Wallowa-Whitman Forest Collaborative
March 25, 2015
La Grande Ranger District Office
La Grande, Oregon

Attendance: Mike McDonnell, Joe Hessel, Mark Jacques, Ray Osipovich, John Williams, Ayn Shlisky, Lindsay Warness, Rob Klavins, Rex Storm, Ron Rochna, Darlene Rochna, Vince Naughton, Paul Boehne, Michael Jennings, Gunnar Carnwath, Mark Davidson, Bruce Dunn, Cynthia Warnock, Neil McCusker, Tom Montoya, Andrew Spaeth, Larry McCalden, Nick Myatt, Montana Pagano, Larisa Bogardus, Cindy Christensen, Dana Taylor, Toni Molina, Laura Navanete, Dana Taylor, Bob Clements, Lisa Laufenberg-Soward, Mark Lacy, Karen Hardigg

Welcome & Introductions
Karen Hardigg is the new Wallowa Whitman Forest Collaborative facilitator. In her previous professional experience she served on the Tongass National Forest as a liaison and facilitator between the Forest Service and local communities to achieve triple bottom line outcomes, not dissimilar from the work being done on the Wallowa Whitman. Her aim is to harness the expertise and intelligence of this group to achieve outcomes. Her involvement is to help the group develop solutions and her role is neutral. Please call or email Karen at any time. She has an open door policy and wants to hear from you. Occasionally, she will check the pulse of the group by raising thumbs. Thumb up if you are on board, sideways if you have a clarifying question, or thumb down if you disagree. If members put a thumb down, then Karen will ask what it would take for you to move towards a thumbs-up.

Lower Joseph Creek Update
The Lower Joseph Creek sub-committee met on March 11 and again on March 17. Discussions focused on 1) roads and 2) other undeveloped lands (OULs) as they relate to the Lower Joseph Creek project. The sub-committee did not reached consensus on either issue, and is seeking guidance from the full collaborative on these issues. The sub-committee needs to circulate a consensus recommendation by April 8th, two weeks before the April 22nd meeting. Per the operating principles, any documents seeking collaborative consensus needs to be circulated two weeks prior to a formal meeting for that purpose.

The sub-committee anticipates meeting again the week of March 30 to finalize a position on roads and wrap up discussion on OULs. Any draft consensus position that is agreed upon at the sub-committee level will be shared with the operations committee at their April 2nd meeting and shared with the full collaborative no later than April 8. The plan for the consensus document is to clearly outline the places of agreement and disagreement.

A member of the collaborative asked why the consensus document includes areas in which there is no consensus. A member of the sub-committee shared that including the areas where there is not agreement is important because it has an impact on other statements within the document. The sub-committee believes it will be more beneficial to get one document to the group as opposed to create separate majority and minority documents.

A member asked what is the process is moving forward. The draft consensus document will be sent out no later than April 8th to the full group. The sub-committee responded by saying that they are trying to keep this simple and avoid further wordsmithing. If it is a matter of word choice the sub-committee asks

that members please refrain from additional edits. If there are substantial issues with the language and intent then please raise that concern with the sub-committee.

Ayn Shlisky, Team Leader of the Blue Mountains Interdisciplinary Team, briefed the group on the public comments received following the release of the Lower Joseph Creek Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). In total, the agency received about 900 comment letters. Approximately 98% were in a form email that had common comments. The other 22 comments or so were very substantial documents. Comments that came from people who are engaged in the collaborative displayed a good understanding of the NEPA process and how to write comments that were useful to the process. Some comments from members of the group were position oriented, which were not as useful. The suite of comments does not point toward developing a new alternative. All the comments were within the range of effects that were analyzed in the DEIS. Ayn noted that the collaborative process has been difficult, but believes that if you take a broader view the amount of agreement in the room it is quite impressive. The agency thanked the collaborative for spending extra time trying to find common ground.

East Face Project: Elk Habitat Presentation

Laura Navarete, wildlife biologist on the La Grande Ranger District, shared a presentation on elk habitat in East Face. A coarse way to look at cover is to look at forest types to identify the potential types of forage. The East Face project area is mostly comprised of marginal cover and does not have great forage overall. The latest summer nutrition model shows that the quality of summer nutrition is highly linked to winter health of elk. Moist forest types offer higher nutritional quality. Regarding the proposed action for East Face, the fuels treatments would not impact canopy cover and thus would not have an effect on nutritional quality, but the commercial treatments are more likely to have an impact. It is important to remember that forage is just one component that creates areas of predicted use. The areas identified as having the best forage do not necessarily have the highest use. Elk are expected to spend more time in areas with fewer disturbances by humans (e.g. roads), so trying to enhance quality forage while at the same time closing roads may impact how elk use the landscape.

