

Harney County Restoration Collaborative Meeting

HCRC Field Day – Flat Planning Area

Tuesday, July 26, 2016 Flat Project, Malheur National Forest, Burns, OR

Meeting Notes

Partners: Travis Swaim, Lori Bailey, Melissa Ward, Jordan Van Sickle, Melissa Speeg, Noe Reyes, Tom Segal, Howard Richburg, Richard Wilhelm, Phil Jenkins, Jeff Maben, Rod Klus, Gene Scrivner, Leon Pielstick, Craig Hempling, Roy Sutcliff, Kerry Kemp, Calla Hagle, Lisa Foster, Christy Cheyne, Sabine Mellman-Brown, Josh Giles, Jon Reponen and Jack Southworth.

Communications discussion with Melissa Speeg

Melissa talked to the group about expanding communications. HCRC has funding for communications and we are currently doing HCRC newsletters for the group, supporting the website, and creating HCRC posts and events on Facebook. Based on conversations at the last HCRC field meeting, Melissa proposed created a series of informational handouts to provide to the public that demonstrate the work of the collaborative and show the decision making process being used. Melissa provided the group with a questionnaire to fill out to help guide the development of the materials. Melissa emphasized the importance of needing the group to provide her with input so she could share their voice. Melissa asked the group if there were people willing to be a point of contact for her to reach out to during the initial development of materials. Jack suggested that Kerry Kemp and Leon Pielstick be initial points of contact.

First stop at Crooked Creek Meadow



The first stop on the field trip was along the 37 road adjacent to Crooked Creek in the northern portion of Crooked Creek Meadow. We looked at historic aerial images of the meadow from 1943 and compared them to imagery of the same area in 2012. The comparison showed evidence of conifer encroachment into formerly open areas of the dry meadow. It was deemed that encroachment was bad for shrub-steppe vegetation, and removal of conifers would improve the water table and overall riparian health. The prescription for this area included cutting all trees <21 inches dbh where evidence of conifer invasion was present. Large woody debris, including root balls, would be put into Crooked Creek to improve stream health and help with bank stabilization. Prescribed fire would be allowed to creep into the edges of the open meadow area, but no active lighting would occur down the center of the meadow. There was strong consensus within the group to move forward with this prescription.

Second stop at Crooked Creek Meadow



The second stop of the day was also along Crooked Creek in the southwestern portion of Crooked Creek Meadow. We again used aerial imagery for comparison of historic versus contemporary meadow and riparian conditions. Evidence of heavy invasions by lodgepole pine into the riparian area and adjacent meadow could be seen. Much discussion ensued on how to treat this area. The prescription presented included removal of all conifers <21 inches dbh where evidence of encroachment was apparent. The group reached overall consensus to move forward with this treatment. Other topics included the possibility of planting and fencing riparian hardwoods following conifer removal, temporary loss of stream shading, and leaving conifers for bank stabilization.

Shelterwood establishment cut on Gold Hill



For the third stop of the day we visited a shelterwood establishment cut that was implemented in 1995 near Gold Hill. We discussed the prescription and the current conditions for this unit. The prescription included partial removal of the remaining shelter/seed trees, which would include removal of many large, old ponderosa pine. Sidebars for the treatment included retaining large shelter trees that did not have adequate regeneration within double their dripline. This was by far the most controversial proposal of the day and it generated a rich discussion revolving around many topics including: socio-economics, wildlife cover and forage, the use of historic conditions as baselines for management, current biological function of the site, and the need to show biologic urgency before removing large, old trees. The HCRC was split on whether or not to move forward with this type of treatment. Although it meets the HCRC common ground principles in theory, the group did not believe it really met the intent of those principles, therefore this treatment proposal was dropped.

Declining aspen stand near Gold Hill



The final stop of the day was in a declining aspen stand near Gold Hill. Evidence of aspen mortality due to conifer encroachment and the lack of regeneration was very apparent. The lack of aspen regeneration was primarily attributed to cattle grazing. The prescription presented included removal of all conifers <30 inches dbh within 100 feet of any live or remnant aspen. The goal of the treatment would be to reduce shading of aspen and to improve water holding capacity in the soil. Big-game friendly fencing would be used following the treatment to exclude cattle from the area. The group agreed on the original prescription with one minor change; we would remove all conifers < 30 inches dbh within 150 feet versus 100 feet of any aspen. Big-game friendly livestock fencing would still be installed following treatment.