

**COLLABORATIVE ACTION:  
*WORKING TOGETHER TO EFFICIENTLY IMPLEMENT  
STATE WILDLIFE AND FOREST ACTION PLANS***

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Collaborative approaches and coordinated action are needed to address growing environmental challenges and leverage scant resources for conservation. Because of their shared focus on natural resources within the same geographical boundaries, state wildlife agencies and state forestry agencies are logical partners. In 2012 the Open Space Institute (OSI) assessed the status of cooperation between these agencies in Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Missouri, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.

The project documents current joint efforts and identifies future opportunities for enhanced collaboration between sister agencies in implementing state wildlife action plans and forest action plans, known as SWAPs and FAPs. They also helped four states launch “collaborative action projects” to test the hypothesis that despite the inherent differences in their missions, the agencies could improve outcomes through collaboration.

OSI developed four key findings based on academic research, a survey and interviews with state agency directors, and implementation of the action projects:

**I. Align action plans.** SWAPs and FAPs can be the basis for developing shared goals, common metrics, and coordinated action, with an eventual goal of coordinating some plan sections. A basic first step is aligning plan update schedules and incorporating existing joint efforts into the plans.

**II. Focus on priority issues for collaboration.** Three challenges that are already state priorities require coordinated approaches and landscape-level action: fire management, invasive species management, and climate change adaptation.

**III. Focus on priority places for collaboration.** Wildlife and forestry agencies can achieve synergies by working in areas where their individual priorities overlap—even before they reconcile their goals, approaches, and metrics.

**IV. Pursue efficiency and effectiveness.** Because of funding and staffing constraints, the challenge is to deliver a better outcome with the same resources or reduce total resource needs, not to collaborate for collaboration’s sake. Outcomes must be measured.

Three examples illustrate the potential for collaborative action:

- Florida’s wildlife and forestry agencies are developing joint metrics for outcomes in order to ensure collaborative work around fire, invasive species and other issues can be measured jointly.
- Kentucky’s sister agencies are pursuing joint certification of state lands, despite different goals and metrics. The wildlife agency would measure outcomes in terms of new management plans and activities; the forestry agency wants to develop timber markets and will measure success in terms of certified acreage.
- Georgia’s wildlife and forestry agencies plan to hold joint outreach sessions for informing the 2015 action plan updates. This simple step will increase planning efficiencies and ensure cross-pollination of strategies.
- Tennessee’s wildlife and forestry agencies are coordinating work on stream buffer restoration. Without compromising their individual goals, they can conduct joint monitoring, increase response time to landowners and leverage each other’s impacts.

This report summarizes the lessons derived from the study and offers potential next steps to help state wildlife and forestry agencies advance effective collaboration and, ultimately, meet their missions to protect the states’ natural resources.

## **LESSONS LEARNED: SUMMARY**

### ***Align action plans***

State wildlife action plans (SWAPs) and forest action plans (FAPs) are a logical focus for collaborative effort, but to date, the plans have not reflected the extensive collaboration ongoing in the states. Developing shared goals and metrics could eventually lead to coordinated implementation of state action plans.

#### Key finding I. Use the plans to develop shared goals and metrics for collaborative projects.

- a. Align plan update schedules and use updates as an opportunity to increase collaboration.
- b. Establish a formal requirement for agencies to work together on plan updates. Currently FAPs require this but SWAPs do not (Appendix 3, Federal and State Programs That Encourage Collaboration).
- c. Use incentives—public funding and private grants—to encourage joint development of plan sections over time.
- d. Consider future opportunities to increase coordination with regional partnerships and other state planning efforts.

### ***Focus on priority issues***

Shared threats to wildlife and forests are a natural focus for coordinated effort. Agencies in all seven states currently collaborate on fire and invasive species. Four states report that their agencies are working together on climate adaptation. These three issues can advance effective partnerships because the threats require coordinated action.

#### Key finding II. Focus collaborative projects on priority problems.

- a. Review outcomes for ongoing coordination on fire and invasive species management.
- b. Jointly develop approaches to climate adaptation.
- c. Adopt landscape scale approaches to the three priority issues.

