

Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI)
April 27, 2020, 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM
RMRI Funding Subcommittee
Meeting Summary-FINAL

ATTENDANCE

Participants: Angela Boag, Christina Burri, Patt Dorsey, Jason Lawhon, Tom Spezze, Cindy Williams, Scott Woods, Peter Wyrsh

Facilitation: Heather Bergman and Samuel Wallace

ACTION ITEMS

Patt Dorsey	Work with RMRI-Southwest (RMRI-SW) partners to develop a funding request to present during the May 1 RMRI meeting.
Angela Boag and Scott Woods	Integrate their grant resource lists into a single format, add categories to organize the grants, and send it to the Funding Subcommittee to review.
Peter Wyrsh	Contact his colleagues at Blue Forest Conservation to determine if they would be available in mid-May for a conservation finance webinar.
Jason Lawhon	Contact Quantified Ventures and RenewWest to determine if they would be available for a conservation finance webinar in mid-May.
Heather Bergman and Samuel Wallace	Create PowerPoint slides for the Funding Subcommittee report out at the May 1 RMRI meeting.

FUNDING SUBCOMMITTEE ROLE DISCUSSION

Meeting participants discussed the role of the Funding Subcommittee. Their comments are summarized below.

- From the three local landscape perspectives, they have only a vague understanding of what the Funding Subcommittee is going to accomplish, and they are seeking clarity on the role and purpose of the Subcommittee and the available opportunities to generate additional funding to fill funding gaps. The Upper Arkansas partners have discussed the challenges of funding treatments, particularly on private lands, the challenges of using Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) funds because of the reimbursement requirements, and the need for a revolving forest health fund. RMRI-Southwest Colorado (RMRI-SW) partners have identified near-term funding needs.
- Potential roles of the Funding Subcommittee include:
 - Constructing a database with detailed information on grant opportunities.
 - Serving as a matchmaker to connect local partners to organizations to generate funding.
 - Developing a private funding/philanthropy funding strategy.
 - Developing a broad-based funding approach.
 - Supporting creative funding strategies, like a revolving forest health fund.
 - Leveraging funds from existing programs.
 - Pursuing statewide policies (e.g., a statewide tax).
 - Pooling and consolidating resources.
- There are three broad ideas that the Funding Subcommittee can address:
 - Grant matchmaking
 - Higher-level policy changes (e.g., a statewide tax)

- Bigger picture funding approaches (e.g., conservation finance mechanisms, pooling resources, etc.)
- An example of a big picture funding approach is the Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative, which serves a statewide function by pooling resources and then distributing funding to projects across Utah. Developing big picture funding strategies, like the Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative, would require a more in-depth discussion as these types of suggestions would affect the governance structure of RMRI and the work of the Governance Subcommittee.
- Another potential role for the Funding Subcommittee is to develop a strategy for private funding and philanthropy, like a private fundraising campaign. Federal and state agency partners on the Funding Subcommittee cannot and will not be a part of a team that strategizes on how to engage private funders and foundations. There will need to be representatives from non-profits and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on the Funding Subcommittee who can do the work to generate private funding. The NGOs and non-profits can form a team within the Funding Subcommittee to ensure that state and federal agency employees are not involved with any activities that involve pursuing private funding. The Funding Subcommittee will bring a request to RMRI partners during the May 1 meeting for RMRI partners from non-profits and NGOs to join the Funding Subcommittee to develop a strategy for private funding/philanthropy.

FUNDING SUBCOMMITTEE MATCHMAKING ROLE DISCUSSION

Meeting participants discussed the opportunity for the Funding Subcommittee to act as a matchmaker between local partners and appropriate funding sources. Their comments are summarized below.

