

WALLOWA WHITMAN FOREST COLLABORATIVE
FULL GROUP ASSEMBLY, December 17, 2013
La Grande Ranger District Conference Room, La Grande OR
MEETING NOTES

In attendance: Bill Gamble, Irene Jerome, Steve Edwards, Arvid Anderson, Nils Christoffersen, Bruce Dunn, John Buckman, John Laurence, Sabine Mellmann-Brown, Jon Paustian, Mark Jacques, Ken Gebhardt, Steve Derry, Toni Molina, Paul Oester, Tom Barry, Brian Kelly, Mike Hayward, Mark Davidson, Gary Miller, Tony King, Kris Stein, Neil McCusker, Nola Driskell, Lindsay Warness, Tom Montoya, Dana Taylor, Cindy Christensen, Renee Coxen, Bill White, Tim Lillebo, Dale Blahna, Barb Wales, Bob Clements, Steve Hawkins, Paul Boehne, Ron Rochna, Darlene Rochna, Larry McCalden, Ben Hayes, Lynn Oliver, Susan Jane Brown (phone), Chris Heffernan, Lori Baird (recorder), Patrick Shannon (facilitator)

Lower Joseph Creek Watershed Project: This project is the first of three restoration projects, selected by the new Blue Mountain ID Team under the Eastside Restoration Strategy because of the existing work done by Wallowa County, the WW Forest Collaborative and the Forest Service, , which provided a baseline for the project. The timeline for this project, with a signed decision scheduled for December 2014, is accelerated and ambitious.

The Blue Mountain ID Team laid out the following objectives: (1) Get to know each other, continue to collaborate, be innovative, figure out how to work within the timeline, within the requirements and procedures spelled out by NEPA, and with the group. (2) Review NEPA timeline so we can understand the constraints. (3) Discuss draft Purpose and Need and Proposed Action for Lower Joe.

Draft Purpose and Need: Focused on restoration, and increased economic and social vitality of surrounding communities, and honoring tribal trust agreements. The goal is to develop plans that are scientifically defensible and socially acceptable.

Draft Proposed Action: The initial Proposed Action (PA) is a preliminary formulation of anticipated work to be done in the project. It is used to solicit public response. The PA doesn't have to be perfect – it is not our final decision, only our initial proposal. The ultimate preferred alternative may differ from the initial PA.

Timeline: Currently on schedule. Purpose and Need and Proposed Action completed by the end of December. January/February: develop alternatives. Spring: effects analysis.

Planning Constraints: Forest Plan; tribal trust responsibilities; fisheries; Fish and Wildlife (endangered species); wildfire management strategy (national); other laws and regulations (clean water act, etc.)

The Blue Mountain ID Team silviculturist described the current stand conditions, composition, structure, density, and pattern. Data was gathered from the draft Wallowa County watershed assessment, some old forest service records, as well as the field work we did this fall.

Treatment recommendations include commercial thinning on about 20,000 acres (considered a high priority because of density); non-commercial thinning (about 5,000 acres); retention of old trees regardless of species or size (150 years or older); management of trees infected with disease or insects; and prescribed burning. The ICO approach (individuals, clumps and openings) recommended by Franklin and Johnson will be utilized. In riparian areas, the team will look for opportunities to move these areas toward their management objective. Eliminate trees that have encroached into grasslands due to lack of disturbance. The 20,000 acres of commercial thinning does include Hells Canyon and does include old-growth areas and possibly some inventoried roadless areas. May need to set those aside as “acres needing further discussion.”

The Blue Mountain ID Team fisheries biologist discussed opportunities to improve riparian areas, specifically in Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCA). The goal is to treat riparian areas for the purpose of maintaining or improving those areas for fish, in particular salmonids, through water quality improvement and habitat improvement. Any silviculturist prescription would be analyzed in regard to how it might affect downstream fish. Riparian management also applies to wetlands and springs. All management would be done in a collaborative, interdisciplinary way.

