

ABSTRACT

Over the last ten years, the number of landscape-scale, collaborative initiatives involving land trusts and both private and public partners has increased. Given that the success of local land trusts depends in large part on their grassroots origins and connections, why are these organizations joining together to create large-scale, regional initiatives? What challenges are they facing in these efforts? Do the benefits of working regionally outweigh the costs? In order to explore answers to these questions, original data were gathered through interviews with executive directors or key staff members from five landscape scale collaborative initiatives. Case studies included:

- The Bay Area Open Space Council (California)
- The Mississippi Blufflands Alliance (Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Iowa)
- The Michigan Dune Alliance (Michigan)
- The North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership (Massachusetts)
- The Northern Rockies Initiative (*unofficial name*) (Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, British Columbia, and Alberta)

The primary sentiment expressed by participants was that the benefits of participation in large-scale collaborative initiatives outweighed the challenges and costs. The access to additional funding, the learning and networking opportunities created, and the resulting increased organizational capacity were unanimously praised by participants. In contrast, most challenges were raised either by few participants or simply as areas for discussion and improvement. Primary challenges cited included locating scarce resources (such as time, energy, and money), creating an effective organizational structure, and establishing a group vision that supported the missions and goals of participants. Factors contributing to the success of collaborative efforts, including the informal nature of the group and the presence of key personalities, as well as potential future changes participants would like to see made, were discussed. The results of this work can be used to guide future collaborative efforts. Recommendations for group capacity building, including lessons learned regarding the structure, size, composition, and project focus of collaborative efforts, are reported. Finally, ideas for land trusts contemplating participation in regional initiatives are included.