

WALLOWA WHITMAN FOREST COLLABORATION  
FULL GROUP ASSEMBLY July 24, 2013  
East Face Project Field Trip  
MEETING NOTES

In Attendance: Mark Penninger, Ray Osterpovich, Mark Jacques, Paul Oester, Jon Paustian, Vince Naughton, Jenny Reinhardt, Rex Storm, Bruce Dunn, Bill White, John Laurence, Tom Montoya, Dick Flemming, Dave Powell, David Salo, Dan Kinney, Joe Sciarrino, Kat Naughton, Gretchen Sausen, Susan Jane Brown, Julie Tarvin, Arlene Blumton, Laura Navarrete, Lindsay Warness, Fred Warner, Nils Christoffersen, Tim Lillebo, Patrick Shannon, Brian Kelly, Paul Hessburg, Willie Crippen, John Buckman, Lane Parry, Chris Heffernan, Larry McCalden, Ken Gebhardt, Gunner Carwash, Nick Myatt, Bill Gamble, Mark Davidson

**6 stops on East Face Project**

**Agenda of Field Trip Stops and Discussion:**

Primary Objective today is dialogue and discussion through the collaboration process and ideas.

**STOP 1 - Overview of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife – Elkhorn Wildlife Area**

**– Pilcher Creek Reservoir –**

- Overview of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Elkhorn Wildlife Area
- Interface between State, private and public lands, and wildland urban interface
- Opportunities to implement/integrate treatments across ownerships to reduce risk of fire/enhance forest resiliency, and achieve wildlife habitat objectives

Overview of stop:

Public Lands – Forest Service

- a. Interface along boundary – 20 miles with private and ODF&W wildlife area (3 miles are Elk Horn Wildlife Area)
- b. Lands along Forest Service boundaries include: Hancock Timber, Private landowners, BLM and ODF&W Elk Horn Wildlife Refuge
- c. Forest Service objectives would be consistent with the Cohesive Wildfire Strategy

Elk Horn Wildlife Refuge: ODF&W

- d. Not managed since 1971 – North portion is overstocked - excess trees/acre resulting in minimal ground vegetation and little to no wildlife use. Closed Canopy with no late successional. Most ridgelines are ponderosa pine and overstocked but less than north portion of refuge.
- e. Mistletoe in DF, PP with signs of Bark Beetle activity. Mistletoe activity is across property lines. Important to start addressing these issues.
- f. Management Plan would be focus on improving Wildlife Habitat and Forage
- g. There is need to create skips and gaps to promote Late Old Structure and wildlife cover (Dave Powell)
- h. Roads are not used and in draws. It would be good to relocate them.
- i. Challenge is lack of management on public lands to draw elk off private lands(fields).
- j. Refuge is host to other wildlife also: Eagle nest on Butte near Pilcher Reservoir.

- k. Cultural resource @ Pilcher estimated at 7-10,000 years old – now underwater.
- l. Recently hired a cultural archeologist to begin surveys. Ground disturbance mitigations may be needed such as treatment on frozen ground.
- m. Looking for help from partners with expertise on native seed
- n. Concerns include: wildlife, forest health, fire hazard and fire danger, bull trout habitat.
- o. ODFW is lacking the budget and in-house expertise to complete NEPA – National Environmental Policy Act.
- p. Elk count fluctuates in numbers with seasonal severities. There are 10 different winter feed sites; one for deer.

#### Discussion at stop 1:

- a. Important for this effort of boundary treatments to be a Collaborative effort with FS, ODF&W, private landowners, National marine fisheries, etc.
- b. Human caused wildfire is of concern during hunting season particularly in October.
- c. Non-game considerations include: Great Gray Owls, Pileated woodpeckers, Goshawks. There is a beaver compound on adjacent private lands.
- d. There may be opportunities for re-introduction of fire to be brought to the table with the collaborative.
- e. The primary objective is to draw the elk off of private lands and onto the refuge and Forest Service lands and reduce crop damage particularly in the winter months. Through this project Forest Service can increase forage production for use by elk during spring, summer, and fall seasons and keep elk at higher elevations longer.
- f. A starting point could be to use mapping to illustrate where early seral conditions would be and what it would look like. Use elevation and aspect combined to identify upper elevation site treatments. The site would dictate optimum areas for treatment and promotion of forage. Treatments should be designed with maintenance in mind. (Paul Hessburg)
- g. The higher elevation areas have relatively low potential for growth. Snow depth limits the area for winter forage. Option could be to utilize Starkey Research for hiding cover, thermal cover and best types of forage.