### ***Focus on priority places***

Geography is another natural focus. To produce synergies, collaborations between wildlife and forestry agencies should target priority places; the work can begin with shared concern over a place even before goals and approaches are reconciled. Data that identify the most promising places are already available.

#### Key finding III. Focus collaborative projects on priority places.

- a. Use GIS technology to define places where conservation priorities overlap.
- b. Avoid duplication of mapping work and use existing regional maps.
- c. Where possible, align the unit of analysis for mapping (e.g., watershed, county, forest block).

### ***Pursue efficiency and effectiveness***

Collaborations must be cost effective and oriented to outcomes. Because the state agencies face funding constraints and cannot add more staff, the challenge is to deliver a better outcome with the same resources or reduce total resource needs, not to collaborate for collaboration's sake.

#### Key finding IV. Pursue only collaborations that are cost effective and results driven.

- a. Encourage more funding sources to encourage high quality collaboration.
- b. Reconcile the metrics and outcomes of successful collaborations.
- c. Review outcomes from current programs that promote collaboration.

## 1. About the Open Space Institute

*The Open Space Institute protects scenic, natural and historic landscapes to provide public enjoyment, conserve habitat and sustain communities. We do so through acquisition, financing, stewardship, research and advocacy. Founded in 1974 to protect significant landscapes in New York State, OSI has been a partner in the protection of nearly 2.2 million acres across the eastern United States. A leader in environmental conservation, the Open Space Institute leverages our knowledge and attracts resources for strategic investments to make innovative land conservation happen.*

*OSI's experience ranges from producing practical research to successful on-the-ground conservation. From the border region of Canada through the Southern Appalachians, OSI makes bridge capital and grants available to conservation partners for high-priority transactions. OSI conducts research that influences land-use policy and practice through a blend of analysis, communication and training activities focused on promising approaches to landscape-scale conservation.*

*OSI has a track record of partnerships with public and nonprofit partners to catalyze private investment and effect change in agency practices, public awareness, and political support.*

## BACKGROUND AND METHODS

With experience in both forestry and wildlife conservation across the eastern United States, the Open Space Institute (OSI, Box 1) was selected from a pool of 10 applicants to implement the Forest and Wildlife Action Plan Collaboration Pilot Study. The purpose of the study was to document the opportunities and challenges to advancing effective collaboration and establish the potential for a second phase that would implement the lessons learned.

Throughout 2012, OSI working with business and GIS consultants cataloged the wide range of collaborative approaches already adopted by seven southern states, identified barriers to increased collaboration, documented specific benefits of collaboration, and distilled lessons that could catalyze further joint action (Box 2).

The pilot study was undertaken in Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Missouri, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. An oversight committee was established by the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, consisting of representatives from the U.S. Forest Service (John Dondero), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Mark Musaus), the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (Tommy Tuma-LA), the Southern Group of State Foresters (Mike Countess), and the Endowment (Peter Stangel).

The oversight committee met bimonthly to review the work and advise on next steps. Committee members also provided updates to state agency directors and others on the progress of the project at regular meetings of Southeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the Southern Group of State Foresters, and other venues.

To determine whether collaboration on state wildlife and forest action plans could measurably increase outcomes and resources for the agencies, OSI first constructed a baseline. Researchers reviewed the states' 14 action plans, interviewed the state agency directors, and surveyed each agency to collect information on the history of collaboration and its future potential (Appendix 1, Survey Questions and Results). OSI documented collaborative work and assisted interested states in developing collaborative action projects, which resulted in new and sometimes more ambitious approaches (Appendix 2, State

Collaborative Action Project Summaries). To support implementation of the projects, some states sought outside funding.

