

Wallowa Whitman Forest Collaborative
General Meeting
Wednesday, June 24, 2015
Forestry & Range Sciences Lab
1401 Gekeler Lane
La Grande, OR 97850

Participants: *In Person:* Bill Gamble, Lindsay Warness, Rex Storm, Karen Hardigg, Vince Naughton, Mark Jacques, Darlene Rochna, Ron Rochna, Kris Stein, Brian Kelly, Bruce Dunn, Alan Ager, Larry Sandoval, Paul Oester, Alyssa Cudmore, Rem Larson, Montana Pagano, Arnold Albertson.
Phone (for portions): Tom Montoya, Susan Jane Brown, Rob Klavins, John Laurence

Meeting Goals: (1) Brainstorm about East Face Field trip and what group would like to gain from the trip (2) Gain better understanding of a tool the Forest Service could use to prioritize restoration and management efforts in the WWNF (3) Get better understanding of where the group would like to go with future WWFC-initiated projects (4) Provide clarity on monitoring process and Collaborative Functionality Evaluation that Alyssa Cudmore, graduate student intern, will be conducting for the group.

UPDATES

Lower Joseph Project:

The Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy Team is in the final stages of the Final EIS and ROD. On June 9th they had a consultation with the Nez Perce Tribe, and on June 15th a follow-up meeting with Wallowa-Whitman Forest Supervisor, Tom Montoya. They hope to finalize the EIS and the ROD by the end of June. The Team also had a final NEPA consultation on the Snake River Steelhead on June 18th with the Wallowa County Natural Resources Advisory Committee (NRAC), discussing issues like ways to reduce road density and how to incorporate economic and social values. They will have additional discussions early next week to make a final decision with respect to roads. District Ranger Bill Gamble said they are waiting for the Office of General Council's (OGC, located in the regional office in Portland) final review for the four proposed forest amendments to the FEIS. By July 1st the FEIS will hopefully be completed, and will take 3-4 weeks for printing. The facilitator clarified that the objection period is 45 days. In order to object, you must show you participated in the public comment process, provided input, and your objections must be related to the comments you submitted. The facilitator reminded the group they have worked hard to get close to agreement on the consensus document. She reminded the group if anyone anticipates submitting an objection, to first flag it with the group.

East Face Project Status

On June 16-17 the Forest Service, NRCS, ODF and others partnered to put on a field trip on the East Face Project for the Forest Service and national staff. The tour highlighted the partners' efforts in putting Joint Chief funding to work towards applying the Cohesive Wildfire Strategy in Northeast Oregon. The group also toured the North Powder Mill site where they are starting a log sort yard, a log kiln, and potential production of biochar from the gasification process they will use to do the drying.

From the last meeting, the group had concerns about the length of time spent in the field and the number of times getting into and out of the car. The main topics the group wants to cover include: fire resilience, soil, fish passage on Wolf Creek, representative post-treatments on the border of public and private lands, sample markings, and interface with commercial/noncommercial treatments, ODFW lands, and examples of timber sale contracts. Bill Gamble reminded the group it has been a long time since the majority of the parcels at East Face were managed. The facilitator encouraged the group to think about the upcoming field trip the Collaborative will be taking to East Face.

Comments & Questions from collaborative members:

- Propose that the tour include just three stops so group has enough time to see the treatments and discuss.
- Would really like to see post treatments. If those are not available to view at East Face, can we have two field trips: one in July and one in September. The first will be at East Face to understand the landscape we will be working with. The second field trip could highlight different types of treatments and their impacts on different vegetation/forest types. The group agreed this was a good idea. Bill Gamble and Karen Hardigg will bring this “September Field Trip” idea to the Operations Committee and will report back to the group.
- Is the project far enough along for a project map? Yes, the Forest Service can provide maps of East Face for the Tour.
- It is good we are not spending all of our time getting out of cars, but while we are driving, can you flag items of interest for us to watch for? Yes. Good idea.
- Clarification: this is an EA, not an EIS? And it will be released in September? Yes. It is an EA and should be released in September 2015.
- As collaborative do we have enough information to talk about consensus positions? Is any further analysis needed?
- What more does the collaborative need to know about East Face?
- Have we seen the ORV analysis? I would like to see that overlaid with the wildlife corridors.

