**Harney County Wildfire Collaborative Meeting Summary**

**August 19, 2018**

**Meeting Objectives:** *Provide an opportunity for partner updates and action reports since the last meeting; fire report; updates/discussion on PEIS’s; Early Detection Cameras; Pueblo Mountains EA; Pueblo Mountains Subcommittee; Communications and Pilot Project #2.*

**Attendance:** Benjamin Cate – HDP, Rod Hoagland – Fields/Andrews RFPA, Bruce Taylor – IWJV, Mike Fox – Frenchglen RFPA, Tom Sharp – OCA, Chad Karges – Malheur NWR, Cheryl Smith – Crane RFPA, Rick Knox – BLM, Jacob Gear – USFWS, Ron Whiting – Lone Pine RFPA, Gary Miller – Frenchglen RFPA, Rhonda Karges – BLM, Shane Theall – BIFZ, Jeff Rose – BLM, Angela Sitz – FWS, Chad Boyd – ARS, Dustin Johnson – OSU, Marvin Vetter – ODF, Mike Fox – Frenchglen RFPA, Tyson Bertone-Riggs – RVCC, Emily Jane Davis – OSU, Bryant Kuechle (Facilitator) – Langdon Group

**Action Items**

* Follow up on third party monitoring with BOYT – *Angela*
* Get pictures of what a ‘mosaic’ might look like of a full range of the outcomes we’re talking about for Pilot Project #2 for next month’s presentation - *Rick, Bill, Bruce, Angela*
* Research Rincon Road / Hwy 205 as possible options for add ons to work in Pueblo Mtn’s - ?
* Ask Jay Kerby & Dan Nichols if they would like to participate on the subcommittee (pilot project #2). – *Ben Cate*
* Get brochure from Bill D. and send to Mike F. – *Ben Cate*
* Marla talk to Gary Miller about the improved communications between agencies and RFPA’s – potential success story – *Marla/Gary*
* Find local hunting group to inform hunters about wildfire risk (vehicle ignitions). Prevention team could be brought in to educate. (potentially hunter education course)

**Emily Jane Davis (*Oregon State University)* – Discussion on RFPA research**

Jeff Rose provided background about how our local RFPA’s became involved in Emily Jane Davis’ study. The study included Crane & Owyhee RFPA’s (along with 2 in Idaho). This work occurred in 2015-2016, so there may have been developments since then. Some of this might be outdated already. Interviews were conducted about what works well/what is a struggle. Highlight how the RFPA model put into practice the advantages that ranchers have for preventing fire. BLM/private interaction. Looked at how RFPA programs can best be structured to facilitate the collaborative effort of managing fire.

Q: Does this provide any benefit to discussing with legislature – (funding discussion)

A: It’s not quantitative, its qualitative, so there aren’t hard numbers associated with it. If it’s something that is of interest I would be happy to help mold this into something that could more easily be used for that purpose.

There was discussion about tying this research to $$. Return on investment. Using metrics on volunteer per hour time. There was a comment about getting to the level of quantifying volunteer hours we can put a number to the value of RFPA’s. It’s important that these hours be tracked.

Last year there were 14K hrs. of volunteer time & 20K hrs. administration time.

Sometimes the RFPA workers don’t understand the importance of recording their hours.

New Research: How you can collaboratively manage wildfire risk. Do we want to participate?

This would be a series of interviews (this is the Oregon case study we are looking to move forward with).

Chad Karges comment: The National Policy Consensus Center will be documenting the High Desert Partnership process. Maybe you should tie in with them to learn about the work they will be doing as well.

Emily Jane Davis: I think that the value for this group could be sharing the lessons learned from other case studies.

**Approval of July notes –** no comments, notes approved. - *Bryant*

**Suppression *– BLM and RFPA’s***

**RFPA funding discussion – Marvin Vetter**

Marvin Vetter: When we started, this was the most difficult county to work in. We’ve made a lot of headway, everyone knows who the district manager and FMO is. That’s not the case everywhere.

Marvin gave background of how RFPA funding came about. From entirely grant funded to unfunded mandates (sound like a good idea, you should do it, no money attached) to in 2015 – legislature approved RFPA budget. 1.2 million + funding some RFPA coordinating positions.

