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A Road Map for Place Based Collaboration For Conflict Reduction

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A **ROAD MAP** TO

PLACE- BASED COLLABORATION FOR CONFLICT REDUCTION

WESTERN LANDOWNERS ALLIANCE

PLACE BASED COLLABORATION

Why Collaborate?

To remain intact, connected and whole, western ecosystems need multi-purpose working lands. Both rural communities and wildlife rely on working landscapes for their survival. We refer to these shared landscapes as the working wild. Yet, the movement of some wildlife species, including wolves and grizzly bears, within and through working wild landscapes and communities can result in wildlife-livestock conflicts that threaten livelihoods and create challenges for wildlife management agencies. Wolves and bears kill, injure and stress livestock, and elk damage fences, compete for forage and act as disease vectors. These conflicts between wildlife and livestock operations can create conflicts between people over the management of wildlife and land use priorities, further adding to the complexities of making a living in the working wild.

Place-based collaborative groups offer a means to coordinate community-scale action to address wildlife-livestock conflicts, and processes to lift landowner and livestock producer needs, while finding areas of agreement and shared purpose to meet a variety of resource challenges. These groups, many of which are landowner-led, may include all or part of a particular community and offer a way to meaningfully engage state and federal wildlife agencies, non-profit organizations and other stakeholder groups within a community-level decision-making process.

To address livestock depredations specifically, place-based collaborative groups have successfully worked with landowners to support the application of conflict prevention tools, including fencing such as fladry and 5-wire fences, as well as range riding and carcass management programs at the community scale. Place-based collaborative groups often engage stakeholders through workshops and one-on-one meetings to increase the efficiency of delivering these techniques. They also provide technical assistance and cost-sharing programs that take on the financial risks associated with their implementation and maintenance.

The 4 Cs comprise a systems-based conflict reduction framework that supports conservation and provides opportunities to address the social, ecological, and economic situations unique to each region, community, and operation. This framework allows the social and financial burden associated with conflicts within landscapes shared by people and wildlife to be balanced.

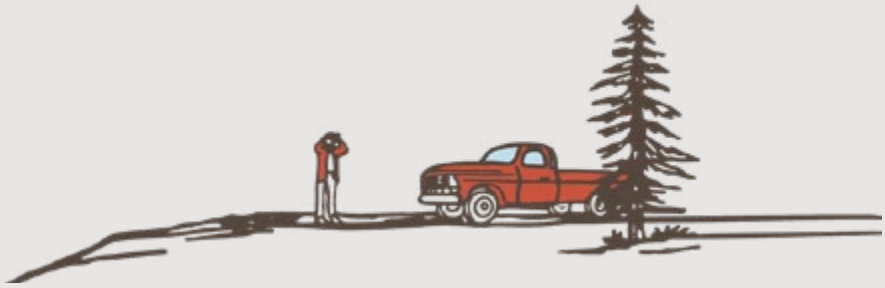
COMPENSATION - Payments that partially or fully cover losses caused by wildlife damaging property and reward land stewards for providing whole and healthy rangelands that provide important wildlife habitat.

CONFLICT PREVENTION - Any of several non-lethal practices that endeavor to remove or limit access to attractants, establish human presence, and/or monitor and manage livestock to reduce conflict. These practices, such as range riding, carcass management, electric fencing, and deterrent devices, when deployed effectively can benefit both wildlife and agricultural operations.

CONTROL - Targeted lethal removal of individuals or groups of wildlife to reduce damage to humans/livestock/property.

COLLABORATION - Engagement by diverse interested parties when developing wildlife policies and land management plans, including those that will be directly impacted, often landowners and land managers, early in meaningful decision-making processes. True collaboration facilitates respectful conversations, shared learning, constructive debate, and results in mutually beneficial solutions.

When forming place-based collaborative groups, context is key. Presence or absence of each of the 4 Cs creates the regulatory context that underpins how different stakeholders view problems as well as potential solutions. Place-based collaborative groups focused on conflict reduction primarily organize two of the 4 Cs, collaboration and conflict prevention, and offer processes and potential outcomes that increase trust and improve working relationships among the different groups necessary to effectively deliver the other two Cs; compensation and lethal control.



