

Meeting Summary: Harney County Restoration Collaborative March 28, 2017

Meeting participants: Jon Reponen, Phil Jenkins, King Williams, Kerry Kemp, Travis Swaim, Jim Campbell, Jeff Maben, Dave Hannibal, Mark Owens, Lori Bailey, Jordan VanSickle, Howard Richburg, Leon Pielstick Susan Garner, Steve Grasty, Pam Hardy, Irene Jerome, Karen Coulter, Dana Skelly, Tim Boyce, Marley Luke, Brooke Cassell, Cheryl Smith

Facilitator: Jack Southworth

Meeting Notes: Brenda Smith, High Desert Partnership

Tim Boyce, ECRD fire management specialist, on the five-year prescribed fire plan for the southern Malheur National Forest:

Tim presented on the 5-year plan and then collaborative members were offered the opportunity to ask questions or provide comments.: We have 70K acres to burn, if you have a plan into place currently 82K acres is off limits because silviculture is not complete. We are considering how we can we meet objectives without mechanical treatments? Maybe we can we just burn.

Q. How many years does the 70K acres project go back? A. probably as early as 2008. It is well documented a 30-plus year project in Marshall Devine with mechanical treatment is great but if you don't add prescribed fire you don't get the same benefit and then need keep fire return intervals in more line with normal fire cycle. There should come a day when maintenance burning will be natural fire and be unplanned ignitions.

Q. Do you know what needs to be burned in annual cycle to keep up with natural burn? A. Probably about 30K acres. Weather and environmental factors are impossible to predict so it is difficult to tell what we can get done in a year. Acres for prescribed burning is all about under burning, this does not include pile burning.

Average burning across the forest is 6,000 acres/year across the forest. Last year we got 9,000 acres burned. We are taking a different tactic on smoke. We are running our own models in the district with smoke and not relying solely on the smoke management office out of the area. We are also working with better systems and it allows us to get more burning. We still have unplanned ignitions that have the potential to assist in some of areas that have been prepped for burning.

Q. How much burning do you feel you want to get done to feel comfortable with unplanned burning? A. Wolf was a 240-acre early season fire, right people in the office ran the models, wasn't treated and this is only treatment it will get. This district is better at doing larger blocks than other forests. Getting other treatments lined up to get more acreage and more integration implementation planning. One of the hang-ups is coordinating with permittees, birds of prey nests. Tim has put these factors in a matrix spreadsheet and then imposed on the 5-year map we have coordinated. We have big numbers this year. If we have larger windows and more acres. And we talked about where cows are. Some of the things listed in the fall could be moved up in the priority.

There are artificial constraints of allotments – if you burn an allotment are you allowed to burn it all at a time? We don't always rest as much as a year. We have done burns in some areas in the spring and allowed for fall grazing. We have an implementation guide that allows us to evaluate case by case and depends on what grasses are in the allotment. If we burned more than a certain percentage of grasses,

after we burn we go out and monitor. There are places we could go out and burn and then graze the same year?

Permittee meetings going on all spring and they can use this 5-year plan to decide when and where to burn. Great to have a 5-year plan and none of us work in a vacuum and good to know what is going on.

Those tools can be tools to complain – figure out a way to give positive input with these tools. There is risk associated with putting out more information but let's make it a benefit to feed positive input into this. Not just complaints. What if we showed areas recently burned and attach pictures to it on the map?

Q. Who evaluates bird nests? A. Howard Richburg - Ground nesting birds are hurt in a spring burn. We monitor for active nests and protect the nest. Eagles don't like activity and will abandon chicks. Forest service biologists do the monitoring.

- Good to see a long-term plan, turning out more NEPA all the time and getting caught up on this. A plan that seriously addresses what it is going to take to get the job done? Those of us who lobby outside interests and a report that would show what happens in an ideal world.
- Smoke constraints seems to be the biggest hurdle. Dana has been opening a dialog with - smoke. Tim: With Unplanned ignitions – we don't have to call smoke management. Getting permission to burn is more constrained by smoke and they will only let you burn so many acres.
- Would like to take another field trip on previously burned area.
- Travis: This map helped us this year, then I look at what more needs to be done and find some mechanical treatment done and this means we can move forward with the burning more efficiently. BLM, FS have been coordinating for years. And this helps us get more burned. There is the good neighbor authority now in order to pull in some private lands.
- This is helpful for wildlife – we know where they are going and we can focus efforts to get the monitoring done. Every group has their restoration efforts. Can work on a delay of burning.
- Karen: There is a tremendous backlog of burning and the backlog is due to the unsustainable pace and scale of harvest. If we are not seeing those happening or in a timely way we cannot support the restoration. Is backlog due to pace and scale of restoration? If we must do mechanical and then burn. It is too expensive to thin mechanically and by fire. So, it is not so much the pace and scale but the costs. I don't think you are wrong but there is more to it. The funding issue is a concern to me – the sawlog extraction always happens but the other things don't happen. Things we want to see happen is backlogged or doesn't happen at all this is a problem for us. The dryer areas down here – fire suppression is done by the timber interests. Fire must play its natural role. But we are also – use sawlog logging to reduce fire is problematic.
- Marshall Devine was more recent and it was done under the stewardship contract – it is not a timber sale and the operator does more of the work and it happens more quickly.
- It is different with the stewardship contract. One efficiency we haven't hit on: funding opportunities and other department could be applying for grants to leverage funds. Starting this spring will have a spreadsheet for every district and look at every day if in prescription. Did we burn and if not why we did not burn. We can't do more big fires if the agencies don't coordinate. We need to rebuild our team and use all our facilitation tools to get more fire.

