the challenges that come. And we write very simple, very short documents that still cover all of the issues that are important. And, to date, I think we've had one challenge, and we were successful when that was litigated.

Senator LEE. Is there anything we can do, anything that can be done with NEPA to make collaborative projects, like WRI, move forward more smoothly?

Mr. THOMPSON. Certainly in the beginning of the initiative we had the categorical exclusions that allowed us to do 1,000-acre and less projects on federal lands when it came to issues that were fuels- and fire-related. Those categorical exclusions have since gone away. Those were heavily utilized by the watershed initiative and the return of those type of categorical exclusions would obviously be helpful.

Senator LEE. When were those put in? When did they go away?

Mr. THOMPSON. I believe they came in during the Bush Administration. And I think they were litigated and I'm not sure, timing-wise, when they went away, but it's been about a decade since we've had use of those.

Senator LEE. How were they put in in the first place?

Mr. THOMPSON. I believe they were part of the Bush Administration's Healthy Forest Initiative.

Senator LEE. Okay, so it was in a regulatory rather than a statutory change that brought that up.

Mr. THOMPSON. I believe so, yes.

Senator LEE. Okay, thank you.

Senator Daines.

Senator DAINES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding this important hearing.

Ms. Weldon, it is good to see you here again today. Thank you for testifying.

Anytime we have discussions about forest management I wish we could take folks here in Washington, DC, out to Montana and spend time around a table listening to our conservation groups. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation most recently—two weeks ago—was talking about the fact that we can no longer get in and do responsible forest management projects. Of course, timber is a renewable resource and it just continues to grow and grow and grow—we are not thinning. The habitat now is getting to be a point where it is not suitable for elk.

Of course, when Lewis and Clark came out to Montana the elk were out in the plains, as were the grizzly bears, but with man

coming out West, we have moved those animals up in the mountains and they have adapted. But when you move them to the mountains they have to have grass to eat. When you have the thick forest, you do not get the sun down, get the grass sunk through the bottom because of the canopies, you do not have grass and you do not have elk anymore.

So it is a serious issue. Never mind the issue of loss of our jobs from 30 active sawmills when I was a kid growing up in Montana down to eight. We see counties in Montana that have 90 plus percent of their lands that are controlled by the Federal Government, and they pay no taxes. Consequently, we have counties that are just dying on a vine, literally, back home because we have lost the revenue that used to come off our national forests for the jobs, revenue to support our infrastructure.

We have county commissioners now, literally, having to jump on snow plows in the wintertime and plow the road to get the school buses through because we cannot afford to hire men and women to run the graters.

It is truly a sad state and unfortunately, in my home State of Montana, our forests used to have loggers in there responsibly managing our forests. Now our forests are crawling with lawyers. Virtually every timber project, almost every one of them, gets litigated by extreme environmental groups after we have outstanding collaborative efforts. You bring everybody together—conservation groups, timber industry—and then we get litigated and the projects, oftentimes, are halted.

I strongly support efforts to increase collaborative forest management. As you know very well, fire risk and other forest health challenges have no regard for these boundaries. I joined Senator Amy Klobuchar in sponsoring legislation to encourage partnerships between the Forest Service and state foresters to carry out cross-boundary restoration projects, including on federal lands. Our bill codifies and expands existing initiatives and encourages the use of Good Neighbor Authority to achieve better forest management. At another hearing just last week, Chief Tidwell expressed agreement with these goals. I look forward to further discussing this bill with you and your colleagues at the Forest Service.

I have a few questions here, and they will all be for Ms. Weldon today. I was struck just a few weeks ago when I brought Senator Pat Roberts, Chairman of the Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee, to hear some of these firsthand stories from folks on the ground up in Columbia Falls, Montana, up in the Northwest part of our state. We had a couple folks representing the timber industry there. They are all running a single shift, single shift. We had five or six members of the press there, and sometimes the story will get construed that suggests that the reason we are running single shift is because the demand for lumber is not there.

Our timber folks reminded us that the demand has not been better. The constraint is logs. We would run additional shifts in our operations if we could get logs—we cannot get enough logs. The tragedy, we are having these meetings—we are staring at millions of acres of national forest, in some cases, dead and dying timber because of beetle kill—and we cannot get in there and harvest and responsibly manage our forests. We are shipping logs in from Can-

ada. We are shipping logs in from hundreds of miles away from neighboring states because we cannot get logs and we are surrounded by them there in Montana.

