



Northern Blues Forest Collaborative

Operating Principles

*Adopted at the full group meeting
December 3, 2020*

I. Group Mission and Vision

Mission: The Northern Blues Forest Collaborative is a forum for informed and civil conversations amongst a diverse group of stakeholders to provide input about the management of the Wallowa-Whitman and Umatilla National Forests. We believe that by incorporating a wide diversity of interested voices into a respectful, constructive conversation we can increase the ecological health of the forest, the economic opportunity in our region, and the social harmony in our community.

Conversations are informed by diverse community perspectives, best available science, local indigenous knowledge, and the law and policy governing these lands. We provide the Forest Service and the public with well-considered suggestions on areas with wide agreement and provide constructive feedback to the Forest Service on areas of disagreements to aid in understanding the nature and extent of differences between stakeholders.

Vision: We are striving to create a vibrant Northern Blues with a restored and resilient forested landscape, strong job and business opportunities, and social harmony across the region.



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II. Group Values

Participants in the Northern Blues Forest Collaborative (NBFC) agree to the following values:

- a. **Integrity & Good Faith**: We work to build trust in all our interactions. We abide by our commitments to each other and in the Operating Principles. We provide honest, solution-oriented input into the processes to develop projects. We provide any relevant skills and expertise to the extent we are able in support of the development, implementation and monitoring of projects.
- b. **Mutual Understanding & Respect**: We recognize the legitimacy of the interests and values of others. We seek to understand each other, and to ask for clarification where there is confusion. We offer our perspective as clearly and respectfully as we know how.
- c. In all decision-making processes we will review, understand and consider the forest management goals of the Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests.
- d. **Practicality**: We work on tangible, implementable projects. We engage in deliberate dialogue on issues that have not yet reached agreement and/or have higher potential opportunity for positive involvement. We focus on projects with high restoration need and the potential for ecological, economic, and social benefit.
- e. We will seek to identify opportunities to provide economic benefit to local communities.
- f. We will seek to identify opportunities to protect and restore clean water, stable soils, native vegetation and quality habitat for native fish and wildlife, and other ecosystem values.
- g. **Inclusion**: We strive to create an inclusive environment in which all feel welcome and are able to participate. Our community includes all the people both local and distant, especially those most affected by decisions to be taken, namely those living beside the resource base in local communities, who feel that their life is affected by the decisions made about these forests.
- h. **Science, Data & Shared Learning**: Where disputes arise, we agree to seek the best available science and data to help inform our opinions, illustrate our values and work to resolve differences.
- i. We incorporate landscape-scale, ecological, economic, and social considerations into a holistic analysis while making collaborative suggestions.
- j. **Humility & Reconciliation**: Each of us will fail in our efforts to live up to our ideals at some point. In such situations, we value self-reflection, apology and forgiveness.



III. Membership and Participation

The NBFC will actively seek to involve representatives of diverse perspectives, needs, and expertise. This includes (but is not limited to):

- Community support organizations
- Concerned community members
- County Commissioners and other elected officials
- Economic development agencies, organizations or interests
- Environmental/conservation groups
- Federal agencies
- Forest contractors
- Forest industries
- Landowners
- Recreation interests
- Scientists
- State Agencies
- Tribes
- Watershed councils/soil and watershed conservation districts

Formal Membership Requirements

While collaborative meetings are open to the public, only persons signing this Operating Principles document and becoming a voting member may participate in group decision-making.

Membership requirements:

- Signing of, and good faith adherence to, the Operating Principles.
- Attendance at least 3 of the last 6 full group meetings. Members may send an “alternate” from time to time, if needed. Alternates will be expected to sign the Operating Principles, and be able to speak for the principle member with the same authority as if the principle were there. Attendance means good faith participation at the large majority of the meeting.
- Special rules for organizations: Organizations may have more than one voting member, but they may only have one vote on any given subject. If organizational members send alternates, alternates should be signatories to the Operating Principles, and able to speak for the organization’s interests, and vote on their behalf.
- New members will be expected to review any existing Zones of Agreement¹, and sign on if possible. If not possible, the new member should offer to explain their concerns in terms at least as substantive as the original document. New members are not required to agree with us, but they are required to demonstrate that they understand the agreements the group has already reached, and

¹ As of this writing in December, 2020, the Northern Blues Collaborative has no existing Zones of Agreement. Until we do, we recommend that new members review work done on the Thomas Creek and East Face Projects.



