

Eastside Restoration Strategy Update # 14

June 17, 2016

“The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it.”

Michelangelo (probably apocryphal)

This is the 14th edition of the ongoing Eastside Restoration Strategy (ERS) Updates. These updates are intended to give a 10,000ft view of the accelerated restoration work going on in the region, focusing on the concepts, approaches, and partnerships that are allowing the Forests to ramp up the amount of work they are able to do on their landscapes.

The last update included a report on the region’s first Eastside Peer Learning Workshop, and the notes from the meeting and copies of all of the presentations are now posted on the ERS webpage:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r6/landmanagement/resourcemanagement/?cid=stelprdb5423597>

Since that time, a National Collaborative Restoration Workshop occurred in Denver, bringing together 300 collaborators and Forest Service staff to talk about ideas, challenges, and successes in the world of collaborative restoration. Our region and PNW research sent 12 FS employees to this workshop, and we each came home with a greater appreciation for the importance of collaboration, science, scale, and shared learning (see more detail below).

There is a lot of creative, quality work going on in the region in the name of accelerated pace, scale, and quality of forest restoration. In the good old days, Forest Service districts and forests were somewhat isolated from one another by distance and communications infrastructure. Modern communications tools, while sometimes hard to keep up with, can support much more effective information sharing and learning. It is important, even critical, to our mission that we look for every opportunity to share and learn from one another.

In that light, the experiment with the Blue Mountains Restoration team is going to be evaluated and documented in a lessons learned analysis, conducted by the Ecosystems Workforce Project and the Northwest Fire Sciences Consortium (led by Cass Moseley and Janean Creighton, respectively). The key objectives are twofold:

- Tell the story of the Blue Mountains Restoration Planning effort openly and honestly, sharing what worked and what didn’t work well and why.
- Identify lessons learned--especially for regional, forest, and district staff -- in particular, planning teams that are taking on large-scale restoration work — with a second set of audiences among collaborative groups and other interested stakeholders.

We are looking forward to starting this project with Cass and Janean, and in sharing our experiences with you all!

Enjoy this 14th Eastside Strategy Update!

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for the greatest good

What we're accomplishing with the Eastside Restoration Strategy:

Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration (CFLR) Projects:

The region's 5 CFLR projects are gaining ground on the restoration backlog within their respective landscapes. A recent analysis shows that the R6 Forests with CFLR projects have increased their fuel treatment accomplishments by 43% compared to pre-CFLR (compared to an overall 10% increase regionally), and a 14% increase in timber volume sold (compared to a 7% regional increase). The increase in fuel treatment, in particular, indicates that the CFLR forests are able to put CFLR funds to "completing the job" of forest restoration, following the timber treatments, with mechanical treatment of small material and prescribed burning.

Three years ago a similar analysis was hard-pressed to show any effect of CFLR on fuels or timber programs; the take-home message should be that it takes a few years of focus to plan, prepare, sell, and complete restoration projects, and we are now starting to see the results of this focus.

Joint Chief's Projects 2016: Great News!

With the third round of project selections, R6 now has 5 Joint Chief's Projects, representing shared funding between the FS and NRCS to accomplish fuel reduction and restoration work on NF lands and adjacent non-federal lands:

| <u>Project</u> | <u>Forest</u> | <u>FS \$\$</u> | <u>NRCS\$\$</u> |
|---|---------------|----------------|-----------------|
| East Face of the Elkhorns | WW | 832K | 375K |
| Ashland Forest All-Lands Restoration | ROSIS | 1,000K | 2000K |
| Northeast Washington Landscape Restoration | COL | 657K | 506K |
| Greater La Pine Basin Cohesive Strategy | DES | 880K | 250K |
| All Lands, All Hands Washington East Cascades | OKAWEN | 200K | 580K |

Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy

The Blue Mountains Restoration Team has two planning projects – the Lower Joseph Project on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, and the Forest Resiliency Project covering portions of the Ochoco, Wallowa-Whitman, and Umatilla National Forests.

The Lower Joseph Project Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was prepared by the team first, and they completed their work in July of 2015, which initiated consultation with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries. NOAA provided the Forest with a Biological Opinion on June 16, 2016, and this project is now ready for release of the Final EIS and draft Record of Decision.

The team has completed scoping for the three-forest Forest Resiliency Project (FRP), including 8 public listening sessions during the month of March, and engaging the three Forest Collaboratives and most ranger districts that will be affected by the project. The team is now putting more detail to the proposed action and anticipated alternative. The project website <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r6/landmanagement/resourcemanagement/?cid=fseprd490874> includes an interactive map that commenters could use to better evaluate the proposed action and provide substantive comments on the proposal.

Another communications tool is the use of social media to communicate with the public. While the FS does not currently host any web logs (blogs), there are a number of examples of our cooperators or partners hosting these blogs to help us get the word out. Sustainable Northwest is doing this for the Forest Resiliency Project, and have posted a series of monthly blogs this winter and spring. Follow the link to <http://sustainablenorthwest.org/what-we-do/success-stories/features-from-the-blue-mountains-restoration-strategy>.