A question, Ms. Weldon. In your testimony, you highlight efforts by the State of Montana to accelerate forest management in our national forests, yet I am hearing concerns that Good Neighbor Authority is not working as effectively in Montana as it should because there are not enough NEPA-ready projects, even with the Farm bill's expedited authorities at your disposal. Can you discuss the barriers the Forest Service faces to completing NEPA on these common-sense projects more quickly?

Ms. WELDON. Great, thank you very much.

And I just want to echo your sentiment, you know, my experiences in Montana, earlier, really showed the value and importance of folks coming together across the landscape and really making some great progress.

So having NEPA-ready projects is a challenge and struggle. Part of that comes from the fact that, as you mentioned, there is quite a bit of litigation with our projects that we do get decisions on. And that has the effect of taking the workforce, the experts that would be working on that next NEPA project, and having them, you know, preparing for the litigation which takes quite a bit of time and energy.

So what we're working to do is still strengthen and build on collaboration for the results, but the region there has, in working with the states, looked at ways to increase our effectiveness in delivering NEPA. They have several pilots they're working on that have us with NEPA strike teams who are concentrating their efforts to increase the amount of decisions that we can get made and do it in a way that allows that more certainty as far as the types of projects that will come out.

So that's an area that we fully acknowledged. I've had some good conversations with the states and other partners on our need, as Tyler was saying, for us to really relook at how we apply our categorical exclusions, how we look at putting larger areas within our analysis so that we can get decisions on larger landscapes and then continue to make sure we're implementing every efficiency we can in delivering the NEPA process to get more work done.

Senator DAINES. Thank you and beyond addressing what, I believe, is excessive process and as well as extremely excessive litigation, are there reforms to Good Neighbor Authority or that build on Good Neighbor Authority that would help the Forest Service and their state partners carry out forest restoration projects faster?

Ms. WELDON. One big area of feedback we've been hearing, pretty much across the whole country, is around the restrictions that are in Good Neighbor Authority associated with the ability to share investments and work on road construction, reconstruction and maintenance that's associated with delivering the work. So that's one area that, as we look at a new Farm bill, we would like to address.

Senator DAINES. And my last question, Mr. Chairman, could I ask another question? I know I am out of time here.

Mr. Chairman, thank you, I have one more question for Ms. Weldon.

State foresters are required to develop State Forest Action Plans. Is the Forest Service consulting those plans in determining where to target fuels and forestry funding and has the agency leadership provided direction in that regard?

Ms. WELDON. I'm happy to report that our regional forester, Leon Martin, and the state forester in Montana have, over the last couple of years, really increased their efforts to look at the best places to make shared investments as it relates to reducing hazardous fuels and changing fire behavior.

The state forest action plans are a basis for that. They're also being considered in the places that we are revising or updating our forest plans. And it's a requirement within our 2012 planning rule to ensure that the information available, the strategic prioritization that's occurred with state forest action plans and others, other type, are considered. So that is happening in Montana.

Senator DAINES. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator LEE. Are there any examples any of you can point to of successful instances of interstate collaboration? The collaboration we are discussing here is important. Can you think of any good examples of where this has worked well across state lines?

Mr. Moore.

Mr. MOORE. Senator Lee, certainly there are a number of examples of interstate collaboration. I do believe the Sage Grouse Initiative that is occupying that large sagebrush-steppe habitats that encompass 11 states where the greater sage-grouse lives, is a very good example of our attempts at interstate collaboration.

Each state undertook to utilize the same science-based conservation objectives in designing unique state plans to address that large landscape across those various states. It was science-based, but then each state, working with the federal, private and state land managers there, came up with their own unique methods for dealing with what they felt were important to that state, relative to those landscapes, using that common science that was out there.

That common science came from a number of teams that were interdisciplinary and multi-state, but ultimately the process of NEPA, itself, for getting those plans approved was worked forward at the states' request to get this done, but failed as a collaborative at the end, in my estimation because once those state plans went forward, there was review in this town by some that modified those state plans for some states that created litigating and other issues associated with implementation we're still dealing with today. But it is an example of where my Governor put a task force together in the state to design across the board with industry and private lands, NGO's, a state plan that was honest to the science that did a great job of that—I co-chaired that effort for the Governor. And then it got spoiled at the end through the federal NEPA process and the fact that it was done actually well locally, but it got spoiled at the end from, frankly, a DC perspective, I'll be honest with you, and we're still trying to sort that out. And unfortunately, our local land managers on the federal side are somewhat constrained by those.

