

**Collaborative Process:  
Better Outcomes for All of Us**

**Communications Recommendations  
and Analysis of  
54 Interviews with Decision Makers on  
Environmental Issues in the Western U.S.**

conducted for

**The Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation and Partners**

**July 2001**



**Tremaine Foundation**



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## **I. Introduction and Methods**

### **Introduction**

In the fall of 2000, the Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation, in partnership with the Meridian Institute, the Sonoran Institute, and the Northern Lights Institute asked Douglas Gould & Associates and Belden Russonello & Stewart (BRS) to help improve communication on the value of using a collaborative process to resolve difficult issues involving the environment. After an initial meeting, BRS, with much consultation from Doug Gould and the project's partners, designed a research study that would result in development of effective messages on collaboration.

The study investigated the opinions and practices of key decision makers on environmental issues in the western U.S. through interviews with leaders in government at the county, state, and federal levels, as well as individuals working in leadership positions for non-profit environmental, business, and other organizations. We learned the ways these leaders approach environmental issues, their understanding, views and uses of collaboration, the problems they see standing in the way of effective collaboration, and the best ways to communicate about collaboration.

This report uses the information we found in the interviews to draw specific message recommendations for effectively communicating about collaboration. These recommendations are found in an executive summary, which is followed by an analytical discussion of the interviews, including quotations.

## Methods of the Research

From February to June, 2001, BRS conducted 54 qualitative interviews with a broad spectrum of decision makers on environmental issues that arise in the Western region of the country. Our interviews focused on decision makers within four states: Arizona, Colorado, Montana, and Wyoming, and Washington, D.C.

Interviews were all conducted by telephone by either David Vaina or John Russonello of BRS, and the length of each interview was between 20 minutes and 45 minutes. The questionnaire for the interviews was developed by BRS in collaboration with the project partners and Douglas Gould. The sample for the study was selected by BRS, with input from the project partners.

The sample is stratified by state and by type of position held by each decision maker. Geographically, we interviewed 13 individuals in Arizona, 10 in Colorado, 16 in Montana, 10 in Wyoming, and five in Washington, D.C.

Looking at the sample by type of position of those respondents, we completed 12 interviews with decision makers in county government, 15 with state government officials and 11 with those in federal government, as well as 16 with leaders of non-profit conservation organizations, business councils, and other groups. Each respondent was promised anonymity.

The 12 completed interviews at the county government level included:

- County commissioners;
- Directors of planning and zoning commissions;
- A director of an environmental services department; and
- Directors of planning and building.

The 15 completed interviews with state government officials included:

- A director of a state land department;
- Policy advisors to the governor and lieutenant governor;
- A director of a state geological survey department;
- A director of a state oil and gas department;
- A director of a water reserved rights compact commission;
- Directors of environment quality councils;
- Directors of state forestry departments;
- A chief of a habitat protection bureau; and
- A director of a water development commission.

The 11 completed interviews with federal government officials included:

- ❑ A legislative counsel for the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works;
- ❑ Legislative aides on the environment for western U.S. Senators;
- ❑ A legislative aide on the environment for a western U.S. Representative;
- ❑ A senior economist for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM);
- ❑ State directors for the BLM;
- ❑ A regional administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency;
- ❑ A deputy forester for the U.S. Forest Service; and
- ❑ A program director for the U.S. Forest Service.

The 16 participants working in non-governmental organizations included:

- ❑ Directors of conservation and environmental organizations,
- ❑ Directors of business/economic councils; and
- ❑ A director of a cattlemen's association.

Readers of this report are advised to keep in mind that these are qualitative interviews, designed to generate ideas and to learn about the most effective language to clearly communicate the importance of the collaborative process in dealing with environmental issues. They provide valuable insights into how decision makers are thinking and talking about collaboration, and what may be the problems and promises related to this process. These results do not project the opinions of the entire population of key decision makers across the west or the nation as a whole.

## **II. Executive Summary and Communications Recommendations**

### **Executive Summary**

The 54 interviews with decision makers on environmental issues in the west illuminate the potential and the pitfalls to advancing a collaborative process on these issues. Overall, the outlook is cautiously optimistic for more collaboration, with government the most sanguine about the possibilities and outcomes.

When these western decision makers use the term collaboration, they refer to bringing together different interests or groups to resolve the issues of land use. This often means local, state, and federal government officials working together with environmentalists, the business community and others to resolve competing objectives for land use, such as the desire by some to develop vs. the desire by others to protect watersheds, manage and preserve forests, and save endangered species.

Decision makers in business and environmental communities feel less positively than those in government about collaboration because they see some issues as simply not open to compromise. They say that it is realistic to expect that at certain times, their contrasting agenda will need to be resolved by a contest not a collaboration. Whether to expand roads in national forests is one area cited by an environmentalist as not open to collaboration because the issue goes to core values of both sides.

Environmentalists in our study are the most mistrustful of the collaborative process. More than other decision makers we spoke with, environmentalists feel besieged and therefore take more rigid positions than others, they worry that business and industry continually hold the advantage over environmental

groups in negotiations, and they resent that government bends to please business before environmental interests.

Despite these reservations, the general message from most of those interviewed is that collaborative process could and should be used more often to resolve the disputes they often confront, but there are limits to its usefulness.

### **The Potential**

The potential is rooted in our respondents' general openness to collaboration to resolve disputes. Many of them report that they currently use a collaborative process often to resolve difficult issues relating to growth, development, endangered species, and the conflict between pressure to develop and the desire to preserve nature.

Many of these decision makers use the word collaboration, without prompting, to describe their approach to issue resolution. They believe it is realistic, and worth trying most of the time.

The second reason for hope that collaboration will blossom and spread in the west is that most respondents offer similar ideas about the ingredients needed for successful collaboration. Most do not approach collaboration simply from their own perspective, but try to see the process from the viewpoint of different stakeholders.

The decision makers in our study view the collaborative process involving a number of different groups, with different agenda for "sitting down together," and agreeing to work on a common solution.

From their responses, we identified six key common ingredients to successful collaboration:

- First, they say, is for the participants to agree on a shared goal, or a set of solutions to work toward at the outset of the process. Unless you can work toward the same goal, the process is unlikely to produce results. This does not mean each party needs to be motivated by the same reason to work toward the goal.