Last biennium we put in a POP (Program Option Package) for roughly 650K. Some to fund the RFPA liaison position. Some went to the unfunded mandates to fund insurance / admin. costs, filing papers for 501C3, etc. Out of the 650K we only got roughly 400K.

Marla Rae (retired lobbyist went to legislature & lobbied to fund RFPA’s)

This year, ODF is not putting in a POP for the RFPA’s. It is all part of the ODF budget now, can’t be taken away.

DAS (dept. of administrative services)

We are putting in a POP to fund liaison position & updating radio equipment & PPE

POP must be submitted every biennium – can fund insurance costs, fuel costs, repairs, etc.

Average RFPA brings in $3500 / year. (Not enough to cover much)

Q: would it be possible to do an emergency fuel POP for the entire state?

A: It would be difficult – part of that is tracking financing (receipts – using fuel from farmers fuel tanks used as an example – don’t record how much fuel used for reimbursement requests)

Q: Are FMAG reimbursements available to RFPA’s?

A: No, those are for private (rural fire districts/dept.) – these are basically FEMA funds

Chad Q: Is there a coordinated ask between all RFPA’s statewide, that can make this into some kind of base funding? Rather than a POP?

Marvin A: There is a possibility for some base funding for positions, but not for pass through money that goes to RFPA’s.

The POP money must be spent, can’t be put in the bank & saved for later. (one potential way around this would be to purchase a large fuel tank to save fuel for future needs)

**Fire Report**

(42 acre fire in area of last stop on field tour)

Griffin Creek fire: worked with Crane RFPA. 3-4 days it was taken care of. Was ¼ - ½ mile from our last stop and burned 42 acres. Near the juniper cut. Mid slope, lots of dead & down, looked like a timber fire – likely lightning start.

The rest of the fires were also RFPA assists. Round Barn, Hay stack, and the Buffalo fire (500 acres – human start on Lakeview dist.) MODIS (infrared satellite imagery) detected Buffalo fire the night before. Allotment was grazed, likely helped catch it. Credit should go to everyone who worked so well together. BLM, RFPA’s, everyone worked really well together. Credit is due to those people. From 2012 to now there is an amazing difference in the communication link. There were several comments around it being the relationships that make the difference, getting to know individuals, builds trust, etc. Conversations at the end of the fire with BLM fire staff is very helpful in educating RFPA’s.

Crane RFPA’s have been hitting 1-2 fires a week. All small & human caused, mostly on private.

Potential for large fires this season is still there. There are years where the fire season seems to be later.

Q: Are our fire resources being reallocated because we haven’t had many fires?

A: No, we’ve been holding our resources tight in the event of a fire.

Q: what are our Jet-A fuel resources?

A: fine for now, I’m sure if we had a large active fire we could run the reserve low.

Chad B: relationships are a common theme in collaborative work. We are positioning ourselves to make exponential progress once initial relationships are built.

**Discussion around education of public:**

Find a local hunter group to inform hunters about wildfire risk.

* Prevention team could be brought in to educate. (hunter education could be a good place for this as well)

Gary M: Why wouldn’t you report? If you’re a citizen who starts a fire… I think the fear of the cost of suppression efforts may prevent people from reporting fires

Comment that auto insurance will cover the costs (some) of suppression efforts for auto cause fires. – education is key here.

**Update on BLM’s Programmatic EIS’s**

Drafts should be submitted to the wider audience by Aug 30th.

Angela: We (USFWS) still need the species list for endangered species consultation. That isn’t developed yet & it could slow down the process

**Early Detection Camera Update:**

Couldn’t get the question of overlap of the viewshed of each camera answered as easily as thought after the last meeting. There were issues with the program used to investigate that and we’ll continue to work on answering that question. It turned out to be more difficult than anticipated.

Vale district cams are going up now. The Steens should be done soon & that will be it for this year. Next year there should be more money coming to do more of these.

Q: How does MODIS perform with smoke?
A: It works well. But the fire must be a pretty big (10 acres) to detect. System doesn’t trigger until there are multiple squares detected. These are thermal based.