Blues Coalition Meeting (7/27 – 7/28)

July 27th – July 28th the Blues Coalition will meet in Baker City. Collaborative members are encouraged to attend.

PRESENTATION: “Forest Service Strategic Planning and Understanding Trade-offs” – Presentation by Alan Ager, Pacific Northwest Research Station, introduction by Larry Sandoval

Larry Sandoval reminded the group about the Forest Service’s Strategic Landscape Planning process and new GIS tools it is using to prioritize future management projects. The Forest Service is working to (1) target forest areas to increase planning efficiencies so they are more integrated and (2) develop and prioritize landscapes that provide for commercial and ecological benefits. To accomplish these goals they worked with Alan Ager with the Pacific NW Research Station, who developed a scientific model to create 42 potential planning areas on the Wallowa Whitman National Forest (WWNF) in six watersheds. There are four criteria to choose the potential sites: (1) vegetation departure (2) wildfire hazard to and from the WUI (3) insect and disease risk and (4) timber volume. They chose projects based on an optimization for these multiple treatment objectives. Larry said that the tool will have a lot of flexibility for rangers to use to help prioritize certain treatments within the landscape given multiple objectives.

Alan Ager provided an overview of the model he developed. Alan focuses most of his research on strategic planning and prioritization, and has developed a Future Scenario Planning Assessment Tool to use at the project level up to the national scale. The tool is able to span scales, issues and connect landscapes conceptually and spatially. He made a note that the results are preliminary and only provide a conceptual framework. The results of the model can help prioritize management and restoration efforts given multiple goals and objectives like fire protection, restoration or habitat connectivity. The model can help them answer questions such as: How can the Forest Service identify optimal projects given a number of goals, new policy priorities or community concerns for a certain landscape? How can they take data and turn it into potential projects and priorities? What are the trade-offs of having multiple projects with multiple goals? What is the optimal mix?

See Alan's presentation for more details.

Questions & Comments from collaborative members:

- Do the possibility frontier curves take into account the annual Forest Service budget?
 - No. We have not looked at that. These are hypothetical, for example you have \$50 million in your fuels budget this year, and your two objectives include WUI wildfire exposure and ecological departure. What could you use that money for and where would you go, given those objectives? This model can help with that.
- Do these include recent projects on the forest?
 - No. This is 2012 data.
- *Forest Service:* Hopefully the collaborative got valuable insight for when prioritizing how to work across the WWNF. We would like to hear feedback from the collaborative about criteria that is missing in terms of how we could use this model for prioritization of restoration work. This will help us decide where to go for our next project.
- How are you incorporating the East Side Restoration strategy into this discussion and how it affects these projects?
 - We can incorporate any parameters or objectives we would like into this prioritization model. You just have to determine if the data exists and which parameters you want to focus on. We are still trying to determine if this is going to be a valuable tool going forward.
- Does this model take into account metrics related to production and economic value? For example, where the nearest mill is located?
 - No. But it could if someone collected that data and input it into the model.
- From a regional perspective, this is a great way to stimulate conversation about how to set regional priorities for restoration across the landscape. But we need to be incorporating other variables like socioeconomic and cultural objectives. Right now I can see this framework being used as a way to get the conversation going about why or why not we may want to approach a certain area for management. But as it stands right now, I can't see us basing our decisions entirely on the framework's ranking system.
- Alan: We still need to incorporate production capacity or fertility into the model. How long can we maintain certain production rates? How can that be incorporated into the model? That is beyond the scope of the model I have produced and is not something I have worked on, but something that could be looked at in the future if the data exists.
- *Forest Service:* The Possibility Frontier Curves you have shown us only show two variables, but we often have many more objectives when we are looking at a potential restoration project. Can we incorporate many objectives into this model?
 - These models often are most successful with just three objectives. Once you get more than five, they don't make sense and they are not useful any longer. Instead, we recommend incorporating the 3 to 5 main issues that might be the most contentious and having those as your criteria or objectives you are inputting into the model.
- I would like to see issues like wildlife and fisheries elevated to be part of the initial screening when we are using this model. For example, can we use this model to help identify ways we can enhance connectivity across the landscape or habitat for particular kinds of wildlife?
- I would like to see economic feasibility incorporated into the model. We need to look at what industry infrastructure we have in place and items like haul distances, mill location, pulp, saw logs etc. These will be important considerations when deciding on tracts of land to prioritize for restoration and active management.
- Alan: Recommend calling this a framework, not a model. Models have bad connotations.

