

Blue Mountains Forest Partners

Operations Manual: Organizational Structure, Communication, and Decision Making Process

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I. OVERVIEW

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 their mission. They have agreed to honor and adhere to this document. This is also a ‘living manual’, and as the group evolves, and needs and opportunities change, so will this document.

II. INTRODUCTION, MISSION, VISION, AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Introduction

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 quality jobs for local workers, and restoration ‘byproducts’ for local manufacturing. Accomplishing this 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 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 to address the critical issues of public forest land management. Through regular meetings, field trips, project planning teams and other activities, this group is building trust and relationships, identifying common interests, and advancing an agenda defined by restoration and collaboration.

Mission

“Blue Mountains Forest Partners is a diverse group of stakeholders who work together to create and implement a shared vision to improve the resilience and well-being of forests and communities in the Blue Mountains.”

Vision

The Blue Mountains Forest Partners (BMFP) represents a broad constituency of stakeholders interested in healthy forest ecosystems, economic vitality and quality of life in Grant County, Oregon. We provide the US Forest Service (USFS) with proposals for management of National Forest (NF) lands, and we support the utilization of forest resources and related opportunities to strengthen local communities.

The BMFP is a member-driven organization with clear codes of governance of its own operations and the working relationship with the USFS.

The BMFP engagement with the USFS supports efficient and timely progress of projects through selection, planning, execution and monitoring phases.

At all times the focus of projects is to support steady progress towards the long term goal of the Forest as a healthy, diverse ecosystem that is resilient to natural and human disturbance, while at the same time ensuring our communities are safe from wildfires. Project selection and scale of

execution is such that major restoration at the overall forest level will be evident in a 30-year timeframe.

Activity in the forest and use of forest resources are foundational to the economic vitality and the quality of life of our local communities, fostering a diversity of business and employment opportunities, and supporting the infrastructure to capitalize on the natural resources available from the Forest.

The BMFP engages in advocacy, science, and economic education to advance achievement of its vision.

Sensitive but persistent active management supported by the BMFP/USFS partnership, with a strong focus on a long term vision for the forest, coupled with diligent monitoring to guide us, is returning the Forest to its natural resilient character.

Guiding Principles

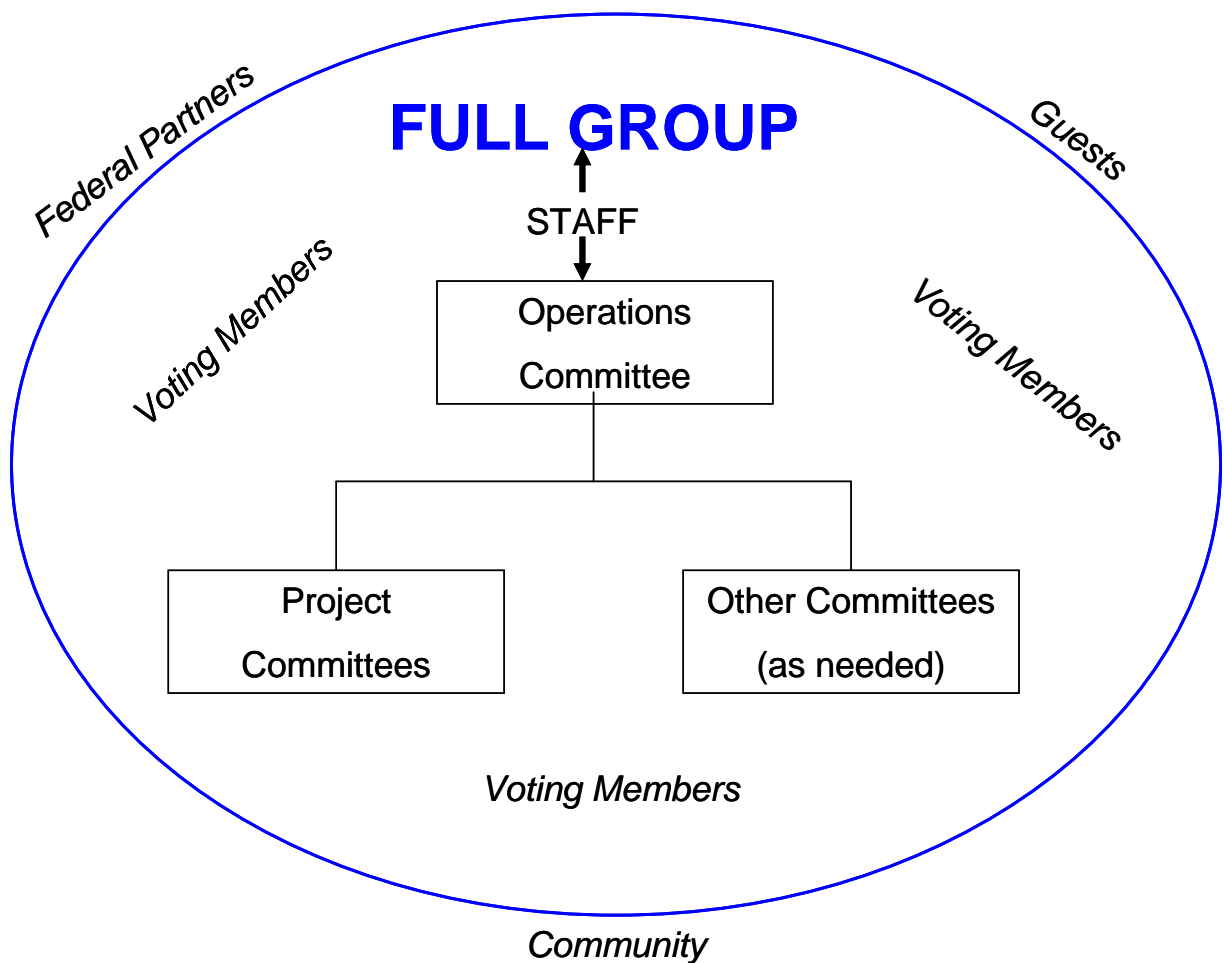
- Every effort should be made to ensure participation of our diverse stakeholders; the process will encourage participation, and be open and inclusive
- Decision making processes for the group should focus on producing outcomes that strive to meet the needs of all participants
- Project scope, complexity and objectives should be appropriately scaled
- Projects will be selected that are of mutual concern and are agreed upon by the group
- Projects will include a monitoring component
- Projects will honor the complexity of forest ecosystems
- Projects will focus on enhancing forest ecosystems, supporting the current infrastructure, and generating economic opportunities.

III. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

BMFP will actively seek to involve representatives of diverse perspectives, needs, and expertise. This includes:

- Federal and State Agency representation (USFS, BLM, and ODF)
- Community nonprofit support organizations
- County Commissioners
- Economic Development
- Contractors
- Forest industry representatives
- Environmental/Conservation Groups
- Other elected officials
- Concerned community members
- Landowners
- Tribes
- Recreation interests

Organizational Diagram



A) Full Group

The full group consists of all the voting members of the collaborative. Their responsibilities include participation in meetings and committees, election of Operations Committee, overall collaborative decision-making, and defining strategic priorities. See “voting member” below for individual responsibilities.

B) Operations Committee

The operations committee is elected by the full group. The committee provides: direction to the Executive Director, leadership on strategic priorities, communication to full group, and collaboration with committee chairs.

C) Staff

○ *Executive Director*

- The executive director is charged with managing the implementation of the BMFP Strategic Plan and executing other assignments under the direction of the BMFP Operations Committee.
- Additionally, the executive director will ensure day to day operations of BMFP are in compliance with BMFP’s Rules of Governance

○ *Support Personnel*

- Support the Executive Director
- Plan and coordinate meetings
- Responsible for overall communications of the collaborative
- Take, distribute, and archive meeting minutes
- Maintain accurate contact lists of members
- Support outreach and recruitment activities

D) Voting Members

- Agree to operate under guidelines outlined in the operations manual
- Sign the Declaration of Commitment
- Maintain “active” status
 - Member are considered “active” if they have attended at least one meeting, either full group or subcommittee, in the previous four months
 - After 6 months on “inactive” status individual will be removed from the voting member list
- Must be in “active” status to vote at current meeting
- 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)
- Suggest ideas or initiatives
- Offer to take leadership on ideas and initiatives
- Provide technical resources
- Commit to long-term involvement (by partner or their representative)

E) Federal Partners

- Serve as non-voting members
- Be committed to collaborative process and maintain active engagement at meetings, project planning, etc.
- Offer resource information
- Share historical data

- Conduct NEPA
 - Share technical resource and expertise
 - Are not bound by what the group decides
 - Participate actively in project discussions; clarify scope of recommendations acceptable to the agencies early on and consistently
- F) Guests/Community
- Information will be made available to guests on background of collaborative
 - Full disclosure of guests at each meeting
 - Abide by ground rules
 - Listen
 - Share experience and expertise
- G) Media
- Information will be made available to media on background of collaborative
 - Full disclosure of media at each meeting
 - Abide by ground rules
 - Listen
 - Share experience and expertise
 - No individual, other than the Executive Director, will represent the collaborative when talking to the media unless given permission on a case by case basis.

IV. COMMUNICATION

A) Basic Rules for Collaboration

- Respect each other in and outside of meetings.
- No backroom deals.
- Personal attacks will not be tolerated.
- The personal integrity and values of participants will be respected.
- Stereotyping will be avoided.
- Commitments will not be made lightly and will be kept; agreements will be honored.
- Disagreements will be regarded as “problems to be solved,” rather than as “battles to be won.”
- 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.
- Participants commit to keeping their colleagues/constituents informed about the progress of these discussions.
- Participants commit to stating interests, problems, and opportunities. Not positions.
- Participants will air problems, disagreements and critical information during meetings to avoid surprises.
- Participants commit to search for opportunities and alternatives. The creativity of the group can often find the best solution.
- Participants agree to verify rumors at the meeting before accepting them as fact.