Q: Do you stage resources (engines) where we are expecting storms – lighting?

A: Yes, they chase the storms (generally the closest resource to the fire is dispatched to that event)

6’s & 2’s are what we look for in terms of a storms potential to start fires. 6 is dry lighting – 2 is widely spread lightning (can get lighting out of small clouds)

**Draft Pueblo Mountains Fuels Reduction EA Discussion**

Rhonda Karges: One thing that didn’t get worked into the document was how additional water affects suppression efforts. Will also add in the no action alternative that the cameras are being installed and specifics about how we will drill seed (drag behind the drill to bury seed – hopefully result in better germination)

New direction from Secretary of Interior Zinke – all EA’s need to be done in 180 days and be 7-15 pages long.

Dan Morse had brought up concerns about Burns Paiute Tribe – McDermmitt Tribe in last meeting.

Comments from the Upper Snake River Tribe’s foundation technical staff around fuel breaks were mainly concerned with maintenance over time.

Rhonda: I feel like we address many of these concerns in the adaptive management piece & monitoring plan. With ‘if / then’ type statements…

There was a discussion around cattle use (51 head) post seeding. Cattle will be excluded for 2 seasons, or until objectives are met. BLM will be actively working with permittee to move cattle to different areas during this timeframe (using water development/supplements) to control where grazing activity occurs.

Tom Sharp: How are we going got keep the pumps going?

Rick: First choice would be solar. – system we buy can run both solar or generator – have option to pump more with generator if solar is insufficient.

Q: how much does the smoke affect the solar.

A: It does, but it doesn’t seem to diminish it that much

Q: How are you going to keep the water from freezing in winter? What considerations have you put to that?

A: 30 ft. bottomless, bubbler systems, etc. there are options there to keep it ice free. Ideas were discussed how to keep troughs ice free.

Rick: preparing paperwork to contract to drill well.

Angela Sitz: Discussed need for local seeds. USFWS botanist (Seeds of Success) scouting for collection sites for local seeds. (Burns doesn’t have a seeds of success crew, that’s a gap we could talk about for future). We don’t have the current resources / people to bulk & grow local seed after the initial seed is collected either. There is a niche there that could be filled with local business (potentially).

**Next steps for Draft Document**: I would like to finalize this and send it out for public comment. I would like to get approval from this group and be able to send it out.

Bryant – I think we get notes turned around quickly, to give opportunity to others that weren’t at this meeting to offer up comments before it goes out for public comment period.

Angela: I haven’t had a chance to read it through cover to cover, will have comments by next Friday.

**Monitoring assignments (Chad B/Angela S/Jeff R).**

Action Item, BOYT: Angela follow up on third part monitoring.

Bruce Q: Is it a money issue or a personnel issue? (about monitoring)

Jeff A: more of a personnel issue. Sometimes more money doesn’t help if capacity isn’t there.

Ron W: There was questions at last meeting about how extensive monitoring needed to be, has that been resolved?
Chad B: I think we’re at an acceptable place to move forward at this point.

**Pueblo Mountains Subcommittee Report Out & Update**

When initially looking into Pueblo Mtn. project we divided into seven units/zones & ranked them on importance from most to least, talked about why we picked the area that we did. We identified an area with very high fire risk / no fuel breaks to work in with a goal to reduce fire risk.

Is there anything we’d like to follow up with in addition to this project?

Ricky: What are some potential areas of concern that we are not working on?

Rincon road and Hwy 205?

protect sagebrush habitat west of road. Possibly spraying or mowing brush.

And HWY 205 – Ricky comments – sees it as a burning hazard, lots of annual grasses, lots of traffic / potential for starts.

Potential spraying (plateu), cattle (existing management) are using cheatgrass & reducing fuel loads

Additional NEPA wouldn’t be needed to spray. But, to mow we would need to make a new decision based on existing NEPA.

Angela: I think that we have some models of fuel breaks on that (Rincon) road – analyzed as another option when initially talking about Pueblo project.

Bryant: Where does this group want to go next? We’re talking about moving to Bartlett area for 2nd project, do we want to keep this (205, Rincon road) project as a next project to go back to?

