



Increasing Sustainability of America's Working Landscapes Through Improved Public-Private Collaborations at Multiple Scales

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September 2014

www.foodandagpolicy.com

This publication was commissioned by AGree to inform and stimulate dialogue about policy reform; it does not represent official AGree positions. The views expressed here are those of the individual authors.

Foreword

AGree drives transformative change by connecting and challenging leaders from diverse communities to stimulate policy innovation and develop initiatives that address critical challenges facing the global food and agriculture system. AGree believes we must elevate food and agriculture policy as a national priority.

AGree's work addresses four broad challenges facing the global food and agriculture system:

- Meet future demand for food;
- Conserve and enhance water, soil, and habitat;
- Improve nutrition and public health; and
- Strengthen farms and communities to improve livelihoods.

We have taken a deliberative, inclusive approach to develop a policy framework and ongoing, complementary initiatives to meet these challenges. To overcome traditional obstacles to change, we engage a broad array of stakeholders whose insights and commitment contribute to meaningful solutions. AGree's work, building on our research to better understand problems and assess options, aims to stimulate creative ideas and encourage new perspectives while fostering the linkages key to catalyzing effective action.

In this paper, two Western ranchers and conservation leaders and the Executive Director of Partners for Conservation (PFC) outline a range of strategies and tactics to improve landowner-agency relationships and foster collaborative approaches to natural resource challenges. They draw on lessons from their experience leading PFC, a highly successful national network of landowners working in partnership with agencies, nonprofits, and other stakeholders to achieve conservation outcomes on working lands. The authors suggest that successful efforts need to be regionally calibrated, driven by local leadership and peer-to-peer learning, and supported by public professionals and NGO partners who are skilled in collaborative approaches and understand landowner needs and concerns. Case studies include the Van Duzen Environmental Stewards, which built trust between California cattle ranchers and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency through collaborative data collection and planning and led to improved local water quality, and the Karval Community Alliance, through which Colorado ranchers worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect the mountain plover without listing it under the Endangered Species Act.

This publication is part of a series intended to broaden discussion and complement AGree's consensus recommendations on policies and actions focused on food and agriculture. While the concepts presented in this paper have greatly enriched the deliberations of the AGree Co-Chairs and Advisors, the perspectives and positions do not represent consensus among them.

We hope you find this paper a helpful resource.



Deborah Atwood
Executive Director

Contents

Increasing Sustainability of America’s Working Landscapes Through Improved Public-Private Collaborations at Multiple Scales

Introduction	1
Challenges to Large Landscape Conservation – Agency/NGO Perspective	2
Challenges to Large Landscape Conservation – Landowner/Landscape Perspective	3
Overarching Need to “Set the Table”	4
Strategies and Tactics – Agency Needs	4
Strategies and Tactics – Landowner Challenges	7
Conclusion	8
Appendix: Partners for Conservation Collaborations.....	9
Van Duzen River, northern California Van Duzen Environmental Stewards (YES)	9
Southeast Colorado Shortgrass Prairie – Karval Community Alliance	10
About the Authors	11

Introduction

The vast majority of landscapes in the United States can be described as “working landscapes” where some use is made of at least parts of the landscape for a broad range of human uses such as production of food, fiber and energy among others. Even the majority of our public lands can be described as working landscapes as, outside of national parks and wilderness areas, these lands are utilized by the private sector for activities such as agriculture, forestry, and energy production, as well as by the federal government for activities such as military training and national defense. Common to almost all of these working landscapes is the importance of private interests, including in most cases landowners. Taking the other side of the coin, in all of our landscapes, working or otherwise, 100 percent privately-owned or 100 percent publicly owned, there are public interests. In the case of public lands, the governmental interest may be directly related to the day-to-day management and activities of the land. In 100 percent private landscapes, the public sector may pursue its goals as a facilitator or funder through such public policy tools as the Conservation Title of the Farm Bill or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and/or exercise its authority as a regulator of such issues as water quality and wildlife conservation.

