

# NBFC Minutes

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*Meeting Date: December 5, 2019  
Location: La Grande Ranger District  
Approved: January 23, 2020*

## In Attendance:

NBFC Members and Guests: Paul Anderes (Union County Commissioner), Mike Billman (ODF), Nils Christoffersen (WR), Alyssa Cudmore (WR), Pam Hardy (WELC), Brian Kelly (GHCC), Kerry Kemp (TNC), Rob Klavins (OW), Andrew Merschel (OSU), Todd Nash (Wallowa County Commissioner), Vince Naughton, Katy Nesbitt (Wallowa County NRAC), Laura Platt (PSU), Eric Wunz

Forest Service: Brianna Carollo, Peter Fargo, Bill Gamble, Brian Goff, Nathan Poage

Staff: Jeff Costello (Facilitator)

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## Action Items:

- **Pam:** Submit draft notes to Jeff before leaving for India

## Key Decisions:

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## Open Questions:

- There seems to be an opportunity for agreement on Rx Fire. Should we take this up, in 2020?
- There was group interest in the 20-Year strategy that the Umatilla NF is working on. Brian Goff said they may be able to present to the NBFC, in March

Open Questions remaining from past meetings

- How is implementation monitoring accomplished?  
EG: how do we know that all the road closures & PCT/NCT that are listed in the NEPA are getting done?
  - Where do we house monitoring data long-term? And how do we ensure that long-term monitoring protocols will be followed 1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 20+ years down the line?
  - Through the help of the NBFC, there is/will be monitoring taking place in three areas (Umatilla NF, East Face, and Lower Joseph)  
It would be helpful to have common protocols across all three areas, especially if we get CFLRP funding
  - What kinds of timber contracts are there?
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## Minutes Key

- Meeting minutes do not represent collaborative agreements, unless they specifically say so. They are meant to record three basic things only: 1) the issue discussed, 2) the major points or questions raised in the conversation, and 3) the resolution, if there was one. Unless specifically stated, resolutions are only the resolutions of the people present at the meeting.
- Common Abbreviations:
  - Q: Question
  - A: Answer
  - Cmt: Comment
  - Tx: Treatment
  - Rx Fire: Prescribed Fire

- Highlighted Items are those that probably require follow-up.  
(Usually suggestions for future agendas)

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## Meeting Notes

### Preliminaries:

- Upcoming Events: Dates are set for the next six meetings.  
01/22-23, 02/26-27, 03/25-26, 04/22-23, 05/27-28, 06/24-25
  - March: Umatilla NF will present about their effort to draft a 20-Year plan
  - April: John Marshall will speak about the Osborne Photos
- The RVCC Annual Conference Jan 14-16 in Silverton, Oregon.  
Registration is open now.  
RVCC = [Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition](#)  
They advocate in the legislature (mostly federal) for policies that have bi-partisan support such as CFLRP and the Forest Service fire funding fix.  
The conference is your opportunity to have input to their agenda and get on their policy making sub-committees.  
Conference link: <https://www.ruralvoicescoalition.org/annual-meeting>
- NBFC Funding:
  - Kerry submitted a TASS proposal for historic disturbance regimes.
  - OWEB: Proposal went in just before Thanksgiving (Update: approved, in full, 01/14/20)  
Covers facilitation, collaborative costs such as guest scientists/researchers, meeting expenses, etc.
  - Weyerhaeuser Family Foundation: approved (maybe continued funding, up to 3 years)

### Andrew Merschel, OSU Researcher

#### Using Dendrochronology to Guide Forest Restoration in Central Oregon

- To see the Powerpoint go to Andrews OSU Box link:  
<https://oregonstate.box.com/s/g1yzm88hahc3w6ca35zswg4qmw03ieqd>  
Look for the file titled "La Grande 12-05-2019"
- This science was actually used in Deschutes Collaborative (DCFP) Zones of Agreement.  
(a copy of which can also be found in the Box drive)
- Disclaimer: Fire regimes & conditions vary a lot by landscape.  
Be careful not to over-extrapolate.  
*See also* Heyerdahl 2001 for details on variability.
- Goal of the research: Understanding Historic Forests  
Fire history was reconstructed using fire scars & cohort establishment
- ~180 plots in the Ochoco & Deschutes
- Naming conventions: Persistent/Recent – Why name them that way?  
in 1900 there is a wave of establishment.  
Some stands remain PPine or MMC – those are called persistent  
Other stands convert in the absence of fire – those are called recent.
- There are currently a lot more trees in the forest  
However, they are smaller on average than they used to be.

