**Harney County Wildfire Collaborative Meeting Summary**

**July 19, 2018**

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

**Attendance:** Benjamin Cate – HDP, Marla Polenz – HDP, Tom Sharp – OCA, Ron Whiting – Lone Pine RFPA, Dan Morse – ONDA, Angela Sitz – USFWS, Dan Nichols – HDP, Cheryl Smith – Crane RFPA, Jerry Rank – Crane RFPA, Bruce Taylor – IWJV, George Heinz – HCRC, Chad Boyd – ARS, Chad Karges – USFWS, Rhonda Karges – BLM, Casey O’Connor – BLM, Dustin Johnson – OSU/ARS, Toby White – BLM, Mitch Prophet – BLM, Jacob Gear – BIFZ/FWS, Richard Roy – BLM, Mike Fox – Frenchglen RFPA, Gary Miller – Frenchglen RFPA, Bill Dragt – BLM, Travis Hatley – BLM, Bryant Keuchle (Facilitator) – Langdon Group

**Action Items:**

* Coordinated RFPA emergency fuel funding request: JACOB will work with MARVIN and coordinate with BRUCE and TOM
* Schedule and hold communications committee conference call: MARLA and COMMITTEE
* Quantify early detection cameras overlaps (where are Vale Dist. Cams located?) – JEFF / CASEY
* Answer remaining questions and produce recommended responses for full group feedback prior to 8/16/18 meeting – PUEBLOS DRAFT EA SUBCOMMITTEE – RHONDA schedule
* Invite Burns Paiute to participate (or USRTF?) – BEN
* Remove fuel load/clipping language from DRAFT EA monitoring plan – CHAD B
* Inquire interest of Boyte participation in DRAFT EA monitoring – ANGELA
* Schedule call w/ facilitators of HCRC and HCWC – BRYANT / BEN
* Correction in May notes: Frenchglen RFPA was listed as Lone Pine RFPA

**RFPA Updates and Report Out**

Update on RFPA’s from BIFZ staff (Jacob), updates from individual RFPA’s, NRCS staff plans, lessons learned from a few different fires, and issues with recruiting the next generation of RFPA volunteers (aging generation w/ not many younger folks to fill in behind the existing RFPA volunteers).

**RFPA Summit (May 15-16) report out**

Discussion about this summit started with lessons learned including the Cinder Butte fire and Antelope incident (RFPA chief went on initial attack without PPE, let emotions get involved and had to drive though fire into the black to avoid being burned over). There was acknowledgement of the accomplishments of this collaborative group in bringing RFPA and agency coordination. Bruce Taylor brought up the fact that there is a subset of sage-con group looking at budget request for next year – RFPA’s need to put together a coordinated list of needs for the upcoming year with specific numbers & lists – Jacob Gear will coordinate this effort. There were comments around money allocated to RFPA’s not making it to the actual RFPA’s on the ground. Many are paying out of pocket for their own fuel. Chad B. asked the question: is there a way at a state level if the Federal Gov. & RFPA’s are working together on fires, the fed’s cover fuel costs for the RFPA’s. Any way to put in place an agreement where RFPA’s can use Federal fuel on that fire? There was a comment that we’ve gone from 9 to 24 RFPA’s and so the money is just being spread thinner.

**FALT Meeting update (May 17)**

Agency administrators meeting – provided update on predictions for the upcoming fire season. They were predicting a severe fire season. Some troubles the agencies were having was hiring people to staff trucks. Was simply a lack of hiring pool.

**Joint Harney County Restoration Collaborative and Harney County Wildfire Collaborative meeting**

Facilitators of each group will get together to discuss this potential meeting need.

**Announcement:** New Communications coordinator for the High Desert Partnership: Marla Polenz

Marla will schedule communications committee call to discuss next steps

**Update on BLM Programmatic EIS’s**

Jeff: We’ve received all comments and are now generating alternatives. Will probably be fall before the draft is out. Boise team is working on it, there are some short staffing issues making it longer process.

**Early Detection Camera Updates**

Pending an archaeologist looking at the site, the Steens Mtn. cameras should go up this month (August)

For Pueblo Mtn. they are generating agreements and once those are signed then we will tackle NEPA, those will likely be installed next year.

There was discussion around overlap of the cameras viewshed. Making sure the Steens and Pueblo cameras aren’t overly redundant (although there is some need for redundancy to triangulate fire locations).

**Pueblo Mountains Fuels Reduction EA**

Issues identified for Pueblo Pilot Project were listed on handout at meeting.

Lingering questions from Rhonda Karges:

Should we install well prior to burning so that the cattle operator can have an option to keeping cattle out of that area post-burn? Generally when we burn an area w/ cheatgrass we rest that area when seeding.

How much seed mix do we need to seed? We talked about 12 lbs. per acre & what species?

Do we want to plant any seedlings?

After an area is mowed, how do we maintain that?

Subcommittee: Rhonda K., Chad B., Bruce T., Angela S., Jay K., Casey O., Autumn L.

Subcommittee to address these questions then share the suggestions to the full group prior to August meeting to be discussed and approved at the August meeting.

Angela S.: We likely need to get the ball rolling on finding a seed source if we are serious about seeding. I think that it is important to get site specific seed to increase seeding success. Cultivars have shown to have low success compared to site specific seed.

Benson Seed (reputable native seed producer – have collected near Roaring Springs ranch) is a good option but we need to think about this far in advance to give time for growing out of collected seed.

