



RVCC
Rural Voices for
Conservation
COALITION

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PUTTING SHARED STEWARDSHIP INTO PRACTICE: Three Models for Local Engagement in California, Oregon, and Minnesota

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About RVCC



RVCC envisions healthy landscapes and vibrant rural communities throughout the American West. We are committed to finding and promoting solutions through collaborative, place-based work that recognizes the inextricable link between the long-term health of the land and the well-being of rural communities. By bringing rural leaders together to share their work, we serve as a vital peer learning and capacity building network that accelerates the practice of land stewardship and aligned economic development. To learn more about our work, visit: www.ruralvoicescoalition.org

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Klamath Marsh National Wildlife Refuge, Fremont-Winema National Forest, USDA Forest Service

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USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Oregon

Introduction:

Dunham Creek, Lolo National Forest, USDA Forest Service

California:

Lassen National Forest, California. Photo by USDA Forest Service

Contra Costa County, California. USDA Photo by Lance Cheung

Oregon:

Paddock Butte Forest Health Project, NRCS photo by Tracy Robillard

Lakeview Stewardship Project, Fremont-Winema National Forest, USDA Forest Service

Minnesota:

Chippewa National Forest. Photo by USDA Forest Service

Members of the Leech Lake Band of the Ojibwe Tribe harvest rice on Mud Lake, USACE photo by George Stringham

INTRODUCTION

In 2018, the U.S. Forest Service (the Forest Service) introduced its [Shared Stewardship Investment Strategy](#), a vision to address large-scale, cross-jurisdictional land management concerns through a renewed emphasis on partnerships. With this strategy, the agency committed to working directly with states on issues of mutual concern. Key components of cooperation included identification of priority areas for restoration, leveraging the best available decision-support tools, and capitalizing on all available resources and authorities. The Forest Service relies on states to engage their local stakeholders and collaborative groups in their statewide strategies.

In 2019, RVCC hosted a Shared Stewardship workshop with forty different nonprofit, academic, state agency, and Forest Service partners to discuss the direction of the new initiative. Although most state MOUs contained references to “partnership” and “collaboration,” community-based groups and collaborative members agreed that their opportunities to engage in Shared Stewardship were concerningly unclear to them.

In response, RVCC identified three examples of local groups and tribal governments engaging in the Shared Stewardship initiative. Each addresses the core components of the Forest Service’s strategy - establishing mutual priorities, sharing resources, and working across boundaries - in their own way, and appropriate to their context. Today, every Western state has a Shared Stewardship agreement in place, and we hope that federal and state partners will find inspiration in these examples as they work to facilitate broad stakeholder inclusion in the initiative. RVCC partners may also find transferable lessons for their own local engagement strategies.





California's Shared Stewardship Advisors

State investment in partnership coordinators

BACKGROUND

The state of California relies heavily on local partners such as resource conservation districts, nonprofits, fire safe councils, and counties to implement Shared Stewardship priorities. These groups are eligible for targeted state grant funds that position them to leverage significant resources in federal agreements and cooperative work. This results in a rich but complex partnership environment in the state, requiring capacity among local, state and federal entities to coordinate and communicate together. This dynamic has also shifted roles and responsibilities—local partners now oversee multi-million dollar projects and supervise contractors as their federal counterparts have historically done, while federal agencies increasingly support those efforts through a renewed focus on partnership management and technical assistance.

APPROACH

In 2021, California launched a four-year pilot program creating Zonal Shared Stewardship Advisor positions. They are designed to provide much-needed partnership engagement capacity within the state. Advisors are tasked with providing direct technical support to local partners who may need help developing projects; acting as a conduit of information from government partners to local partners; and being a resource to California's Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) and the Forest Service as they seek to collaborate with local partners.



