

St Joe Workgroup Meeting (Final Notes)
February 5, 2004
St. Maries Federal Building

Work Group Members: John Walters, George Currier, Dale Dimico, Joe Epler, Dave Spicer, Bernie Lionberger, and Wes Case, and Mel Lane.

Forest Service: Ervin Brooks, Gary Ford, Shanda Dekome, Kimberly Johnson, Ken Gebhardt.

7:00 Ervin Brooks passed out the notes from the January 29 meeting. Workgroup was asked to review the meeting notes and provide corrections.

Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes

Changes to notes: Workgroup member indicated that the January 29 meeting notes should reflect that he was opposed to the Yellowstone to Yukon “Y to Y” concept presented by Art Zack.

Workgroup members indicated that they still needed a good definition of old growth. Need to check with Art Zack on clarification of old growth for next meeting. Definition will be provided in the meeting notes.

Old Growth DEFINITION requested at the meeting – is provided by Art Zack and is as follows:

“Mature forests are dominated by trees over 100 years old. Large refers to stands dominated by trees that are large for that habitat type group -- generally 15 - 20" or larger in diameter. So **large/mature** refers to stands dominated by trees \geq 100 years old and equal to or larger than the 15"-20" diameter size class.

Old growth forest (conceptually) refers to the late stages of stand development, and are distinguished by old trees and related structural attributes. More exact old growth definitions are specific to ecosystem and forest type. The Forest Service charged each Region with developing more specific local definitions of old growth that apply to their ecological types and forest types.

The Northern Region of the Forest Service developed definitions by Habitat Type Group and Forest Type. Defining characteristics include a minimum number of trees with a certain minimum age and size, and also a minimum basal area (density measure) for the stand.

For the moist forests of northern Idaho, the most common **Old Growth minimum criteria** is at least 10 trees per acre equal to or greater than 21" in diameter, and 150 years old, plus a minimum stand basal area of either 120 or 80 square feet per acre. (A few of the less productive habitat types may have a smaller tree size threshold (cold upper elevations), or require fewer trees per acre and less basal area (dry ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir). Extremely productive riparian cedar requires larger trees size.

Other characteristics sometimes associated with old growth (canopy layers, snags, down wood, etc) are not part of the old growth definition, because these vary greatly even in stands that are clearly old growth.”

Workgroup Introductions

Workgroup introductions. Mel Lane introduced as a new attendee.

Guest Speaker - Shanda Dekome – Forest Fishery Biologist – Presentation Topic - InFish.

Topics/Subjects Presented by Shanda:

- What is InFish? – Inland Native Fish Strategy it was signed in 1995.
- Established to protect all inland fish, not just bull trout.
- It was intended to be an interim strategy, first for 18 months, then to be looked at in Forest Plan Revisions.
- It was created and adopted to protect fish and habitat.
- InFish amended all Forest Plans in the Columbia River Basin
- InFish is not just a fish strategy, it's a riparian strategy
- RHCA's – Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas
- InFish protects more than just fish. Also many other species that utilize riparian areas
- Why riparian areas are important (*see Handout*)
- Out of the entire land base in the west, one to five percent of the total landscape is riparian/wetland, yet over 75% of the animals present are highly associated with these areas.
- InFish document (Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact) was provided to workgroup members (*Handout*)
- Attachment A is most important part of the document..
- InFish was based on very good science. Although the name may change in the Forest Revision process, the concept will not likely change, for example it may change from fish to ALL riparian species.
- Description of riparian areas
- There is some flexibility in InFish to manage vegetation in riparian areas as long as you are providing benefits to the riparian resources.
- In the past, the Forest Service typically has not managed habitat within riparian areas. Just recently, there have been a few projects that have managed timber in riparian areas (fuel projects).
- The Forest Service has an obligation to protect habitat and populations of bull trout (federally listed species)
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will expect the Forest Service to show that they can protect bull trout populations and habitat. InFish or a similar Forest directive will show the USFWS that the Forest Service is protecting threatened fish species and their habitat.

