

**Wallowa Whitman Forest Collaborative**  
**April 23, 2014**  
**La Grande Ranger District Conference Room**  
**10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.**

**Participants:** Patrick Shannon, Barbara Wales, Ayn Shlisky, Michael Brown, Ray Osipovich, Mike Billman, Lindsay Warness, Emily Jane Davis, Bruce Dunn, Larry McCaldin, Mark Jacques, Paul Oester, Rob Klavins, Brian Kelly, John Buckman, John Williams, Ron Rochna, Darlene Rochna, Chris Heffernan, John Laurence, Vernita Ediger, Mike Straw (arrived late), Bill Gamble (arrived late), Melanie Sutton (arrived late), Nils D Christoffersen,

**On Phone:** Susan Jane Brown, Billie Jo George

**Recorder:** Nils D Christoffersen

**New OSU Extension Statewide Position** - Forest Collaboration: Emily Jane Davis was recently hired for this position. Her duties are to provide technical assistance to Oregon's forest collaboratives, act as a scientific information liaison, and contribute to teaching a course on collaboration at OSU.

**Lower Joseph Creek Restoration Project** – Status of Planning – Ayn Shlisky and Michael Brown [power point slides] – Lower Joseph Creek is one of three project that the Blue Mountain ID Team is working on. It is the smallest of the three. Lower Joseph Creek is piloting innovation in analysis, process, and working with collaboratives. It is innovative in working at a landscape scale, crafting a strong NEPA purpose and need in partnership with local collaborative groups, and its emerging alternatives.

The Team is currently undertaking effects analysis and developing the range of alternatives for Lower Joe. Anticipate a proposed action with two other alternatives. Still plan to have final EIS and Draft Record of Decision (ROD) by end of 2014.

The team has stratified Lower Joseph Management Areas, with three key areas for vegetation treatment – timber production area (dominant management area), wildlife / timber management area, and HCNRA dispersed recreation / timber.

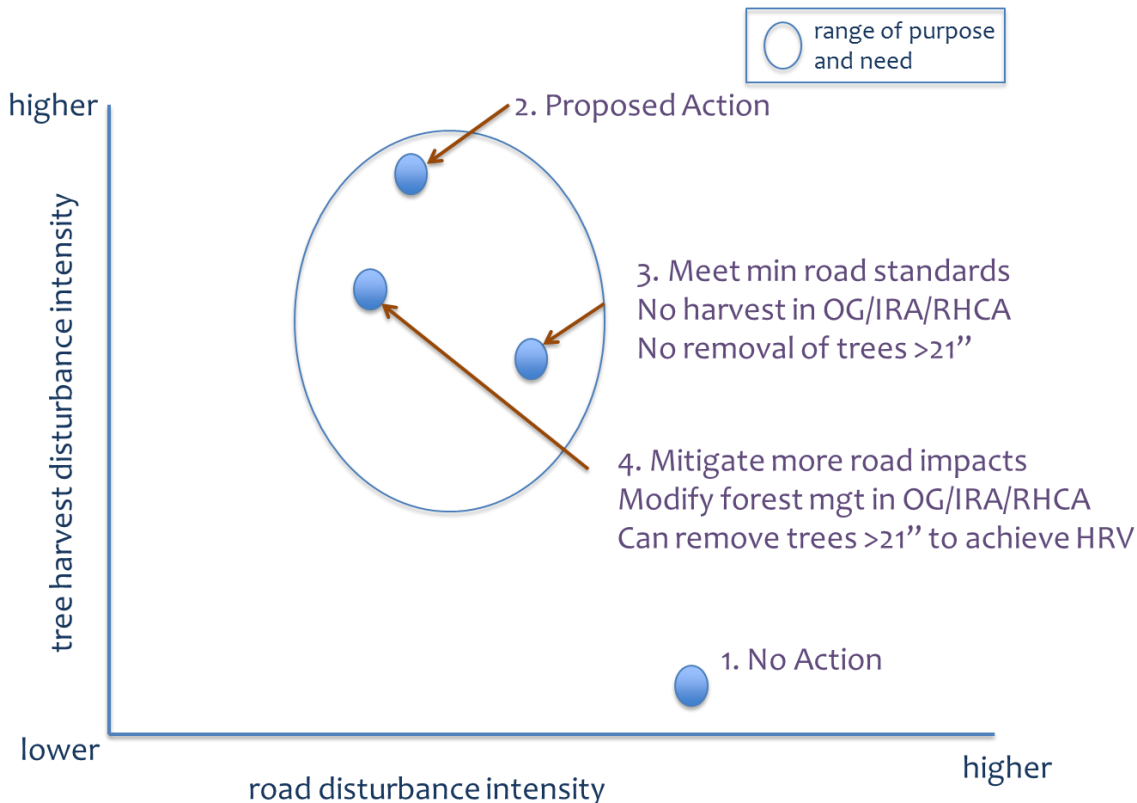
- Timber production – 28% of area – most outside IRA
- Wildlife / Timber – 36% of area – half outside IRA

