

“DRAFT” Lower Kootenai GA Workgroup Meeting Notes
Bonnors Ferry, ID
01/26/04

Attendees:

Public - Patty Perry, Bob Blanford, Sandy Ashworth, Adriane Borgias, Don Nystrom, Ron Smith, Dave Wattenbarger, Jeff Ennis, Jack Douglas, Robert Hill.

Forest Service – Allen Chrisman, Art Zack (Vegetation & Fire History), Tom Martin (Silviculture and Timber Management)

Vegetation and Fire Risk: Art Zack (IPNF Forest Ecologist) went over a slideshow about an overview of the **vegetation condition and fire history**. **This slideshow will be on the website**(?). Art went over the following which was available in a handout:

- Planning Questions:
 - In our dynamic local environments what kind of forest vegetation would be productive, diverse, healthy and resilient?
 - What actions should we take to sustain and restore this type of forest?
 - Recognizing that historically fire was a keystone process sustaining healthy forests when and where would we:
 - Allow certain types of fire?
 - Always suppress fires
 - How do we manage and sustain healthy forests in areas where we suppress fire?
- Very productive forest types in north Idaho – coastal weather influences precipitation.
- Very high plant species diversity (20 tree species!).
- Many rare plant communities.
- Old growth cedar unique.
- Selkirks and Upper Priest Lake have some of the best integrity on the Forest.
- Linkages – Idaho Panhandle part of linkage of Yellowstone to the Yukon.
- Ecosystems are constantly in change – factors of succession and disturbance:
 - Historically disturbance adapted species Ponderosa Pine (PP), Western White Pine (WWP), Western Larch (WL) made up over ½ the Forest area – this has changed to the more shade tolerant Grand Fir (GF) and Western Hemlock (WH), and the more short lived Lodgepole Pine (LPP) and Douglas-fir (DF). We have lost 70% of our ponderosa pine forests, 90% of the western white pine forests, and 66% of the western larch forests, with corresponding increases in Douglas-fir, grand fir, and western hemlock.

- Douglas-fir and grand fir do not handle drought, insects, fire well.
- Structure: have reduced old growth compared to historic levels, but smaller size classes (seedling/sapling and pole sizes) are similar to historic levels. Distribution is different however as historic fires made large contiguous mosaics where current harvest-type regeneration blocks are more fragmented.
- Result of changes in species composition: less drought resistance, more insect and disease problems, increasing risk of wildfires, leads to less wildlife habitat.
- Coeur d'Alene Fire History Study:
 - Fire Frequency approximately 80 years.
 - Stand replacement fires about every 200 years.
 - In 400 years, 21 major fire events occurred (fires that burned over 5% of the drainage).
 - Note: If we suppress all low intensity fires and a good portion of the mixed severity fires (which we currently are doing) the only fires to be a dominant feature on the landscape will be the large stand-replacing fires which aren't historically representative.

Q. In Old Growth management, do you pick an area and designate it, or rotate Old Growth around?

A. Current Forest Plan directs us to maintain 10% Old Growth with some guidelines. We have 12%, so are working to maintain it all. A question for the Forest Plan Revision, is with the deficit in Old Growth compared to historical levels, is to what degree do we move back toward those levels? We also recognize that Old Growth is subject to disturbance cycles (fire, insects, disease) so is not static over time. We need to determine how we are going to handle recruitment old growth. We also need to determine what we can do from a management standpoint to assist in recruitment/retention. For example currently we see encroachment of DF/GF in drysite stands of old growth ponderosa pine – we are harvesting out the encroachment, and using prescribed fire to enhance the old growth character.

Q. Endangered Species Act does not look at natural loss of species over time – are we going to blame all species loss on humans? (example caribout)

A. Tough question – ESA does not address natural species loss, but is firm in the requirement to provide habitat for species recovery. We are on the edge of the caribou range, so it is difficult for them.

Q. Your Coeur d'Alene fire study tracked fires back to the 1500's – how far back can you go with good data to support your findings?

A. The fire history study was done using tree ring and fire scar analysis. The maximum we can go back is about 500 years based on the longevity of our tree species. Other studies using pollen core extractions have gone back significantly longer (example is that our current climate has been relatively constant for the past 2,000 – 2,500 years, before that it was significantly different).

Timber Management and Ecosystem Issues: Tom Martin (IPNF Forest Silviculturist) went over a slideshow about an overview of the **vegetation condition and fire history**. This slideshow will be on the website(?). Art went over the following which was available in a handout:

Planning questions include those for **Vegetation:**

- In our dynamic local environments, what kind of forest would be productive, diverse, healthy and resilient?
- What actions should we take to sustain and restore this type of forest?

Wildlife:

- What conditions are needed to maintain viable populations of native and desired non-native species?

Timber Planning:

- How can we incorporate timber planning to meet desired ecosystem conditions (including vegetation, aquatic and terrestrial desired conditions)?

- How do we incorporate timber planning with vegetation management and wildlife management?
- Suitability Analysis: 1987 Forest Plan had approximately 900,000 acres designated as unsuitable, 1,600,000 acres suitable.
- Reviewed appropriate methods of timber harvest – explained Silvicultural prescription process.
- Harvesting today does not rely on the rectangular clearcut blocks of the past. Flexible Silvicultural systems vary the size and stocking of residual trees left after harvest, creating more diverse settings.
- Shade intolerant species (ponderosa pine, western white pine, western larch) still need openings to successfully regenerate and grow. These openings need to be blended with surrounding forest in contrast to the clearcuts of the 1970's and 1980's.
- Reviewed a number of photo examples of recent harvest activities.
- Will determine the Suitable Land Base:
 - Tentatively suitable takes the forested land base and subtracts:
 - Lands withdrawn from timber harvest (wilderness, admin sites, research natural areas)
 - Areas not capable of producing industrial wood (whitebark pine, birch)
 - Non-forested lands
 - Areas with potential for irreversible soil/watershed damage (extremely sensitive landtypes)
 - Areas where tree regeneration within five years cannot be assured
 - Areas with inadequate response information

- To determine the Suitable land base, take the tentatively suitable timberlands and subtract:
 - Areas where land is proposed for resource use that precludes timber production (INFISH). (Can't rely on a sustained production of timber from these areas)
 - Areas where other multiple use management objectives limit timber harvest (could vary by alternative)
 - Not cost efficient (not necessarily a "below cost" timber sale issue, but more likely where reforestation costs would be excessive)
- Remaining lands are considered suitable for sustainable timber harvest

Q: What kind of inventory do we have on the forest land?

A: The Forest Inventory and Analysis program is just completing work on the IPNF. This is a grid of forest inventory plots systematically laid out across the Forest as part of a national effort. One plot per 6,300 acres. Recently complete, so this is good information.

Q: Is Endangered species habitat unsuitable?

A: Not necessarily. Example is grizzly bear, where timing of motorized activities is the issue, not necessarily the harvest itself. Some timber stands are included in a harvest moratorium for caribou in the 1987 plan. These would be unsuitable.

Next meeting dates. Jodi and Mike will work on getting specialists to talk about Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs), Access, and Recreation at the next meeting:

- Feb. 9th: IRAs and access and recreation and start on developing Desired Condition statements
- Feb. 24th

Note taker: Allen Chrisman