

POLALLIE COOPER STEWARSHIP CREW MEETING
February 12, 2013

Attendees:

Rick Ragan	Whitney Olsker
Bruce Holmson	Kim Valentine
Ed Simmons, Mountain Shadows landowner	John Dodd
Matt Hegerberg, Hegerberg Timber (late arrival)	Gary Asbridge
Mike Moore, ODFW	Stephanie Powers
Daina Bambe	Christina Wessler (notes)
Janeen Tervo	

Rick: I would like to begin by discussing the project area and ideas or concerns that we have about it.

Daina: (Provided background on the project from its initial layout in the early 90's, subsequent litigation and removal from the program of work.)(Refer to notes from previous meetings)

Rick: We have held two meetings in the field to familiarize ourselves with the area. I would like to get formal wording down in the notes regarding project goals for fuels reduction and forest health issues.

FORMAL NOTE: A complete list of the project goals compiled and edited by attendees is available at the end of these minutes.

Bruce: The fire issues we discussed previously were along Hwy 35, where a fire could foreseeably reach The Dalles Watershed due to ladder fuels accumulation. Remind me of the fire regime.

Whitney: The majority of the eastside has a fire regime of 3.

Rick: Are there objectives and goals in the Forest Management Plan which should be addressed?

Mike: The recent fires in this area have opened up a great deal of foraging habitat for deer and elk. Since this project encompasses much of the Gnarl Ridge fire, I would look for sideboards available to emphasize wildlife habitat improvement, such as identifying areas for road closures near large forage openings.

Rick: In the Landscape Area Design this area was identified as a connectivity passage for wildlife.

John: In the plan, this area was defined as a potential "pinch point" between private and federal lands which could affect analysis of our impacts to wildlife passage.

Rick: Migration and genetic exchange were identified as needing this connectivity. The private land pinches this corridor from the north. We don't know much about ongoing actions on this land and the effects on this project.

Stephanie: Here are the main points from the Landscape Area Design Plan:

- East to West connection for later seral, small-medium home range obligates.
- Low elevation connectivity pathway between Surveyors Ridge and Bull Run LSR. Connective pathways should be maintained for East to West species integrity.

Ed: What do these animals need?

Mike: Cover, minimal disturbance from humans (ATVs and vehicles). Without disturbance they can consistently use one area.

Stephanie: This is security habitat – a buffer from human activity.

Mike: As long as these buffers are in place, timber harvest activities would not be a great issue.

Stephanie: There would need to be cover to allow movement between habitat areas such as Late Successional Reserves, etc.

Ed: Could you explain how Gnarl Ridge benefits wildlife?

Mike: It will change vegetation states as the forest recovers from the fire, and provides browse. There has been definite benefit and use by wildlife (there has been a 50% hunter success rate in this area). This response is common after fires.

Bruce: Is there an optimal corridor size for wildlife movement?

Mike: This is not defined. It would need an analysis of cover, forage and security provisions.

Bruce: Ideally you would not want roads in the corridor?

Rick: Or open, gated roads.

Mike: Studies suggest that trail and road density has impact on how wildlife utilize an area. They would utilize decommissioned roads as vegetation began to return.

Gary: How important is this area as a travel connection corridor?

Mike: We would like to radio collar some elk to see this movement. At present we aren't exactly sure.

Gary: I ask because most of the landscape design plan wildlife component was pushed by a Forest Service biologist. I understood there was some dispute as to the importance and use of this as a corridor.

Stephanie: The extent of the importance is unknown, but it is definitely used by deer and elk.

Mike: We will be reviewing the data and maps we have. We have some old radio collar data from about 10 elk which moved through this area and returned.

Rick: This doesn't mean that only Forest Service land is used. The influence of private land should be discussed.

Daina: There has been aggressive commercial timber harvest in the Upper Hood River. We should look to where we can maintain habitat connectivity to deal with these effects.

Ed: What did you learn from the two trial projects? How would this affect these decisions?

Whitney: It is difficult to discern the results from these projects, because these fuels treatments were not completed.

Daina: (History of project) (Refer to past meeting notes)

Bruce: Anytime you open up trees you increase the understory forage growth.

Rick: However, this can be counterproductive for fuels management if not maintained.

Kim: We would like to open up large enough areas that we would have manageable maintenance cycles (cost/acre). A 10-20 year maintenance cycle would be preferred.

Ed: What would the disturbance have been like in this area?

Whitney: Natural disturbance would have moved through every 7-15 years.

Kim: We may also need to look at other treatments. There are smoke issues with applying fire only.

Rick: Can we use Restoration Stewardship with this project?

Daina: Yes.

Matt: The primary objective here is ecological. What about managing for this but approach it from an industrial perspective?

Rick: It is true that whatever we do needs to be economically viable.

Kim: Fuels do not rot down as quickly as they do on the westside. Lop and scatter may be an option in some areas, but it would not reduce the fuel loading in this area. It would depend on the situation.