- Before 1900, there were years where sites that are 100s of miles apart have the same fire.  
1910 – The “Big Burn” was evident on the Deschutes.  
1918 there were also a lot of burns
- Effectiveness of the 21” rule...  
There are a lot of old trees less than 21”  
There are a lot of young trees larger than 21”
- Q: Are you missing some big old trees because the stumps may have burned or decomposed?  
A: We don’t think that happened because
  - the historic density we get from stumps matches historic inventories
  - these sites haven’t burned since the big trees were cut
 We are probably missing some smaller trees.
- Q: People say we’re having more fire ... is that true  
Or is it just that we’re comparing the present to the last century, when there was little fire?  
A: We have less fire than historically, in terms of acres & frequency.  
What’s changed is the severity & effects.  
Stands used to keep their big old trees when they burned.  
We have more stand-replacing fires now.
- Sites on buttes in lodgepole seas burned out of sync with the connected areas.  
Created an “isolation index”  
The more isolated the site, the more erratic the fire history.  
In the connected areas, the fire return interval was more regular.  
The buttes are probably getting struck by lightning on an irregular basis.  
Lodgepole on the Deschutes are on pumice flats  
There is a lot of pumice on the Deschutes from the eruption of Mt. Mazama ~ 7000 years ago.  
Pumice is not great soil, so they take a very long time to recover; and there is a long period, during which they can’t carry fire, which creates isolated buttes.
- Fire is responding to fire season climate  
(as opposed to annual climate)  
so if it’s hot & dry in August, it’s going to burn regardless of how wet it is the rest of the year.
- The most departed stands have a combination of high productivity soils and climate, and a history of frequent fire.
- It’s harder to reconstruct fire regimes in the north because there are fewer old trees that have recorded the history. Ponderosa pine is exceptionally good at recording fire history. In forests where there were few ponderosa, fire scars aren’t often available. There, we have to depend on other methods, such as cohort establishment.
- Q: Have insects been a part of the historical disturbance regime?  
A: They are probably more widespread now than they used to be. Conditions are better for insects now, because trees have higher inter-tree competition for nutrients and moisture than historically.
- Q: Native American burning? What do we know? Were they a big influence?  
A: We can’t tell what started them.  
We know that there is a correlation between climate & big fires.  
We know that there are places that see very frequent lightning.  
We know that early European scientists thought Native Americans started a lot of fires.  
Cmt: Kerry offered a link to a paper on this topic  
Link: <https://www.pnas.org/content/109/9/E535>  
It looks at lake sediment cores from the last 3000 years.

Cmt: Just because native people were setting fires in other areas doesn't mean they were setting fires here. It would be interesting to ask them.

Cmt: Rumor is that the Blue Mtns were so named because of the fires set by Native Americans.

- Megafires ... Technically they are defined as over 100,000 acres.  
But it also seems to refer to higher severity fire than we used to have.  
We should get our terminology better defined.
- Q: Stand Replacement patch size. How much has that departed?  
A: Just because it was mostly low-severity doesn't mean there was no stand replacement.  
There were 9 times in Andrew's work where there was a new cohort & nothing older.  
But it never went across the landscape at that intensity.  
High severity patches were in 10s of hectares, not 100s of hectares.  
Cmt: We saw the same thing on the Malheur.
- Q: We talk about restoration to Historic Range of Variability (HRV). But, we know that, given climate change, we should be thinking about the Future Range of Variability (FRV). But, we don't really know what climate change will bring, yet – so, we don't have a clear vision of what FRV should be. But we think HRV is probably closer to FRV than the current situation. So until we have a good vision for appropriate FRV, moving toward HRV is a good step in the right direction. Is that right?  
A: What we're doing now – the current range of variability - is less resilient or resistant than HRV.  
Forests will change substantially in a high-severity fire.  
Historic forests weren't resilient, they were resistant.  
When a system is "resistant" it's better ready to take on a big climate hit without changing a lot.  
They used to exist below the "stocking level", so they had resources to recover.
- Q: Did your 4 types match up well with PVTs?  
A: No. A lot of PVTs were in recent Douglas Fir.  
Where you had frequent fire, it was over-riding what was on the landscape.  
PVT was about what would be there in the absence of disturbance.  
But disturbance was never absent on the landscape.
- Q: To Laura Platt (PSU Graduate Researcher in Kerry's Northern Blues research project): Are you seeing similar results to what Andrew has found?  
A: Across forest patches, we're seeing similar fire years in Ponderosa Pine.  
However, cohort establishment dates might be a better indicator because fire scar histories don't go as far back. 1750s are our earliest records.
- Q: Lodgepole – what do we know about it and fire regimes?  
A: In some places, there are lodgepole with 4-5 fire scars. In others, it's stand-replacing history.  
You might try aging some of them to see what the establishment date was.  
A: Kerry: in the Rockies, where I did my research, if there was a moderate severity fire, even a small component of lodgepole would result in a sea of young lodgepole.  
In the Bob Marshall Wilderness study, we found that the forest needed fire at least every 9 years, or Ponderosa Pine would convert to lodgepole.

