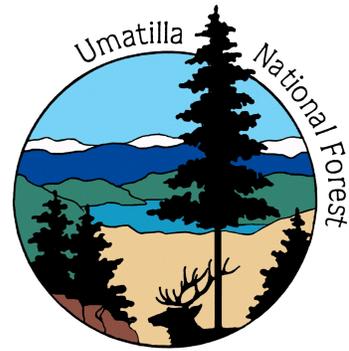


MEETING NOTES

Potamus Fuels Reduction Project

May 5, 2009
Heppner, OR
6:00 PM



Meeting Facilitator: Joani Bosworth

Participants: Tom Mafera, Brian Spradlin, Janet Plocharsky, Dale Boyd, Carrie Spradlin, Joani Bosworth, Ken Franz, Bruce Young, Stanley Boatman, Don Stroeber, Ron Haguewood, Steve Cherry, Tom Bennett, and Steve Rhea

Introductions

(Joani Bosworth – Public Relations Officer – Umatilla NF)

Joani Bosworth welcomed the public participants to the second public meeting held at the Heppner Ranger District. Individuals introduced themselves and briefly described their interest in being part of the group of collaborators for the Potamus Fuels Reduction Project.

Review Collaborator’s Resource Book

(Brian Spradlin – Fuels Specialist – Heppner RD)

Brian Spradlin introduced the Collaborator’s Resource Book developed by the Heppner Ranger District. This book is designed to keep the participants informed and updated with meeting notes, relevant maps, an overview of the Morrow County CWPP, Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA), and the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), and examples of completed treatment types (e.g. mechanical fuels reduction, prescribed fire, commercial harvest and non-commercial thinning) from the Heppner Ranger District and abroad.

Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA)

(Joani Bosworth)

Joani Bosworth gave the participants an overview of FACA or the “Sunshine Act.” This Act provides the legal structure and regulations that dictate how our collaborative process will proceed in the planning of the Potamus Fuels Reduction Project. Joani stressed that we were not looking for consensus from this group of collaborators and each participant has an equal and individual voice in this process.

This process will remain open to the public as we move forward and the group membership may not be static and can grow or shrink depending on continued interest. Joani emphasized that the final decision concerning treatment of this project resides with the Agency Administrator – Tom Mafera (District Ranger).

Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA)

(Janet Plocharsky – District Planner – Heppner RD)

Janet Plocharsky summarized the important differences between planning under HFRA versus our traditional planning under NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act). Typically under the HFRA process planning is streamlined to a limited number of action (treatment) alternatives depending on the detail in the County's CWPP and location (distance from community at risk) of the specific project area. There will be development of a minimum of two action alternatives for the Potamus Fuels Reduction Project. Alternatively, there may be many more action alternatives developed under the traditional process depending on the number of substantial comments received for the project. In order to have legal standing in the HFRA process comments must be submitted *in writing* during the objection process.

Question:

Are we still working in the confines of the normal Forest Service Process?

FS Answer:

Planning under HFRA is designed to streamline the process by minimizing the development of multiple alternatives, thus it should be a quicker process than traditional NEPA planning.

Question:

Will the Morrow County CWPP make the process go faster?

FS Answer:

Yes, that is why we are funded to do this project right now. The Forest Leadership Team recognizes that this is a priority for the forest.

Public Comment (Steve Rhea)

The reason for the CWPP was to help with private grant funding through the state of Oregon (ODF) and aid the Forest Service with the planning process and setting priorities.

Morrow County CWPP

(Dale Boyd – Fire Management Officer (FMO) – Heppner RD)

Dale Boyd discussed the development of the Morrow County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). The CWPP process was given direction under the HFRA encouraging communities to define their WUI (wildland urban interface) areas. Through this process the community was able to identify areas at risk from wildfire (based potential fire behavior), adjacent to the forested environment, and identify priorities for treatment. The following 3 risk factors were analyzed to determine treatment priorities within the community defined WUI:

- Potential Fire Behavior
- Values at Risk

- Infrastructure

For more information on the CWPP visit this website:

(<http://www.oregon.gov/ODF/FIRE/docs/PREV/MorrowCWPP.pdf>)

Past Fuel Reduction Projects

(Tom Mafera – District Ranger – Heppner RD)

Tom Mafera described the Metolius Basin Forest Management Project’s (Sisters Ranger District - Deschutes National Forest) approach to treatment in context of an integrated landscape strategy for fire hazard mitigation. The Metolius Project’s historical conditions are similar to those in Potamus (e.g. widespread spruce budworm mortality) coupled with ice and snow damage has created fuel conditions for potentially severe wildfire. Additionally, the adjacency of the Camp Sherman community creates the potential for high impact to private property and public safety.

The Sisters Ranger District proposed a wide variety of treatment (e.g. non-commercial and commercial thinning, underburns, etc.) in the following 3 “zones” – similar concept to what we envision for the Potamus Fuels Reduction Project.

1. *Treatment of Private Land*
 - a. *Using national fire plan grant money*
2. *Defensible Space*
 - a. *Create conditions immediately adjacent to private property and evacuation routes that enable ease of fire suppression, increase egress/ingress ability, and improve firefighter and public safety in the event of wildfire.*
3. *Landscape Level Treatment*
 - a. *Recognize that the “matrix” land surrounding the designated WUI influences fire behavior and public safety.*

Public Comments and Questions

(Tom Mafera – District Ranger – Heppner RD)

Question:

Is the entire area available for treatment?

FS Answer:

There may be more than one project within the 50,000 acre analysis area shown on the map.

