Draft Field Trip Notes: Wednesday June 12, 2019 9:30am – 3:00pm

Location: Wolf Planning Area, USFS Road 17, Harney County, OR

**Attendees:** Marla Polenz, Matt Cawlfield, Frank Heide, Jack Southworth, Jim Campbell, K.D. Burman, Jon Reponen, Tom Segal, Caleb Sturgill, Irene Jerome, Arnie Cole, Pam Hardy, Mark Owens, Ben Cate

**Action Items:**

* Add agenda item to next inside meeting to discuss aspen restoration. (prioritize prescribed fire & timing of seedling plantings.

**Introductions**

The group met at the junction of Hwy 395 and the USFS 17 road to discuss the upcoming tour.

**Stop #1: Aspen Unit 1A**

*Description of the Site:*

Aspen restoration (conifer removal) & fence building activities occurred on this site. A few remnant large/old aspen trees were left, with very few new recruits prior to treatment. Felling started 12/18/2017 and all skidding was completed by 1/12/2019. This was a winter logging operation done over snow. A forest amendment done to allow for harvest of up to 30” trees. A large sample of trees were cored of largest most dominant trees to allow for that. There was a small amount of running water, from a spring, just outside of the fenced area that ran into and through the fenced area. There was no running water in that area prior to the treatment. There was a significant amount of bug mortality that occurred between awarding the contract and implementation. It is planned to be burned in the future and aspen plugs planted into the site to speed recovery.

*Comments at the site:*

* This site looks almost exactly like the technical report that USFS uses to guide aspen management decisions
* I think we need a blank check when it comes to wet (riparian) / aspen areas. They’re so unique & provide such diversity that we should do all we can for them.
* We often look at things post treatments, but rarely do we look at them through time. We should consider photo monitoring for this site.
* There was a discussion about the large pine trees that were left for “bank stabilization” at one section of stream, almost all of which were dead (bug mortality).
  + With aspen we should take as aggressive approach as possible, meaning take all conifers we can.
* This was the 1st treatment that we harvested over 21” trees.
* There are lots of areas where logging over snow is great & necessary, but with aspen some disturbance (mechanical scarring) is often beneficial to encourage suckering.
* We need to prioritize fire in this area. Because it’s aspen, unique, and to benefit the timing of planting aspen plugs. Don’t want to burn up all the plugs you recently planted.
* Can HCRC help in prioritizing this site for prescribed fire (write a letter, etc.?)
* Agenda item for next meeting in town should be follow up to this aspen site visit to talk about prioritizing fire at this site and timing of seedling planting vs. fire.

**Stop #2: Hot Dry Pine Stand**

*Description of the site:*

This is an even age pine stand (younger trees) with a basal area retention of 60 ft./acre. Leave trees looked evenly spaced & there was a 2-acre gap near the road where we stopped. It was noted that for every 2-acre gap, there was an associated 2-acre skip (untreated) in the unit. There was 1 gap (& 1 skip) every 25 acres.

*Comments at the site:*

* Q: Are all of the gaps circles?
  + A: Yes, they are. It’s hard to control the size & make it something easy to implement for contractors doing anything other than a circle.
* Q: How difficult would it be to consider where historic openings are? Considering aspect, slope, age of trees, etc.?
  + A: We sort of did that here, and have done that some in other areas, but it’s a capacity issue. Having the hours to dedicate to investigating historic openings hasn’t been a priority.
* Virtual boundaries may be a good option moving forward (GPS) for contractors. They are using this method on other forests.
* We need to step back and ask ourselves the bigger picture question, “Are we getting the ecological objectives we want to see on the landscape?”
  + We need to be planning for the future, knowing that we won’t revisit / retreat sites for several decades. It might look good now, but what about in 20+ years?
* There was also concern about lack of planning for future timber harvest. “I see an age class problem coming very soon, where there won’t be anything left to cut” (in the allowable size class), which will be bad for the economics.
* We need to work on the public license to reduce basal areas lower to plan for future growth
* In order to get buy-in from the environmental groups we need to use the best available science on Historical Range of Variability (HRV) – James Johnston’s work. What was here before & how do we get there again?
* We would need to have the ability to harvest some trees over 21” in order to get to James Johnston’s picture of HRV.
* There was consensus by the group that they support bigger gaps, more mosaic (less perfect circles) gaps, & slightly lower basal area for dry sites like this. (because it won’t be revisited for some time)

**Stop #3: Mixed Conifer Stand**

*Description of the site:*

This was a warm-moist to cool-moist forest type. It was also a commercial thin with gaps and 21” double drip line treatment. There was a ‘2-acre’ gap near the road where we parked, however, it appeared much smaller & more filled in with seedlings than the previous (dry pine) site. There was a large dominant white fir right in the middle of the gap. Basal area retention of 80 ft./acre (average) across this unit.

*Comments at the site:*

* It’s difficult to understand that when you say a ‘12,000 acre commercial harvest’ that you’re only actually treating 3,000 acres. I assume when I hear 12,000 acres of commercial harvest that you’re treating 12,000 acres. Somehow clarifying how much is actually going to get treatment within each unit would be helpful.
* I think the best way to manage this type of site is not to thin it evenly, but to ‘blow holes’ in the canopy. Opening some areas up, while leaving some ‘denser’ cover areas for wildlife shelter.
* Would be interesting to see an analysis of this unit in terms of the remaining Basal Area for Pine vs Fir vs Larch.
* It will look different after it is pre-commercially thinned than now (when we viewed it)
* Another comment about planning for the future, knowing that we won’t revisit the site for some time. (lower basal area)
* The young trees in this stand are nearly all fir, not many pine seedlings.
* There was consensus at this site that there was too much fir left and that the stocking was too heavy. Group would like to see lower basal areas implemented.

**Wrap up & next steps**

* Note that the sites we visited today were implemented at a time when there was a different social license than we have today. (to aggressively thin stands to lower basal areas) There is more broad support for those types of treatments now.
* Next meeting we might consider another tour with James Johnston to look at different sites. (one ideal site exhibiting HRV & one ‘not-so-good’ site more like site 3 on today’s field trip)
* Need NEPA & Resource specialists present that know the constraints the USFS must work within.
* Invite District Ranger, Forest Supervisor, Forest Silviculturist to the tour.