

## The Roundtable

The Roundtable

Interview Synthesis

Michele Bratschun

August Ritter

Pete Mach

Leander Lacy

Valerie Miller

### **Interviewee Roundtable Participation/History:**

Interviewee #1 (I1) started working with the Roundtable in 2009 as a member of the [omitted] team.

Interviewee #2 (I2) started working with the Roundtable in 2007. They commented that very few members are left and that norms and group dynamics have changed.

Interviewee #3 (I3) started working with the Roundtable in 2005. They commented that the goal of the Roundtable at this time was to reach agreement and not protect wilderness.

Interviewee #4 (I4) started working with the Roundtable sometime before 2006 as a part of the [omitted] group. They defined the mission question for the Roundtable as characterizing: “What do we want the forest to look like when it grows up?”

Interviewee #5 (I5) has been involved with the Roundtable since one of the original organizations was invited to the Roundtable, and they described their involvement level throughout the years as “consistent”.

\*In the remainder of the document, interviewees will be identified as I1, I2, I3, I4, and I5.

### **Common Themes: Why Taylor Mountain Conflict Occurred**

After interviewing our five representatives from the Roundtable, several themes emerged regarding factors that may have contributed to the conflict surrounding the forest management that took place at Taylor Mountain. Both I1 and I4 stated that USFS management and population history set the stage for the conflict. I1 and I4 described how suppressed fires have led to unhealthy forests. I1 also explained how the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) has

been growing with increasing human populations, resulting in more opportunities for conflicts to arise.

The contributing factor that was brought up by all of the interviewees was a lack of communication. More specifically, all interviewees stated that a need exists to create a clear definition of exactly what is meant by the term “forest health” and what actions will be taken to achieve this state. I3 agreed that there is a misunderstanding of technical science and that the Roundtable must decide how they will define restoration in terms of silviculture. I3, along with I2 and I1 commented that, although treatment location has been established, treatment methods need clearer definitions. I4 said that according to the guidelines of the grant received (CFLRP), grant recipients cannot cut “big trees” but that “big trees” needs to be defined. I4 and I5 both described how even though verbal agreements were made in the field (only trees with a diameter less than 18 inches will be cut), changes that were made later were not communicated by the USFS to the Roundtable or citizens.

Another common communication theme was a need to communicate to citizens. There should be more discussion regarding what forest restoration entails, including the use of large, noisy machinery, and a discussion of how this might change the appearance of the ecosystem. I1 explained that currently, many peoples’ definition of a healthy ecosystem is different from how science defines it; I2 explained how the idea of restoration is different than how it is actually carried out. Similarly, I5 brought up the fact that restoration no longer looks like a plantation but includes more variety.

Also relating to communication, several interviewees touched on the fact that many miscommunications took place. I1, I4, and I5 expressed their opinion that there is a lack of

communication between the USFS and citizens. Specifically, I5 expressed that the USFS did not communicate their fuels treatment prescription plan beforehand with the Roundtable or the public. I4 and I5 stated that a lack of an apology from the USFS has led to decreased trust, although I5 believes that the USFS won't make this mistake again. Regarding rectifying this situation, I5 believes that the USFS should be responsible for taking the lead. Regarding the letter writing, I2 and I3 say that the writer went around the Executive Team to deal with the disagreement. On the other hand, I4 commented that the letter was simply meant to be an internal letter and that it was the public who sent it to the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture. According to I4, miscommunication began when large trees were cut despite that legally, according to the awarded CFLRP grant, large trees were not supposed to be cut. I5 believes that this communication can be avoided in the future if the USFS works closely with the monitoring team.

Another contributing factor that several interviewees (I1, I2, I4) mentioned, was the complication that the recent mountain pine beetle attacks has added to forest management. As I1 described, because mountain pine beetle attack of Ponderosa Forests in a new occurrence, no best management practices yet exist to base current principles on. This lack of a science base, which is something the Roundtable values greatly, complicated determining whether an infringement had occurred.

Overall, the history of forest management, population growth trends, lack of clear definitions and communication to citizens as well as well as mountain pine beetle invasion were commonly identified themes that contributed to the dispute that occurred over the management at the Taylor Mountain Project.

### **View of Conflict**

Although not specifically a part of the cause of the conflict or ideas for future success, all of the interviewees commented on their opinions of conflict. I1, I2, and I3 all expressed their belief that conflict is inherent in natural resource management, and according to I3, this is where the role of collaboration is needed. From the perspective of I5, this type of conflict is a result of the fact that historically, government agencies made management decisions without collaborating and were then tied up in appeals. I5 said that appeals have been successfully avoided by being forthright with communication and working collaboratively. I5, therefore, views the Taylor Mountain Project conflict as growing pains resulting from the Roundtable and USFS learning how to collaborate. I4 has noticed that conflict usually does not persist in situations with strong interpersonal relationships and speculates that the Taylor Mountain Project conflict is lingering due to the high turnover rate of people involved with the Roundtable. Regarding how conflict will affect future collaboration, I4 believes that conflict will only be resolved when collaborative implementation, regarding the USFS working with the Roundtable, is defined and I1, I2, and I3 agree that conflict can largely be avoided. According to these interviewees, the Roundtable's goal is to implement large-scale treatment. Instead of debating exactly how to treat small areas, perhaps it is better to hold off treatment in those areas, as there are a plethora of other locations where work can be done.