- One role for the Funding Subcommittee is to act as a matchmaker. Matchmaking involves guiding local partners to the right funding source, depending on the needs of the project. The role of Funding Subcommittee is *not* to keep funds or make direct decisions on where to direct funds. Instead, they can act as a partner and facilitator between the landscapes and grantors to help local landscapes move through the grant process. This matchmaking can help reduce competition and conflict among project implementors in the local landscape areas who have had to compete for the same sources of funding in the past.
- Because the Subcommittee members would only serve as a matchmaker and would not make decisions directly about funding, they should be prepared to support the decisions of the fiscal agents on how they choose to allocate funding.
- As a part of their matchmaking role, the Funding Subcommittee could connect local area partners to prioritization efforts and other webinars, meetings, committees, etc. For example, NRCS Colorado is currently prioritizing source water areas for funding; in this case, the Funding Subcommittee could make sure local landscape partners are aware of and engaged in these source water prioritization discussions.
- The Funding Subcommittee may also be able to leverage funds in existing programs to prioritize RMRI landscapes. This strategy has already occurred in the Restoration and Stewardship of Outdoor Resources and the Environment (ReStORE) grant. When state agencies administer federal grants, the state agencies need to make sure they follow federal guidelines and rules when setting any priorities for RMRI priority landscapes. The Funding Subcommittee also needs to act as a neutral party among RMRI landscapes and not give off the impression of favoritism for any specific RMRI priority landscape; the Funding Subcommittee should not pick winners or losers among landscapes or projects or steer funding in any direct way. A grantor may choose to give priority to RMRI landscapes, but

RMRI landscapes will still need to submit a grant application to be evaluated by the granting agency, which ultimately decides on how to set priorities and allocate funding.

- There are several ways to act as a matchmaker. One approach is to construct a database with detailed information on deadlines, application requirements, etc. Angela Boag, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and Scott Woods, Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS), have each constructed a preliminary list of grants for their respective agencies. The CSFS has a good grants database, but it could be improved by adding categories on application periods, general award size, available funding, method of funding distribution, annual funding cycles, etc. Grant opportunities could then be searchable and organized through the database based on local landscape needs. Databases can be helpful, but they are helpful to the extent that local landscape partners have the capacity to apply for grants and the resources to spend money upfront if the grant awards funds through reimbursements. Angela Boag and Scott Woods will integrate their grant resource lists into a single format, add categories to organize the grants, and send it to the Funding Subcommittee to review.
- Another approach to matchmaking is to clarify the near-term and long-term needs of priority areas and then use those needs to identify funding opportunities and connect priority areas partners to potential funders. It is important with this approach not to get too detailed with the needs of each landscape and to maintain a broad overview of needs. Instead of identifying local landscape needs, this strategy should take the frame of identifying a list of opportunities for funders to put their funding to good use.

PRIORITY LANDSCAPE NEAR-TERM FUNDING NEEDS

Meeting participants discussed how to approach addressing the near-term funding needs of RMRI-SW and other priority landscapes. Their comments are summarized below.

- RMRI-SW partners have two near-term needs. The first is the need to increase staff capacity. Most of the work in RMRI-SW is expected to be done in collaboratives, so there are near-term staffing needs for those collaboratives to sustain their work. The second need is funding for a treatment project in Durango to demonstrate a near-term win.
- One of the challenges for local landscapes is that grantors often reimburse funding, which requires grant recipients to have the upfront capital to spend on projects. The other challenge is that funding is often to implement projects and conduct treatments rather than to increase staff capacity.
- The approach for addressing near-term needs does not have to represent the long-term process of the Funding Subcommittee. They could develop a solution to address near-term needs now and then develop a different plan to meet future needs during fiscal year 2021.
- One approach is to build a “win list” of project and capacity needs to identify opportunities for early wins in the priority landscapes and then share that win list with potential funders. Those needs could then be cross-referenced with the funding database that Angela Boag and Scott Woods are developing. This list could be used to identify the near-term and long-term funding needs that will help priority landscapes achieve their desired outcomes. It is important for local landscapes to clarify how additional capacity and resources would help them achieve their outcomes to justify the return on investment for funders.
- Meeting participants discussed what information local landscape partners should provide regarding near-term funding needs, such as the total cost for one year, the actions/activities the money would fund, one-year outcomes, and 10-year outcomes. When requesting information from local landscape partners, the Funding Subcommittee should consider the busyness of those who are implementing the work in relation to how much information the Subcommittee asks them to provide. If the Funding Subcommittee asks local landscape partners to put time and detail into identifying funding needs, the Subcommittee should

