



## ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE U.S. FOREST SERVICE'S SHARED STEWARDSHIP STRATEGY

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In 2018, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) published the Shared Stewardship Strategy, which emphasizes partnership with the states, Tribes, and other collaborative partners to identify priority areas for forest management, coordinate work across jurisdictions, and leverage diverse capacities. Colorado State University has been studying the implementation of Shared Stewardship, beginning with nearly 120 interviews in 2019-2020 in Western states with Shared Stewardship agreements (Phase 1 of our research), nearly 70 interviews in 2020-2021 in Eastern states with agreements (Phase 2), and now case studies of projects implemented in the spirit of Shared Stewardship (Phase 3—in progress). Our goals are to understand early progress, changes to prioritization processes, and key challenges and opportunities.

### Shared Stewardship Progress to Date

The development of Shared Stewardship is unique in each state and ranges from a continuation of existing practices to more significant changes, depending on leadership and past collaborative efforts. A common theme, however, is increased engagement with state government and state-level groups to expand partnerships, coordinate prioritization and implementation of forest work, and share capacity. Interviewees in Eastern states characterize Shared Stewardship as a continuation of existing approaches, whereas more significant changes to agency practices and partnerships are underway in some Western states.



Several states created new communication efforts, formed state-level advisory committees, and developed new positions to support Shared Stewardship. Interviewees in most states report that multi-stakeholder advisory committees have formed or been expanded to inform agency decisions and represent diverse perspectives. Multiple new positions have been created, including a national Shared Stewardship coordinator at USFS headquarters and federal-state shared positions in several states.

Joint prioritization activities, using shared data, were the focus of some early efforts, particularly in the West. State Forest Action Plans presented a ready opportunity to revisit and capture shared priorities across jurisdictions. In Eastern states, interviewees generally expect prioritization processes to remain internal to individual agencies and organizations, yet they intend to enhance coordination and communication about priorities across partners.

## Opportunities and Challenges

**Interviewees emphasize that adequate capacity, strong leadership, and clear expectations both in the federal and state government, will be critical to pursuing shared priorities.** Many say that Shared Stewardship presents an opportunity to expand collaboration and partnerships at the state level, which is important for effective forest management and risk sharing going forward. They say that the future of Shared Stewardship will depend on leadership direction, but they anticipate maintaining increased state-level engagement.

**Interviewees emphasized that monitoring outcomes of Shared Stewardship, based on collaboratively designed measures, would be essential for longer-term realization of shared priority-setting processes.** They wanted to develop measures that reflect desired outcomes and that capture the effects of joint prioritization, collaboration and coordination, and partnership development. Interviewees also noted that USFS timber targets often impede their ability to pursue other goals.

**Interviewees want more capacity and expertise about how to use existing policies but did not articulate a need for new policies.** Some major challenges for cross-boundary work will be to couple authorities, enter into agreements for resource sharing, and utilize diverse funding streams across agencies.

There is a need for more expertise and consistent advice in these areas, which may mean more people in boundary-spanning positions. Interviewees also identify the need for more capacity and funding in general, including for coordinator positions and advisory committees.

**There are many challenges associated with engaging the forest products industry, particularly considering the low value of wood removed in restoration projects.** In many states, the workforce is too small to carry out the necessary work and there is limited industry capacity and market access. Interviewees emphasize that industry members or representatives should be involved closely in the Shared Stewardship process.

**An important, unanswered question is how prioritization and collaborative processes at different levels work together.** As more emphasis is placed on national and state-level prioritization processes, it will be important for these different efforts to work together in a strategic and coherent fashion with local collaborative efforts and processes under programs like the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program. We recommend the development of a multi-level prioritization framework that integrates datasets and prioritization efforts at national, state, and local levels across different, existing programs and initiatives.



### More Information

Find reports and other publications about this ongoing research at:

<http://sites.warnercnr.colostate.edu/courtneyschultz/shared-stewardship/>

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