Viewed through this lens, all landscapes are in some way managed via a merging of public and private interests however functional or dysfunctional that merging may be. In the western United States, this merging of public and private interests has long been recognized as a source of both conflict and opportunity given the mixed public and private land ownership that exist here. Public agencies have discovered that it is impossible to achieve their mission without engagement of private interests. Many landowners, in the west particularly, have agricultural operations that rely on publicly owned lands and water. One definition of partnership is being “united or associated with another or others in an activity or a sphere of common interest.” So public and private interests are by definition partners to some degree.

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This merging of public and private interests has been a source of frustration at times for all involved, but all could agree that better collaboration and more productive partnerships among these interests is key to meeting modern natural resource management challenges. One challenge that must be understood is that agencies, as well as some nongovernmental organizations, and private interests typically approach conservation challenges differently. Failure to identify, address and mitigate these differences is an absolutely critical step in developing more productive partnerships. Participants in effective partnerships understand that these differences are not good versus bad or right versus wrong, but they are real and cannot be ignored.

A small, but growing, number of far-sighted landowners and agency personnel are seeking to enhance collaborative management of working landscapes for multiple outcomes by enhancing communication and coordination between and among public and private stakeholders. Where the “stars have aligned” these collaborations have achieved conservation results only dreamed of just decades ago, while other examples exist where no amount of financial or personnel resources have achieved the desired results.

The obvious questions are:

1. Why have these collaborations worked in some areas and not others;
2. What is required to increase the probability of successful public-private collaborations; and

3. What can policymakers, stakeholders and others interested in scaling up successful collaboration do to improve the odds that functional partnerships are the norm in our working landscapes?

At this point it is worthwhile to point out that this paper is written from the perspective of private landowners in working landscapes who have and continue to be intimately engaged in this work in their communities and have experienced first-hand what has worked and not worked at least in their specific locations. To see the stories from which the concepts and ideas presented in this paper evolved please see the “Our Landscapes” profiles at www.partnersforconservation.org. Two examples from northern California and southeast Colorado are also reproduced from the website in Attachment 1.

Challenges to Large Landscape Conservation – Agency/NGO Perspective

There are several areas where agency leadership and personnel are challenged when the goal is to establish or enhance a public-private landscape level collaboration.

First is a matter of approach. Agencies often seek to replicate successes by developing a manual, standard operating procedure or training module where things that have worked are turned in to a roadmap for replicating success in new locations. The problem with this strategy is that while many landowners and landscapes share challenges, there are differences in local stakeholder leadership, motivation, and capacity, which are all critical to sustainable, successful landscape level collaborations.

Second, agencies and programs that are landowner centric are most often focused on a one-on-one interaction with an individual landowner. Often not understood is that additional knowledge, skills and abilities are required to work within a collaborative public-private partnership.

Third, agencies and NGOs often also fail to recognize that in many, if not most, successful collaborations, the beginnings can be traced to an event, a proposal or a moment in time, most often associated with something the landscape views as a threat (regulation or other proposed governmental action for example).

Fourth, most sustainable landscape collaborations will not originate through interagency meetings or an agency meeting with landowners. Landscape collaborations arise when a landowner or landowners recognize a perceived threat and are then motivated to action, eventually reaching out to agency partners. Agencies must realize that those landowners that do reach out are going to have a whole host of concerns related to economic viability and community sustainability that may not, on the surface, be seen as critical by bureaucracies trying to achieve specific programmatic outcomes. The appropriate response to this initial outreach can be key. Initially focusing on landowner concerns is very important. Bureaucracies are bound by structure and can be slavishly devoted to process often as a requirement of relevant laws, regulations or policies. Landowners and other private stakeholders are likely to be much more outcome focused and results driven. Budding relationships can sour when these two approaches intersect. What agency staff views as key may be viewed as almost irrelevant to landscape stakeholders who are trying to solve a problem with the same results-oriented approaches they use to deal with other challenges in their operations. If this difference is not recognized, addressed and mitigated, landowner interest can wane quickly.