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if they don't agree, explain why. This is in keeping with our value of mutual understanding. If an individual would like to apply for voting members status without signing on to the existing Operating Principles and Zones of Agreement, they should discuss the matter with the Steering Committee, and ask for an hour on the full group agenda to explain their concerns with the Operating Principles and Zones of Agreement to the full group, and to take questions from the collaborative members. After this initial discussion, voting members of the collaborative may either vote the applicant in without their signature on the Operating Principles and Zones of Agreement, elect to continue the conversation at another date, or reject the application. Voting members of the collaborative shall deliberate and vote in executive session without the presence of the applicant or other non-voting members (including reporters). If rejected, the applicant may reapply after attending six additional meetings within the next twelve months.

Attendance

Counting attendance for membership/voting qualification purposes: Attendance means good faith participation at the large majority of the full group meeting. If a meeting is two days long, each day counts as a single meeting. Participation in subcommittees may be evidence of good faith, but does not count toward the 3 meetings required to acquire voting membership.

Collaborative members are encouraged to prioritize attending meetings in person. If this is not possible, members are encouraged to ensure an alternate is in attendance, attend via phone or teleconference, or to submit written input to the facilitator ahead of time. Submitting written input to the facilitator does not constitute attendance.

Attendance by Organizations: Organizations are encouraged to send the same individual on a consistent basis in order to assure continuity. Organizations may send a proxy when needed, but proxies are expected to understand the organizations position in relationship to the issues at hand in the collaborative. If an organization is changing direction, the new member, or proxy, is expected to be able to explain the reason for the change. Potential proxies are expected to sign the Operating Principles early, and are required to sign before participating as a voting member.

People interested in participating in the collaborative on an ongoing basis - whether interested in full membership or not - will be invited to review and sign these Operating Principles as soon as possible.

Forest Service Employees

Although Forest Service employees cannot be voting members for legal reasons, the Forest Service is an important partner. The NBFC will invite the Forest Service to engage, assist, advise and support activities of the group, providing leadership and staff expertise, working with the NBFC to develop and implement projects consistent with the mission and vision of the NBFC.

IV. Decision-Making System

As stated in our Mission & Vision, the NBFC collaborative sees itself as a forum for informed, civil conversation about the management of our local National Forests. While consensus remains an ideal, it can



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be very difficult to reach. In many cases, our most valuable contribution to Forest management may be simply participating in the conversation, and helping the Forest Service – and our fellow community members – come to a more nuanced understanding of the nature of the divergences of opinion and perspective.

Completing formal documentation of our positions is not as important as clear mutual understanding.

However, there will be times when a matter appears to be important enough that we will want to express our perspective(s), in writing. When those kinds of situations arise, we will use the following guidelines to help us through the process.

Consensus-Seeking

The NBFC is a consensus-seeking group. Consensus is defined as decisions that all parties can support, or at a minimum, agree to live with. We acknowledge that consensus is not always possible. When we can't reach consensus, we place great value on mutual understanding of the nature of our agreements and disagreements. Lack of consensus is not failure if members of the group, and especially the Forest Service have come to a more nuanced understanding of the nature of and grounds for the differences of opinion.

