

# Blue Mountains Forest Partners



## **Operations Manual: Group Process, Structure, and Function**

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## **I. Summary**

This document presents the Blue Mountains Forest Partners process for working together. Members of this collaborative group developed this document together, modeling the collaborative and consensus-based approach they aim to use in advancing the goals and mission of the group. They have agreed to honor and adhere to this document. This is a ‘living manual’, that will change as the group evolves, and new needs and opportunities arise.

## **II. Background**

Grant County, Oregon is in the process of redefining the community’s role in forest management. Opportunities exist to address ecological restoration and stewardship needs while providing new types of quality jobs for local workers, and woody restoration ‘byproducts’ for local manufacturing. Accomplishing these goals requires a new approach to natural resource stewardship; one that is locally-supported, incentives-driven and that relies on the power of solutions that integrate the environmental, economic and social needs of communities. Collaboration between diverse stakeholders, and with the land management agencies, is an essential tool in this approach. The trust that is developed through collaboration will also lead to stable, long-term solutions that will hold through the shifting political winds.

Formed in April 2006, the Blue Mountains Forest Partners is a partnership of diverse local and regional interests who have come together to address and resolve the impassioned social gridlock and controversy surrounding natural resource management in the region. This nascent group, which includes all parties that have had a role in forest management in the area, is committed to the collaborative process. It is a crucial and exciting time to build positive, forward momentum with this nationally-significant collaborative group. Through monthly meetings, field trips and other activities, this group has begun to build trust and relationships, identify common interests, and advance an agenda defined by restoration and collaboration.

Over the past year, we have:

- Grown and strengthened the group to ensure active participation of key interests (forest products, environmental, tribes, local government, community citizens, landowners, agency representatives, etc.). Approximately 35 individuals participate.
- Developed, through a consensus-based process, a mission, vision, group objectives, roles and responsibilities, decision-making process and ground rules for engagement.
- Established working groups (project planning, agenda setting, fundraising) as a means to engage participants and effectively advance our work.
- Begun planning our first forest restoration project, focused on the ‘Dad’s Creek’ sub-basin of the Malheur National Forest. This project explores restorative thinning to realign the forest to its historic range of variability, mistletoe infestation, hardwood and old growth resilience, stream repair, and the communities’ social and economic needs.

Over the next year, the group will focus on the following goals:

- Develop and support the implementation and monitoring of forest restoration projects.

- Solidify the Grant County Collaborative as a diverse group actively engaged in all aspects of forest restoration projects.
- Employ joint learning, education and outreach to increase knowledge and understanding of forest and community issues.

### **III. Organizational Structure, Function, and Process**

#### ***Mission***

Enhance forest ecosystem health, economic opportunities and public safety in Grant County through collaboration.

#### ***Scope, Goals, and Principles***

The Blue Mountains Forest Partners (BMFP) works together on the following agreed upon scope, goals, and guiding principles:

- 1) Scope
  - a) To promote projects that improve forest ecosystem health
  - b) To enhance community economic development through forest-related work
  - c) To support defensible space programs, and assist in the implementation of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP).
  - d) To come together with diverse groups and agencies in an open and inclusive process to find consensus and commonality for action; to create a ‘safe’ space for discussion and vetting of ideas.
  - e) To focus on public lands, with the possibility of adjacent private lands work if there is an interested and willing landowner.
  - f) To be involved in all aspects of collaboration, including:
    - i) Identification of priority areas and development of potential projects (based on ecological, economic and social priorities);
    - ii) Participation in identifying appropriate contract mechanisms
    - iii) Development and initiation of a multiparty monitoring plan
    - iv) Support to project implementation
  
- 2) Goals
  - a) Improve our ability to work collaboratively and participate actively in these issues, finding common ground for our work.
  - b) Promote projects that integrate ecological, economic, and community needs that have been developed and/or prioritized through collaboration.
  - c) Overcome gridlock in forest planning and implementation, expediting the work that needs to be accomplished.
  - d) Work collaboratively to identify, design, and implement projects that can address a range of priority concerns such as:
    - i) Forest health and loss of ecological functions
    - ii) Insects and disease

- iii) Noxious and invasive weeds
- iv) Fish and wildlife habitat
- v) Road restoration
- vi) Soil stabilization
- vii) Water quality
- viii) Health of the local economy, particularly forest-based
- ix) Loss of infrastructure
- x) Community and private lands damaged due to severe fires
- xi) Fire and community protection
- xii) Fuel loads and stand densities

### 3) Guiding Principles

*Note: The Group is still working to define the “Guiding Principles” and possibly some “Restoration Principles.”*