- *Forest Service:* For next steps, we are going to do a presentation on the model to the Forest Leadership Team. There is general support of this framework on a regional level, but we want their input about how it could work on a local level. We also would like input from the collaborative about how it might be valuable to your decision making and what other items the model should include to help the group prioritize work going forward.
- The collaborative does not have a representative for recreational interests. It would be helpful to make sure we incorporate recreational interests into a model like this.

WWFC DEVELOPED PROJECT

The facilitator reminded the members at the end of the last meeting they said going forward they wanted to take on their own project. How would the group like to move forward?

Questions & Comments from collaborative members:

- The Lower Joseph Creek Project was very unique. The Forest Service provided us information and we provided input to create the Alternatives. The collaborative is in a reactive mode. Do we want to start our new project from the beginning instead it being handed to us?
- I don't understand what "starting a project" entails. Developing a project sounds interesting, but we should think about how much time and resources it will take. Will the collaborative members be producing data? Gathering data? That is a lot of work. Do we have the bandwidth or the time? How? Who? Timeline?
- *Forest Service:* Starting a project together from start to finish, going through the NEPA analysis and process, the data gathering, finding a place where the collaborative want to jointly work on – this could be a great exercise and learning opportunity for the group.

The facilitator summarized that doing a project from start to finish, could build trust and agreement within the group. Lower Joseph Creek was challenging, complex and large. There could be value in doing a project that is smaller and less complex as a group.

The facilitator encouraged the group to think through questions like: (1) Where on the land would you want to do forest management? (2) When might you like to complete the project? (3) What do the treatments look like? (4) How does this align with your mission? (5) How? How will the planning piece be passed off to the Forest Service?

Questions & Comments:

- Speaking to the question of timelines, Lower Joseph Creek has been on an accelerated timeline, and that created challenges. Building relationships takes time, and when we are on such a fast timeline, relationships suffer.
- *Forest Service:* We would reiterate that if the purpose is to learn as a group, we would recommend doing a small project that is not complex, and not on an accelerated timeline like Lower Joseph Creek. Perhaps on a five year timeline?
- I am going to push back. This is going to take a very long time. We are here to increase the pace and scale of restoration to accommodate the communities that are in need of economic development. That is where I am coming from. To take on a project of this magnitude without funding, is a big undertaking. Building relationships is important, but I am worried we will lose key partners who don't have that amount of time to invest.
- I hear what you are saying and that is very helpful to hear. But to play devil's advocate, we could lose people on the other side if we keep pushing for bigger and faster projects, without increasing

the quality of the project. I am interested in doing a smaller project as a group. It may take a long time, but it may pay larger dividends later on.

- Maybe we shouldn't say: 'We will just work on our own project' or 'we will just respond to the Forest Service.' Maybe we should decide if we want to do both? We could spend two to three years working on our own 3,000-acre project, and simultaneously be reviewing Forest Service Projects. It will still be a learning experience and maybe the stuff we are learning about ourselves will help us in future projects.
- The Forest Service should be moving forward on their projects to obtain their sustained cut that needs to be taken out of their forests every year. The collaborative is a separate entity. They shouldn't be waiting for us to make up our minds. If we take on our own project there will be many more partners involved and as a result, more rules and regulations.
- I would like the Forest Service to help us identify a small project related to forest health issues, which we could get through on a quicker timeline and would also satisfy their needs.
- But what is the difference between what we have already been doing as a collaborative and what we are proposing to do? With Lower Joseph Creek, the Forest Service gave us options for projects. We didn't go with one of their alternatives. We created our own "WWFC Alternative." We didn't officially come to consensus.
- Maybe we could provide parameters or general sideboards for a project like, we want a 3,000-acre project, 70 acres should be in warm, dry forests, with a creek running through it, summer habitat by elk and develop a CE (categorical exclusion)?
- When we first got involved in this collaborative I thought we would develop a Zone of Agreement and then advise the Forest Service. Right now we are at a crossroads- should we create our own project or be reactive? Lower Joseph Creek was a large time commitment and a lot of work - this kind of time commitment is not sustainable. I like the idea of choosing a certain kind of project upfront as a group— a project that doesn't have roadless areas. Specific forest types? We should get rid of projects where we have philosophical disagreements within the group. Related to the CE – I need to have a conversation with my folks – the Farm Bill and the CE is not popular.
- This is an interesting discussion – it doesn't have to be one option or another. If we are not a proactive collaborative, this is not a bad thing. The general public knows that we are an entity that provides feedback to the Forest Service. That is okay. That said, we have serious concerns about the Farm Bill provisions and Categorical Exclusions. The collaborative is a useful tool, but not a replacement tool. The CE eliminates public comment, and gives the collaborative more power than the general public. This is especially problematic for groups without the resources to participate on the collaborative. Also, for us, a 3000-acre limit (5 square miles) is really big. What about the specifics of a site? The view sheds? The adjacent lands?
- *Forest Service*: The amount of public participation is discretionary. There is nothing in the CE that states public participation has to cut off at a certain time. The collaborative can be a form of increased participation.

