

**Hood River Stewardship Collaborative Meeting**  
September 29, 2016  
**Red Hill Field Trip Notes**

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*The following notes are intended to capture basic discussion and information presented during the field trip in order to inform future Stew Crew discussions.*

**Present for all or part of the field trip:** Jon Paul Anderson (High Cascade, Inc.), Bob Ballard (USFS), Tyson Bestone-Riggs (OR Dept. of Forestry), Sam Doak (Resident), Ann Dow (Resident), Cathry Flick (retired USFS), Kieth Harding (HRVRC), David Jacobs (ODF), Rick Larson (Rocky Mountain Elk), Jay McLaughlin (Mount Adams Resource Stewards/ HR County), Russ Plaeger (Bark), Rick Ragan (HR Soil & Water Conservation District), Anne Saxby (local resident), Darcy Saiget (USFS), Janeen Tervo (USFS),

**Notes:** Anne Saxby and Cathy Flick

**Stop #1 – 1610 Road, accessing Basalt Timber Sale (TS)**

The group discussed 1610 road reconditioning: Bob Ballard explained that the existing asphalt (chip seal) was ground up and is being laid down over road bed base on 7.2 miles of the 1610 Rd. After the ground asphalt is laid down, another rock surface will be integrated on top, rolled and graded to create a hard crust. Work is being done by a grader; we see the grader spreading out ground-up pavement as we leave Stop#1. Heavy brushing was done along road.

When Red Hill scoping was originally done, the existing road was hard to travel due to heavy brush encroachment. The chip seal road bed was installed 20 years ago and had a 10 year life span. When work was begun, the chip seal was in fairly good shape but potholes were developing. Under the Travel Analysis Process (TAP) the 1610 road was designated level 2 (gravel, high-clearance vehicle). By returning it to gravel, the USFS can better maintain it with minimal road funds. Bob estimated that it would cost \$2 million to repave FS road 1610.

WKO is doing the road work as part of the timber sale contract. Additional work includes replacing/upgrading two creek culverts and installing road culverts where side roads intersect 1610 road. The road will be paved over the two stream crossing sections to reduce sedimentation.

The land is owned by Weyerhaeuser but it was originally owned by the US Forest Service. It was traded to Weyerhaeuser back in the 1980s as part of the establishment of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (Weyerhaeuser had land in what is now the CRGNSA).

Road cyclists petitioned the US Forest Service to maintain the 16 road as paved. Janeen spoke with local cycling leaders Chad Sperry (Breakaway Productions-puts on Mt. Hood Classic road race) and Temira Lital about funding opportunities to maintain paved roads. None were found.

Generally, the group felt that the gravel road looked like new and brushing was done well. Russ pointed out that one roadside culvert was already partially crushed by vehicle driving over edge of it. Bob said that the contractor would use heavy equipment to open up crushed end prior to completion of road work.

**Stop #2 – Bull/Bronco TS (unit 21) on the 16 Rd.**

The group finished up the road reconditioning discussion from the first stop. During the drive to Stop #2, we traveled over several short gravel sections on the 16 Rd. Janeen explained that the subsurface was giving way in these areas. The USFS had the subsurface excavated and stabilized, then resurfaced with gravel. Again, this is an attempt to maintain roads with a greatly reduced road maintenance budget.

The group discussed plantation [commercial] thinning. Jon Paul explained that skyline cable logging was completed on this section of unit 21 in late May 2016. The entire unit is 108 acres spread along FS road 18 in five sections of 5 to 30 acres. About ½ of the work on the Bull/Bronco TS has been completed. This plantation was planted 61 years ago. The thinning prescription was 15 ft. by 15 ft. DBD. Trees 5 inches and up were counted towards removal. The goal was to reduce canopy closure from 80 % to 50%.

Skips and gaps\* were included in the prescription and the riparian buffer in this unit was 120 feet. The basic prescription for buffers is 60 feet on perennial streams and 30 feet on intermittent streams.

\*Darcy read the definition of skips and gaps from the DN. A skip is a special habitat area ranging 1/2 acre to ? acres. A gap is a created opening  $\leq 3$  acres and  $\geq 1$  acre in area. Skips and gaps are 2 chains apart. Wildlife marking prescription was read also: there is some marking of decay features amongst the leave trees. Specific leave trees with yellow paint were cleared around (not clear how many feet radius, however).

Debris piles were pulled up adjacent to the 16 road. They will be burned this fall by USFS crews.

There was a discussion about snags. Little to no snags were evident from FS road 18, which were similar in size to or greater than the dbh of the leave trees, within this 61 year-old commercial thinning unit. This same comment applies to Coarse Woody Debris (CWD) within this 61 year-old thinning unit. It is unknown what the snag & CWD levels were prior to harvest or if some were some left within the skips. Russ asked if creating snags was part of the contract; it is not. Jon Paul explained that OSHA rules prevent them from leaving hazard trees if they might fall on crews while logging. Janeen noted that the USFS likes to wait a couple of years to see if snags naturally develop after treatments are done. If they don't develop, USFS staff may create some. Russ commented that this unit is snag deficient.

The group generally liked what they saw [except several members commented on the lack of snag and/or CWD]. The area is opened up enough that younger trees can grow, creating a multi-storied, multi-species forest in the long term. Little shrub/sapling layer remains post-logging. We turned around to view the same forest stand (not logged) on the upslope side of FS road 18 to compare its tree density, species diversity and shrub component.