Chad B.: due to the dry nature of the site, it likely will need multiple entries (seeding).

Dan M. Q: Has the culture clearance been done on this area?

Rhonda K. A: based on a number of factors the archaeologist will predict whether it is likely there are cultural resources, then field-check that prior to entering into the site.

**Discussion on Tribal Engagement**

There was concern that tribes are altogether against fuel breaks, and a comment that there may be an impression on what a ‘fuel break’ consists of (dozer line down to bear earth) when it may not be the case.

A comment was made that we need to consider the relationship between BPT and McDermitt, we wouldn’t want to pit one tribe against another by having one in support and one in opposition.

We need to tread carefully and choose our verbiage wisely when in discussions with the tribes.

Ben will reach out to Burns Paiute and USRT to gauge interest and report back to coordinating committee.

**Draft Monitoring Plan Discussion**

Issues brought up with the monitoring plan were around the clipping and weighing of vegetation as a means to answer the question of fuel loading. (Is the grazing treatment reducing fuels to the desired level? If not, we need a plan to do something else such as mowing) There was concern over who was going to do the work and whether we could answer this question with other data such as ocular estimates. The quality of an ocular estimate could be a concern, however, there will be data covering a much larger total area by doing an ocular estimate vs. clipping and weighing. We are proposing removing the clipping and weighing portion of the monitoring plan. BOYTE is doing a study about annual herbaceous cover using satellite imagery (Angela will follow up on this)

**Field Trip Discussion**

**Site 1:** Highly degraded site, due to high frequency of fires and invasive annual grasses.

At this site we looked at a Plateau treatment for invasive annual grasses. Site was sprayed in 2015 and again in August of 2017.

The District is treating around 30,000 acres per year of Medusa Head.

The site looks bleak (lots of bare dirt) due to the chemical treatment combined with little moisture, but we are generally happy with the effect of the Plateau in removing the annual grasses and reducing fuel continuity.

Q: Did plateau inhibit the crested wheat at this site?

A: Studies show 6 oz. / acre didn’t affect perennial grasses, but there are more variables in the field, add to that low spring precipitation and we just don’t really know.

There was a comment that we need to consider chemical resistance when spraying year after year. We don’t want to create a chemically resistant annual grass.

**Site 2:** Winter grazing pasture (targeted grazing to remove annual grasses)

This is a site where there is sagebrush present, but we’ve lost most of the perennial grass understory to annual invasive grasses.

Started this treatment of this site in 2012. Timing is key with this kind of treatment.

We’ve found that the cattle do eat the Medusa head once it retains some moisture. Medusa head is also a winter germinating plant and so it greens up with fall precipitation and is targeted by the cattle at that time. Cattle appear to maintain good body condition in this pasture. No Eureka moments here, just chronic management.

**Site 3:** Overlooking buzzard complex fire – mid elevation site – mix of perennial and annual grasses, very little brush/shrub component at this site.

Here Casey O’Connor gave a quick discussion on fuel continuity and the spray treatment along the roadside to reduce that continuity. There was discussion about flame length here vs. more brush/trees and the risk of fire spotting/crossing the road

**Site 4:** This stop was in the ‘chute’ (small gulley) in a (phase 3) juniper stand

Discussion here around fire activity in a site like this vs. the previous grass dominant site. Longer flame lengths, steeper gradient, higher likelihood for fires spotting. Likely too dangerous to even attempt a frontal attack on a fire in this area.

Different options for treating juniper in an area like this:

Historically: cut and leave

Now: cut and broadcast burn, however…

If you want to save understory bruch you would pile and burn. This is beneficial because you can burn any time after (don’t have to wait for the perfect conditions)

Q. What would this look like if it all burned @ elevations about 5200’. Seems like it wouldn’t be all that bad. It would remove juniper & fuel loads & likely recover well.

A. It likely depends on the understory. If it is in tact, it could recover, but if it is invaded with annuals & losing the brush component, it may not recover.

Note: the historic juniper treatments along the roadside in between stop 4 & 5.

**Stop 5:** Higher elevation site at the top of the hill – above 5000’ elevation: lots of desirable brush & diversity at this site, but also many small/young juniper (along with dead skeletons from a historic juniper treatment).

Discussion here about the cut & leave treatment performed & how you can end up with more juniper than you started with after doing this kind of treatment. It DID release the brush (and that recovered well after juniper treatment) but the young juniper came back just as thick as before.

Word of the day (for Stinkingwaters): Mosaic

You likely wouldn’t cut all of the Stinkingwater. Restoration will likely involve a mixture of treatments and will likely include fire (where applicable)

Q: What would the BLM like to see?

A: 1. Less fuel, 2. More sagebrush

Then there was discussion around using fire for restoration in these high elevation sites: removing juniper

There is a lot of mixed ownership here so would require working with private landowners. (already working with Tree Top ranch near this site)

Is managed wildfire an option at a site like this? Fuel breaks would be a tool in managing potential wildfires for restoration in areas where appropriate.

Scale is an important consideration: How big of a block is acceptable?

Important Note: we are seeing some higher elevation sites (south & west) that are converting to cheatgrass post burn, so there is some risk. Sites we wouldn’t expect to see that.

A lot of different thing to consider when burning in sagebrush habitat, but it seems like in site specific areas (less valuable to sage grouse due to juniper/other threats, low threat of invasives, etc…) fire could be a restoration tool. (and accomplish much more area per effort than manual removal of juniper – which doesn’t seem sustainable)