

WALLOWA WHITMAN FOREST COLLABORATION

FULL GROUP ASSEMBLY March 27, 2013

La Grande Ranger District, La Grande Oregon

MEETING NOTES

Attendees:

Nils Christoffersen (WR), Tim Lillebo (Oregon Wild), Dick Fleming (Baker NRAC), Kevin Keown (USFS), Kat Naughton (USFS), Penny Hall (USFS), Gary Miller (USFWS), Patrick Shannon (SNW), Larry McCalden (Boise Cascade), Ron Rochna (private citizen), Darlene Rochna (Cove City Council), Kathy Nesbitt (Observer), Bruce Dunn (RY Timber), Randy Strohm (USFS), Ann Carlson (USFS), John Buckman (ODF), Mark Jacques (ODF), John Laurence (USFS), Lindsay Warness (Boise Cascade), Vince Naughton (private citizen), Mike Harward (Wallowa County), Mark Davidson (Union County), Joe Justice (LaGrande School District), Bill White (Union County Cattlemen), Mark Porter (WR), Renee Coxen (NOAA-Fisheries), Aric Johnson (USFS), Ken Gebhardt (USFS), Brian Kelly (HCPC), Willy Crippen (USFS), Dave Hannibal (Grayback Forestry), Raymond Osipovich (Grayback Forestry), Tom Burry (USFS), Melissa Shelly (USFS), Joe Sciarro (USFS), Noah Wachacha (USFS), Lane Parry (Baker NRAC), Paul Oester (OSU Extension), Kathleen Cathey (Sen Wyden's Office), Laura Navarret (USFS), Cindy Chirstensen (USFS), Dana Taylor (USFS), Emmit Taylor Jr (Nez Perce Tribe), Bill Aney (USFS). [Participating by phone – Cynthia Warnock (SWCD), Jodi Kramer (USFS) and Gunnar Carwash (USFS)]

Agenda:

- East Side Restoration Strategy – Bill Aney, USFS ESRS Coordinator
- Lower Joseph Creek Watershed – Nils Christoffersen, WR; Ken Gebhardt, USFS WWNF
- East Face Project – Bill Gamble, USFS WWNF
- Outreach to general public – open discussion
- Coordination with other collaboratives – open discussion
- Future meetings and field tours – open discussion

Minutes:

1. Bill Aney – Presentation on Eastside Restoration Strategy
 - a. Summary of remarks
 - i. Been on the job only four weeks – still getting grounded. Have received a three page direction memo from the Regional Forester (vision, goals, etc.). Want to leave the forests in better shape than they are today. Anticipate results in 2-3 years and draw lessons from this work for the rest of the Region.
 - ii. 1.5 million acres in need of restoration across the the 6 million acres of the Ochoco and Blue Mountains national forests. Overstocking a key concern. Currently only treating through thinning and fuel reduction 50,000 acres a year so it will take 30-35 years just to catch up with the need that exists today.
 - iii. Generating a predictable, consistent flow of raw materials is critical to sustaining the few mills left in the region. These mills are critical to the economics of forest restoration and management, as well as to the local communities in the region.