For example, if a developer wants to build a shopping mall near an environmentally-fragile piece of land that is habitat to an endangered species, the shared goal might be to provide new shopping to the area without hurting the habitat for the endangered species. Business and environmental

partners may have completely different reasons for working toward this goal, but agreement on the goal at the outset is essential.

- A second ingredient is trust among the participants – and there is no magic tonic that participants can take that will immediately dissolve years of mistrust. Trust is a quality that is earned through the collaborative process, by working to obtain the other ingredients. Trust may indeed be the product of collaboration.
- A third ingredient is patience. Decision makers in our study acknowledge that collaboration often requires a long, arduous process that measures progress in inches at first, before it is able to take great strides in resolving disputes. They say that agreement to commit to a lengthy process at the outset is important.
- A fourth ingredient is the presence of a leader to keep the process on course when it appears stalled or derailed.
- A fifth ingredient is a mandate or condition hanging over the heads of participants. Most decision makers in the study do not believe that parties enter into collaborative agreements without the threat of some type of action—either an existing or impending court ruling, government administrative order, or law. They feel that these conditions also serve as important incentives to keep the process going.
- A sixth ingredient is for the process to treat all participants as equals. When one group is seen as carrying more weight than another, mistrust builds and corrodes the process.

### **The Pitfalls**

The pitfalls acknowledged in the interviews show a mirror image of the ingredients for success. The decision makers mention that pressure from their own constituencies to take a non-collaborative stance inhibits their role in collaboration.

When asked about the obstacles to effective collaboration, the overriding problem is a lack of trust among the different constituencies. All groups agree that unless the process includes trust, the results will not last long because one party will try to win more for its side outside the process, through litigation or legislation. Business, environmental, and government leaders all feel this is a problem and that trust is key.

Failure to establish common goals up front, having an imbalance among stakeholders, with one group gaining an advantage over another, failure of agreement on the need for patience in a lengthy process and absence of a leader, all can hurt the chances of successful collaboration.

### **Message recommendations**

The decision makers in the study already use the word “collaboration” – they believe it is a good way to describe the process of different interests coming together to resolve disputes.

Based on the interviews we can make the following message recommendations for communicating about the value of collaboration.

1. The key point: Stress the outcome more than the process. The message that says “collaboration produces better outcomes for all of us” is by far the most popular message we tested. It speaks to self-interest and relates it to public interest.
2. An appeal to community interest directly adds value. Describing collaboration as community building is popular.
3. Use the imagery of different groups sitting down together to reach for common ground on an issue to describe the process. This is more effective than talking about reaching out to “adversaries.” The term “dispute resolution” is an acceptable, positive term to describe collaboration, but it does not speak to the value of collaboration as much as the phrases, “seeking common ground among diverse stakeholders” or “community-building” solutions. Less effective terms are “cooperation” and “consensus,” which are seen as too idealistic.
4. Assert that collaboration will result in “enduring results”. This quality resonates with the decision makers, although not as much as “better outcomes.”
5. Recognize that fairness and a democratic approach to problem solving are good ideas but not as inspiring as better outcomes as reasons for our decision makers to enter into collaboration.

6. Avoid appeals to efficiency, when it is related to time, since this has little credibility or salience as a reason for engaging in collaboration.
7. It may be futile at this point to assert that collaboration happens when “interested parties participate voluntarily rather than in response to a court or administrative mandate.” Our respondents find this unrealistic without more information.
8. These points suggest the following message:

**Collaboration results in better outcomes for all of us. This happens when people of different interests sit down together to seek common ground and to create solutions that will benefit the whole community.**

### **III. Findings**

#### **A. Environmental Context, the view from Arizona, Colorado, Montana, and Wyoming**

*The controversies that we face are really tied to the rapid pace at which conservation priorities are being lost. – Director, conservation organization*

##### **1. Growth is the key issue**

Most often the Western decision makers in our study describe their most controversial or difficult issues as pressure to develop land, “over-development,” “growth,” or “sprawl,” or “economic expansion.” County officials especially mention sprawl, but the issues relating to growth are heard from state and federal government employees as well as private, non-profit representatives.

Fights over endangered species and their habitats are frequently mentioned as the issues they deal with, but even these issues have as their root the desire to develop, according to our respondents. It is very clear to our respondents that threats to habitats and species become controversial mostly because of private or commercial owners seeking permits to expand into protected areas, whether it is a new shopping mall or an addition on a home.

Energy issues, such as mineral development vs. environmental protection, were also raised by a number of these western decision makers, mostly in the later months of the interviewing (April-June) when energy issues have become more salient.

Water policy issues, such as water rights and over-use of waterways because of growth, also emerged in a number of interviews.

We did not hear many variations across the interviews. Growth remains the dominant cause of controversy: Senate staffers in Washington blame it on their fights over endangered species. BLM and Forestry officials see it as the main threat to open space and farmland under their responsibilities. State government officials worry about it straining natural resources and eliminating open space. Conservation groups see it as a source of numerous problems, and business groups recognize the conflicts between the pressure to build and the desire to protect a state's natural areas. Business groups speak of a need for "balance" between economic growth and environmental concerns. Many others are more likely to speak only of the problems of overdevelopment that strain resources, eliminate open spaces, and destroy habitats that are home to wildlife and that clean water for humans.

### **The context of environmental conflicts:**

[The] identification of lands for conservation, open space. The main conflict is obviously between development and preserving for open space -the pressure is from both sides. - *Director, state land department*

The general topic of land use and land management. Just dealing with the influx of people and change in \_\_\_\_\_ and in the west is a huge issue. Fifty percent, plus or minus, of \_\_\_\_\_ and the west consists of federal lands managed by the BLM, Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife. Those are always difficult, on-going, chronic issues or disputes. One issue that is sort of related to land use and growth but is sort of a more specific set of issues, and I think we are just starting to see the tip of the iceberg in \_\_\_\_\_ and the west, has to deal with river recreation. It is specifically a question of overcrowding. There are just too many damn people who want to go fly-fishing and so what do you do? - *Key staffer, governor's office*

A lot of times what happens is you have a private property [constituent], whether it's a farmer, a developer [or] people who build homes in this massive way and they find out they have an endangered species on their property or they need to get permits...that triggers a permitting process and that's where the conflicts sometimes comes into head if they try to deal with one of the federal agencies or they are not going to be able to move forward with the development plan that they wanted. - *Legislative counsel, U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works*

