

We Don't Go It Alone

Conservation through Collaboration

by Drue DeBerry



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists and Yakama Nation personnel conduct defishing activities prior to the Upper Hancock Spring Channel restoration project in north-central Washington. Photo Credit: USFWS

“In our attempts to make conservation easy, we have made it trivial.” Aldo Leopold

A partnership exists when two or more parties agree to combine their resources for a common cause and then share credit for success or responsibility for failure. Partnerships come in all shapes and sizes. There are perfunctory partnerships of necessity, where no one puts much into them beyond attending meetings and no one gets much out of them other than minutes. It's not hard to think of an example of “conservation made easy” – it plays a useful role for certain utilitarian needs, yet does not inspire. However, that type of partnership should not be confused

with partnerships that are genuine game changers. Powerful partnerships wrestle with challenging issues that have serious implications. Partners' anxiety about potential outcomes can reach Russian-roulette heights. In best-case scenarios, the sense of urgent struggle can have the upside of encouraging stakeholders to fully engage in and ante up for a partnership formed to reach a brighter outcome. If stakeholders invest their time and energy to work together, the return on shared investment can produce success that exceeds the highest of expectations.

The stories in this edition provide insight on noteworthy partnerships that are having a significant impact

on conservation. Each story provides inspiration.

“Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is a process; working together is success.”

Henry Ford

What makes a successful partnership?

A partnership should follow a few basic rules: share a common purpose and vision, check your ideological differences at the door, and treat everyone involved with respect. Set achievable milestones for the partnership. The more productive a partnership feels to the partners, the more partners will want to collaborate.

The Puerto Rican parrot (*Amazona vittata*) story highlights how three agencies are leveraging each other's strengths with great results and how their success has encouraged them to expand their vision and achieve even more.

How are partnerships started?

Many partnerships stem from partners coming together to discuss a shared challenge. A partnership cannot be forced or rushed; it must develop at a natural pace as trust develops. One tip is to build personal relationships. For example, arranging an opportunity for stakeholders to share a meal together, can help accelerate the group cohesion process. The story on the Amargosa toad (*Bufo nelsoni*) is an example of how one person's passion can be the spark. When anxiety over the status of the toad started to devolve into an "us versus them" scenario, David Spicer, a rancher in southern Nevada, reached out to all sides, opening up a dialogue to help everyone come out ahead.

"When land does well for its owner, and the owner does well by his land, when both end up better by their partnership, we have conservation" Aldo Leopold

Who should be included in a partnership?

Partnerships gain strength as they gain diversity. The odd bedfellows are a powerful force when aligned in purpose. When you begin to wrestle with an issue, ask the group if everyone who cares about the issue is represented at the table. Are all interested points of view represented? Once you agree on what you want to work toward, you can always negotiate how you get there. Predator control and animal welfare are not obvious causes to join forces, yet the project to remove feral cats from California's San Nicholas Island to benefit the threatened western snowy plover



Amargosa toad (*Bufo nelsoni*). Photo Credit: Joe Milmo, USFWS

(*Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus*) and other nesting birds highlights the value of engaging in a dialogue, finding common ground, and coming up with a resolution that worked for all parties involved. The effort to restore Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) and steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) to the Upper Hancock Spring Channel in north-central Washington also demonstrates the strength and value of a diversified partnership. By involving scientists from the University of Idaho into their projects, the Service and the Yakima Nation gained the ability to analyze the impact of restoration efforts and improved their flexibility to work within strict permitting regulations.

Leading a partnership.

Playing a leadership role for a partnership is a unique challenge. To be effective, the leader should understand the perspectives and concerns of each of the partners. When leading a diverse coalition, it is not uncommon for the leader to be met with strong disagreement from polar ends of the partnership spectrum. This

is to be expected. Although difficult, the partnership is worth the rancor. It is the job of the leader to push the boundaries while maintaining and urging the partnership toward achieving the shared goal. Remember the more contentious the issue, the harder it is to hold the center, the greater the potential for a conservation success. It also helps to remember that both Aldo and Henry would probably approve.

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