Senator LEE. Let me ask you, Ms. Weldon and Ms. Bail, what are some things we could do to streamline the NEPA process to make it not so burdensome?

Ms. WELDON. I'll start.

One thing that we can do is, as I mentioned before, make sure that we're making use of the categorical exclusions that we do have. We have quite a suite. Some of them came through with the Good Neighbor Authority and the Farm bill authorities for forestry.

I think there's a huge opportunity for us to look strategically in the context of projects that fit those goals; for example, for projects up to 3,000 acres, to reduce fuels, to do active forest management in places that there's agreement from a priority standpoint.

The other thing is for us to take a hard look at how we need to make sure we can get to a point where NEPA is doing what it needs to do from a legal standpoint and get away from, perhaps, many requirements that have built up over the years in a different era that may not be needed now.

So we're taking an active look at how to put our field folks, our practitioners and our decision-makers, in a place to really look at what is the, how do we meet that standard in such a way that allows us to do it more quickly, more efficiently and frankly, at a larger scale, as we're saying before to get more work, decisions for work to get done and focus on the implementation.

Senator LEE. Thank you.

Ms. Bail.

Ms. BAIL. In addition to what Ms. Weldon discussed, the Secretary has issued a memorandum that has started a process within the BLM for us to take a hard look at all of our processes, the land use planning process, the NEPA process, as well as how we comply with laws such as the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, et cetera.

How can we work better among federal agencies, how can we improve our business practices and processes, and how do we do what we need to do in a transparent way and more effective way and more cost-effective way?

So we're looking at everything from, you know, protest processes. We're looking at our internal policies. We're looking at are there regulatory things that we can do?

And then also would look forward to when we have our report that we are going to deliver to the Secretary on September 27th, having a conversation after that about how we can work together with this Committee or others who might be interested in moving forward on additional opportunities.

So we are in the process and we are getting a lot of great minds in the room and talking with, you know, CEQ and other very important folks to get their insights as well as other agencies so that—and we're very much focused on making the process better. We look forward to sharing what we find out here in the next few months.

Senator LEE. Thank you.

Senator Cortez Masto.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair, I appreciate it.

And apologies for the delay. I was in another committee meeting that was going on at the same time, but this issue is just as important to me, so I wanted to be here. And thank you for coming today. I know we changed the time of the hearing as well.

I am from the great State of Nevada. Over 80 percent of the land is owned as public land. Watershed protection is so important for Nevada, and our federal partners are key, as you well know.

Let me start off with Ms. Bail, with the BLM, because they are key partners for us in the State of Nevada. You mentioned that the BLM has partnered with the Nevada Departments of Wildlife and Conservation and Natural Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Newmont Mining Corporation on a sagebrush ecosystem conservation program for managing over 1.5 million acres of habitat. Can you elaborate on this partnership and why it has been so successful?

Ms. BAIL. Thank you, Senator.

And one thing that I believe is key to the success is that it was a willing landowner, voluntary effort, common interests and we're using the state conservation credit system, you know, so this is the state looking to facilitate conservation, financial incentives for doing so and meet conservation purposes.

So those efforts that are built, you know, from the ground up that build on common interests that are cross boundary and collaborative—all those are very much part of that success. And the fact that it is covering more than 1.5 million acres, I mean, there's a lot of ground that can be covered there. And we're very much looking forward to continuing to fulfill all of the opportunity that that provides.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. Thank you. I mentioned that because I agree with you. I think particularly in Nevada, where you have from the ground up all the stakeholders coming together who may have differing opinions initially, but when they come together they try to find common ground. That should be respected.

I am hoping that our federal partners, who are part of that conversation, and the leaders here are listening and respecting that and letting the states and those people that are on the ground living there know what's happening, and listening to what their recommendations are.

That's true in Nevada for sage grouse because I know we've done the same thing. The Governor has brought together key stakeholders trying to address this issue. We have all found common ground, and we'd hope that would be respected. So I appreciate those comments.

Talk to me about—and I am going to open this up to Ms. Weldon as well—wildfires. We have seen hot spots in Northern Nevada, particularly Northern California, and many parts of the West. This is going to be a difficult year for us, particularly because of cheatgrass. Can you talk a little bit about your thoughts on how we address that, particularly in an environment where we are cutting funding to the very resources that we are going to need, in both your agencies, to address these wildfires?