[The controversial issues] are the same issues that we've had for sometime. Primarily, it's in development, residential developers versus protection of wildlife and the natural resources. There's only a specific amount of private land in \_\_\_\_\_ County and of course that is valuable to the developers as well as to the federal and state agencies in the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat. – *Director, county planning department*

Controversial issues are the Endangered Species Act and the amount of land that may be necessary to protect from uses—development, grazing, things like that. Basically, how much land do we need biologically to protect species and their habitats? And that's a big issue that we are dealing with right now because the interests are varied as far as the stakeholders - realtors, homebuilders, developers, environmentalists, citizens, neighborhood activists, ranchers, in the full process, and of course land managers, the government agencies that are pretty big, that have a lot of land too. – *Director, conservation organization*

The controversies that we face are really tied to the rapid pace at which conservation priorities are being lost and the need to scramble and assemble financing from lots of different sources often in order to step in and make a strategic conservation purchase. – *Director, conservation organization*

There are probably two major issues. One, is dealing with the municipalities and establishing our urban growth areas and annexation policies within those municipalities. We are engaged in sort of a land grab so different communities have overlapping service areas. The other natural resource issue we are dealing with is mining, which is becoming very contentious because of the conflicts with adjacent residential uses. – *Senior planner, planning department*

The main issue is population increase and how you design for that population increase while balancing those kind of requirements with what I think is currently being called ecosystem protection or management consideration—that is the driving consideration around here. – *County commissioner*

Sprawl is definitely the main thing. People are buying up land outside the urban areas more cheaply of course than it costs nearer to the urban areas where they do their developments. Probably over the long haul, trying to preserve open space, get people not to build on ridge top—those are the big things that come most immediately to mind. – *County commissioner*

In the west there is a lot of development coming and the main concern is farmers and ranchers in this community who have had property in their family for generations now find out they can get a lot more dollars if they sell their land. We are seeing a lot more parcels of land being turned into subdivisions and we're seeing less and less land being saved so to speak for production for agriculture uses. That's a concern we look at almost every day when we as commissioners are moving new plan maps for different subdivisions that are coming to us for our review.

– *County commissioner*

Land-use issues in general: we are the fastest growing county in the state of \_\_\_\_\_. Our growth is greater than 44% in the last ten years. We have infrastructure problems, we have inappropriate commercial and recreational businesses going in areas they shouldn't be. We have groundwater being impacted because of sewage and septic, multitudes of problems. Anything you can think of, we seem to have those problems.

– *County commissioner*

I think kind of the \$64,000 dollar question here is can we manage the hard edges of growth? We are in the business of trying to identify the balance of growth needs of the economic engine with the quality of life and planning needs and the environmental concerns. We have been involved in what we call \_\_\_\_\_, which is kind of a version of Smart Growth concepts nationally. – *Director, business council*

[T]he main issue is sprawl and the preservation of farmland, retention of community character, loss of control over your states, those are issues we encounter all the time. – *Forestry official, USDA*

[W]e deal with trying to get permanent protection of public lands as wilderness. And we deal mostly with only public lands. In terms of the public land, the major threats right now are roading and habitat fragmentation for wildlife and also water quality issues as a result of roads, and then right now, oil and gas development and the threat of energy production off public lands. – *Director, conservation organization*

The top one is sort of BLM's role in preserving open space. Open space is a really big issue in cities and counties and local officials and environmental groups and recreation folks, *etc.*, and BLM is becoming the last bastion of open space. – *State director, Bureau of Land Management*

## B. Defining the Collaborative Process

*[In] \_\_\_\_\_ County there is a great bit of collaboration. I would say more often than not there are people working together and that means both sides giving and taking just a little bit in order to accomplish what they want. – County Commissioner*

### 1. Collaboration already in use as a word and concept.

Most of our respondents already use the term collaboration to describe how controversial issues are often resolved. Decision makers in and out of government all use the term collaboration to describe a process to achieve results that all sides can live with, if not love. It is a way to bring people together to resolve disputes, by:

- “sitting down” together, and involving the community;
- Having a willingness to work toward a “shared goal,” to seek common ground rather than advantage; and
- A desire to work toward a solution that will benefit the community.

Our decision makers tell us that collaboration does not mean consensus, or that everyone will be happy with the result. Most see the process as a semi-formal structure of stakeholders engaging in a lengthy process of resolving differences to reach a common goal. They repeat often that not everyone will be pleased but that is ok.

***The importance of all the participating parties in a collaborative effort clearly articulating the objectives of their dialogue and agreeing on a long-term vision before involving themselves in the process is key. The following example demonstrates this intellectual challenge to successful resolution.***

We put together a land use plan for the \_\_\_\_\_ State Forest, basically a consolidation of state trust land. You know the state forestry was responsible for the forest vegetation management and fire protection, state parks was responsible for the recreation, game and fish was responsible for the wildlife management and there was a grazing association that was responsible for the grazing on that. They had local groups that involved local citizens, local, you know the different interest groups-they all participated. They ended up developing a plan that is now being implemented-it's a mixture of land ownership between state, city, county- private land, BLM, aiming out a common goal of mitigating fire losses. Probably the common thread, the more closely aligned and defined the objectives are and willingness of the partners and ownership of all the different objectives by the partners, the more successful the process will be. – *Director, state forestry department*

### **Making collaboration happen:**

[I]n \_\_\_\_\_ County there is a great bit of collaboration. Developers bring their projects to the planning department and by and large by the time it reaches the board of county commissioners level, they have worked out their differences-not always but I would say more often than not there are people working together and that means both sides giving and taking just a little bit in order to accomplish what they want. We here in \_\_\_\_\_ County have some forward-looking developers that are trying to do what is best for the land. – *County commissioner*

We approach what we do in the spirit of collaboration and often times again because these land purchases require so many interlocking partnerships, collaboration is absolutely essential to what we do. The way we ensure that these collaborative partnerships are functioning and productive, is to work very hard at good communication. We spend a lot of time on the phone, we spend a lot of time with written correspondence, written communication, [making sure it] is as clear and compelling as it can be. At its core, it's about good communication. [F]undamentally, it's about listening and being thoughtful in one's response and not getting too far out in front of the partners in collaboration. – *Director, conservation organization*

