

**WALLOWA WHITMAN FOREST COLLABORATIVE  
FULL GROUP ASSEMBLY, September 25, 2013  
La Grande Ranger District Conference Room, La Grande OR  
MEETING NOTES**

In Attendance: Bill Gamble, Lori Baird, Jenny Reinhardt, Cynthia Warnock, Renee Coxen, Bill White, Ray Osipovich, Dave Hannibal, Rex Storm, John Williams, Paul Boehne, Barb Wales, Mark Jacques, Vince Naughton, John Buckman, Spencer Hovekamp, Mike Hayward, Mark Davidson, Larry McCalden, Lindsay Warness, Brian Kelly, Susan Jane Brown, Gary Miller, Bruce Dunn, Dick Fleming, Nils Christoffersen, Paul Oester, Veronica Warnock, Trina Evensen, Andrew Spaeth, Bill Aney, Ayn Shlisky

**Agenda Items:**

- 1. Welcome and Introductions**
- 2. Brief recap and discussion of Lower Joseph Creek Watershed Field Trip**
- 3. Update on the Blue Mountain Eastside Strategy Team (BMEST)**
  - a. Identity of team members and their roles
  - b. Expectations of team, region, and collaborative
  - c. Timelines and data gap needs identified so far and WWFC involvement
  - d. Overview of the BMEST team plan for moving forward with Lower Joseph Creek Watershed Assessment
- 4. Forest Collaborative Guest Speakers for future meetings**
- 5. Discussion on future speakers and presentations**
- 6. Other items**

**Lower Joseph Creek Watershed Field Trip**

Meeting notes from the Lower Joseph Creek Watershed Assessment Field Trip of August 28, 2013, were distributed and reviewed. (The full notes are available on the WWFC web site.) A slide show with pictures from the field trip and a summary of the primary points of discussion in the field was presented by Jenny Reinhardt.

With reference to the first stop of the field trip, there was discussion about the difference in the targeted condition in the prescription versus what resulted from implementation. Implementation did not reduce stand stocking as much as prescribed. Is follow-up possible to ensure that the treatment meets the prescription? Moving forward, how do we design for quality control and monitoring?

Stop #2: There was discussion about the 21" rule and need for flexibility on a site by site basis. A 150 year old tree rule would often do more to achieve the desired stand conditions. There was not 100% consensus on this point – although the 150 year old tree rule would be a better application for this particular stand, it should not be generalized.

Stop #3: Discussion considered the abundance of elk residing in this area – current numbers far exceed the management objective for the area.

Stop #4: Understory thinning should be considered in some riparian areas, as stocking has increased over the last half century. Thinning operations would leave stands at a higher stocking rate in riparian areas. The collaborative needs to make sure management objectives are met and addressed. Riparian areas should not be an automatic no-touch area. There was discussion of residual hardwood and managing to encourage their release. Also some discussion of fire issues vs wildlife issues, the need to

maintain snags and large down woody debris, while also treating fuels so riparian areas don't become wildfire corridors.

Discussion then shifted to Old Growth. A question was raised as to whether the collaborative should identify the actual Late-Old Structure stands and designate these as old-growth areas rather than accepting areas currently designated old-growth which don't meet Region 6 definitions for Old Growth. Further discussions are needed on both the "old-growth" and "riparian" issues and priority areas.

Comment: Need to have information updated – there is a terminology disconnect. The Lower Joseph Creek Watershed Assessments is using older stand definitions and labels than the rest of the Blue Mountains. We need to standardize and clarify terminology.

There is a need for a CROSSWALK between old terminology and new terminology and between old methodologies based on EVG and current data systems and USFS handbook guidelines. We need to adopt the terminology that will be represented in the new forest plan, but must be able to interpret that terminology appropriately.

NEW FOREST PLAN: Due out December 2014.

### **Blue Mountain Eastside Strategy Team (BMEST)**

Ayn identified the team members which includes 7 full-time permanent staff in addition to Ayn and Bill. It is an internal team – all USFS employees except for one who is with the Nature Conservancy.

- Bill Aney – Coordinator
- Ayn Shlisky – Team Lead
- Michael Brown – Hydrologist
- Paul Boehne – Fisheries Biologist
- Jenifer Ferriell – Ecologist/Botanist
- Amy Gowan – Sociologist
- Neil McCusker – Vegetation Management Specialist/Silviculturist
- Brian Spradlin - Vegetation Management Specialist/Silviculturist
- Barbara Wales – Wildlife Biologist
- 2 – ½ time people: an administrative assistant and a data analyst

Ayn commented on the benefit of being able to hire the members as a team – not just fill individual position. They were able to put together a suite of people who fill gaps and meet all the needs of the team. If there are any holes in the team, it would be in economics, roads, climate change, and recreation.