#### **STOP 2 - Intermingled dry and moist upland forests**

- Discussion of disturbance regimes and treatment options in areas with intermixed dry and moist upland forests. Species at location were Douglas fir, ponderosa pine, some western larch. Mistletoe in the larch.

#### Discussion:

- a. Unit forest stocking is currently 100 to 120 Basal area. There have been some past entries.
- b. area is winter range, critical bull habitat
- c. multistory large tree numbers (Old forest multi-stratum – OFMS) are ok/within historic range of variability (HRV); single story large tree (Old Forest single stratum – OFSS) is at 3% and should be between 40 – 46%
- d. Indicator species shows different scales of plant associations; twin flower present doesn't necessarily move it into a moist site, it does indicate a more productive site with deeper ash. This site is likely a pinegrass site with moist inclusions. Indicator species are present following years without natural disturbance, possibility of different indicators with disturbance consistent with historical range. Charlie Johnson's Plant Association of the Wallowa's and the

Snake River Providence provides a guide on small site. In this case twinflower would be at a small scale and pine grass at a landscape scale. (Dave Powell)

- e. Stands are delineated based on forest characteristics of the area. When forest characteristics change a new stand is delineated based on that forest. Objectives could also drive the stand delineation in terms of management approaches.
- f. Plant associations appear to be more mosaic. Understory DF, PP, WL coming in. Separate out micro sites or go bigger overall with indicators.
- g. Scattered DF, WL, PP would be excellent leave trees. Older GF valuable for wildlife habitat-birds.
- h. Keep in mind how it fits into the larger landscape scale in terms of fire frequency, fire regime, and fire effects. Historically, the landscape was impacted by burning that occurred in small pockets and infrequent big events creating mosaics. Use that window to look at landscape treatment opportunities. Past disturbance patterns were impacted by topography and vegetation types. Landscape was a patchwork of fuel bed, surface vegetation and canopy fuels. The stand scale had variability in clumpiness. A lot of fire regime evidence supports gaps and skip concept. Andrew Larson and Derek Churchill, *Tree spatial patterns in fire-frequent forests of western North America, including mechanisms of pattern formation and implications for designing fuel reduction and restoration treatments*. (Paul Hessburg)
- i. Vary treatments for wildlife purposes through corridors and clumps, re-introduce fire, single storied stands, etc. Allow some sites to indicate the Basal Areas, the stands are dynamic and will continue to change.
- j. Silviculture focus is stand conditions and health. There is a desire for an integrated approach with silviculture and other resources working together from the start. Marking guidelines should capitalize on multi-diverse resource approach through early field reconnaissance. Each resource must understand the other disciplines language and concepts, for example what does 60 Basal area look like.

### **STOP 3 - Dry upland forest restoration - Winter Range/Timber**

- Appropriate patch size/scale of treatments (ridgetop to draw bottom) and creation of landscape fuel break.
- Economics of alternative harvest systems (skyline, helicopter) required to treat landscape

#### **Discussion:**

- a. Expect to see more Open conditions on southerly aspects. Landscape characteristics influence stands. South slopes dense but north slopes higher density.
- b. 35% + slopes – Helicopter option is becoming a less option with rising prices. Short skyline system with good suspension would work but it must have the capacity available for companies to move equipment. Some local companies working in western Oregon. There needs to be enough cable ground to support local contractors to get equipment to stay in the area. Aggressive treatments with 5000 bf/acre to make it economical, 8 to 10,000 bf/acre is better. Line logging can leave less foot print on the ground. The idea was suggested of possibility of using equipment called an Off Road Jammer similar to what Idaho has used.
- c. It may be difficult when going from 115 basal area down to 60 basal area with an average size of 11" to 12". If larger trees have less than 30% crown ration they would likely be cut to get stand down to recommended basal area.
- d. Objectives will drive the desired basal area. Prescription should be driven by what is best for the forest with collaborative effort toward sound ecological treatment.