It really depends on the issue and the political context. You know some [disputes] are resolved ranging from the most adversarial to the least. Some of them are resolved in court or legislative processes with clear winners and losers and others get resolved through more mediated process of bringing people together and having dialogue and trying to come up with solutions where there is common ground and mutual interests satisfied. - *Director, conservation organization*

[W]e are finally wrapping up a project that has been well over a year called the \_\_\_\_\_-we've had numerous public hearings, both the city and the county working with different agencies trying to get a plan in place for how we are going to develop our \_\_\_\_\_, taking in a lot of public testimony from people how we want different subdivisions put in, how we want strip malls to be put in, [and] how we want certain areas to be preserved for parks and recreation areas. - *County commissioner*

What matters is providing the opportunity for those who may be impacted or those that have an interest in [environmental] proposals or activities to have an opportunity to share their concerns and ideas. What really matters is we give an equal voice out there or a voice or an opportunity to be heard. - *Deputy regional forester, Forest Service*

[Disputes] are resolved in different ways. Sometimes, they are resolved through negotiation and various stakeholders sitting down and trying to come to some consensus on what a solution would be to a problem. In other cases, they are resolved by using the courts and letting the judge decide how a problem can be resolved. [W]e're pretty opportunistic and we're not wedded to using any one tool. In some cases, we do try to bring various stakeholders together, see if there can be some sort of consensus on what needs to be done and in other cases, we sue the bastards. The one thing that we try to do is to keep in mind the ultimate mission of the organization and the ecological realities of the greater \_\_\_\_\_ ecosystem, just to make sure that we don't engage in a consensus process that may result in a solution that everyone agrees to but it really doesn't meet the resource protection needs of the greater \_\_\_\_\_ ecosystem. - *Director, conservation organization*

## **2. Collaboration is seen as realistic with some caveats.**

*You need that hammer that sets a bottom line of what is acceptable and if somebody wants to go beyond that, that's where the collaborative process comes in and everybody can get in their win-win situation.  
– Assistant director, state environmental quality council*

The study reveals a general feeling among decision makers that it is realistic for different groups such as government, business, farmers, ranchers, and environmentalists to work together to resolve their disputes. Collaboration, however, has its limits, according to the decision makers. They believe that it is not always possible to engage in collaboration on every occasion.

More than half of the participants (and especially those in the non-governmental arena) think that lawsuits will always be a problem-solving option for those engaged in environmental disputes. Some say that lawsuits sometimes have a constructive role in that they bring people to the table to collaborate. Others believe if a party is unhappy with the outcome of collaboration, it turns to the legislature or the courts.

Looking at the different segments of decision makers, we find that county and federal government officials are much more likely than state officials or the conservation or business decision makers to have positive reactions to collaboration. The BLM in particular is raised as an organization where collaboration strategies are a critical part of their philosophy (*e.g.* offering employees courses in collaborative decision-making skills.)

Those who work in the non-governmental organizations, especially for conservation organizations, are the most likely to say that these controversial environmental issues are not resolved but remain on going. For example, the conservation groups point out the environmental policies of the Bush administration have made them go back and try to resolve issues that they thought had been previously decided when Clinton was President.

**Collaboration as realistic with some caveats:**

[A]bsolutely, they should be working together. There is a group called the \_\_\_\_\_, a statewide group that is trying to resolve conflict and it has ranchers, developers, and environmentalists on it. It is mostly a process group trying to figure out ways to avoid controversy so that sort of thing is essential. In my county, I have made the effort to go out and meet every rancher on an individual basis to try to figure out how they can protect the value of the ranch yet try to preserve the environmentally sensitive portions of the ranch. But on the other hand, there are times when litigation is necessary. If all that cooperative effort, collaboration doesn't work, doesn't reach a resolution, then litigation may be necessary. – *Director, planning and zoning commission*

I think they do work together well and there are examples in the state of \_\_\_\_\_ that do exemplify that when all parties come in and go into the collaborative process open-minded and wanting to solve it. I do believe that is a viable alternative. There is a concern within my voluntary realm what's the driving force to actually go beyond compliance to regulation and I feel that you need that regulatory oversight. You need that hammer that sets a bottom line of what is acceptable and if somebody wants to go beyond that, that's where the collaborative process comes in and everybody can get in their win-win situation. – *Assistant director, state environmental quality council*

I think lawsuits and confrontations foul the environment for real collaborative relationships to occur. Now, that doesn't mean that they are not sometimes necessary but what I think is we are not skilled—we haven't trained our leaders or developed best practice processes for reaching collaborative agreements. – *Director, business council*

I don't think you will ever get away from lawsuits. There are certain groups who will always use that as one tool and it's probably necessary in some cases, a necessary tool. But I don't think I know any effort that the [BLM] is doing now that doesn't involve outside groups in working together. I think that has just become a way of doing business. – *State director, Bureau of Land Management*

***Fairness to all interests – being treated as an equal – must be built into all collaborative processes. Many of our decision makers stress that this cannot be a symbolic gesture but a guarantee that no participating group will feel intimidated or marginalized during the dialogue.***

We're lucky in a stakeholder group if it's set up and there are 10 proponents of big business and one environmentalist. Well, you know what the outcome is going to be. So, I guess I am not saying you shouldn't do it because it's important for people to talk but the advice I give to people who are getting involved in a process like that, is to find out who is being invited to the table, how are the decisions going to be made, does anybody have veto power and just make sure up front what the process is going to be and if there are going to be 45 people at the table and you are the token environmentalist, then maybe it's better not to be there—you can spend your time better elsewhere. – *Director, conservation organization*

I think an important perspective is collaboration, consensus-building/negotiation/mediation is not a panacea. It's not appropriate in all circumstances. – *Key staffer, governor's office*

I think that it is quite possible for the constituencies to work together [and] it happens every day [but lawsuits] are a part of our culture. – *Natural policy advisor to the governor*

Right now I am sort of believing that things never get totally resolved and they get temporarily resolved and then there's a court fight or a political change and it's sort of an ongoing process—we sort of smug our way through a lot of these issues. – *Director, state geological society*

I don't know if you can ever avoid lawsuits. You can inoculate yourself against them, you can insulate yourself from them by doing your homework and I think we have done that. While we would like there not to be lawsuits, we think we are protected and if you are speaking of lawsuits as part of the process, I imagine they always will be. – *County commissioner*