B) Meeting Behavior - all participants will:

- Come to meetings prepared
- Respect the basic rules of collaboration (as stated above)
- Voice their concerns during meetings and take the time to resolve those issues
- Refrain from side conversations during the meeting
- Participants will make sure only one person speaks at a time – let individuals finish their thoughts and then take a deep breath before responding
- Respect the facilitator and meeting agenda

C) Meeting planning and coordination

- As a general rule, full group collaborative meetings will be scheduled for the third Thursday of each month (4pm – 7pm)
- Meetings where key decisions will be made will be announced well in advance (2 weeks)
- Meetings will be announced via email and available on the calendar located on the BMFP website (or by phone and/or mail for members who do not have email)
- Meeting agendas will be sent out approximately 10 days prior to the meeting to allow for group input and suggestions.

D) Record keeping

- Minutes will be taken at each meeting and shared with members who are on the list serve or have requested them by mail no later than 2 weeks following any meeting.
- 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.

- Member organizations and representatives will be listed in minutes, with information indicating their presence or absence.

E) Internal communications protocol

- A partner listserv (bmfp@googlegroups.com) will be used for ongoing communication with partners.
- 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

F) External communications protocol

- 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.

V. DECISION MAKING PROCESS

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

The Blue Mountain Forest Partners will make decisions by **consensus**. Consensus is defined as decisions that all parties can support, or *at a minimum, agree to live with*.

A) Reaching Consensus

Project-related decisions will be made first by the project subgroup. Decisions made during project subgroup meetings will be recorded in the meeting minutes and distributed within a week of the meeting to all subgroup members, and any other BMFP member that requests them in advance. Each subgroup or full group meeting will begin with a brief review of the decisions made during the previous meeting.

Subgroup members are encouraged to prioritize attending meetings in person. If this is not possible, members are encouraged to ensure a proxy is in attendance (see section 2 for proxy definition), or to submit written input to the subcommittee chair ahead of time. Subgroup and full group agendas should note if the group will be asked to make a decision during that meeting. Materials and information that will help inform subgroup or full group member decision-making should be distributed at least a week before the group is asked to discuss it.

Decisions made during meetings will not be revisited by the subgroup unless significant new ecological or economic information that may affect the decision becomes available. The subgroup will present their recommendations and rationale to the full group for discussion and final ratification.

There will be a minimum of two weeks between the meeting when a subgroup makes a decision and the meeting where the full group is asked to make a decision. This requirement is to ensure that subgroup members that were unable to attend the meeting have time to develop and share their viewpoints with the subgroup or the full group before the full group makes its decision.

As decisions are being made by either a project subgroup, or the full group, meeting participants will be asked to indicate their support either by a show of hands or verbal confirmation. Each participant has the ability to disagree with elements of decisions as they're being developed, but must offer a constructive alternative that seeks to meet the needs of all participants involved.

Consensus on a decision about a project, recommendation, or action the group plans to take will be reached when all meeting participants can make one of the following statements about a decision:

- I agree with the decision and will publicly support it
- I agree with the decision but will refrain from publicly supporting it
- I can live with the decision (and won't disparage it in public)

Once the full group has ratified a decision, a report will be given to the USFS for their consideration in their role as decision makers for USFS managed lands and waters.

B)Inability to Reach Consensus

Subgroups and the full group will make every effort to reach consensus within the given timeframe (as laid out in the project timeline developed at the outset of a project) for making decisions. As stated above, there will be a minimum of two weeks between when the subgroup makes a decision and the decision is brought to the full group for discussion and ratification (see “Reaching Consensus” for interim steps).

If the subgroup cannot reach consensus during a subgroup meeting, members are encouraged to continue the conversation via conference call, email discussions, in-person meetings, or whatever format is most effective, in between meetings in order to function most effectively.

If a time comes when the subgroup or full group is unable to reach consensus the following actions will be taken:

- Areas of agreement and disagreement will be clearly recorded in writing
- Majority and minority reports will be written to address the areas of disagreement. Each of these documents will include:
 - The name of the lead author and names of all who agree with the report
 - A description of their proposal and the rationale used to develop it
 - What group members in the majority and minority anticipate doing if their proposal is chosen by the USFS (i.e. defend it in public), or not chosen (i.e. file an objection, appeal, litigate, etc).
- The majority and minority reports will be given to the USFS for their consideration in their role as decision makers for USFS managed lands and waters.

C)Decision-making Participation

A group member must be an active member (see Membership/Active Participation above) to be able to participate in decision-making.

Participating group members can send proxies to participate in subgroup and full group meetings. Proxies must be an informed affiliate or member of the organization, business, or entity being represented, and be able to represent the active member in decision making.