This study was funded by the USDA Forest Service Research and Development (R&D) Division (Pacific Northwest Research Station).

USDA Forest Service Partnerships

A Report Generated for the National Partnership Office

November 2012

Project Overview

This report presents findings from a research project on USDA Forest Service partnerships. Opinions of agency personnel were assessed using on-line surveys. Previous study findings illustrated that the contribution of time and energy to promote and sustain partnerships require extra effort beyond ordinary duties, and that this effort is not always accounted for or rewarded. The purpose of the project is to improve the knowledge of current partnership conditions as well as increase the agency’s ability to develop successful partnerships. This report provides an overview of results from thirteen participating national forests.

Within Administrative Units:

**Partnership Emphasis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Agree or Strongly Agree</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership places a high priority on partnerships</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships are strongly encouraged; they are everyday business</td>
<td>66%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual initiative drives partnerships more than management directive</td>
<td>58%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This report was generated by Erin Seekamp (North Carolina State University, erin_seekamp@ncsu.edu), and Lori Barrow (Southern Illinois University).

This project was funded by the USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station. For information, contact Lee Cerveny, (lcerveny@fs.fed.us).

We thank the study participants for taking time to share their ideas about the agency’s partnership culture.

Most agency employees (85%) work with partners. However, only half of employees surveyed (47%) reported prior experience working with partners.
### Partnership Work by Functional Area (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functional Area</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recreation, Wilderness, Heritage</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restoration</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetation &amp; Watershed</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildlife &amp; Fisheries</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inventory &amp; Monitoring</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Management Planning</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Products</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Enforcement</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grazing</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landownership</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minerals &amp; Geology</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Percent of Time Spent Working with Partners (%)

- **60-79%**
- **80-100%**
- **0%**
- **20-39%**
- **40-59%**

### Partnership Work by Types of Partners (%)

- **Other government agencies** 70%
- **Private contractors, concessionaires, permit holders, consultants** 60%
- **Individual volunteers (incl. campground host)** 54%
- **Schools, universities, outdoor ed. Groups** 50%
- **Local non-profit groups (e.g., env. groups, rec/outing clubs, “Friends-of”)** 49%
- **Government sponsored programs (e.g., JobCorps, YCC, AmeriCorps)** 42%
- **Private, corporate, nonprofit foundations, trusts, or granting institutions** 40%
- **National non-profit organizations (e.g., land trusts, env org, trail assoc.)** 39%
- **Agency or university researchers** 33%
- **Neighborhood or homeowner’s associations** 26%
- **Prisoners, probationers, community service** 25%
- **Inter-agency coalition** 24%
- **Forest Service enterprise team or similar governmental entity** 24%
- **Local or regional corporations (e.g., forest products, utilities, ranching)** 24%
- **Religious organizations, youth groups (e.g., scouts), camps, teams** 23%
- **Historical societies, museums, cultural centers, or interpretive assoc.** 21%
- **Planning meeting or watershed groups** 21%
- **Local civic groups (e.g., Elks, VFW, Kiwanis, Chamber, garden clubs)** 19%
- **Tribes or Native corporations** 19%
- **National Forest Foundation** 19%
- **Volunteer vacation or eco-tourism groups (e.g., Earth Corps & the SCA)** 16%
- **Coordinating groups that facilitate relationships with other partners** 14%
More than half of employees survey reported having a partnership item in their performance evaluation (58%) but less than half have partnership in their position description (46%).
The challenges personnel on all forests sampled most often face when working with partners include:

- administering grants & agreement paperwork;
- lacking agency resources to bring to the table; and,
- not having time to recruit & maintain partners.

Personnel on all forests sampled sometimes face the following challenges and barriers:

- maintaining relationships after personnel turnover;
- dealing with difficult partners;
- the loss of knowledge, skills or abilities to perform specific tasks within the agency;
- the loss of agency control of decision processes;
- a lack of rewards or incentives;
- partners lacking required training (e.g., safety);
- a lack of administrative support to manage partners; and
- a lack of skills to recruit & maintain partners.

Most personnel (67%) do not believe that their administrative unit has the necessary financial resources to work with partners.

Research Methods

In 2011, 13 national forests were randomly selected for this project. At least 1 national forest from each of the 9 USDA Forest Service regions were sampled. Participation in the project was authorized from forest supervisors and district rangers. Emails with a link to an online survey were sent to all district personnel and select individuals working at the forest supervisor’s office. Of the 1542 email requests, 611 USDA Forest Service employees responded (40% response rate). USDA Forest Service respondents served an average of 16 years with the agency and 7 years in their current position.

Partnerships enhance the budgetary and human resource capacity of public land management agencies—estimated for the Forest Service to be $1 billion annually—and foster a public land ethic.