- a) Every effort should be made to ensure diverse participation of stakeholders; the process will encourage participation, and be open and inclusive
- b) Decision making processes for the group should focus on producing outcomes that strive to meet the needs of all participants
- c) Project scope, complexity and objectives should be appropriately scaled
- d) Projects will be selected that are of mutual concern and are agreed upon by the group
- e) Projects will include a monitoring component
- f) Projects will honor the complexity of forest ecosystems
- g) Projects will focus on enhancing forest ecosystems, protecting the built environment, and generating economic opportunities.
- h) The success of our work is tied to long-term sustainability of forests and communities

### ***Collaboration***

The collaborative group will develop and implement projects that fulfill the stated vision/mission, and are aligned with the guiding principles. The group will also be involved in the activities outlined in the scope of our work together.

#### 1) Basic rules for collaboration:

- a) Respect each other in and outside of meetings.
- b) No backroom deals.
- c) Personal attacks will not be tolerated.
- d) The personal integrity and values of participants will be respected.
- e) Stereotyping will be avoided.
- f) Commitments will not be made lightly and will be kept; agreements will be honored.
- g) Disagreements will be regarded as “problems to be solved,” rather than as “battles to be won.”
- h) Participants are representative of a broad range of interests, each having concerns about the outcome of the issues at hand. All parties recognize the legitimacy of the interests and concerns of others, and expect that their interests will be represented as well.

- i) Participants commit to keeping their colleagues/constituents informed about the progress of these discussions.
  - j) Participants commit to stating needs, problems, and opportunities. Not positions.
  - k) Participants will air problems, disagreements and critical information during meetings to avoid surprises.
  - l) Participants commit to search for opportunities and alternatives. The creativity of the group can often find the best solution.
  - m) Participants agree to verify rumors at the meeting before accepting them as fact.
- 2) Meeting behavior:  
All participants will:
- a) Come to meetings prepared
  - b) Respect the basic rules of collaboration (as stated above)
  - c) Voice their concerns during meetings and take the time to resolve those issues
  - d) Refrain from side conversations during the meeting
  - e) Make sure only one person speaks at a time – let individuals finish their thoughts and then take a deep breath before responding
  - f) Respect the facilitator and meeting agenda

### ***Collaborative Group Structure***

- 1) Membership/Active Participation
- a) The group will actively seek to involve representatives of diverse perspectives, needs, and expertise. This includes:
    - i) Agency representation (Forest Service and BLM)
    - ii) Community nonprofit organization/convener/coordinator
    - iii) County Commissioners
    - iv) Economic Development
    - v) Contractors
    - vi) Forest industry representatives
    - vii) Environmental Groups
    - viii) Other elected officials
    - ix) Concerned community members
    - x) Landowners
    - xi) Tribes
    - xii) Recreation interests
- 2) Individuals are considered members of a group if they:
- a) Agree to the Mission, Scope, Goals, Collaboration Commitments, Ground Rules, and Collaborative Group Structure
  - b) State that they want to be a member of the group and will commit to active engagement and participation in group meetings, with a high percentage of attendance
  - c) Take responsibility for knowing what happened at meetings, reading notes, making comments, etc.