Alternative development started with an analysis of the issues raised from public comment. The issues highlight key themes, and alternative ways to management landscape that address public concerns or values. The themes are combined and become integrated alternatives.

**The three issues** were driving alternatives are:

- 1) The best road network to address multiple uses and resource needs
- 2) The vegetation treatments needed to achieve the purpose and need
- 3) What types of forest management are needed in Old Growth (Management Area 15) and IRAs

**Alternative Development.** Eleven themes were established that address the range of activity needed to address each issue (e.g., degree of vegetation treatment in IRAs and MA 15, relative optimization of road access vs aquatic restoration, etc). These were evaluated and combined into four alternatives for detailed analysis.



**Actions common to all action alternatives**

- Favor leaving early seral tree species
- Achieve trends in patch size distributions toward HRV
- Reintroduce fire to the majority of the landscape, where ecologically and socially appropriate
- Retain large trees of early seral species and old trees of any species
- Restore wetlands and springs to allow them to play their natural roles
- Conduct a roads analysis to assess the transportation system and actions needed
- Make use of the existing road network for most road-related activities
- Road closures will be focused on reducing resource damage, and improving resource conditions
- Establish two RNAs (Horse pasture, Haystack Rock)

- Maintain and enhance culturally significant resources, settings, viewsheds, and TES habitat
- Develop a monitoring strategy
- Connected actions: road maintenance, activity fuels treatment, hazard tree cutting, etc.

The range of treatment between alternatives is focused on the extent and location of prescribed burning, the selective harvest of trees larger than 21" dbh, the extent and types of treatment in Old Growth, IRA and RHCA management areas, and the extent and types of action relevant to the road system and use.

#### ***Four Alternatives<sup>1</sup>:***

*Proposed action* –The most commercial harvest. Moderate in terms of road disturbance intensity.

*No action* –no harvest and no change to road density (does not meet forest standards).

*Alternative 3* – This alternative has a lower acreage of harvest, and leans towards more road access. It would meet minimum road standards. No mechanical treatment in Old Growth/IRA/RHCA and no cutting of trees larger than 21".

*Alternative 4* – More harvest than Alternative 3, but less than the Proposed Action. More restrictions on road access. Modify forest stands in OG/IRA/RHCA, including some large trees. It would undertake pre-commercial thinning only in IRA/OG and optimize aquatic restoration.

