

WALLOWA WHITMAN FOREST COLLABORATION  
FULL GROUP ASSEMBLY April 24, 2013  
La Grande Ranger District, La Grande Oregon  
MEETING NOTES

In Attendance: Renee Coxen, Ann Carlson, Theora Mickey, B.W. Mickey, Rex Storm, Robert Armbruster, Darlene Rochna, Ron Rochna, Mark Jacques, Chris Haefer, D. Wagner, Dan Stark, Lori Schaafsma, Vergita Ediger, Jeff Tomac, Nils Christoffersen, Dick Fleming, Teresa Brown, Donna Mattson, Jodi Kramer, Kevin Keown, Steve Edwards, Bruce Dunn, John Buckman, Veronica Warnock, Brian Kelly, Fred Warner Jr., Mike Hayward, Mark Davidson, Vince Naughton, Marty Story, DeForest Ballard, John Phillips, Lindsay Warness, Tim Lillebo, Jenny Reinhardt, Kat Naughton, Lori Schaafsma.

**Agenda Items:**

1. **Lower Joseph Creek** - Summary of Lower Joseph Creek Recommendations and Project Status. Will seek consensus on project recommendations to advance to next phase of site specific planning.
2. **East Face Project Updates**
3. **Guest Speaker: George Wuerthner**, Ecologist. *“Ecological concerns related to forest thinning and implications for natural fire regimes”* (Note: A wide range of speakers will be invited to speak before the Collaborative in successive meeting and field trips. George has been scheduled this week to take advantage of his previously scheduled visit to La Grande.)
4. **Updates and miscellaneous items:**
  - o Update on moist mixed conifer workshop in Hood River
  - o Boise Mill Tour in May
5. **Other items?**

**Lower Joseph Creek Watershed**

**RECOMMENDATIONS TABLE**

Jenny presented a draft table of Lower Joseph Creek Watershed integration results.

The table showed the resource groups integration outcome by displaying several of the following: a list of the issues, current conditions, desired condition, agreed to integration recommendations, and integration results and comments. The table provides a summary of watershed conditions, needs, recommendations in moving the watershed to a healthier condition, as well as rational and discussion points that occurred between the resources. This summary table presents the results of many years of work and integration meetings. The summary depicts the entire watershed, not a specific project area.

Table highlights include:

1. Cultural Issues, mitigation measures, recommendations for treatment
2. Recommended Forestry, Fire and Fuels treatment acres by Biophysical Group (temperature/moisture regime) and stand structure. Fuels and Fire integration. A question was asked regarding comments from Fuels and Wildlife Wildlife would like a 25 – 50 foot buffer along high use roads; fuels would like road side treatments for

suppression defensible space and safety. How will this conflict be addressed? The NEPA team and FS management will need to balance both resource needs. These concerns are listed to ensure they are addressed during NEPA.

3. Rangeland table with recommendations by geographic area to meet desired condition with integration results and comments. Rangeland includes: Range, Weeds, and Botany. The table includes recommended monitoring.
4. Wildlife current conditions/issues, desired conditions, recommendations and integration.
5. Roads and Recreation provides a combination of ALL roads approved through integration that *maintain the current road use status*. Road segment lengths in the table represent the MAPPING segment length not treatment length. Many recommendations are culvert, spot rocking, or drainage type repairs. This section of the table is still under production.

Question: What about the recommendations NOT approved in integration?

Answer: There is a separate table outlining the recommendations that need further discussion. The table layout for issues needing revisited is similar to this table being presented. Those items will need more dialogue, and potentially field visits.

The Wallowa County Collaborative is seeking support of the Forest Collaborative to move forward with the recommendations. This table will also be sent out for review.

The table will also be given to the Wallowa County NRAC for comments/edits for discussion at their next meeting.

We want to forward to the Forest Service updated information with social buyoff from multiple resource groups containing community members that are behind the approved recommendations.

## **PURPOSE AND NEED**

The combined sub-committee's from the Wallowa County collaborative and the Forest Collaborative worked together to develop the Purpose and Need.