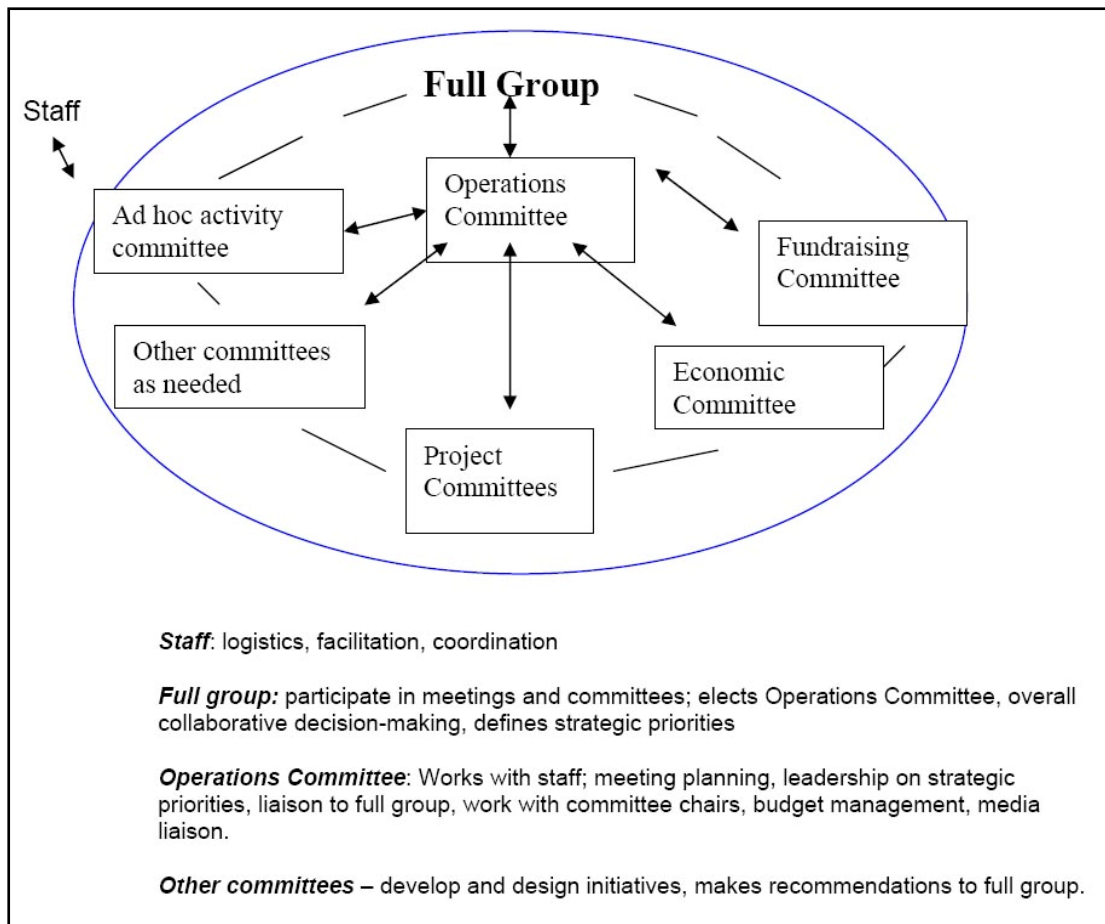
- d) Someone will be asked if they want to remain a member, with potential dismissal if they repeatedly violate ground rules without resolution
- 3) Roles and responsibilities of Group Members
- a) Group Facilitator (Sustainable Northwest has currently been asked to fill this role)
    - i) Facilitate meetings in a non-biased manner
    - ii) Ensure that everyone has a chance to speak and be represented
    - iii) Ensure that ground rules are met
  - b) Group Coordinator (Sustainable Northwest and Diane Browning are currently filling this role)
    - i) Plan and coordinate meetings
    - ii) Responsible for overall communications of the collaborative
    - iii) Take, distribute, and archive meeting minutes
    - iv) Maintain accurate contact lists of members
    - v) Support outreach and recruitment activities
  - c) Participating Members
    - i) Participate actively
    - ii) Be well-informed of group's activities
    - iii) State whether they are an individual partner or are representing a larger entity (i.e. organization or company)
    - iv) Provide input from each individual constituency; communicate back to constituents and organization; resolve internal conflict with other members of the representative's organization (to avoid two opposing opinions from one member organization)
    - v) Suggest ideas or initiatives
    - vi) Offer to take leadership on ideas and initiatives
    - vii) Provide technical resources
    - viii) Abide by scope, mission, desired outcomes; respect ground rules
    - ix) Attend meetings, as possible; send alternate if necessary; RSVP for all meetings
    - x) Commit to long-term involvement (by partner or their representative)
  - d) Federal Partners
    - i) Serve as non-voting members
    - ii) Be committed to collaborative process and maintain active engagement at meetings, project planning, etc.
    - iii) Offer resource information
    - iv) Share historical data
    - v) Share contract writing expertise
    - vi) Share experience working with local contractors
    - vii) Share technical resource and expertise
    - viii) Conduct NEPA
    - ix) Do not facilitate the collaborative group; are not bound by what the group decides
    - x) Participate actively in project discussions; clarify scope of recommendations acceptable to the agencies early on and consistently
  - e) Observers and Guests

- i) Information will be made available to guests on background of collaborative
  - ii) Full disclosure of guests at each meeting
  - iii) Abide by ground rules
  - iv) Listen
  - v) Share experience and expertise
  - vi) Landowners adjacent to projects and other project stakeholders will be considered guests at meetings and will be encouraged to attend and participate in relevant meetings
- f) Media
- i) Information will be made available to media on background of collaborative
  - ii) Full disclosure of media at each meeting
  - iii) Abide by ground rules
  - iv) Listen
  - v) Share experience and expertise
  - vi) No individual will represent the collaborative when talking to the media

**Organizational diagram and responsibilities**

Subcommittees are formed to serve as ‘working groups’ for the full group. These subcommittees provide recommendations to the full group; the full group is the decision-making body.

