

## **Harney County Restoration Collaborative Meeting Summary Notes – 12-5-2017**

First HCRC meeting of 2018 is **Tuesday February 6, 2018**, Harney County ESD Meeting Room

**Attending:** Glen Johnston, Kerry Kemp, David Houghton, Mel Hall, Christy Cheyne, Tom Segal, Jon Reponen, Howard Richburg, Patty Dorroh, Jack Southworth, Craig Hempy, Jim Campbell, Travis Swaim, Melissa Ward, Lori Bailey, George Heinz, Tim Boyce, Mike Sterling, Phil Jenkins, Zach Williams, Mark Owens, Jordan VanSickle, Dave Hannibal, Brenda Smith

### **Harney County Restoration Collaborative accomplishments in 2017 (from opening circle of 12/5/2017 meeting)**

- Learning more about natural resources issues on the southern Malheur National Forest.
- Hearing different opinions in a respectful manner. Having deep conversations that deal with hard topics.
- Seeing meaningful forest restoration on a landscape scale.
- The implementation work that was done on Marshall Devine.
- The use of drone mounted camera to help us better see and understand the health of a project.
- Gave input to Emigrant Creek Ranger District Hazard tree plan.
- Increased diversity of new members.
- Still locally driven, don't rely on outside facilitators or staff.
- Working on our Common Ground Principles – seeking consensus on contentious issues.
- Reaching near consensus on Soldier Project Categorical Exclusion.
- Having good discussions about how to increase the presence of fire on the forest.
- Being able to influence Forest Service prescriptions and decision making resulting in better decisions.
- The prescriptions we came up with on the Flat Project which will result in a more open, fire tolerant forest.
- Completion of Dove Project and near completion of Flat Project.
- Airing of Era of Megafires film and presentation by Dr. Hessburg.
- The cumulative work done on the southern Malheur. We're making a difference on the landscape through commercial and non-commercial thinning along with prescribed fire.
- Letter to Oregon Smoke Management Review Committee re smoke management and recommendations by HCRC.

### **HCRC Desired Situation regarding fire on the landscape of the southern Malheur National Forest:**

- Average of 40,000 acres burned per year over a ten-year period.
- Combination of multiple run teams on prescribed fire projects.
- A couple of 'managed' natural ignitions each year.
- Wouldn't have to do much if a fire was started, it would flare up, die down, wander around on its own.
- Public OK with more fire on the southern Malheur Forest due to increased communication among the collaborative, the public and the Forest Service.
- Fires of low, medium and severe intensity.
- A strategic fire plan would be in place.
- Historic conditions for fuel loads on the southern Malheur achieved.
- A more natural fire regime resulting in a forest structure matching historic conditions.
- Eighty percent of the southern Malheur National Forest sees fire every fifteen years.

- The southern Malheur Forest has structural complexity and diversity.

**Worst Fears about fire on the Southern Malheur National Forest:**

- We rely too much on natural ignitions to get burning done.
- No social license to have more fire on southern Malheur.
- We will resort to establishing fuel breaks that are too small to be effective.
- Give up on prescribed fire.
- Are not able to use all the tools in our tool box such as strategic thinning, wide fuel breaks and managed natural ignitions.
- Have too much fire resulting in a landscape with a few large trees and no bitterbrush or mountain mahogany for wildlife.
- Unable to keep fire off BLM and private ground.
- We think of fire as an enemy rather than a tool.
- As a result of fire, the forest is invaded by annual grasses.
- Get 40,000 acres burned without mechanical treatment.
- What happens when a 'managed' fire gets out of control?
- We think we've failed if we don't burn 40,000 acres every year.
- We'll have catastrophic fires if we don't have fuel reductions.
- We burn too hot in riparian areas.
- No funding fix for FS budget – end up doing nothing but fighting fire.

