

Wallowa Whitman Forest Collaborative  
East Face Field Trip  
September 22, 2015

Present: Nils Christoffersen, Rex Storm, Bill Gamble, Karen Hardigg, Lindsay Warness, Eyley Aldrich, Larry McCalden, Josh White, Tom Burry, Brian Kelly, Susan Jane Brown, Neil McCusker, Darlene Rochna, Ron Rochna, John Williams, Rob Klavins, Kristen Wright, Danielle Packard, Andrew Spaeth, Dave (USFS staff).

### **Introductions**

Each member introduced themselves. The group discussed the background and history of the project. East Face was developed with support from the Wallowa Whitman Forest Collaborative. A sub-group of the collaborative authored a draft purpose and need, which was adopted by the Forest Service.

The purpose of the field trip is to 1) spend time together in the field, outside the office, getting to know each other; 2) visit moist mixed conifer sites treated within the last 20 years, which are representative of proposed treatments in East Face; and 3) consider whether the WWFC might provide shared comments on the East Face project and if so, what the process or comments might look like.

### **Stop 1 – Sugar Project**

Sugar is a 52 acre unit in Management Area 1. The stand was commercially thinned in 2013, whip felled in 2014 to prepare for a prescribed burn, and will be concentrated burned in 2016. The goal is for the remaining stand to have 100-120 sq. ft. of basal area per acre, which is the same as the proposed remaining basal area in many of the treated areas in East Face.

Questions and discussion:

What does the Forest Service mean by changing the structure and composition?

There is high understory retention and there is an under-representation of large tree component. Move towards large tree and promote fire tolerant species.

What is whip falling?

Post-harvest prescription to cut down trees damaged during harvest and aid in providing a better burn product. Whip falling is also described as “drop and lop” at times and may result in removal of undesirable species or those species that the agency does not want to manage for in the future.

What is concentration burning?

Concentration burning is also called “jackpot” burning and simply means burning piles or concentrations of fuel and slash where it falls.

In this type of moist mixed conifer site would there be one entry or multiple entries? A member shared that logging does some damage to the ground so if you come back every 30-40 years as opposed to every 20 years and take more volume initially you could reduce some of the effects of logging. Grand fir may decline after the prescription so should do regeneration harvest. Need different prescriptions across the landscape. Heterogeneity in age class in order to do more regeneration harvest – need to open up canopy – some openings are better stocked with seedlings.

Is the agency discriminating against certain species (i.e. Grand fir)?

There is a need to manage in a way that promotes early seral species and in cases remove grand fir. The objectives on the NFS are not the same as the objectives of private land owners.

A member suggested that areas that are currently considered understory retention (UR) may be a place for active management and there is a deficiency in old-forest multi-strata (OFMS) and old-forest single strata (OFSS) across the landscape. Another harvest in 20 years may push this area towards something a different stand structure.

A participant shared that it was really impressive how the site moves from dry scab to quite moist with Pacific Yew and sword fern in a relatively short distance.

In the cumulative effects analysis are all lands considered or just private lands?

The agency has to include all lands. Members suggested that management activities should be placed within the larger context. The number of acres across the landscape varies depending on whether or not you include both public and private lands or only look at the public lands. As a follow up the group will continue to discuss how to evaluate the number of total forested acres in the area and the number of acres designated for different management regimes.

An overarching question was raised at the end— what are we managing for? Ecological, social, or economic objectives? Can't it be more than one?

### **Lunch Stop**

The group was posed with a number of questions including: What does it mean for the WWFC to be successful with the East Face project? Is it important for the WWFC to develop shared comments on the East Face project? What would be an effective process to advance conversations on East Face?

A participant suggested that on East Face the group try to get ahead of some potentially difficult issues – in particular the potential wilderness area and other undeveloped lands conversation. The process is different depending on whether or not the Forest is using the new forest planning process or the old project-level process.

In moist mixed conifer it may be helpful to hire an intern or a forester to study the current and historic forest condition, reconstruct fire history, and help the collaborative better understand how the stands have changed over time and if there is a need for restoration. Old aerial photos may also help develop a better understanding of any potential openings that would have naturally occurred within this forest type across the landscape. Future collaborative learning and agreement could be developed based on that work. It could be complex to implement something like this, but there are some students and practitioners that would be helpful to engage. James Johnston has studied fire in roadless areas and is developing an old-growth grand fir guide to compliment the Van Pelt guidelines. This could also play into a larger strategy of engaging the OSU College of Forestry in Eastside restoration work.

A participant suggested that the group work on defining what there is agreement on and what there isn't agreement on. The level of specificity of the agreement may depend on the issue. In some cases, it will be important to try to go a bit deeper and resolve some of these issues and perhaps try to follow through on the issues through implementation and monitoring.

Another member suggested that a success would be fire wise protection of private property in the area.

