Polallie Cooper Collaborative Stewardship Meeting (Field Trip)
Thursday October 25, 2012
Meeting Minutes

In Attendance:

Rick Ragan – HRSWCD/HRWG
Whitney Olsker – USFS
Ed Simmons – Mountain Shadows HOA
Leanne Hogie – Individual
Bruce Holmson – Individual
Andrew Mulkey – CRAG
Jim Denton – Individual
Max Brunke – CRAG
Kim Valentine – FMO
Stephanie Powers – USFS
John Dodd – USFS
Chris Winter – CRAG
Richard Larson – RMEF
Brenna Bell – Bark
Christine Toth – Bark
Meredith Cocks – Bark
Andrew Tierney – USFS
Don Jacobson – NPSO
Justin Sharpe – Fire Planner
Leo Segovia – USFS
Lucas Jimenez – USFS

Office Portion:

(Introductions)

Whitney: The main goal of today is to introduce the collaborative group to the Polallie Cooper project area and the general forest conditions found within. We will also be visiting other hazardous fuels reduction projects that have already been implemented. The Polallie Cooper project is a blank slate at this point with no specific treatment or unit locations identified. The Forest Service has only identified the general project area in which we are anticipating potential treatment.

The Forest Service hopes to have all recommendations for the projects from the collaborative group no later than February of 2013 so that there is time to develop treatments and identify unit locations. These units will then need to be field reviewed in the summer of 2013.

Ed: What would the desired treatments be for this project area?

Leo: We would looking to reduce fuels in and around the Polallie Cooper Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)

Field Portion:

Stop # 1: Rack Demonstration Project Unit

Whitney: This is the Rack Demonstration Project that was implemented from the DB Cooper planning effort. The main goal of the project was hazardous fuels reduction.

Ed: What was the canopy cover percentage prior to the treatment in this area?

Leo: Probably about 80% canopy cover.

Brenna: It appears that surface fuels still pose an issue in these treatment units.

Leo: Correct, the fuels piling for these units were never implemented as the cost was too high due to the small treatment area.

Andy: This project was too small to be economically viable. None of the larger operators that would have the capacity to implement fuels reduction projects were interested in purchasing the contract. In order for fuels reduction project to be viable they need to be of much larger scale so that the larger operator are willing to come to the table with an offer.

Whitney: Fuels reduction work like grapple pilling generally runs about $500 an acre.

Brenna: The trees straight ahead of us look like they are dead.

Kim: The trees appear to be scorched from burning a landing pile but they will most likely survive as a majority of the canopy is intact.

Brenna: There are tradeoffs to the large scale treatments that may be more economically viable like increased impacts to soils and construction of new roads. Could the treatments be focused along existing roads?

Whitney: We would definitely consider treatment or fuel breaks centered on road systems but we would also like to focus our treatments to the plant communities that would be the most responsive to treatments.

Chris: The 2009 Omnibus bill has very specific language regarding treatment activities within the Crystal Springs Zone of Influence (CSZI) including no commercial harvesting.

Andy/
Whitney: All proposed activities within the CSZI would be consistent with the Omnibus direction.

Rick: Limiting treatment to non-commercial only could inhibit fuels reduction treatments due to economics.

Chris: Is there any additional funding available for this project?

Andy: There is no external funding at this point.

Brenna: With no other funding sources maintaining the fuels treatments into the future may be difficult.

Whitney: Funding has always been an issue. We compete for hazardous fuels funding with other forests that have more significant fuels reduction programs. In order to get additional funding we will need to show we can maintain a fuels program.

Kim: We need to show that we have a sustainable program of fuels reduction, which would allow us to change our future funding allocations.

Ed: Would there be any potential for biomass and who is currently buying biomass?

Andy: There is not much of a market for biomass at this point as it is more expensive to extract than it is worth. However, we can pay to have biomass removed as a service item in a stewardship sale or separate service contract.

Kim: Boardman take most of the biomass in this area.

Rick: Startup costs for biomass plants are high and there are no reliable sources of biomass. Even with a reliable source of material the biomass removal would need to be subsidized and this has kept it from being viable.

Chris: How did you prioritize treatment areas to choose this planning area?

Whitney: The Polallie Cooper planning area is one of the last untreated WUIs on the eastside of the Mt. Hood.

Whitney: I would like to continue our conversations but move to a creek crossing to show the group a typical riparian area for this project area. We are proposing to treat within riparian reserves but would have no touch buffers along streams.

Brenna: All treatments within the riparian reserves must meet Aquatic Conservation Strategy ACS objective and guides.

Whitney: We would make sure to address all ACS objectives while also meeting the resource needs on the ground.

