

## CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

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### Overview

This chapter describes the research path we used to conduct a systematic analysis of collaborative resource partnerships in the United States. As described in Chapter 1, our core objectives were to:

- **Review** supportive and critical perspectives of collaborative approaches to natural resource management;
- **Describe** the current range and variation of collaborative activity in the United States; and
- **Explore** how participants in specific cases respond to challenges and opportunities present in collaborative resource management efforts.

To achieve these objectives, six research phases, diagrammed in *Figure 2-1*, were followed. Each phase correlates with development of one or more chapters of this project (see diagram page 2-9):

- 1) Reviewing current literature about collaboration;
- 2) Identifying and developing a collaborative partnership database;
- 3) Developing a framework for analysis;
- 4) Selecting cases for in-depth study;
- 5) Conducting interviews; and
- 6) Performing cross-case analysis.

Progress with each phase was supplemented by:

- *Website development* to disseminate and to gather information <[www.umich.edu/~crpgroup](http://www.umich.edu/~crpgroup)> and;
- *Presentations* at the following conferences to further develop and acquire case-study information:
  - ♦ *Building Capacity in Environmental Community-based Watershed Projects -- Peer to Peer Learning*, Skamania, Washington, February 7-10, 1999;
  - ♦ *The Society for Range Management Annual Conference*, Omaha, Nebraska - Report on Coordinated Resource Management activity, February 23-24, 1999; and
  - ♦ *The Society for Public Policy and Dispute Resolution (SPIDR) Mid-year Conference for the Environmental and Public Policy Sector*, Keystone, Colorado, May 13-15, 1999.

## RESEARCH PHASES

### *Introduction*

The following description of research phases details what became a one and half year evolving effort to understand and describe collaborative activity. Therefore, it is important to note that our objectives necessitated overlap in nearly all research steps. This description serves to explain why we took the steps we did, the thought processes behind it, and final products.

### **Phase 1: Reviewing Current Literature About Collaborative Activity**

Reviewing the literature on collaborative activity was the first step in determining how those involved in the natural resource management field currently think about collaboration and why. In addition, we knew that, to credibly assess the range of collaborative activity, it was essential to understand the driving forces behind the growing number of collaborative partnerships. Indeed, this phase guided our thinking, providing a clear view of where gaps in knowledge about collaborative activity existed. Consequently, information gathered from the literature also helped frame the need for a broader systematic assessment of collaboration.

During the initial six months of research (6/98 - 12/98), over 600 different sources of information were investigated, including academic and professional journals, web sites, popular press, previous case study reports, and government documents. Specifically, we used the following topic areas to access information related to collaborative activity:

- Environmental conflict resolution
- Alternative dispute resolution in environmental conflicts
- Positive and critical perspectives of collaboration in resource management
- Collaborative approaches in natural resource decision-making
- Case histories of well known collaborative partnerships

This step contributed to development of the first three chapters of our work:

#### *Chapter 1: Background*

Extensive literature review provided the information needed to create a descriptive history of collaborative efforts, detailing interest-based organizational activity and agency operations in the United States. It also helped to explain why there is confusion about the collaborative process and, moreover, why it is important to begin trying to understand the landscape of collaboration.

#### *Chapter 2: Critiques of Collaboration*

Understanding the literature also provided insight into the broad critiques, both supportive and negative, of collaboration. As such, this chapter became a review of the supportive and critical perspectives of collaborative activity. It also provided the basis for identifying many of the challenges to collaboration that were later refined into case study interview questions.

#### *Chapter 4: Mapping the Terrain*

Finally, viewing the literature enriched our understanding of the many and varied *Dimensions* of collaborative activity. Consequently, we developed over thirty continuums to represent the variation we observed in collaborative initiatives across the country. We then used this chapter to describe the dimensions of collaboration in resource management, highlighting how groups differ along a single continuum as well as between different categories.

#### **Phase 2: Identifying and Developing a Collaborative Partnership Database**

Once we had defined what was being said about collaboration, our next step was to determine what was actually being done on the ground. We did this by building a large database of case information including groups from all parts of the spectrum; whether formal or informal; ad hoc or institutionalized; large or small; time limited or ongoing. To avoid overlooking parts of this landscape, it was necessary to initially frame collaboration in a purposefully broad manner. Therefore, for research purposes, *we defined collaborative partnerships as:*

*Groups of people from varied organizations or interests working together on natural resource management issues.*

With this definition in hand, we set out to:

- 1) Review compilations of collaborative initiatives; and
- 2) Contact individuals and organizations in the field to learn about additional cases.