**What are the strategies and behaviors that will help us achieve our desired situation regarding fire on the southern Malheur National Forest?**

1. Giving FS tools they need and leeway to make decisions in field to be as efficient as possible.
2. Collaborative supporting the project.
3. FS needs to be better at lending resources.
4. Start education about fire at a younger age. We need to come up with the next cartoon to replace Smokey Bear. Start a fire curriculum.
5. Change thought processes in some of the Forest's upper management – don't put fires out immediately.
6. The public information part is critical. Without social license, we won't get to do any of the things we want such as managing unplanned natural ignitions.
7. Tell our story a little better outside of the Forest Service to shift the mindset of the public. (So, when something goes wrong the public has a better understanding of why.)
8. Educate public on how fire works. It's not exact, does some things we don't want it to do. We can't have no smoke and a healthy forest.
9. Nationally, the fire terminology changes – appropriate management response: if conditions are right, manage the fire. Make a decision based on conditions – availability of fire fighters, weather, etc.
10. Education: need to change attitude of wildfire, talk about restorative properties – example is Canyon Creek fire – benefits to wildlife. Rx fire before commercial treatment. You know what you're going to get if you treat after.
11. Value in getting to higher ups in FS. Make sure that all funds don't all go to fire. If you're not putting some \$ to restoration you're not going to get out of this endless loop.
12. Dream position: every district has a Public Affairs Officer partnership position that has ear of local community. Need a prevention position. Education.

13. Telling FS story is huge, all the good things we do. Don't want to explain why some things happen. Better educate the public.
14. Multiple crews that could help with implementation of Rx fire.
15. Create a Smoky the Bear that lights fires instead of putting them out. Make it more entertaining.
16. More community outreach. Get the public involved on a volunteer basis. Involve students in a classroom project.
17. Why don't we incentivize resource managers to use fires? Instead of having to justify why burn, must justify why you put a fire out. Goes to policy level in Washington office.
18. Efficiencies committee on BMFP to talk about how to get things done more efficiently. If we could get away from thinning and piling and think more about thinning and arranging slash and burning it maybe we could eliminate a step, save some cost and get a little further ahead.
19. Social license isn't our biggest barrier.
20. Completely redesign how we do a burn block – larger perimeters, burn the edges and then the middle, do it over a several years period.
21. Can't hit 40,000 acres – mentally defeating. Need to redesign the goal to accommodate variations in annual acres burned.
22. Identify three main barriers, identify solutions to the three main barriers and try to perform.
23. FS is making progress in our messaging. We are only five years into telling the public that not all fires are bad.
24. Budget is a problem. Ongoing issue. 3<sup>rd</sup> party is best messenger.
25. Social license can be gained.
26. Internal education with interagency duty bosses and with initial attack resources.
27. Region should consider parking a fire use module in the tri-forest region for the summer to handle managing unplanned ignitions.
28. See something like aquatic EA for fire under-burn plan. When we get a snow line, can use fire on a quick basis. Open options a little bit. Also for general burning in spring and fall.
29. Fire breaks – use priority roads. Don't make them too regimented. When doing treatments, set a minimum, don't use straight lines, don't limit to a set distance. Use natural land forms.
30. Strategic look: If we don't get to 40,000 acres right away, look at areas where we have planned burning under NEPA already – be strategic about where we burn. Have more decision space. May affect prioritization of burn blocks.

**Most important things HCRC needs to accomplish in 2018:**

1. Implement Melissa's idea – get some education going about fire.
2. Help establish Public Affairs Officer position on ECRD
3. Have a good, slick put together Rattlesnake project that grows lots of deer and elk.
4. See how implementation of Soldier turns out.
5. Getting some actual restoration done on the ground: makes the soil, water better. More about the woods than the economics.
6. Each one of us can affect people and their attitude about fire.
7. Create a specific goal that will get us ahead. Come to consensus on a plan to get more accomplished: fire, silviculture, restoration things, etc.
8. Maybe HCRC should be active as a group rather than just making suggestions to the Forest Service.
9. Implementation in Soldier. See if we can create more savannah-like structure.
10. Managed unplanned natural ignition (MUNI) on ECRD.

11. Not lose another Interdisciplinary team member on ECRD. Continuity of staff is important.
12. Decision on Rattlesnake
13. See how effective Rattlesnake and Soldier projects are in controlling insect damage.
14. Education piece – having collaborative support. Host a prescribed fire open house.
15. Mike Sterling should play a bigger role working with collaborative helping our story and your story be told together.
16. Balance – ecological improvement with economic gain. Figure out how to balance ecological with economic.
17. Find \$, creative ways to get more \$ to fulfill plans and bring them to fruition.
18. Finding ways to help FS burn 40,000 acres.
19. Unit size: make them bigger. Minimum of 50 acres.
20. Really get more momentum with burning program. No project is complete until burning is done.
21. Tangible strategy for what we can do. What's the tangible strategy for the fire question?
22. Participate in community events with outreach person.
23. Monitor outcomes on Rattlesnake project. Is it all too little too late? Will we still have insects, disease, and severe fire when we're all done? Having an outreach and education position. FS operates for the public – have to get public involved.

