



FUNDING COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS: *THE CHALLENGE OF PRIVATELY LED PLANNING*

By Wanda Burget and Jonathan B. Haufler

INTRODUCTION

We have been involved over the past four years with efforts to fund the work of the Thunder Basin Grasslands Prairie Ecosystem Association (TBGPEA). We would like to share with you today some of our observations on sources of funding.

Collaborative efforts have various purposes, occur in different locations, and have a wide range of goals and expectations. Most collaborative efforts require some level of funding. Nearly all have some operating costs, whether it's just for mailings and phone calls, or for staff, travel, office space, or other expenses. In addition, many collaborative efforts need technical assistance. Some require funding for facilitation of meetings; others require assistance with data compilation and analysis; while others still may need legal assistance, financial management, etc. Most initiatives require funding to carry out its projects. Obviously the needs can vary widely, depending upon the specific mission of the collaborative effort.

FUNDING NEEDS OF TBGPEA

The TBGPEA has a number of funding needs. We have various operating costs. We require phone calls, mailings, printing and distribution of materials, website development and maintenance, insurance, and similar expenses. As Denise [Langley, TBGPEA Vice-Chair] noted earlier, we had assistance from a plan coordinator (for one year) and from a managing consultant (for two years) as we were getting organized and oriented as an Association. We have had travel costs—to meet with agency representatives and for our advisory committee to meet with us one to two times/year. We have also sought legal advice. We have hosted two symposia, which we have tried to make as inexpensive for attendees as possible. We have been involved in projects, such as the cooperative weed project mentioned by Denise that required funding support. Our biggest funding need is associated with our development and implementation of an ecosystem management plan. This is not a small undertaking for a sizable landscape with diverse economic, social, and ecological objectives. Consequently, we have invested considerable energy in seeking funding support.

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Our planning initiative is somewhat unique in that we have chosen to be a privately led, collaborative initiative that is conducting its own planning. Most collaborative conservation initiatives, addressing scales of the size of our effort, rely heavily on agency plans or on agency-generated data and its analysis and interpretation, and involve private landowners primarily in review and discussion of this information. We wanted to lead our own planning effort.

What we identified as the steps in our process included conducting an ecological assessment of the landscape; developing an ecosystem-management plan that integrates ecological, economic, and social objectives; developing specific implementation agreements; and putting resulting actions into place. We have been asked why we didn't just piggyback on the National Grasslands Plan. This plan, developed through the Northern Great Plains Assessment, was developed at a much larger scale than our initiative. The data and information used in this broader plan were much coarser in resolution and not tied to the specific sites in our planning area. We thought that we could produce a more accurate plan that is more appropriate to our specific conditions than the plan generated for the entire Northern Great Plains. Additionally, agencies don't have needed information about private Association lands; nor were their objectives for public land management necessarily the same as the objectives for our private lands. This is not to say that we won't use any appropriate information that the agencies may have that is available to us and that can help in this planning effort.

We've estimated that our initiative will cost approximately \$1.4 million from 2003-2006. This may sound like a lot, and it did to us, but when we looked into what it takes to address complex and challenging issues for a 931,000-acre landscape, we recognized that considerable information and work was needed. I don't want to spend much time on the specifics of our budgeting, but it's important to understand the level of funding we've been trying to obtain to support our initiative. Though our estimated funding needs are not anticipated to be constant over the projected four years, they do average \$350,000/year. We found that this puts us in the middle ground of funding levels. Our initiative is larger than many agencies or foundations may be accustomed to funding—grants of \$10-50K appeared to be more the norm—but it's not so large that it's viewed in some circles as a major initiative.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

Powder River Coal Company has chosen to be a contributor to the Association. We support its goals and directions, and think that such a collaborative planning effort is the best way of addressing the management challenges we're all facing. However, Powder River can only be contributors to this effort, not the sole source of private funding—both from the standpoint of the required levels of funding that are beyond the level of support available from Powder River Coal, as well as the importance of this being a collaborative effort in all senses of the term.

We have sought numerous other funding sources including federal programs, state programs, and private sources of funds. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) initially allocated some Endangered Species Act monies to the Association for protection of black-tailed prairie dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) habitat on private lands. The Association used these funds to start its ecological assessment and to further private landowner educational programs. However, Section 6 monies are very limited and in Wyoming most all of these funds are needed for work related to grizzly bears (*Ursus arctos*) or other species where Game and Fish involvement is needed for management activities.