Bruce: We can think of these as a phase 2 of the pueblo project. Move forward with what we have now, go back to this later.

Rhonda: Dan Morse isn’t here, what would he think about doing more in the Pueblo’s?

Jeff: I think if Dan were here he would say let’s see if what is currently proposed works before we add more to the project.

Chad: Going back to 205. If we bring this in as part of the collaborative we would be working on more of a landscape level.

Jeff: It seems like there is more conversation to be had around 205 & Rincon road about whether this is something to include.
Agenda item for next meeting: 205 & Rincon road discussion.

**Communication Plan Update**

Tom Sharp reviewed discussion on communications committee conference call including:

* Various communication channels such as ONDA, IWJV, Cattlmen’s Association, etc.
* Partner’s only section on the website: Used to post documents, etc.
* HC Fair, does HCWC want to have a presence?
* Check with Brenda about past meeting notes w/ details about the camera program.
* Asked whether we plan to use drone technology for any of our projects

Website status: [harneywildfire.org](https://linkprotect.cudasvc.com/url?a=http%3a%2f%2fharneywildfire.org&c=E,1,juhn64XQCsPKyfifEY5VJMFjyJprC-Xe78WfIvjtShFur5DdI_kGGO-X55b8vci5TixJHxNeY5peIwsFdEnCRvDfp-NSR5vzlDTfzGtfrIPk&typo=1)

*Next Steps*: Start posting agendas and notes on website.

Dustin: MaybeMarla needs to talk to Gary to put together a story. Gary talked about the improvement in RFPA & government coordination. Maybe that could be a success story that we share on the website.

Comment about posting documents on website: you need to be wary of public access, but I think that putting approved docs up for public (library) would tell the story of the collaborative group well.

Crane RFPA has been approached about drones (for prevention) by INTEL – has infrared heat, etc., there would be communications with Fire Dispatch, etc. if this were ever to happen.

**Pilot Project #2 – Field Tour Recap**

Stop 1

Lots of Bare Dirt, some bunchgrasses, decent stand of crested. I think maybe for this site, we seed perennial bunchgrasses, try to get those established & wait for sagebrush to come back naturally.

Biggest risk for this site is more fire. More burning will keep this in a state of annual invasive grasses

Bill Dragt: If we get sagebrush, I think that we will have less grass. Not terribly productive, one will likely replace the other.

Stop 2

There were quite a few perennial bunchgrasses, still lots of cheatgrass, some sagebrush. It’s a winter grazing allotment, targeting cheatgrass.

Biggest risk to this site is still fire. There are seedling sagebrush, crested, native, and medusa head in the interspaces. Lots of evidence of recruitment. Trend is positive for this site.

Another threat is mismanagement (timing of grazing on plant community response)

The winter grazing has been highly positive for the perennial bunchgrasses.

For this site we change nothing. Meaning that we continue current management. (been going since 2012 – targeted grazing)

Q Ron W: Is there something that precludes doing this type of management on site 1?
A Bill D: The problem with BLM permits is that we have already authorized basically any season & any management to meet our objectives. So we must work with the permittee to meet the needs of both parties.

Stop 3

Grassland (mostly native perennial bunchgrasses) slightly higher elevation – probably closer to an 10-12 in. precip. site, maybe even higher…

Burned in 2014 buzzard fire. Pretty resilient to fire. A big threat to this site is conifer encroachment (long term) – burning again will likely just keep it in it’s current state, which isn’t terrible (native grasses)

Stop 4

Juniper shoot – late phase 2 juniper stand. Beginning to lose the shrub understory. Showed pics of griffin creek fire to compare it to this stop. Lots of downed dead juniper @ the Griffin Creek fire.

Stop 5

Juniper burns hot. It scorches soils & will require you to do active restoration after. It will be much more resilient without juniper.

There are 2 other factors of resiliency that we haven’t talked about yet. We’ve hit ecological, but what are the socio-economic benefits of decreasing fire risk / increasing productivity of rangelands, etc.?