### **Stop #3 – new bridge over Marco Creek on 18 Rd.**

The group discussed the new bridge that replaced a culvert on Marco Creek. Darcy explained that this work was part of a larger program on the West Fork Hood River. Nationally, USFS prioritized watersheds for focused work. The West Fork Hood River is one of two watersheds in our region that was targeted. The USFS and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation have completed the first of two large wood placement projects on the West Fork; the other will be completed next summer.

Marco Creek is not anadromous due to a passage barrier lower down on the creek. Darcy shared that there are also no listed fish here. However, the culvert blocked passage for resident rainbow trout. In addition, there was concern that all the fill used around this creek culvert and the one above could be washed down into the West Fork in a high flow event. Cost of the bridge was around \$400,000. US Forest Service engineers determined that it was less costly to build this bridge than to replace the culvert; Darcy said this was a real plus because a bridge is better for fish and water quality. Darcy said they hope to upgrade the culvert above as well.

A large area around the new bridge had been cleared for the project. Darcy said the size of the clearing was larger than she would like but was needed to set up a temporary road crossing and also allow movement of the large crane needed to place the bridge. Larger logs that were cut were stockpiled to be used on future instream large wood projects.

The stream had just been returned to its channel that morning. There was some discussion about the steepness and straightness of the stream on the uphill side of the bridge.

#### **Stop #5 – Storm-proofed spur road off of the 18 Rd.**

There was a short discussion about storm-proofing done on a spur road off the 18 Rd. Work was done by WKO's heavy equipment as part of their contract with the USFS for the Bull/Bronco TS. Storm-proofing consisted of water bars and an impassable ditch and mound at the bottom of the spur road where it intersected the 16 Rd. The ditch was 5-6 feet deep and the mound consisted of dirt and large rock. Rick thought the road might be a remnant of an old railroad bed. The consensus was that the blockage at the road entrance would do a good job of preventing access.

#### **Stop #6 – Wedge TS.**

The group discussed the Wedge TS, which was done 5-6 years ago as part of the Lake Branch Planning Area. The access road for timber removal was storm-proofed by scattering a lot of slash on the roadbed. The entire access road was treated this way as part of the contract. Rick thought that the amount of slash was too great, made the road hard for big game to use, and prevented immediate regrowth of herbaceous/shrub forage. He thought it would be better for large game if only the first 100 feet were treated this way. Jon Paul noted that this prescription was part of the contract and if we want to see something different, we should make that recommendation. Catherine noted that this treated roadbed was narrow enough for big game (elk and deer) to jump across it and into the thinning unit. Catherine's opinion is that the treated roadbed was directly parallel to FS road and susceptible to public use if not effectively put to bed, which it was.

The Wedge TS harvest area looked pretty good to everyone. Jon Paul noted that the undergrowth was as heavy as he'd ever seen, with lots of chinquapin, vine maple, etc. The understory is coming back. Some members thought there could have been more trees removed during the harvest (tree density was still high in areas of the unit).

The group returned to the discussion about snags. Jon Paul noted that the wind storm of a few years ago had taken the tops off of a number of trees just uphill of the sale, creating snags. Catherine suggested that skips within commercial thinning units could be selected that have snags in them already or other special habitat features. Tyson shared Jerry Franklin's (UWA Emeritus professor in forest ecology) recommendation of leaving "cull" trees to become the future snags, or to put it another way, leave some trees that are not the best, rather than selecting the biggest and best for the leave trees, as is currently done.

**Rick suggested we go around the circle and provide summary comments on what we'd seen today.**

- Catherine reiterated that it is important to have snags and coarse woody debris in various sizes and decay classes for wildlife. She suggested that we recommend leaving some trees with defect (examples: mistletoe, ramiform branches, existing cavities, and multiple leaders) for wildlife habitat.
- Rick L. noted that we had a discussion during the Red Hill scoping field trips about leaving temporary roads accessible to large game. (It was noted that the Wedge TS was planned prior to Red Hill, so our recommendations on Red Hill were not part of Wedge). He also would like to see more trees removed than at Wedge for wildlife forage.
- David thought the areas we saw looked good generally. He was pleased to see some work being done on these plantations, rather than nothing.
- Sam thought the areas looked good. He thought they met not only intermediate, but long-term goals. Ann agreed with Sam.
- Anne S. supported the work that was seen throughout the trip.
- Tyson thought it was good that our recommendations on the Red Hill area made for decisions that were commercially viable. He shared that from his perspective, without funds from timber harvest, our other goals can't be met. He noted that the important topics that we covered today should be part of future discussions: road surfacing from pavement to gravel, snags, and slash levels on decommissioned roads.
- Rick R. thought the Red Hill treatments met our recommendations. The riparian areas looked good. Tree spacing and fuels were handled well. The debris piles weren't too big.
- Keith would like to see more prescribed burning used as a management tool. He would also like to see more trees left.
- Russ suggested that we consider using various methods (approaches) to forest thinning and monitor more (before-and-after thinning) to evaluate activities. Russ asked about what has happened to huckleberry patches in the area burned by the Dollar Lake fire. We need to investigate how the huckleberry bushes responded to that fire as we consider treatments to enhance huckleberries. Ann Dow and Catherine were very interested to see more huckleberry treatments and the responses from fire, thinning, gaps, etc. at a future fieldtrip.
- Jay noted that the group members have different goals; he is a BIG fan of variable-density thinning. He mostly liked what he saw today.
- Sam noted that under the NW Forest Plan, adaptive management was supposed to be used to determine actions. He suggested that from his perspective, we are still using linear thinking. Adaptive management means selecting a range of actions, then seeing the results of those different actions before determining future actions.

The group left the site to return to the Mt. Hood Ranger Station and then adjourned to Sawtooth Roadhouse for a cold beverage.