## **2. Overview of Study Methods**

- Literature review on public agency collaboration.
- Analysis of FAP and SWAP mapping priorities and state map products.
- Analysis of each state’s SWAP and FAP.
- Interviews with agency directors to assess current collaboration, use of action plans, and project engagement.
- Extensive survey on resources, collaboration, and use of action plans.
- With interested states, development of collaborative projects.
- Research on funding sources and opportunities to leverage collaboration.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

### **I. Use the plans to develop shared goals and metrics for collaborative projects**

#### **Findings**

##### ***Use of Action Plans***

Action plans can be effective tools for promoting collaboration if the documents are closely tied with the agencies’ day-to-day work. In interviews with directors, we found that action plans are used as strategic planning documents for about half of the 14 agencies.

Directors most frequently mentioned using the plans as a basis for funding requests and acquisition priorities. In several cases, the planning process helped galvanize new work or prioritize and focus existing work (Box 3). The most common reason that state directors cited for not structuring agency work around the plans is the necessity to be opportunistic and focus on what funding is available. However, even when directors said that the action plans were not a major input for strategic planning, their agencies’ top priorities often matched action plan priorities, suggesting alignment was strong.

One impediment to greater use of the plans may be their length. Some interviewees commented on the lengthiness of their states’ plans. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies’ “Best Practices Guide for 2015 SWAP Updates” recommends shortening action plans for 2015 updates to ensure they are used more regularly.

## **3. PROMISING EXAMPLES**

**Tennessee and Florida**

In the Tennessee Division of Forestry, the FAP helps organize the agency's goals, day-to-day work, and metrics. The plan identifies water quality as the top issue, describes a stepwise process for advancing restoration of riparian areas, defines the metrics for measuring outcomes, and ties all staff assessments to furthering the goals of this plan.

Outcomes from Florida's FAP include development of a longleaf pine map that has received broad buy-in. The plan also established a policy committee on controlled burning and a task force to deal with the economic viability of working forests in the state.

Although every state agency is collaborating on some projects, the action plans are not being used to organize and advance joint effort. Collaboration is not prominently featured in the participating states' plans, and what collaboration occurs may be due to Farm Bill requirements that FAPs be developed together with Wildlife Agencies. Every forestry agency, for example, mentioned participation by wildlife agency staff on committees and technical review teams for developing its plans, and five of the seven wildlife agencies mentioned the participation of their state's forestry agency in developing wildlife plans (Box 4). Other references to joint action in the action plans included the following:

- cooperative agreements (e.g., Forest Stewardship Program in Florida and Virginia, Wildlife Management Area Program in South Carolina);
- wildfire suppression;
- data sharing; and
- assessment of need for the Forest Legacy Program.

Place-focused examples of collaboration in the action plans include Tennessee's Mississippi River Valley Initiative, South Carolina's Wildlife Management Areas, and Missouri's Conservation Opportunity Areas.

Notably, 50 percent of the time, only one of a state's two agencies identified an area of supposed ongoing collaboration. In several cases, one agency reported collaboration on a topic but its sister agency did not.

This finding can be explained by differences in definitions of collaboration— for some, sitting on a joint committee may constitute collaboration, while others might hold a higher bar. Another explanation is that many times effective collaboration often begins in the field, where an opportunity for sharing resources evolves organically. Management may not be aware of these collaborations.

#### **4. OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION PLAN COLLABORATION**

There is strong potential to increase collaboration in developing action plans, as these examples illustrate.

After a joint meeting of Georgia's Wildlife Resources Division and Forestry Commission for this project, both agencies' directors determined to hold joint outreach sessions for informing the 2015 action plan updates. This simple strategy will increase their planning efficiencies and ensure cross-pollination during feedback sessions.

Missouri's Department of Conservation has recently committed to completely integrating FAPs and SWAPs. The idea is workable because the wildlife and forestry agencies have the same director.

Virginia's Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and Department of Forestry discussed the idea of developing joint plan summaries for principal audiences. The idea is to ensure broader uptake of key plan findings by summarizing major points for shared audiences in a user-friendly format.

## Action Steps

We recommend that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Forest Service consider creating incentives for states to integrate collaboration into action plan updates. Because many of the expectations for the 2015 plan updates have already been communicated, subsequent updates may be the earliest opportunity for coordination. Action plan updates should be synchronized to emphasize the importance of partnerships between wildlife and forestry agencies.