ROAD MAP Your 10-step guide to landowner-led, place-based collaborative groups

This is a hands-on guide for developing landowner-led, place-based collaborative groups with a focus on reducing wildlife-livestock conflicts. While your regulatory context, stakeholders, wildlife and landscape will vary, this 10-step guide provides a process and examples to aid landowners and practitioners in developing community-led solutions to address wildlife-livestock conflicts. Four case studies provide on-the-ground examples of how place-based collaborative groups have formed and organized to address conflicts and support landowner and wildlife needs.

1. What's your spark?

Place-based collaboratives start with a problem to address. This problem, or "spark," works to start a collaborative because it is relevant to the situation and everyday experience of those living and working in the landscape. Sparks that may set off a place-based collaborative include increasing or new wildlife-livestock conflicts, or the listing of a species under the Endangered Species Act. Challenges like these often create the initial motivation for convening a local group to respond. If the group finds that the problem is likely to require collective action or a community-scale approach, forming a lasting place-based collaborative may be key to finding solutions.

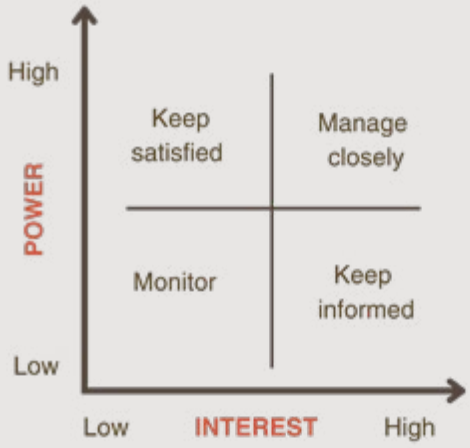
2. Identify focal people"

Within any process or problem, there are key groups that may be affected by or are affecting resource challenges. Any collaborative effort should carefully consider the "focal people" who should be closely involved as decision-makers within the group, those who need to be involved in conversations, and those who can stay on the periphery and be kept informed. The Power-Interest Grid, developed by Colin Eden and Fran Akerman, is a useful tool to support this process.

Identify stakeholders
Brainstorm who the people are who should be involved. Include all people who will be impacted by decisions being made.

Prioritize stakeholders
Map out your stakeholders. Who do you bring into the fold? Who do you keep informed? The Power-Interest Grid is a useful tool to stratify individuals/groups into different categories based on their levels of power and interest.

Understand your key stakeholder
Reach out for interviews with key individuals in your network to understand their needs and perspectives.



3. Build community-based leadership

Local leadership is essential to the functioning of successful, durable place-based collaborative groups. To set a precedent for successful collaborations for reducing wildlife-livestock conflicts, livestock producer voices, those often most affected by conflicts or land use changes, should be lifted early and often. Trusted individuals within the community often make the most effective leaders within collaborative efforts, and finding leadership roles for such individuals can help build trust in the process amongst other members of the community and support positive outcomes.

4. Include boundary-spanning organizations

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Organizations with knowledge of best practices and resources to support the process of convening a collaborative group or implementing practice for reducing conflicts can jumpstart conversations and provide existing resources for new groups. These groups can help grease the wheels of the collaborative process and support solutions identified by the group.

It is important to note that these organizations should not dictate solutions, as this can shift the balance of power away from the affected community, where it belongs. Examples of these groups working in the conflict reduction space include Western Landowners Alliance, Heart of the Rockies Initiative, Working Circle, People and Carnivores, Defenders of Wildlife, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, and Greater Yellowstone Coalition.

5. Create forums for communication and a decision-making process

People don't have time for endless meetings that don't lead to decisions and action. But community processes require social lubrication, so events or informal gatherings are essential to supporting deliberative dialogue among members of the group. Determine a regular cadence for meetings and gatherings, that will form the backbone for a decision-making process. This could be by consensus, by majority rule or another form of decision-making. A good decision process is inclusive, transparent, and produces results with legitimacy within the group. To shepherd this decision-making process a group may hire a facilitator, work through a third-party group, or look to an elected or volunteer leader from the community.