Finally, more resources and more staff alone will not make a collaborative sustainable without other critical enabling factors being in place. Even if there is initial success, it may be fleeting and the collaborative may cease to function when funding finds other needs more pressing. Conversely, a healthy collaborative will continue under its own momentum if broadly supported in the landscape and will continue to seek out resources to achieve a shared vision.

Challenges to Large Landscape Conservation – Landowner/Landscape Perspective

Landowners and other stakeholders on the landscape also face challenges when seeking to establish vibrant public-private landscape level partnerships.

First, positive relationships with agency personnel may be lacking. In many situations past relationships with agency personnel may have been more adversarial than collaborative. Some organizations, particularly federal, employ a promotion or advancement model that rewards or even requires regular job and duty station changes which may adversely impact relationships built on trust.

Second, working with your neighbors is one thing but working with agencies devoted to process and procedure can be frustrating to landowners for whom time truly is money. Investments in time typically produce some sort of business result; the same may not be true initially for public-private collaborations. If the collaboration does take off, there will undoubtedly be new costs to bear and time to commit. The potential results achieved must be worthy of the investment in limited time and money.

Third, there are a number of risks that landowners face when considering whether or not to proactively engage. In addition to the financial risks already mentioned, there are social and reputational risks involved. There may only be one or two opinion leaders who want to reach out to conservation partners in a collaborative fashion. These individuals may spend a great deal of reputational capital convincing their peers that collaboration with other entities to address the community's concerns is a good idea. Fourth, when collaborative work begins around an issue that the landscape views as a potential threat the final outcome/destination/result of the collaboration is unknown. Concerns that information or access gained through collaboration may actually turn the potential threat into an actual threat for the landscape may impede the landscape's willingness to engage.

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With all the structural challenges of agency process and culture and landowner uncertainty, the more appropriate question may be why and how do successful public-private landscape level collaborations ever emerge and become sustainable? Even though the number of well-communicated success stories may be rather small, what most share are extraordinary people, within both agencies and communities who did not shy away from the risks nor let engrained process and structure impede results.

The answers lie not in a process that can be duplicated like a recipe from a cookbook but rather in increasing the probability that:

- The right people will be at the right place at the right time;
- Impediments presented by agency structure or process and landowner reluctance and uncertainty are minimized; and
- There is an understanding and acceptance that sustainable collaborations have to grow from the bottom up and cannot be imposed from the top down.

If these factors are recognized and addressed, much progress can be made in addressing landscape level agricultural and other natural resource challenges within currently available programs, while providing some idea of where additional tools and techniques may be desirable.

Even though these landscape-scale collaborations may be stimulated from external events, they cannot reliably or effectively be started, developed and sustained

without active leadership and participation from within the landscape. Following are presented a number of recommendations to better prepare agencies and nonprofit organizations to identify and respond to partnership opportunities with landscape interests that seek to initiate collaborative efforts. Also included are recommendations to help empower landowners and landscapes to consider large-scale public-private partnerships as a viable method to address natural resource conservation challenges.

Overarching Need to “Set the Table”

There are several general recommendations that could help set the stage for making public-private partnerships the more natural response to natural resource challenges.

First, government agencies could adopt, as a matter of policy, a preference for outcome-based, cooperative, voluntary, and incentive-based solutions as opposed to process-based regulatory remedies to address natural resource challenges on working landscapes. While many agencies have made progress along these lines, universal adoption of this preferred approach by all agencies that operate where public and private resource interests meet would certainly be of great benefit. It would lead to increased innovation among staff and encourage the level of risk-taking that will be required to create

- ***Collaborative conservation is impossible without first having honest and open communication.***
- ***Positive reinforcement provided through sharing success stories and objective evaluation of where collaborative efforts have not succeeded would provide opportunities for both inspiration and learning.***

an environment where non-conventional approaches can be reasonably considered. This change also offers the only realistic hope of making landscape-level collaborations the preferred method of achieving agency programmatic goals and community sustainability goals at a national scale.

