



IIJA Collaborative Capacity Peer Learning Session

On Jan. 31, 2023, staff from Forest Service national and regional offices, as well as collaborative partners from around the country, participated in a peer-learning session focused on the \$100 million authorized in the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#) to support "collaboration and collaboration-based activities." The Forest Service intends to allocate a portion of that IIJA-authorized funding to a new national program that will provide capacity support for collaborative efforts and groups. As a precursor to development of a new program, the agency last spring allocated \$100,000 of IIJA funding to each USFS region to support collaborative capacity in the way they saw fit. As the agency moves forward with a larger, longer-term national program, the peer-learning session on Jan. 31 offered a chance for staff from Forest Service Regional Offices to share how they spent this initial seed money, and how that reflects the nature of collaboration and collaboration support strategies in different parts of the country. The following is a summary of what was shared by USFS Regional Office staff, developed by staff with the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC), which helped organize the session. For more information, please contact RVCC program manager Emery Cowan at Emery@wallowaresources.org.

USFS Regional Expenditures of IIJA-authorized Collaborative Capacity Funding

Region 1 (Montana, North Dakota, and northern Idaho)

The Regional Office entered a Challenge Cost Share agreement to support the Montana Forest Collaborative Network with its work, which includes developing workshops, webinars, training, and educational white papers for forest collaboratives in the state. Region 1 is also coordinating with Region 4 to provide funding for forest collaboratives in Idaho. To inform decision-making on how to spend the IIJA funding, the Forest Service referred to an existing SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis, consulted with established forest collaborative networks about needs in Montana and Idaho, and thought about how investments could best support a longer-term vision of collaborative support.

Region 2 (Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, and most of South Dakota and Wyoming)

Region 2 allocated its share of the IIJA funding to the Southwest Colorado CFLRP for forest health collaborative support and for third party facilitation support for CFLRP governance. Together, the three collaboratives within this CFLRP landscape work to inform and engage stakeholders in forest and community resilience issues and projects across southwest Colorado. Examples of collaborative and stakeholder work include development and implementation of monitoring protocols, standing committees, project planning, and associated public engagement. A Southwest Colorado CFLRP Governance group was formed in 2022, along with a charter outlining guiding principles related to ecological restoration and stakeholder participation.

Region 3 (Arizona and New Mexico)

Information unavailable.

Region 4 (Nevada, Utah, southern Idaho, and far western Wyoming)

The Regional Office entered an agreement with the National Forest Foundation under which the NFF will disburse the IIJA funding to forest collaboratives in Idaho. NFF will send out an invited grant request to the 10 Idaho collaboratives identified in partnership with the Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership. Funding will be allocated based on proposals received.

Region 5 (California)

Region 5 hasn't yet decided on how to allocate IIJA funds.

Region 6 (Washington and Oregon)

Region 6 deployed the IIJA funding via an agreement with Sustainable Northwest, a nonprofit in the region that has a history of providing technical support to forest collaboratives. The agreement intends to enhance collaborative capacity for forest restoration through training Forest Service interdisciplinary teams on working with collaborative groups, providing technical assistance to collaboratives, and sharing best practices through peer-to-peer collaborative learning networks.

Region 8 (Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee)

The Region 8 Office entered into a participating agreement with the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, to administer the IIJA money and help the Region plan a Southern Natural Resources Summit. The Summit will bring together a variety of partners working on the many existing natural resources initiatives to compare notes on landscape initiatives and cross-boundary work, and to develop strategies for better leveraging time, money, and resources.

Region 9 (Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia, Wisconsin)

IIJA funding will be used to support the operationalization and implementation of an upcoming MOU the Region will sign with the Grand Portage, Bois Forte, and Fond du Lac Bands of the 1854 Treaty Tribes of Minnesota for co-stewardship of the Superior National Forest. Regional Office staff said specific activities could include workshops, convenings, and facilitated conversations that address topics such as Tribal needs, how the Forest Service can show up as a supportive partner, and how implementation mechanisms such as the Tribal Forest Protection Act and stewardship agreements can be used to carry out priorities in the MOU. The Region is hoping this approach can be replicated elsewhere.

Region 10 (Alaska)

This funding has not been committed in Region 10.

Summarized Themes

- **Variability in collaborative activities.** The range of functions and activities supported by this collaborative capacity funding demonstrates the many different ways that collaboration occurs across the country. Some places, especially in the West, have a number of well-established, long-running collaborative groups that provide multi-stakeholder input on federal forestlands. In other places, partnerships and alliances are common, and specific partners from those groups may participate in deliberate collaboration (i.e., diverse stakeholders coming together to discuss common issues and seek areas of agreement) on a project-specific basis.
- **Building on past work.** Forest Service regions largely used the IIJA funding in ways that would support, build upon, and complement existing efforts, processes and entities.
- **Consideration of other IIJA funding.** Some regions are working to align investments to support the Forest Service's Wildfire Crisis Strategy priority landscapes while others expressed a desire to direct the collaborative capacity dollars to places that didn't receive other surges in IIJA funding.
- **Reaching underserved communities and partners.** Regions are particularly interested in how this money can be used to reach underserved and underrepresented communities and partners. Some Regional Office staff mentioned relying upon existing networks and collaborative groups as a means of engaging with underrepresented partners, though more extensive and deliberate program design and outreach may be needed to reach entities not involved in these existing networks and groups.
- **Forward-looking investments.** Regional Offices attempted to be forward-looking in their use of the IIJA funding, with high interest in how the investments could strengthen existing collaborative efforts, lay the groundwork for emerging efforts, and support long-term sustainability of those efforts (e.g., by providing an initial convening that could spark new connections, supporting networks that provide ongoing resources and services, and developing strategies for implementation of Tribal co-stewardship MOUs that can be scaled and replicated).
- **Importance of flexibility.** Forest Service staff emphasized a desire for continued flexibility in how to determine what counts as collaboration or collaboratives that could be supported with this funding.
- **Tracking and reporting.** Regional Office staff recognize a need for transparency and tracking of accomplishments associated with this funding. Additional support and guidance on this topic would be valuable.
- **Balancing impact with reach.** Regional Office staff noted challenges with determining how to allocate the funding in a way that provides meaningful capacity support for collaboration and collaborative groups without spreading the funding so widely, and to so many entities, that its impact would be diluted. Forest Service staff also referenced inherent challenges and potential pitfalls of the agency being responsible for selecting which collaboratives should receive funding. Some navigated these challenges by working through intermediary organizations and processes to allocate funding directly to collaboratives, or funding

collaborative support organizations that provide services that benefit multiple collaboratives and collaborative partners.

- **Clarity in agency authorities.** Regional Offices experienced some challenges with varying interpretations of agency authorities to fund collaboratives and collaboration. There is a need for alignment and clarity on this topic.