



Eastside Restoration Strategy Update

13 March 2013

Background: There are compelling ecological, social, and economic imperatives to accelerate the amount of forest restoration occurring on the National Forests in eastern Oregon and Washington: With our current approach and workforce we are actively restoring only a fraction of the number of acres we *need* to be treating just to keep pace with forest growth. We still have a wood products industry in place to help in this restoration, but the survival of this sector is tenuous. We need to do some things differently if we hope to leave the land and communities in good condition for future generations.

Part of the solution is a broader eastside restoration effort, which was chartered by the Regional Forester and is aimed at accelerating the amount of restoration. This effort is focused on exploring different ways of approaching this work. We are starting in the Blue Mountains of northeastern Oregon and southeastern Washington, building on the good work already underway on these four National Forests.

What will be different? We envision 1) a dedicated project planning team of very experienced natural resource specialists, 2) early and frequent engagement with collaboratives, 3) working at a large geographic scale, and 4) direct, deliberate connections to, and counsel from, the forest science community. We also envision using innovative tools to implement projects, with the entire range of contracting authorities at our disposal.

Current Status: Two weeks ago, I began work as the Eastside Restoration Coordinator as a temporary detail. Since starting this work, I have identified four general areas of work:

- 1) Assemble a dedicated planning team
 - a. We envision a dedicated planning team of 5-7 professional natural resource experts with outstanding experience in NEPA planning and collaboration, able to work well with the public and with large landscapes.
 - b. **Thus far:** we have developed an organization chart and drafted an initial budget, collected position descriptions for team members, and began to reach out to identify candidates for the team leader position. There is plenty of interest in this position from outstanding candidates.
- 2.) Explore collaborative models
 - a. There are 5 existing collaboratives in the Blue Mountains that are engaged with the Forest Service in developing restoration projects. The question is: how do we best engage these collaboratives in larger scale restoration projects, honoring the work that they have done already, caring for the relationships and agreements that have already been forged, and respecting the time commitment that it takes to do meaningful collaboration. When working at a larger scale, should we be talking about a *different* collaborative, or one made up of members of the existing 5, or some new model?
 - b. **Thus far:** I met with the Umatilla Collaborative during their March meeting, and am scheduling time to meet with the rest of the collaboratives to explain the initiative and to hear their ideas and concerns. The timing of these meetings has been a bit of a challenge to cover, and this briefing paper is in part the result of the need to share the status of this initiative with those groups I have not yet been able to meet.
- 3.) Identify a project of appropriate scale and value



- a. One initial vision is that the planning team would engage in planning a large scale restoration project, one that focuses on the highest priority areas without respect to forest boundaries. There are other models to consider (programmatic NEPA focusing on restoration work with broad public agreement, intensive “pre-NEPA” analysis/assessments, etc.), but before that is determined it will be critical to engage the collaboratives in the discussion.
 - b. **Thus far:** the regional ecology and natural resources group and TNC are developing one common map of restoration priorities by watershed across the Blues, based on 5th field HUC scale condition class. This is but part of the picture. Social and economic needs, aquatic restoration needs, etc. will also help inform this prioritization. The four forests are already engaged in planning work, and we expect that some of the ongoing planning efforts are in the areas shown as a high priority for treatment. We are currently developing a map layer that will allow us to look at the status and location of ongoing planning work overlaid on the prioritization maps.
- 4.) Communications and Alignment
- a. This has been the greatest challenge thus far. There is obviously a high level of interest in this work, based on the number of contacts from collaborative members, agency employees, government and non-governmental partners, and the media.
 - b. **Thus far:** day one on the job, I was interviewed for an Oregonian article that laid out the eastside restoration effort. That article was published on 13 March. This briefing paper is the result of a need to give the collaboratives, Forest Leadership Teams, regional leadership, and other internal and external audiences a picture of where we’d like to take this effort, and the current status.

Summary: The eastside restoration strategy has an obvious high level of support and interest. It is taking some time to develop a vision, establish some structure around the program, and begin to understand the potential of the strategy. Internal and external communications will be critical over the next few months to ensure we have a common picture of the status, and potential, of the effort.

Contact Point:

W.C. (Bill) Aney, Eastside Restoration Coordinator, Pendleton OR
(541) 278-3727
waney@fs.fed.us