Reports tapped for cases included, but were not limited to:

- *Balancing Public Trust and Private Interest: An Investigation of Public Participation in Habitat Conservation Planning.* Masters Project, University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources and Environment. Dr. Steven L. Yaffee et. al. May 1998.
- *Building Bridges Across Agency Boundaries: In Search of Excellence in the United States Forest Service.* Dr. Julia M. Wondolleck and Dr. Steven L. Yaffee, July 15, 1994.
- *Coordinated Resource Management: Guidelines for All Who Participate.* Rex Cleary and Dennis Phillipi, Society of Range Management, 1st Edition, 1993.
- *Ecosystem Management in the United States: An Assessment of Current Experience.* Dr. Steven L. Yaffee et. al. Island Press and The Wilderness Society, 1996.
- *The Keystone National Policy Dialogue on Ecosystem Management, Final Report.* The Keystone Center, Colorado, October 1996.

- *The Watershed Source Book: Watershed-Based Solutions to Natural Resource Problem.* University of Colorado Natural Resources Law Center.

The World Wide Web was also useful for examining the state of upcoming groups, many of which posted descriptions of their work. We contacted hundreds of organizations this way and accessed a variety of list servers. In total, approximately 1,000 individuals were reached, including federal and state land agencies, countless professional dispute resolution organizations, and every office of The Nature Conservancy in the United States. Indeed, maximizing the level of personal communication with individuals in the natural resource management field was key to capturing groups previously unstudied.

In total, this process allowed us to build a database of over 450 collaborative partnerships. For each, an information form was developed (called a Collaborative Partnership Brief or CP Brief -- see *Appendix 2-2*). These forms---highlighting information such as the initiator of the partnership, funding source, outcomes, and contacts---illuminated the broad variation of collaborative partnerships that was appearing. The database also formed the pool we later used to illustrate the dimensions of collaboration (see Chapter 4 - Mapping the Terrain) and to select cases for in-depth study described in Phase 4.

### **Phase 3: Developing a Framework for Analysis**

After establishing this database, a framework was needed to make sense of the broad range of collaborative efforts that are occurring. Though we initially attempted to neatly divide groups into the descriptive boxes often found in the literature---such as Ecosystem Management groups, Watershed Initiatives, Sustainable Community initiatives and Collaborative Resource Management Partnerships---it soon became evident that there were many distinguishing as well as unifying characteristics among groups, suggesting a more complex relationship. In response to this confusion, we developed a conceptual framework that captures and make sense of the many dimensions along which collaborative groups vary. More than 30 descriptive continuums were identified describing the range and variation we observed among hundreds of collaborative groups found in both the literature and our partnership database.

#### *Development of interview questions for in-depth cases*

The second stage of the analysis framework was development of interview questions for case studies. Interviews allowed us to empirically assess how groups managed the common challenges and opportunities present in collaborative partnerships. Because of our interest in the controversial aspects of collaboration, interview questions were based on the critical perspectives of collaborative partnerships identified in the Critiques Chapter. These challenges, described in Appendix 2-2 and detailed in Analysis Chapters 15-20, include:

- Ensuring stakeholder representation;
- Accommodating diverse interests;
- Dealing with scientific dimensions of natural resource management; and

- Accommodating diverse capabilities

#### *Interview process*

Interview questions were divided into two parts. Questions in Part 1 further probed background knowledge on each group, such as the *origin* of the group and its *organizational structure* (See Appendix 2-2 for full text) to give a sense of a group's evolution and outcomes. In Part 2, participants were asked describe how their group dealt with the common challenges to collaborative processes and what specific strategies they used to manage them. The result was 10 in-depth case studies describing the evolutionary nature of particular collaborative processes, the challenges they face and the strategies they use to address these challenges (Chapters 5-14).

#### **Phase 4: Selecting Cases for In-depth Study**

Along with establishing a framework with which to examine variation of partnerships, we also faced the daunting task of choosing a subset of cases (10) that exemplified the variation we were observing among groups as well as the acute challenges they face. To narrow the selection pool, a second definition of collaborative partnerships was applied involving four criteria:

- *Diverse representation and citizen involvement*
- *Consistent management activity*
- *Focus on problem-solving*
- *Minimum three -year existence*

#### ***Diverse representation and citizen involvement***

Qualifying cases needed to involve stakeholders representing diverse perspectives on the resource issue at hand. For this criteria, we considered both the number and type of perspectives present in the decision making process, prioritizing groups whose participants identified themselves as representatives of three or more of the following interests:

- ♦ *Environmentalists*
- ♦ *Business representatives*
- ♦ *Agency personnel*
- ♦ *Citizens*
- ♦ *Landowners*

In particular, we wanted cases to have direct citizen involvement, not consisting only of agencies, government, and formal organization representatives. This helped focus case studies away from more formalized processes toward the phenomena of increasing public participation in resource management.