Roads Analysis: assessment has been done of road system, including roads needed for management and tree removal (facilitation of log truck traffic). Utilized existing forest database and information accumulated by Wallowa County in 2010 to get an approximation on road density relevant to forest guidelines and on road maintenance needs. Estimates include: 25+ miles of current roads that need repair; 25 miles of new roads that would need to be built (temporary) – these would be deconstructed following timber harvest; 28 miles of road that would be considered for closure (most of which appear to be naturally closed and grown in through lack of use).

Monitoring: we want to learn from whatever we do. It is important to design a monitoring strategy that we can learn from and use to adjust future projects.

Next steps: Post the Notice of Intent on this project in Federal Registry – by early January. Once it is posted, the Final Proposed Action document will be sent to the collaborative. There is a 30-day comment period following publication in the Federal Registry – our next meeting will be within this time frame (January 22).

Participants in the WWFC agreed in general that the draft just presented is an appropriate summary of the work prepared by Wallowa County and discussed previously by the WWFC. . There was recognition that road issues would be a challenge for this project. Wallowa County did not expect road issues to be an issue in Lower Joseph Creek – as they had expected any

proposals to change current road use to be deferred to any future consideration of the Travel Management Plan. Multiple stakeholders with pressure to maintain traditional access and use (firewood, hunting, camping, trail riding, etc.) and opposing pressure to close roads for fish and wildlife, hydrologic, or general aesthetic reasons. Wallowa County noted that its road inventory identified over 80 miles of roads that were no longer being used by the public and had naturally grown in. To the extent that road density needed to be reduced in any management area to meeting Forest Plan guidelines, these naturally closed roads – roads that had not been used by the public for a very long time – should be the priority. The process moving forward must be completely transparent – within this group and with the general public. As the scoping process starts, it is hoped that collaborative stakeholders will feel comfortable discussing any concerns or issues, and will share any comments they submit directly to the USFS with the rest of the WWFC.

East Face Project: The East Face project area encompasses approximately 44,000 acres of FS land and 4000 acres of State lands on the east side of the Elkhorn Mountains between Anthony Lakes and Ladd Canyon. The area straddles Union and Baker Counties and occurs primarily in the North Powder River and Wolf Creek-Powder River watersheds.

WWFC discussions focused on current stand conditions, composition, structure, density, and pattern, and treatment plans and options. Following the discussion on forest conditions, the group discussed recreation use, road networks, and proposal from mountain bike community to establish trail opportunities. The session concluded with a discussion on fisheries issues – Wolf Creek, Anthony Creek, and Indian Creek – incorporating information gathered from field survey efforts by the Bull Trout society.

Dr. John Bailey – OSU College of Forestry – Integrated Fireshed-Level Adaptive Management Evaluation Sites (i-FLAMES): Dr Bailey raised the opportunity for landowners or collaborative groups involved in large landscape projects to participate in a study to analyze the fire impacts of different forest management strategies. Landowner would provide: modest-sized watershed/fireshed (<1500 acres), and a series of planned fuels and restoration treatments. OSU would provide design/review support, site history summary, overstory and understory data, pre-treatment data collection and synthesis, and monitoring data collection and synthesis.

Basic minimum design: Three <100-acre parcels which would be treated as follows: 1/3 – light fuels reduction, low thinning; 1/3 heavier restoration treatment; 1/3 control (no treatment) – in some locations this may be a burn-only treatment.

Need areas where we plan to do treatments, and where we have funding to do treatments. Opportunity to participate in the network sharing results of the various treatments across Oregon. Get all pre-treatment data collection, establishment of permanent plots, archive of data. OSU has three more years of funding to complete their data collection – looking at implementation and monitoring. All results will be analyzed and the data will be archived.

Within the Lower Joseph or East Face Projects, it would be possible to identify nine 100-acre plots. Three plots will be controls, three will be treated heavily, three will be treated lightly. It is an opportunity to learn how different approaches are affected in a wildfire scenario (light thinning vs heavy restoration management vs control). OSU would bring to the table to the opportunity to monitor the effectiveness of different treatments in a very deliberate, purposeful way.

