



WWFCG & UFCG Joint-Meeting, 8/28/2015

Blue Mountains Forest Resiliency Project Collaboration Workshop

Present: Karen Hardigg (facilitating), Bryant Kuechle (facilitating), Nick Ducote (scribe), Ann Shlisky, Darcy Weseman, Joani Bosworth, Bill Gamble, Mike Brown, Katy Nesbitt, Brian Spradlin, Amy Gowan, David Hatfield, Ann Niesen, Kerry Kemp, Lindsay Warness, Kris Stein, Nick Myatt, Eric Wunz, Tim Cudmore, Barb Wales, Gary Miller, Mike Hayward, Mark Davidson, Bruce Dunn, Rex Storm, Brian Kelly, Chuck Oliver, Vince Naughton, Neil McCuster, Randy Jones, Veronica Warnock, Cherise Kaechele, Ray Osipovich, Nils Christoffersen, Dea Nelson, Ron and Darlene Rochna

ACTION ITEMS:

1. Schedule BMRP updates to each collaborative at key project milestones or every-other month
 - Consider timing with line-officer check-ins
 - Schedule input opportunities at implementation (real-time monitoring) and review pre and post treatment data (QA/QC)
2. Notify the collaborative members when the draft Purpose and Need is released for comment. Recommended focus areas for Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy Interdisciplinary team consideration for discussion at future collaborative meeting updates:
 - Neighbor land impacts (clear cuts, fire transfer)
 - Early seral stage species impacts
 - Broader social impacts
 - Public Education (fire, insects)
 - Maintain tree size variety
 - Wildfire analysis
 - Snag and dead tree usage
 - Timber sale considerations
 - Slash impacts to fire treatment options
 - Private land partnerships
 - Identify efficiencies in NEPA (Interaction points, lessons learned)

Welcome and Introductions

Facilitator introduced meeting, which was led by both facilitators from the Umatilla Forest Collaborative (Bryant Kuechle) and the Wallowa-Whitman Forest Collaborative (Karen Hardigg). EOU students from Social Problems 411 (SOC 411) attended the meeting to observe and provide input about possible opportunities to assist the collaborative.

Facilitator shared goals for the meeting: to increase dialogue, transparency, trust; to create a forum for listening to enhance mutual understanding; to share science/analysis blue team is using to develop proposed action; to identify similarities/overlap between collaboratives.

Collaborative members reflected on what they hoped to gain from the day's meeting, as well as shared their best memory for participating in a forest collaborative. Many people expressed an interest in learning and understanding more specifically about the project. A few named an interest in better understanding the nexus between NEPA and collaboration. Most people shared positive experiences related to field trips, and some noted that their best experience is yet to come (looking forward)

Presentation by Blue Mountains Forest Restoration Team

Initial Overview by Ann Shlisky

Thank you for collaboration and for sharing your knowledge with the Team. Ayn shared the intent of Regional Forester, Jim Pena: Focused on increasing pace and scale of active management of the Blues – we are currently not keeping up with rate of degradation. The Team wants to find innovations in the NEPA process to reach effective and efficient solutions in collaboration with collaboratives.

The project purpose:

1. Focus active restoration on *dry forests* outside of existing project planning areas on 4 Blue Mountain (BM) forests.
2. Focus strategic fuel treatments on *all forests types*. Ecologically-limited scales.

Objectives:

1. All lands integrated assessment of restoration needs. (Scientific assessment)
2. Greater forest resiliency.
3. Increasing canopied and large/old forests.
4. Resilient habitat for fish and wildlife and native plants.
5. Jobs and econ benefits.
6. Data and tools to support multi-partner planning
7. Improved wildfire decision making.

Go from broad assessment to concrete project.

- Scientific and broad perspectives. Integrate all these to define and enable resiliency:
 - a. What is the physical environment? Variations across BMFs.
 - b. Climate change
 - c. Fire/Insect/Disease Regimes
 - d. Potential vegetation.
 - e. Landforms
 - f. Watersheds
 - g. Current and future vegetation.
 - h. Habitats, species, structures, social values
 - i. Tribal Ceded Lands, Landownership, Roads

Drivers of resiliency: Departure from range of variations alone, also including disturbance regimes, climate change vulnerability of forests, species, and long-term landscape permeability.

Q: To what degree is climate change impacting disturbance regimes? To what extent impacting future veg? Our climate change model will be discussed later.

Q: What is the unit of analysis the Team is using? Will they consider impacts on neighboring private land from National Forest land and treatments and vice versa? We focus on Blue Mountains as an Eco Region, regardless of ownership. Our goals include evaluating both National Forest lands and the impacts to, and by, all other lands.

The Team currently does not have much data on forest patterns but we are developing that data.