Indicator	Metric	No Action	Proposed Action	Alt 3	Alt 4
Single tree selection	Acres	0	14,249 <sup>1</sup>	10,554	11,399 <sup>3</sup>
Single tree selection – old growth areas	Acres	0	1,661 <sup>1</sup>	0	1,329 <sup>3</sup>
Group selection	Acres	0	2,780 <sup>1</sup>	1,266	2,224 <sup>3</sup>
Intermediate treatment (mistletoe)	Acres	0	372 <sup>1</sup>	190	298 <sup>3</sup>
Savanna (grassland restoration)	Acres	0	1,179 <sup>1</sup>	1,177	943 <sup>3</sup>
Stand improvement (pre-commercial)	Acres	0	5,268	2,555	5,268
Road construction	Miles	0	1.5	TBD	TBD
Road closure/decommissioning	Miles	0	45 <sup>2</sup>	TBD	TBD
Road reconstruction/maintenance	Miles	0	24	TBD	TBD
Temporary road construction	Miles	0	26	TBD	TBD
Seasonal road closure	Miles	0	40 <sup>2</sup>	TBD	TBD
Riparian planting	Acres	0	TBD	TBD	TBD
Riparian Habitat Conservation Area Trts	Acres	0	TBD	0	TBD
Aquatic organism passage improvements	#	0	TBD	TBD	TBD
Riparian and range fencing	Miles	0	23.5	23.5	23.5
Wildland fire (planned and unplanned)	Acres	0	≤90k	≤90k	≤90k
Stream bank stabilization	#	0	TBD	TBD	TBD
Establish RNAs	Acres	0	763	763	763
Spring and pond improvements	#	0	27	27	27

<sup>1</sup> Estimates currently include treatments in RHCAs of all stream classes. RHCA treatments in Class 1-3, and some 4 streams will be removed for final.

<sup>2</sup> Represents existing decisions in the project area.

<sup>3</sup> These are modeled acres for this effects analysis presentation and will be replaced with true numbers with finalization of alternatives.

Each Alternative is analyzed and classified against a common set of decision criteria of specific indicators and metrics.

#### Decision Criteria

Indicator	Metrics
Veg. structure and composition	% vegetation departure from HRV
Large/old tree structure	Tree size class distribution by PVT
Vegetation pattern	% of landscape treated with ICO prescription
Insects and Pathogens	Change in I/D susceptibility rating
	Change in degree of mistletoe infestation
Native plant diversity	Diversity score
	Relative contribution to TES suitable habitat
Understory productivity	Annual production
Ecological resiliency – fire	% Fire regime departure from HRV
	Beneficial versus adverse effects of fire on high resource values
Watershed condition	% proper/at risk/impaired
Riparian areas	Trend relative to riparian mgt objectives (RMOs) in RHCAs
Wildlife	% Habitat departure for MIS
Social and economic contributions	Timber volume removed as a result of restoration
	Restoration jobs
Roads	Miles of road treated to mitigate resource concerns

A separate team consisting of staff from the USFS Regional Office and the Ecosystem Workforce Program are evaluating the economic impacts of the alternatives, and full implementation of the project.

The Blue Mountain ID Team completed preliminary analysis of the vegetation patterns and conditions against HRV. The analysis revealed:

- Similar patterns and distributions of land cover types over time.
- *Dry upland forest* is the dominant type of forest in the Lower Joseph Creek project area.
- Fire impacts are variable but about 15% of the landscape was impacted annually, and 2% of the landscape was impacted annually by insects and disease. Mountain pine beetle was the dominate agent, impacted on average 1% of the landscape annually, followed by mistletoe, impacted on average about 0.5% of the landscape annually.

## Effects analyses

- State-and-transition simulation modeling, and Forest Vegetation Simulation (FVS) will be used to compare differences between alternatives relative to trends in vegetation structure and composition, insect and pathogen risk, fire regime departure, wildlife habitat departure, and timber volume removed as a result of restoration.
  - Preliminary analyses show that all of the action alternatives reduce departure from HRV in cover type, tree size, % cover (density), and stand-level pattern, with the Proposed Action generally having the greatest positive effect. None of the action alternatives resolve the serious deficiency in western larch and lodgepole pine within the analysis area.
  - White-headed woodpecker and western bluebird habitats increase in abundance under the action alternatives, and decrease under the No Action alternative.
  - Goshawk and pileated woodpecker habitats are stable or slightly increase in abundance under all alternatives. Current habitat abundance is at or near HRV.
- Burn probability modeling will also be used to evaluate fire regime departure.
- A new elk nutrition and habitat model will be used to analyze relative effects of the alternatives on elk.
- RHCAs will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to determine relative achievement of riparian management objectives.
- Watershed Condition Framework analysis will be used to determine watershed condition. Eight of ten sub-watersheds are currently functioning properly, two are functioning at risk.
- The Ecosystem Workforce Program's "Blues Calculator" and IMPLAN will be used to analyze relative economic contributions.
- Roads analysis will be used to determine the relative degree of mitigation of road-related resource concerns.