#### ***Consistent management activity***

Consistent management activity meant considering only those partnerships deliberating on and proposing changes to resource conditions (e.g. watershed management or rangeland improvement). Comparatively, advisory councils, typically engaged only in information exchange, did not qualify.

### ***Focus on problem-solving***

Selecting groups with a long-term on *focus problem-solving* eliminated partnerships that did not go beyond one-time dispute resolution. Specifically, we were interested in examining initiatives with long-term investment in resolving resource management issues.

### ***Minimum three-year existence***

Finally, a minimum of three years experience for groups improved the possibility that case study partnerships had significant experience working in collaborative processes. This time period was based on empirical evidence and personal communication from case participants indicating the establishment of goals, objectives, and organizational framework typically required 1-2 years.

Combining these four criteria, our case-study definition of collaborative partnerships read as follows:

*Groups composed of diverse stakeholders and unlike perspectives that involve citizens at a community level, actively addressing natural resource issues and focused on problem-solving.*

This case selection parameter reduced our database pool by 75%, from over 450 collaborative partnerships to 112. Within this new subset, we identified groups reflecting the range and variation we had mapped in the 'Dimensions' section. Further background interviews were then conducted to verify information and availability of group members for interview. Finally, selected cases were compared between research team members, with short descriptions of each case scrutinized during meetings against the four criteria.

Given time limitations for case development, the 10 cases chosen were:

- *Animas River Stakeholder Group, Colorado*
- *Blackfoot Challenge, Montana*
- *The Clark County Habitat Conservation Planning Process, Nevada*
- *Darby Partnership, Darby Creek Watershed, Ohio*
- *The McKenzie Watershed Council, McKenzie Watershed, Oregon*
- *Nanticoke Watershed Alliance, Maryland and Delaware*
- *Northwest Colorado Resource Advisory Council, Colorado*
- *Owl Mountain Partnership, Colorado*
- *Three-Quarter Circle Ranch Coordinated Resource Management Group, Wyoming*
- *Scott River Coordinated Resource Management Planning Council, Scott River, California*

These cases comprise Chapters 5-14 of our report.

## **Phase 5: Conducting Phone Interviews**

With partnerships selected, phone interviewing comprised the information-gathering phase of each case. Our purpose was to give a "spotlight" look at the nature of collaborative activity across the

country, providing descriptions of what collaborative activity looks like, how it functions, and the challenges it faces under specific circumstances.

The first step in this process was to develop additional background knowledge about each case partnership to tailor questions to specific cases and more rapidly cover the background questions in Part 1 of the interview. We then contacted group participants matching the range of perspectives we wanted to capture in each group. When possible, this included an environmentalist, small business or industry representative, agency personnel, and citizen and / or landowner. The interviewer also spoke to at least one individual *outside* of the partnership to obtain external opinion on the partnership and determine why, if relevant, they had abstained from participation.

In all, between seven and twelve interviews, each lasting approximately one hour, were conducted and transcribed for each case. Conversations generally followed an open dialogue guided by interview questions in which participants described challenges and strategies of their partnership in detail. On several occasions, second calls were necessary to clarify points.

### **Phase 6: Cross-case Analysis**

The cross-case analysis represented the final phase of research. Given the wide variation among collaborative processes, prescriptive advice for collaborative efforts was deemed inappropriate. Rather, analysis of partnerships identified cross-case themes in regard to challenges, strategies and opportunities existing in each group. Analysis also paralleled four main challenges to collaboration imbedded in the Critiques. It also compares the range of outcomes found in the ten in-depth cases and reason participants chose to be involved in collaborative processes. The focus of each analysis section is as follows:

- ***Chapter 15: Why Collaboration and Alternatives***

There are always a variety of different ways to try and solve a problem or encourage action or decisions by others. Participating in public hearings, appealing agency decisions, and filing lawsuits are certainly some options that have been frequently used. Multi-party collaboration is another option. Why did the participants in the case study groups choose to collaborate rather than pursuing other avenues for addressing their interests? What do they believe would have happened with the issues of concern had the collaborative group not formed?