- e. Collaboration is creating project resembling a three legged stool with Economics, social, and ecological needs.
- f. Operating Principles are designed not only for ecological restoration and sustainability but community and economics sustainability as well. Most log mills aren't cutting large trees anymore; the few that remain may not be around much longer.
- g. Restoration is needed from past practices. Large trees provide resiliency, the average log at the Elgin mill is 9 – 18".
- h. A variety of objectives can drive rationale for treatment with different tradeoffs. Examples include: wildfire risk for protection, stand density reduction for ecological benefits, and forage. Landscape should be designed with skips and gaps regardless of logging system. This is more efficient than 60 basal area over an entire area. Also, some managed lands can be treated more intensely than others. Management Areas should also drive the treatment Objectives.
- i. The Eastside Strategy Forest Restoration on Monday discusses the option of treating both sides of roads for defensible space over multiple forests.
- j. There is also landscape inertia to consider. What will happen even with best intentions? Consider the area, the seed rain (seed source) is it DF, GF, WL etc. This could potentially allow issues to continue to occur. In order to make a dent on the landscape the "scale" of the problem needs to drive the "scale" of the treatment. Larger, more aggressive treatments in strategic locations are needed in response to the inertia. (Paul Hessburg)
- k. Also look forward on conditions in the future. There is an expectation of average annual temperatures rising with that comes more fires and species shifts. Consider risk assessment and magnitude of the consequences over the next 50 to 100 years for both treating or not treating the landscape. Ask yourself, "What is the consequence(s) if I am wrong and climate predictions are right"? (Dave Powell)
- l. Also consider the concept of the 2 Rs – resistance and resilience. Resistance involves things we can do in the short term to help ecosystems withstand the effects of climate change (such as drought over the next few decades). Resilience involves longer-term strategies, such as selecting for (or planting if need be) the tree species that are most drought-resistant, fire-resistant, etc. (Dave Powell)

#### **STOP 4 - Early-mid seral moist upland forest**

- Stem exclusion moist forest plantation in Management Area 1 – Timber Production  
Emphasis
- Discussion of treatment options and objectives

#### **Discussion:**

- a. Area is old Anthony Lakes Fire, approximately 20,000 acres, that was aerial seeded with Lodge pole pine after the fire. Stands are stem exclusion, which means the canopy is very tight and is preventing understory vegetation to occur. There is high dominate inter tree competition.
- b. Objective for the stand would be to promote health and vigor in western larch and thin out the lodge pole pine. Local silviculturalist would promote the idea of taking all lodge pole pine and leave the western larch.
- c. There are opportunities to promote young willows within the area. Option would be to not plant and see if shrub and diverse species occur. Understory vegetation will likely have dramatic respond to treatment.

- d. Dave Powell referenced: Lodgepole pine development after early spacing in the Blue Mountains of Oregon. Res. Pap. PNW-RP-503. 24 p. You can find the publication at the following web site: [http://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/pubs/pnw\\_rp503.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/pubs/pnw_rp503.pdf)  
The publication is based entirely on plots established in the 19,500-acre Anthony burn which occurred in 1960 (same burn as our field trip stop). Cochran and Dahms (1998) studied lodgepole pine development after early spacing in the Blue Mountains and found that if thinning was delayed past a mean stand height of 9 feet, it was very difficult to delay or prevent crown recession, and that once lodgepole pine crowns recede up the stem, they don't come back down again. They concluded that early spacing control was crucial to allow development of wide crowns and thereby achieve elk cover requirements (defined as 50-70% canopy cover). (Dave Powell)
- e. Need to develop a prescription for continued maintenance of stands to protect the investment.
- f. Avoid getting into a corner with Fire Regimes. It is not one kind of recipe but "Landscape" patches. It could easily be an area of western larch and dominate grasses. Areas set into shrub community 10% of the time. Moist forest would be in shrub/grasses from frequent burning even in mixed severity. Not being in forest is "OK". (Paul Hessburg)

