



Eastside Restoration Strategy Update 3

2 May 2013

It can be safely said that when it comes to actual work on the ground, the objects of conservation are never axiomatic or obvious, but always complex and usually conflicting.

Leopold 1922 – Standards of Conservation

Background: This is the third briefing paper regarding the accelerated eastside restoration effort. The focus of this effort remains on doing things differently in order to increase the amount of forest restoration that we are able to do with active management. We want to build on, not replace, the good work that is already underway on the four National Forests of the Blue Mountains, in cooperation with their respective public collaborative groups.

In the past month, the team leader (Ayn Shlisky) has arrived in Pendleton and has started work. Her concentration at first will be on getting the interdisciplinary team hired and in place, and on developing the first set of project proposal ideas for the collaborative group(s) to consider.

As coordinator, my focus is currently on establishing the collaborative model we will follow, identifying “pinch points” in the current planning and implementation process that the restoration strategy can address, and communications, both internal and external.

Current Status:

- 1) Planning team: The outreach period ended on April 17, and we got a good response, covering all of the resource specialist categories we had identified. The next step is the vacancy announcements, and we are working with human resource specialists to get these out the door.
- 2.) Collaboration and communications:
 - a) I met with the Ochoco Collaborative in April, and have the next meeting of BMFP and Harney County collaboratives on my calendar. I presented the restoration strategy to a meeting of all of the collaboratives in the region at a workshop in Hood River, and during this workshop spent about an hour meeting with about 50 people interested in the idea of a “coalition” of collaboratives in the Blues. At the end of this discussion, the group accepted the offer of Commissioners Davidson and Hayward to talk with the Eastern Oregon Association of Counties about convening this group. Since that meeting, Maia Enzer has met with these commissioners to work on details, and the commissioners presented the idea to EOAC, who agreed to the convenor role. We expect this first meeting to be mid-June, and are currently working on setting a date, location, and sending invitations/announcements of the meeting.
 - b) Becky Rine (RO Public/Legis Affairs) is continuing to develop the communications strategy, and has added an internal communications plan to her work. We are developing FAQs, and welcome any communications from Forests and Districts that would help us define these questions.



- 3) Identify a project of appropriate scale and value
 - a. Some participants at the Collaborative Workshop asked that the FS develop a specific proposal for the coalition of collaboratives to consider. Not willing to take that work space away from the coalition that is forming, I agreed to develop several project ideas in enough detail to present to the coalition for their consideration. Right now, I see the following projects or project types:
 - i. Work in a single large landscape (100K-300K acres) identified by the biophysical and economic assessments as high priority. Both the Middle Fork of the John Day and the Joseph Canyon landscapes should be considered, as there is data for both and the respective Forests have these projects on their planning schedule (but have not yet started the NEPA process). Staged decision making, where one analysis supports multiple decisions staged over time, could help relieve some anxiety about planning at this scale.
 - ii. Programmatic NEPA – resulting in implementable decisions (as opposed to midscale analysis which requires more analysis before a decision). One clear example would be planning the restoration of aspen clones or stands wherever they occur within the Blues.. Another, more ambitious proposal would be treatment of dry pine forests, based on vegetation type mapping. In any case the analysis would need to be set up with constraints or project design criteria that set standards for treatments – and the collaborative(s) would be weighing in on what they would recommend for these criteria.
 - iii. Implementation of a fuels treatment strategy – the idea here would be a network of fuels treatment areas placed in strategically important areas to help facilitate both the control and use of unplanned fires across all NFs in the Blues. Visualize strategically located (existing) roads that are made to be suitable fire perimeter locations because of the shaded fuel breaks placed 200-300ft wide alongside each side of these roads. This would be a substantial number of treatment acres, all (by definition) already roaded, and aimed at facilitating the use of fire for restoration, in a safe and cost-effective manner. This strategy would supplement, but not replace, the need for landscape-scale active restoration treatments.
 - iv. Restoration treatments in past regeneration harvest areas in moist mixed conifer forests - on the northern end of the Umatilla NF, and adjacent WWNF, there are 30-50 year old clearcuts that were planted to off-site ponderosa pine. Natural regeneration has also filled in these sites, and there is an opportunity here to remove much of the advanced pine, create small openings, add coarse woody debris back to these sites where it is lacking, etc. Initial discussions with the Umatilla collaborative indicate there is opportunity for agreement about how to treat these stands.
- 4) Opportunities to address “pinch points”
 - a. I have been in discussions with WWNF staff about the opportunity to complete botanical surveys this year, potentially allowing the Lower Joseph Creek project up a year on the planning schedule. Wallowa County NRAC has been collecting data in this project area and is encouraging the WWNF to begin planning here. Botanical surveys need to be done early summer, and it is not currently on the WWNF program of work and is not funded this FY. I am trying to put TNC together with the WWNF on this project – as of this morning, TNC may not be able to provide the field crews, after all.



- b. The state of Oregon (Dept of Geology and Mineral Industries) is planning on collecting LiDAR data this summer adjacent to NF lands near Pendleton. They have offered to add on to their existing contract to collect this data, with obvious economies of scale as more area is added to the contract. I intend on committing about \$200,000 to this effort, with a project area to be determined mid-summer after the collaborative coalition considers project ideas.
- 5). Integration with science
Working with the Institute for Natural Resources (at OSU), TNC, and RO-NR to develop a set of Blues-wide potential and current vegetation data that is compatible with Forest-level data – essentially resolving differences between the broader scale, regional data and the project scale Forest data.

Summary:

The arrival of the team lead has allowed us to concentrate our individual efforts. Communications, particularly internal, is a key focus, so that Forest and District personnel can keep up to date about what the strategy is and what it is not – and what it might mean for their work and their landscapes. We are making progress on the coalition of collaboratives idea, with great support from the counties.

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