Question: Has there ever been a subjective study to show that InFish buffers are better than State BMP's? Not sure. Joe Dupont (Idaho Fish and Game) did present some information when he was working for IDL.

Question: Does the Forest Service have a stream segment that they study that has not been logged or impacted as a baseline reference? Yes, there has been work on other Forests. Forest Service researchers are conducting these studies. The Salmon Challis National Forest has several wilderness areas that they study regularly.

Question: Is there anything in InFish to stop its misuse (safeguards)? (Handout provided by workgroup member). The news article stated that roads were being closed to improve fish

populations and habitat. Workgroup member disagreed that roads were negatively affecting fish habitat and populations. Shanda Dekome stated that there was a great deal of research that showed that roads and road densities do affect fish habitat.

Question: Are there some harvest methods that could be used in riparian areas? Theoretically speaking, there are ways to manage vegetation within riparian areas that will promote growth of remaining trees and future recruitment of large woody debris. An example is thinning.

Question: Why was three hundred feet selected as an RHCA buffer width vs. 200 feet? At the time, the Forest Service wanted maximum protection for fish populations and habitat.

Question: Is there any evidence that fish stocks have improved as a result of InFish? Habitat has improved. With improved habitat that usually mean that fish populations will improve as a result.

Question: How do you show that InFish is effective when there are “checkerboard” ownership areas? It is very difficult to show that InFish standards are beneficial in these situations.

Workgroup Desired Future Condition Statements

Kimberly Johnson and Ken Gebhardt summarized the DFC statements provided by workgroup members. Issues and subjects were listed by frequency of occurrence in the drafts provided (*Handout*).

Kimberly Johnson handed out copies of some of the Kootenai National forest workgroups DFC statements. These can be used as examples. (*handout*)

Gary Ford suggested that the workgroup work on developing a DFC statement for the revision topic Timber Production:

One workgroup member stated that he was disappointed to see very general DFC statements. He indicated that the current workgroup has several individuals who are very familiar with the logging industry and the St. Joe GA. He thought that the workgroup could develop very specific DFC's with these experience and knowledge of the workgroup members. Gary Ford indicated that the group could make the DFC's as specific as they would like.

Workgroup member presented a news release from Wyoming that talked about what was happening with the Medicine Bow NF Plan Revision. He stated that if the IPNF plan went in a similar direction, the Forest would be in trouble (*Handout*).

Workgroup member stated that he was unsure whether the workgroup could improve upon the last Forest Plan. He suggested that it was more important to spend time on things that didn't work in the last Forest Plan.

Workgroup member reported annual timber harvest or production on the IPNF since 1987 (from forest plan monitoring reports) as follows: 1997 (108.3), 1998 (90.3), 1999 (30.3), 200 (78.2) 2001 (40.7), 2002 (53.4), 2003 (22.1 mbf). He stated that these numbers indicate that there should be a considerable amount of timber available for harvest.

Workgroup member indicated that we need reliable and realistic ASQ's. He also stated that the 1987 ASQ is not realistic under today's conditions. Maybe the 1987 ASQ's was also not realistic at the time it was developed.

Suggested DFC for Timber Production:

Based upon the prioritized list of DFC subjects contained in workgroup member DFCs, the group drafted a DFC statement for timber production as follows:

Create a reliable and realistic timber production program to improve and maintain local economies and forest health.

- **Insure that this process is timely, legal, and profitable process to respond to disease, fire, insects, and other disasters.**
- **Priorities:**
 - **Restore fire resistant species in ecosystems (WL, WP, and Larch)**
 - **Improve and maintain fish and wildlife habitat and populations**
 - **Urban interface**

The workgroup indicated that they wanted the Forest Service to look closely at the work included in a timber sale contract and better balance the amount of the required work against the value of timber being offered. Suggestion was that small loggers were not bidding because they could not afford to contract out for some of the work being attached to the sale and still make a profit.

Next Meeting – February 19, 2004, 7:00 pm.

Kimberly Johnson agreed to send out the draft DFC statements from tonight's meeting and the list of prioritized DFC subjects/interests.

The REVISION TOPIC subject for the next meeting will be VEGETATION.