A first step for the states is cataloging current collaboration. OSI found considerable diversity in how state agencies classified, summarized, and categorized joint efforts. The difficulty of managing information often means that innovative joint efforts are overlooked by agency decision makers. It is important to ensure joint understanding of both the areas where collaboration is ongoing and the level of collaboration that is anticipated (Box 5).

A second step is using the action plans to develop joint goals and metrics for achieving outcomes on collaborative projects, particularly on priority issues (Key finding II). For example, wildlife and forestry agencies might work together on portions of the prescribed fire section of the FAP and then incorporate those portions into the SWAP as well.

### **5. Levels of Collaboration**

The social science literature identifies three levels of collaboration:

**Network:** a loose system of contact, with no commitment to working jointly.

**Coalition:** shared information, potentially leading to joint planning and maybe joint implementation.

**United action:** the pooling of resources to serve a single set of objectives.

This hierarchy helps in understanding the agency partnerships observed in the study and any effort to strengthen their collaborations. The loose network requires very little commitment and resources; the more advanced levels of collaboration require progressively more shared goals and resources.

Accordingly, issues of resource disparities and perceived differences in mission need to be reconciled before participants can achieve full collaboration.

## **II. Focus projects on priority problems**

### Findings

We asked survey participants to recommend issues that could be more effectively addressed by working together through action plans. Altogether, participating state wildlife and forestry agency staff identified 31 areas of current or potential collaboration. Each identified at least seven areas for advancing collaboration. In descending order of frequency, the top five issues were prescribed fire, habitat restoration, water quality, climate adaptation, and land-use change.

Fire management and invasive species management are already the focus of some collaboration in all seven states, and four states indicated that collaboration on these problems could be increased. Fire and invasive species both require complementary capacity and skills. Climate change adaptation was also identified as a priority for increasing collaboration; it is important because it is an issue with the least ongoing collaboration.

Those three issues overlap. One director noted that his agency's response to climate change is management of invasive species, fire, and water, since healthy landscapes may ultimately be more

resilient to climate change. Similarly, longleaf pine conservation, another subject of collaboration, involves fire management regimes that may help ecosystems adapt.

Although collaboration on all issues identified by the participants may add value, approaches to fire, invasive species, and climate change have little chance of success unless state agencies work together. As one staff person said, these are issues “we’ll have to deal with whether we choose to or not.” We therefore recommend focusing efforts to increase collaboration on fire and invasive species management and climate change adaptation.

**Prescribed fire.** Fire management is a priority issue across all seven states. Increasingly severe wildfire and encroachment of development into forestlands are cause for significant concern. The federal government recently announced the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy for restoring and maintaining resilient landscapes (such as longleaf), creating fire-adapted communities, and responding to wildfires. The initiative could offer an umbrella and possible funding to support more collaboration in this area. Many states have created interagency burn teams (Box 6); however, all of the strategies described in the national initiative are ripe for collaboration.

## 6. PROMISING EXAMPLE

### Georgia: Interagency Burn Team

In Georgia, a partnership involving the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Orianne Society, The Nature Conservancy, and private landowners is working on prescribed burns. Each partner organization contributes fire training or leadership classes to which staff and volunteers from any of the other partners are invited. On their own, the organizations lack the time and resources to provide complete training, but by collaborating, they can enhance everyone’s capacity. All members are exposed to a wider array of classes and gain more knowledge.

Partner agencies also supplement each other’s staff and share equipment. When a team is needed at a specific location, whoever is closest is called, to reduce travel expenses. Fire resources, including engines and utility vehicles, are deployed in the same way.

Since 2003, the collaboration of the Interagency Burn Team partners has increased each organization’s capacity and ability to serve more areas and acres, reducing the frequency and severity of wildland fires.

**Invasive species.** Invasive species management is an area of ongoing collaboration in every state. The responsibilities often fall to the forestry agency to work on forest pests that cause economic damage, while wildlife agencies are responsible for dealing with invasive species that affect wildlife habitats. Often, a further division of responsibility puts wildlife agency in charge of management of state lands and the forestry agency in charge of responding to private landowners’ needs. Agencies are already approaching collaboration in creative ways and there is significant opportunity increase collaboration to improve outcomes and reduce costs.