[W]e also have programs that deal with stream restoration and often times the work is done on private property and with full cooperation with private landowners so there definitely are opportunities with environmental interests and with people who are private landowners to work together. – *Chief of the Habitat Protection Bureau, Fish and Wildlife Parks*

I think lawsuits and confrontations are boring. [But it] appears to be necessary at this point. Say that the \_\_\_\_\_ legislature takes away the Montana Environmental Policy Act, or guts it to the point that it is

useless. That is what used to stop people from going to court so it was through the public process under the umbrella of \_\_\_\_ where development decisions could be made. But without that umbrella, of course conservations are going to end up suing. – *Director, conservation group*

I don't know about confrontations. I think lawsuits are a necessary part. As much as we are collaborating now on this conservation plan, the whole issue was brought before it because of the lawsuit. You know, I am not one to sue, but I think they are necessary to bring out the issue and some changes. – *Director, conservation organization*

I absolutely feel that it is imperative that people work together . . . and actually we do have environmental organizations involved in our work as sort of one of the public interest groups because they get interested making sure there are in-stream flows for fisheries. The farmers and ranchers who use the water are intimately involved with our settlements. Business maybe a little bit less so. So, yes, I think it's really critical that people try to work on these things together. Although, I will say that I do think that there are some situations that are pretty intractable that don't offer good solutions and sometimes it is necessary for people to go to court to protect a resource and you know, fight for something that they believe in. - *Director, state water rights commission*

I think the only way to get anything done is to bring all the parties to the table because you want to make sure that every issue that's a main, broad issue, you get all the people involved at the table or else you're never going to get it done because you will always have a faction that maybe you missed that has this stance one way or another. [This faction] could be in opposition or for [and] you can shorten up the process quite easily by just getting everyone there. – *County commissioner*

### **3. Definition of collaborative process draws mostly positive responses, with some reservations.**

*[I]t is hard for people to just kind of step back and be thoughtful and analytical about what's going on and oftentimes you do need impetus, an external "want-not", a worse alternative to an initiated agreement.  
- Director, conservation organization*

***Definition of collaboration presented to respondents: A process in which people and organizations that have been adversaries will work face to face to resolve a natural resource problem,... create a policy... or create a management plan. This would be a process in which interested parties would participate voluntarily rather than in response to a court or administrative mandate.***

While some decision makers react with unequivocal support for this definition, and applaud themselves for doing what the statement outlines, most of the time, decision makers believe that the description "sounds good but" needs some realistic cautions.

For example, the most common reservation or observation about collaborative process is that it does not simply happen voluntarily, but needs a catalyst to move people to the table. Government laws, mandates, or administrative rulings, as well as lawsuits, are mentioned a number of times especially by the conservation group leaders.

I would say that the only thing that one should recognize is that there are indirect mandates that often bring people to the table. That should be understood. I'll give two. Endangered Species Act and then court actions interpreting and applying the Endangered Species Act.  
- Director, conservation organization

[P]eople tend to underestimate the fact that having strong legal requirements in place nine times out of ten are reasons that people come to the table on things like the Endangered Species Act. We wouldn't be doing this planning, there wouldn't be these collaborative processes emerging if you didn't have the stick of the Endangered Species Act sort of out there scaring the hell out of people to get them to come to the table and try to do something positive. If it weren't there, we wouldn't be having these experiences—people wouldn't voluntarily be trying to have these things, generally speaking. - *Legislative counsel, U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works*

[I]t sounds realistic but I don't think the issues of voluntary and a court-ordered mandate are necessarily mutually exclusive. When I said that lawsuits are necessary, a lot of these issues have come around because of lawsuits but people are still there voluntarily. And lawsuits have the effect of educating people. I think that it is a good definition but I don't think you could limit it to people that are there without the force of lawsuits. – *Director, conservation group*

[I]f one person statutorily has the right to do something, it's hard to get them to come to the table and talk about that just because some other people don't like it. For example, under state statute, if you have the right to mine—why would [the representatives from a mining company] enter under a collaborative process to talk to their neighbors about that? – *Senior planner, county planning department*

A lot of collaborative efforts were actually the result of people sitting down after a court order. You know again, all the other factors we talked about earlier: the size, it depends. I don't have a problem at all sitting down with adversaries and figuring stuff out [but] that's really hard. But if you are going to collaborate on some public policy issue than there's no way you are going to get all the stakeholders at the table to do that, to do public policy on federal lands. – *Director, conservation organization*

***The idea that a legal mandate is essential to bring groups with different opinions on natural resource issues to the table is illustrated in this business leader's story of dealing with growth issues:***

We are trying to identify the balance of growth needs of the economic engine with the quality of life and planning needs and the environmental concerns. So, there's really a balance in that . . . The big issue now is the preparation of general plans in all of our member communities and the process of trying to facilitate dialogue to get those communities to coordinate those general plans preparations together. There's no statutory requirement that really forces those plans to be coordinated into a regional plan. – *Director, business council*

A second reservation, heard less often, is the realization that sometimes there are people whose goals are just so different that they simply do not want to collaborate and who are unwilling to look for shared goals.

I think there are a lot of people that are ready and willing to do that because they have not been as successful as they would like to be with the more aggressive approach to resolving these problems but I also think it's actually good that people do have a line that they draw in the sand or at least a lot of people do and are unwilling to back off from certain desires or certain desired outcomes. – *Director, conservation organization*

Some issues you will never get a resolution just because of the factions involved in it. I guess it would have to depend on what the issue is, if it's going to be an issue regarding folks that are conservationist people, you know, you would have to realize what the issue is and what the bottom line is. – *County commissioner*

Decision makers of every type often balk at the word “adversaries,” because they do not want to be thought of as adversaries. They would be more comfortable with the terms “groups with diverse interests.”

“Collaborative process” . . . I think it's a good working definition. I think sometimes people won't necessarily be adversaries and sometimes if it is in response to an order, they can come up with a good process but as a voluntary process, that definition works. – *Director, state environmental quality council*

Some government officials say this type of collaborative process is happening right now and some participants interviewed from government say this is almost exactly practice the BLM has in place when addressing land-use disputes.