We explored other USFWS private-lands funding programs. The private stewardship grants program is designed to help listed or candidate species on private lands. The funds can be used for habitat-improvement projects on private lands. Their focus is for on-the-ground activities, not for planning, data collection, or similar activities. Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) is focused on restoring habitat of fish and wildlife species that are the trust resources of the agency: migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, and candidate species. Funds are available on a cost-share basis for on-the-ground projects that restore habitat. Interestingly, the High Plains Partnership is proposed to receive \$5 million from this program in 2005, with these funds primarily targeted for hiring additional agency personnel to provide technical assistance to private landowners. However, the word we received when we pursued these funds is that they were not for planning, but for on-the-ground activities. Landowner incentive program funds are allocated to states for assistance in

enhancing, protecting, or restoring habitats that benefit federally listed, proposed, or candidate species on private lands. These include programs to provide technical and financial assistance to private landowners under two tiers: Tier 1 is for administrative support up to \$180,000, and Tier 2 is for project implementation; both require a 25% non-federal match. We have worked with Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) for application of these funds. WGFD had already applied for and received its Tier 1 dollars, which it has allocated to programs such as its grasslands program and to hiring staff to support these programs. Tier 2 dollars are for on-the-ground projects. The Association has been specifically mentioned in Wyoming's request for Tier 2 support, so that these funds may help fund future on-the-ground projects, but not our current planning efforts.



*Funding the Association's ecosystem management plan for Thunder Basin required an extensive national search.
Photo: J. Haufler*

We have investigated sources of funds available through the Farm Bill. Specifically, we looked into the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), and Grasslands Reserve Program. EQIP funds are designed to support voluntary conservation programs for farmers and ranchers that install or implement structural and vegetation practices—with the focus again for on-the-ground projects at a cost-share basis. The local conservation district approves the types of projects that are deemed to address local needs. Presently, in our planning landscape, the focus of EQIP is to support projects focusing on water improvements to better distribute grazing pressure, fencing, or similar conservation actions. In the future, EQIP might provide incentive funds for specific restoration projects, but they were not thought to be appropriate to our present funding needs. The WHIP provides funds on a cost-share basis for restoration, improvement, and maintenance of wildlife habitat. It could fund our future on-the-ground activities. However, it doesn't address our present funding needs. The Grassland Reserve Program provides funds for various types of easements for maintaining rangeland—basically to prevent development activities on rangelands. These funds are primarily allocated to willing participants in areas with high development potential. For example, grasslands in the Jackson Hole area would be key candidates for this program. These funds were not thought to directly apply to the Association.

Despite the challenges we found concerning each of these specific programs, we were able to receive Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) support this year. This funding was just firmed up within the past few months, through the considerable support and assistance of Ed Burton, Jerry Jasmer, and other NRCS personnel. These funds are the primary source allowing us to continue our ecological assessment work this summer. We were able to secure these funds with Ed's assistance and with the support of Deputy Undersecretary of Agriculture Mack Gray and Chief of NRCS Bruce Knight, with whom we met in Washington, DC, last fall.

We were encouraged by Assistant Secretary of the Interior Lynn Scarlett to look into the Conservation Challenge Initiative, or CCI, funds. This is a two-year-old program within the Department of the Interior (DOI) that is jointly administered by the USFWS, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the National Park Service within each state. Because it is new, we found that not as much is known about this program and what it can fund. In a follow-up meeting with Chris Kearney, who administers this program for DOI, it was indicated that this program was also targeted for on-the-ground projects rather than for planning or data collection activities. Chris indicated that support for planning went directly into agency budgets, with the assumption that the agencies did the planning—not the private landowners. Nevertheless, we were encouraged to apply for these funds and have submitted applications through the BLM and the USFWS. We haven't received word on the outcome of these applications at this time.

We have also pursued funding through the United States Forest Service. We did apply for, and received a Rural Community Assistance program grant in 2003, administered by the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest. Thunder Basin National Grasslands also sought additional monies to help support the assessment work of the Association this year, but their funding flexibility for 2004 has been affected with reductions and reprioritizations of federal budgets. State and Private Forestry program staff suggested that we pursue community development grants that could be used to fund planning efforts that looked at local economic activities. We have not yet pursued this line of support.

We have discussed potential funding with WGFD, in addition to the USFWS and its Landowner Incentive Program. The Department *does* administer its Habitat Improvement Funds for private landowners. These are matching funds for on-the-ground habitat improvement projects. Again, it may have application in the future, but did not meet our current funding needs.

The Association requested, and has received support, from the Governor's office through the Natural Resource Policy Account. An initial request was approved by Governor Geringer in 2001, and additional support has been provided by Governor Freudenthal. These funds are important, both for their direct support and for their use in meeting potential matching-fund requirements for non-federal funds.

We have sought support from three of the four counties included in the planning landscape. Converse County has provided monetary support in the past. Campbell and Weston Counties are supportive, but haven't yet provided funding towards this initiative.