1. Before beginning a consensus-seeking process, the group will establish an agreed-upon review period to ensure members have had adequate time to review all relevant documents and materials and consult with their organization or constituents.
2. Rather than establishing formal quorum rules, the group agrees that substantive decisions and discussions are best made with the full spectrum of membership present. The group may make tentative decisions at such meetings, or may delay decisions until the following meeting.
3. Full group agendas should note if the group will be asked to make a significant decision during that meeting. Materials and information that will help inform committee or full group member decision-making should be distributed at least a week before the group is asked to discuss it.
4. As decisions are being made by either the full group or a subcommittee, eligible members will be asked to indicate their support either by a show of hands or verbal confirmation.
5. **Consensus** on a decision about a project, suggestions, or action the group plans to take will be reached when all meeting participants can make one of the following statements about a decision:
 - I agree with the decision and will publicly support it.
 - I agree with the decision but will not be publicly supporting it.
 - I can live with the decision (and won't disparage it in public).
6. When there is disagreement, the dissenter shall provide the basis for their dissent and offer a path forward. It is incumbent upon all participants in the conversation to seek a constructive alternative that they think will meet everyone's needs and interests. If it appears that differences are irreconcilable, it is incumbent on the disagreeing parties to do their best to truly understand the other perspectives, and to offer their dissent in the terms most likely to help others understand them.
7. If no consensus can be achieved, a subcommittee may be formed to find a resolution. If the subcommittee is unable to find a resolution that the full NBFC can support by consensus, the full NBFC will determine whether further debate or a report would enhance the clarity of conversation.



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8. **Majority-Minority Reports:** The NBFC may issue a report with a majority–minority decision. Majority-minority reports are not desirable and therefore all efforts will be made to reach consensus. In the event that a majority–minority report appears to be the best path forward, each report will include the majority and minority position of the full group for each suggestion, and a full list of persons and/or organizations supporting each suggestion. The most important purpose for a majority-minority report is to help all parties better understand the nature of the disagreement at hand, and whether there might be additional information that could bring the parties closer to agreement.
9. All decisions that were made at a meeting will be documented at meetings end and the level of agreement with decisions will be recorded.
10. Efforts will be made by the facilitator to reach milestone decisions throughout project discussions on clearly defined decision points.
11. The facilitator, in conjunction with participants, shall identify benchmarks for the upcoming meeting. Proposed benchmarks shall be established either at the meetings or in the interim, and included on the agenda for each item for an upcoming meeting.
12. In the interest of time and completing the agenda items for the day, the facilitator, shall, at his/her discretion, bring a discussion to a close, but shall offer opportunities for continuance via a subcommittee or other means.
13. If all of the above fails, a decision may be finalized by agreement of 50% plus one of the active membership. Votes may be made in person, by proxy, by email, by call-in etc. Such votes shall record who voted which way, and briefly summarize the substance of the opposing perspectives.

Zones of Agreement

Zones of Agreement represent the overlap of agreements common to all signatories. Rarely do they represent the full breadth of what any particular party would do if they had full control. Rather, they represent only the places where all parties agree.

Zones of Agreement will only be amended when significant new ecological, economic, or social information relevant to the issue becomes available. If there is interest in amending the ZOAs, a subcommittee will be formed to inquire more deeply into the issues involved, and return to the full group with recommendations. Any amendments require a full group decision in accord with the process set out above.

As of this writing in Fall, 2020, the Northern Blues Forest Collaborative has no Zones of Agreement.

Objections

The NBFC recognizes that individuals both within the Collaborative and outside of the Collaborative, may choose to object to a project that the collaborative has had extensive discussions about. Collaborative participation does not necessarily indicate support for the final action. The Collaborative also recognizes that the USFS is the ultimate decision maker with regards to all projects. The Collaborative expects that members who object will not object to anything within zones of agreement that they have signed on to.

Should a member of the Collaborative object to a collaborative project, the Collaborative requests that the member who is objecting inform the Collaborative of the nature and extent of the objection and outline the



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reasons why the objector feels an objection is necessary. Members who plan to object shall be provided an opportunity to explain the reason for their objection, and all members agree to demonstrate maturity and respect for other participants.

The NBFC requests that the USFS invite all NBFC members to objection resolution meetings of projects for which the collaborative has provided substantive input either orally or in writing.

V. Operating Protocols

Members agree to review, discuss and re-adopt these Operating Principles on a biennial basis to ensure all members continue to be in agreement and current membership is fully vested. New people interested in participating in the collaborative on an ongoing basis will be invited to review and sign these Operating Principles as soon as possible.

