

**Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests
White Mountain Stewardship Contract
Multi-Party Monitoring Board Field Review
Tuesday, June 2, 2009**

Attendees:

Board Members: Don Berry, Steve Sims, Sue Sitko, Larry Stephenson, Bob Vahle, Liz Wise

U.S. Forest Service Staff: Jim Aylor, Jim Copeland, Jerry Drury, Jim Pitts, Raymond Rugg, Bob Taylor, Robert Whitten

Other Participants: Dwayne Walker, Molly Pitts

Field trip to view WUI thinning projects on the Alpine Ranger District

This field trip was designed by Alpine District staff to not only visit various treatment sites on the Alpine Ranger District, but to also see the quality of post-treat recovery. We visited sites that were just treated (no growing season recovery yet); after one, two, and then five growing seasons. We stopped at various locations in that chronological order, allowing participants to see re-growth of the herbaceous understory as it unfolds. On the last site, a treatment cut five years ago was directly adjacent to a treatment from last fall, underscoring the remarkable ability for forest recovery and re-growth. The trip was very interesting, and the Forest staff present provided excellent information.

Nutriosio Unit 1A

The first stop was in Nutriosio along Auger Creek in Nutriosio 1A. The area was cut last fall along a narrow strip bordering the creek and in other upland stands. A number of residents discussed their concerns with the District about potential erosion from mechanical treatment and the potential disruption to elk calving habitat along the creek. The area immediately adjacent to the creek is very steep with highly erosive soils. There was a high density of small trees; a stand exam showed old growth but that wasn't evident. The prescription called for 15 to 25 foot spacing between crown drip lines. All springs are buffered and, because this was not in the NEPA, Jim said this gave more latitude to adapt to the topography. Piles will be burned during monsoon or in winter and then broadcast burned. Best Management Practices (BMP) monitoring will be resumed when a staff member is hired to fill that position.

This treatment occurred in a Mexican spotted owl PAC area. Clumpiness is not so relevant because the topography lends itself to providing cover. In all the MSO PACS, consultation with Fish & Wildlife was completed and approved. The crown drip line prescription is limited to conifers only, and there is no diameter cap. However, no trees over 16" dbh were cut unless diseased; the high crowns help to meet fire mitigation standards.

Molly commented that the Four Forests Initiative is currently working through a discussion on the issue of diameter caps. Jim Copeland and other staff indicated that they would probably have achieved the same result with a 16" diameter cap on this specific project because they only removed one tree >16" for every three acres. Quality timber is coming off the project but presently there is no market for it so it goes to the pallet plant. Currently there is no grazing on the allotment pasture in this treatment area and, except for future fire suppression needs, all roads will be closed except to administrative use, probably with gates to facilitate entry in the event of a fire.



Abert's Squirrel in Alpine WUI 1



Stop 1: Nutrioso Analysis / Auger Canyon

Alpine WUI Unit 3

The second stop was at Alpine WUI 3, behind Tal-Wi-Wi Lodge and group of cabins. It was cut over one year ago, and piles were burned this past summer through winter. The soil under some of the burn piles was scorched and will be inoculated by mixing in some surrounding soil to restore its productivity. In some of this treatment area, regrowth looked extremely promising and healthy. Tal-Wi-Wi neighbors responded positively to most of the cuts. However, in a few other areas, the predominant tree was white fir, in very dense stands on steep slopes. An overstory removal of the largest and best trees in 1987 left these patches in an undesirable condition, with mistletoe and unhealthy trees. Because of the steepness, some of these areas were left untreated, but some areas needed treatment. This treatment met fire-risk reduction objectives, but didn't have the aesthetic value of the other treated areas. However, to promote healthy re-growth, dead and downed material was left in an appropriate amount for nutrient recycling. Very little reseeding was done because it further disturbs the soil and is very expensive. The vegetation will come back on its own.



Tal-Wi-Wi area; one years' growth and treatment of white fir on steep slope

Alpine WUI Unit 2

This project is on the Alpine allotment and has now had two seasons of growth. It shows very little scarring and the burn piles are mostly grown over.



Alpine WUI Unit 2 treatment with two years' growth

Alpine WUI Unit 1

This WUI was treated five years ago under a different stewardship contract. Large former log decks are now covered with vegetation. A healthy understory was evident, and oaks and aspen trees seem to show active regeneration.