<u>Questions from members of the group:</u>

Are these static ecosystems?

- The meadow that is created may not be there forever. Either through our treatments or through other natural disturbance there is likely to be changes.

Would the actions in East Face change the population size or just the distribution?

- This project would not necessarily increase the number of elk, in part, because they are a managed species. If you look solely at the project area we could see a shift of elk use from private land to public land.

How does might the project affect other plants, especially sensitive species?

- The Forest Service tends to avoid areas where there are sensitive plant species. Part of what we are trying to do is mimic the disturbance regime that would have occurred naturally.

Can you explain the road distance bands?

- All the dark lines are the open roads in the project area and the agency puts a 1.5 mile buffer around any of the “security” areas. Habitat effectiveness index (HEI) uses road density, but that doesn’t really get at the issue. The distance band tries to address that by seeing areas where they are further away. Each color on the map is further away.

Is road use included in that analysis?

- Road use is included in the predicted use map.

Is the distance from the road linear or slope faced?

- It is linear.

If you have a thicket of lodge pole pine where you can't see off the road and different sizes of trees is that accounted for?

- That information is not included in the road density map, but the HEI model looks at canopy cover and vegetation type. Models are useful but they don't tell us everything.

Can you help explain in the model what is considered a closed road?

- A road that is permanently closed will not be included on the map.

How do we know that even the closed roads have no motorized use?

- The predicted use model includes the best information we have available to use including the anecdotal evidence we hear, see, and that is reported to the agency.

Do we have the ability to do these models for the alternatives?

- Yes. The overall effect of disturbance and other impacts are included and we try to use the best available science. If studies came out stating that there was not an impact on elk that would be included.

East Face Project: Scoping Comments

Cindy Christensen of the La Grande Ranger District is leading the East Face Interdisciplinary Team and provided an overview of the scoping effort and some of the alternatives that were suggested in public comments. In total, 14 groups sent in comments. Cindy broke this into key issues, which will help inform alternative development. Comments expressed the following:

- Support for fuel reduction in wild-land urban interface (WUI) and recreation areas.
- Support for all-lands approach and using prescribed fire across boundaries.
- Concern voiced over blanket use of cohesive wildfire strategy – structure ignition areas that are defined as within 100 feet of structures.
- Concern that logging could exacerbate fire behavior.
- Support for stand density and management – insects don't know boundaries and thus density management is desired on USFS side.
- Questioning of validity of using regeneration harvest and if there is a valid ecological rationale to use that on the landscape – shelter wood and patch openings.
- Insect activity pointed out as beneficial as natural disturbance because when trees die there is wildlife habitat benefit.
- Concern that timber harvest degrades forest health.
- Concern that roads are in disrepair and in need of management.
- Support for decommissioning roads for resource protection.
- Concern for temporary road construction and heavy reconstruction work being proposed.
- Support for the project to contribute to local economies and mills.
- Concern over ability to fund non-commercial fuel reduction activities
- Recommendation to increase timber harvest to ensure non-commercial activities can be done

- Recommendation to reduce cost of logging systems and consider making logging not necessarily helicopter.
- Dead and dying trees are important and should not promote corporate profit.
- Acknowledge that late old structure, old forest is well-below historic levels and maintaining and enhancing them is important.
- Big game habitat will create disturbance during critical periods.
- Concern about sustained disturbance from vehicle use.
- Concern that ecologically significant areas (e.g. IRA, PWA, etc.) should be protected from harvest and road building.
- General concern about landscape connectivity patterns, dead and downed woody debris, existing condition of snag levels, climate change and carbon storage, whitebark pine, soils, water quality, and sensitive species.
- Concern that timber harvest activities can harm and destroy resources in the forest.
- Concern that machinery can be a vector for introduction of invasive species and disease.

A wide range of comments were submitted on East Face. The next step is to develop themes for alternatives. Some of the recommendations will be considered but not necessarily in detail, in part, because it may not meet the purpose and need. Using these comments, the agency will develop alternatives and then analyze the effects. A range of alternatives should be prepared by the next collaborative meeting. A draft EA should be released sometime this fall.

<u>Questions from members of the group</u>:

Are any concerns significant enough to move East Face from an EA to an EIS?

- Not at this point. Once the alternatives are developed the Forest Service will know if there should be an EIS.

What does CFR mean?

- Code of Federal Regulations

What is the Bull trout distribution?