*Please see Appendix I for details of committees and subcommittees.*



### ***Decision-making: recommendations & specific actions***

Goal: to come to a decision that group members can support following a respectful hearing of all concerns.

- 1) Absolute Consensus – The group will make decisions based on Absolute Consensus. Decisions will be made that all parties can support, or at a minimum, agree to live with. Decisions will be made by absolute consensus. Every effort will be made to find absolute consensus. If a time comes when absolute consensus cannot be reached and a project cannot move forward without it, then the language on absolute consensus will be revisited. One option, if consensus cannot be reached, is to follow “consensus minus 1” or “consensus minus 2.”
  - a) The following will be used to reach an agreement that all parties can support, or at least live with:
    - i) I have nothing more to add, so:
    - ii) I agree with the decision and will...
    - iii) I disagree with the decision and will...support the decision in public
    - iv) I disagree with the decision and will...not support the decision in public
    - v) I don't know and will..
    - vi) I am willing to...
  - b) If an individual is not able to support the decision in public, then we will ask:
    - i) What will it take to gain your support?
    - ii) What can we expect from you in public?
    - iii) Will you actively work against the decision or acquiesce to the decision of the group?
- 2) Voting Participation – a group member must be an active member (see Membership/Active Participation above) to be able to participate in decision-making.
- 3) Proxy – participating group members can send proxies to participate in decision-making. Proxies must be an informed affiliate or member of the organization, business, or entity being represented.

### ***Communications***

- 1) Meeting planning and coordination
  - a) As a general rule, full group collaborative meetings will be scheduled for the third Wednesday of each month (4pm – 7pm)
  - b) Meetings where key decisions will be made will be announced well in advance (2 weeks)
  - c) Meetings will be announced via email (or by phone and/or mail for members who do not have email)
  - d) Collaborative partners will have the opportunity to participate in developing the meeting agenda
- 2) Record keeping
  - a) Minutes will be taken at each meeting and shared with members and interested stakeholders

- b) Minutes from the prior meeting will be reviewed at the beginning of the next meeting and any issues (clarifications, other) will be discussed; meeting minutes will be approved.
  - c) Member organizations and representatives will be listed in minutes, with information indicating their presence or absence.
- 3) Internal communications protocol
- a) A partner listserve (bmf@googlegroups.com) will be used for ongoing communication with partners.
  - b) A website will be maintained for storing and sharing all information. Partners are encouraged to help develop content for the website. The address is:  
[www.bluemountainsforestpartners.org](http://www.bluemountainsforestpartners.org)
- 4) External communications protocol
- a) Information about the collaborative will be made available to external stakeholders via the website and other venues as appropriate; all efforts will be taken to ensure that the group's work remains transparent to external audiences. Non-members will have access to all information and the ability to share thoughts and comments with the group.
  - b) Sustainable Northwest and Diane Browning will serve as interim communications liaisons until a more formal strategy is developed; group members should direct media inquiries to them until notified otherwise

## **Appendix I: Committees and Subcommittees**

*Committees are coordinated and staffed by Sustainable Northwest and Diane Browning*

### ***Operations Committee:***

Tim Lillebo, Oregon Wild (co-chair)  
Mike Billman, Malheur Forest Products (co-chair)  
George Meredith, community resident (treasurer)  
Mark Webb, Grant County Judge  
Jeff Fields, The Nature Conservancy  
Irene Jerome, Forestry Consultant

### ***Fundraising Subcommittee:***

George Meredith  
Mike Browning  
Emily Platt

### **Project Subcommittees:**

#### ***Dad's Creek Subcommittee***

James Johnston (team lead)  
Mike Billman  
Dan Bishop  
Diane Browning  
Karen Coulter  
Jeff Fields  
Irene Jerome  
Tim Lillebo  
Charlie O'Rorke  
Emily Platt  
Asante Riverwind  
Mark Webb

#### **Federal Partners:**

Brooks Smith (District Ranger)  
Stan Benes  
Ryan Falk  
Elaine Kohrman  
Curtis Qual  
Eric Wunz

#### ***Damon Subcommittee***

Mike Billman (team co-lead)  
Emily Platt (team co-lead)

Dan Bishop  
Mike Browning  
Mat Carter  
Karen Coulter  
Glen Johnston  
James Johnston  
Tim Lillebo  
Bryan Nelson  
Charlie O'Rorke  
Asante Riverwind  
Jack Southworth  
Mark Webb

**Federal Partners:**

Elaine Kohrman (District Ranger)  
Ryan Falk  
Dan Hubbard  
Roy Walker