

Harney County Restoration Collaborative Meeting
October 12, 2016 HCRC Field Day –
Marshall Devine Project Area, Malheur National Forest, Burns, OR
Meeting Notes

Partners: Kerry Kemp- TNC, Howard Richburg, Lori Bailey, Christy Cheyne, Travis Swaim, Jason McGovern, Lisa Arntz, Josh Giles, Scott Frost, Melane Finch- USFS, Jack Southworth- facilitator, Rod Klus -ODFW, Zach Williams – Iron Triangle, Jeff Maben -Malheur Lumber, Brenda Smith – HDP

Purpose: This tour was held on the Marshall Devine project with a theme of ‘Lessons Learned’. Josh Giles and Travis Swaim, USFS, led the tour with the purpose to glean what has been learned in developing restoration prescriptions over the last several years.

Location: Met at gravel pit on the 31 road – ½ mile from Hwy 395 intersection. First stop excess thinning and piling, second stop wildlife clumps, third stop discussion about if this is what we wanted as an initial product of restoration efforts.

Updates on current projects: Scoping for the Flat Project finalized and proposed actions. Scoping should go out about the first of November.

Prescribed Fire work: Jason McGovern

Had a good fall prescribed fire season but felt very lucky that they were able to conduct prescribed fires without converting into wildfires. It was a short season, but the prescribed fire crews never missed a burn day and they never had smoke into town. The crews burned as much as they could. The crews have a variety of things to burn, including slash and also trying to reduce fine fuels. Two other forests in the area had prescribed fires convert to wildfires. The Dairy Project prescribed fire was conducted most recently (10/8/16), on the day they burned the Ochoco forest had a fire convert to wildfire. On the Dairy project it was an active fire with thousands of spot fires but it was a very successful burn. In this project in the timber sale area the burn was beautiful. Heavier fuels and the trees looked good with bigger fuels burned well. Logging is not enough, important for optimum desired ecological conditions need to burn. Fall burning is better than spring to get optimum fire activity. With the prediction of a big storm (Oct. 15) it is anticipated the prescribed fire season is over. There are over 8000 acres of pile burning (essentially 1 pile for every 10 acres for landing piles) that still need to be conducted and this can occur after significant moisture. Wet conditions are actually desired for pile burning. However, the work force is small now, most seasonal positions are now terminated. USFS is finding that the smoke management officials (DEQ from Oregon Dept. of Forestry) have been out to the forest to help understand the issues more. They are working with USFS.

Jack Southworth question to Jason:

- There are 750,000 acres on Emigrant Creek Ranger District and for optimum ecological health prescribed fire should occur on a 30-year rotation. Ideally, this would mean that 25,000 acres would need to be burned every year to achieve this rotation. Jack asked Jason what would need to be in place to achieve this?

Jason's McGovern's (USFS Fuels specialist) response:

- As the burn boss, if I convert a prescribed fire to a wildfire that is bad. High risk and there is a lot of pressure. "No one ever got fired for not lighting a match".
- We are doing our prescribed fires correctly by burning on a landscape scale, instead of unit by unit. In planning we always plan as big as we can and adjust based on climatic conditions of the day.
- USFS is struggling to hire enough people to do the job and those they do hire lack the experience. They are going on a recruiting tour to the Los Angeles area in the next month to see if they can interest "structural fire" trainees to get experience in forest fire work. The struggle is remote area and lack of housing for seasonal workers.

First stop

Pre-harvest stand was measured at 142 basal area (DBH)/ acre and was thinned to 60 basal area (DBH)/acre. The prescription was for the stand to be cut to 50. Comment it was nice to be in a stand at 50-60 basal area and it took the collaborative to get below 100. Stand opened up and now getting a "sea of green" in pine seedlings. The plan would be to have a prescribed burn within 5 years. It would be great to get the funding lined up so that all the work will be completed in 10 years or less. Lots has changed in the last 3 years. When we did NEPA for Marshall Devine there was no CFLR. In the NEPA process we don't know if the project will be a stewardship or a timber sale. In the past we have collected more data and the timber markers would find wildlife concerns. No one wanted stewardship. This was hard and change was hard. But, the big driver is fire. All the money is going to the east side. These forests are out of whack and we need to do something because they are a ticking time bomb.