NUTS & BOLTS

- 1 The Shared Stewardship Advisor positions are funded by a California Climate Investments (CCI) award granted by CAL FIRE to the Forest Service.
- 2 To ensure the advisors work effectively between partner, state and federal staff, the program is overseen by a third party, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, which also helped select and train the advisors.
- 3 Shared Stewardship Advisors are contracted individuals or organizations that serve one of four geographic zones: Southern California, the Southern Sierra, Northern Sierra, and Northern California.
- 4 Five primary objectives have been identified for these positions: 1) Provide support and capacity for implementation partnerships driving on-the-ground work, 2) Advise state and federal field offices on partnership strategies, 3) Develop a list of cross-boundary projects within each Shared Stewardship Advisor zone, 4) Help partners identify and apply for available funding, and 5) Educate local partners, Forest Service staff, and CAL FIRE on the suite of Shared Stewardship programs and tools available.

KEY OUTCOME FOR SHARED STEWARDSHIP

The Zonal Shared Stewardship Advisors pilot provides dedicated capacity for technical assistance, capacity-building, and communication that supports the integration and inclusion of local partners in Shared Stewardship implementation of cross-boundary projects using Shared Stewardship tools.

LEARN MORE

Contact people:

- Michelle Barry, Shared Stewardship Coordinator, U.S. Forest Service - Pacific Southwest Region (michelle.barry@usda.gov)
- Chris Fischer, Deputy Director of State & Private Forestry, U.S. Forest Service - Pacific Southwest Region (christopher.fischer@usda.gov)
- Jerry Bird, Regional Forester's Representative, U.S. Forest Service - Pacific Southwest Region (jerry.bird@usda.gov)

Additional resources:

- [U.S. Forest Service Region 5 Partnership webpage](#)





Oregon's Klamath and Lake Counties Shared Stewardship Partnership

All-Lands Partner Cooperation

BACKGROUND

In the Klamath and Lake Counties region of Southern Oregon, forest stewardship has long been a community endeavor. Dating back to the early 1900s, woodland owners, timber interests, government agencies, and nonprofit groups in this area have self-organized around fire prevention and infrastructure protection, laying the foundation for today's cross-boundary coordination around forest health and restoration.

In 2004, these efforts solidified through the incorporation of a new nonprofit, the Klamath Lake Forest Health Partnership (KLFHP). KLFHP serves as an organizational hub for all-lands coordination in the region, helping facilitate restoration projects across public and private land, and offering relevant education and outreach to Klamath and Lake Counties.



APPROACH

Klamath and Lake Counties utilize two nesting frameworks to execute their Shared Stewardship work.

One is their partnership framework, outlined through a Shared Stewardship Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Twenty-two different government, nonprofit, and private partners in Klamath and Lake Counties signed onto this agreement in 2020. It codifies their commitment to working through a Shared Stewardship approach on wildfire risk reduction and forest health, and secures the ongoing participation of each signatory.

The other framework is a thoughtfully sequenced process for planning and implementing all-lands projects. These steps are described in KLFHP's "[Planning and Implementing](#)" Partnership Guide. They include considerations for standing up a partnership, identifying landscapes, landowner outreach and education, mapping and assessments, supporting private landowners, and pursuing implementation funds. These steps offer a common playbook for the partners and have become standard operating procedure for their coordinated, all-lands work.



NUTS & BOLTS

1

The partners to the MOU benefit from the organizing capacity of the Klamath Lake Forest Health Partnership. This nonprofit is identified in the Shared Stewardship MOU as the central, neutral platform that convenes partners and holds coordination and sub-committee meetings.

2

The partners share facilitation responsibilities in lieu of a designated facilitator, which they report fosters a sense of equality in their work. This has reduced administrative costs and allowed the partners to direct nearly all their grant resources to project implementation.

3

Identifying a core group of committed participants within the broader partnership was a critical first step. Through sustained relationship building and hard-earned trust, a solid core group can keep the broader partnership on track.

4

Leveraging and respecting each partner's unique role is critical to coordinating efficiently. Every organization or agency is asked to work within their respective purview to bring their expertise and resources to bear.

KEY OUTCOME FOR SHARED STEWARDSHIP

The Klamath and Lake Counties Shared Stewardship MOU helped to formalize partner participation in existing regional efforts, but the true strength of the group lies in its established project planning and implementing process, established by the KLFHP.

