

Polallie Cooper Collaborative Stewardship Meeting (Field Trip)
Thursday November 29, 2012
Meeting Minutes

In Attendance:

Rick Ragan – HRSWCD/HRWG	Mark DesMarits - Bark
Rick Larson – Rocky Mountain Elk	Whitney Olsker - USFS
Bruce Holmson - Individual	Daina Bambe - USFS
Eric Fernandez – Oregon Wild	Gary Asbridge - USFS
Matt Hegerberg – Hegerberg Timber	Leo Segovia – USFS
Ed Simmons Mountain Shadows HOA	Stephanie Powers – USFS
Brenna Bell - Bark	Christina Wessler - USFS

Field Portion:

Stop : Hwy 35 Viewshed

Daina: First, Whitney will give you an overview of this project.

Whitney: For this project, we are proposing fuels reduction. There is a component of large ponderosa which we want to promote, and high understory fuel stocking which will need to be reduced. We are planning to use a variety of treatment methods to accomplish this.

Brenna: How would you plan to treat on this steep slope?

Whitney: We would use a helicopter, with a feathered treatment, and skyline where we can.

Brenna: You wouldn't be yarding?

Whitney: We would not pre-bunch.

Whitney: Leo can give you a better overview of the fire concerns.

Leo: Fire activity over the last several years (Particularly the Bluegrass Fire in 2006) prompted a long-term fire assessment. The assessment suggested that there is a high likelihood of a fire burning down this canyon and running north into the Dalles Municipal Watershed. Or a fire could start in the canyon bottom and run up the slope. The purpose and need is to create less hazardous fuels conditions to avoid a stand replacing fire in this viewshed. The project area has not been influenced by humans in roughly 100 years, apart from fire suppression. We've had multiple big burns in this area: Bluegrass, Gnarl 1 and 2, and Dollar last year.

Brenna: Where is the Dalles Watershed fire break?

Leo: On the other side of the ridge.

Daina: The highest fire risk is on these steep slopes. We have a mosaic of live trees with a high dead and down component.

Rick Ragan: Where did the other fires burn? Do they create a natural fire break for the west side of the highway?

Daina: We have a reference map for all the historic burns.

Leo: The fires were mostly continuous burns, but there are still pockets of dead and down which are a potential threat.

Rick Larson: Is this area behind us Forest Service land? (Indicates the forest to the west of the highway, behind the pullout where we are meeting) And is it included in this project?

Daina: Yes, this is FS land, and we are planning on including it in this project.

Rick Larson: Wouldn't this flatter area be easier for a fuels treatment?

Whitney: It would be easier, but not necessarily better. We need to be taking a landscape approach to fuels reduction treatments, rather than focusing on the areas which are easier, or only in Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).

Rick Ragan: Promoting stand health, not just by using fire for treatments, but by reintroducing fire.

Whitney: We have a dry plant community here on the eastside which historically experienced a more frequent fire disturbance regime, so we are confident it will support a fuels reduction.

Brenna: How much fire treatment would you use here?

Leo/Whitney: As much as we can. We need to be cost effective and use all types of burning as needed.

Daina/Leo: There is a challenge associated with using fire. It is difficult to achieve first stand objectives in these heavy ladder fuel pockets.

Leo: There are different techniques we can use to avoid stand replacement. Sometimes we need to go in first and rake around all the trees and pull fuels away from the big trees we want to save.

Whitney: Research suggests that having frequent fires would historically have prevented the fungal rhizomes from growing so close to the surface. That's part of the reason we have increased mortality with fires today. But we also need structure for wildlife, so we are

using skips and gaps in our treatments. It is a balancing act, and we are in a trial and error process to determine the best methods.

Brenna: We saw some of the trials and some of the errors on the last field trip, and it was interesting to see how stands had changed. It is difficult to extrapolate this treatment over time to imagine how this site would look.

Do you have a fuels model that we can see at our next meeting?

Whitney: No, it won't be ready by our next meeting.

Bruce: Listening to the fire folks is scaring me. You need to go slow before you can go fast. How much fire do you think you would put in here? Because I don't think you can put pre-treatment fire in this landscape if it has been absent for 100 years. If Jerry Franklin were here he would be telling you to daylight the big pine, 30 feet around the base. There are logistical problems to planning in this kind of area.

The landscape is degrading due to fir encroachment. In 1990 we had a planning effort up above this ridge and we marked trees. There was competition from grand fir, but the pines looked good. It would be nice to treat this whole area, but not all at once. The problem with using helicopters on that slope is that once they pick up a load they like to fly downhill and they'll have to cross the highway. That will be a big ODOT concern.

Daina: We had difficulties with that during the Gnarl burns. We needed to land here, off the highway, and ODOT did not like that because you end up flying right over traffic. We also had smoke concerns, and this project would be creating a smoke hazard.

Rick Larson: What is the likelihood of putting some of this wood directly into the E. Fork for fish habitat?

Bruce: Would there be a downstream bridge issue? You'd need to work that out with ODOT.

Gary: Whole trees would be great for us to move directly into the water, but I'm not sure off-hand about the logistics.

Erik: This is a very complicated project with the multiple technologies, the viewshed, WUI, Wild and Scenic River designations...

Brenna: Crystal Springs water, too.

Daina: If we continue to stay away from these difficult areas we will be dealing with the consequences. It's not a matter of If, it's a matter of When we are going to get a fire in this area. We had some worrying moments this October when we had such hot, dry weather. And climate change may continue to complicate matters further.

Bruce: What are the regulations for treatment along a Wild and Scenic River?