Second, more focus should be placed on communication and sharing of success stories between and among agencies and landscapes. Collaborative conservation is impossible without first having honest and open communication. Positive reinforcement provided through sharing success stories and objective evaluation of where collaborative efforts have not succeeded would provide opportunities for both inspiration and learning. This flow of communication could also be structured in a way to give agencies regular non-confrontational, non-judgmental feedback on what is working and not working in program design, delivery, and implementation. Landowners involved would also benefit from learning the challenges and opportunities agencies have given the relevant laws, rules, and regulations. Over time the benefits of this feedback loop would not only include more positive outcomes and increased efficiencies, but also a higher level of trust and understanding between agencies and landscapes. Following are more specific recommendations to address these overarching needs.

Strategies and Tactics – Agency Needs

Identification of opportunities - Agencies and nongovernmental organizations will be more effective if they are prepared to recognize and respond to opportunities where they arise while simultaneously accepting that opportunities for public-private collaborations will self-select to a great degree. In other words, be prepared for opportunities everywhere but do not have expectations that they will arise everywhere. Even when the catalyzing event may be directly related to pending or actual regulatory action within an agency’s purview, that in and of

itself does not preclude use of collaborative approaches. See Attachment 1 northern California and southeast Colorado landscape profiles for examples.

Collaborations that are sustainable typically share the following attributes:

1. Initiated at a moment in time viewed as threatening by some portion of the community, such as an endangered species petition, water body impairment listing, rapid fragmentation, etc.;
2. Motivated local leadership that is effective, respected and trusted, and in the landscape; and
3. Emergence of a shared vision of success among landowners and other stakeholders.

Agencies can be better prepared to respond to these opportunities as they arise and help nurture them as they develop, but it is extremely difficult for agencies themselves to initiate collaborations and develop the necessary attributes from scratch.

Agencies, as a part of their strategic and operational planning could add emphasis on evaluating what might be called the “collaboration readiness” of landscapes in addition to the more typical inventory and evaluation of ecological, geological, hydrological, and similar factors addressed in current plans and assessments. Often overlooked by agencies is proper pacing. Collaborations arise at different places for different reasons, but they also arise, develop and evolve at their own pace. Landowners and landscape stakeholders will have to set the appropriate pace and agencies need to realize the pace will vary by place. This will certainly require a change in agency expectations and perhaps increased flexibility.

Message and messenger are both important - Agencies need to recognize and respect the fact that landowners and other stakeholders in the landscape have social and economic interests beyond the agency’s more focused programmatic objectives. However, in most if not all cases the outputs desired by agencies and landscapes overlap to a high degree. Recognizing and highlighting this high degree of correlation between functional

When opportunities to develop landscape scale public-private collaborations emerge, agencies and NGOs should resist the urge to respond with a process-driven answer and instead work with the landscape to identify those outcomes to which all can agree (the 80%) and then identify programs, policies or procedures that can either advance or impede achievement of the mutually identified outcomes.

landscapes, economic sustainability, and agency goals in communications, presentations and outreach can directly address landowner reluctance to engage with agencies. Also important is the messenger. If agencies can seek to deliver this message via landowner organizations, or even more desirable, individual landowners, the message will have a better chance of being received. In as much as it is possible, agencies should seek to partner with landowners, ideally those who have been part of successful collaborations, when conducting initial interaction in areas where the potential for public-private collaborations have been identified.

Peer-to-peer learning - Peer-to-peer learning where success stories and lessons learned are shared can be one of the most important ways to transfer knowledge on large landscape collaboration. Developing a network within each agency (as well as among agencies) of personnel who have real-world experience with both successful and unsuccessful collaborations is an important first step to spreading real-world information on the challenges and opportunities of working with landscapes. These networks will also be able to work with their landowner and community partners within landscapes to provide an opportunity for other aspiring practitioners to gain insight on how landscapes view

and approach collaborations. In the early stages of collaboration when trust is still being developed it is particularly important that relationships not be compromised by missteps that might be otherwise avoided. There is no better place to learn the tricks of the trade than from peers who have already experienced both success and failure.