#### **STOP 5 - Fire regenerated lodge pole forest**

- What to do with a "sea" of fire regenerated lodge pole pine – 10-12,000 acres across planning area
- Small diameter, challenging harvest systems

#### **Discussion:**

- a. Even age lodge pole stand with healthy ponderosa pine in some areas. Spiraea exist in stands which is inconsistent with lodge pole. This lodge pole was aerial seeded after the fire. It is currently homogenous with a need to create a heterogeneous landscape with western larch, ponderosa pine intermixed with some lodge pole.
- b. The old fire was 20,000 acres in 1960 and heavily salvaged for 2 years starting in 1961. Dozers were used on the fire and dozer lines were still obvious in 1980's. Weather eventually stopped the fire. A lot of old roads exist that could be opened and used again.
- c. A few ecological principles to keep in mind: (Paul Hessburg)
  1. Don't aerial seed with lodge pole
  2. Operations could be tough, eventual potential for beetle kill
  3. Pock up the lodge pole with mechanical treatment and fire to restore structure
- d. Canada has been burning holes in their lodge pole to create some heterogeneity. It has been occurring at Radium Hot Springs through Rick Kubian. Timing would be important for this option. This is easier to accomplish with younger stands of lodge pole. (Paul Hessburg)
- e. Size of current lodge pole is merchantable it maybe worth taking the economic opportunity when there is chance to harvest it.
- f. The Umatilla NF is considering using a heli-torch to create small openings in a very dense (20,000 stems per acre) lodgepole pine forest in the northern third of the 1996 Tower fire (52,000 acres) on the North Fork John Day RD. This was a more viable option there because the trees are much smaller than in the Anthony burn, and no noncommercial thinning has been completed in the Tower fire lodgepole. It was considered better to wait a while longer in the Anthony burn and let the trees become merchantable rather than considering a heli-torch operation. It is likely too late for a heli-torch operation to be effective in the Anthony burn due to the larger tree size. (Dave Powell)

- g. Treat the drier aspects for drier species. Spiraea is a drier site indicator so need to address it that way if the area was aerial seeded with lodge pole.

#### **STOP 6 - Dutch Flat Trailhead**

- Review conditions on private and public land interface
- Discussion of need for treatment along private land interface to reduce wildfire risk/enhance fire management options, treatments at stand scale as opposed to defined fuel break widths

#### **Discussion:**

- a. Private lands were treated down to 60 basal area while public lands are untreated. Location provided an opportunity to visualize before and after treatment. Douglas fir and pinegrass stand type. There is approximately 20 miles of property line on East Face Project.
- b. Boundary of the Rock Creek/Bulger Flat Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) encompasses the east side of Gorham Butte and over to the wildlife area.
- c. Private land concern of fires coming off of untreated public lands. There is interest in protection of private lands long term. Private land owners cannot recover timber value if it burns.
- d. The Cohesive Strategy supports this through – All Lands All Hands
- e. Treat entire stand type for resiliency at appropriate "scale". Small units contribute less to overall objectives.
- f. Projects in WUIs open up opportunities for Grant dollars for private landowners for treatments.
- g. Opportunities include: fire protection, WUI treatments, re-introduce fire, wildlife. There must be a commitment over time to be successful, not treat and leave.
- h. The open stands on private provide wildlife opportunities for forage, calving since the cow elk like to see through the stand to watch for predators. Starkey experimental station has done studies on the number of trees per acre, distance from roads, etc. Starkey Experimental station has a own web site at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/starkey/>
- i. There is an option to leave small moist sites for cover if necessary.
- j. The collaborative can come up with solutions for this boundary area, but on other forest types the collaborative may need to work to reach agreement.

#### **1. Wrap up**

- a. Next Month there will be a field trip to the Lower Joseph Creek Watershed – scheduled for Wednesday August 28th. More information to come in the near future.