**Update on Rattlesnake project and the overlap of Soldier and Rattlesnake prescriptions** – Travis Swaim  
Why here and why now and why these specific acres in Soldier? This area is the densest, the most at risk for bark beetle and why we chose these acres. We are proposing resiliency thinning – precommercial and commercial treatment with basal areas ranging from 30-60. Lay soldier units out this winter and will be a timber sale this year. We do have a significant cultural resource out there: the Ft. Harney Trail. The main issues it that we have to avoid the 28 road. Insects moving quick. Extensive need for this project.

**Timeline of EA's on Flat and Rattlesnake** – Lori Bailey & Melissa Ward  
Aquatic EA in summer 2018. Q. What is the source of funding for this? A. We have used title II funds. It is a challenge to find funding for these projects. We don't have in house money this year. The costs are not huge for these projects. High Desert Partnership can apply as a nonprofit to support HCRC restoration projects. Q. Does aquatic EA allow you to do work out of the riparian area? A. Yes, can go to the ridge if will benefit the riparian area.

**Cut to Length and an update on Seneca Mill** – Zach Williams (Zach had a PowerPoint – Available on [www.highdesertpartnership.org/what-we-do/harney-county-restoration-collaborative](http://www.highdesertpartnership.org/what-we-do/harney-county-restoration-collaborative))

*Cut to length (CTL)* is a logging system. 7-12 tons is the contract that we can leave slash up to. Contractually, this amount has to do with the size of residual stands. What happens if you can't burn this and what happens if a wildfire goes through? Residual stand damage – from the logging or from a fire going through and burning the crowns of the trees. We are going to have some acres that are at risk. When line logging is required it is required. From a statistics standpoint, how much ignition out there because you might not get a start in these fuels. In terms of residual damage, I see that slash piles create a lot of damage to soils. That is where you see the weeds. They don't recover for a long time.

Iron Triangle prefers the CTL method, it is easier to get around, is cleaner and gets away from the huge landing piles. When we started it was an uphill battle to even do it, now about 40% of our logging is on cut to length. We are more efficient with cut to length. Trying to get more acres done with the sales

that are coming up. Forest administrators prefer CTL because they don't have to mark trees for landings. FS has done both of them in NEPA, but we will continue to do both because it is the best option and we can understand where you guys are coming from.

Marshall Devine was all whole tree and grapple piled. When we get a change from the contract if they want it piled, there is never any cost added to the fee. We don't want to invest in equipment that was made for large trees because we don't have large trees. In reality, it should be case by case and the pines look good with CTL. It reduces their cost to get past some of the no-bid projects. Noticing with whole tree logging that if it is too clean, then there are other reasons to have some of the slash. Need the nutrient cycling with the slash. Places where soils are extra soft – i.e. aspen a good place to use this system. Use the right tool in the right spot.

Biomass is delivered at a loss – there is no market. A position statement, important to have the discussion and let folks know this. We want flexibility on the ground. Phil can take the group to a CTL logged area – both pine and conifer.

*Update on Seneca mill – Painfully slow, but just got an update that we are cutting today.*

Wood drying is not acceptable so we are now looking at a kiln. We are proposing processing between 3-4 million board feet a year. Q. How much decked right now? A. All from last winter harvest 3.8 million board feet decked right now. We have to remove this material. No one wanted to buy this from us and this is the kind of material we get. Q. What is the average size of logs? A. Mainly 3-6 inch and some cull white fir. Q. Does this change your view of lodge pole? A. Yes. We often ask for more lodge pole. We have been in partnership with Parma pole for many years. Q. What is the market for \$185/ 1/3 cord retail firewood? We are delivering to Lowes, Ranch and Home. Hoping to be running by June next year. Q. How many jobs? A. 12 jobs. Anything with juniper – right now Malheur lumber will take juniper for 50\$ a load.