Outcome vs. process - One of the differences that is hardest to overcome is the merging of process-based entities, such as agencies, with outcome-based entities such as landowners. Agencies need to acknowledge this difference and recognize that this can cause extreme frustration at times among otherwise willing partners. Solid conservation planning at any scale starts with the desired outcomes or end state and only after that are the tools and techniques selected to achieve the desired results. When opportunities to develop landscape scale public-private collaborations emerge, agencies and NGOs should resist the urge to respond with a process-driven answer and instead work with the landscape to identify those outcomes to which all can agree (the 80 percent) and then identify programs, policies or procedures that can either advance or impede achievement of the mutually identified outcomes. The most successful landscape-scale collaborations have largely followed this model of matching programs and tools to the desired outcome as opposed to deploying a one-size fits all program or process in an attempt to achieve the agency's goals for a landscape.

Individual employee skill sets and focus - There are thousands of highly technically skilled and trained employees within public natural resource agencies. A subset of those employees within a smaller number of public natural resource agencies are also highly skilled and have duties that require them to be adept at working in partnership with individual landowners. An even smaller group of those who are both technically skilled and can work productively with individual landowners have demonstrated the ability to assist in the development and function of landscape-scale, collaborative, public-private conservation efforts. Even as agencies are increasingly realizing the importance of these collaborations in achieving programmatic goals,

there are few signs that agencies have aggressively changed their recruiting practices and desired knowledge, skills, and abilities to reflect this new emphasis. In many cases the only staff with the ability to work effectively with landowners and landscapes are in positions with a dedicated focus on private lands and landowners. It is positive that there is focus on hiring some specialists that have both technical and community skills but as it has been pointed out previously, opportunities for meaningful collaborations can arise or not arise anywhere irrespective of where agencies have chosen to place the specialists. Many more opportunities would be recognized and developed if more attention was given to private landowner and partnership skills across a much broader cross section of agency employees. As difficult as it may be, it is likely better to place more emphasis on people and community skills during recruitment than it is to address these deficiencies through post-hire training. Often individuals who seek out field staff opportunities are trained in scientific disciplines where dealing with ambiguity, interpersonal relations, communication with diverse audiences, negotiation, facilitation, consensus building, and other similar skills key to partnership work are not a major part of the curriculum. An additional consideration is that agencies, particularly federal agencies, tend to encourage frequent movement of individual employees either directly or indirectly through their advancement policies. Building the initial trust required to make collaborations successful is very difficult when communities are getting to know a new agency employee every five years. Keeping individuals skilled in landowner relations and partnerships within landscapes for longer periods would be extremely helpful. The concept of proper pacing tells us that it is impossible to make collaborations emerge, develop, and mature in a predetermined timeline.

Organizational skill set and focus - Governmental and nongovernmental conservation and producer organizations are typically organized around the achievement of some relatively specific goals. Organizations that have conservation of functional working landscapes as a concern typically seek to work

collaboratively in those places as a means to an end as opposed to focusing on the conservation of a landscape itself as a programmatic goal. This narrower focus can be problematic when entering into a public-private collaboration involving stakeholders with much more diverse goals and motivations. In some cases, agencies may find it challenging philosophically to buy into the concept of achieving sustainable results on the 80 percent of the issues where agreement can be reached while discussing, recognizing, and accepting that there will be 20 percent of the issues where the partnership cannot reach consensus. To effectively engage in landscape level collaboration as a tool, agencies will need to be willing to accept the fact that there will be tradeoffs in what will be achieved, when it will be achieved, and that flexibility will be required as to agency expectations. As a collaboration moves forward, an individual agency will not be able to see all of its programmatic objectives at the top of the list at all times even though incremental progress is being made toward the desired programmatic goals. Additionally, as collaborations develop and mature, agency objectives may be reached through some previously unanticipated or unidentified pathway, which would not have been possible had formal processes been strictly followed.