Discussion of “seral classes” – early-open, early-closed, mid-open, mid-closed, late-open, late-closed – and their historic range of variability. There are generally less now of early stages (to seedling/saplings). Mid-seral closed are much higher than historically. Very little late-seral open habitat. Millions of acres in Blue Mountain Eco Region and it includes all land areas, not just National Forest lands.

Q: Why is the Team focused on late-seral while other classes are also important to wildlife and ecosystems? I may be miscommunicating. Fires are driving our focus on early-seral. We believe we have a role in preserving existing late-seral forests and creating more early-seral forests. We’re going to get more early-seral no matter what and fire management can be a great way to create healthier forests.

Discussion began among members about goals and values of collaboration. A member commented that the collaborative is here to find a balance, create projects better our forest health, have habitat for all different species, provide for communities, and do it in a way that is not so destructive. Others agreed, adding the discussion can become too focused on binaries of do something/do nothing.

Q: What is the economic benefits of the historic range of variability vs. what we have today? What are the economic trade-offs? The Team will be including this in the analysis.

The Team explained their wildfire suitability models that can model into future for temperature and moisture using past data and future models. It models probability of fire transmission to other lands.

A management framework, Mike Brown

Key metrics in forest resiliency: plant and species habitat, refuge for biodiversity, landscape permeability and species migration, snags and large wood.

Mike introduced the Team’s ideas about proposed actions and alternative management schemes. Mike acknowledged that there have been communication issues in the past between the USFS and collaborative partners. We want to discuss alternative management schemes, maybe scope more than one option – help us develop these collaboratively, your assistance is very beneficial.

Project purpose: focus active restoration on *dry forests* and strategic fuel treatments on *all forest types*. Capitalize where we have existing dry forests, leveraging for win-win on ecological and social benefits.

Regarding strategic fuel treatments, the Team went to districts and asked where it would make sense to break up the landscape. Not just capital assets, but the full range of values. Districts are accomplishing a lot and we want to start where the districts left off. 90% of strategic fuel treatments in the dry forests. In the Wallowa-Whitman and Umatilla, there are far fewer of those and we will examine treatments outside the dry upland forests. We want to encourage appropriate types of fire.

We want to minimize road construction while optimizing fire-fighting. Selecting stand-scale treatments, not like a power line corridor. Working with existing landscape to select ecologically appropriate scales and using full range of treatments.

Q: Is this only looking at implementation outside of existing projects? Yes and no. We will be working on existing projects to make sure it lines up with BMFP need/purpose. If we identify an area for treatment outside existing, we will make sure existing work is in line with what we want. We have unique ability to get landscape-level analysis, not individual watersheds.

Q: Are projects being litigated counted as existing projects? Yes.

Q: Are you taking into account impact of slash piles on wildfire transmission? Yes, slash does pose a window of additional vulnerability that is a risk calculated and disclosed in effects analysis. We will also analyze ROI.

The Team will help determine purpose and need, will work with line officers. Balancing that with what our senior leadership wants. We collaborate with state, local, regional, and federal officials.

We have identified possible treatments opportunities. There's a need and we have resources to manage it. Now let's talk about what management can look like. Don't take opportunistic approach if the classes post-treatment won't persist. We are examining how the shape of lands can impact forest health. In canyon lands, sometimes only riparian areas burn. On the plateau, it's much more regulated by conditions. One size fits all won't be effective solution. Look at the land for clues. Analyze patch size distribution on historic data.

Brian Spradlin on fire simulation

Large fire simulator (FSim) takes inputs from our landscape file. We overlaid with forest structural aspects and fire fuel model and weather files from fire starts. Not integrated with the climate change model. Probability that a single spot will catch fire. We also analyzed perimeter growth. How much does a fire transmit to another place? Nodes and transmission patterns. Pre-and-post treatment. Use these tools to evaluate alternatives and treatment. High valued assets and resources and how they interact with flame length.

Pine Creek Watershed: Treatment Design, Mike Brown

We have active restoration opportunities. We want to highlight dry upland forest in mid-seral closed class. There are a lot of opportunities in this watershed and many tools available. Analysis may tell us to treat 100% or 150%, but we are limited by resources and classifications like wilderness. Some good opportunities, but may be in roadless or inaccessible areas. Just because it's in a roadless area doesn't mean we don't consider it. How long do we expect them to persist? Integrate all areas into analyses, not just what we can treat.

Q: How are you defining active management? Prescribed fire is active. So is mechanical. Planned and unplanned ignitions. Vast majority of the stands in the strategic fuels treatment intersect dry forests.

Ladd Canyon Watershed: Treatment Design, Mike Brown

Cold, dry, and moist upland forests. Dry forest restoration in this area would mean a smaller footprint. It would be a good study in how we manage fires around municipal watersheds. Social reality is that most of the time we are trying very hard to keep fire out of watersheds.