Basic Rules for Collaboration

- Respect each other in and outside of meetings - personal attacks will not be tolerated.
- No backroom deals.
- The personal integrity and values of participants will be respected.
- Stereotyping will be avoided.
- Commitments will not be made lightly and will be kept; agreements will be honored.
- Disagreements will be regarded as “challenges to be solved,” rather than as “battles to be won.”
- Participants are representative of a broad range of interests, each having concerns about the outcome of the issues at hand. All parties recognize the legitimacy of the interests and concerns of others, and expect that their interests will be represented as well.
- Participants commit to keeping their colleagues/constituents informed about the progress of these discussions and to bring concerns back to the group.
- Participants commit to stating interests, problems, and opportunities. Not positions. “My-way-or-the-highway” does not support collaboration.
- Participants will air problems, disagreements and critical information during meetings to avoid surprises.
- Participants commit to search for opportunities and alternatives. The creativity of the group can often find the best solution.
- If concerns arise, participants agree to speak directly to the person involved, and not talk behind others backs.

Meeting Behavior - all participants will:

- Come to meetings prepared.
- Respect the basic rules of collaboration (as stated above).
- Make sure only one person speaks at a time – let individuals finish their thoughts and then take a deep breath before responding.
- Voice concerns during meetings and take the time to resolve those issues.
- Listen carefully to other’s concerns, and seek to understand before responding.



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- Refrain from side conversations, or other distractions such as cell phones, during the meeting.
- Respect the facilitator and meeting agenda.

Individuals who are being disruptive, or do not adhere to these principles may be warned about their behavior and/or asked to leave the room.

Meeting Date and Time and other Logistics

- As of January 2021, NBFC meetings are regularly scheduled for the fourth Wednesday and Thursday of every month. When months start on a Thursday, meetings will be scheduled on the 4th Wednesday and 5th Thursday so that they remain back-to-back days.
- **Meeting locations** will vary. Summer schedules will typically include an office meeting at either the La Grande Ranger District office or the Umatilla Supervisors office on Wednesday, and a field trip on Thursday. Group members have indicated a desire to spend more time in the field to build bonds and better understand different situations and management strategies therefore more than two annual field trips are encouraged. Winter schedules are typically entirely indoors or via teleconference and some meetings will likely be moved to accommodate the holidays. Some meetings may occur at other sites entirely. When practical, call in, or video-conference options will be made available. See the agenda for last minute details.
- Members are expected to review the minutes of meetings at which they were not present in order to stay abreast of potentially significant upcoming decisions. If an item appears to be significant, and a member who would be expected to be interested in that item is not present, the group present should draft a proposed decision, and finalize it at the following meeting.
- Meetings will be announced via email and available on the calendar located on the NBFC website (or by phone and/or mail for members who do not have email).
- Meeting agendas will be sent out approximately 10 days prior to the meeting.

Communications protocols

- **Internal:** A website will be maintained for storing and sharing all information. Partners are encouraged to help develop content for the website. The website is currently under development (January, 2021). Meeting announcements will be posted on the website and sent via email. To get on the official email list, contact the facilitator.
- **External:** Information about the collaborative will be made available to external stakeholders via the website and other venues as appropriate; all efforts will be taken to ensure that the group's work remains transparent to external audiences. Non-members will have access to all finalized information and the ability to share thoughts and comments with the group.
- No individual member or participant of the NBFC is empowered to speak on behalf of the full group without first gaining explicit consent of the full group. Zones of Agreement, formal letters voted on by the collaborative membership and other consensus documents are the best representation of NBFC's collective stance on any given issue.



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Subcommittees

Subcommittees may be formed, as needed, to deliberate on areas of disagreement, do research, draft procedural documents, or work on any other matter that the full group has decided is relevant. Recommendations from subcommittees shall be brought to the entire NBFC for deliberation and approval.

Steering Committee

The NBFC will utilize a Steering Committee to assist in the following functions: developing draft meeting documents such as agendas and notes for full group consideration, fiscal administration oversight and assistance to the host organization discussion and feedback for staffing and other contracts, annual facilitator and host organization performance reviews, and agenda-setting for full group meetings.

The Steering Committee is charged with lending their individual skills to ensure that the mission and vision of the collaborative are being accomplished, and that grant objectives and financial obligations are being met. The opinions and positions of individual committee members in regard to projects do not belong in this role.