Ms. BAIL. That's where collaboration and partnerships become even more crucial. How can we work together, looking across fence lines, across boundaries and be strategic? There are some areas

that are already heavily infested with cheatgrass. Do we focus there or do we focus on protecting those areas that are still good habitats, still providing good livestock forage and, of course, protecting communities' economic livelihoods?

So having those conversations at the ground level and working together to determine where the best use of what funds we do have can be accomplished, you know, that's very important.

And then it takes a multiplicity of things. It's continuing research on how do we treat cheatgrass? You know, there are new biocides. How can we create fuel breaks along roads to stop fires and give the firefighters a better chance? How can we use targeted grazing along roads to natural, you know, through grazing, create fuel breaks and also provide an opportunity for willing permittees to have another opportunity for forage? Working with rural fire protection associations, you know, our, the ranchers on the ground that are the first responders that can get to a fire more quickly than the federal resources can.

So it's using all of those tools—having the relationships, having the conversation, looking across boundaries—those are going to be keys for success because we've got a big problem out there, millions and millions of acres and we'll keep chipping away at it.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. Thank you.

Ms. Weldon, do you want to add anything?

Ms. WELDON. I think Ms. Bail said it very well.

Those efforts to make sure that we're expanding our ability to share skills, expertise, in front of this problem, you know, which is really critical on a number of fronts, especially with our ability to ensure that we can continue with the grazing permittees and their uses as well as protecting and concerning sage grouse habitat. So, I think Kristin covered it very well.

Another thing to mention is around this, the great collaboration that's occurring with wildfire through the National Cohesive Wildfire Strategy. And that is really calling on prioritizing to the very local level, identifying important resources and looking at maximizing the impact of what everyone can contribute to achieve outcomes for the landscape, but more importantly for good suppression efforts and being able to protect community and community values.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Senator LEE. Thank you.

Mr. Thompson, what is the biggest obstacle to preventing or that prevents your expansion, that prevents you from doing more from your effort, that is stopping your effort from expanding its reach?

Mr. THOMPSON. Certainly funding is always an obstacle for us. We have, on average, about $30 million of requests each year. We can usually come up with about $15 or $18 million of that each year. So we have enough work on the ground. We have enough NEPA on the shelf and folks that are ready to implement shovel-ready projects. We just need the funding. We need more funding to help us get that in place.

And then, the areas that we are struggling with NEPA and, you know, any resources that we can develop or that we can apply to the federal agencies to help them hire employees or find outside contractors or whatever needs to be done to help get more of that

NEPA on the shelf and do it at a large scale and provide areas for us to move into where we can complete restoration year after year after year. Those are the real bottlenecks that we're struggling with.

Senator LEE. When you look at an area that has been affected by a fire 20 years down the road, one that has had a rehabilitation effort, can you tell an immediate difference between those that have received rehabilitation and those that have not?

Mr. THOMPSON. Absolutely. In this day and age where we have the destructive wildfires and we have species that have come from across the world and are invading these different wildfire areas, they do not set themselves on the trajectory that they have in the past. And so, when we come in and do this restoration work, it actually sets it onto a trajectory that we'd like to see it set on and that actually makes those areas more resilient and more resistant when wildfires come in.

We've seen in Utah where we've had effective wildfire rehabilitation, fires starting in those areas or moving into those areas and slowing down, the flame lengths are reduced. They've gotten to the point where active firefighter resources can be moved in and fight those fires. And we've also seen that if those areas do burn, that they come back on their own, that they don't need as much active restoration following a subsequent wildfire event.

Senator LEE. So it's a dramatic acceleration of the improvement of the recovery.

Mr. THOMPSON. Absolutely.

Senator LEE. Okay. Thank you.

I have no further questions.

Senator Cortez Masto, do you have anything else?

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. Just a quick follow-up.

I am curious, Mr. Moore and Mr. Thompson, as representing your states, what else can we be doing? What else should we be doing at the federal level to address your concerns and work with you at the state and local levels?

Mr. THOMPSON. You know, the other issue that we deal with in Utah is that we need more involvement from the private landowners. So certainly anything we can do to reauthorize the Farm bill to give us more flexibility with it.

One of the issues that we run into quite a bit is the income levels of a lot of our landowners—they're not eligible for Farm bill funding and there's still a lot of good patchwork private lands that still need restoration. We have to skip over those or we have to find state funding to put onto those private lands because they've hit either the income level or they've hit the Farm bill, I think it's a $400,000 maximum over the life of the Farm bill.

