

Wallowa Whitman Forest Collaborative
January 22, 2014
La Grande Ranger District Conference Room
10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

In Attendance: Nils Christoffersen, Bruce Dunn, Nick Myatt, Gary Miller, Brian Kelly, Veronica Warnock, Steve Edwards, Mark Jacques, Larry McCalden, Rex Storm, Mike Hayward, Lindsay Warness, Ab Orton, Catherine Orton, Darlene Rochna, Ron Rochna, Neil McCusker, Bill Aney, Jenifer Ferriel, Brian Spradlin, Amy Gowan, Steve Hawkins, Jodi Kramer, Robin Maille, Gunnar Carnwath, Bill Gamble, Dick Fleming, Mike Brown, Paul Oester, Paul Boehne, Kris Stein, Tim Lillebo, Steve Derry, Ray Osipovich, John Laurence, Dale Potter, Earl Sherrod, Fred Werner, Lori Baird
On the Phone: Susan Jane Brown, Zoe Anderson, John George

Lower Joseph Creek Watershed Restoration Project

The goal for the discussion was to review the Purpose and Need and the Proposed Action, and to receive an update from each member of the Blue Mountain ID Team assigned to this project. The group also discussed the timeline for the project and how the Collaborative can assist the team with their needs.

Kris Stein, Wallowa Mountain Office District Ranger, provided background on the Project. The goal is to accelerate the pace and scale of restoration on the Lower Joseph Creek Project (LoJo) within the Wallowa Valley District, and to test and demonstrate opportunities to accelerate NEPA as well. Wallowa County has collected a lot of good data and there is an opportunity to do some good work there.

Brian Spradlin (USFS)/Project Timeline: Proposal development is completed and are now at the “proposed action” stage of the NEPA process. We have identified the need; we have initiated scoping. The next steps are to define significant issues, develop alternative solutions, then the effects analysis. Right now we are at the public engagement point – talking about the process and accepting public comment as we move forward.

Amy Gowan (USFS)/Heritage, Culture, Tribal, Socio-Economic Concerns: There are social / cultural data gaps in our information relative to the LoJo. She is working with others to establish an inventory plan (gathering sites, hunting camps, botanicals, historic sites, sacred areas, archeological sites, etc.) in an accelerated manner. The CTUIR and the Nez Perce tribes both have ceded lands within the LoJo. The USFS has an obligation and an opportunity to work closely and consult with the tribes, and with local communities – there are a lot of common objectives. Information gathering and feedback is ongoing.

Neil McCusker (USFS)/Silviculture: Reviewed the composition, structure, density, and pattern of trees on the landscape (both dry forest and wet forest) – what it looks like now and what we would like it to look like. Forest pests and diseases have taken over, which is affecting the landscape more so than fire. Fire is not utilized as a regulating force.

Grassland areas are shrinking – trees are encroaching on historical grasslands – particularly with the elimination of fire. Wallowa Resources and Wallowa County collected an immense amount of data on LoJo which is being adapted and reconfigured to be more useful for the team.

General (not site specific) treatment opportunities include:

- * Commercial and non-commercial thinning to favor shade intolerant, fire tolerant species, retain all old trees, and reduce stand density for long-term maintenance and forest health. Thinning will focus on smaller diameter trees – but many will be large enough to be commercial saw logs. Remove trees that inhibit stand development (species that are over-represented) and protect those that are under-represented. Apply variable density thinning (ICO approach: individuals, clumps, and openings).

- * Prescribed burning – reduce accumulation of litter and duff. Reverse trend and reestablish habitat for plant species that are not thriving. Expand grasslands where they have been encroached upon. The proposed action spoke to the possibility of using prescribed fire on “up to 90,000 acres”, but further analysis will target the use of this tool on the best options.

- * Making firewood available to public - opportunities will be made available and public notice provided –trying to do a better job of getting the resources connected to those with a need.

- * Ensuring end result matches original prescription - Put in the work to plan appropriately up front and maintain our hands-on approach during the implementation. Need to work on trust issues – don’t wait until sales are purchased. Monitor those details before job goes out to bid – stay involved in process via multi-party monitoring. The collaborative hopes to build trust but must deal with a history of end results falling short of original prescriptions.

Paul Boehne (USFS)/Roads, Riparian Areas:

Riparian Areas: key issues relate to intermittent stream channels, riparian areas, and habitat conservation areas. No site specific information on these attributes. Investigating potential treatment strategies once we have that information. Rely on site-specific info particularly on intermittent stream information. Produce a prescription to assess current conditions and develop treatment strategies.

Anticipate any forest plan amendments? No – need to follow the steps outlined in PACFISH / INFISH. Riparian Management Objectives are as stated in PACFISH. The objective will be to improve aquatic habitat. Required to do watershed analysis that assesses riparian habitat conservation areas – current condition, and how those conditions and trajectories fit into the overall functioning of the watershed. Seek to achieve riparian management objectives. Those conditions and objectives will be clarified at later meetings once that information has been gathered.