### **Recommendations for future:**

Views on how similar situations can be prevented in the future related greatly to the contributing factors mentioned previously, in particular, improving both internal and external communications were stressed as areas of focus by all five interviewees. In addition, several

interviewees talked about the importance of relationship building. In terms of internal communication improvement, everyone interviewed supported the fact that more specific definitions in general are needed and I1, I2, I3, and I5 specifically referred to the need to better define protocols for old growth trees. I4 and I5 suggested marking trees for cutting in treatment project areas because, as I5 stated, “forest prescription must be clearer and well defined.” Another idea arose from I5 that perhaps the National Forest Service (NFS), who manages Pike Sand Isabel National Forest (PSI), can work with managers in the Arapahoe Roosevelt National Forest (AR) to communicate lessons learned because PSI has been working in collaboration for a longer time and has more experience writing detailed prescriptions. Along with improving definitions, a new subcommittee was created to improve internal communication, however, it appeared that I1 and I4 either did not fully understand its purpose or did not wish to discuss it.

As for external communication, I5 thinks that the conflict regarding the Taylor Mountain Project cost everyone in the Roundtable credibility with outsiders. I5 believes that the AR must follow through with their statements, but at the same time believes that the USFS won’t make this same mistake again as they are professionals and will improve their prescriptions. I1, I2 and I3 stressed the importance of involving local government as a way to communicate externally to citizens. I1 explained how it is very important to explain what happened to the public and to communicate that it will not happen again. They also commented on the importance of increasing education to the public about proper forest management so that their perceptions match what is supported by science.

In terms of building relationships, I5 discussed the importance of including everyone; particularly USFS staff, contractors, Roundtable members, concerned citizens, and elected officials in the on-the-ground-plan (or fieldtrips) to plan forest treatment prescriptions. As a part of relationship building, the importance of trust was talked about by I4 in the context that with the high turnover rate of representatives in the Roundtable, building trust is essential. This interviewee also commented on the fact that the facilitator's (Gali Beh) conflict resolution protocol plan assumes that trust exists between members and that resolution is likely, but that conflict cannot be managed without trust. CSU students, that attended the last meeting, noted that high levels of trust existed between individuals who attended the quarterly meeting, at least verbally.

Improving internal and external communication and building stronger relationships were the main strategies suggested by the interviewees regarding avoiding and dealing with future conflict. Also pertaining to the future of the roundtable, all of the interviewees expressed great faith, gratitude, and hope in the Roundtable. I1, I2, I3, and I5 stated that although the conflict is not entirely resolved, common ground will be found and the mistake will not happen again. I1 said that the Roundtable's value lies within the fact that, "when an idea passes through the Roundtable, the idea is understood to be well balanced, forward thinking, and widely supported." As a concluding thought of hopefulness, I5 said that, "Collaboration is the way of the future, people are learning to work in this paradigm and I think they will. They are smart and dedicated people."

### **Reflection**

Our interviews with the Roundtable members revealed many common themes related to internal and external communication, and conflict management and resolution. While we were only able to collect the opinions of five members we can reflect on their insight and our research on the Roundtable to analyze the common themes that emerged. Our interviews partially focused on the Taylor Mountain Project and conflict resolution strategies but it became apparent that finding consensus in defining the conflict and its severity in the first place was difficult. Some members see that the conflict stemmed from an error on behalf of the Arapahoe Roosevelt National Forest staff in communicating the fuels treatment prescription with Roundtable and the public. While others thought the conflict was actually due to the letter of concern sent to US Forest Service officials within the Roundtable that was considered a breach of collaborative protocol. Either way there were and possibly still are community members who are upset with the manner in which the USFS implemented the Taylor Mountain Project. This friction has and could continue to, if not dealt with properly from here on out, cost the USFS and all Roundtable stakeholders' credibility.

The Taylor Mountain Project has been completed and yet it seems there is still a differing in opinions of the severity of the conflict that arose, but the Roundtable is moving forward with great optimism. We feel there is much need for the Roundtable to continue to work on building trust internally especially with the turnover of many members. Strengthening these interpersonal connections within the Roundtable is the first step to improving internal communication. The lack of communication both within the Roundtable and externally with the USFS and the public exaggerated the disagreements with the Taylor Mountain Project. We



recommend reviewing CFLRP to see if it can help give the collaborative some direction on its role in future restoration projects.