Q: Would those be 250' breaks? No, selection of stands optimized with respect to other features of the landscape. Prescribed fires, commercial and non-commercial thinning are all tools available. We can't ignore cold and moist forests.

Q: Both examples have private land boundaries – by excluding the private land from the maps, aren't you considering it a non-valued asset? We are considering private lands in our analysis.

The Team highly encourages collaboratives to learn through monitoring. Motto for monitoring: keep it simple, do it soon, keep it often. Collaborate on monitoring metrics.

Merging NEPA and Collaborative Process

Facilitator shared their observations after the presentations: We may want to discuss how collaboratives work with FS and how does that impact ownership and vision of group? Historically, NEPA has been the way the public engages with the FS, but over the past 15 years we are moving towards collaborative governance. One of the goals of collaboration was to have a less adversarial, longer lasting, more integrated solutions and to get more things done. We are collectively defining interests and needs. Both collaboratives are at similar stages – have worked on two projects so far, are in similar stages of finalizing the projects, have worked on shared comments and agreement in response to those projects. Both groups are thinking about next projects. Clarity on expectations, roles, and responsibilities will be essential as projects are developed and implemented.

Group discussed ideas on NEPA interaction and possible check-in points. National Forest Foundation document may be helpful: [“A Roadmap for Collaboration Before, During, and After the NEPA Process.”](#)

USFS explained that they are more constrained by case and procedural laws once NEPA begins. The longer we are in a NEPA process for a project, the greater the risk that things will change and impact the project. The Team appreciated the assistance of collaborative members to interpret public comments during the NEPA process. That stage may be a good check-in point for future projects.

A member commented that clear check-in points during NEPA would be helpful. The why should be figured out external to NEPA process. How, what, when is decided in the NEPA process. Once we arrive at where, then we face controversy. We don't know prescriptions until the decision/notification. Part of my frustration has been with FS and collaboratives is that we haven't been able to propose what we actually need. FS gives us everything and that's not the most efficient use of time. Identify points where it would be appropriate to drill into the details. Another member agreed and articulated that 4-5 different check-in points in the planning process would be great. Collaboratives should work to provide input and feedback on purpose and need.

A member commented that they did not feel the Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy team integrated collaboratives in the creation of purpose and need. The Team explained that it was a line officer choice to not collaborate on the purpose and need for the BMRP. Because of the scale of this project, the Team wanted to maintain a narrow purpose/need. USFS added that input from collaboratives in the coalition meetings were integral to choosing individual projects in 2013.

Another member explained that they attended the 2013 meeting and they looked at potential projects. I was a member, question was posed to me, do you want collaboratives to take a project on? We did not at that time. Don't make too many conclusions based on disparate voices expressed in the

collaboratives. We have been involved in crafting the USFS purpose/need statements. On Kahler project we did. Cautionary note – input is good, but what is the input?

The Team explained that the purpose and need is very high level and unless there's a massive gap between conceptions, there's a risk that it could be unproductive to spend months wordsmithing.

After the full group discussion, the group broke into two smaller conversations focusing on the nexus of collaboration and the NEPA process. The groups were asked to reflect on what worked well during their projects to date, what could be improved, and what collaboratives expect from the FS and vice versa.

Conclusions from small groups:

- What is the most important info from FS? When do we need to know it? What's the most efficient/effective way to go about that?
- Smaller working groups (such as treatment design)
- More issue-based than about alternatives.
- Earlier discussions on trade-offs of relationships and pace and scale.
- Proposed solutions lead to reactions, we should begin to engage on desired conditions.
- Need to tackle dilemmas (like cool moist science).
- Untangle NEPA and collaborative intent.
- Collaborate pre- and post-NEPA.

Field trips are great and can help improve everyone's understanding of issues. We could improve field trips by not getting bogged down in treatment on specific trees, rather look at desired conditions.

- Purpose/need development with collaborative leads to good relationship building and foundational development.
- Cooperative development of assessment in field (pre and post-NEPA)
- All analyses can be helped along with collaborative input, USFS can check assumptions.
- Identify desired conditions (treatment design) in the field rather than prescribed conditions.

WRAP UP

- What did you learn today and how can you use it to help engaging with the BMFRP?

BMRP Process:

- Consider 1 project in each forest
- Consider sub-committee of all forest collaboratives that engage landscape-scale issues
- Consider 1-2 projects in a pilot study situation
- Audit of purpose/need.
- Individual forest collaborative input on treatment design.

General process recommendations:

- Project monitoring long-term to make sure we're meeting objectives we define initially. Use technology to monitor in real-time. iPads on harvesters and create visual and spatial aids. GPS tags. Like FES visual aid.
- Project monitoring post decision will lead to the next project

- Better understanding of objectives and purpose/need to help along group.
- Reach agreement on key issues and identify problems in the process of a project, not just a conclusion at the end.