Colville Plan Revision
Meeting with the Northeast WA Forestry Coalition
April 21, 2016

Subject: Request for discussion and clarification on road density and soils

Participants:

Maurice Williamson, Dick Dunton, and Mike Petersen, NEWFC

Amy Dillon, Forest Plan Revision Team Lead, Debby Kelly, Forest Plan Revision Public Affairs Lead, Bill Gaines, Forest Plan Revision Wildlife Biologist, Karen Honeycutt, Forest Natural Resources Program Manager and Forest Plan Revision Lead for Fisheries, and Marcy Rumelhart (notes). Jon Day provided some information related to vegetation management in writing prior to the meeting.

Meeting start time: 1:30 pm, Williamson Consulting Office, Colville, WA.

This meeting was requested by NEWFC for the purpose of understanding how the road density goals were formulated. They requested participation of Forest Service specialists who were involved in the analysis for better understanding of how road policy was developed. The following questions (in italics) were provided by Maurice Williamson to Amy Dillon prior to the meeting, and were discussed by the group. The first two bulleted items were discussed together.

- *Are the 1mile/sq. mile and 2 mile/ sq. mile standards developed at a National , Regional, or Forest level? We understand that the "Focused and General " Restoration watersheds are determined by each forest.*
- *Line(L) 10482-10484 stipulates that road density is a " broad scale" metric and the condition of the roads (watershed) is a better approximation for potential effects of the roads on hydraulic and aquatic function. What flexibility will there be on a project basis to deviate from these standards?*
    - Bill – there has been a lot of discussion trying to balance between resources and need for access, and most of the road discussion happened when the Colville and Oka-Wen forest plan revision efforts were still combined. Road density is a coarse scale measure and is commonly used in wildlife, fish, and hydrology literature to indicate effects roads have on the aquatic and wildlife environment. The starting point was looking at the science around roads. Next, had discussions with our regulatory partners since they use road density in their language as a way to discuss a function of the watershed. We looked at their numbers in relation to the literature and science. Internally, we were directed to use the summary of science from the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP). They did an extensive literature review of roads on wildlife, and used metrics to quantify effects. We looked at the watershed condition framework (WCF) from 2010, which is a national program that established a consistent way to look at watersheds - in terms of condition, ways to allocate funds, and look at monitoring. In the WCF one of the indicators is road density. Generally forest plans used road density to address specific types of habitat and used as a standard, but reduces the flexibility of folks who sign decisions in terms of progress. The decision was to use road

density, but vary it by management area and alternative (a coarse metric, category of desired conditions). Desired conditions allow flexibility for folks at the project level to make decisions about roads. In regards to the desired conditions we would need to show progress toward it.

- If we used the broad scale metric and science, also considering that grizzly bear recovery plans use the road density numbers already, there was enough information pointing us in this direction.
- We also received internal feedback that using road density at the project level is a challenge. It was decided to use a desired condition, instead of a standard, to set a long-term view of what proper function and habitat should be. Would maintain or move toward the desired condition at the end of a project, except in key watersheds. Areas with key watersheds and recovery areas were included in the focused restoration management area with a lower road density desired condition. The rest was included in the general restoration management areas, recognizing the need to continue to provide access to the public.
- Road density desired conditions are for FS system roads, open or closed.

- Maurice felt the way it is worded does not provide flexibility, suggest better wording.
  - Bill asked Maurice to look at the objectives section of the draft plan, which provides the big picture.
- Dick – What is the goal for fire access?
  - Amy – nothing specific in the draft plan. Ben worked with Jon and Bill and felt our ability to address fire starts would not be affected by road densities. At the project level, fire should be part of discussion. The plan doesn't address specific roads, nothing to tie numbers to.
- Maurice – think we could do a lot more for wildlife if we make more level 1 roads instead of removing roads.
  - Bill – we struggled with having that at the forest plan scale. Many level 1 roads are having some sort of hydrologic impact. We can't field check every road at this point.
- Maurice – disagree with that, would like to see the plan say all the roads will be checked.
  - Amy – that is done at the project level.
  - Karen – is already an existing policy so not included in draft plan. (On pg 47, line 1217 of draft plan). It is not an issue of road maintenance level, but if the road can be maintained properly. The plan recognizes we will manage appropriately. We estimated based on what we would normally do in a year. It gets back to the objectives and applies to all roads, to make them better.
- *Page 25 concerning roads states: roads, admin. sites, are excluded from contribution to detrimental conditions. Standards and guides (that Jon Day gave us at our last meeting) includes roads in that determination1(a) page 16. Which is it?*
  - The standards and guidelines provided to NEWFC at the meeting on March 31 were from the 1988 forest plan.