### **Reconsidering forest restoration strategy on the Southern Malheur Forest.**

Jack: While restoration projects have done a good job of reducing tree density through removal of commercial trees and some non-commercial trees the projects are falling behind on non-commercial thinning and prescribed burning. Since reintroducing fire is such a critical aspect of forest restoration should we rethink our restoration process? Instead of working on projects that are unable to be completed in terms of non-commercial thinning and prescribed fire should we instead start working on fuel breaks along main arterial roads that will allow the Forest Service to utilize wildfire as the main fire management tool? What if we don't have any natural ignition on the forest?

Tim Boyce: We have a set amount of resources down here. We have to consider the 4.5 million acres south of the highway. Desert fires take a lot of resources - 20-person hand crews. We are really limited on resources on any given day and have to work with BLM and USFWS on any given day. We have Frenchglen and Allison as active guard stations. Also Crow Flat and 19 trucks total on the zone – 15 BLM and 4 FS. Last footprint was Egley in 2007. Underburning has been about 10,000 acres. Back log on prescribed fire is over 150,000 acres due to timing including nesting and wildlife, resources, funding, a few internal constraints. Fuel level and weather are another constraint – parameters have expanded for fire behavior and have done this to open up more fire. We have a spring and fall prescribed fire. In the fall, it goes from too dry to too wet and snowy very fast. Spring is a little more open and bigger window. I think we could take a little more risk. Not everyone is on board with more risk but some leadership is willing.

### *Comments*

Pretty accurate. We have a lack of fire and it seems like we are getting more social acceptance. The thought of a man caused fire would never been discussed before. Will take a long time. This is an issue across the US. Regulations are binding. We are burning 10-20% of what we should be doing. The baby steps are in no way getting us to where we need to be. We are way too much in a swiss cheese model. This is completely outdated and not holding up to large fires. What would make fire more acceptable?

Two main barriers: 1. Having resources dedicated to initial attack and 2. Then having another whole set of resources to manage a wildfire start on the forest and we get a start on a project area where we are trying to manage. How many pile burning acres are backlogged? We are caught up on piles after this year. How much impact of smoke management? There is some but we have taken some risk because we have our own modeling. What is the biggest issue? If it is not one thing then it is another. From a national standpoint it is the same issue across the US. Many fire dependent ecosystems and then you get non-fire adapted species taking over and that is the issue and causes more smoke.

We are using a natural tool (fire) for an unnatural situation. We have an unsophisticated public and lose credibility if you lose a fire. We don't have the social license to do anything we need to do and I think that is the biggest hurdle. Wish someone would do an article on that. Ask Tim about the project he talked about. What is the desired condition of fire return interval of 15 years? Need 40,000 acres of fire a year on the district. 632,000 acres on the district? What could you accomplish? It is tricky, 500 acres day – looking to get 10,000 acres a season.

What if you could bring in 5 burn bosses and 10 engines? Then what could you do? What does it take? Getting more treatments on 2 and 4-digit roads. Beauty of a wildfire that we are managing is that wildfire doesn't have to go around smoke issues. Are we missing a description of what it looks like? From a wildlife standpoint – would like to see it sprinkled around. 40,000 acres in one place makes me nervous.

Ok you have a 15-year plan. Coordinate with the commercial and noncommercial pretreatment. Then have a Plan B if something falls apart. There are other forests in Idaho that don't wait for the commercial treatment. Need to have alternatives if it doesn't go as planned. You will never hit the average of 40,000 acre a year. There are going to be huge fires some years and not always planned. Never going to hit exactly what you want each year.

Want to achieve historic conditions for fuel loading and fire effects so that this has a positive effect on our communities etc. Once we get back to that, the agency spends as much on prescribed fire as they do suppression each year. Need an agency that can and has the will to do it and a public that is educated. What it looks like under natural fire regime so it is patchy and ultimately sustain the resource later. We want to see structural complexity in the forest.

How interested is this collaborative to host a public meeting? George Heinz got a burn plan from Ochoco, held a public meeting about the burn plan and everyone understood what everyone is up against. The more we can do as a collaborative to educate about prescribe fire the better. If you were to go over a specific burn plan it would be well attended.