Stop # 2: Spotted Owl Dispersal Habitat

Stephanie: This site is currently listed as dispersal habitat for the Northern Spotted Owl (NSO). However, in this condition it is not functioning properly due to high stand densities in the younger age class.

Whitney: We have several historic NSO sites within this planning area. We are intending to treat within NSO habitat areas similar to this stand if there is a need from a fuels reduction standpoint. This will require consultation with US Fish and Wildlife.

Chris: Are there any NSO nest sites on the west side of the project area?

Whitney: Yes, there are a few sites on the west side.

Stephanie: Surveys were done for the original Polallie Cooper project that found nesting sites. However, we will need to re-survey for NSO and we may not find them in the same locations.

Brenna: It looks like this stand could be thinned from below with few larger trees needing to be removed.

Ed: What is meant by “thin from below”?

Whitney: In a thin from below the smallest trees would be thinned first followed by progressively larger trees until the desired stocking is achieved. This leaves the largest and healthiest trees in the stand.

Leo: This stand represents the drier end of mixed severity fire regime. Based on the fire return interval for this site it appears that we have missed at least one fire cycle here.

Brenna: What trees would be left here post treatment to achieve a fuels reduction?

Whitney: Most of the overstory trees would remain with a few of the less healthy removed.

Stephanie: In some cases we will be removing the canopy cover to the point where the stand will no longer be classified as suitable or dispersal habitat for NSO.

Older Gentleman: What would happen with the snags?

Whitney: We would not be looking to remove snags unless there was a surplus necessary to be removed to meet a fuels reduction goal.

Chris: Have you found any Barred Owls during surveys?

Stephanie: We have located Barred Owls during NSO surveys.

Whitney: Not all stands proposed for treatment need to be like this one. In a landscape fuels reduction all areas need to be considered for treatment including previously harvested stands in addition to dense stands.

Jim: Is there any placement of fuels breaks to maximize benefit?

Leo: The goal of a fuel break is to get the fire to transition from the crown to the ground at which point we can engage the fire in an effective manner.

Stop # 3: Fuel Reduction Unit (Buckskin)

Kim: This is an example of a completed hazardous fuels reduction unit. This is also the time of year that we would be burning piles.

Ed: Do you have problems with soils scorch?

Kim: We generally burn the larger piles during the winter with snow. Due to the time and conditions when we burn we have had little trouble with scorch.

Whitney: This unit was from the North Fork Mill Creek EA and was part of the Buckskin Stewardship Contract. We are in the final stages of this project with only the planting of trees remaining. This unit was thinned and the surface fuels piled and later burned and or chipped.

Lady in Florescent Jacket: Are invasive species an issue with this type of treatment?

Whitney: There are contract provisions to help limit the impacts of invasives such as equipment washing. Known infestation areas are avoided and retained receipts can be used to treat invasive species as well.

Lucas: Treatments for invasive species are not part of the normal road maintenance program and are implemented separately.

Lady in Florescent Jacket: Are there any issues with spraying in the watershed?

Andy: The Forest Service would first consult with the City of The Dalles before implementing an herbicide treatment within the watershed.

Ed: How many trees per acre are left here in this treatment unit?

Whitney: There are approximately 60 trees per acre left within this unit. Like Buckskin we would be using Designation by Prescription (DxP) to mark the leave trees within a treatment unit. In DxP the contractor is responsible for implementing the silvicultural prescription. Once marked the Forest Service would inspect and approve the mark before any cutting occurred.

Brenna: Clackamas seems to have trouble marking the trees especially the butt mark.

Whitney: The Clackamas uses (Designation by Description) DxD in most their contracts as the stands are much more uniform with few disease issues. In DxD marking of the trees is optional.

Andy: DxP is used primarily in complex stands where a simple spacing requirement would not meet the silvicultural prescription.

Brenna: What is the difference between a fuel break vs fuels reduction in regards to the potential Polallie Cooper treatments?

Whitney: Treatments would be a varied intensity depending on location and purpose. Treatments in close proximity to roads would be treated heavier to achieve a fuels break, while interior units would receive a lighter fuels reduction treatment.

Brenna: Is there any way to use fire suppression dollars to fund fuels reduction treatments?

Kim: We cannot use any suppression funds for fuels reduction treatments. The only mechanism we have for treating more acres is to reduce the treatment cost per acre by having larger treatment areas. Currently we have a 1,600 acre a year target for the Mt. Hood.

Whitney: We would like to get the group's recommendations as soon as possible on this project in order to prepare for next year's survey season.

Rick: Do we need any other field trips in order to start discussing recommendations? The next meeting we could have a field portion looking at the Highway 35 corridor and an office portion to discuss recommendations. I will coordinate with Anne to set up a doodle poll for the next meeting.