6. Find overlapping values and prioritize long-term goals

Within any group, there will be sets of competing values. Some will prioritize carnivore protection. Some will prioritize protection of livestock and supporting the economic viability of working lands. A continual challenge and opportunity for place-based collaboration is balancing these values, and finding common ground on which to stand. In certain cases, identifying and addressing the underlying disagreements and deep-seated conflicts among members of the group may be necessary before finding this shared ground.

When engaging in and observing the same situation affecting a community or landscape such as the regulatory context, level of wildlife-livestock conflict, or availability of resources, individuals will see different problems based on their worldview. Developing a shared understanding of the situation and problems facing the community is an important part of aligning individuals with different backgrounds into focused action.

7. Seek early wins

Early wins, whether it be a memorable convening, a key restoration project, a new range rider, or just finding common ground on a tough problem, can create goodwill amongst the group and catalyze cascading successes, leading to addressing larger and more divisive problems. Group leaders should seek these early wins prior to diving into more challenging subjects within the group, as strong working relationships and belief in their ability to achieve tasks together may be required to cascade into broader challenges head-on.

8. Implement collectively, not individually

What happens on your neighbor's property often affects what happens on yours. Resource problems don't recognize property lines. Uncontrolled cheatgrass spreads. Poorly managed forests or unburned ditches create fire risks. Similarly, livestock-carnivore conflict prevention practices also affect neighbors, either leading to spillover of carnivore activity to less protected neighboring properties or supporting a system more resilient to predation.

Community-scale implementation of conflict prevention tools coordinated across private and public land boundaries can minimize spill-over effects and maximize their collective benefit. For example, if only one livestock producer is removing bone piles and carcasses, while their neighbors do not, wolves and bears may still be drawn into the area. Therefore, practices and tools like range riding and carcass management are best approached at community scales, where coordinated efforts result in benefits for the whole community, not just individuals.

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9. Seek long-term funding

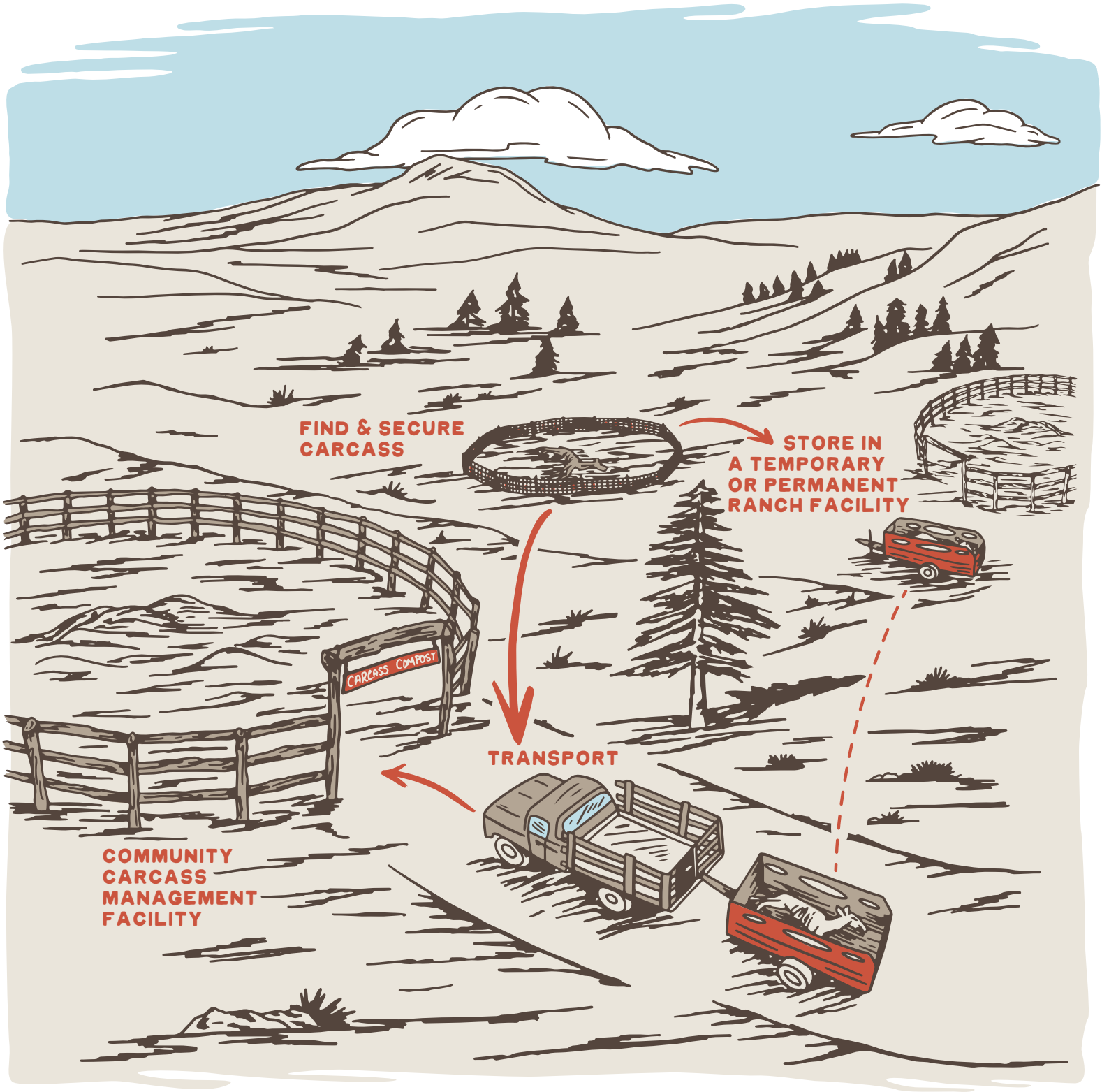
While there is often funding available for cost-sharing conflict prevention tools, it is difficult to fund the continued capacity and time necessary to support successful implementation at community scales. Natural resource management is by nature a long term pursuit, yet year to year, place-based collaborative groups must cobble together funding to provide important community services. Funding is a major challenge and more funding sources are needed to provide capacity to collaborate, support programming and implement projects continually for greatest effect.