Public Comment:

I think that Metolius should have been bigger – due to surrounding area that could still burn and affect the community given existing conditions and historical disturbance attributes.

FS Answer– Tom Mafera

There is an apparent need to treat fuels to reduce fire hazard and threat to property and life, but we are looking for what you (collaborators) think?

Question:

We keep getting larger and larger fires; Are we going to treat more acres? Is the current fuel load the reason for the larger fires?

FS Answer:

Fuel loading is part of the issue. With 100 years of fire suppression the fuel loading across the landscape has been augmented by widespread insect and disease mortality. On this forest we have mainly had large fires on days with multiple start/ignitions that exceed the local and regional capabilities to contain when they are small.

FS Answer:

I feel that around the houses and cabins we should use more intense treatments removing a greater amount of fuel (surface, ladder, and density reduction) and as we move further away from the private land boundaries we can use less intense treatments. Treatment in the matrix land surrounding the high priority WUI may be more focused on maintaining or returning natural fire cycles, fuel loads, and density.

Question:

Do you need to treat every acre?

FS Answer:

From a fuels reduction and fire suppression perspective the greater percentage of treatment the better. Placement of additional fuels reduction treatments should be designed to work in concert with past treatments that have occurred in the area.

Public Comment:

Some private landowners want to do treatment on their property, however, some do not.

Public Comment:

My property has not been touched in 100 years. I would like to treat my land prior to building a cabin so it won't burn up in a wildfire. I treated some of the area last year and can not tell where I did the treatment – it is overwhelming for individuals to treat any significant portion without some sort of cost-sharing programs. I feel I have a responsibility to treat my land so that if a fire starts on my property I don't burn up my neighbors' property or cabin.

Question:

Are there cost share funds currently available?

NRCS Comment:

NRCS has some money for working forests. The new Farm Bill may have some dollars for this type of treatment on private land. There is some potential to share 50% of the cost.

Public Comment:

The Forest Service should engage as many landowners as possible to make this successful.

Question:

Elk, deer, and fish habitat are all important; Are there restrictions on private land treatments?

Public Comment:

Private land treatments are regulated by the Oregon Forest Practices Laws and administered by ODF. There are some regulations and restrictions on treatments.

Public Comment:

We should be site specific when treating the land (e.g. wet or inaccessible areas). Managing for the health of the forest will greatly benefit most resources issues, but be sure to treat enough so that wildfire can be suppressed when/if it threatens identified values.

Question:

How do you protect your property when a neighbor does not want to treat?

Public Comment:

Most landowners want to see more areas treated to have a good positive impact.

Public Comment: (Steve Cherry – ODFW)

(Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife) supports the treatment of dead and down adjacent to private property, but concerned about potential impacts to the “bread and butter” elk habitat on the Heppner Unit. Most elk disturbance and displacement is due to interactions with the public not so much active management on the landscape.

Structure protection is priority within the high priority WUI, but outside we should be cognitive to elk habitat needs. Roads are also a concern to elk disturbance so the fewer roads there are the better.

Public Comment:

The Morrow County Court values the homes surrounding Penland Lake. The project should focus on those and work out from there.

Question:

Can the Forest Service work on private land?

FS Answer:

We may have some ability to share costs with private landowners, however we look to Oregon Department of Forestry and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to work with private landowners.

Public Comment:

Senator Wyden proposed legislation to allow federal funds to be used on weed suppression on private land, perhaps there is some leniency with other treatments.

Public Comment:

I think that when people see the treatment around Penland Lake that occurred last fall everyone will want to do that on their property.

Question:

Are some of these areas still at risk from spruce budworm or other insect and disease outbreaks?

FS Answer:

There remains some risk to this type of disturbance so long as fire is not behaving in its natural role on the landscape. Disturbance agents (e.g. insect, disease, fire, wind etc.) will happen on the landscape at certain scales. When

one of these agents is absent another will compensate - as we saw with the widespread budworm outbreak in the absence of fire.

Additional Information Desired:

Fire and Vegetation characteristics on private land

Location of past treatment on private land

Information about cost-sharing opportunities

More details about NRCS funding options

List of Interest/Concerns for the Project Area

This list was compiled during the question/answer section of the public meeting.

- What is the treatment area? Can we treat the entire analysis area?
- General concern over the high fuel loads on FS and private property
- Do you need to treat every acre around Penland to accomplish safety objectives?
- Concern over private landowners that treat their property adjacent to those that do not
- General comment that the “problem” is overwhelming for a landowner to take on alone – interested in aid programs.
- Concern over stream buffers and elk habitat
- Concern over Dead and Down trees and fuel versus elk habitat
- Structure protection is high priority
- With lower road density, treatment has less affect/disturbance on elk
- Morrow County’s focus is on the high priority WUI
- Questions arose about Forest Service’s ability to work on private land
- Concern over additional insect and disease outbreaks in the area creating additional fuel hazard.

Closing Thoughts

(Tom Mafera – District Ranger – Heppner RD)

Tom Mafera ended the meeting with closing thoughts to help direct the next step to take for group. There was a suggestion that we schedule a field trip to bring the type of treatments and existing conditions into sharper focus for the collaborators. Don Stroeber encouraged the group to get out on the ground and look at some of the past treatments on private and Forest Service land. Steve Cherry suggested separating the field trip by 2 “themes:”

1. High Priority WUI Area and
2. The rest of the project area

By doing this we can focus on the differences between treatment location, intensity, and type based on resource concerns and desired conditions post treatment.

The group chose June 8th, 2009 for the field trip – the details will be worked out in the weeks preceding the field trip.

The next public meeting was also set for July 2nd, 2009 at 6:00PM.