The draft Purpose and Need was presented with the 4 key needs: (see attachment)

1. Treatment of forest structure and vegetation for ecological health;
2. Improved waters sources and fences for riparian protection and livestock distribution;
3. Improve watershed aquatics, water quality, through improved road conditions for fish passage, sediment reduction;
4. Economic stability through products both commercial and private, and recreational opportunities such as hunting and sightseeing.

It was suggested to add a statement into the Purpose and Need to reflect a need for plant diversity for wildlife and to meet cultural needs of the Nez Perce Tribe. (Phrases addressing this have been added for review and feedback).

Question: It appears the Historical Range of Variability (HRV) was used to guide the desired conditions. Were Future Conditions considered in regard to climate change and drying trends predicted?

Answer: Forest Service (FS) direction is to look at HRV when developing management recommendations. This information will be used by the FS to develop NEPA documents that tier to the Watershed Analysis. Based on the prescriptions being proposed and desired conditions,

many treatments are in line with climate change projections and the need to create a more resilient landscape.

## **East Face Project Updates**

Project boundary is still under development in coordination with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODF&W). There may be a possibility to extend the boundary to include the Wildlife Refuge. This would be consistent with the W-W's Land and Resource Management Plan's wildlife goals. That parcel was identified on the map in a previous meeting.

1. Question: How many acres is this and will there be discussion with other land owners to promote their involvement in the project.

Answer: Yes, there may be opportunities on adjoining private lands such as fuel reduction. ODF&W is approximately 1,000 acres. There are in-holdings and there are opportunities on private lands along Anthony Lakes Highway and at base of the Elk Horns.

2. Question: If the Wildlife Refuge is included it will be important for ODF&W to become permanent fixtures in this process. Will the FS retain the lead in this project?

Answer: The Forest Service will retain the lead for the NEPA process, but ODF&W will retain final management decision authority for the state wildlife land. ODF&W will be providing analysis for the wildlife refuge. It is important to look at the area as part of the project since we know elk will be a big discussion topic. There is value in having ODF&W involved from the start.

3. Question: There is an Elk viewing area in the vicinity. The elk come down onto the agricultural lands. Do they migrate upslope in the summer? What are the expected issues regarding Elk and does ODF&W have solutions they are considering?

Answer: That cannot be answered at this point. There is a problem with big game using private lands over the year. More information is needed to identify the appropriate management response.

La Grande Ranger District is still working with a variety of individuals to determine the project boundary for East Face. After the previous presentation to the collaborative it opened up a couple of thoughts on how to define the boundary and the supporting analysis needed; such as incorporating the ski area, the wildlife refuge.

The intent is to have one analysis document and two administrative decisions from the document. The Forest Service will not have authority to make a decision on ODF&W lands. That's why it is good to have these discussions now.

The data collection will start this summer but the size of the project may warrant two field seasons for data collection.

Based on this information - is the WWFC plate full or do we need to find another project in Baker County? This project is off the Whitman Unit but La Grande is doing it. Patrick is another one that was presented earlier.

The Forest Service has not articulated our (the districts) full program of work and how the East Face Project fits in. This will be done at the Forest Leadership Team meeting.

Leadership Team (FLT). East Face and Patrick are still in the infancy stages, the question is how the collaborative is going to engage in this process.

The Patrick project is located south of Highway 7, south and west of Phillips Reservoir, south of Whitney. The Whitman district is putting a project initiation letter together for Patrick project to provide guidance for going out and gathering field data this summer too. Patrick and East Face will likely parallel with similar time frames. As Little Dean is finished specialists will start looking at Patrick project.

Based on East Face presentation at the last meeting we will have some cool moist biophysical presentations for the collaborative. In addition there will be one or two field trips to East Face in order to start understanding the landscape.

4. Questions: When does East Face open up for access?

Answer: It is fairly open now but typically late May. Bill is looking at field trips this summer and discussing Fire Regime Condition Class (FRCC) of the area. There may be another presentation prior to the field trip.

It is important to look at the big picture whole landscape in regard to forest types, inventoried road less areas, wildlife etc.