Part of the experiment with the Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy team was to reduce the effect of ID team member turnover by hiring the entire team at the same time. This effect only lasts so long, of course, and we are starting to see some turnover, nearly three years after the first members were hired. Ayn Shlisky, team leader since April 2013, resigned in May after three years of extremely dedicated and creative work leading the team and bringing in top-notch science to the analyses. We offered a 120-day detail assignment to help keep the project moving while we develop a longer-term solution, and we are looking forward to having the help of Anne Thomas from the Tonto National Forest starting June 28th.

A Different Strategy to Meet National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 Compliance

Typically, the US Forest Service meets their obligation for protection of cultural resources by completing cultural surveys, record inventories, site protection strategies, and Tribal and State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) consultation during the National Environmental Policy Act process, prior to a project-level decision. For the Forest Resiliency Project, we wanted to explore a different, potentially more efficient and effective way of protecting these resources. One way of doing this is through the use of a programmatic agreement between the Forests and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).

The programmatic agreement sets up a “phased approach” to compliance, whereby the Forest Service commits to work prior to *implementation* of any projects, rather than prior to decision. This requires consultation with SHPO and the affected tribes during the planning process, as well as developing updated cultural resource overviews, working research questions, and inventory strategies that will address data gaps in archaeological information. This information will be used to develop, test, and refine geographic models that predict the presence or absence of historic properties, evaluate the effects of broad scale restoration activities on the properties, and improve design criteria to protect historic values – a different approach to identifying and protecting cultural resources.

To date, the 3 forests have completed a contract with the Warm Springs Tribe’s Geo Visions for consolidation of cultural resources data that will inform phase 1 commitment to update cultural resource overviews, and predictive survey models. We have also entered into an agreement with the Nez Perce Tribe to conduct traditional use studies for the areas of the Blue Mountain Forest Resiliency Project of interest to the Nez Perce Tribe. Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation are also interested in providing use studies for their area of interest. These products will add to much needed knowledge regarding cultural resources values, management options and traditional lifeways within the footprint of the FRP.

The Blue Mountains Heritage Interdisciplinary Team members, the three affected Forest Archaeologists, and the Regional Office Archaeologist, engaged the Oregon SHPO early on to initiate consultation needed to collect the necessary information to develop the programmatic agreement. The FRP Heritage Resource Implementation Plan will tier to guidance informed by

the phased approach to then lay out the work that is needed prior to implementation of any project under the FRP Decision(s).

Thinking About Site-Specificity

One of the biggest areas of uncertainty and discomfort when teams start thinking about larger scale projects is the degree of site-specificity necessary to satisfy the aims of NEPA: disclosing effects and informing decisions. With the Blue Mountains Restoration ID Team, we have spent a lot of time thinking about this, and working to communicate about different models in use by federal agencies engaged in a very broad range of actions.

One way of thinking about this question is to think of different types of information we develop during the planning process. For vegetation treatments, consider three types of information: location of treatments, prescriptions, and mitigation measures. Below is a table that arrays these different types of planning information on a gradient from most to least site specific

| | MOST | site-specificity | | LEAST |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------|--------------|
| Treatment Units | Mapped | Mapped | Mapped | Not mapped |
| Prescriptions | Specific | Specific | Conditional | Conditional |
| Mitigation | Specific | Conditional | Conditional | Conditional |

The left column model (listed under “MOST”) is what some might consider the traditional, highly site-specific approach – treatment units or areas are mapped during the planning process, and treatments and mitigation measures are prescribed for each. In fact, the next column to the right is probably more common, as many of our traditional mitigation measures are “conditional”, expressed as “when we find situation X, apply mitigation measure Y”.

The LEAST site specific approach in the table, the furthest right column, is one where we do not identify the location of treatments, and we apply prescriptions and mitigation that fit the site based on a series of “if, then” statements. Several of our larger scale NEPA decisions fit this model (the national fire retardant application EIS, for example, and a number of forest-wide invasive plant treatment analyses/decisions).

For the Forest Resiliency Project, we envision using an approach closest to the second column from the right – with mapped treatment units, and an initial prescription, but with instructions on how to adjust the prescription during the implementation phase when necessary to achieve the objectives of the plan (for example, when data used to develop the plan doesn’t fit the site perfectly, or when crews discover inclusions of aspen, well developed shrub communities, remnant natural openings, etc. that merit a slightly different treatment). Our intent is to allow some “little d” decisions to happen on the ground, during project preparation, guided by clear IDT intent documented in a detailed implementation plan. This plan, with instructions and checklists of tasks to be completed during implementation, is one piece of work that the ID Team is developing for this project.

Mill Creek A-Z Project Final Decision Notice Signed, Task Order Issued

Forest Supervisor Rodney Smoldon signed the North Fork Mill Creek A to Z Project DN/FONSI on June 13, 2016, completing 3 years of planning work on this portion of the Mill Creek project and beginning the implementation of upland and instream restoration work. The selected alternative includes 4500 acres of commercial thinning, 4000 acres of prescribed burning, associated road work, and 1600ft of stream habitat improvement and replacement of 3 culverts.