- Appreciate the 5-year plan has informed the research I am doing as I am scaling the plan into a 100-year plan. How to make this meaningful to the public? A lot of people feel the same way as the people they disagree with. They are under the misconception about how the forest is being managed – it will be helpful to have pictures and in terms that can be understood.
- Fire gets away with not meeting its goals when everyone else is held to meeting their goals. Maybe you need a few years of more than 30K acres and the fire becomes a routine part of the forest. We are not just measuring our success on acres but also measure our success on how many days could we burn and how many of those did we burn. Maybe it is capacity.
- As a permittee, I like the spreadsheet. Read the book Good to Great and read the brutal hard facts.
- Kerry: would like to acknowledge the Malheur is doing an excellent job of the fire problem, which is widespread in dry forests across the west. We have recognized that the Malheur has been innovative in attacking the problem – creating spatial fire plan, using natural ignitions, integrated implementation planning.
- Tim: Dana (Skelly) helped the forest think more about how to be more creative in implementation of restoration when prescribed fire is completed. There is a lot of work on the forest and important to get all the pieces beyond the timber harvest and the forest is looking to be more proactive. We are looking at prioritizing differently – perhaps work backwards from the fire that needs to be done. There are a lot of external constraints. The forest is forward looking to get ahead of the ball and making progress to the extent that they can.

Review and Discuss what we did last year on our Areas of Common Ground and what we didn't resolve. – This topic was changed so that Karen Coulter and Pam Hardy could offer the collaborative what is going well and what is not going so well. What is going well with restoration in Eastern Oregon and what could be improved?

Karen Coulter: Blue Mountain Biodiversity Project (BMBP) does field surveys, comments on, and makes objections and appeals on Malheur NF and on 4 to 5 other forests in Eastern Oregon. Summer internship program with volunteers, field survey 90% of proposed timber sales, information gathered goes into comments on NEPA. Core value is to protect environmental biodiversity and ecological function, as well as preservation of diverse species. Looking at root causes of community and ecological instability. Promoting ecologically sound restoration. I have walked out on the other collaboratives because they were harvesting big trees, this collaborative is not taking big trees.

Things going well: You have a good vibe, worked toward common ground and some of it is overlapping. With the Dove Project there is less commercial harvest. Do like increased riparian restoration. Beaver are coming back and fencing summit creek off from cattle was good. Doing controversial things on a small scale first is a good thing.

These things are not going well: Regional trend moving into the riparian zones with heavy equipment and taking out big timber and causing the impacts to the buffers that you are trying to protect.

Anyone want to respond to about the riparian areas? King Williams -we are going to disagree. A lot of the areas we were going to do work on in the riparian areas was the encroachment of the pines into the hardwoods – that is the rationale.

KC: We are walking the streams and the hardwoods are being shaded out by the small trees primarily. Problems with the streams are cattle and roads.

KC: Specific comments on Dove Project: good to see less percentage of saw log in Dove. But huge increase in biomass and use of heavy equipment. Where is the analysis about what is supposed to be there? Informed analysis leads to good decisions – and Dove was weak on the analysis. Travis didn't write Dove. Lori – most of the riparian in Dove is Cat 4. shrub steppe and the work would have to be over snow. KC: got the response to comments – did not get the science citations. Look at old historical photos, soil layers, age trees –that should all go into the EA. The EA is very indefensible right now. No clarification on what you would take out or how you would take out. FS: If there are no roads it would not be removed.

I want to negotiate this project and not litigate but tens of thousands of acres to take out.

The accelerated pace and scale increase means the analysis is suffering, the planning is suffering and the analysis is getting separated from the timber sale. I don't ever know if restoration is going to happen.

FS Comment: We do not speak of aquatic ea restoration projects – we do not speak of an aquatic proposal unless we have funding. In Dove there was none, in Flat there is one.

Are the fuel treatments funded with the projects? They are not exactly linked. Underburning has never been an issue on the forest for funding. So funding is not a problem for fire? 70% of the volume the Malheur offers each year depends on the income from the noncommercial thinning. This is under the 10-year stewardship project so they are linked. The other projects are at the mercy of the other funding and probably don't get thinned. With the CFLRP funding there is more ability. With the pace and scale on Malheur, restoration has increased more than the logging.