Strategies and Tactics – Landowner Challenges

Most of the previous recommendations are offered to provide insight into how agencies can evolve internally to better enable public and private partnerships. While it is clear that successful, sustainable public-private collaborations initiate from the bottom up, there are a number of things that agencies can do externally to increase the probability that landowners and landscapes will consider a public-private partnership as way to address their concerns. Once again, these are not recommendations on how to initiate public-private collaborations but rather concepts that can be adopted to ensure that the best atmosphere possible is created for collaborations to emerge and thrive.

Peer-to-peer learning - As discussed in the previous set of recommendations, one of the best methods for transferring knowledge and understanding is from peer-to-peer. This holds especially true for landowners and landscapes. Outreach efforts conducted by agencies and delivered by agency personnel are often discounted by landowners. Information on the same subject matter delivered by those viewed as peers and perceived as facing similar challenges may be much more meaningful. Should an agency choose to proactively deliver information on landscape level collaboration to a community of landowners, that information is more likely to be well received if presented in a familiar, low-key atmosphere (picnic, community barbeque, conservation district event) by a landowner with direct experience with landscape-level collaboration. Stories from relatable people who have walked-the-walk are much more meaningful than formal presentations and workshops, especially in the early stages when communities are facing threats that they feel may be emanating from some of the same entities that might like to engage in a collaborative effort.

Leadership engagement - One of the key requirements or common threads of successful collaboration are local, respected, community leaders who are willing to step forward and engage. As stated previously, in successful collaborations, one of the most important inflection points is when local opinion-leaders take ownership of the effort and begin to mobilize others in the community and engage public partners. These community leaders are likely known to local agency personnel within a landscape through previous involvement in other programs or processes. Finding ways to get these individuals connected with other collaborations, either directly or through organizations such as Partners for Conservation, can provide opportunities for them to hear success stories and also hear the nuts and bolts view of how these collaborations have emerged and often thrived in other landscapes. One example of a national effort at this type of communication, sharing and networking, is the annual gathering of landowners, landscape representatives and conservation agency partners at Private Lands Partners Day events that have been co-sponsored by private landowners and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s – Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program since 2008.

These events feature attendees from many states attending field trips, presentations and less structured networking time over a two to three day period. Partners for Conservation has evolved from these events and is beginning to fill a niche as a place where public-private partnerships can be supported and meaningful conversations can be convened not just between landowners committed to these efforts, but also between agencies and policymakers, regarding what is and is not working in the area of landscape conservation.

Encourage constructive engagement on government programs/policies - Most if not all government programs and policies that relate to working landscapes, whether regulatory or incentive-based, are initiated, developed and implemented with a strict top down approach. Large interest groups that seek to represent stakeholders, such as commodity groups or conservation organizations, may be engaged in parts of the process, but for the most part the intended program participants (landowners and other stakeholders in the landscapes) are largely left out of the equation. Consequently, many initiatives that require active participation never achieve their programmatic goals or only achieve success after numerous changes. Much preferred and more effective would be the engagement of the intended audience at the earliest possible stage and throughout the entire lifecycle of programs. The same is true for existing programs. Providing this feedback mechanism should not only increase participation rates and effectiveness but also help to build trust between intended participants and agencies, something that should be a goal of all organizations committed to landscape-scale public-private collaborations. To be effective, engagement should be focused on improved outcomes and success stories from existing programs as opposed to a place where dissatisfaction with past outcomes and ongoing processes are the primary topics of discussion. Landowners engaged with Partners for Conservation are already, proactively, reaching out to agencies to provide this feedback and initial efforts have been well received by both agency administrators and policymakers. This shift in focus is reflected in the conservation title of the Farm Bill and in endangered species management.

Conclusion

The increased interest in the use of public-private collaborations to address issues of natural resource condition, agricultural sustainability, and rural community viability is a very positive development. Working landscapes are critical not just for the people, places, and ecological communities that exist there, but truly to the entire country as life's basics flow quite literally from these landscapes to urban and suburban areas where most Americans live.

Recognition and enthusiasm are not enough – successful implementation is required and this implementation does not fit the mold of many previous government efforts which most often have been expressed via regulation and/or massive public investment. The success stories are exciting and share several common threads, as have been identified, but they are also very different in how they began and grew to be successful. Successful implementation at scale requires an increased understanding of and focus on people, communication and relationships. This may be difficult for agencies to implement, but the potential payoffs are immense and are absolutely critical to maintaining our natural infrastructure and national standard of living going forward.