- ***Chapter 16: Outcomes***

The dimensions highlighted in Chapter 4 illustrate that there are wide-ranging objectives and goals evidenced across collaborative groups. What specifically has been accomplished by the case study groups? What do participants believe to be the most important achievement of their effort?



- ***Chapter 17: Ensuring Stakeholder Representation***

One challenge that collaborative groups encounter is achieving sufficient representation of those individuals and groups who will likely be affected by the group's decisions. This is a two-edged sword. The more interests that are represented, the more complete the information and knowledge about the issues at stake; at the same time, the more people that are involved, the more difficult it can be to manage discussions and reach decisions. What specific challenges did the case study groups face in ensuring representation? How did they deal with these challenges?

- ***Chapter 18: Accommodating Diverse Interests***

The diverse representation that makes collaborative groups unique presents both opportunities as well as challenges. On one hand, "two heads are better than one" and having diverse perspectives at the table can lead to more innovative solutions that are better tuned to the specifics of the problems being addressed. This diverse representation can also lead to a more broad-based and thorough understanding of the issues at stake. At the same time, to accommodate many different stakeholders requires that compromises must be made. What specific challenges did the case study groups face in accommodating the diverse interests in their partnerships? How did they deal with these challenges?

- ***Chapter 19: Accommodating Diverse Capabilities***

Another inherent challenge to collaborative initiatives is that people bring varying levels of knowledge, skills, power and resources to the table. What specific challenges did the case study groups face in accommodating the inevitable differences in influence, resources and skills between the involved parties? How did they deal with these challenges?

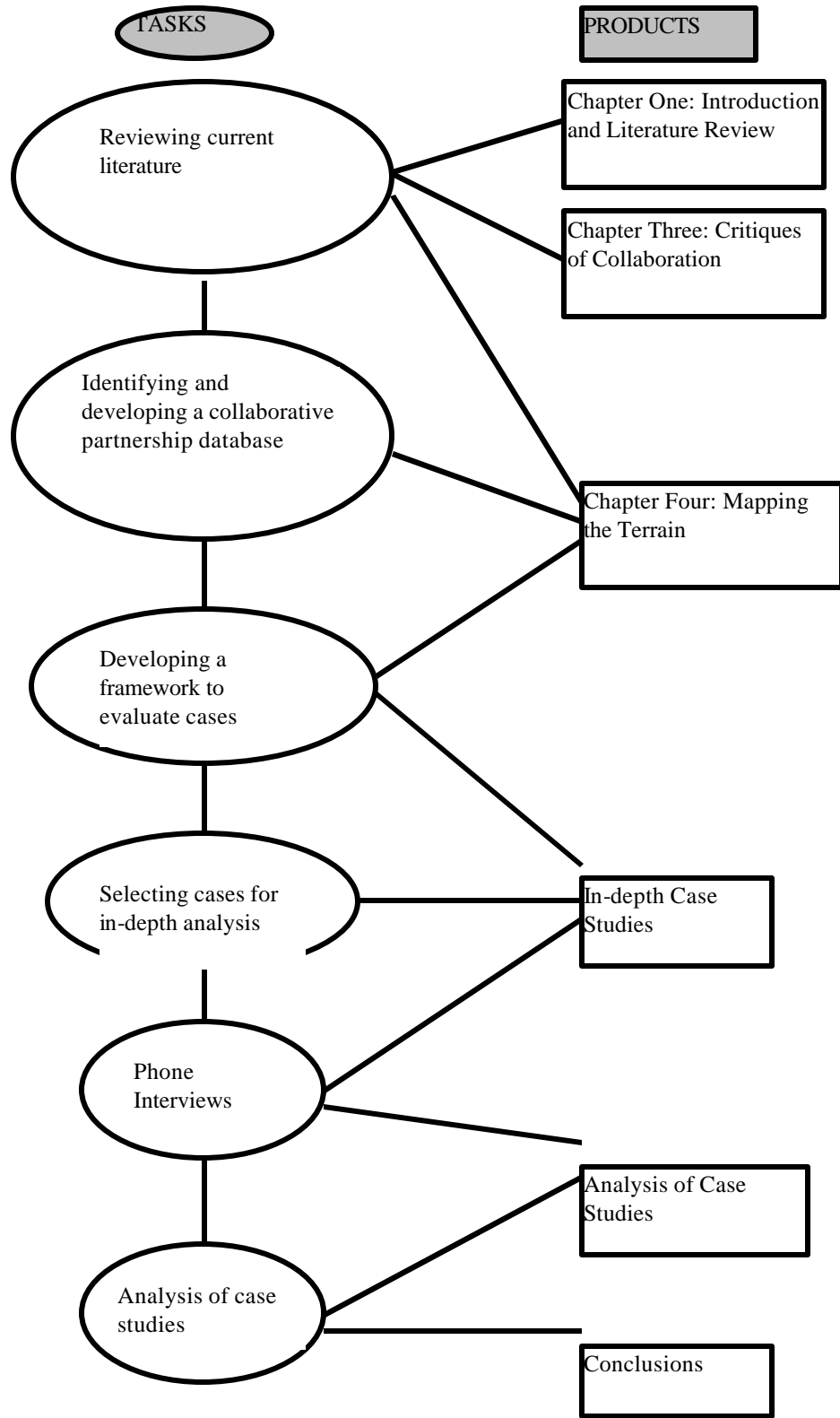
- ***Chapter 20: Dealing with Scientific Issues***