Fortunately, support for place-based conservation is growing! Current funding sources for place-based collaborative groups include resources from boundary spanning organizations (see step 4), and other non-profits, USDA grants including Conservation Innovation Grants, resources available through conservation districts, and private donations from community members and foundations. Groups have also secured small grants from local banks, businesses, and other entities with a stake in the success and vibrance of the broader community.

10. Monitor, evaluate and adapt

When a collaborative group shares a purpose, the group needs to know how to measure its progress in achieving that purpose. Without landmarks against which we judge our progress, it can be easy to get discouraged by challenges as they appear on the horizon.

Monitoring, evaluation and adaptive management are essential, ongoing, and iterative parts of successful collaborative groups. These practices inform the value of ongoing participation by internal partners, determine if the strategy is working as intended, indicate areas for improvement, and determine how the benefits weigh against the cost of efforts.



CARCASS MANAGMENT

STARTING FROM SCRATCH

The Rocky Mountain Front Ranchlands Group recent start

The Rocky Mountain Front is a region spanning roughly 150 miles from Augusta, Montana, through the Blackfeet Indian Reservation to the Canadian Border. The region is bounded by rugged peaks to the west: a vast expanse of ranchlands punctuated by remote, rural communities spreads to the east. Over the past twenty years, growing grizzly bear populations have led to increasing conflicts and declining trust with wildlife management agencies in this windswept corner of the Treasure State.

To meet this challenge, The Rocky Mountain Front Ranchlands Group was formally founded in 2021 to offer the community a platform to advocate for practices and policies to help reduce wildlife-livestock conflicts. Trina Jo Bradley, who ranches near Valier, Montana, embodies this voice, providing much of the motivation and organization that brought the group into being. To systematically represent seven communities on the Front, the group is composed of a board of seven livestock producers that meet quarterly. As the Executive Director, Trina is responsible for the majority of decisions and the development and implementation of projects, while the board serves to guide and provide input from individuals throughout the region experiencing issues with grizzly bears and wolves.

In order to connect community members to resources, the group holds biannual workshops for producers to share information about conflict reduction methods and funding resources. “We’ve seen a lot of progress with getting some awareness here and showing agencies the problems we’ve been having,” said Bradley. This increased understanding, in addition to an influx of new hires to the region, has set a positive trajectory. While Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Wildlife Services have resources that could be helpful for people and wildlife on the Front, the Ranchlands Group serves as an important bridge to the producers who need them.