Improving external communication on behalf of the USFS and the Roundtable on fuel reduction and forest restoration methods must occur. The on-the-ground field site visits are continuing and this is a great chance to get all stakeholders to be part of the same conversation. As the Roundtable knows, this is the best way to prevent future conflict and increase understanding of the science of forest management, and the concerns of the public. These field site visits should include the Roundtable monitoring team and other concerned members, USFS staff from all levels, forest contractors, elected officials from local governments, nearby landowners and other concerned citizens, as well as local media. The shared dialog at these visits should influence the forest prescription and create an understanding among all the stakeholders. If the visits are carried out enough in advance of the project's implementation it will give people with concerns a chance to voice them before it is too late.

Communication with landowners adjacent to forest treatment areas is also of particular importance as well as educating the nearby communities on what fire mitigation and forest restoration projects entail. The Roundtable can help in setting expectations for the communities so the impact of the project is expected and understood. In the end the Roundtable's strength is being able to focus and act on forest management issues where there is broad agreement. If there is a site in the future where fuel treatment and restoration is extremely conflictive with the community it is better to move on and focus on those sites where there is agreement for management actions.

We also had some interesting insight on the overall process of reviewing this collaborative. The facilitator of the Roundtable, Gali Beh, was extremely helpful during the entire process. Having her introduce us to our interviewees was imperative in order for us to complete successful interviews. The interviewees were extremely open with us. This openness, we believe, was a direct reflection of the trust and respect they have for Gali. The interviewees also took time to explain aspects of the Roundtable that we had not understood previously. They did not seem threatened when we asked about a slightly contentious issue, the Taylor Mountain Project. Though they were open with us and did not seem threatened, we felt that these factors did not necessarily equal total transparency. We thought that their answers were ones that they would have likely given the Roundtable itself. Some of the interviewees made comments about how they would not tell us anything they would not want published.

Gali also did a good job of giving us enough background about the Taylor Mountain Project to allow us to structure the interviews appropriately but not so much background as to give us preconceived notions about the project before we started. We also felt like we drew more attention to the Taylor Mountain Project than was needed. All of our interviewees acted like it were a non-issue that had been dealt with. We all agreed though, that the Roundtable can and should learn a lot from this incident.

Another interesting observation that came up was our positions about the Roundtable and the Taylor Mountain project before and after the interviews were conducted. We each found ourselves taking the sides of the people we interviewed. It was as if we took on their role long after we had finished our interviews. From these specific roles we realized that in order to take a less biased view of the Roundtable it might have been beneficial to interview a wide

range of stakeholders including but not limited to; private landowners, more members of the Roundtable who weren't on the executive committee as well as the contract company that the USFS hired to implement their restoration plan at the Taylor Mountain site. We also found that the two of us that attended the Roundtable meeting in Denver in early March had the best overall view of the Roundtable.

One of the main points that came up during our discussion about the Roundtable was how enthusiastic and optimistic participants were. During the meeting in Denver most of the attendees mentioned how excited they were to be a part of this collaborative. During our interviews the interviewees all mentioned how much faith they had in the Roundtable. We firmly believe that it is this positive attitude which has played such a big role in helping the collaborative get to the point that it is today. We also think that this attitude is the reason that the collaborative has not had more conflict issues during its existence.

It is important to keep in mind though, that similar to any collaborative at this scale, internal disagreements will continue to play a part. Based on our interviews and collective synthesis of the process we think that the Roundtable should come up with a protocol for dealing with these internal disagreements. While we believe that the Roundtable should decide on its own process we offer an example below.

The following is a protocol that the Roundtable could adopt in dealing with these issues.

1. When a concerned party within the Roundtable objects to something that another Roundtable member/organization (stakeholder of concern) is doing, they submit a disagreement form to the Executive Committee (EC).
2. The EC meets with the concerned party to see if they can resolve the issue.

- a. If the issue cannot be resolved then the concerned party writes up a list of proposed changes for the stakeholder of concern.
3. If the issue is still unresolved the EC and concerned party will meet with the stakeholder of concern to see if they can accept some or all of the proposed changes.
4. If the issue cannot be resolved between the two parties and the EC then the issue is brought forth to the entire Roundtable to decide what to do.

It is at step 4 where we believe that the Roundtable will need to come up with a way to handle such issues at the organizational level, whether that is by voting or by assigning all disagreements to the Collaborative Adaptive Management “Process” Team.

### **Appendix I – Roundtable Interview Guide**

Interviewers used the following questions to guide their interviews. Each individual asked other questions when appropriate to gather information.

#### Topic Area 1: Roundtable Background

1. Can you describe your participation in the Roundtable?

#### Topic Area 2: Taylor Mountain Restoration Project

2. Can you tell me about the Taylor Mountain Restoration Project?
  - a. Why do you think this situation occurred?
  - b. How has the Roundtable addressed the situation?
3. What steps do you feel the Roundtable should take now to resolve the issues with Taylor Mountain?

#### Topic Area 3: Future Issue Resolution

4. Taylor Mountain Restoration Project aside, what types of process do you recommended the Roundtable to follow to resolve issues in the future?
  - a. Can you name specific steps for the procedure?