LEARN MORE

Contact person: Amy Markus, Cohesive Strategy Coordinator, Fremont-Winema National Forest (amy.markus@usda.gov)

Additional resources:

- [Klamath Lake Forest Health Partnership Website](#)
- [Planning and Implementing Cross-boundary, Landscape-scale Restoration and Wildfire Risk Reduction Projects: A Guide to Achieving the Goals of the National Wildfire Cohesive Strategy](#)
- [Forest Resilience in Klamath and Lake Counties \(Video\)](#)



The Leech Lake Band
of Ojibwe's Shared
Stewardship Agreement
with the Chippewa National
Forest in Minnesota

A government-to-government approach to Shared Stewardship

BACKGROUND

The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (LLBO) is one of six bands in the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. Their ancestral homelands extend throughout northern Minnesota. In an 1855 treaty the Tribe ceded territory to the U.S. government in exchange for reserved lands for their exclusive use, and commitments that their sovereignty, basic human rights, and access to hunting and fishing would be honored. Today, 90% of the Tribe's reservation falls within the Chippewa National Forest (CNF), and the Tribe retains treaty rights to hunt, fish and gather across the entirety of the Forest.

The cultural lifeways of the Tribe are predicated on access to natural forest conditions and the shoreline of Leech Lake – both of which have been impacted by private development and commercial timber practices. With the functional execution of their reserved treaty rights in peril, in 2016 LLBO requested a formal review of forest management practices and the 2004 Land and Resource Management Plan of the CNF.

APPROACH

The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and the Forest Service amended an existing MOU in 2019 to establish a Shared Stewardship approach to future management of the Chippewa National Forest. The document reaffirms the sovereignty of the tribe and the government-to-government relationship between the signatories. It commits to meaningful collaboration around the express goals, needs and legal rights of the Tribe. Finally, it outlines a process for shared decision-making and communication between the governments as the basis for ongoing cooperation and co-management.



NUTS & BOLTS

1

In 2016, the Forest Service Chief requested that the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe outline its desired vegetative conditions (DVC) for the Chippewa National Forest. In response, LLBO developed a guidebook detailing eight DVCs focused on ecology, cultural identity, and environmental justice. This document offers an additional and critical lens for prioritizing forest management activities that bring value to the tribe and fulfill the agency's trust responsibilities.

2

Both parties signed an MOU amendment in 2019. This expansive document clarified a process for honoring pre-existing treaty rights by outlining a shared decision-making procedure that includes coordination prior to public scoping, tribal participation in the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process as a "cooperating agency," tribal consultation prior to public notice within the NEPA process, and consultation prior to issuing a final decision.

3

In tandem with these changes, the U.S. government has taken an important step to address the impact of past wrongs against the Tribe. In 2020, legislation was passed to transfer nearly 12,000 acres of land back to LLBO that was illegally transferred to the Forest Service by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Once finalized, this process will improve the Tribe's access to lake shoreline and expand available housing on the reservation.

4

Committed staff from LLBO and CNF continue to work on relationship-building and ongoing training as they pursue project implementation, in particular leveraging the agency's Tribal Forest Protection Act authority.

KEY OUTCOME FOR SHARED STEWARDSHIP

By establishing the management goals and needs of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe on the Chippewa National Forest, both governments used the framework of Shared Stewardship to clarify the U.S. Government's trust responsibilities, protect the Tribe's reserved rights and cultural practices, and generate a new model for shared decision-making.

LEARN MORE

Contact people:

- Ben Benoit, Division of Resource Management, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (ben.benoit@llojibwe.net)
- Lisa Radosevich-Craig, Community Relations & External Affairs Staff Officer, USDA Forest Service (lisa.radosevich-craig@usda.gov)

Additional resources:

- [Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe History \(LLBO Website\)](#)
- [Memorandum of Understanding Between the USDA Forest Service Chippewa National Forest and the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe](#)