Similarly, government decision makers, especially those at the state level, say that a collaborative process often works to bring about agreement among different government agencies. Thus, it is not just the traditional industry vs. environmental paradigm that people apply to the term collaborative process or collaboration.

I think that is a pretty good definition. It reminds me of the model some of the federal agencies use in the BLM and in resource management areas or something like that where it is basically what you described. – *Chief of the Habitat Protection Bureau, Fish and Wildlife*

#### **4. When collaboration works best. Ingredients to successful collaboration.**

*Collaboration means a lot of time and energy, understanding and trust. – County commissioner*

Decision makers across the study cite a number of elements that combine for successful collaboration. Here are the most common ingredients:

- Establish at the beginning an agreed-upon vision or definition of objectives. There must be a shared end goal that everyone in the process wants. In many cases, this is related to how they would like their community to change.

[I think] there needs to be some acceptance or agreement on what the goals of the project are up front. – *Key staffer, state department of natural resources*

I think I am a strategic, focused facilitator almost to a fault. And I think clearly the biggest obstacle to any kind of endeavor like this is it's not just the failure, it's the lack of attention given among collaborative organizations of reaching agreement up front around longer goals.  
– *Director, business council*

You have to have some willingness to engage in seeking a solution that works for all interested parties. So that sort of has to be an agreement up front that people will do that and that they will just respect the other participants. – *County commissioner*

I think going into a process, being clear up front of what your bottom lines are, is also important. To be able to not enter into a process until you have already identified areas where you could work together or where there is overlap so if does get to the point to where everyone can agree on, you recognize that in advance and see that is adequate.  
– *Deputy director, conservation organization*

What do we want this country to look like? What do we want the natural resources to be like? We found in general that you can get people to agree on what those goals are: whether it's clean water or more grass or scenic vistas, all that kind of stuff. People will agree on that but what they like to fight about is the tools and the appropriate use and those sorts of things. – *Director, state parks and historic sites department*

I think if you can get into it early it's probably very more prone to be settled in a collaborative process than after if you have either entered into it legally through regulation or a court case. Once those boundaries are set, it's hard to break them down. – *Assistant director, state environmental quality council*

- The process includes participants who agree on how long the process will last and who understand that large amounts of time and patience are often required for success.

The shortest time frame for any dispute is about 18 months. And much of that 18 month-time frame is dedicated to public involvement. Early on we typically form a stakeholder group. We start a project through the process, gather everybody's concerns, identify what the scope of the analysis is going to be and then go ahead and develop alternatives based on that. And the proposed action goes out into the public again for review and comment as the draft is put together and leading up to that with your stakeholder group, there are numerous meetings, discussions, information provided. At times, there are other agencies that will come in as cooperating agencies—*Director, state forest service*

Collaboration means a lot of time and energy, understanding and trust.  
– *County commissioner*

We have been working with people for years trying to find a set of solutions that would address environmental or ecological issues in the forest by trying to restore natural process and function and at the same time allow for economic activity based on restoration needs which involve the utilization of small diameter trees that are removed from the woods as part of restoration and we've had a lot of success in trying to bring people together on that issue and proposing activities and testing and experimenting and finding a lot of common ground and it's going be going on for a long time. – *Director, conservation organization*

- The process has a leader who has some leverage or sway with the group to keep it going when members want to quit. This leverage can come from a leader's moral authority, personality, or from a government position. A collaborative process will sometimes have a neutral, objective leader who serves as a catalyst or can move the process along when certain obstacles need to be overcome (*e.g.* a facilitator or someone from government can serve as the role but must remain neutral.)

I find that if you work on [a collaborative process], you need to have a moderator or a meeting manager that is neutral to both parties where they can meet in a neutral sight and go into the individual communities.  
– *County commissioner*

One of them I think is some leadership, usually from an elected official who is trusted and trying to bring the parties together. Probably another is getting a hook—defining some issue that everyone is interested in, that people think they can gain from resolving [an environmental dispute.]

– *Senior Planner, county planning department*

- As discussed, a legal mandate that brings people to the table can be very helpful.

At a bottom line, without regulatory oversight, you would have people who would thumb their nose towards any kind of improvement of environmental quality. – *Assistant director, state environmental quality department*

- The collaborative process should position participants as equals.

I suppose if it is an even playing field, it might be more conducive. When one body, one entity has political stroke or financial stroke or some kind of stroke that the other entity doesn't have, then probably collaboration is less likely to occur. – *Director, state geologic society*

The thing that makes a collaborative process in our minds work is when everybody is sitting at the table with equal power. – *Assistant director, conservation organization*

- The process should have as a goal the building of trust among diverse stakeholders.

Yeah, it requires trust—you have to trust each other. That trust doesn't exist when you begin and so that's why you want to talk about goals, you take it a piece at a time. – *Director, state parks and historic sites department*

[T]here has to be an element of trust in all of this. If I come to the table with a particular interest or expertise in... a particular willow tree, let's say. And I have studied that willow tree all my life and written about it and I am acknowledged in the scientific community as the expert, I am not really interested in spending much time with some guy who is a cattle rancher and the presence of cattle in that area is the death knell for my willow tree. The public land grazer has to understand the importance of the willow tree and the biologist or whatever has to be able to get to a point of trusting the cattle grazer. – *County commissioner*

***Trust is a quality of successful collaboration, and mistrust can be deadly, as this state forest official's testimony shows.***

I know there is a group in \_\_\_\_\_, the \_\_\_\_\_, and there's another group, the \_\_\_\_\_, and I know some of the positions they have taken on some of the issues: that all of the compromises were made eighty years ago with the development of the west. Those compromises have been made, there are less than 3% of virgin forests left and we're going to fight to save every species and tree that's out there. You scratch your head and say, should I engage in a two to three year process when I know there's a group out there, a group that has money and power and will not participate in this process will probably not like the result and will probably sue? - *Director, state forestry department*

- A potentially successful collaborative process is willing to embrace all the views that are interested in the outcome of a certain issue.

There is a discussion that] represents a diverse coalition. In other words, if you leave somebody out of the discussion, then it could come back to bit you at the end of the process. You have to make sure everybody who is at stake who wants to participate is there. - *Director, conservation organization*

- Local, small-scale issues work better than larger geographical issues.