- Wolf, Anthony, and Indian Creeks have Bull trout. A more conservative approach will be taken in these areas. The proposed action includes the uplands and RHCA treatments in those areas. In Indian Creek there is only non-commercial work. There is a fifty foot no activity stream buffer. Depending upon the amount of slash that would be hand piled and burned. Piles would be small to reduce hydrophobic soils and erosion.

What's the condition class of those streams?

- Cindy said she will take that question down and make sure we gather that information. Later, she responded by saying that all bull trout streams are perennial fish bearing streams and therefore Class I.

The common boundary and WUI doesn't seem to be included in the key issues. Is that a mistake?

- WUI will be included. The Forest Service received comments that there is support for treatments in the WUI.

Is there anything learned from Lower Joseph Creek that the group should be thinking about?

- There are always tradeoffs in management of national forestlands and those tradeoffs can inform a potential decision. It is also important to make clear that some actions are more closely tied to the purpose and need and thus if we do not take those actions it may affect our ability to meet the purpose and need for the project.

Forward Planning: Wallowa Whitman National Forest (WWNF) 5-year Planning Process
Larry Sandoval, Natural Resources Staff Officer, presented on the WWNF prioritization process for the forest's Strategic Landscape Analysis. This is a process the forest started more than a year ago. This is a three pronged approach – organizationally, NEPA efficiency, and strategic landscape analysis. Together that helps the agency determine what to do on the forest and where. WWNF staff have been working closely with Pacific Northwest (PNW) researchers in La Grande and Portland on how we can use that information in a modelling exercise that further helps us define the tradeoffs associated with various projects and approaches.

Michael Jennings, Ecologist and Analyst at PNW Research Station, shared his presentation as it relates to the strategic landscape analysis, entitled, "Downscaling Insect Risk Maps for the Blue Mountains." At the national level there is a continental analysis and a model for forest stands and insect outbreaks. These models are useful at that level but not necessarily at the unit at which the forests are managed. The model Michael presented is fine tuned to the Blue Mountains and shows areas where there are high risk of insect and disease outbreak. Early detection is important in dealing with the problem, but the challenge with bark beetles is that the agency does not necessarily have the technology to know until a year later that the trees are defoliated. In the future, NOAA predicts that droughts will become more extreme in this area with hotter temperatures and less precipitation, especially in summer months. In times of water stress, trees do not have the capacity to produce the resin to push beetles out.

<u>Questions and comments from members of the group:</u>

Might tussock moths and spruce budworm also increase?
- There isn't necessarily a quick answer to that. We're not sure how climate might drive that.

In mid-70s when the mountain pine beetle came through the long term effect was on ponderosa pine because it was more widespread. I didn't see that in the chart – it was focused on lodgepole pine. Does that hold for ponderosa pine as well?
- The effects are likely to be equally as severe for ponderosa pine.

Is there an opportunity to learn more about the natural frequencies and intensities of insect and disease and deal with some of the human caused changes as they relate to density and some of the other conditions?
- The historic range of variability for insects is not necessarily well known. One of my hopes is to be able to include the insect dynamics and state and transition models. That doesn't occur in a real robust way today. Historically, outbreaks occurred and they were relatively small, which are not the outbreaks we are seeing today. Moving forward we are probably not moving into a non-cyclical pattern. Looking back, we do need to better understand what those dynamics were.

In Southern Wyoming, you mentioned you didn't have any options for treatment, why?
- There was not any infrastructure that was viable to do that work. No industry capacity was one of the big challenges when the agency tried to remove hazard trees from roads and campgrounds. It is safe to say that industry is a much needed partner.

How has the Wallowa Whitman Forest Collaborative been involved in this process?

- This is the first time the collaborative has been involved and presented with information on the five year planning process. The Forest Service expressed that they are here to listen and it is helpful. This process has a lot of flexibility. The Forest Service suggested that the information they need from the collaborative is a better understanding of what tradeoffs the group is willing to make and what is important moving forward.

Members of the collaborative shared that they'd like the group to be less reactive and think more about the projects that will help advance the group's mission. As a collaborative, the group can continue to do this at a project by project approach or talk about issues and share agreement with the forest more generally. Or, perhaps the group wants to take a slightly different approach? Members suggested that it seems like it would be helpful to participate in defining what the projects actually are in terms of boundaries and economic feasibility. A member expressed that they hope that the collaborative doesn't completely limit projects to vegetation treatments. The group has almost finished the first project and may want to consider projects that are not just veg, but that also include wildlife and the social considerations.

Meeting adjourned at 3:00 PM