



Case Study

WHEN MULTIPLE-PARTY RENEGOTIATION HAPPENS WITHOUT A FORMAL PROCESS: THE CROWN OF THE CONTINENT CANADA & U.S.A.

An opportunity for multiple partners to support a highly visible, large-scale conservation effort provides a check-in on roles, responsibilities and a vision for the future.

There is a 10 million acre swath of North America that runs from central Canada into southern Montana known as “The Crown of the Continent.” These are “working” wild lands that encompass some of the biggest blocks of roadless areas in the contiguous U.S.; a place where public lands, private ranches and timber companies maintain habitat for grizzly bear and large elk migrations. Not a single plant or animal seen during the Lewis and Clark expedition has gone extinct here.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and a number of longtime partners, non-profit rancher-led groups, timber companies, public agencies, and environmental non-profits are all active in the region. Conservation wins by the groups individually and as partners have been huge.

- Thanks to the rancher-led [Blackfoot Challenge](#) nonprofit group, the Blackfoot Valley has been widely protected. TNC’s purchase, with the support of the community, of more than 80,000 acres of private commercial timberland was an unprecedented victory in collaboration and conservation in the region.
- TNC and The Trust for Public land partnered for the [Montana Legacy Project](#) – and purchased more than 310,000 acres of land from the Plum Creek Timber Company.
- On the [Rocky Mountain Front](#), TNC partnerships with many local ranchers have preserved this land for both wildlife and family agriculture.

The preparation and implementation of the outreach and media work for a highly visible *New York Times* article and other outreach in 2004 created a moment of ‘checking in’ with the core partnership between TNC, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and leadership ranchers in several geographies. As the core partners created outreach materials for the Web and other outlets that reflected their own involvement in “The Crown of the Continent” effort, they had an opportunity to communicate about past successes and articulate future aspirations.

The messages honed for this outreach revealed how these three partners' shared objectives had evolved together, and illuminated that the core partnership was now working in an environment of additional partners and cooperators. Discussions and planning for major external media also clarified all partners' goals, roles and responsibilities in the larger effort. The result was external and internal collateral materials that could be shared across all core partner constituencies.

The actual on-the-ground work by the core partners in specific locations continued, but the conservation actions were then 'rolled up' into the larger vision. As a *New York Times* reporter wrote, the Crown of the Continent effort is unusual because it is not driven by a single entity: "People are thinking locally and personally, and the resulting combined quilt of their contributions is what creates the corridor."¹

The "Crown of the Continent" effort shows how continuous communication among core partners can help partners reaffirm and clarify their various roles and responsibilities. Undertaking such outreach was the result of trust borne of working together for decades with the private ranching community.

One ranching leader had been the chairman of the board of the Montana Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, so the ranching community was familiar and comfortable with the Conservancy as a partner on a deep level. One of the rancher groups, the Blackfoot Challenge, has been used as an example of leadership innovation by Harvard's Kennedy School. Their maxim of "Listen well, don't rush and find the common ground before acting" is helpful in reviewing the importance of periodic renegotiation of partnerships that can occur informally:

"Listen Well"

Hear what partners are saying about the past and about the future.

"Don't Rush"

Engage in thoughtful discussions about the next chapter of both the partner relationship and the conservation outcomes.

"Find the Common Ground Before Acting"

Before committing to the next step, whether it is to maintain, improve or end your partnership, communicate with your partner and make sure your goals and expectations for the future are in alignment.

For the "Crown of the Continent," core partner 'renegotiation' was accomplished in an informal rather than transactional manner. The process was facilitated by all the communication taking place formally and informally between the organizations. The greater partnership achieved its goal of 'improving' its conservation outcomes by 'renegotiating' the partnership through a process of joining together officially to support a larger conservation vision.

¹ Johnson, K. (December, 2, 2004). For Wildlife With Wanderlust, Their Own Highway. In *The New York Times*. Retrieved August 23, 2010, from <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C02EFD91E3EF931A35751C1A9629C8B63>

For more information:

The Blackfoot Challenge
www.blackfootchallenge.org

Montana Legacy Project
www.nature.org/wherework/northamerica/states/montana/preserves/art29100.html

Rocky Mountain Front
www.nature.org/wherework/northamerica/states/montana/preserves/art30079.html