Obviously the smaller the geographic area, the smaller the issue and the easier they are to resolve with people who are directly involved. As that scope expands, the issue becomes tougher to resolve that are bigger in nature. Particularly if industry, or a particular environmental group may have as a national issue, it gets a lot more difficult. If you can deal with real issues, real problems, you can resolve them. But when you start getting into philosophies of position, then it gets more difficult. - *State director, Bureau of Land Management*

[I]f it is at a real local level, and decisions are being made at a local level, than I think people feel like they have influence versus when decisions are being made at the national level than I just think they feel that they are a one in a million. Their voice is not being heard. - *Director, business council*

## C. Obstacles to Successful Collaboration.

*I guess the most apparent obstacle is people's belief that they are right. And that their goal is the only goal. – Director, conservation organization*

These decision makers define unsuccessful collaboration a number of ways: 1) failure of collaboration to get started, 2) a break down mid-way into the process, and 3) a collaborative result that is short-lived because one party was dissatisfied.

We heard many obstacles to successful collaboration from the participants in the study. The obstacles to successful collaboration often reflect an absence of those ingredients for success cited earlier. Here is a discussion of the most common problems cited.

- The decision makers most often bemoan a lack of “trust,” or simply “bad chemistry” among parties. They believe that when collaboration fails it is often because participants have a philosophy or personality that will not tolerate compromise. This arose particularly in attitudes among and about conservation groups, several of which believe that collaboration means compromise and compromise means selling out their convictions about natural resource protection. Some conservationists see it as compromising their values. In a more cynical view, we heard claims that conservation groups take a hard-line position on issues because it plays to their core constituencies and helps them raise money.
- Landowner and property rights groups are also criticized for taking a rigid position against any form of government regulation or oversight.

And for example, in the committee we dealt with the CARA bill—the idea was to reserve a lot of land for wildlife preservation and for a number of other things of that ilk and it had a lot of bipartisan support and the purpose was not to purchase any of the land that was out there already but to expand what they have currently but some of the property rights owners—especially some of the right-wingers out in the western part of the state—went bonkers and said this was going to be a huge federal land grab and there was a lot of misinformation out there and there was some concern amongst a lot of folks out there that the program was going to swoop in and take them off their property and take their land. – *Legislative aide on the environment, U.S. Senate*

[I]f we are talking about roadless areas, and it has occurred before, there's an attempt to have a dialogue with the timber industry. Well, I am not really interested in talking to them about logging and road less areas because we don't believe logging should occur in road less areas. – *Director, conservation organization*

What happens, what is in our world right now, where we're at right now, there is no trust. It has gotten so antagonistic that there is the assumption going into those kind of collaborative efforts [there is the attitude] that if I don't get what I want, I will try to go back and get it next time. There is no feeling [of trust] from my perspective. – *Director, cattlemen's organization*

[T]he environmental community has its own cultural biases that interfere with this sort of collaboration: The environmental community tends to [demonstrate] a religious purity about this that we are out to save the world and to the extent that there is a theological approach, almost derived from the Garden of Eden mindset of pure nature polluted by homo sapiens, that interferes with the potential of collaboration. Similarly, those environmental groups who say they are saving x from the land-rapers, tend not to be interested in collaborative stuff that says we are working with these folks because that doesn't tend to help with raising money. The third problem with the government folks is that a lot of them are stretched, a lot of them are gun shy of any kind of public process because it makes them vulnerable to criticism so that they have their own psychological mindset that you have to work with and overcome. – *Director, conservation organization*

I think that there is an independence that goes along with owning property and earning your own living off your own property and I think that there is an independence there that sometimes doesn't always fit well with regulatory agencies. – *Chief of the Habitat Protection Bureau, Fish and Wildlife Parks*

[N]orth of here in the \_\_\_\_\_ Valley where there is unbelievable hatred and unbelievable anger and there's been all kinds of talk on the radio about going down and burning down Green Nazis homes, for example, people are driving pick-up trucks with bumper stickers that say "Have you bitch-slapped an environmentalist today?" Just breath-taking! It is just hard to have valid conversations in an atmosphere like that.

- *Director, conservation organization*

[T]ypically, the biggest obstacles are that the sides are polarized. In the case of the \_\_\_\_\_ development, for example, there were millions of dollars spent on both sides and neither side was willing to sit down with the other and it became so contentious there was no hope of a compromise position. - *Director, county planning and zoning commission*

I think a lack of willingness to consider different points of view, just operating from a power position and not a collaborative position...you don't get a decision that is widely accepted. You just have a power struggle and somebody wins and a lot of people lose and that doesn't really solve anything. - *County commissioner*

[A]n unwillingness to compromise and come to the center. The BLM and others, Forest Service included, we have a multiple-use mission and so included in that might be, for example, wildlife concerns. And that's one of a lot of things that we have the responsibility to consider as we make decisions. If you happen to be an advocate for wildlife and that's your only responsibility then it is a lot easier not to make the compromise or to seek some common ground. The only interest is benefiting what would be best for wildlife without any other considerations. And you could pick any resource and make that statement. - *State director, Bureau of Land Management*

I think the biggest obstacle is a kind of us against them attitude and I think that the agricultural people and the multiple-use folks view the different land use agencies, whether they are state or federal, as the enemy. And I think if they got to know them and realized that these people are just trying to do the best job they can for everybody, that would break down a lot of barriers. - *Director, business council*

I guess the most apparent obstacle is people's belief that they are right. And that their goal is the only goal and [an] inability to see things in the eyes of other people and I think a lot of these resource management issues in this region, people are pretty dammed entrenched. For example, the snow mobile issue in \_\_\_\_\_-people either want them in there or they don't want them in there. And, there's very little middle ground of people saying we can have some in there as long as they aren't making a lot of noise and causing a lot of pollution problems. That's a very small camp-I think most people are either all or nothing.

- *Director, conservation organization*

Probably communication is the biggest problem. We have in the west some people who are very much personal property rights people who want to do what they want to do with their land and they don't want to anybody to tell them . . . the old west type of mentality-I've been here and nobody's been telling me what to do with my land. – *County commissioner*

I think people are becoming somewhat more polarized in their views. The whole environmental versus development has become very polarized—it shouldn't be but it has become very polarized . . . people are becoming more self-involved and competitive and that makes it a lot harder to come together for the common good. – *State director, Bureau of Land Management*

- Collaboration fails when one participant has large advantage over another. Equality of stakeholders is important to achieve. We heard criticisms by environmental groups that when government officials organize a collaborative process, the participation is stacked against them, with many more business groups than conservation groups represented. Government officials dispute this claim, saying generally that all groups are represented fairly.