We have pursued support through a number of private sources, primarily foundations. In 2001, we received support through a request submitted by the Ecosystem Management Research Institute to the Bradley Fund for the Environment. These funds allowed initial GIS development, initial prairie dog surveys, and support for the 2001 symposium. We requested funds through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and this year we were successful in receiving support. These funds, which will help support our identification and development of conservation actions, require non-federal matching support. In 2003, we applied for and received support from the Leopold Stewardship Fund for species assessment work that we are conducting on Association lands. The Association also applied for and received a grant from the Sonoran Institute's Rural Community Collaboration (RCC) Program. These funds were targeted to support organizational needs of the Association, including travel expenses of advisory committee members and development of a website. This program of the Sonoran Institute, while limited in the level of funds it can provide, specifically recognizes the needs of collaborative efforts to fund organizational costs that most other sources of funding won't support. We applied for Community Assistance Program funds from the National Forest Foundation—a similar type of funds to the Sonoran Institute's RCC funds—but we were not selected in this competitive allocation last year. We also have applied to the National Forest Foundation for general project support, but have not been successful in these requests.

We have approached other foundations or private sources of funds for support. These included the Turner Foundation, prior to its substantial contraction in programs, but this initiative did not fit their priorities at the time. We applied to the Hewlett Foundation, but were not successful. We have approached both the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) and the Mule Deer Foundation, both of which are interested in the efforts of the Association. The RMEF provided some support for the 2001 symposium. We also approached a number of energy production companies besides Powder River Coal. Triton and Thunder Basin Coal Companies provided some support for start-up in 2000.

Members of the Association pay yearly dues that provide some support. While not a large amount of funds, it does represent a substantial commitment of the Association members to this initiative.

I have provided this overview to show the breadth of possible funding programs we have pursued. What we have found is that there is considerable support available through programs that support on-the-ground stewardship projects. When we move from our planning stage to our implementation stage, we foresee having many possible sources for funding. We have found only limited sources of funding for development of collaborative efforts. The funding we have received from the Governor (both Governors) has been very important. Sonoran Institute's Rural Community Collaboration program and the National Forest Foundation's Community Assistance Program both support collaborative initiatives, but have limited levels of support. Yet, collaborative efforts require support to accomplish the kinds of progress that Denise described in building relationships and trust, mutually learning together, and accomplishing the day-to-day activities of an organization.

We found virtually no funding targeted to assist privately led planning efforts. We found this interesting. Agencies have large sources of funds to offer to on-the-ground projects. However,

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efforts to make sure that these on-the-ground funds are being spent wisely in effective stewardship activities do not have readily identified sources. I should be clear:

all of the agencies we have talked with have been supportive of our efforts. They just don't have any specific sources of funds for privately led planning efforts. We think that this is a significant oversight in federal, state, and many private funding programs.

We think that privately led planning is a very important funding need. If landscape level collaborations are desired, the greatest need is in understanding and prioritizing programs for private lands. Most private lands do not have the information needed for conservation planning compiled or analyzed. Consequently, allocations of funds for many on-the-ground projects may not be spent where they can do the most good. While many sources of on-the-ground funds are available, the total amounts of these funds is inadequate to meet all of the diverse stewardship needs, so proper planning is needed to assure the best results from allocation of these monies. Privately led planning will allow for coordinated and effective implementation of these actions.

Given some of the challenges to funding that I've described, you might ask how has the Association been successful, to date, in acquiring the funds it needs to move this initiative forward? I can point to several things. First, we have pursued many diverse, potential sources of funds and have been persistent in these pursuits. We have pursued funding through local sources and agency contacts. Having the support and endorsement of the local offices is important, not just from the basis of cooperative efforts, but for funding. This includes working with the local agency contacts as well as county commissions and other appropriate groups. We have met with and obtained similar support

from “state” level administrators, such as Ed Burton, Mary Jennings, and Mary Peterson. We have also taken our requests to national levels—meeting with upper-level agency and administration personnel, such as Bruce Knight and Lynn Scarlett. We have obtained support for our efforts from the past and current governor, as well as from the Wyoming congressional delegation. In particular, the support of Senator Enzi and Dallas Scholes of his staff has been very important.

CONCLUSION

What lessons have we learned that we can suggest to other collaborative efforts? First, collaborative efforts take time and funding to accomplish many goals. The level of funding depends on the mission and approach of each collaborative effort. For us, we identified early on that we wanted to lead our own initiative. We have used technical assistance available from state and federal agencies, and will continue to use this assistance as we move forward with our initiative. However, we needed additional assistance to conduct our own planning process. Funding for privately led planning is not readily available from existing government programs, or from most foundation sources. Similarly, support for building collaboration efforts is limited. To accomplish privately led planning and collaboration building requires a diverse and persistent effort.

We suggest that agencies and foundations consider that landowners may want to be in a leadership role, even in planning efforts. Many landowners are skeptical of government assistance that comes in the form of recommendations on how to manage their private lands. In many cases, the landowners may have other ideas and processes for obtaining desired conservation objectives. Resources should be available to help build collaborations (including organizational support) and to support privately led, planning efforts. While we recognize the interest in spending funds on on-the-ground activities, poorly planned or coordinated activities will not effectively achieve desired conservation goals. We encourage administrators of funding programs to consider these suggestions as future procedures and priorities are set.