What is unusual about this project is that all phases of the project, from pre-NEPA through implementation, will be completed under the same stewardship contract held by Vaagen Brothers Lumber. This is a single award, performance-based, requirements contract spanning ten years. The first task order for on the ground work was issued to Vaagen Brothers shortly after the final decision was signed, and work is anticipated to start this summer.

The Mill Creek A to Z project also includes a second analysis, called the Middle/South Fork A to Z project, and the Forest anticipates a Final EA and Draft Decision Notice this summer.

Congratulations to the Colville folks for pioneering such a novel approach to accelerating the pace, scale, and quality of restoration work – a testament to the quality partnerships in place in NE Washington!

How we're learning with the Eastside Restoration Strategy:

National Collaborative Restoration Workshop, April 26-27 2016.

Twelve FS employees from R6 and PNW Research attended the National Collaborative Restoration Workshop in Denver Colorado in April – part of a crowd of 300 FS employees and collaborative members. The workshop organizers purposely limited the number of FS employees to make room for partner participation. The partners were numerous and diverse, adding to the synergistic workshop environment and opportunities to share and compare ideas. As part of our commitment to shared learning, we each agreed to share our top 2-3 “take homes” from this workshop; “A-Ha” moments, light bulbs, cool ideas, etc.

The workshop notes and presentations are now posted on the National Forest Foundation [website](#).

This collected group of take home messages is intended to pique your interest, and cause you to take a look at the material on the NFF website.

Common Themes:

1. Collaboration is central to our business model:

- a. Capacity and competency to collaborate with external partners is important.
- b. Capacity and investment in communications and engagement is critical to success.
- c. Collaboration is inextricably linked to achieving ecological outcomes.
 - i. To be effective with ecological restoration we need to be effective at engaging and communicating with our communities.
 - ii. At the core, collaboration is about people and places

- d. We need skill and support to collaborate internally, across units and within units. The characteristics of effective collaboration apply to internal project planning teams as much as they apply to external collaboratives.
- e. Collaboration requires commitment to be sustainable over the long run.
 - i. One size doesn't fit all. We are not all dealing with the same set of issues or opportunities and as such collaborative efforts and processes that work in one area, may or may not be effective in other areas.
- f. Collaboration relies on skills we should have learned early in our lives
 - i. Respect for others
 - ii. Ability to listen and accommodate others' needs whenever possible.

2. Science and the Social Sciences are Important:

- a. Using the social sciences to guide our work is essential to our credibility.
 - i. Measuring success (outcomes) is critical – not just in ecological terms, but social benefits, as well.
- b. Access to science is critical to building trust and understanding

3. Scale matters:

- a. We need to work at multiple scales to be effective.
 - i. There are critical values at the small scale that should not be neglected as we focus on the larger scale issues like fire.
- b. Working across ownerships is vital to sustainable land stewardship
- c. Landscape Scale Problems require landscape scale solutions

4. Structure and resources for learning and innovation are needed:

- a. We need to look at our systems and procedure and embrace innovation.
 - i. The need to align our contracting processes with the agency's commitment to rural communities to ensure more of the benefits go towards these communities.
 - ii. There is an impressive, building body of NEPA work outside R6 that employs many of the strategies we're trying to test within the region relative to large landscape scale planning at an accelerated pace.
- b. Many new tools are available and are being utilized
 - i. Stewardship Contracts
 - ii. Agreement Vehicles
 - iii. Programmatic
 - iv. Computer models and other analytical programs

5. There were several variations on the definition and understanding of restoration evident in the workshop.

- a. However, it was clear everyone understood restoration wasn't returning conditions to pre-settlement time.
- b. It was also commonly understood that restoration should strive to be holistic, although some logistical and political barriers still exist.

How we're engaging in the Eastside Restoration Strategy:

Good Neighbor Authority

In late March, Regional Forester Jim Peña and Oregon Governor Kate Brown, along with ODF Director Doug Decker and ODFW Director Curt Melcher, signed the Master Good Neighbor Authority Agreement. The Good Neighbor Authority, included in the 2014 Farm Bill, provides authorities for the use of federal funds to be used by the state for work on Forest Service lands. The Master Agreement sets the stage for local Supplemental Project Agreements (SPAs), which are negotiated between local Forest Service and state units, and can allow both agencies to capitalize on their respective strengths, expertise, and resources.

Many National Forests in Oregon are already working with the state on projects. The Good Neighbor Authority expands on the type of cooperative work we can undertake, and reduces some previous constraints and limits (requirements for matching funds, for example).



ODFW Director Curt Melcher, Governor Kate Brown, Regional Forester Jim Peña, and ODF State Forester Doug Decker at Master Good Neighbor Agreement signing ceremony 3/29/16

| **Restoration News:** (follow the links for the whole story)

[Local collaborative awarded \\$4 million in federal forest restoration funding](#) (Blue Mountain Eagle)