



Harney County Restoration Collaborative – October 26, 2015 Meeting Notes Pine Room, Burns OR

The overall purpose of this meeting was to take a “big picture” view of the Dove Project and make sure the proposed prescriptions meet objectives for achieving the things we are concerned about on the southern Malheur National Forest. Among the overall concerns are to:

- Create a forest that is tolerant of prescribed fire;
- Ability to have some control over Wildfires through creation of strategic fire breaks;
- Retention and increase in Old Growth Ponderosa Pine;
- Diversity in Wildlife habitat;
- Diversity in age, structure and spacing of the forest;
- Create a forest that is able to stay healthy in a drying climate;
- Ensure opportunities for future commercial harvest; and
- Roads that meet the needs of the public, wildlife and forest management.

Participants:

Rod Klus (ODFW), Melissa Ward, Travis Swaim, Joshua Giles, Lisa VanTieghen, Roy Sutcliffe, Christy Cheyne (USFS), Jeff Maben (Malheur Lumber), Gerard J. LaBrecque (Josephs Juniper), Zach Williams, Phil Jenkins (Iron Triangle), Kerry Kemp (TNC), Jim Campbell (Farmer), Jon Reponen (BLM) Jack Southworth – Facilitator, Brenda Smith (High Desert Partnership)

Information on how to access info on the Dove Project – Melissa Ward demonstrated an interactive map that has been published for the Dove Project. We used it during the meeting to understand the prescriptions and planned work. It is available for use at the following link:

<http://usfs.maps.arcgis.com/apps/PublicInformation/index.html?appid=2f7077c1dfe04809877c989a1c5031e0>

Those in attendance agreed this was a very valuable map and it was used throughout the meeting to discuss aspects of the project’s prescriptions.

High Desert Partnership website info – The High Desert Partnership has new website that will be up on the internet soon. All information related to HCRC will be found at this website – www.highdesertpartnership.org

Update on Eastside Restoration Strategy – Barb and Jennifer were not able to attend the meeting to give this update.

A strategic, high elevation look at the Dove and Flat Projects.

Hear from the collaborative group: Do the proposed prescriptions meet our required objectives?

Do you have any comments or suggestions?

How about utilization of juniper? There is not enough to meet the 2.5 million board feet in demand. We need to go beyond laying it down in the national forest –more emphasis on juniper. What about watershed condition? – Either upland or riparian. Juniper is now a marketable product.

Josh Giles –USFS Silviculturist who has planned the Dove Project was asked to please address these issues:

The end goal of all projects is to produce a forest that is tolerance to prescribed fire. Currently, the forest is not at this phase, there are too many stems/ acre. Prescribed fire cannot be used when the forest is not fire tolerant.

The usual return interval in this forest is 6-20 years we have gotten far away from this. The goal for our forest is to have multiple seral stages in our forest. We need stand initiation, large diameter trees, and we are trying to reduce competition to create old growth stands. Unfortunately with our current prescriptions we are hammering the mid-growth stands. If we only go after mid-growth we need to retain some of the economically viable stands to retain

replacement old growth stands.

Creating a forest that is healthy in a drying climate. Hard to do because we don't know what the future brings. We are preferentially treating for Ponderosa pine because they can best handle drought.

Do we need to address our paradigm as we go into a drying climate? Do we need to have less diversity in a drying climate? For most of our treatments we are going toward HRV treatments because we don't know what the future is going to bring. Not much is going to change because we usually treat for Ponderosa pine. At this point we are at the cusp – if we start converting forests then we are making the statement we know exactly what is going to happen. We can't do that.

Q. Do you really want nature fire to operate on the landscape? Is the planning around a forest tolerant of prescribed fire or tolerant of natural fire?

A. This project does not have strategic fuel breaks, but we want fire to burn through at low intensity. This will take close to a decade to go through with prescribed fire. It does have anchor points for prescribed fire.

Q. What is the backlog of prescribed fire?

A. Currently we have 16,000 acres ready to burn. There is 100,000 acres to burn across all projects.

Commercial harvest. I like what you (Gerard) said about juniper being the wood of the future. We are analyzing all of the ground in order to utilize juniper. We don't want to burn it up we want people to use that material. We need to think about non-traditional uses. We can't continue to hammer mid story levels .

Q. What is the snag situation on this project?

A. We are prescribing thinning throughout the diameter range. We can't continue to take the 15-20 inch trees and not take the 27 inch trees. Still need to think about economic value and if we don't have a project?

Q. I wonder about the snags – James (Johnston) research says that we have more 21" diam. trees than in 1860. At what point is this is this a forest plan issue too?

A. We are going to run into this issue – Eastside screens are a huge fiasco and has handcuffed the FS. We are deficient in stand initiation also. Have to treat throughout the diameter range.

I echo Zach – The Eastside screen is a problem. We can only do a forest plan amendment if the ecological necessity is dire. I wish the Eastside team was here. If we could utilize Blues Restoration Strategy team to provide the data to do a forest plan amendment to do away with the Eastside screens that would be helpful. It wouldn't be a forest plan amendment anymore. Additionally we need to create markets for the small stuff.