**Discussion around Pilot Project #2**

Rick Roy: We already have restoration happening down low (herbicide, targeted grazing, seeding, etc.), we don’t need it in the middle elevation (where it is naturally resilient & bunchgrass returns post fire) but I don’t think we have a coordinated plan on what we do in the higher elevations. I think we get more bang for the buck in higher elevations. Less risk due to more moisture. More likely to get desirable vegetation after fire, more chances for success.

Bruce T: I thought that treating Phase 3 juniper was a low priority?

Chad B: I think a better way to think about it is whether there is enough understory remaining to come back after treatment. I think some of the sites are on the verge of tipping that ecological threshold where the understory goes away and then you have to rebuild the plant community from the ground up. Most of the sites we are talking about are late phase 2.

Jeff: I think at low elevations, there’s a lot of things we can do (a lot of restoration options) but its long term & in small increments. At high elevations we can see a lot faster response and potentially more socio-economic benefit to that response faster.

Bruce: How is this treatment of Phase 2.5 juniper going to reduce the risk of large wildfire?

Part of the restoration aspect of this is understanding that it will burn eventually but getting it to the point where when it does burn it comes back to a desirable condition faster with less active restoration post burn.

Rick Roy: You need to think about analyzing the road systems to make them more suitable for initial attack. Also, if you treat juniper you will release the grasses and we need to consider managing that vegetation response when/if it happens?

Mike: I think an easier bang for the buck is tackling the compartmentalization of fire prone areas (top of ridgelines)

Angela Sitz: I don’t want to walk away from those 1st two sites. I think that deferment would be very beneficial to these sites. There are some things we could do with those that would be beneficial.

Bill D: I like the idea of doing these smaller scale, easy to implement things.

Dustin: We’re kind of on a timeline here also where we’re on the cusp of tipping over a threshold where we lose the understory, so treating those Phase 2 sites, that have an understory, should be a priority. It’ll get more expensive if we tip over that threshold.

Casey & Jacob: I think that connecting fuel breaks is key here. A lot of the threats to many of these sites is fire & if we work only in high elevation & don’t address fire mitigation in lower areas then we may lose those low sites. I think we should work in all sites in various ways.

Jeff: I would like to bring in someone to tell us if some of our assumptions around social & economic response to some of these options are correct. I’m making a ton of assumption around socio-economics of these ‘restoration’ treatments and I don’t know enough about it.

Bruce: I think that we’re circling back to what we did in the Pueblo’s to create the larger vision for what we wanted to do & then prioritize projects.

Comment from Mike: I think that we need to bring this back to our end goal (vision) we want to prevent the megafires, have a mosaic of fire activity.

Bryant: Trying to summarize the discussion: I think that we want to come up with a plan for this entire area – wholistic plan. Get a vision and plan for the area and then come up with projects inside of that plan and prioritize those. Maybe higher elevation rises to the top for restoration, fire mitigation…

Is that common among the group that we have a high level plan for the area, and then ID a first & most important project to start with?

Bryant: Do we want a field tour to sites that are similar that have had some treatments done to them?
Chad B: I think maybe a better venue for that may be in this room with pictures of the range of possibilities.

Chad K: I want to acknowledge that what we’re talking about here is a lot of planning. The vision, the largescale plan, then the project plans. And we are consciously taking the action to move down the path of a large plan. 2nd I think we need to bring in some outside knowledge of socio-economic consideration

Bryant: Maybe the initial larger scale planning isn’t super in depth. Maybe it’s a conceptual framework.

Mike: I think that we should look at this through the lens of ‘wildfire’ management. When we talk about ‘how we want this to look’ that may have an aesthetic component. That’s getting outside of the intent of this collaborative. We need to look at this through a resiliency lens, not aesthetics.

Bryant: I think I hear a plan. We want to look at this at a landscape level plan (that’s what restoration is / should be). At least at a high level, then maybe take that plan and narrow it down to prioritize projects, while bringing in socio-economic specialists in to give us more insight into the effects of any restoration on that aspect.

Jacob Gear: Missoula ?? looks into some kind of social/economic analysis of ? (Potential resource)

Gary M: Any permittee from that area involved in this? I think we need to get a permittee involved.

**Next meeting is Tuesday September 25th**