**Climate change adaptation.** The Tennessee Division of Forestry, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources (Box 7) have developed detailed strategies for climate adaptation. Most states’ action plans, however, mention climate and climate adaptation but do not incorporate a full analysis or recommend specific strategies for action. The directors of several agencies said they plan to address the issue in greater depth in their

plan updates. As states begin to increase their focus on climate adaptation, we recommend coordinating the response between forestry and wildlife agencies.

## **7. PROMISING EXAMPLE**

### **Kentucky: Interagency Response to Climate**

- Goal 1: Conserve and restore functioning ecosystems in Kentucky.
- Goal 2: Create or protect “key” or “concentrating” habitats.
- Goal 3: Implement multiagency plans for wildlife corridors and connectivity in Kentucky (e.g., utilize priority conservation area plans of other government and nongovernmental agencies).
- Goal 4: Monitor fish, wildlife, and ecosystem responses for climate adaptation.
- Goal 5: Evaluate the effectiveness of actions implemented as a result of Kentucky’s climate adaptation chapter, and adaptively manage populations and habitats based on monitoring results.
- Goal 6: Continue efforts to educate the public about wildlife conservation and continue efforts to stay optimally informed of current climate adaptation predictions and observed climate adaptation (e.g., form partnerships and/or liaison positions to facilitate education of other entities about Kentucky’s interagency goals).

### **Action Steps**

Advancing collaboration on the three issues may include the following actions:

- developing case studies to document approaches to collaboration on these areas and evaluate outcomes;
- ensuring that funding sources related to these three issues encourage effective collaboration;
- developing model goals and metrics for collaboration in these areas; and
- increasing coordination on these issues through the sister agencies’ action plans.

The level of existing collaboration around invasive species and fire management creates a strong starting place for advancing collaboration. An essential first step will be further study of the existing collaborations and better documentation of their ability to improve outcomes and/or leverage resources to achieve their goals most efficiently (Box 9). This will facilitate learning across states and adoption of the most effective approaches.

Climate change adaptation, where there is less established collaboration, offers opportunity for the agencies to work together from the very beginning of their planning processes. The Landscape Conservation Cooperatives of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provide assistance to the states in climate adaptation. Because their mission is explicitly about wildlife and habitats, forestry agencies have been less involved to date; foresters’ participation may be an important first step in advancing joint efforts.

### **8. Examples of landscape-scale plans and reports**

- Landscape Conservation Cooperatives
- America’s Great Outdoors Report
- Southern Forest Futures Project Report
- State NRCS Programs
- America’s Longleaf Restoration Initiative
- Partnership for Southern Forestland Conservation

Beyond interagency cooperation within individual states, fire and invasive species management and climate change adaptation cut across state boundaries and require regional action and cooperation. Ranked as priorities by all seven states in the study, these issues provide a pathway for strengthened interstate collaboration across the southeast. To this end, interstate collaborative efforts should be coordinated with ongoing plans, some of which involve cooperation between federal agencies as well (Box 8).

**9. PROMISING EXAMPLE**

**Florida: Developing Joint Metrics**

Florida’s wildlife and forestry agencies chose to work together to develop a collaborative action project to assess where they could develop joint metrics for tracking and reporting on outcomes. Staff felt that this would be the most effective way to begin to deepen their collaboration on fire, invasive species, and climate change adaptation. They recognized that reduced funding has increased the need for accountability; their expectation is that joint monitoring can provide information to justify additional funding. The two agencies are moving forward with a pilot effort to develop joint metrics for their fire strike team.

**III. Focus collaboration on priority places**

**Findings**

In *Strategic Conservation*, Ole Amundsen calls maps a prerequisite for any successful planning effort. Focused planning yields more successful outcomes, and sound planning is based on understanding where the relevant resources are.