We run into that maximum a lot with private landowners too where, you know, we're doing such large amounts of work and such big projects that those are quickly reached and we have to, kind of, skip over those landowners until the next Farm bill is authorized.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. Okay.

Mr. Moore, anything to add?

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Senator.

Certainly, I think that providing the resources necessary to get more private landowners involved in these multi-landowner landscapes that include the state lands, the private lands and the federal lands. Certainly those boundaries don't, are meaningless, to the resources we manage out there, to a large degree. And those incentives, each state is unique in that.

I am jealous of the State of Utah for the amount of legislative resources they get from their legislature. At the same time, we get a small amount but it needs to be augmented. We need to have the ability for resources to move transparently across boundaries and in some cases, state boundaries.

Idaho needs to maybe move across with Nevada or Utah in those areas where we have common landscapes that abut each other without even thinking about it. Those need to be preplanned and pre-implemented.

And certainly there are unique aspects, but we know how to do that when we fight a fire. Again, I go back to that. We haven't quite figured out how to do that as effectively when we're trying to prevent fires or manage the resources within each of those jurisdictions or land ownerships. I know we can do it. I've seen it work.

So it's just a matter of figuring out how to get that transparently done and incorporate those private landowners into the effectives because the landscapes they live on—the landscape, especially in our sagebrush-steppe habitats, they live on and they function in are their home regardless of the ownership. They have an important component with those wet areas down there for the biological resources I have responsibility for. But they depend on the uplands, both state and federal lands. And so, we've got to figure out how to combine all those together. I've got ranchers that move across state boundaries quite readily. They own property in all three states so they know how to manage across those and we need to incorporate them in.

So that is one of the issues, I think, that collaboratives need to recognize and we need to go through. We have great collaboration among the state agencies across state boundaries. We've figured out how to maintain each entity's unique management and state law responsibilities while achieving the common goal of the management of those resources for all of the people out there. We need to figure out how to do that with the federal lands as well.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. I agree. Thank you.

Thank you for your comments, I appreciate it.

Senator LEE. I do have a couple of other questions I would like to get into if that's okay.

Ms. Weldon, it occurs to me that Good Neighbor Authority does not extend to road repair or reconditioning of roads, things like that. Could this possibly be a good opportunity to expand Good Neighbor Authority?

Ms. WELDON. Yes, we have gotten quite a bit of feedback in our first few years of implementing Good Neighbor Authority from the states that said this is another area that, if there were some adjustments made to relax the restrictions around road construction, rather road reconstruction and maintenance, that it would allow the more certain accomplishment of projects and expand the number of opportunities for that.

Senator LEE. Okay, thank you.

And then, Mr. Thompson, what can you tell me about your seed bank? What's unique about the Utah seed bank?

Mr. THOMPSON. So, Utah is one of the only states in the West, I believe, that has its own seed warehouse. Our seed warehouse was built with funds from both the Forest Service and the BLM. It's expanded to a capacity of about 1.5 million pounds.

And one of the unique things in Utah is that the BLM has actually signed an agreement with Utah that makes our seed warehouse part of the BLM's network. And so, BLM employees can utilize our seed warehouse as if it were their own. And what that does is that it really allows us to purchase seed together. It allows us to go out earlier because we're utilizing that state procurement system that's much more efficient than the federal system.

We test the seed. We mix it together with the seed that they've purchased and the seed that we've purchased. It makes the whole operation much more efficient and has been a key part of Utah's success.

Senator LEE. And you use that substantially, I would imagine, in your rehabilitation efforts?

Mr. THOMPSON. Absolutely. And in our regular efforts too. We put a lot of seed out just through our regular watershed restoration efforts as well.

Senator LEE. Okay, great.

Senator Cortez Masto, anything else?

Any other member of the Committee?

If not, I want to thank all of our witnesses, again, for being here today. Thank you for your testimony. It has been very helpful.

Members will be free to submit questions for the record. The hearing record will be remaining open for another two weeks.

The hearing stands adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:09 a.m. the hearing was adjourned.]

APPENDIX MATERIAL SUBMITTED

Testimony of Dylan Kruse, Policy Director, Sustainable Northwest

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources,
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests and Mining

Oversight Hearing on "Collaborative Initiatives: Restoring watersheds and large landscapes across boundaries through State and Federal partnerships"

June 20, 2017

Chairman Lee, Ranking Member Wyden, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Dylan Kruse, and I am the Policy Director at Sustainable Northwest, as well as a member of the leadership team of the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition. Sustainable Northwest is a regional non-profit located in Portland, Oregon working on forest, range, energy, and water-related initiatives to resolve conflict and maintain healthy working landscapes that are good for community and economic well-being. The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition is a West-wide network of practitioners committed to collaborative, equitable, long-lasting solutions to natural resource challenges that are grounded in people and place. Both organizations are committed to enhancing the quality of life in rural communities and the continuation of a natural resource-based economy in the West.