Eric: ¼ mile on either side of the river is the default.

Daina: It also depends on the designation. This section of the river is most likely a recreation designation. Fish wasn't a driver, but it might be an ORV (Outstanding Remarkable Value). Possibly Scenic or Geologic. The East Fork torrents have a dynamic function. We do not have a management plan yet, but no activities can compromise these ORVs. We are cobbling together funding to create Wild and Scenic River Management Plans for the E. Fork and the Middle Fork. This often depends on the recreation work that will be there.

Matt: There are some logistics to consider with the cost of using helicopters. There are probably not very many straight stems on that slope. If you included some large pines in the sale it would be more economical. A contract PCT with fuels reduction included would kill multiple birds with one stone. Some previous sales on the forest have not sold because the bids were too high.

Daina: Many of our forest roads are heavily used for recreation. In order to safely haul timber we need to first do road work, and this is very spendy. That is a component of those bid prices.

And on the big pines: from a silvicultural standpoint we are trying to avoid wind throw. We've lost that big pine component and we need that balance. We have many areas which are just young plantation stands.

Whitney: This will all be tied to the purpose and need. The big pines provide a component which Douglas fir and grand fir (many of which are infested with mistletoe) do not. We are trying to create a multiage, functional stand with wide open space in between. We haven't had much human interaction here.

Brenna: Apart from fire prevention.

Whitney: There is a balance for fuels reduction and a healthy stand. We do still need to plan and survey to get stand data for this area.

Matt: As a management technique, we often leave the big pines. We got the contract for the Star Salvage sale. There was a great deal of windthrow the winter after that sale. For example: we hauled 11 truckloads out of 4 acres. Taking too much out of the understory and leaving just the big pines is a risk.

Whitney: We will need to do this project in stages as a trial and error process. Star was a large fuels reduction. You have to weigh the risk of fuels reduction against the benefits.

Bruce: When we surveyed around this area blowdown was not considered a big issue. There was no danger of it because the trees were well established. The understory wouldn't all be coming out in this area.

Matt: What were the stocking densities when you surveyed?

Bruce: I'm not sure anymore.

Daina: The Camp Baldwin area windthrow was due to compromised root systems.

Whitney: One of the things we've come across is that most of the trees which were girdled to create snags for wildlife are not functioning as snags, and instead blow down to become fuels.

Eric: When I said earlier that this was a complicated project, I did not mean to imply that we should not attempt it. We need to be comfortable with fire as a reality – a natural process. This is not a bad thing and we need to educate the public on this.

Rick Ragan: We have just started the planning process for this project. It is a blank sheet right now, which allows us to talk about what we want to accomplish.

Daina: Some of the issues we will need to address with this project are smoke management guidelines. This is going to be a safety issue here on the highway. Another dynamic is the thermal belt which allows fires to burn actively at night because it does not cool down as much.

Brenna: Here is a general fire question: Is it time to revisit the Mt Hood Fire Plan? Right now there is full suppression of fires outside the wilderness. Perhaps you could work with wildlands ignitions and begin to allow fire to burn naturally.

Daina: Right now the Forest Plan guidelines restrict us, and that is the liability that we face. The plan requires us to suppress all human caused fires and natural ones. We sometimes have the ability to herd the fire, depending on conditions.

Recently we've been seeing these extended seasons all across the region. There is less room to work with here on the Mt. Hood. There is human influence and human concerns to consider. In theory, where we can stand back and modify suppression is in areas with fuel breaks and modified fuels for reduced intensity burns which allow it to burn more naturally.

Bruce: What is the Wild and Scenic River designation with respect to fire? Can we put it in within ¼ mile?

Daina: Yes, but there are listed fish in the river which we may have habitat concerns for. We have limited populations of these species, so habitats require more regulation and protection.

Gary: As a personal opinion, I believe fire is part of the landscape and should be allowed to creep into the riparian zone. It will need to be assessed though.

Eric: You can get creative, and go in when conditions limit risk, like after a rain.

Leo: When we burn near streams we always slow the fire down, but it slows on its own too, once it gets to the water.

Whitney: We have a Google Aerial photo of Mt. Hood showing the Dollar and Gnarl fires (the last 6 years of fire), to better show the recent fire activity.

The maps and handouts will all be up on the web, along with the notes from the last meeting.

Daina: Also, let us know if anyone else from the Mountain Shadow community wants to be added to the mailing list.

Office Portion:

Viewing GoogleMaps for historic burn outlines in relation to project area.

Rick Ragan: In the late 70s there were logging corridors along Dog River. They have filled in now. They were up in a roadless area and were skylined across the bench.

Matt: You can still see those corridors on this image.

Whitney: In the newer versions of Google you can also view historic aerial photos to view these historic timber sales.

Daina: Is there any information that you would like us to have for future meetings?

Matt: Stocking surveys, and a map which includes the different land boundaries. You could then create a mosaic with objectives for different areas.

Daina: We are only treating on Forest Service land for this project. But we do want to take these other areas into consideration during our planning process.

Crystal Springs (off Cooper Spur) did some treatments recently.

Matt: Yes, I viewed that sale. The logging in there was poor, but resulted in good multistory. The fuels reduction should be wrapping up now. They put in some bad waterbars. It was

heavily infested with mistletoe, so they took out the dead. 16 acres were ground based, and 3 acres were skylined. Slash was piled and burned.

Rick Ragan: The County had some land logged up there too. It could be interesting to see how it has changed since that happened.

Next Meeting will be in February. Maps of land ownership and historic treatments adjacent to project area will be created prior to meeting.