Nearly all the work done by wildlife and forestry agencies can be organized by place. Whether the focus is a forest, habitat, stressor, or water resource, maps show where the target is located. Nevertheless, we found that even agencies with advanced map products in the action plans have not relied on maps to direct their work. This may indicate lack of knowledge about the map development process or low buy-in to the mapping products. For example, one state director noted that the agency’s action plan map was its best effort to reduce priorities to about 30% of the state, but that the map didn’t really direct the agency’s work.

Even less frequently were maps used to identify joint priorities by the agencies. Exceptions were the Missouri and Kentucky forestry agencies, each of which developed an overlay with its sister agency’s wildlife maps for its FAP. For the remaining five states, OSI developed maps showing intersections and overlapping of priorities. We looked specifically at high-priority areas that spanned state and private holdings, since these lands are often treated differently, and found extensive areas of potential collaboration—based only on the overlaps of both agencies’ priority areas.

Of the 14 action plans, 11 used existing maps developed by outside organizations. It is encouraging that states are using available high-quality mapping rather than starting over, but it may also mean that the agencies do not fully buy into the final map products. In total, 10 data layers (e.g., relative fire threat, invasive species outbreaks, water shortages) were used to develop action plan maps (Appendix 1, Figure 11).

The forest action plans of Georgia, Kentucky, and Missouri ranked priority areas through data layer overlays (Boxes 10a and 10b). The other 11 action plans presented data layers individually, without synthesizing this information to identify priority places where landowner outreach and state land management should be targeted.

**10a. PROMISING EXAMPLE**

**Missouri: Place-Based Focus**

Our study found that collaborations based in a specific place were much more strongly correlated with measurable outcomes. One example is collaborative work around “conservation opportunity areas” in

Missouri. The Missouri Department of Conservation, which comprises both the wildlife and the forestry agencies, selects priority areas as the foci for accelerating outreach and programs. As a result, staff has been able to measure increased public satisfaction and participation in state programs. The more widespread application of best management practices has improved the health of wildlife habitat (Appendix 6, Targeting Work in Conservation Opportunity Areas).

#### **10b. PROMISING EXAMPLE**

##### **Tennessee: Collaborative Independence**

Collaborative work on shared priority places may not require that agencies adopt the same goals or methods. In Tennessee's Collaborative Action Project, the state's Division of Forestry and Wildlife Resources Agency were working separately on stream buffer restoration with the federal Natural Resources Conservation Service and The Nature Conservancy. Each organization had its own criteria for selecting priority areas, its own funds to implement the work, and its own ways to measure progress. Whereas the federal agency was focused on soil erosion reduction, for example, the state forestry agency was focused on drinking water quality, and the state wildlife agency and The Nature Conservancy were trying to improve riparian habitat quality. Through this project, they coordinated riparian buffer restoration work in specific areas.

Without compromising their independence, they will seek to achieve these significant benefits collectively:

- **Monitoring.** One group working in an area could monitor progress and report to the others.
- **Leverage.** The organizations' contributions to the total stream buffer restoration leveraged each group's investment.
- **Service.** Response time and service delivery to private landowners improved.

#### **Action Steps**

The proliferation of data can complicate the selection of priorities. Rather than develop more map products that will not be used, we recommend a deeper understanding of existing high-quality data and increased efforts to ensure staff buy-in before map products are finalized.

On the technical side, wildlife and forestry agencies' priorities need to "talk" to each other. Adopting the same mapping software and synchronizing measurement standards and units of analysis (*e.g.* watershed, county, or forest block) will help facilitate collaboration.

#### **IV. Pursue only collaborations that are cost effective and results driven**

##### **Findings**

The major purposes of collaboration, as articulated by the wildlife and forestry agencies' directors, are leveraging resources, attracting new money, ensuring accountability based on clear metrics, and ultimately, better outcomes than could be achieved by a single agency (Appendix 1, Figure 9). These

same purposes are apparent in academic research on state agency collaboration. To put it bluntly, if a collaborative effort does not save money or improve outcomes, it will likely fail.