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Appendix: Partners for Conservation Collaborations

Van Duzen River, northern California Van Duzen Environmental Stewards (YES)

The Landscape: The Van Duzen River basin ranges from 62 feet to 5,096 feet above sea level with headwaters located in mountains of the California Coastal Range, flowing through oak woodlands, grasslands, and lower elevation redwood forests before it joins the Eel River seventeen miles north of Eureka, California. The watershed supports important agricultural and timber operations and the entire Eel River system supports important fisheries, including threatened and endangered anadromous (freshwater/saltwater) salmonid.

The Issue: The moment in time for the YES group emerged in 1998 when the Van Duzen watershed was recognized as an impaired water body by the Environmental U.S. Protection Agency (EPA). The group crystalized as a response to EPA committing to establish a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for sedimentation as a result of a lawsuit.

The Story: The group began to come together as a result of the cattle ranching landowners engaging in an effort with EPA to conduct an assessment of the watershed to determine potential sources of sedimentation. This was followed by collection of historical data from long-time residents about how the land use and condition had changed over time in the basin. These efforts led to additional opportunities for trust to develop between the community and government partners. These initial efforts culminated in the discovery that ranch road design and maintenance were the primary sources of sedimentation in the middle

reaches of the watershed where the landowners lived and worked. The relationships and trust built during the data collection and planning process led to many opportunities for cooperation during implementation of best management practices to reduce sedimentation. The group eventually incorporated as a nonprofit organization, is governed by a volunteer board and conducts work through volunteer committees that deal with different aspects of the work of the collaboration.

The Partners: YES has partnered with many public partners. Initially, the primary partner was EPA but the list of partners quickly grew to include other federal agencies as well as state and local agencies, universities, nonprofit organizations, and private engineering and consulting firms.

The Results: One of the mottos of YES is the following: “Coming together is a beginning, working together is progress, staying together is success.” Working together, both among neighbors and between the community and agencies, has required much time and effort but the group has managed to voluntarily address a public resource concern within the watershed. The group has received numerous grants totaling more than \$6 million to address sites producing excess sediment, primarily improving drainage and stream crossings on private ranch roads. This has improved water quality which has benefitted fisheries and endangered species habitat. As YES comes to a completion of the work of reducing sediment that was started 10 years ago, the organization is starting to shift its focus to working locally with a variety of organizations, encouraging collaborative approaches to addressing resource issues on working landscapes.

Southeast Colorado Shortgrass Prairie – Karval Community Alliance

The Landscape: The shortgrass prairie of southeast Colorado includes large expanses of grasslands and smaller amounts of plains riparian habitats along the streams and rivers. Wildlife species that occur here include pronghorn antelope, swift fox, black-tailed prairie dog, mountain plover as well as neotropical migrant birds, native plains fishes, and numerous reptiles and amphibians. It is also an area of small communities, large cattle ranches and significant farming operations, particularly in association with the Arkansas River Valley.

The Issue: The inflection point for the Karval community came about as a result of a 2010 lawsuit forcing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to reinstate a proposed rule to list the mountain plover under the Endangered Species Act. Individuals within the community sought to engage the USFWS in an effort to demonstrate that their landscape was providing habitat for the bird and that the birds were more numerous than had been estimated, in an effort to address concerns without listing the species.

The Story: The ranchers in the landscape were very concerned about how the listing of the mountain plover might impact their community, their operations and their way of life after they became aware of the issues related to the potential listing. As a response, some individuals in the community took a leap of faith and began to cooperate with researchers to determine

how many of the birds were using their ranches and what habitat they were using. As this relationship developed, these ranchers met more conservation agencies and partners who saw the broad diversity of shortgrass wildlife species that utilized the ranches and partnerships began to emerge. Eventually, the data researchers collected indicated that the plover were doing much better than anyone had imagined on the Colorado ranchlands. It was also discovered that other shortgrass wildlife species of concern were thriving. Eventually the USFWS determined that a listing was not warranted. Also as a result of the plover research, the Karval Community Alliance formed and an annual Plover Festival was established where birdwatchers, both local and otherwise, are hosted on local ranches and are treated to a weekend of plover watching and other activities.