Matt: Mix of treatments, over multiple years. 15, 30 year maintenance.

Rick: There may also be timing issues. We need to see what the site potential is first.

Whitney: Ultimately we want this to be sustainable, naturally or with harvest.

[Discussion of Pre-Commercial Thinning and harvesting for Ed's benefit. Economics vs. maintenance.]

Daina: A couple things came out in the previous collaborative group. One of these was the natural role of fire in the environment. The discussion was about whether we have opportunities to allow fire back into the system naturally. We need a protective space in order for this to happen.

Also, private landowners are working to reduce the fuels risk and threat of insect disease on their lands, but issues due to overstocking or fuels are spilling over from FS land. Landowners brought forward these concerns about risks to their property due to proximity to federal land in need of maintenance.

Rick: Can HFRA (Hazardous Fuels Reduction Act?) be used for this type of project to establish a fuel break to protect private land? Is the desire to create fuel breaks around private lands?

Whitney: We can have one big fuels reduction project but we would need more details on what you want so we can plan our area.

Daina: We also have the proposed Crystal Springs Watershed to consider. This can be heavily influenced by surface flow silts from harvest, burning or other projects.

Bruce: I would say another key fire issue is reducing ladder fuels threatening the large legacy ponderosa pines.

Whitney: This is also tied to our forest health concerns.

Stephanie: Could we also consider ways that we can use thinning and fire to create structural components needed for nesting spotted owl habitat?

Bruce: Within the existing nest patches?

Stephanie: Within corridors and home ranges based on the historic variability range.

Bruce: We should identify which roads are open and closed to tie back to wildlife corridors.

Stephanie: We also need to be careful with fuel breaks. The forage for wildlife becomes available when you open up those areas, but there is no screening for security.

Kim: We can be deliberate with our approach. The treatment doesn't need to be a clear cut, but it needs to provide a fuel break for firefighters. This is not designed to stop fires, but it provides a defensible position for firefighters to turn it back safely.

Rick: We need to have all these definitions and standards provided.

FORMAL NOTE: A list of definitions and standards is provided at the end of these minutes.

Rick: What are the restoration opportunities?

Gary: I would like it to be understood by the group that these are potential projects that can be tied into this EA based on the ultimate purpose and need. This is not all-inclusive.

Rick: What this group is doing is making suggestions to the Forest Service to assist in their decision making. The stewardship crew does not make decisions.

Matt: Have you considered managing the "low hanging fruit" in the Mountain Shadow lands surrounding forest land? What about the project as a whole – where do project dollars go?

Daina: Any monies in excess go into retained receipts which can be used for restoration projects.

Matt: Consider doing an intensive fuels project (on private land?) while planning for owl habitat restoration.

Bruce: Cooper Spur is in the project area, Mountain Shadows is not. Opportunities are there for treatment.

Ed: From our neighborhood standpoint we would consider the greatest risk to be from further up on Hwy 35. A block that belongs to the county (ownership uncertain) would burn.

Rick: Let's compile a list of things we will need from the Forest Service by the next meeting:

- County land ownership – contact Peter Mackwell, Hood River County.
- Community Wildfire Protection Plan (available online)
- Crystal Springs Omnibus Bill
- Critical habitat/suitable habitat map

OBJECTIVES TO DISCUSS

- Reduction of fuels loading in Wildland Urban Interface (to be defined)
- Address Forest Health issues
- Eastside of Hwy 35 – fire issues associated with vulnerability of The Dalles Municipal Watershed (ladder fuels, density associated with fire cycles).
- Capitalize on opportunities to improve/benefit wildlife habitat in concert with past Gnarl Ridge burn.
- Look at road maintenance/management opportunities (open road density) in the area to benefit wildlife habitat (be mindful of security-poaching dangers) associated with wildlife habitat connectivity and proximity of private lands (pinch point). Look at Landscape Area Design.
- Manage the area to meet ecological needs but do so in an economical manner. Manage more as commercial land base.
- Legacy Pine vulnerable to fire and stress.
- How can we use thinning and/or fire to create vertical complexity for spotted owl habitat in the area (4 documented nest sites).
- Look at management of “low hanging fruit” along Hwy 35 (county lands).
- Identify restoration opportunities, acknowledging that all may not be covered in this EA.

TERMINOLOGY TO DEFINE

- Riparian Reserve
- Riparian Zone
- Riparian Area
- Road closure
- Road obliteration
- Road decommission
- Road stormproofing
- Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)
- Precommercial Thin (PCT)
- Shaded fuel break
- Fuel break
- Variable density thinning
- Thinning from below
- Thinning from above
- Nest sites
- Core areas
- Suitable habitat
- Dispersal habitat
- Home range
- Thermal cover
- Hiding cover
- Fire regimes
- Condition class
- Fire return interval