5. Question: The collaborative looked at East Face but I was under the impression that the FS staffing capacity was stretched out in regards to the other projects. Does the FS have the capacity to begin Patrick?

Answer: It depends on the level of field work data being discussed. We still need stand exam data. As Little Dean finishes up then the specialist will shift to Patrick. It is not the priority but we will start working on it as specialist time becomes available. Silvicultural information will be looked at. That said the south end of the Forest is concentrating on Little Dean for the moment. The collaborative will need to decide what level of involvement they would like to have. As Patrick moves forward, the collaborative will be informed of the status.

6. Question: Do we, as a collaborative, want to put together a list of desired information to evaluate East Face.

Answer: As the information is gathered we can receive presentations on the information? It would be a list for the Forest Service of information the collaborative is interested in such as: HRV analysis, stand structures and acreage, fire history etc. This would help the specialists know what to prepare for when bringing forward information to the collaborative.

7. Question: If we are looking at a schedule for East Face Project in 2016-2017 – is that the only project the collaborative will look at in the next four years? There needs to be some shelf stock of what's being developed.

Answer: In Lower Joseph Creek Watershed there are three total projects to look at on public lands. The first one is approximately 30,000 acres, 2<sup>nd</sup> 28,000 acres and the 3<sup>rd</sup> project is HCNRA

and the smallest piece. The collaborative is already looking at a sequence of landscape projects in respect to Lower Joseph Watershed at least one of which will start prior to East Face. The collaborative will be looking for that kind of sequencing and forward planning in particular to the Whitman District and also in the La Grande District too.

### **George Wuerthner - Presenter**

#### Main points:

- Forests need dead trees for long-term productivity and ecosystem services
- Removing dead trees may result in biological impoverishment of the forest
- Wildfires and forest insects are primary agents generating dead wood
- Dead trees are critical habitat to wide range of birds, mammals, insects, and lichen. Uneven distribution of dead trees on landscape.
- Dead trees are also important to aquatic systems
- Logging, thinning, and biomass removal results in less healthy forests by removing dead wood. Thinning or logging will not simulate wildfires.
- Thinning and fuel reduction projects don't provide safety from wildfire. Key variable is climate (temperature, humidity, wind), not stand density and fuel loads. When uncharacteristic severe fires occur in very low relative humidity (ie 2%) and high winds even then thinning will not stop fires.
- Popular fire history is wrong – vast majority of fires were small and extremely variable in their impact across their occurrence area. Key influence is periods of hotter, drier weather. Questioned accuracy of recent fire history studies.
- Defensible space around homes not always effective as wildfires can spot (jump) over fuel breaks and ignite anything that will burn. Key is reduced flammability of roofing materials and immediate vegetation or material up against home.
- To the extent fuel reduction treatments are conducted, they must combine mechanical thinning followed by underburning to be effective.
- Fire suppression has had little impact on forest structures and wildfires. Lack of fires between 1930's and 1980's presented as climatic conditions.

#### Collaborative discussion Points:

- Interest in seeing a bibliography of research references.
- National Forests already have guidelines designed to address number of snags per acre. Basic concept of snags, biomass on landscape is important, scale and amount is a key concern.
- Fuels (standing live and dead and down) can be manipulated not weather. Fuels plays higher role in fire effects to overstory stands and cannot be discounted. Successful fire suppression has impacted stand conditions contributing to heavy down fuels and dense stands. People can manipulate fuels to alter fire behavior, weather cannot be changed.
- Group would have liked to see more topic emphasis on Eastern Oregon ecosystem types.
- Renewable resources are important.
- Several case studies exist where thinning and fuel treatments have been effective during wildfires. (Case studies - James K. Agee and Carl N. Skinner produced a paper in 2005 on Basic Principles of Forest Fuel Reduction Treatments)
- A thorough look at research is needed to help us make informed decisions based on current science.
- High social interest in local forest management.
- WWFC meetings are designed for a hands-on approach for ecosystem management.

1. Question: You stated that the wind affects your fire size not the fuels.

George: Wind is critical. You reach a threshold where wind becomes more important than fuels.