Many environmental problems and natural resource management issues are both scientifically complex and involve elements of risk and uncertainty. An additional challenge for collaborative groups is to meet the diverse needs and concerns of those involved but, at the same time, to do so in a way that is scientifically sound and credible. What specific challenges did the case study groups face in dealing with the scientific dimensions of the issues of concern to them? How did they deal with these challenges?

Finally, our **Conclusions** (Chapter 21) provide a summary of major findings from each analysis chapter. We also recount the core lessons about the nature of collaborative activity in the United States gleaned from the research phases of this document.



Figure 2-1. Flow diagram of tasks and products





## Appendix 2-1: CP Brief

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Location:   |  |
| Environmental issues:   |  |
| Scale:  |  |
| Land ownership  |  |
| Initiator   |  |
| Participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• number</li> <li>• representation,</li> <li>• paid / volunteer</li> <li>• likes / unlikes</li> </ul>   |  |
| Process structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• open / closed</li> <li>• facilitation</li> <li>• decision rule</li> <li>• connection to existing procedures</li> <li>• formality</li> <li>• other</li> </ul> |  |
| Time Frame: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• when initiated</li> <li>• ongoing?</li> <li>• meeting schedule</li> </ul>  |  |
| Funding Source:   |  |
| Scientific basis for planning, implementing and monitoring:   |  |
| Decision authority:   |  |

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
|--|--|

**Appendix 2-1 CP Brief (continued)**

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Outcomes:   |  |
| Level of support /<br>opposition:                                     |  |
| Other comments<br>(include<br>characteristics not<br>mentioned above) |  |
| Sources   |  |

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| Contacts |  |
|----------|--|



## Appendix 2-2. Interview questions

### **PART I. BACKGROUND**

#### *Introduction*

- What is the full name of your partnership, and can you spell it for me?
- How would you describe your position in this partnership?

#### *Origin of Partnership*

- Who and/or what initiated the partnership?
- Why was the partnership initiated?
- When was the partnership initiated?

#### *Issues Information*

- What natural resource issues is the partnership concerned with?
- How visible were these issues prior to the partnership formation? How were they dealt with before the creation of the partnership?
- Is the area of interest primarily public or private lands (give percentages of ownership)?
- How large is the geographic area the partnership decisions would affect?
- How far do members travel to participate in partnership activities?

#### *Organizational Information*

- Who are the members of the partnership and whom do they represent?
- Does the partnership have a relationship with agencies responsible for the resource? If so, please describe.
- Why did members chose to participate?
- What were principle goals of the partnership at the beginning? Have they changed?
- How did the partnership establish its goals?
- Is there a formal mission statement? What is it?
- How is the partnership funded?

#### *Process Information*

- How often does the partnership meet? Where?
- How did the partnership choose to meet on this schedule?
- How does the partnership make decisions (e.g. How did the partnership establish its goals? consensus or majority rule)?
- Does a facilitator assist in the process?
- Does the partnership have any formal decision-making authority?

- How much time do you invest in this partnership?
- How does this compare to the time others invest?

### *Outcomes*

- What kind of projects has the partnership accomplished?
- What would you say has been the greatest accomplishment of the partnership?

## **PART II. CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

### *Choosing to Collaborate*

#### STATEMENT:

There are always a variety of different ways to try to solve a problem or encourage action or decisions by others. Participating in public hearings, appealing agency decisions, filing lawsuits are certainly some options that have been frequently used. Multi-part collaboration is another option.