I'm pleased to describe a movement in the Pacific Northwest towards shared stewardship of our public and private lands. This movement is grounded not in conflict and interest group politics, but recognition of the value of collaborative, landscape scale restoration of our forests, rangelands, and waterways for ecosystem resilience, wildlife habitat, economic prosperity, and the well-being of rural and urban communities alike. It acknowledges that the challenges confronting these landscapes and communities are complex, integrated, and do not discriminate based on land ownership and boundaries. If we are to be successful in rising to meet them, we must embrace new partnerships, tools, and flexible approaches that reject artificial barriers and adapt to conditions on the ground.

From the Ground Up

My home state of Oregon has been a leader in fostering collaborative efforts to overcome disagreement in pursuit of durable solutions for ecological and socioeconomic well-being. In the fallout of the timber wars that plagued the Pacific Northwest in the mid-90s, we saw the emergence of some of the nation's earliest community-based collaborative partnerships, including the Applegate Partnership in southwestern Oregon, and the Lakeview Stewardship Group in southeastern Oregon. These groups established channels of communication and built trust between opposing interests at a time when resolution seemed impossible, charting a course toward sustainable resource management that provided consistent local economic opportunities. The results were landmark achievements that demonstrated what collaborative partnerships and consensus building could accomplish. By establishing a new restoration-based sustained yield unit on the Fremont-Winema National Forest, Lakeview was able to save Collins Pine, the last of five sawmills in the county. The mill still stands today, and supports a local stewardship workforce that partners with the now 20-year old Lakeview Stewardship Group to maintain "a sustainable forest that will ensure quality of life for present and future generations."

These initial successes gave birth to new collaborative efforts across each of Oregon's eastern forests, including the Blue Mountains Forest Partners and Harney County Restoration Collaborative on the Malheur National Forest, and the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project on the Deschutes National Forest. These groups have also played an essential role in overcoming crisis. When Malheur Lumber

announced that it was planning to shutter its doors due to a lack of timber supply in 2012, collaborative groups rallied, in partnership with Oregon's Congressional delegation and the U.S. Forest Service, to establish a 10-year stewardship contract to restore between 200,000 – 500,000 acres and triple the annual board feet targets on the forest. For the first time in nearly 15 years, the mill was able to add a second shift, both sustaining and increasing jobs at the largest private employer in the county. No forest management lawsuits have been filed on the Malheur National Forest in a decade.

Today, Oregon and Washington are home to 33 forest collaboratives, including at least one group on each of the region's 17 national forests. What began as single-issue efforts in the region's dry national forests have now expanded to more complex endeavors across the entire Pacific Northwest, leading to all-lands management strategies that aim to overcome public ownership boundaries for holistic landscape scale restoration. This philoshophy has expanded to rangelands, culminating in comprehensive partnerships between landowners, local, state and federal governments, and non-governmental organizations addressing issues like Sage Grouse conservation. Oregon and Washington support five Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration projects, seven Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership projects, and two Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy pilot projects - a further testament to the region's leadership on collaboration and state and federal partnerships.

The Role of the State

A once radical concept - collaboration between federal land management agencies and diverse stakeholders to improve ecological health and increase economic opportunities in rural communities - is increasingly common. Natural processes, like fire and insect and disease outbreaks, operate regardless of property or management boundaries. Pooling public and private resources from across ownerships and investing long-term in local workforce development have never been more critical to natural resource stewardship or community well-being.

Seizing on this momentum, the Forest Service began the Eastside Restoration Strategy in 2012 to improve the health of dry forests in eastern Oregon and Washington and contribute to the economic status of adjacent rural communities. To enhance the Forest Service's efforts and establish a greater role for the state in setting and achieving regional goals, the Oregon State Legislature and Oregon Department of Forestry launched the Federal Forest Restoration Program (FFRP) in July 2013. The program seeks to increase the pace, scale, and quality of restoration on Oregon's federal forests, and recognizes that coordinated efforts are needed for the achievement of restoration objectives. Coupled with the signature of a Master Stewardship Agreement under Good Neighbor Authority between Oregon and the Forest Service, this arrangement serves as a model example of how state-federal partnerships are leading to improved ecological, social, and economic outcomes on all lands.

