

Hood River Collaborative Stewardship Meeting (Field Trip)
Wednesday September 19, 2012
Meeting Minutes

In Attendance:

Rick Ragan – HRSWCD/HRWG
Whitney Olskar – USFS
Erik Fernandez – Oregon Wild
Bruce Holmson – Resident
Andrew Tierney – USFS

Clay Penhollow – CTWS
Gradey Proctor – BARK
Megan Saunders – HRWG
Mike Moore – ODFW
Clay Penhollow – CTWS

Office Portion:

Whitney: The Lava planning area was originally part of the Red Hill planning area but was separated out as the required field surveys could not be completed within the required timeframe established for Red Hill.

There are a variety of potential vegetation treatments within the Lava planning area including tree planting within the Dollar Lake fire, sapling thinning within young stands, plantation thinning, commercial thinning, commercial firewood and huckleberry enhancement.

Today we will be visiting units 54 (Commercial Thinning), 25 (Sapling Thinning) and 8 (Plantation Thinning) which represent some of the potential vegetation treatments. Our last stop will be at a Yaka project unit to represent the targeted end result of our proposed treatments.

While we are in the field please be aware of potential safety concerns including driving on narrow forest roads, walking on uneven ground, encounters with wildlife like bears, and stinging insects. If anyone has a serious allergy to anything we may encounter in the field please let us know.

Field Portion:

Unit 54 (Commercial Thinning)

Whitney: This unit is not a typical plantation thinning unit as we have no specific planting history. There is evidence of a past fire within the unit. Looking around we see large diameter well-spaced Doug fir sumps, which indicates the historic stand composition. Currently the understory is suppressed huckleberry and bear grass. The average stand age is around 80 years. There is an older patch of trees in the Northwest of the unit.

Rick: What are the management options for this unit?

Whitney: We would target the true firs and lodgepole for removal leaving a 20-25 foot residual tree spacing leaving the largest healthiest trees.

Mike: What does an average age of 80 years mean? It appears there are larger trees in the stand.

Whitney: Average age represents the stand age as a whole. There are trees older and younger than 80 years within the stand.

Mike: What is your planning timelines for completing projects such as Lava?

Whitney: It generally takes us between 1 to 2 years to begin implementation of our projects.

Rick: Why are there only two commercial treatment units? Is plantation thinning synonymous with pre-commercial thinning?

Whitney: There are more than two commercial treatment units as the plantation thin units will have a commercial component. Other commercial treatments include this unit and a commercial firewood unit 51.

Rick: Why are the Red Hill huckleberry units here in this planning area?

Whitney: There was a requirement to survey within the units for botanical species over two years that would not allow for Red Hill to be implemented on schedule. Also the huckleberry units fit better in Lava as huckleberry is much more prevalent in this planning area.

Erik: Weren't recommendations made for the huckleberry units in Red Hill. The huckleberry treatments are still controversial. Can we look at the treatments occurring within the plantations where huckleberry exist as huckleberry enhancement and drop the huckleberry enhancement units?

Whitney: Daina wanted to defer the huckleberry units to Lava in part to give the group more time to discuss the treatments and as huckleberries are more prevalent with the Lava planning area.

Clay: The tribes would like to see as much huckleberry treatments as possible due to declining fields.

Erik: A middle of the road approach would be allowing huckleberry enhancement within the commercial thinning units.

Mike: What species of huckleberries are in this stand?

Whitney: These are big leaf huckleberries and are the preferred species of the native tribes.

Rick: There used to be more huckleberry in the area especially in areas recently harvested.

Unit 25 (Sapling Thinning)

Whitney: This is a representative unit for the sapling thinning treatments. Looking around we can see signs of balsam woolly adelgid activity. True firs such as noble, silver and grand are the most susceptible to this insect and would be targeted for removal leaving Doug-fir and hemlock when available. The insect kills the trees through defoliation. The sapling thinning would focus on trees under 8" DBH.

Rick: What does the economics look like for this project? Will there be retained receipts available for project work?

Whitney: There is a potential for retained receipts to be collected in this project. If there are any other projects that the group would like to propose we need to know of them as soon as possible.

Whitney: Another potential project for the Lava project area is planting within the Dollar Lake Fire. The goal of this treatment would be to reintroduce western white pine and other adelgid resistant species. We will not be visiting any of these units today due to accessibility.

Erik: Is there anyone who the group could utilize to help in proposing stewardship projects that is familiar with the area, like someone in fisheries or aquatics?

Andrew: We could look into getting someone from fisheries to attend the next collaborative meeting.

Unit 8 (Plantation Thinning)

Whitney: This unit is representative of the approximately 1300 acres of proposed plantation thinning with the Lava planning area. The thinning treatments would have a target of approximately 40% canopy cover retaining Doug-fir as available. Treatment would occur within the riparian reserves; however, no touch buffers would be established in proximity to streams. Harvested trees would be "tops attached" yarded.

Rick: It would be very helpful to define all of the terms that the forest service will be using during the collaborative process. Like riparian reserve, stream influence zone as well as other terms like road decommissioning and road closure. It will help with clarity.

Whitney: We will look into getting some of our terminology better defined for the group. The thinning treatments will be designation by description otherwise known as DxD. We would use skips and gaps utilizing variable density thinning were appropriate.

Yaka Unit (Understory Thinning 2002)

Whitney: This unit was treated in 2002 as part of the Yaka EA. The tree spacing was 25-30 feet and there were no riparian treatment buffers.

Bruce: This was a natural stand that was marked more heavily than was typical for the time. Grand fir was discriminated against as it was more susceptible to root rot.

Whitney: Grand fir is still treated in much the same manner today. Doug-fir and Ponderosa Pine are the preferred leave tree species.

Bruce: We also tried to maintain large golden chinquapin which is very rare in Washington State and parts of Oregon.

Whitney: We would still retain golden chinquapin where available. They are prevalent here with lots of recruitment but less in other areas of Lava.

Rick: Is fuels a driver in the project design for Lava?

Whitney: No

Andrew: Fuels is not a big component for Lava. Forest health is the main consideration for treatments.

Bruce: The limb material here has not yet decayed as is typical for dryer sites.

Whitney: We will be treating the limb material here differently than in Red Hill as Lava is a dryer site. We will be "tops attached" yarding and machine piling limb material for disposal as to not create a buildup.

Next Meetings

Andrew: This concludes our field visit for the Lava planning area. We were also hoping to start a second collaborative effort for Polallie Copper the next planning area.

Rick: Does anyone see a reason to come back to the Lava planning area for a second field visit?

Group: General agreement that a second field visit for Lava would not be necessary.

Whitney: Let us know what specialists assigned to Lava the group would like to be present at the next Lava meeting. Hopefully we can set up a field visit to Polallie Cooper sometime in October so that the group can meet over the winter to discuss this project as well.

Rick: Ann can set up a doodle poll to schedule the field visit for Polallie Cooper. Maybe sometime in mid-October. A concern in doing two collaborative group together is that we focus only on one at a time and not mix meetings. Discuss only Lava in a Lava meeting and Polallie Cooper in a Polallie Cooper meeting.

Whiney: We are hoping that the group can come up with recommendations within a few meetings for Lava as it is fairly similar to Red Hill and we have already discuss may of the same issues in Red Hill as we will encounter in Lava. After we get the recommendations for Lava we can then dive into Polallie Cooper.

Whitney: We will need to set up at least two Polallie Cooper field visits before the snow flies so that collaboration can take place over the winter.