Roads: Proposing to use roads analysis to assess the roads that are on the landscape: condition, location, management objectives. Wallowa County conducted an inventory of all roads in Wallowa County and the info was shared with the forest service. This will also be used as a piece in the discussion. What roads should remain open? What is the

condition of the roads? Do we need to upgrade? What roads are needed to implement prescriptions (access)?

The USFS is aware of the general public concern with road closing and how that affects public access. A public forum is being held to encourage input and comments.

Temporary roads for management activities: try to build over existing footprints – areas that have been otherwise affected – compacted, erosion - open them up and then do a better job of restoration.

Secured the services of an engineer on the Umatilla to do the roads analysis and make sure we are doing the right thing with the right data. Goal is to reduce impact as much as possible.

Temporary roads are not engineered. No investment in them. Put on ground for access, typically short, (might be a limit on the length of a temp road), put on ground by sales administrators. Reviewed by inter-disciplinary team in concert with sales administration to assure that the road is done in an environmentally sensitive manner. Amount of impact is minimal and is used seasonally, which helps reduce impact. Immediately after use, they are restored.

General Questions about Proposed Actions:

Research Natural Areas (Haystack & Forest Pasture Ridge): where do they come from and how were they identified? Part of the previous land forest management plan – identified by previous forest ecologist – his expert opinion that these areas were the best representation of common native plant life.

Socio-economic piece: requested details about how economic aspects of the project are evaluated. Other resources/partners are being encouraged to help explore best approaches to socio-economic analysis. Input/output study being done that will address economic issues.

Monitoring and adaptive management is included in the Notice of Intent and in the Proposed Action. The Collaborative must have full transparency – without it, there is a trust issue. Collaborative process is extremely valuable to the FS. The goal is to build alternatives for decision making and address potential issues. There is a mutual benefit to the county and to the Forest Service by getting more people involved in the process from the beginning to help move the project forward more quickly and smoothly.

How can the Collaborative measure their success? Identify some small items that we can measure to determine if we are being successful, to determine if we are meeting our goals. Cannot measure everything, every variable, but can identify some areas that we can monitor.

Forest Plan/Concerns: There may be possible amendments to the forest plan, recognizing that the plan was written in the late 80s and our knowledge and strategies for

management have changed quite drastically. Amendments would not be applied universally across the project, but applied in a limited fashion and on a small scale.

Scoping: anybody planning on sending scoping comments in, the collaborative would like to have an opportunity to see those in a timely manner in order to be able to address them. Requested that a summary of scoping comments be shared with members of the collaborative prior to the next meeting.

Upcoming Meetings – Agenda Items:

Learning from the Malheur Collaborative: can we piggy-back on what has already been done in other Collaboratives? What can we learn from their process? Susan Jane Brown may be available to discuss the Malheur Collaborative process at a future meeting. It was also suggested that a FS representative be present to address the process from their perspective. A comment was made that it took several years of trust-building before the Malheur Collaborative met with success. One participants raised questions about accelerating the process of trust-building – it is an important element in the success of our projects. Another noted that there are a large number of stakeholders within the WWFC that have been working together in a collaborative way for 13 years, and have built relationships working on Lower Joseph Creek with Wallowa County NRAC, or through both the Umatilla and Malheur Collaboratives. So the relationships within the W-W Forest Collaborative are not all “new” – most of the groups have been cooperating for many years. It is important that we continue to respond to questions and concerns from the public and professionals who have not been a part of the process from the beginning. We must maintain our outreach and communication with the outside community.

Invite Paul Hessburg to discuss what he has done in regard to landscape scale connectivity and habitat over the long term. What types of guidelines are important?

Discussion of Forest Plan Amendments: there is a need to commit to tackling one of those amendments at our next meeting. It was suggested that we tackle the 21” diameter discussion – at least talk about the rationale behind it, best practices, and the identification of guidelines for cutting 21” trees (why and where and when?).

East Face Project: Bill gave an update on this project. 40% of the field work is completed. The team will be discussing opportunities for treatment. At our next meeting: bring back results of those discussions and start talking about the Purpose and Need statement. The hope is to create a P&N that everybody can get on board with.

Private Land-Owner Funds: There is funding available for private land owners to manage their forest lands – particularly those adjacent to the East Face Project. The Natural Resource Conservation Service is funding a project that will enable private non-industrial forest land-owners to implement thinning and slash treatment of thinning – and they can acquire funding to help. An effort has been made to contact the owners of approximately 3400 acres of private land. ODF will be overseeing the work. Property owners will have to put together a management plan, and will have three years to

implement the plan. NRCS will dole out funding as the work is completed. Application forms are available through NRCS and ODF.

OWEB grant update: \$200,000 in grant funds were made available through the Governor's Forest Health Package. The WWFC applied for a \$15,000 grant to support ongoing management and staffing on this project. We are rumored to be in the first level of awards. There will be a larger pot of money available in June or July. Are there other needs that we might have that might be met by additional grant money?

WWFC Operations Committee: Conference call scheduled for next Thursday, January 30 at 2:30 p.m.

Timeline for upcoming meetings: Consensus to stay with current 4th Wednesday meetings for the next several months.

Meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.