## Break for Lunch

## Minutes

- October meeting minutes approved with one revision: Rob expressed "qualified support for CFLRP".

## Review of Last meeting

- At the October meeting we discussed CFLRP, and the members present agreed to support it.
- Afternoon: the Forest Service talked about how they are managing MMC, and why they think that's the right thing to do.
- They are managing for "health of the forest" as well as fire & WUI.
- A lot of the Umatilla is being managed for Wilderness.  
The pieces that are expected to be managed are limited.  
Brian Goff can share the maps of both forests.
- Combined Umatilla & WW by the numbers:  
Together, the two Forests cover 3.8 million acres  
75% of the total land area is forested  
Of the forested acres:  
22% of the land is in Wilderness.  
17% is in designated Roadless  
62% is in active management  
  
Of the entire 3.8 million acres, 46% is in active management.  
The rest is "being treated by natural processes"
- Of the Forested Acres  
44% is dry  
21% is cold – a lot of this is in Wilderness  
35% is moist
- Based on this morning's presentation,  
A big question is going to be how far into the mixed conifer is it healthy to treat the forests?  
Some of Kerry's work is looking into historic fire regimes of the moistest sites.  
There is a growing interest across the region in better understanding this.
- "It's the variability that drives fire regime, not the averages"
- "We agree that the patient is sick."  
What is the right way to resolve it?  
Just more logging & grazing, as was done in the past, is not the answer.  
PODs & bringing natural fire back to the landscape "is a great way to do it."  
It's about restoring natural processes.  
If one of the tools we can use is logging, that's fine.  
It's about what we're doing after - how are we restoring the natural processes?
- Cmt: Shouldn't leave the human use out of it.
- It's not about just taking the Deschutes research and applying it here.  
It's about using that information to help us figure out how to ask better questions here.

## CFLRP Update

- It's bringing a lot of people together, and building relationships.
- Tier II proposal is due on 01/06/20, with a follow-up presentation to the USFS Regional Office on 01/16/20

## Granite Gulch Fire – Video

- The group watched the new FS video about the Granite Gulch fire in the Eagle Cap Wilderness Area  
Link to video: <https://youtu.be/VtwnNuWMY9E>
- Cmt: Good communication from the FS to the County.  
This was very helpful to the Commissioners.
- Cmt: Conservation community thought the way this fire was handled was good, too.  
It would have been good, if the USFS had contacted them for comment, as well.  
Perhaps an opportunity for the two sides to speak with one voice.
- Q: Why can't we plan for more events like this?  
Why do we have to wait for random lightning strikes?  
A: If it's a planned event we don't have the resources that we have for wildfire.  
An "emergency response" allows us to use suppression \$, and doesn't require NEPA.  
it also doesn't trigger smoke regs.  
A "planned action" requires NEPA and a burn plan.
- In some places you can only get things to burn in the dry seasons. You need natural ignitions to start that sort of thing because you can't start Rx fires in the dry season.
- Cmt: It would be great to do 10,000-acre blocks at the end of the fall, when you know the rain & snow is right around the corner. Resources are available then.
- This seems like an area in which the collaborative may have agreement?
- There are also issues with permittees.  
They need to have somewhere to put their cows on the years that there's a burn.  
However, they would likely appreciate having so much forage returned, post-fire.
- CFLRP, if it's successful, will make it even more important to address this.  
Even if we don't get CFLRP funded, improving fire mgmt. is still a priority.  
It just won't happen as quickly.
- Q: Could we get a map of the upcoming project areas?  
A: Yes...a full presentation with maps at our January 23<sup>rd</sup> NBFC meeting.  
Tom DeMeo, from the USFS Regional Office, has made it clear that a successful CFLRP proposal would need to have a cohesive strategy, rather than just a series of NEPA ready shelf stock.  
A: The Umatilla is working on a 20-year strategy for active mgmt.  
There is a fire strategy that we're figuring out how to display.  
Could ask the Umatilla fire managers to come in to present on this.
- The limiting factor has been social support for fire  
(EG: tolerance of smoke, fear of burning up resources, health and safety concerns, etc.)

Adjourn: 2:50