identify what they plan to do with that information, how providing information will benefit local landscape partners, and then be upfront with the plan. The Funding Subcommittee should request general information from local landscape partners in line with the information that was provided in the RMRI proposals rather than asking for too many details. A one-year outcome is also a short turnaround for demonstrating results, and local landscapes may be able to include more detailed information if they were to identify one- to three-year outcomes instead of only one-year outcomes. Another approach could be to ask local landscape partners to identify the funding needs that are of strategic value (i.e., the funding needs outside of direct treatment costs that are of particular value for moving local landscape partners forward).

- Having landscape partners identify their funding needs will make it easier to focus the resources of RMRI partners to address those needs. During the May 1 full RMRI meeting, RMRI-SW partners can share their near-term funding needs with the partners on the call. The Funding Subcommittee can then ask RMRI-CO partners to assist in identifying ways to support the near-term funding needs of RMRI-SW during the meeting. This same approach can be used during the Upper Arkansas and Upper South Platte orientations over the next couple of months. Patt Dorsey will work with RMRI-SW partners to have a funding request during the May 1 RMRI meeting.

CONSERVATION FINANCE WEBINAR DISCUSSION

Meeting participants discussed organizing a conservation finance webinar. Their comments are summarized below.

- At the February 26 RMRI meeting, there was a proposal to explore the idea of conservation finance and creative funding mechanisms. There are several conservation finance organizations that are already involved with RMRI or RMRI partners in some capacity: Blue Forest Conservation, Quantified Ventures, and RenewWest. Quantified Ventures works with the RMRI-SW partners, and RenewWest works with the Coalition of the Upper South Platte in the Upper South Platte. Each of these conservation finance consultants has a different financial model. A conservation finance webinar would include a panel of these consultants to discuss their different tools and strategies to finance forest health projects.
- Local partners may be interested in using conservation finance mechanisms to fund their projects, and it would be worthwhile to provide an opportunity for local partners to connect with conservation finance organizations to explore different funding options. For local landscape partners who do not have an immediate need for a conservation finance plan, it would still be helpful to begin to identify what is needed in terms of project details to develop a plan.
- The webinar should have a high-level overview of conservation finance mechanisms but also have an opportunity for local landscapes to share their specific project and landscape needs. The webinar can begin with presentations from Quantified Ventures, Blue Forest Conservation, and RenewWest, followed by virtual breakout rooms with a question and answer session with each of the organizations. The webinar can also be recorded, and local landscape partners can reach out to any of these organizations after the webinar.
- The conservation finance webinar will be tentatively scheduled for mid-May. Peter Wyrsh will contact his colleagues at Blue Forest Conservation to determine if they would be available in mid-May for a conservation finance webinar.

NEXT STEPS

- During the RMRI-CO full meeting on May 1, the Funding Subcommittee will provide an update. In that update, they will:

- Explain the role of the Funding Subcommittee
- Request that RMRI partners from non-profits and NGOs join the Funding Subcommittee to develop a strategy for private funding/philanthropy
- Request that RMRI-CO partners assist in identifying ways to support the near-term funding needs identified by RMRI-SW partners
- Heather Bergman and Samuel Wallace will create PowerPoint slides for the Funding Subcommittee report out at the May 1 RMRI meeting.
- At the next Funding Subcommittee meeting, they can discuss further clarifying their role, potentially in the governance charter, and identify how to approach near-term funding needs for Southwest Colorado, Upper Arkansas, and Upper South Platte.