- iv. Exploring new and innovative ways to get restoration done – seeking suggestions from the 5-6 collaboratives operating in the region for ideas and opportunities – although unlikely to be able to work with all of them.
 - v. Different ideas also emerging from State of Oregon and Governor’s Federal Forest Advisory Committee and new Federal Forestlands Sub-Committee of the Oregon Board of Forestry.
 - vi. Would like to pursue large landscape projects – 200,000 – 300,000 acres – either in large block or through programmatic approach identifying a series of forest blocks in similar biophysical environments and with similar conditions. For example, structural stage and condition mapping reveals a large block of similar forest stands in the middle fork of the John Day which span 3 national forests. Another example might be the plantations growing on old clear cuts in the Blue Mountain National Forests.
 - vii. In the process of hiring a planning team of 5-6 people which will be dedicated to this project. A science team will work to identify the best available science and make that available to the team and the rest of the region. Also undertaking a vegetation assessment / mapping effort of the Blue Mountain Area.
 - viii. Exploring with Maia Enzer the value of forming a new collaborative for this effort – a collaborative that represents the larger region being addressed.
- b. Discussion
- i. Non-Agency / Contracted ID Teams? Don’t believe that is the best way to go for this effort. Will focus on hiring ID Team members from within the USFS.
 - ii. Distributed, targeted support to existing efforts to provide critical additional capacity to accelerate their timeframes and success? Seeking to do something new and different that provides larger learning for the USFS and all Collaboratives.
 - iii. Consultation with NOAA / USFWS? Needs to be done upfront and early. Effort to accelerate the pace and scale of restoration on USFS will run into constraints on the consultation side since NOAA and USFWS don’t have additional staff to respond to increased work load.
 - iv. Thinning and Understory Burning? There’s a backlog of thinning and underburning NEPA ready projects needing funding to execute. Need to focus on timber sales and stewardship contracts that will generate revenues that can be re-invested in the thinning and underburning.
 - v. Funding? Have \$4 million committed this year from carry-over funds. Have faith that the Regional Forest will continue to fund the Eastside Restoration effort over and above the regular forest budgets.
 - vi. Larger regional collaborative membership? Interest and relevance will depend on the eventual project that is chosen. Important that there is a balance of representation and voices. Likely to create further participation constraints amongst those already participating in collaboratives – many of whom participate in more than one.
- c. See Briefing Papers attached.

2. Lower Joseph Creek Update

- a. Nils Christoffersen reviewed briefly the background work done by Wallowa County NRAC and the review and discussion that the WW Forest Collaborative had engaged in since September 2012.
- b. Have identified potential project boundaries and a series of multi-resource recommendations in each suggested project area. Will be seeking full collaborative consensus on these recommendations in April or May as a foundation for the collaborative to enter site specific project analysis and development.
- c. Focus now on next phase of project specific analysis needed to bring these projects to a decision, contract and implementation.
- d. Ken Gephardt reviewed the next phase of assessment, data gathering and NEPA capacity needs to achieve an accelerated restoration project in Lower Joseph Creek.
- e. He referenced the existing County Collaborative assessment as a “30,000 ft look” which identified the broad scale conditions and cross-resource relationships, as well as some site specific project recommendations.
- f. Project specific data gathering is critical to support specialist reports, NEPA analysis and the final project decision.
- g. The initial project area advanced by the Wallowa County Collaborative within Lower Joseph Creek is 36,000 and includes recommendations for 9,000 acres of silvicultural treatment. As well as other range, riparian, road and recreational projects.
- h. The first critical step is to identify the actual implementation opportunity acres from the 9,000 acres advanced for consideration. Once this is established, the other field specialists can conduct their field analysis on the actual acres prioritized for treatment. Some of this work must take place during specific seasons depending on phenology, or stream flows, or reproduction (nesting / fledgling) etc.
- i. The implementation opportunity survey will consider stand volumes, road systems and access, riparian buffers, logging systems, etc. Decisions need to be made as to whether there is sufficient volume to cover the operating costs of the appropriate logging system, as well as use of old or temporary roads, and the condition of specific riparian buffers and whether they would benefit from treatment as well. Estimates from the Wallowa Valley Ranger District suggest that a survey of 5,000 implementation acres would cost about \$25,000.
- j. The next priority is seasonally dependent data gathering – starting with sensitive plant species, listed avian species, weeds, and stream habitat. This requires a broad range of specialist input ranging from range and botany to riparian and wildlife to soils and hydrology, etc. We estimate that this phase of data gathering and analysis will cost \$275,000 for a 5,000 acre project.
- k. For any timber, fuels or vegetation project there is also the need for supporting field work including timber unit layout, cruising, marking timber, boundary work, data input, map preparation, contract preparation, etc. The additional costs total about \$400,000 for a 5,000 acre project – most of this goes to marking trees and timber unit layout.
- l. The final step is a dedicated NEPA Analysis and Decision team responsible for synthesizing resource information, analyzing the impacts of the proposed project, writing specialist reports

and if necessary working through the appeal and litigation process. The Wallowa Valley Ranger District estimated that this would cost an additional \$200,000.