- Karen – this speaks to soil productivity only. We don't expect roads or administrative sites to grow trees.
- Amy – this gets to productivity and detrimental soil conditions.
- Mike – think some clarity on the wording would be helpful, productivity vs detrimental soil condition.
- Amy – there is a total soil commitment guideline on page 28 in draft plan.
- Maurice asked about regional direction on system roads vs. temp roads.
- Amy – nothing has been decided and is not addressed in the draft plan. Draft discussion at this point.
- Question about level 1 roads - Bill stated it is mostly use of the road that impacts wildlife, not the road itself.

- *Line 4273- Concerning access, identifies 3 concerns regarding road density, we would like to clarify two of those concerns. 1) Current funding is not sufficient to properly maintain existing road system at current operational maintenance level. 2) The current road system is not aligned with current and future resource management objectives. Aren't the current objectives inclusive of increasing the footprint of vegetative restoration (which cannot be accomplished without adequate access)? Will there not be additional resources available to accomplish road maintenance through the increased sale of valuable products and stewardship contracting? We feel this is a strong argument for departing from the non-declining, even flow establishment of quotas as suggested in Alt. B.*
  - From Jon - The first vegetation objective (FW-OBJ-VEG-01) states we will do active management on 6-12 thousand acres per year. That being said, there is nothing on the vegetation side prohibiting us from doing more than 6-12,000 acres. We are able to accomplish some additional road maintenance using stewardship retained receipts, however relying on this to maintain a vast, oversized network of roads isn't prudent. Our recent experience with stewardship projects shows us that generally these funds are being used to close, demolish, or move roads with an overall net decrease in road miles for each project.
  - From Jon - The push to depart from a non-declining, even flow timber yield will have cascading effects through all the resources, including wildlife and hydrology. We can certainly entertain such an alternative and do all of the effects analysis, however in the end there would be some undesirable effects, particularly for wildlife and hydrology.
  - Amy – considering all the work Jon did with Bill and Ben, don't see a conflict with the road guidelines and how we want to treat.
  - Bill – is built with some flexibility, as opposed to a standard with no flexibility. Other people look at it differently and we have to find balance.
  - Mike – looks like there is room for a lot of road building from a legal standpoint.
  - Karen – this forest is generally in good shape for taking care of our roads, but road density needs to stay in the plan.

  - Mike – it seems the FS has to have a project to be able to fix a road. Is there a way to deal with roads at a broad scale? How do we address that across the forest? Project level doesn't always pick up the bad roads.

- *Isn't there an implied need to increase the footprint demonstrated in table 32 to accelerate the return closer to the historic fire return interval?*
  - From Jon - there is nothing in this draft plan prohibiting us from increasing our footprint for burning.
- *Isn't line 4110, "Affected Environment/Fire History and Behavior" also strongly supportive of increasing the footprint of restoration?*
  - From Jon - there is nothing in this draft plan prohibiting us from increasing our footprint for burning.
- *How have the improved road construction and maintenance techniques been factored into the analysis to determine the current detrimental effects of roads as we apply those new techniques?*
  - Karen – probably not factored in.
  - Maurice – would like to see that noted in the forest plan.
  - Mike – is the 1 mile or 2 mile based on wildlife or road construction standards? Think a better explanation of that would help the public understand.
  - Bill – most people can understand road density, it is a common term.
- *The practice of determining that all roads are detrimental fails to differentiate between heavily used roads (level 2 and higher) versus level 1 roads. The narrative in the DEIS discusses the differential in qualitative terms, will quantities analysis be done at the project level to allow for flexibility in accomplishing the goals of restoration? Will this allow more flexibility in the road density constraints?*
  - Management of specific roads and how they are managed in a watershed will be analyzed at the project level.

<u>General Discussion</u>

Maurice – under focused restoration, why were the riparian management area buffers expanded? Conflict with InFish?

Amy – intermittent streams, lakes and ponds are wider, that was direction we were given.

Karen – InFish, PacFish and the NW Forest Plan were combined into the Aquatic and Riparian Conservation Strategy. The NW forest plan had the greater widths.

Maurice stated protections for intermittent streams are over-applied.

Amy – is not a forest plan thing, is a specific management question about how the ground is managed by the line officer.

Maurice – regarding wording that the most restrictive guidance will apply in an overlap - agree in some situations, but question it.

Amy – it doesn't prohibit treatment. It might affect timing, might leave a few more trees, but doesn't say we can't treat, we just need to pay more attention.

Maurice - Does this ease analysis since not doing buffers?

Karen – we are getting better direction now. We will do white papers to interpret all of this after the plan is signed.

Meeting ended at approximately 3:00.

Follow-up

Maurice couldn't find ROS in the glossary. It is under the section of the glossary with Terms and Definitions, but does not include the acronym ROS with recreation opportunity spectrum.

A list of acronyms used in the meeting discussion can be found on the Colville Forest Plan Revision web page:

http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/colville/landmanagement/planning/?cid=stelprd3824594