Public comment – Wind effects Rates of Spread of fires, however fuels affect fire residence time - how long a fire burns on a particular site. Fuels impact fire intensity - how much energy or BTU's British Thermal Units are emitted from these fires. The more fuels you have, the more energy those fires are releasing and the more potential for that fire to continue on its path.

George: That's true and all things being equal adding more wind and your get exponential intensity of burning.

Response to answer: We cannot control the wind but you can manipulate the fuels. Grass is a low residence time burning fuel, which means it burns through the grass and it is done, if you have those heavy fuels in there it will stay on that site longer and burn around the trees base potentially killing the trees. If you only have grass and fine fuels with wind, then flame lengths are bent over to where it is not impacting the overstory trees as much. The amount of down woody material and ladder fuels can directly impact the amount of mortality in the overstory.

2. Question: Why can't we manipulate the forest using appropriate guidelines through logging, rather than just let nature do it? We do have other needs of the forest.

George: You do have other needs of the forest but you have to recognize that logging is not the same thing as fires. You are removing biomass. How much of that biomass can one eliminate without detriment to the forest - we really don't know. We also know there are other things that come with logging – such as disturbance to wildlife species.

Response: But you can manipulate that with your timber sale contracts.

3. Question: I am confused on scale issue. I understand the biological attributes of deadwood standing and on the ground, benefits of fire – I do not understand your concerns about too much management, too much removal of biomass. Across the six national forests of the Blue Mountains east of the Cascades (not including the Cascades) we treated less than 50,000 acres of those 6 million acres of forest. 0.8% of that area was logged last year. Nationally, we only treated 0.2% of the National Forest (200,000 acres) across the entire United States with mechanical harvest. We also know that in Eastern Oregon and Eastern Washington mortality today exceeds new growth, so we are accumulating a lot of standing dead and a lot of down woody debris. We are deficient in large standing dead and large down woody. We can address those deficiencies with proper management. I am also confused whether your concerns and evidence is relevant to current condition and activities in eastern Oregon.

George: Let me use your numbers – 50,000 a year multiplied by 10 is 500,000 acres – you multiply that by 100 years it's almost a whole forest logged.

Response: But they regrow!

George: But you are taking the biomass out from the bottom. When it has been logged, you remove that biomass, the other thing is that beetles and the fires are good at selecting which trees should survive and which should not. My point is the less of that we disturb the better we will be in the long run.

4. Question: One of your illustrations pointed out that the most effective course of action to protect homes in an area is a combination of mechanical and fire, where do you draw that line. Your accepting a level of argument that mechanical is in fact a positive influence on managing a forest, I am trying to understand what you are trying to say.

George: It is ok around communities. That's where you want to reduce the most chance of a fire affecting the houses, plus they require the houses to meet certain flammability standards.

5. Question: So do you believe that all these years of active fire suppression didn't change the natural condition of the forest? Did 50 years of investment into forests change the conditions?

Response: Part of the social discussion regarding what the forest can contribute to is a much broader discussion than some of the information you have.

George: I won't deny that I just want to make sure that these points are understood and part of the discussion that's all.

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Topic: Other

Boise will host a tour for the WWFC of the Elgin Facility

1. May 22 at 10 am
2. Takes about 2 hours total
3. Demonstrations and information on: utilization, products, and employees
4. Boots and jeans are a must for the tour.
5. Meet at Elgin - information of exact place to meet will follow soon.

Next Collaborative Meeting: May 22 after Elgin tour

The Collaborative meeting will be in Elgin from 1 to 5 pm.

Prior to the meeting Boise Cascade is offering a tour of the mill starting at 10 AM.

Desire to explore information from the Cool Moist Synthesis discussed at Hood River in mid-April at some future meeting of the Collaborative.

Also,

There was also a lot of research presented at the Sustainable Northwest Conference last week that is very contradictory so it would be interesting to go through that research. The presentations will be available but we may want to look as an Operations Group at inviting some of those folks to come out.

There was an agreement of the Operations Committee to invite a series of speakers and find some diversity, perspectives and opinions with the intention of getting some of that other research to this group either here in a meeting or when the group goes up to take a look at East Face project or something else. We will be following through with that this summer.