Question: What are the team objectives and missions statement? How will the team's transition into this geographic area be addressed? Most people on the team have experience in the Blue Mountains and are at a fairly high level as far as knowledge and experience in their respective fields. The team has been created to help accelerate the pace and scale of restoration, and identify new, more efficient ways to get work done at the scale it needs to be done.

Expectations: There was some discussion of relationships with ranger districts; trying to make their lives easier, not here to undermine their work or create additional work. The team will be working with the WWFC and WR – this project was selected because of the work of collaborative groups.

Project #1 for the team is Lower Joseph Creek, with a projected final NEPA decision by December 2014. This is a very ambitious goal – need to work together as a well-oiled machine, don't allow delays, get around barriers. The BMEST is a dedicated team with no additional responsibilities so can shoot for accelerated restoration.

The two other projects established for the BMEST are the Dry Pine Restoration Project (expected NEPA decision December 2016) and the Strategic Fuel Breaks Project (expected NEPA decision December 2015). The WWFC needs to be able to weigh in on all three projects.

Jenny will get comprehensive information/data to Ayn. The Ranger District has notified Ayn that there is still a lot of data that needs to be collected. The collaborative expressed some frustration by their diagnosis of data gaps. This may be a function of personnel turnover at the Wallow Mountain Ranger District. The WWFC and WR have spent a lot of time and money collecting data as specified by the Ranger District. It must be a priority to identify data gaps so that those needs can be addressed during our next field season.

Question: What is the timeline for figuring out the relationship between the WWFC and BMEST for consultation purposes? Put on the agenda for our next meeting. It is necessary for us to be really comfortable with our working relationship by the end of this calendar year – we need to function effectively and efficiently.

Consultation Timeline: 235-240 days out once the team presents the final planning document.

Question: You have a dedicated team and additional resources. Is there any plan to expand objectives or do additional consultation / planning / implementation. There are some ecological restoration projects (non-timber related) identified in the Lower Joseph Creek – will those be addressed in the plan? It is not out of the question, but must determine the best mechanism for getting work done. The overall goal is to do comprehensive restoration – some of the needs may be parceled out and all goals may not be met. Ecological restoration would reflect positively on the project and team. The collaborative agreed that it is important that we have a comprehensive approach. However, the focus, since 1995 has been on the ecological health and the timber needs have been ignored.

#### **Suggested Future Guest Speakers/Presentation:**

- Starkey Research Station – experimental forest and elk management
  - John Cook
- Landscape attributes, restoration/larger landscape analysis
- Steve Hawkins – assessment n forest scale – watershed condition framework assessment, terrestrial restoration
- NEPA training – one-day session available for collaborative groups
  - Susan Jane Brown could assist
- Forest Ecologist Perspectives – how stands would develop/landscape inertia – need to consider insects and fire danger; can we get ahead of these issues? What is the effect of our actions on these dangers?

- Someone who has been a practitioner/silviculturalist here and in the blues for the past 20-30 years
- Climate change – how will that impact the way we manage the forest (Becky Kerns)
- Landscape context for individual stand treatments. How does management of a specific stand relate to overall landscape in that area? What landscape attributes are we focusing on?
- Socio-economic status of Eastern Oregon. A study is being done by OSU – talk about the human factor of forest management.
- NEPA process / appeals process
- Air quality / smoke management. Roger Ottmeier (?) Emissions, prescribed burning, emissions vs wildfire. Already funded. Need official request from a USFS representative. Also report from State of Oregon Working Group on forest fire, smoke and health impacts

Question: The Collaborative has a lot of work cut out for itself and an ambitious calendar – when are we supposed to get our work done if all our time is spent listening to guest speakers and watching presentations? Any future speakers need to be contributing to the mission, purpose and priority work of the collaborative. The key is to find speakers who can help resolve questions or strengthen consensus around critical issues that the collaborative is wrestling with – questions relevant to Lower Joe, East Face or to larger landscape planning and the identification of the next priority project area.

Operations Committee: Meets next week and will figure out the agenda / plan / calendar for the next 6-8 months. We want to help advance our objectives via these speakers, not stand in the way of making progress on our goals. We have a standing agenda item – the Lower Joseph Creek parcel and the BMEST process / needs / feedback.

**Coalition of Collaboratives:** Perhaps we can get a representative from one of the Idaho collaboratives who focus on large-scale management. We can ask them to share their successes and methods and how we can imitate their process. (Payette / Boise / Clearwater)

**Schedule of upcoming meetings:** Lindsay moved that the meeting time be changed to 10:00 to 3:00 on the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of each month. Many in the collaborative agreed that this was preferred during the winter due to driving conditions, shorter-days, increased likelihood of deer on the road, etc. We can revisit this in the spring when the days get longer. Also, we will keep the meeting date (4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday) for October and November, but cancel the December meeting.

Meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.