**11. PROMISING EXAMPLE**

**Kentucky: Shared Goal, Different Metrics**

Kentucky’s Collaborative Action Project exemplified the use of different kinds of metrics as the wildlife and forestry agencies work on joint certification of state lands. The wildlife agency sees Forest Stewardship Council certification as a way to increase access to niche wood markets, even though its harvests are typically small, and fund active management of its lands. The agency will measure outcomes by the number of management plans for wildlife areas and the number of management activities it can support. The forestry agency wants to promote certification to support development of forest markets. It will measure success by the number of certified acres.

In the past, states have saved resources by sharing staff under cooperative agreements. Bringing in expertise from partner agencies avoids the expense of hiring new specialists.

Some states’ wildlife and forestry agencies have shared staff with each other and with other state and federal agencies, although we found over four states cut joint positions since 2008 because of funding reductions. Agencies still hire staff to cover responsibilities that could be provided by other sister agencies. Across the participating states, wildlife agencies tended to have more staff dedicated to forest-related work than forestry agencies had dedicated to wildlife-related work (Appendix 1, Figures 1–3).

Agencies sometimes work more closely with other organizations than with their sister wildlife or forestry agency. Common partners were the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the state department of environmental conservation or protection, and soil and water districts. This is a good reminder that other partners will be critical to ensuring success.

- Virginia and South Carolina used to have shared staff, before recent funding cuts.
- The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency has four private lands biologists who work in local Natural Resources Conservation Service offices.
- In Missouri, both agencies are under the Missouri Department of Conservation; six field foresters and three wildlife biologists work in local offices of the Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- The Georgia Wildlife Resources Division shares two wildlife biologists with Georgia Forestry Commission.

**12. PROMISING EXAMPLE**

**South Carolina: Use of Cooperative Agreements**

South Carolina forestry and wildlife agencies have a history of using cooperative agreements. The state’s Wildlife Management Area Program allows forestry and wildlife agencies to provide technical assistance to each other through the state’s six wildlife management areas. This work ensures that best management practices are applied to all forestry activities and that hunting and fishing regulations are enforced on state forestlands (Appendix 4, Sample Cooperative Agreement).

**Action Steps**

Collaborations must be driven by budget and financial incentives and by specific outcomes. Developing joint project-level budgets compels each partner to commit in a material way to the collaboration and allows better tracking of resource savings.

It was beyond the scope of this study, which ran only one year and did not observe completed projects, to delve deeply into measurement of outcomes. Nevertheless, the lessons of this project point to metrics as a top priority for additional work on collaboration. Appendix 2, which summarizes the four Collaborative Action Projects, suggests metrics that could be used by the states for evaluating joint efforts. Future research should include tracking collaborative projects over time and observing their outcomes.

There is also value in reviewing outcomes from competitive grant programs that encourage collaboration: have those incentives improved outcomes or resulted in additional, distracting processes? We suggest reviewing current grant programs that favor collaboration, including State and Private Forestry redesign grants (U.S. Forest Service), state wildlife competitive grants (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), conservation innovation grants (Natural Resources Conservation Service), and Longleaf Stewardship Fund (National Fish and Wildlife Federation) (Appendix 3, Federal and State Programs That Encourage Collaboration).

## CHALLENGES

Wildlife and forestry agencies have distinct mandates, and any effort to increase collaboration needs to acknowledge their different perspectives, as exemplified in four questions commonly raised during the study:

- What is the appropriate forestland stocking level?
- Should we restore land to grasslands or retain or restore forest cover?
- How can we deal with incompatible forestry practices on private lands?
- Should we focus resources on private or public lands?