You can use traditional timber sales now. The brutal hard facts are that we want to restore to a resilient forest and the taxpayers do not want to fund this. Can't convert to revenue. I don't think this is still true today. Silvies was the last big gulp projects we have done – culverts, spring restoration. We try not to do those now because we will get litigated and we will lose.

I share concerns of work not getting done in a timely manner and interested in Kerry's project to track it.

Social, economic and ecological – shrinking community, want to see my kids come back. What does it mean for economic and social? It is unfair.

Constant problem manage in roadless areas. Increased pressure to do work in inventoried roadless area.

Keystone predators will not be able to maintain. Species decline is a big issue such as the American marten. Forest Service targeting dense forest and this is a problem. Not in this forest.

Failure to meet riparian objectives and one of the primary was livestock damage at creeks and springs – you have to address this; however, the response to the Forest Service is to wait until the next livestock allotment renewal. Have to address in a timely manner.

Clean water act – not enough macroinvertebrates. Not being very transparent. Water temps too high for fish. There a lot of tmdls – epa can't do water quality, etc. because being defunded.

Pam Hardy: Western Environmental Law Center. We are getting local scientific research interest, place based science specific to our ecosystems. As we do the projects we are getting commercial work done – all the other restoration pieces are not keeping up and Kerry’s project will help us determine if this is the case.

What is not going well: What frustrates me is the prescribed fire we are behind on. There is enough agreement that there we can put the political pressure on. Expanding burn days, pushing back on the state data, the pace we are getting the change to happen is extraordinarily slow.

FS Comment: We are close to non-attainment. They don’t ignore the smoldering days in the background. We have a local smoke management committee. If we become a nonattainment area we get nothing to happen. DEQ is shrinking days to burn and – state committee needs to work with this.

There is EPA rules and Oregon interpretation of the rules.

One thing going well but needs a lot of work: Increasing consensus on what the science says and looking forward to other areas and a lot of work to be done. Moving in the right direction.

Moving in the right direction with monitoring and being able to do multiple levels of monitoring.

A problem is that we see a lot of turnover in the forest service and then we lose them. For example Dana Skelly – moving to the regional office.

Need to get the story out. A lot of misunderstanding out there. There are a lot of people that don’t know what is going on out there. There is a quality conversation going on out there.

Need to get the information out – you are going to get smoke. Do you want it in the form of wildfire or prescribed?

Unique on our forest –restoration of our forest can result in a commercial product.

30-50% of what we do is thinning – we don’t just take out saw logs. It would be interesting to reach into the 90s and 80s and look at what we were cutting – cut volume? Size diameter? What is the trend? I would be interested in looking at the numbers from the past.

Q. Not making the connection of a group of lawyers getting together outside out of the courtroom?

There are only so many cases looking at it on the ground with volunteers – too busy keeping on top of it on the ground. Would rather always negotiate on the ground. Litigation is not magical at all and it takes a long time. We can’t litigate everything. Karen has looked at a lot of cases – when you do NEPA right there are a lot of things. Giant open red flag – and looking at the cumulative effects that is a good idea.

Date of next meeting

Next meeting April 25, 2017. HCRC is going to have a Tomato Derby this year. At the May meeting bring 12 plants of the same variety of tomatoes, Jack with provide the rules and guidelines.

Post meeting Wrap Up Comments

- Interested in finding divergent opinions and where they overlap and see where they might see common ground.

- If would be good faith effort / we are not overly healthy – investment on your part.
- Good on fire need to get caught up
- Adaptive management is outpacing. Don't have luxury with 4.9 million acres. We will adapt on a project down the line.
- Every project we get into we are always changing something.
- Now I feel like I had a whole lot of things I wanted to say and grateful that you are trying to create better communication. Communication is tough and glad you are making that happen.
- Discussion on smoke was new to me. I also have great aspen stands on our property and they have been grazed for years.
- Canyon Creek fire should not be the focus of this. Nothing new. A million acres of fires and we have to look past this. I have an idea – each of us to defend the other / we have to change our perspective on this.
- Tim – great job on the planning. I am not quite sure as a group how we can support you but let us know so you feel that you can be justified.
- The more you can get here – the community thing.
- Science show down. / Appreciate what you have to say.
- If we don't have a biological reason we are probably not going to do it.
- Hope you read the science I handed out and I am getting more and more backing for what I have been saying for years. We need a broader scientific representation.
- Let's do a science panel but we keep getting shoved aside. BMFP and Harney Co. go together
- More environmental participation – I have to represent my own my group and constituency. Not that many of us – only 2 staff people and volunteers. With the pace and scale I am writing comments back and forth all winter. We are trying to cover things on the ground.
- We have helped with enclosure or repair and if we are available we will help.
- Large fires are not a boogy man and how to get back to low severity. I don't think large tree logging is the key to the community. Maybe niche market.
- Thank you for having the meeting and let us know about future meeting. Better understanding among us in a respectful atmosphere.