- m. The sum-total is about \$900,000 for an accelerated 5,000 acre forest vegetation restoration project – although we may well realize savings due to the existing body of data and analysis that the collaborative has assembled.
- n. Discussion
 - i. Do you have the money to go ahead and do this project? Not at present. Current priority is to get final decision and contract on Puderbaugh this summer and continue project preparation for Cold Canal.
 - A- Is Eastside Restoration Strategy funding available for this project? Too early to tell which projects ERS team will work on.
 - ii. Will other grant money be available for this project (Lower Joseph Creek)? Wallowa Resources, with support from Wallowa County NRAC, has applied for additional funding. If we are awarded that funding, we would have funds to contact priority early season field work.
 - A- Will this assessment be looking for opportunities to work on finding areas in poor condition that are in need of supplementing N fixing plants? Also can you work in riparian area to improve habitats (i.e. hardwood and beaver...)? The forest can pursue treatments in riparian areas if that is needed to improve riparian and in stream habitats, Range staff identifies areas of poor condition Forest has a native plant propagation program and could grow N fixing plants
 - B- Will there be cost savings for Lower Joseph projects as the acres go up? Yes there will be more efficiencies as the acres go up
 - C- What is the status of the Governor's initiative to use state dollars to promote forest management at the state level? Governor's proposal is getting strong support from Eastern Oregon and the regional forester. Decision will be made near the end of June and some funding may become available this fall or next spring. Funds can be used to fund staff to support collaboratives, provide science and technological assistance, and contract field work. Legislators are discussing whether any State funds should come in the form of a loan to the feds, and whether they could be used for USFS staff or restricted to contracting additional capacity from private sector.
 - iii. WVRD and WWNF currently have Lower Joseph Creek on the 2016 calendar for implementation following Puderbaugh and Cold Canal. Wallowa County would like to see treatment on the proposed 9,000 acres to begin in 2014/15. Old Growth and designated Roadless areas have already been removed from the proposed 9,000 acres. The Collaborative realizes there are many projects and not enough staff people. Isolated tactical investments of USFS dollars (i.e. ERS) could get the immediate and most time sensitive field work complete (i.e. Botany). The Lower Joseph Creek group would like to start initial GIS and field work on the actual implementation opportunity by May 15th.
 - iv. Bill Aney replied that ERS would not have field staff until mid summer. They would prefer to wait for the Blue Mtn Forest Collaborative Congress (BMFCC) to identify priorities.

- v. Starting new collaboratives take time. The ERS staff has a three year timeline but awaiting input of a new Blue Mountain Collaborative will slow the whole process and jeopardize that output. Several group members stated that having the local collaboratives form a larger regional collaborative is better than the USFS or State forming a new group as it would facilitate sharing amongst the forestry collaborative groups.
- vi. Many areas that are in need of treatment have been ignored historically because they were controversial. We have the recommendations of the Lower Joseph Creek Assessment and the support of two collaboratives that recommend some work in riparian areas and the temporary use of some "closed" roads. There are opportunities to use some old roads and then close or store them in a better state than they were to begin with. The cost of Forest Plan Amendments was included in the estimates of cost per 5,000 Ac. It will be important to bring specifics of proposed treatments back to group once initial field evaluations have been completed.
- vii. There's a range of projects that have proven successful and avoided litigation. Projects that involve things like opening closed roads, working in roadless areas, or involve Forest Plan amendments will likely require more time. Opening roads will depend on the specific context and the scale of the projects.
- viii. Would an aggressive NEPA decision that had Forest Plan amendments take longer than conservative decisions without Forest Plan amendments? A bit longer, but not necessarily significantly longer. NEPA should be driven by purpose and need and the goal should be to move from the existing condition to the desired future condition. The group should consider things that may require Forest Plan amendments as challenges not constraints.
- ix. Roadless and undeveloped areas will be examined carefully for their actual restoration needs. Some stakeholders have focused on the protection of Inventoried Roadless and undeveloped areas. Temporary use of old roads is more palatable than opening new roads. High lead logging is a tool that should be on the table because it can be lower impact than other systems. The Little Dean approach to remove conifers to release hardwoods on a small scale demonstration basis was a good approach but would require monitoring.
- x. It may be cost-effective to lump the Swamp Creek and Cougar project areas in Lower Joseph Creek together to improve the data gathering efficiency and bring the overall cost down.
- xi. Without extra funding for Lower Joseph Creek work this season, will the project begin data gathering in 2014, for a 2015 decision, and 2016 implementation? Yes that is true. Increased funding, if approved soon, could move the project up one year on the timeline.\