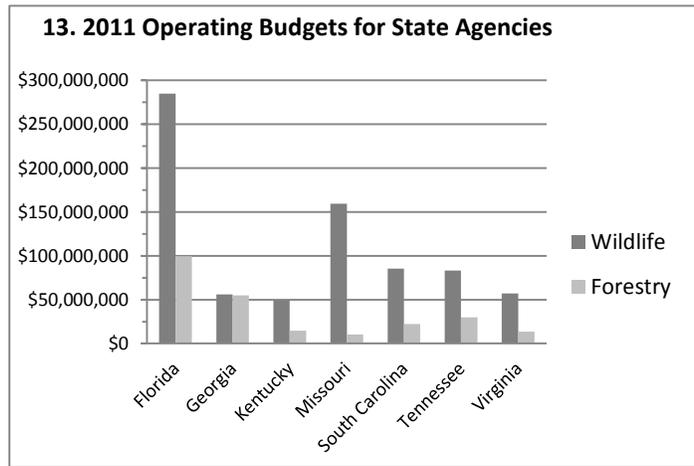
The question of stocking levels came up most frequently—in comments in the survey, in the initial interviews, and as one of the major, systemic disagreements that can affect relationships between the agencies at all levels, from the director on down. Forestry agencies are mandated to help meet landowners’ goals, which often include the economic returns on harvesting high-density plantings. Wildlife agencies are often looking for opportunities to increase understory growth and favor lower-density plantings that admit more sunlight to the forest floor.

**Wildlife agencies’ mission:** To preserve, protect and perpetuate fish, wildlife and ecosystems while providing sustainable fish and wildlife recreational and commercial opportunities.

**Forestry agencies’ mission:** To sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.

The focus on private versus public lands is another important difference between the agencies: wildlife agencies expend more resources on public lands, while forestry agencies spend more on private lands. We believe this difference creates opportunities for collaboration—for example, to develop demonstration projects for private landowners on state lands, and to create public-private land management units like the exemplary projects launched by the Quality Deer Management Association (Appendix 7, Greater Noxubee Wildlife Management Cooperative).

A challenge to collaboration is prevailing attitudes about disparities in funding sources for wildlife and forestry agencies. Our research found that wildlife agencies have operating budgets two and a half to six times the size of forestry budgets (Box 13). Wildlife agencies also have more funding sources available to them: 10 sources on average, versus an average of five for forestry agencies. One clear example of this is funding for the action plans themselves.



Implementation of strategies described in the SWAPs is supported by state wildlife grants, whereas the FAPs are unfunded. This creates a natural disparity in the amount of resources each agency can bring to the table in any collaboration.

**14. PROMISING EXAMPLE**

**Georgia: Longleaf Collaborative Project**

The collaborative action project adopted by Georgia illustrates how agencies can pursue effective collaboration on issues even when their goals and missions differ.

Georgia’s collaborative action project is designed to assess quality and development of longleaf pine stands planted with funding from the Conservation Reserve Program. The data collected from the effort will help develop more successful planting guidelines. While the agencies may not agree on whether the longleaf stands should be meeting economic or wildlife goals, their common interest is ensuring that planted longleaf stands grow into healthy forests and this project would pool resources to improve stand establishment.

Across wildlife and forestry agencies, priority places and conservation objectives often overlap. Where approaches conflict and processes differ, we believe the issues can be addressed head on. For example, many SWAPs listed incompatible forestry practices as a cause of wildlife habitat loss; discussion of this issue would create a natural opening for collaboration.

Directors are critical to advancing collaboration. Although collaboration often begins at the bottom, agency leaders play an important role in encouraging effective collaboration. Agency directors can bring collaboration projects to scale and amplify their effects. Forestry directors will be especially important in advancing a place-based approach that prioritizes landowner outreach in select places.

**NEXT STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTING LESSONS**

The Southern Group of State Foresters and the Southeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies have been integral in advancing this pilot study and providing feedback and direction, through their participation as members of the Oversight Committee. Buy-in from the 14 participating state agencies made this project possible—and they, ultimately, are the primary audience.

Once the participating states sign off on this project, it will be important to reach out to a broader circle of audiences, including regional partnerships like the landscape conservation cooperatives, the National

Association of State Foresters, and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. A PowerPoint presentation and short document on findings can be developed for broad distribution. As more examples of the benefits of collaboration are identified, they may wish to share those successes with federal agency audiences to shine a light on forestry and wildlife agencies' collaboration as an efficient use of public dollars.

The Endowment is exploring the potential for a second-phase investment in implementing collaborative projects that would build on and develop the lessons from this first phase. The second phase would test the potential for collaboration—focused on priority issues and places—to achieve tangible, measurable outcomes.