

Vermillion Basin Plan Revision

July 2004 - March 2006

Location: Craig, Colorado

Background

In 2004, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) began revising its Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the Vermillion Basin area. The BLM wanted an adaptive management proposal that would employ an “out-of-the-box” collaborative planning approach. The North Colorado Stewardship (NWCOS), a newly established partnership representing a broad coalition of area stakeholders, indicated interest in working with the BLM to develop the RMP. This citizen-based approach was designed to keep the community engaged in developing landscape management goals, monitoring the process, and making appropriate adjustments if goals were not met. The BLM and NWCOS asked the U.S. Institute to help NWCOS develop a more formal internal organization and to facilitate the collaborative process for the RMP.

Results and Accomplishments

- The process began with enthusiasm and commitment from community stakeholders. Project phases included developing a charter for NWCOS, workshops and meetings on key issues, and work toward a community alternative for the RMP.
- The group struggled with some of the more contentious issues, such as balancing energy development and wilderness areas. The group could not reach consensus on a recommendation to the BLM. Nevertheless, many stakeholders believe that their input helped the BLM write a balanced plan that included many of the community’s concerns.
- Many participants said that one of the effort’s biggest accomplishments was improved relationships among all stakeholders.



Lessons Learned

Collaborative groups may not always be able to reach consensus, but this case offers some valuable lessons. For example:

- **Consistency in agency expectations and commitment.** All stakeholders, and especially the decision-making agency, should be clear and consistent both internally and with each other about their commitment to collaboration. It is also important to clarify for all parties involved how decisions are to be made both within and outside the collaborative process.
- **Challenges to consensus.** Groups with an open membership policy, such as NWCOS, may find it more difficult to reach full consensus due to inconsistent levels of participation.
- **Recognize important indicators.** It is important in any collaborative process to conduct periodic check-ins to ensure the group is on track. In this case, when the parties sat down to draft a written agreement, it clarified the remaining disagreements and the magnitude of the trade-offs that many of the parties faced.

Credits

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