The process moving forward should work to integrate lessons learned from Lower Joseph Creek and the group should consider opportunities to learn together and conduct multi-party monitoring. One person

reminded the group about what stage of the process we're in. Success at the end of the comment period might look different than at the end of the project and NEPA process. This is only the draft

#### Lunch Outcomes/Next Steps

- WWFC needs to develop a shared understanding of land ownership and management – acres, designations, etc. through a mapping exercise
- Workshop on moist mixed forests/science presentations
- Follow up with Oregon Solutions Intern
- Likely some attempt to provide shared comments on East Face based on responses

#### **Stop 2 – Dark Horn**

Dark Horn is a 40 acre unit in Management Area 1 (MA 1), timber production. The unit was harvested to salvage mortality due to an insect outbreak in 1994, and then underburned in 1999. In 2000, over 13,000 trees were planted (35% Western Larch, 50% Ponderosa Pine, and 15% Douglas Fir). In 2013 the unit was pre-commercially thinned. The regeneration harvests on East Face are likely to look similar with respect to overstory and species composition.

#### Questions and Discussion:

Is part of the objective in East Face regeneration?

Proposed regeneration treatments in East Face are focused in Grand Fir and Douglas Fir stands. Replanting in East Face is likely to be somewhat different than Dark Horn, but there will be some planting as well as natural regeneration that is expected post-treatment. In East Face, most of these treatments fit into Priority Area 1, where the objective is to reduce surface fuel levels. There are likely to be more fuels in moister sites and there may not be agreement among the collaborative about how to treat those areas. A number of members shared that snag recruitment and retention should be an objective in these types of treatments in East Face. Members also shared a concern about how some of these treatments may affect future yields. In regards to fuels, the purpose of this type of treatment is to reduce surface fuels and reduce the potential for a crown fire. Replanting and natural regeneration should promote larch and early seral species that are more fire resistant. These treatments are considered part of the larger network strategic fuels breaks.

When would maintenance work be done again on this site or in East Face in these types of treatments?

These areas will continue to see fuel loading if fires don't come through. It depends on a host of factors and it's difficult to say when the agency would reenter the stand.

The most similar treatments on Lower Joseph Creek, near McCarthy Ridge Road, are the group selection treatments, which create openings that were part of the landscape pattern.

The forest has a partnership with Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation to work on these types of treatments, in part, to leave cover and create openings for wildlife connectivity and forage. A member shared that this type of treatment could meet multiple objectives including creating strategically-placed fuel breaks, helping encourage elk to use the national forest lands as opposed to the adjacent private lands, and the sales would likely be economically viable.

The facilitator handed out a note card to each person and asked everyone to write down: 1) what would success on East Face look like for the collaborative, 2) what process should the collaborative use to

move forward on East Face, and 3) if the group developed a “shared letter” or some type of consensus position, what should be included in that letter? Responses will be collected and used to inform the East Face process.

### **Stop 3 – Mount Emily**

This is a 67 acre unit in Management Area 1 within the wildland urban interface (WUI). The unit was commercially thinned in 2006, then whip felled and masticated in 2008. Proposed future treatment is to re-enter the stand in 20-30 years. This site is likely to look similar to moist sites with proposed immediate treatments in East Face.

The target basal area for the site is 120 and the treatment resulted in a basal area of 116. The location is strategic relative to the Grand Ronde basin and river valley below where there are privately-owned forest lands and homes. The treatments extend one-quarter mile from the road. There were accompanying fire wise dollars spent along the base of Mount Emily on private lands. The quarter mile distance made sense because it tied into other treatments and natural barriers. Strategic fuels breaks have to be placed both within and outside the WUI in order to adequately prepare and protect homes and create defensible areas where a fire could be suppressed. The fuels breaks provide fire managers with options, especially in seasons where there are scarce resources. It may have been more desirable to create one-half mile fuel breaks looking back on this project.

Other issues that need to be explored further include the potential tradeoffs of this type of treatment relative to wildlife connectivity. Roads and elk habitat are also important to consider, especially if they have some positive or negative effect on elk. These treatments in cool-moist OFMS need to be considered within the bigger picture. If fuel breaks help to manage fire better and allow for the agency to use wildfires to perform some of the restoration work that could be helpful in building support for these types of treatments in the moist forest. Members of the group also expressed an interest in learning more about how East Face fits into the larger strategy and fire use plan that the agency is advancing.

The intent, at least in part, of these types of treatments is to stop some of the more “reckless” fire activities that are undertaken during a wildfire such as bulldozing a fire line. If the forest can plan ahead and create fuels breaks on the ground it can shift the wildfire management strategy in the future. A member suggested that it would be helpful if the collaborative could meet with the fuels specialist to better understand the overall strategy and how the fuels breaks proposed in East Face fit into that strategy. In terms of both the management and natural processes aspects, it would be good to get some assurances that there is a longer-term strategy and that the fuels breaks fit into that effort.

The google map layers for East Face were requested by a few members of the group.

The field trip ended around 4:00 PM.