While modest in funding, the FFRP adopts an integrated approach to accomplishing structural change and efficiencies in federal lands decision-making and implementation frameworks. The program includes two components: 1) Competitive grants for facilitation, project design, science support, and technical assistance; and 2) a "State-Federal Implementation Partnership." Most of the funding is directed to the second component - a partnership approach in which the state invests in data collection and pre-sale layout on federal lands to accelerate and achieve restoration goals, timber supply, and efficiencies in planning, implementation, and administration. Much of this work is also conducted by seasonal Oregon Department of Forestry fire personnel, who would normally be dismissed at the end of fire season.

Expressed outcomes of the Oregon Federal Forest Restoration Program include:

- Increased capacity of collaborative groups to reach Zones of Agreement.

- Larger projects – and an overall increase in acres – analyzed through NEPA.
- Increased acres treated – both commercially and non-commercially.
- A decrease in the timeframe between signed Decisions and the offering of timber sales.
- Higher quality data to inform environmental analyses.
- Reduced costs and time to conduct planning as required to meet the National Forest Management Act and NEPA.
- Increased watershed restoration projects.
- Increased jobs derived from forest restoration.

Recent results from Oregon's state-federal partnership have been impressive:

- A 16% increase in restoration related jobs and a 14% increase in federal timber harvest have occurred across eastern Oregon since the program's inception.
- In the past two years, ODF employees assisted with marking unit boundaries and tree marking on 54 federal timber sales on eight National Forests and one BLM District. This coordination resulted in presale layout on 275 million board feet (MMBF) of timber statewide, including an increase in the annual timber target by 10 MMBF on the Willamette National Forest; a moist mixed-conifer forest characterized by a recent history of conflict over timber production.
- Three supplemental project agreements using Good Neighbor Authority, with three more currently in development, including timber sale administration and watershed restoration.

Beyond direct program outcomes, there is also a noticeable shift in collaborative engagement and influence on the NEPA process in eastern Oregon's dry forest ecosystems:

- Since 2013, 63% of acres with signed Forest Service NEPA decisions have incorporated input from local collaborative groups.
- Since 2009, the average NEPA decision area with collaborative involvement is 24,000 acres, and just 10,000 acres without collaborative involvement.
- Collaboration has contributed to a 45% increase in annual average of acres with signed NEPA decisions between 2012 and 2015 compared to 2009 – 2011.

Observations to Consider

Federal investment is essential: State-federal and public-private partnerships are innovative approaches to leveraging funding, knowledge, and ideas; yet there is simply no substitute for the substantial baseline funding for our federal land management agencies and the services they provide. Without consistent and increased investments, we will not be able to capitalize on newfound capacity and implement all-lands restoration prescriptions.

The roots go deeper: The increased involvement and investments from states in collaborative forest and watershed restoration have accelerated our ability to implement management prescriptions, utilize new authorities, and identify efficiencies. However, state and federal government agencies are not the only actors in this partnership, and are certainly not sufficient in their ability to meet the entirety of landscape need. As evidenced in Oregon and Washington, state engagement in federal partnerships often follow and integrate with the actions of third party entities and collaborative organizations. Sustained investment in, and the presence of this local community capacity, is often as important (if not more so) than the role of state agencies in shared stewardship.

Manage expectations: There is clear evidence that local collaborative groups, community and regional non-profits, and state agencies can enhance and leverage state planning and investments to increase

the pace, scale, and quality of restoration on federal forests and rangelands. However, the federal government retains decision-making authority on these landscapes, and is the primary funder for implementation of management prescriptions. Collaborative groups and partnerships can build social license and trust to get more work done in an efficient and timely manner, but they do not provide legal sufficiency for decision-making.

We need to deliver: A partner in Washington recently remarked that planning without implementation is a recipe for cynicism. The last decade has seen a tremendous investment in and from local, state, and regional collaborative entities that have established a new paradigm of shared stewardship to function at the pace and scale needed to improve landscape health. We must continue to utilize the full suite of investments, partnerships, and new authorities at our disposal to implement landscape scale plans and achieve desired restoration goals. Sustaining this work and bringing it to scale can only be achieved with clear forward progress that rewards the investments from all stakeholders in the planning process.