At this time: don't need a definitive commitment to work with OSU in this process, but is there enough interest to keep the discussion open? If so, we may need to include it in a NEPA proposal and keep it in mind as we move forward with treatments. We must be planning ahead if this is something we may be interested in doing. The group gave a "thumbs up" to have OSU get in touch with Blue Mountain team and possibly incorporate this process into future plans.

Dale Blahna: Research Social Scientist: Public Engagement, Collaboration & Trust

"Tale of two road plans" – Ducks-Swains Access Management, Dixie NF and Grand Staircase – Escalante NM Road Plan.

Dixie NF Summary: destination OHV trails, inholdings, subdivision, access to Las Vegas and Salt Lake City. Very high road density exceeding Forest Plan guidelines: old logging roads, user created routes, etc.. Lots of conflicts between recreationists, social issues, erosion issues.

Process: GPS/GIS all routes, create a route map; collect erosion and runoff data; conduct extensive public engagement and iterative mapping process – ask users what roads they used, how they used them, when they used them; targeted groups protesting road 'closures'; attempted to meet access, recreation, and resource protection needs (not mutually exclusive).

Outcome: year 1: designed the system; added rehabbed segments; color-coded map, 500 signs. Year 2: closed routes not on system; 60% of routes; density reduced to 2.4 miles per square mile. No appeals, no litigation; opponents supported the plan; partnerships and grants to implement; expanded to whole district; links to state ATV system.

Cooperation led to funding: District obtained > \$200,000 in grants from State and counties to: improve ATV/OHV opportunities with well-designed trail system appropriate settings and expectations; mitigate resource impacts; do high-quality management. Project is ecologically sustainable; socially acceptable; economically feasible – "triple bottom line" - key was early and significant engagement with all stakeholder, and a commitment to bottom-up collaboration

Grand Staircase: Closed 1200 miles of routes (about 50%); analysis based on 1998 land management plan; in 2004 the state/county sued BLM; in 2005 the county commissioner, sheriff, others pulled up 40 signs; in 2007 the county designated routes; in 2009 the last lawsuits were settled; in 2013 still controversial, contentious.

Comparative Summary: In each scenario, six dimensions of social acceptability can be measured: involvement, motivation, knowledge, satisfaction with process, satisfaction with outcome, satisfaction with implementation.

Themes: Collaboration, conflict and trust. During the planning process, it is important to build trust. There will be conflict and disagreement, but this is where conflict resolution and collaboration takes place. There is a counterintuitive relationship between power and trust. If you collaborate and work with stakeholders early on (give up some of your power), you are more likely to build collective power and commitment later in the process (because you've built the trust).

Lessons: Discussion of "issues" early on helps address conflicts. Seeking to avoid conflicts only exacerbates them. Frame issues for shared goals – social and environmental. Stakeholder influence, appreciation, transparency, fairness, and expected outcomes are all common goals. The process is as important as the outcomes – expected outcomes are important, but you can't do everything for everyone. The better people are treated, the better they will feel about the outcomes.

Lee Cerveney: Social Scientist with PNW research station: Engaging partners and the public in sustainable roads planning and implementation.

Public engagement: what does it look like? Involve public in all phases; include all communities; reach diverse groups; offer many opportunities to exchange ideas and give feedback; present clear information about process, timing, outcomes; collect data that can be used by agency planning teams.

Human ecology mapping: gathers information about social values, human uses, and resource interactions using maps and other geo-spatial tools.

What can be captured on maps: social, economic, cultural, or biological values; areas of concentrated use; areas of diverse public use; areas needing management attention (downed trees, erosion, slides); desired forest outcomes or perfect conditions; unique site attributes.

Multiple approaches: public meetings; websites/on-line survey; targeted stakeholders; on-site (visitor centers, trailheads); special events (fairs, farmers markets).

WWFC: how is this translatable to us? To apply a standard set of issues and accommodations is not enough. Need to assess and engage with local people that are particular to that area. Empower the people to be a part of the process. Share in the accountability and responsibility for the results. Let people help design the process.

Meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.