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#### **ADDITIONAL PROJECT INFORMATION THAT MAY BE HELPFUL ABOUT EASTFACE PROJECT**

- The project area encompasses approx. 44,000 acres of FS land and 4000 acres of State lands on the east side of the Elkhorn Mountains between Anthony Lakes and Ladd Canyon.
- The area straddles Union and Baker Counties
- Occurs primarily in the North Powder River and Wolf Creek-Powder River watersheds.
- Comprised of several different land management allocations including MA1 timber production emphasis (80%), MA6- Backcountry, MA15 Allocated Old Growth, minor inclusions of wildlife winter and summer range (940 acres of winter range, 1200 acres of summer range), and MA 16 administrative sites – namely Anthony Lakes recreation area.
- Adjacent to 3 inventoried roadless areas – Twin Mountain, Upper Grande Ronde and Beaver Creek.

- The project area also encompasses the ODFW Elkhorn Wildlife Mgmt Area
- Urban Interface areas in or near project with private residents/property, municipal watersheds (Beaver Creek) and the high use Anthony Lakes recreation area. Two counties, there are 2 Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWFP) that address these WUI areas.

#### Natural Resource Attributes:

- The landscape is characterized by both basalt and granitic landforms with an extensive cap of volcanic ash associated with the eruption of Mount Mazama some 7000 years ago.
- Area supports Bull Trout as well as redband trout. An estimated 18% of the project area is within INFISH riparian habitat conservation areas. Powder River watersheds drain into the Snake River above the Hells Canyon complex of dams, there are no anadromous fish in the system.
- Over the past 100+ years, approx. ½ of the area has experienced large wildfire. Over 50% of the project area is estimated to be substantially departed from historic stand conditions.
- Moderately roaded due to past forest management and recreational pursuits. An estimated 32% has had past harvest activities – 6% regeneration type harvests and 26% intermediate type treatments. Field reconnaissance is identifying more areas of past harvest than current records indicate.
- Approx. 93% of the project area is forested: 3 primary forest types of dry, moist and cold upland forests. Forest stand density is closely associated with fire risk assessments. Preliminary assessment of stand density data indicates: (Numbers may change with more field work)
  - \* Cold 15,210 acres 4500 overstocked
  - \* Moist 17,684 acres 6900 overstocked
  - \* Dry 8,989 acres 3300 overstocked
- Social/Economic Considerations:
  - \* Contributions to employment and local economies through contract work, commodity output,
  - \* visual backdrop to Baker & Powder River valleys,
  - \* Anthony Lakes Rec. Area
  - \* Tribal treaty rights and traditional cultural practices
  - \* City of La Grande Beaver Creek Municipal Watershed
  - \* Wildland Urban Interface
  - \* Public and firefighter safety

#### **Wildlife Management Area**

- 1800 head of elk cost approx. ¼ million dollars to manage. 10 to 11 feed sites
- Encompasses 8800 acres. 6700 department owned and 1700 under coop management agreements
- # 1 objective is to minimize/alleviate conflicts with Agricultural Crops
- 2009 had a timber cruise of forest habitat management to improve wildlife habitat.
- There are 2 critical Bull Trout streams through the area
- Considerations: Forest improvement, fire risk, cultural, Threatened and Endangered species, recreation, Long term source of income – sustainable yield.
- 4400 acres – est. 31 million board feet of merchantable timber; Healthy mature trees with heavy dense understory with some areas 3000 stems/acre. There is some bark beetle activity.
- Production potential of 244 board feet/per acre/per year.

- Minimal forage opportunities but great elk hiding cover. It is a transition area for the elk.

### **Cohesive Wildfire Strategy Perspective**

- It was developed by a large group of state/county/federal representation.
- Cohesive Strategy Goals include:
  - \* Restore and Maintain Landscapes – management across all ownerships
  - \* Create Fire-adapted Communities – create and modify infrastructure to withstand a wildfire without loss of life and property
  - \* Wildfire Response – all jurisdictional participation in safe, effective, efficient response to wildland fire.
- Importance of Cohesive Strategy
  - \* More severe and larger fires & longer fire seasons
  - \* Forest Health condition poor
  - \* Assessment shows 90% of fuels treatments were effective in changing fire behavior.
  - \* 72,000 communities at risk
  - \* Fire Suppression costs increasing
  - \* Fire severities having long term impacts to critical habitats