For example, the Ranchlands Group started a range rider program in 2021, expanding on the success of a Wildlife Services range rider who worked with a subset of landowners on the Blackfeet Reservation.

“Getting the producers to be involved in conflict prevention I think has definitely been a win,” said Bradley, who has seen trust and collaboration between agencies and producers promoted through the program, leading to participating operations on the reservation seeing zero losses for the first time ever.

While the group is still new and the issues surrounding predators on the Front are far from solved, Bradley is beginning to see the initial quick wins important to long-term success. “I’ve had producers reach out to say, ‘I think you’re making a difference,’ and that’s huge,” said Bradley. “At the Montana level, the NGOs and state and federal wildlife managers have figured out that without these ranches here with cows on them, there’s no place for wildlife to live.”

FROM GRAYLING TO GRAY WOLVES

The Big Hole Watershed Committee

The Big Hole River valley is a high-elevation basin at the headwaters of the Upper Missouri River in southwestern Montana and is home to several traditional ranching communities throughout the relatively undeveloped watershed. Established in 1995, the Big Hole Watershed Committee is a landowner-led, community-based conservation group that facilitates consensus-driven decision making by stakeholders with diverse viewpoints on land, wildlife, water and community.

1988 was a year of minimal snowpack and low precipitation that, coupled with high temperatures, caused unusually low stream flow, which led to high water temperatures and decreased dissolved oxygen in the Big Hole River. Coupled with pressure from non-native trout, these conditions put one of the last remaining river-dwelling populations of arctic grayling in the lower 48, a native species that requires cold, clean water, at risk. Impacts from that year were compounded by several years of concurrent drought, leading to additional fishery impacts and community tension over this widely revered resource.

In 1994, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) announced arctic grayling as a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), with the Upper Big Hole River as a critically threatened population stronghold.

Listing could lead to strict water usage regulations and limits on recreation. Rather than accept this fate, the community decided to act. "In this valley we wanted to avoid regulations coming down from agencies on how land and water can be used." said Tana Lynch, now the Associate Director of the Big Hole Watershed Committee. "We wanted local solutions to local problems, local decisions being made by local people. That was why the Big Hole Watershed Committee was formed, so that we could get ahead of these issues, and find solutions before solutions were dictated to us." Ranchers, guides and outfitters, conservation districts and local governments came together to work to avoid listing.