#### QUESTIONS:

Why did you choose to collaborate in this case?

What other options did you have? If the collaborative group would not have formed, what could you have done to address your concerns/problem?

Who, legally, or administratively, was "in charge" and why were they not able to deal effectively with the situation?

What do you think would have happened with these issues/problems if the collaborative group had not formed?

Weighing what the group has accomplished versus what likely would have occurred otherwise, what do you think are the most important achievements of the collaborative group?

How would you describe the role of the collaborative partnership relative to that of the responsible agencies?

What advice would you have with regards to the role a collaborative group should play and its relationship to official agencies?

### *Ensuring Representation*

#### STATEMENT:

One challenge that collaborative groups encounter is achieving sufficient representation of those individuals and groups who will likely be affected by the group's decisions. This is a two-edged sword. The more interests that are represented, the more complete the information and knowledge about the issues at stake; at the same time, the more people that are involved, the more difficult it can be to manage discussions and reach decisions.

**QUESTIONS:**

How did your group select participants?

Were concerns ever raised about the lack of representation of any particular group or interest?

In hindsight, do you feel that there were some interests that should have been involved but weren't?

What advice would you give others about how to deal with this challenge of ensuring adequate and fair representation within a manageable process?

***Local/National Tension***

(NOTE: If this is an issue, it will likely be raised in responses to the above question. If it is not discussed then, however, you should directly raise it, if the group deals with public land.)

**STATEMENT:**

Most collaborative groups coalesce out of a shared concern for an aspect of the environment that directly affects their lives in some way. Because many groups are located in out-of-the-way places, focused on specific resource base, representatives of regional or national groups find it difficult to participate, or even be aware of the group's discussions and decisions. Some criticize collaborative groups that are looking at issues dealing with public lands because they fear that local interests will dominate at the expense of broader national or state interests.

**QUESTIONS:**

Did this local/national tension become apparent in your group?

How did you deal with it?

In hindsight, what would you have done differently?

What advice would you give to others about how to deal with this challenge?

***Accommodating Diverse Interests***

**STATEMENT:**

The diverse representation that makes collaborative groups unique presents both opportunities as well as challenges. On the one hand, "two heads are better than one" and having diverse perspectives at the table can lead to more innovative solutions that are better tuned to the specifics of the problems being addressed. This diverse representation can also lead to a more broad-based and thorough understanding of the issues at stake. At the same time, this diversity poses inevitable challenges. To accommodate many different stakeholders sometimes requires that compromise. Some fear that compromises lead to "lowest common denominator solutions" that are less desirable than what otherwise might have been decided.

**QUESTION:**

Has your group confronted this two-edged sword?

What have been the positive aspects of a group comprised of diverse interests?

What challenges have been encountered?

In what ways do you think it may have improved the decisions that you have made?

In what ways do you think it may have diminished decisions?  
What advice would you give to others about how to maximize the positive aspects of representation by multiple stakeholders while minimizing the shortcomings?

### ***Dealing with Scientific Issues***

#### **STATEMENT:**

Many environmental problems and natural resource management issues are both scientifically complex and involve elements of risk and uncertainty. An additional challenge for collaborative groups is to meet the diverse needs and concerns of those involved but, at the same time, to do so in a way that is scientifically sound and credible.

#### **QUESTION:**

How did your group deal with the scientific dimensions of the involved issues?

How did you obtain scientific advice and expertise when it was needed?

Did some representatives have the necessary scientific background? Consultants? University involvement? Agency expertise?

What actions did your group take to ensure that decisions were in compliance with federal and state environmental laws and regulations?

In hindsight, would you have dealt with this issue in a different way?

What advice would you give to others about how to deal with this challenge?

### ***Accommodating Diverse Capabilities***

#### **STATEMENT:**

One inherent challenge to collaborative initiatives is that people bring varying levels of knowledge, skills, power and resources to the table. Some people fear that collaborative processes may lead to unfair or inequitable attention to some interests given inevitable differences in power, resources and skills between the parties.

#### **QUESTIONS:**

Was this a challenge that you or your group encountered?

How did you deal with the reality that people do come to the table with different levels of power, resources and skills?

Now having the benefit of hindsight, what do you wish you had done differently?

What advice would you give to others about how to deal with this challenge?

### ***Additional Insights Particular to this Case (Last Remarks)***

Are there any other issues or thoughts about your partnership group that you think are important or useful for our project to know about?