3. East Face Project

- a. Bill Gamble invited recommendations on the type of information and field trips that could be arranged / provided to the Collaborative to facilitate consideration and support of the project.
- b. USFS, ODF, and ODFW, are meeting to review cross-boundary opportunities as well as the tie to the Comprehensive Wildfire Strategy and its pilot project in NE Oregon.
- c. Jeff Tomac has led outreach with Baker County and the incorporation of appropriate treatments adjacent to Anthony Lakes.
- d. Approximate breakdown of biophysical environments across the project area is 22% Warm Dry, 42% Cool Moist, and 36% Cold Upland. Primarily granitic and basalt soils. 32% of the area has

been previously entered. Fire has been the primary disturbance factor over the last 100 years, including the Anthony Lake Fire, and the Tanner Gulch Fire. The Oregon Conservation Strategy highlights the importance of the Dry Pine Forests and the Hardwood communities.

- e. Most of the project area is zoned for commercial timber harvest (MA 1), with some areas of winter and summer wildlife range.
 - f. The Cold Upland areas are primarily lodge pole pine, sub-alpine fir, spruce, and grand fir. This area has recreation management overlays, as well as WUI. Both require consideration of fire risk and potential fuel reduction activities to break up potential fire continuity.
 - g. East Face Project Area has a lot of diverse conditions and needs – the majority of the acreage is zoned for commercial timber activity. There are a variety of public uses and benefits from this ground.
 - h. Members of the collaborative asked for background analysis on the FR condition class and HRV and the departure of current conditions from management reference points. Members would also like to understand the science, data, assumptions that lies behind these reference points, and how current and future change is factored.
 - i. USFS indicated that Miles Hemstrom, Ayn Shlisky, and Bernard Bormann have strong landscape analysis backgrounds and tools. They will be invited to introduce the group to those tools soon.
 - j. USFS would like the collaborative to adopt a learning mode and be willing to experiment to learn things at an operational scale.
 - k. The collaborative was notified of the Hood River Symposium taking place on 15-16 April which would bring diverse scientists and stakeholders together to share our current state of knowledge and perspective on cool moist mixed conifer forests. David Powell would be sharing his work at that gathering – including his assessment of current conditions, and how they came about. The symposium would use this type of information to consider management options.
 - l. Bill White summarized his experience with the 1962 fire at top end of East Face Project area, the intensity of the fire, and the resulting silt pack in the creeks that took 10-12 years to wash clear. He suggested that the conditions were just as bad now as they were then.
4. Public Outreach
- a. Potential for EOU Interns to assist with communication plan and implementation
 - b. Review of timing of the meetings to facilitate private sector participation – agreed to shift to afternoon meetings (1-5 PM) on a trial basis.
 - c. Public information sessions in each County – Nils and Lindsay would coordinate with each County to organize a presentation during County NRAC meetings or the equivalent.
 - d. Nils and Lindsay briefed the collaborative on the meeting held with John George and his concerns about travel management and the potential for USFS to try to use the collaboratives as the vehicle to close roads. The Wallowa Whitman Forest Collaboratives position on the first suite of projects in Lower Joseph Creek will not impact the status of any roads. The Wallowa Whitman Forest Collaborative has accepted the recommendation from Wallowa County to defer road decisions to Wallowa County and its TMP committee.
5. Future Meetings and Field Trips
- a. Boise Mill Tour offered prior to May 22 Collaborative Meeting – with Boise then hosting the Collaborative following the tour in their conference room.
 - b. Schedule full presentation on Collaborative Wildfire Strategy – possibly in May
 - c. Look to June, July, August for tours in Lower Joseph Creek and East Face.