The Steering Committee will strive to include diverse representation from amongst the full group, and will include at least one forest industry, one environmental organization, and one local community representative. The Steering Committee will not have more than nine members.

Nominations for membership in the Steering Committee may be made by any voting member of the collaborative. Elections shall be held in the final meeting of each year, and appointments need only a simple majority of the voting members. Committee members will serve two-year terms beginning in January each year and may serve consecutive terms. A committee member elected mid-term shall serve for the remainder of the year elected plus one additional year.

Qualifications for service on the Steering Committee:

- Voting membership status
- Attendance at three of the last six meetings since obtaining voting membership status.
- An ability to separate individual/organizational interests from collaborative interests.
- Evidence of good faith commitment to the mission and vision of the collaborative and these Operating Principles.

Failure to maintain any of the four qualifications on an ongoing basis may result in removal from the Steering Committee.

Record keeping

- Written notes, including attendance, will be taken at each meeting and shared with members who are on the list serve or have requested them by mail no later than 3 weeks following any meeting.
- Approval of the minutes will be sought at the beginning of the next meeting and any issues (clarifications, other) will be discussed.
- Once approved, final notes will be posted to the website.



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- Minutes are intended to reflect each significant topic discussed, the major concerns raised, and the resolutions reached. They are not intended to provide a detailed transcript of the discussion. The purpose of this is to foster free, creative, dialogue, but to ensure that we capture all actual agreements or open questions.
- Agreements documented in minutes shall be considered the agreement only of those present, unless otherwise specified, pursuant to the notice requirements elsewhere in the document.
- The header on the minutes shall contain a list of Key Decisions, Action Items, and Open Questions. The open questions section will help the Steering Committee determine further topics for discussion.
- Recordings: The collaborative may choose to record science and project presentations and the associated question and answer sessions. In order to encourage the free flow of ideas and thoughts, deliberations and discussions shall not be recorded. Links to presentations will be posted on the website.

Accountability

The Northern Blues Forest Collaborative takes its Mission, Vision and Group Values very seriously. Taken together these represent an attempt to build a constructive conversation about historically contentious issues. We expect that at times people will be frustrated at each other, and have a difficult time seeing the best in each other. We also expect that no one will get 100% of the solution they would most like to see implemented, and that this can be not just frustrating, but exasperating. Nonetheless, maintaining status as a voting member requires that people bring their best, good faith adherence to these principles to the table.

If a mistake is made, or trust is breached, an apology is expected. The individuals between whom the breach has occurred are expected to make a good faith attempt to work things out between themselves. Within reason, it is appropriate to ask the collaborative facilitator to help with such meetings. Efforts at reconciliation are expected to be sincere. People are expected to be self-reflective in any situation, and ask themselves whether they might have contributed to any particular difficulty, and if so, to apologize. If efforts at reconciliation are made in good faith, forgiveness is expected.

If the above efforts reach a stalemate, and two or more people believe a voting member is not acting in good faith, they may approach the Steering Committee with their concerns. The Steering Committee will discuss the matter with the other member. If all efforts at reconciliation fail, the Steering Committee has the authority to determine that a voting member is not acting in good faith, and to revoke membership status. If the individual is determined to be disruptive at meetings, the Steering Committee has the authority to deny the person the right to participate in collaborative discussions.

VI. Staff Roles

The host organization of the NBFC will provide, as funding allows, fiscal administration, neutral facilitation, outreach, minute-taking, and other functions desired by the group. The host organization may enter into contracts with other entities to perform desired functions, specifically a third-party neutral facilitator to facilitate full group, Steering Committee and subcommittee meetings; develop agendas for monthly meetings; and review meeting materials and notes.



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VII. Signature Page

By signing this document, I agree to abide by the values and procedures agreed to by the Northern Blues Forest Collaborative as set forth in the Operating Principles adopted December 3, 2020 to the best of my ability.

X _____
Signature

Date

Printed Name

Organization

Signing Statement (*optional*):

NOTE: Because this document was adopted during the Covid pandemic, it was not realistic to have everyone physically sign the same piece of paper. Instead, everyone has been encouraged to print & sign this last page and return. Completed signature pages will be added to the original document as they come in.