Lesson learned in this stand: We contracted for thinning and grapple piling that we paid for but ultimately we (USFS) paid for piling that wasn't needed because there just was not enough material to pile. Ultimately, with the CFLR stewardship projects we have learned to be more responsive in these restoration treatments. Historically, these were smaller projects and we got the funding in piecemeal. With the stewardship all the funding was available upfront. Because we are



planning in large areas Task Orders were changed from Mandatory and Optional to now where they are at a point where there is no mandatory. From a NEPA planning perspective they are now planning over much larger acreage and there is no way to look at every acre at planning. They are moving into the

“fine tuning” part later in the process. The wildlife concerns felt the site should be even more open and patchier.

Second stop Lessons learned:

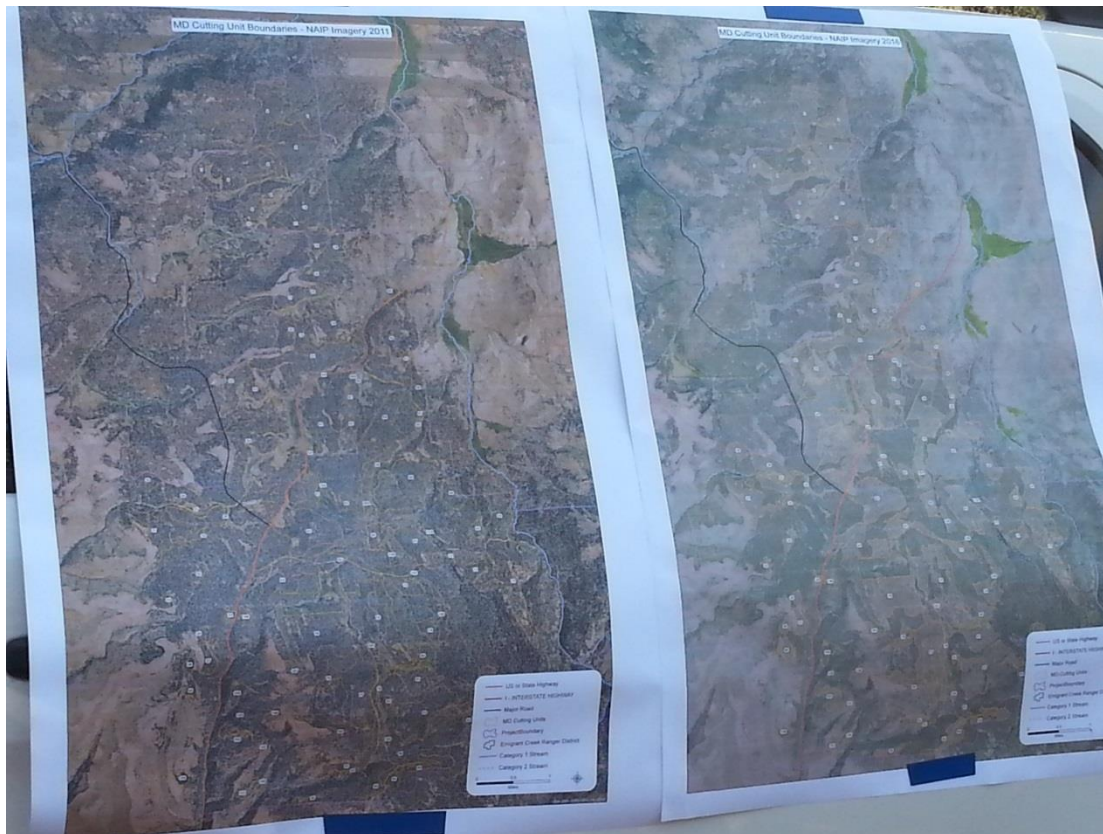
A dry pine site and in the prescription called for leaving enough material for wildlife clumps. But in reality there was not enough material by acre to leave clumps. We either need to consolidate clumps and give timber operator more latitude in deciding clump areas. Larger clumps have more value and need to have hiding cover away from roads so they will be the most useful. Most people that work in the woods know the needs of wildlife.



It doesn't make a lot of sense to mandate exactly what to do on each acres. Need to have the flexibility for deciding where clumps will go. Recommend not to do wildlife clumps by acre, this is too big of a landscape and there is a lot of untreated areas in a project. The idea is to have diversity. When talking about wildlife, it is not just about big game. Need to consider smaller wildlife, rodents, insects, songbirds. Important to have variability at multiple scales.

Third Stop Lessons Learned:

This stand was close to the road and started out a 200 basal area. Estimated that 10 tons/ acre was left on the ground. The clumps are not useful. Poor quality trees remaining. Comment was there was a chance to return it to a meadow to connect to the meadow directly to the east. We don't have enough meadows in the forest and this would have been a better use.



Maps available at the tour and will be available at High Desert Partnership showing pre and post harvest and restoration in the Marshall Devine Project.