



Ecosystem Workforce Program

BRIEFING PAPER
NUMBER 42
SUMMER 2012



ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY FOR NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN OREGON

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Community-based organizations (CBOs) in Oregon are fostering natural resource management and economic development, particularly in public lands communities where the capacity of federal agencies, businesses, and others has dwindled as a result of policy and economic changes. Little is known about how CBOs accomplish a range of goals with limited resources. This study examined the organizational capacity of Oregon's CBOs to build understanding of their financial and human resources, and their external relationships.

Approach

In 2010, we conducted a survey of CBOs across in eleven states in the American West. Oregon CBOs composed 22 percent of all survey respondents. We define a CBO as an entity that has a locally-oriented mission that includes natural resource management. CBOs include nonprofit organizations with 501(c)3 status and informal collaborative groups.

Results

We found that CBOs tended to be small organizations with limited staff and budgets that used a range of partnerships to accomplish their work. CBOs tended to have limited and uncertain financial capacity. Over two-thirds of the study CBOs had a budget of \$250,000 or less. No CBOs in our survey had more than a year of fiscal reserves; and most had less than three months. Informal groups were more likely than nonprofits to have smaller budgets and fewer reserves. In addition, CBOs largely relied on federal and foundation grants, making them vulnerable to shifts in federal poli-

cies and appropriations, and philanthropic funder priorities.

CBOs are small organizations that relied on a few staff to perform a great range of functions. Seventy percent of Oregon CBOs had an executive director, but less than half had any other type of position that we surveyed for; thus, executive directors likely perform many functions for their organizations. Over half of the CBOs surveyed had at least some full time staff. About 21 percent of all Oregon CBOs surveyed had no paid staff at all and used only volunteers to accomplish their work.

CBOs also drew on both diverse and deep partnerships to accomplish their work. CBOs most commonly partnered with federal agencies and other CBOs, which reflects missions related to public lands management. CBOs tended to provide skills such as facilitation, staff services, and policy advocacy to others. In particular, CBOs played significant roles in collaboration. About half of the



Oregon CBOs surveyed identified themselves as a collaborative group, or provided services to a collaborative group. Although the nonprofits surveyed gave a good deal of technical assistance to collaborative processes, 46 percent of them were not compensated for this work.

Conclusions

CBOs in Oregon are performing numerous valuable services that help “glue” together natural resource management and economic development at the local level. They have typically been funded to implement projects on the ground, yet research and practice increasingly suggest that organizations that can provide intermediary functions such as networking, facilitation and knowledge transfer

are necessary for community and ecological resilience. However, there has been increased reliance on CBOs without sustained or stable investments in their durability. As community-based and collaborative approaches to natural resource management continue to grow, there is a need to recognize and support local institutions and skills that will enable improved land management and economic wellbeing.

More information

The complete study can be found in the EWP Working Paper, “Community-based natural resource management in Oregon: a profile of organizational capacity,” which is available on the web at ewp.uoregon.edu/publications/working.

The Dry Forest Investment Zone project team is Sustainable Northwest, the Watershed Research and Training Center, Wallowa Resources, and the Ecosystem Workforce Program. This briefing paper was made possible with funding by the US Endowment for Forestry and Communities and USDA Rural Development. Photo credit: Emily Jane Davis. For more information about the Dry Forest Investment Zone, please visit www.sustainablenorthwest.org/programs/dfiz.

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