The facilitator suggested the group convene a subcommittee to discuss how the WWFC might take on its own project going forward and report back to the group. The subcommittee includes: Cynthia, Kris (as an advisor), Bruce, Nils and Rex. The facilitator asked what more the group needed to know to move forward. Did the consensus process work? Did the subcommittee work?

- It worked at certain levels. It helped us identify areas that are fertile for consensus, or areas that we will never be able to agree on. It took a lot of time.
- It did work. We created a process that was innovative, and the Forest Service is now discussing riparian areas. But it took a lot of work.

- *Forest Service*: We thought that the effort was very beneficial for forming our decision.
- Is there any science we need to have before looking at East Face?
- I would put a cautionary flag. Science does not always bring us together – it has been more divisive. We can each have our own science, and plenty of scientists have differences of opinion. Scientists don't always operate in the realm of science, politics are involved.

MONITORING COLLABORATIVE FUNCTIONALITY

Alyssa Cudmore is an Edna and Bailey Sussman Fellow and graduate student at the School of Natural Resources and the Environment at the University of Michigan, originally from Polk County in Oregon. She is studying environmental policy and planning and is interested in collaborative, community-based natural resource management and the role of community-based organizations in sustainable rural lands management. Alyssa is serving as an intern with Wallowa Resources and Sustainable Northwest this summer and she will be assisting the collaborative in conducting an assessment of collaborative functionality.

Alyssa will be interviewing operations and sub-committee members and will send a survey for all members and partners to complete. The themes of the evaluation include: (1) Collaborative Goals (2) Representation (3) Communication & Participation (4) Trust (5) Consensus (6) Lower Joseph Creek Project (7) Structure & Logistics (8) Ideas for the future.

Comments from collaborative members:

- Alyssa was encouraged to remind people what the mission of the group is and the goals both in interview and on online survey.
- Is there something about communication to the public? Great to talk about it within the collaborative but often miss the public outreach. Would be good to know how we're doing there.
- On trust question, concerns regarding outreach and participation by communities or Tribes or others who might not be involved
- Follow up question proposed on how people might actually reach a zone of agreement. Might be good to define a zone of agreement.
- Be sure to discuss how we work with the Forest Service.
- Would changing the structure or logistics increase collaboration or participation?

COLLABORATIVE BUSINESS AND NEXT STEPS

- The Lower Joseph Creek comment period will be open for 45 days after the FEIS is released; if any collaborative members think they might object, they are encouraged to bring their concerns to the WWFC prior to objecting.
- The group proposed combining the November/December meeting into one meeting on Wednesday, December 2nd – the operations committee will confirm and report back.
- East Face Field Trip
 - Items to think about:
 - What do you want to get or learn from the Field Trip?
 - What do you want to talk about as a group in August, if the Lower Joseph EIS is coming out in September?
- Subcommittee Created to discuss WWFC taking on its own project going forward. The Subcommittee includes: Cynthia, Kris (as an advisor), Bruce, Nils and Rex.

Meeting adjourned at 3:05 PM.