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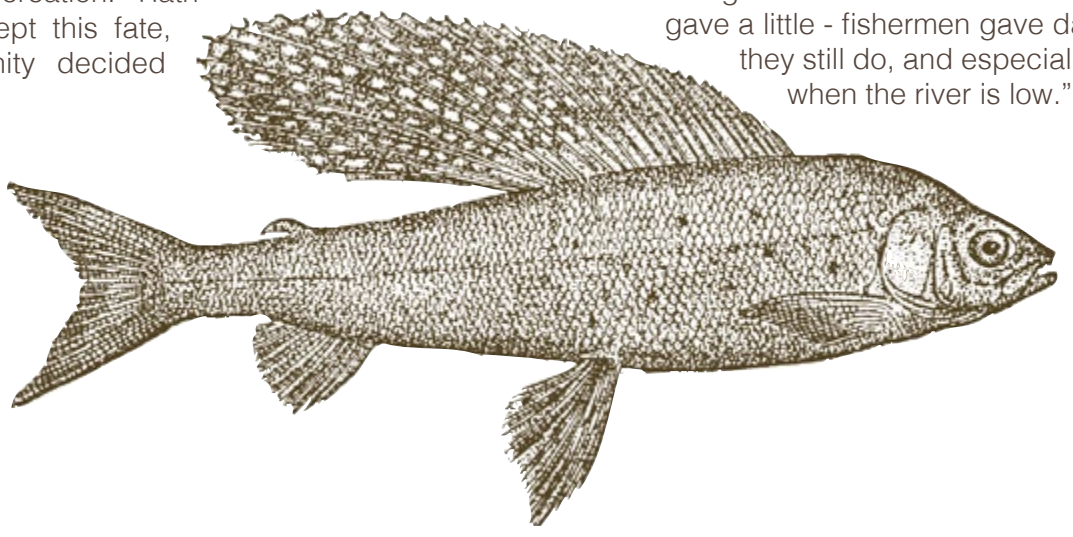
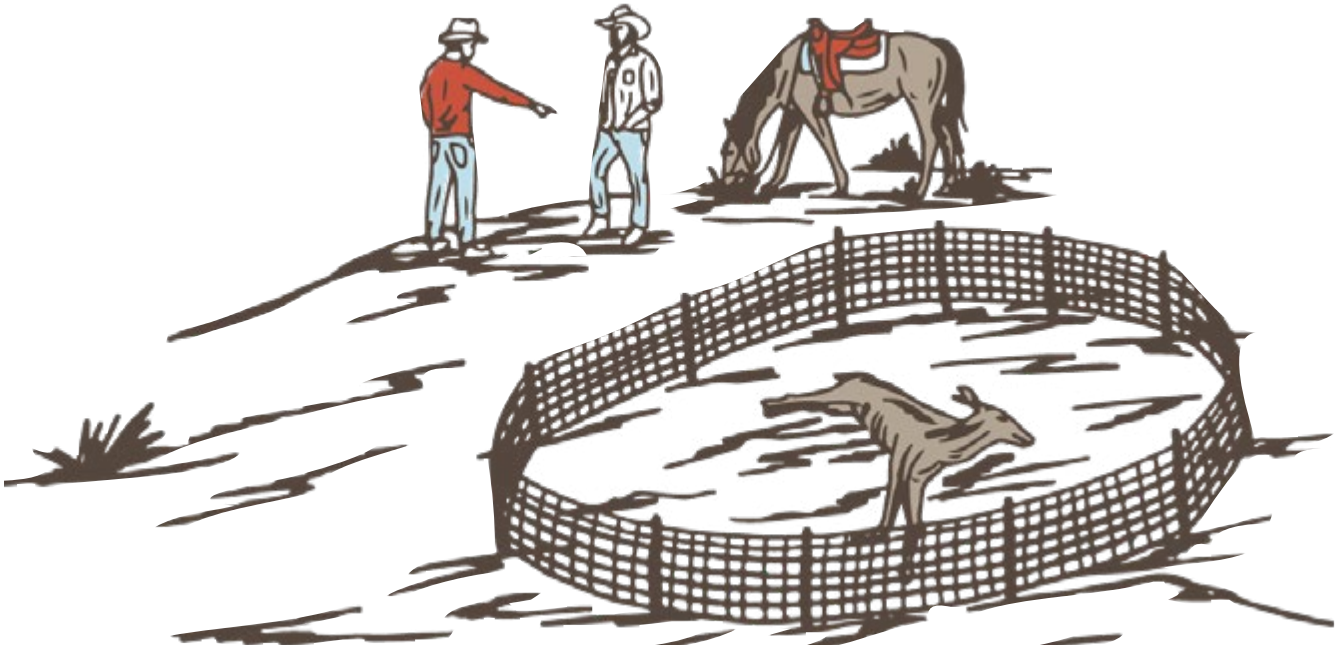
>
> Tana Lynch

One of their first successes came in 1997, when the group created the first watershed-level Drought Management Plan in Montana, which used voluntary participation to meet target river flows and is still in place today. Building off this early win, in 2005, many ranchers enrolled in a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) through the USFWS to provide site plans to benefit grayling in exchange for protections should the fish be listed under the ESA. "Folks in the valley began to drill stock wells so they didn't have to pull water off the river in August," said Dean Peterson, a fourth-generation rancher and member of the Big Hole Watershed Committee. "Everybody gave a little - fishermen gave days fishing and they still do, and especially the outfitters, when the river is low."





"It's all about bringing the community together and getting people to understand and be responsible for their actions." Jim Hagenbarth

All the while, wolves were moving back into the valley after their reintroduction in Yellowstone National Park and Wilderness areas in central Idaho. With the relationships from working to reduce drought and conserve grayling, the community had the framework and capacity to come together to create solutions to potential carnivore-livestock conflict. Committee members convened and formed a wildlife group, targeted to implement solutions to reduce and prevent impending livestock-carnivore conflicts.

