

St Joe Workgroup Meeting (Final Notes)

January 29, 2004

St. Maries Federal Building

Work Group Members: Denise Best, George Currier, Dale Dimico, Joe Epler, Del Rust, Wes Case, Dave Spicer, John Walters, John Adams, Bernie Lionberger

Forest Service: Ervin Brooks, Gary Ford, Art Zak Carolyn Upton, Ken Gebhardt.

Ervin Brooks passed out the notes from the last meeting and introduced the agenda for the meeting. The work group was asked to review the meeting notes from January 15, 2004.

Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes

There were no content changes to the January 15, 2004 meeting notes. A spelling error was corrected.

Introductions

Art Zack- Forest Ecologist for the IPNF - Vegetation Condition and Fire History in the Idaho Panhandle

Subjects of Presentation (See Handout)

- Possible Planning Questions
- Unique features of the IPNF – Most native plant and animal species including large carnivores are still present (high biodiversity, rare plants, cedar groves, old growth)
- IPNF provides a travel corridor for wide-ranging wildlife species.
- Ecosystem (def.)
- Regional ecological dynamics (high moisture, variable weather etc.)
- Ecosystems are dynamic and change is inevitable with or without human intervention.
- Tools to evaluate ecosystem change 1) historic range of variability (HRV), 2) keystone ecosystem processes and structures.
- Critical importance of forest disturbance and succession regimes.
- Forest succession (def.)
- Disturbance (def.)
- Disturbance management
- Ecosystem Health Issues (change in forest composition, structure, and disturbance regimes).
- Historically forests were dominated by white pine, western larch, ponderosa pine, and whitebark pine. These species were drought and fire sensitive, shade tolerant species. Changes in forest cover types graph was described to the group.
- Changes in forest structure were presented. Causes of vegetation changes included white pine blister rust, fire suppression, and past timber harvest practices.
- Implications of vegetation changes
- Origins of wildfire
- Perspective on Northern Idaho Fire History
- Findings from Coeur d'Alene Fire History Study
- Major Fire Events in the Coeur d'Alene – 21 major fire episodes in 400 years. Fires were large prior to 1910. At the landscape scale, average interval between fires was 19 years.
- Different ecosystems = different disturbance regimes. Three different fire regimes in northern Idaho (dry forest, moist forest, and sub alpine forest)
- Fire size-lethal and mixed severity fires. Mixed severity fires were more common.

- Fire maps were described. Historically, USFS fire staff mapped fires that occurred each year.
- Forest Plan Revision Issues
 - Changes in forest composition, structures, and patterns may increase risk of disturbance.
 - Fire suppression contributes to major changes in forest composition, structures, and patterns.
 - Fire suppression means that forests only burn under extreme conditions.
 - Increased human populations and where people choose to live creates new risks from wildfire.

Question: Why are there fewer aspens on the IPNF? Generally the climate is not moist enough for aspen on the IPNF. Populations do occur on the Forest; however, they are normally associated with wet soils, springs, and riparian areas.

Question: What is the difference between large mature and old growth? Large mature are trees older than 100 years. Old growth is usually many trees that grow in the same area that larger than 24 inches in diameter.

Question: What is FS policy regarding fire suppression? Forest Plan gives three options (suppress, confine, or contain). The Forest Plan also provides for prescribed natural fire if a prescription is developed. The IPNF does not have fire management plans so the Forest either suppresses, confines, or contains fires depending upon severity. Fires are addressed based upon priority.

Question: Is there a “let burn” option for fires? Forest Plan revision will address natural fires and when to suppress, confine, or contain.

Question: How is fire managed in wilderness? Each national forest determines how they will address fires in wilderness areas. Generally, fire plans are encouraged for all national forests and wilderness areas. The IPNF does not have a current fire management plan.

Carolyn Upton (Ecosystem Team Leader) and Gary Ford (Planning Team Member)

Desired future condition statements were prepared and presented by workgroup members. Carolyn Upton suggested that the workgroup needed to determine what the desired future condition statements had in common. It would then be possible to draft one DFC for timber that represented workgroup interests and issues.

Question: Why should we develop DFC’s when the last Forest Plan was not fully implemented? Policy and direction has changed since the last Forest Plan. We are not here to discuss the value of the last Forest Plan and/or its pitfalls

Carolyn Upton described how DFC statements would be used for the Forest planning team. Desired future condition input will be used to review and refine the Forest-wide goals. They may also be used for developing objectives. The planning team will consider the DFC information as alternatives for the draft environmental impact statement. This may help frame alternative themes (emphasis areas), map alternatives (opportunities for activities and uses), and help with effects analysis (outputs and outcomes). Realize that every workgroup will provide something slightly different, different formats, emphasis, etc. Therefore, please expect some changes to your workgroup’s input in the draft documents.

Carolyn Upton asked the group about where they would like to go with a DFC statement for timber production. She stressed that the group will need to develop a common statement that represented the interests of the workgroup. The group agreed that the DFC statements would be turned in at tonight’s

meeting. Common statements or ideas would be identified. Issues or statements would be listed by frequency of occurrence.

Carolyn Upton referred to two handouts (desired condition worksheets) that described Forest-wide goals for forest health and timber production. The two handouts also provided steps to follow to help participants identify desired future conditions for each subject.

Example Handout #1- Forest –Wide Goal For Timber Production

Forest-wide goal 2b: Sustainable Uses, Values, Products and Services – Improve the capability of the Forests to provide desired sustainable levels of uses, values, products and services.

The handout described steps to follow to identify DFC for Timber Production

Question: Is there a way to obtain an economic analysis of the effects of timber harvest to the local economy? What is the economic impact of ie...100 mbf of timber to the local economy? This analysis will be completed during the Forest Plan revision process. The workgroup's desired future condition statements will provide information for various economic models. The workgroup will need to decide how specific they want to be in drafting their DFC statements.

Example Handout #2 -Forest-Wide Goal For Vegetation

Forest-wide goal 1c: Forest Health – Increase the amount of forests restored to or maintained in a healthy condition with reduced risk and damage from fires, insects, and diseases, and invasive species.

The handout described steps to follow to identify DFC for Vegetation

Gary Ford stressed that all workgroup DFC statements and ideas would be reviewed and considered by the IPNF planning team.

Next Meeting – February 5, 2004