The Partners: Ranchers engaged with the Karval Community Alliance have partnered extensively with the USFWS-Partners for Fish and Wildlife, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory and other local, state, and national organizations.

The Results: Research conducted as a part of the effort indicated that the plover were doing better than the agencies and universities had suspected, many conservation partnerships were formed, the Karval Community Alliance was established as was the Plover Festival. The group continues to work on a school curriculum called Ranching and Wildlife (RAW), which will provide both local and urban students a learning experience that focuses on the intersection between ranching and ecology in the shortgrass prairie.

About the Authors

Jim Faulstich – South Dakota

Jim and wife Carol, along with their daughter and son-in-law, Jacquie and Adam Roth and their children Alexis and Caleb, own and operate Daybreak Ranch near Highmore, South Dakota. Jim and family use a holistic approach to improve the natural resources while maintaining a Red Angus cow herd, custom grazing yearling heifers, and operate an upland bird hunting and whitetail deer hunting enterprise. Jim is Chairman of the South Dakota Grassland Coalition, attends the Natural Resource Conservation Service's state technical committee meetings, led the movement to bring the Leopold Conservation Award Program to South Dakota in 2010, and gives presentations on ranch adaptive management and conservation to many groups including the South Dakota Grazing School. Jim and family have received the National Cattlemen's Beef Association Environmental Stewardship Award for Region VII, Society for Range Management's Excellence in Grazing Award, South Dakota Wildlife Society's Citizen Award, and the National Natural Resource Conservation's Excellence in Conservation Award. Jim is the current Vice Chairman of Partners for Conservation.

Steve Jester – Texas

Steve Jester is the Executive Director of Partners for Conservation, a landowner-led organization that communicates and collaborates on conservation partnerships for working landscapes to benefit current and future generations. Steve has more than 20 years of experience in working lands conservation. Prior to his current position, he was the Executive Director of the Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust, the first nationally

accredited land trust in Texas. Prior to that he was on the staff of The Nature Conservancy for almost a decade, leading community-based conservation projects first in Texas and later in Wyoming. Additionally, he has worked with state fish and wildlife agencies in Florida and Texas. Steve earned a B.S. degree in Agriculture from Texas State University – San Marcos and a M.S. degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences from Texas A&M University. He lives in the Edwards Plateau region of Texas with his wife Suzanne and daughters Shelby and Shae.

Jim Stone – Montana

Jim is a third generation cattle rancher from the small town of Ovando in Western Montana. Their Black Angus cow/calf operation relies on son Brady, when not in school, to provide a stable and energetic vision to maintaining a valuable and picturesque landscape. Jim's wife Colleen, is a fifth generation rancher and owns a local establishment called the Stray Bullet which adds dining pleasure to this incredible landscape on the southern end of the Crown of the Continent. They believe in a strong tradition of rural communities, land ethics and working together to foster change that will benefit generations to come. The ranch operates on the premise that people are our most valuable asset, partnerships are critical to the daily operation, and the ability to leverage knowledge and science to achieve their goals. Jim is actively involved in the Blackfoot Challenge, a local watershed organization, the Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited, North Powell Conservation District, the Ovando School Board, and Fire Department. He is the current Chairman of Partners for Conservation.

About AGree

AGree seeks to drive positive change in the food and agriculture system by connecting and challenging leaders from diverse communities to catalyze action and elevate food and agriculture policy as a national priority. AGree also recognizes the interconnected nature of agriculture policy globally and seeks to break down barriers and work across issue areas.

AGree is a collaborative initiative of nine of the world's leading foundations, including the Ford Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, The McKnight Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Surdna Foundation, and The Walton Family Foundation, and will be a major force for comprehensive and lasting change.

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