I think that if you had to focus on one obstacle, it would be the difference in opinion among the stakeholders as to what the appropriate resolution should be but there is a whole series of obstacles within that umbrella: who has the power in Congress, who has the deepest grass roots, who can get their message out, who can work the media, all the different arenas of debate are to be characterized as obstacles. – *Director, conservation director*

- Collaboration is more likely to falter when the process is either too long, or when participants are too impatient, expecting a faster resolution than is possible, or when there is no leader to keep the process moving forward when problems arise.

The problem I have with collaboration is really one of timing and I think we as the environmental community jump into these collaborative opportunities, especially among national groups or statewide groups. We will jump into these processes when we feel we are in a policy dead end. – *Assistant director, conservation organization*

[W]hen controversies arise in a particular transaction, and the partners in that transaction may have different viewpoints of what ought to be done, I would say that probably the biggest obstacle is the time necessary to resolve differences and to align viewpoints. When you get into a situation that you are spending millions of dollars on land, to put it into conservationist ownership, these deals never are what they appear to be—they shift and they move around all the time. And again, under the pressures of time, time is one of the principal limiting factors. – *Director, conservation organization*

- Collaboration is less likely to get started without a legal mandate. Respondents believe this is truer today than ten years ago, because now there is less incentive for business and landowner interests to come to the table, because of a more conservative political landscape. These mandates are needed now more than ever. There is less incentive for landowner groups to discuss changing the status quo to protect natural resources, according to conservation groups and government officials.

[M]y experience is this sort of thing works best when there is a perceived threat that the status quo is not satisfying anyone of the key interests and therefore the potential exists that an alternative would be better for them. If people are fat and happy in the situation, they are not going to collaborate across the divide because they think their needs are being met. – *Director, conservation organization*

- Collaboration also is burdened when stakeholders argue rhetoric instead of facts. This happens often on environmental issues because stakeholders cannot agree on the facts.

People think that with all the science we have, that there is an answer. There isn't always an answer. We were encountering some air quality issues associated with coal mining that are just developing and they don't always have technical bases for decisions. They are collecting data, and that takes a while, you don't know if your monitoring is always picking up what you need and that all takes time. This is an air quality issue for a huge coal mine so you are trying to set up monitoring, trying to collect data, trying to test the data, make sure it is reliable data—that whole scientific process there. Meanwhile, these people are trying to mine and the other people are trying to live next door. So, you don't always have a technical answer. That's one of the hardest things. And, so people I work with try to make their decision based on being cautious and considering health and welfare things but sometimes you don't have all the information you need and that takes time. – *Director, state environmental quality council*

I feel like most times the environmental movement, and it's changing and this is probably a gross characterization probably, but a lot of what we are trying to do, is pick the best science and let the facts speak for themselves. – *Assistant director, conservation organization*

## **D. Messages: How to Talk about Collaboration**

### **1. Three popular descriptions of collaborative process stress “community,” “common ground,” and “bringing people together.”**

All eight of the descriptions of collaborative process offered to decisions makers receive generally favorable reactions. None were unacceptable. The three most popular focus on community, common ground, and bringing people together. Less popular are those that focused on cooperation, consensus, and deliberation.

Representatives from federal government agencies expressed the strongest positive feelings toward all of the descriptions. This was in keeping with their more positive view of the collaborative process and what it can and has achieved.

Representatives of conservation groups reacted less enthusiastically than others to all the descriptions. This reflected their more pessimistic outlook toward collaboration.

The three top descriptions are as follows:

- ❑ Community building programs;
- ❑ Seek common ground among diverse stakeholders; and
- ❑ Bring together citizens, businesses, and government in a region to reduce conflicts over the use and management of natural resources.

Other descriptions were also viewed as positive, but not as strongly as the above three:

- ❑ Dispute resolution;
- ❑ Community based conservation;
- ❑ Community based solutions;
- ❑ Make decisions in an atmosphere of deliberation among adversaries whose combined creativity can lead to innovative decisions; and
- ❑ Recognize that we need cooperative approaches.

Looking at these descriptions in the light of respondents' comments across the interviews, we make some observations:

- ❑ “Community” is important to stress. The words “consensus-building” are more effective than simply saying “solutions” because the former suggests an impact that is bigger and longer lasting. Also, the words “community-based conservation” suggest the process will take a side. Therefore, “community building programs” is the top description.
- ❑ The word “dispute” is perceived as somewhat different than collaborating to achieve a common vision.
- ❑ Deliberation among “adversaries” raises several objections from respondents who say they do not want to think of others as adversaries but as different stakeholders in the community.
- ❑ Simply saying that we will “recognize” the need for “cooperative approaches” is less appealing than other descriptions because it does not suggest an outcome, such as “community building,” or gaining “common ground” or “brining people together” to “reduce conflicts.”

## **2. Most effective message to motivate involvement is solution-oriented and inclusive**

When decision makers were asked to choose from five different messages that they themselves would use to engage people in a collaborative process, the overwhelming favorite is the message that is most inclusive and solution-oriented.

The most popular of the five messages tested:

- ❑ Collaboration produces better outcomes for all of us.

Positive but less popular messages:

- ❑ Collaboration creates enduring results;
- ❑ Collaboration is the fairest way to resolve differences; and
- ❑ Collaboration creates a more democratic solution.

A relatively unpopular message is:

- Collaboration is more efficient.

The message about producing “better outcomes for all of us” does not simply state a process but presents a reason for the process that is compelling. It’s message appeals to self-interest, cloaked in the garb of the public interest. The decision makers in our study found this very appealing.

The message about creating enduring results is the next most popular message. It is credible with many respondents and like the top message, it communicates an important value of engaging in the process, according to our respondents.

Other messages that talk about fairness and democracy receive somewhat favorable reactions but are less compelling reasons for engaging in collaboration.

A message that stresses efficiency is the least popular because it lacks credibility as well as salience for many who relate the word efficiency with the time involved in collaborative process. However, for those few who relate the word “efficiency” to financial costs, this message is more popular and credible.