We need to have the Blue Restoration Strategy team here in November – yes, that would be great.

FYI Kerry Kemp - Blues restoration team is doing a one day workshop for Ochoco and Umatilla forests and should we do that for the Malheur? What are they going to do at the workshop? I will find out if that is useful for the collaboratives.

A. I am worried that group has not been down here to talk to HCRC about the dry pine- they are not looking at economics and if they are going to put together a \$300k project that isn't useful that doesn't help much.

Q. Will what Josh described be achievable in the Dove Project?

Collective Answers:

- I think it will
- I can see that someone like me (Jon Reponen) I need to hold fires at main roads. The project as planned now would meet my needs – someone like me is going to be out there firing out a road – if those treatments allow me to do that then great. If fuel blocks are by the roads great – they use roads and ridges
- Need to be more diverse in our cuts
- In the Flat Project we are looking to be more out of the box and also create some larger openings. Get some spots back to stand initiation. Similar to Dove in Flat. Look at strategic shaded fuel breaks to have one continuous fuel break to have an area that can be defended. Shaded means not a clear cut – more like shelter wood break, some trees would be left

Q. Is this an economically viable project?

A. The commercial thinning is but we will be paying to get the small diameter and juniper out. There are a lot of small trees. Basal areas are at the upper range of the stand density index (SDI). Once there is a cut below the SDI, there is release from intraspecific competition and the trees will respond in growth and the SDI is hit again shortly. Higher basal area is better for wildlife.

Q. What is SDI? (a measure of stocking rate based on diameter at breast height that provides the basal area)

A. There are 2000 stands in this project and they range from 380 basal area/ acre to 10 basal area/ acre. Commercial logging needs to be at least 100 basal area/ acre but is better in 150-180 basal area/ acre.

Roy Sutcliffe addressed the Dove Project Plan from a wildlife standpoint.

Generally will be great for wildlife, because there is a lot of diversity in the project. We have connectivity in the drainages and the ridges. There are no roads in the west part of the project. A lot of juniper treatment for shrub steppe on very steep ground. There is also a meadow enhancement cut in the project.

Comment: Juniper treatments are to improve sagebrush steppe habitat and need to pay attention to annual grass issues. Need to have native bunchgrasses to maintain hydrology of the system and also upland forage.

Comment: It would be beneficial to leave clusters of juniper so if there was a really bad winter big game would have something to eat and shelter in as well as hiding cover.

Comment: Connectivity makes me nervous. Do the animals really do what biologists say they do?

Q. What is the weak link for feed for deer and elk?

A. We used to be winter range and that is the limiting factor. Summer range drives the population. We have collared deer and from the tracking it appears they are “running through” the forest to get to the range.

Jack Southworth asked Zach Williams to provide a consensus statement:

The Dove Project is the best scoping document I have read. Where we treat, we need to treat heavier and thin throughout the diameter range and decrease basal area standards to conform to what we think is sustainable moving forward. We don't necessarily need throughout the diameter range everywhere but where it is needed or necessary to accomplish our goals.

This is just part of the tool box we can use. We need a social license to move prescriptions towards thinning throughout the diameter range and decreasing basal requirements. It really comes down to moving the Forest Service's ability to do what is needed on the ground that is restricted by current forest plan standards – a field trip with a sample mark that shows how the forest service personnel (Josh et al.) would see this being done so the group as a whole can see what that looks like would be a good start.

Q. How comfortable are we as a group to have projects stalled by litigation? Should we start swinging for the fences? At some point we have to make a stand.

A. We need to move the bar a little bit at the time and work actively to have a forest plan amendment. How useful are we if we can't push the envelope some – we need to create more decision space. I don't want you to get sued. The forest needs to get managed. Take an id team and take a year to do a forest plan amendments.

How long will it take to get a forest plan amendment? Can be easy or difficult. In our last project we cut over 21” but the ecological necessity was dire.

If we have science that shows we have 21” trees that are not in deficit more science on FS is better.

It is time we push it and get a little bit out of it. I think we should do a project first and if we lose it to litigation won't lose everything.

Change the rules then we are not fighting the rules.

We need some social license to trust us. Probably will need to see first that they didn't screw this up.

Moving toward a forest plan amendment. Right now we are doing stuff and we are doing good stuff.

I can't sign a lot of these documents here we need a solid group consensus that could help alleviate some fear on the decision maker. We agree we want to push the envelope.

Final thoughts

- Good meeting.
- Good meeting - perfect start time is at 8 am.
- Juniper
- Good meeting and keep discussing at plan amendment forest wide
- Phil – 21” rule and we are still talking about it.
- I would prefer to not have a Monday meeting – if we went to Tuesday after 10 and can’t be the 3rd Tuesday – 4th Tuesday is fine.
- Enjoyed the discussion
- Consider travel in winter
- Enjoy the civil discussion. Excited about the interactive map. And add to it in the future.
- Each time we have people that aren’t here and we have to keep those people in mind.
- Make sure we get Trent here.
- Good meeting, a lot of good discussion, I am flexible on meeting times.

3:00 Adjourn