Preliminary analysis at the larger landscape scale suggests that the proposed treatments are insufficient to have a significant impact on desired future conditions, i.e. to move forest stand conditions closer to HRV. But this analysis only assumes this one treatment – if there is a plan to re-enter that needs to be factored into the model and run again.

The question was posed about the data, and whether data collected by Wallowa Resources / NRAC including basal area, trees per acre, crown cover, etc. were used in the model. It was understood that it was critical to reduce stand density and basal area to allow for release of remaining stand growth, and larger openings were required to encourage early seral species to regenerate. The group queried what level of treatment was needed to move the landscape closer to HRV and stand condition goals.

The models help analyze and think about change – they do not generate a precise projection of the anticipated outcomes. The model helps identify shifts in patterns / structure, etc.

Questions were raised about connectivity and patch sizes. Critical issues are permeability – and connectivity across the larger landscape, and from stand to stand.

Analysis has been conducted on species of concern and interest including white headed woodpecker, western bluebird, goshawks, owls, etc. The action alternatives improve habitat for these species.

Consideration was given to the new Elk Model – a summer range model – where summer nutrition is key limiting factor – especially late summer. % canopy cover, existing veg type, potential veg, precipitation, and date. In dry forest types, not gaining much nutritional value from treatment – senesce by late summer (will gain early spring forage). In cool moist forest – can be an advantage if open canopy up to 30-45% - will get nutritional advantage from additional forage.

Variables important to connectivity include land cover class, road density, elevation, housing density, slope. Road density is the only variable impacted by this project – and that variable only has a significant influence on carnivores.

The prescriptions in the project are light – none of them should significantly impact connectivity. Not proposing any regeneration harvests. The group selects are ½ to 4 acre openings, and will be sinuous polygons not squares. These prescriptions should improve habitat. Restoration action maintains basic forest structure. At larger landscape scale relevant to wildlife in our region, the treatments will not interrupt forest cover. Therefore connectivity should not be an issue.

With respect to Watershed Condition Framework ratings - only two sub-watersheds not functioning properly (Joseph/Couger Creek; and Joseph/Sumac Creek). The proposed treatments do not have significant impact on these conditions. Within the composite scores used for WCF rating, only two are terrestrial (biological, and physical).

The team has not yet analyzed forage productivity and native species diversity. They will meet on May 8 to update range / grass / forage data. One issue is putting seed back on the landscape after disturbance.

All of the information provided in this meeting is preliminary – shows approach to analyze alternatives against the goal (purpose and need)

Scoping did not identify any specific concerns with the proposals to work on springs, ponds, fencing. So the action alternatives include the proposed management action from NRAC report. The team recognizes that spring and pond development could be a concern to some – although good to assist grazing distribution. However most of what was proposed by NRAC is not new developments – it is action to restore / improve old developments which will generate benefits to riparian areas. In the event of a new spring development there would be analysis to understand the effects.

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## Geo-Spatial Interface Presentation – Mike Straw

The G-I system provides federal agency staff immediate access to a lot of data. It automates the drudge work of compiling and clipping data, while keeping connections between data and products that work with this data. It still leaves the need for GIS and resource personnel to interpret the compiled data.

With the G-I system, 10-15 minutes of query time – with 1-2 hour computer run time – generates a lot of data in a compatible format. Saves up to a week or more of GIS coordinator time.

The system can assist in building new alternatives or tweaking alternatives. It also helps with the identification of an area – and what data resources exist for that area.

Mike Straw ran a demo on Lower Joseph Creek Project Area – 5<sup>th</sup> HUC watershed and then on Upper Powder. Mike demonstrated the potential of building different alternatives, manipulating data / layers, and generating reports.