Left: burn pile recovery Above: Five-year recovery

Alpine WUI 6

Right next to Alpine WUI 1 was Alpine WUI 6, which was treated last summer using the drip-line spacing prescription. The group was able to visually compare the five-year treatment with an immediate treatment directly adjacent to each other, which capped off a great field review.





Recent treatment (Alpine WUI 6, treated 2008)

Monitoring Activity Updates. Sue updated the Board attendees on activities undertaken by the ecological subcommittee (Sue, Bob Vahle, Don Berry, and Dave Dorum) since our last meeting, as well as an update on a proposal being presented to the A/S Forest Supervisor on June 9 to request funding support for a Stewardship Contract Five-Year report.

Ecological Subcommittee Update. The ecological subcommittee met to re-visit the vegetative plot protocol, as issues have arisen with logistics, timing, definitions of post-treatment, and difficulty of obtaining groundcover data due to prescribed fire management that precludes this collection. The subcommittee met in early April with Jim Pitts and Gayle Richardson, the two primary leads on vegetation plot data collection. Included in the meeting were Norris Dodd, Mike Ingraldi (AGFD), and Sarah Hurteau (TNC). The vegetation plot protocol will need revision to address problems with the three-year post-treatment data collection timeline, as the forest has not yet been able to read post-treatment data due to broadcast burning after the Year One treatments, which rendered herbaceous/groundcover conditions unreadable. Sue, Sarah, Jim, and Gayle have designed an updated protocol, which will be circulated to the Subcommittee shortly. The protocol will be tested in the field by Sarah, Sue, Jim, other TNC staff, and possibly Gayle in mid-July in preparation for adoption for this fall's data collection. Sue will provide a more detailed summary of this discussion and actions resulting from the discussion at the next Monitoring Board meeting.

Five-Year Report Proposal. Sue and Sarah have worked extensively to explore a way to use Sarah's data analysis skills (examples presented at the March Board meeting) by seeking funding for her time to complete the data analysis on wildlife habitat conditions and connectivity; songbird monitoring; tree structure; vegetative changes; and more. Sue felt that since we were entering the fifth year (midpoint) of the Contract, perhaps it was timely to propose the design of a "Five-Year Report." which would analyze, evaluate, and make recommendations based upon the monitoring information collected over the past four years. This Report would be written in a user-friendly format, aimed at multiple audiences. It could be used in multiple ways, including informing adaptive management for the Forest; for legislative purposes; as a template for the Four Forest Restoration Initiative's monitoring effort; for sharing with the Governor's Forest Health Council; for Forest Plan Revision efforts; and more.

Sue and Sarah scheduled a meeting with Supervisor Chris Knopp for June 9 to discuss this proposal.

Other Miscellaneous Updates. Bob Taylor said that Beaver Creek will probably be the next big project and will benefit from lessons learned, particularly as represented on Eagar South in the

attempt to avoid the evenly-spaced “jailbar” effect. Sue commented that a sub-committee needs to be set up to be able to provide input at the beginning of the project.

Steve Sims announced a Green Festival in Snowflake on August 1 that will feature green construction; he would like the Forest and Monitoring Board to perhaps host an information booth.

Updates as of June 12, 2009. Molly Pitts communicated to Sue that Joe McClure, the contractor for the annual economic monitoring, has scheduled meetings with Dwayne Walker over the next two weeks. A report should be ready by the end of summer.

Sue, Sarah, and TNC’s Northern Arizona Project Director Brenda Burman met with Forest Supervisor Chris Knopp on June 9 to present a proposal for additional funding to complete a Five-Year Report. Funding would include Sarah’s time for data analysis; a small portion would fund Sue’s time for Report writing, completion, and oversight; and additional funds would be included for Report printing. Supervisor Knopp not only supported this request, but also strongly recommended that the Monitoring Board envision an expanded monitoring program for the final five years of the contract. Sue will provide additional details at our next meeting. Needless to say, we are very excited to have the support of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest to increase our capacity to analyze the data collected over the past five years and to step up our monitoring effort for the last five years of the contract.

Next Meeting. Currently, the only Board activity scheduled is another field review on August 12, in conjunction with the Natural Resources Working Group. On this trip, we will visit newly-treated areas of the Blue Ridge Demonstration Project. The difficulty of scheduling a meeting in summer, given so many members’ schedules, precludes trying to set a regular meeting. However, with the news of the support of a Five-Year Report and an anticipated Economic Monitoring update, a meeting will be set for early September to discuss these significant activities.