This committee worked to establish a carcass management program, first offering transportation options to a landfill, and then constructing a carcass composting site to increase the scale of the program. To meet challenges of growing wolf-livestock conflicts on public allotments, the committee helped bring on a seasonal full-time range rider. That has been effective at increasing human presence on the landscape and monitoring wolf movement, while increasing communication amongst producers on the allotments. "The Watershed Committee in general and our wildlife programs are kind of a compilation of a lot of different small efforts that come together to make a big difference," said Lynch. "So between the carcass removal, compost sites, and range rider program, bear safety and education and also participating in regional discussions, it all adds up." To solve many of these controversial issues, livestock producer and co-founder of the Big Hole Watershed Committee Jim Hagenbarth emphasizes the need for all stakeholders to come to the table, since everyone is impacted by the decisions. "It's all about bringing the community together and getting people to understand and be responsible for their actions and understanding their responsibility to the resource."

THE BLACKFOOT CHALLENGE

What it Takes to Reduce Conflict at Community Scale

The 1.5 million-acre Blackfoot watershed, located in western Montana, supports vibrant ranching communities and one of the most ecologically intact ecosystems in North America. In the early 1970s, landowners within the watershed recognized the need to build partnerships with public agencies to address natural resource threats facing their communities, and in 1993 together formed a landowner-led collaborative aptly named the Blackfoot Challenge. By focusing their early efforts where they agreed, these partners realized they could accomplish more by working together.

By the early 1990s, threats to natural resources and the rural way of life in the Blackfoot were increasing. Subdivision, recreation, and invasive plants were recognized by the community as threats. The Blackfoot Challenge first focused on reducing invasive plants and land conservation, which was a unifying problem for all stakeholders. Throughout the 1990s, an inclusive, decision-by-consensus strategy had been developed, allowing for all stakeholders to be heard and decisions to be made only after all stakeholders agreed on an outcome. Small successes on invasive plant projects built capacity and relationships among landowners and agencies, developing a foundation of trust among community members in the watershed.

As grizzly bears moved into the valley from the north, the first confirmed livestock losses occurred in 1998, and in 2001, an elk hunter was mauled and later died from a chance encounter with a grizzly bear. Spurred by these conflicts, landowners came together with agency personnel to explore potential solutions. As community leaders, these landowners created the glue that bound the group together and created momentum to address the increasingly complex challenges the community was facing. Small but meaningful wins on weeds and land conservation, supported by sound processes and an appetite for collaboratively developed solutions, allowed the Blackfoot Challenge to mobilize collective action on larger problems quickly. “Some of these earlier wins, whether it be weeds or

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river access and things like that, we had those under our belt before some of these tough carnivore challenges came along," said David Mannix, owner-operator of Mannix Ranch. "Had we been just starting now with carnivores, it would be harder because it's more urgent and very emotional. It takes time to build trust, and so it's hard to start on bears and wolves."

Working relationships with agencies responsible for managing carnivores was an important piece of the puzzle to support the needs of landowners in the valley. With agency leadership from Montana's Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks and support from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Blackfoot Challenge provided the framework to address the issue through their newly formed Wildlife Committee. Through incorporating agency representatives early within the collaborative process, the Blackfoot Challenge served as a channel to support landowner needs and build the trust necessary to help agencies distribute resources effectively.

Galvanized by the momentum of community leaders, landowners, agencies, and good process, the Blackfoot Challenge was able to secure funding to implement several measures to reduce and prevent conflict. A range rider program was introduced in 2007, which provided producers another pair of eyes on the landscape to monitor wolf and grizzly movements and survey livestock health and locations. A carcass pick-up program was also started during calving season which helped prevent dead stock or boneyards from drawing predators near calving pastures. With any departure from the established way of going about business, however, there is bound to be some push-back. Producers that were early adopters within the community got some heat from skeptical neighbors, but through "neighboring up" and demonstrating success, the community slowly but surely got on board.