Recommendations for Continued Success and Scaling Up

Congress:

Getting the job done: Implementation of the landscape level planning and collaborative agreements that have been facilitated in recent years is imperative, but will only be accomplished with appropriately scaled investment from Congress. This includes full funding for collaborative large landscape initiatives and programs that cut across ownership boundaries, leverage private resources, and achieve integrated outcomes. However, the suggested funding levels for the Department of Interior and Department of Agriculture in President Trump's FY 2018 budget propose a dire and unnecessarily austere vision for our federal lands and rural communities. If adopted, these funding levels would jeopardize the ability of state and federal agencies to implement commercial and restoration activities on public lands.

Let's use the tools we have: There is no shortage of policies, authorities, and tools that facilitate working in partnership across ownership boundaries. The 2014 Farm Bill alone permanently authorized the Stewardship Contracting Authority, Good Neighbor Authority, state insect and disease designations with an accompanying Categorical Exclusion, and designation by description and designation by prescription in timber sales. There is significant room for creativity, flexibility, and innovation within existing policies, programs, and authorities to unlock efficiencies and improved outcomes. Rather than rushing towards further policy reform, it is best to first use the tools we have, develop a track record of performance, and then make amendments as necessary. Our partners are eager to use these resources.

Recommendations:

- **Sustain land management agency funding levels as included in the FY 2017 omnibus appropriations bill**: In particular, this should include full funding for collaborative, all lands management programs, including the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, continued investment in the Joint Chief's Restoration Partnership, and support for implementation of state Sage Grouse conservation plans.
- **Funding for State and Private Forestry programs:** Beyond partnerships and collaborative management models, the federal government plays a critical role in funding state forestry programs that support forest health, urban and community forestry, forest stewardship, and volunteer & state fire assistance. The continued ability of state agencies to work on collaborative all lands restoration depends on adequate investment in these program areas.
- **Laboratories of innovation:** States and third parties possess unique skill sets, authorities, or

fewer regulatory barriers that may allow them to take initial risks and identify efficiencies for improved land stewardship. To the maximum extent practicable under law, states and collaborative groups should be empowered by state legislatures and Congress to utilize new management authorities and pilot strategies for project planning and decision-making.

- **Avoid collaborative overdependence:** Collaboration is most effective as an organic process originating and operating at the local scale. Congress should avoid actions that formalize collaborative structure and design, and we recommend against the inclusion of a collaborative process as a sole justification for streamlined environmental review reform.

Administration and Land Management Agencies:

Setting the stage: We now have multiple examples of situations where collaborative groups have achieved agreement on innovative and necessary management prescriptions, only to have implementation limited or stalled by outdated administrative and regulatory requirements. This oversight should be made more flexible where possible, or amended and updated if needed.

Consistency and transparency: Even in a constrained funding environment, our federal partners do an excellent job of meeting diverse performance measures, and working with collaborative and state partners to capture efficiencies and additionality. However, providing results and a consistent program of work for local businesses and the stewardship workforce is essential to sustain partnership and investments from non-federal entities. If adequate resources do not exist to implement collaborative agreements and priorities, agency staff must inform community and state partners of limitations so that they might pursue alternate mechanisms for match contributions or seek implementation efficiencies.

Commitment to partnership: The past decade has seen a demonstrable shift in federal agencies' embrace of collaboration in the project planning and decision-making process. As we seek to increase the pace and scale of restoration, federal agencies should adopt collaborative recommendations to the maximum extent possible, especially when consensus can be attained. State – federal partnerships also require agencies to move beyond bureaucratic constraints and seek creative solutions for enhanced outcomes. This means fostering a culture where agency staff are empowered and encouraged to take risks and are rewarded for behavior that results in innovation, efficiency, and enhanced results.

Recommendations:

- Timely and efficient completion of the U.S. Forest Service forest plan revision process.
- Lift existing, and limit the use of future hiring freezes for agency positions that are critical for project planning, contracting, and implementation.
- Consider joint, boundary spanning positions between state and federal agencies that break down administrative silos and leverage staff and financial resources.
- Include regulatory agencies in the collaborative process as landscape scale projects are developed and proposed, as opposed to on the back-end of project design.
- Create landscape-level strategic plans for collaboration that set priorities, focus resources, and clarify desired outcomes.
- Adopt the use of a "Handover Memo" as recommended by the Planning Rule Federal Advisory Committee to help line officers learn quickly about existing collaborative processes.
- Incorporate adaptive management and monitoring components in long-term landscape scale restoration initiatives to sustain the trust of partners and build further zones of agreement.

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