"Many community members were skeptical about the carcass pickup program, but once they saw operations having success and far fewer predators, many people were quick to join," said David Mannix. Eric Graham, wildlife coordinator for the Blackfoot Challenge, notes that another key facet of success was that conflict prevention practices were voluntary to the landowner. "Making a rancher involuntarily do something is not going to lead to trust or cooperation down the road," said Graham.

Through participatory process, trust, successful implementation and adaptive management, the Blackfoot Challenge helped maintain a sustainable ecosystem and way of life for the community. "Success is a three-legged stool, made up of people, economics and ecology," said David Mannix. "If the communities, economics and resources are thriving and prosperous, then we've succeeded."

CARNIVORES & COLLABORATION

The Upper Green River Cattlemen's Association

The Upper Green River Cattlemen's Association, based in Wyoming's Green River Valley near Pinedale, was formed in 1916 at the request of the Forest Service, for the purpose of consistently managing operations running cattle under pooled and individual allotments. In response to this request, ranchers grouped together and formed the association, allowing the Forest Service to coordinate with the association, rather than individual ranchers, and support hiring cowboys, supplying supplement and building necessary infrastructure on the range.

As grizzly bears and wolves recovered to the region in the 1990s and 2000s, ranchers faced new challenges to their operations. Growing numbers of grizzly bears cause significant conflicts with livestock in the Upper Green allotments. Prior to grizzly bears returning to the allotment, association ranchers experienced a 2 percent calf mortality, increasing to over 12 percent in 2017. Multiple generations of grizzly bears have learned to feed on cattle, resulting in continued livestock depredation.
As this conflict has increased, association ranchers have come to value the importance of communication and collaboration between the Forest Service and Wyoming Game and Fish. Albert Sommers, fourth-generation rancher, state representative, and the former head of the Upper Green River Cattlemen's Association, states "It is so critical that the land manager, the wildlife manager and the cattle manager, that they are talking to each other to help solve these problems or at least to minimize these problems. All three of those managers have to be talking and interacting with each other in whatever form that exists."

To maintain these relationships, the Association regularly holds meetings where Forest Service and Wyoming Game and Fish representatives share updates with ranchers in the association, while offering time for questions and conversation on topics of concern.
Trust built through regular meetings and collaboration has helped people come together to address common problems and co-create solutions that provide benefit to people and place. Through these meetings, the Association has worked with the Forest Service to change pas-

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ture rotations to reduce livestock's exposure to larkspur, a poisonous plant that kills cattle, leaving their carcasses as attractants to grizzly bears.

Wyoming Game and Fish now works with the Association to train its range riders in the detection of predator kills, making depredation investigations by the department much more efficient. This communication is aided by a network of radio phones that help cowboys relay livestock depredations to producers and Game and Fish in a timely manner.

Lastly, initially wary collaboration led to assistance from the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, a non-profit that works with all people to protect the lands, waters and wildlife of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, in the form of shipping containers to secure attractants at cow camps. Trust between the organizations has grown as a result, and more opportunities for collaborative projects are emerging.

Todd Sterns, now-retired long-time range rider for the Association, has seen success on the range through these collaborations, even though his job duties over three decades have shifted heavily from monitoring and moving herds to reporting losses. "Success is just still being able to graze this country and still make a profit, you know, end up with enough [and] get paid for enough stuff that gets killed that we find and have enough cattle come home that it's still profitable" says Sterns. Looking forward, success to many producers in the Association, according to Sommers, means that "the bears are still here, and I'm still running [cattle] on the same landscape that I've run on and my ancestors have run on for 120 years," said Sommers. "Ranches are integral to wildlife habitat in this area and if they go away, it will be a great loss to us all, wildlife included."

CONCLUSION

The saying, “if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together,” is particularly appropriate when it comes to wildlife-livestock conflict reduction. The road map to success starts and ends with collaboration, where collective action on landscape-scale problems can be organized, implemented and assessed. Through embracing the local context, and working to unite people, purpose, process, and products towards a shared vision, place based collaborative groups can make significant strides towards supporting vibrant communities in the West, both human and wild.

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"If you want to go fast, go alone,
if you want to go far, go together."

MADE IN COLLABORATION WITH:

Heart of the Rockies Initiative

Western Landowners Alliance

Montana State University Extension

USDA United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service