

NATIONAL FOREST ADVISORY BOARD (NFAB) MEETING – January 5, 2004 – Great Plains Dispatch Center – Rapid City, South Dakota

ATTENDEES: Board Members: Tom Blair, Aaron Everett, Bob Kloss, Jim Margadant, Jeff Olson, Bob Paulson, John Teupel, and Ed Yelick. Forest Representatives: Frank Carroll, Marcia Eisenbraun, Gwen Ernst-Ulrich, Brad Exton, Mike Lloyd, Cara Staab, Dave Thom, Bob Thompson, John Twiss, and Jeff Ulrich. Deputy Regional Forester Richard Stem.

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: John Cooper, Bryce In The Woods, Ron Johnsen, Pat McElgunn, Jim Scherrer, and Nels Smith.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Approved as submitted to board members prior to this meeting.

COMMENTS TO THE CHAIR: No comments offered.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA: Approved as submitted.

HOUSEKEEPING: Questions on process or facility accommodations may be referred to Carroll or Ernst-Ulrich.

- * Chairman Yelick reported that media representatives were present and asked Blair to meet with these folks to provide comments regarding today's session. Olsen asked that the "Media Role" be placed on a future agenda for clarification. Carroll stated that the media receives the same information regarding meeting agenda, time, and location as board members. Individuals may speak on behalf of their organizations; however, the spokesman for the NFAB will be Chairman Yelick. The recommendation stands that this be placed on a future agenda. No problems have arisen with the procedure for "media interviews" to date, and rotating the person being interviewed through board members provides a broader scope for the media to obtain information. It was recommended that the interviews be done later in the meeting to allow the speaking board member the opportunity to more clearly discuss the primary topic of the day. Carroll will discuss timeframes with the various newsrooms to see if adjustments can be made to conduct the media interviews later in the meeting. The request to add this as a topic for a future meeting remains, and the subject will be added to a future agenda.
- * Due to the State Legislature being in session in February, the next meeting is scheduled for March 17, 2004 at the West River Ag Center. The primary discussion topic for that meeting will be "fragmentation" with the presentation to come from Forest Wildlife Biologist Cara Staab. Staab was present at this meeting to accept comments and input from the Board toward the "fragmentation" topic.

MEETING PROTOCOLS – ISSUES: Chairman Yelick asked if anyone had information regarding the Healthy Forest Legislation recently passed by the U.S. Congress. Forest Supervisor John Twiss indicated that implementation of the legislation is still being identified. No information regarding potential lawsuits was available. WildLaw information had already been shared with members of the Board. No timeframe has been identified for full implementation of the law.

HOT TOPICS: No "hot topics" were identified.

REGULAR AGENDA:

- BLACK HILLS FUEL REDUCTION PLAN – SEVEN-YEAR OPTION: Dave Thom, Forest Resources Staff Officer: The background on the presentation is that Chairman Yelick requested that Forest Supervisor provide a plan to treat all the high-hazard acreage in seven years in addition to the ten-year strategy being prepared in response to Regional direction. Thom distributed a two-page handout that included information for both seven- and ten-year treatment strategies. The strategy is to be finalized and submitted to the Regional Forester on January 13, 2004 in response to the Regional Initiative. The Forest has not made a final decision on which option to present to the Region. Information from this board will be considered in the final decision. Thom reviewed a PowerPoint presentation for the Board, *“The Enduring Forest: Accelerated Alternatives.”*
 - * An error in total treatment acreage was found in one of the tables in the handout. A corrected version is attached.
 - * The “What, Where, and How Much” questions are answered briefly here.
 - ✓ The current 450,000 high-hazard acres is projected to increase by 3 percent each year to 554,000 acres in 7 years and 585,000 acres in 10 years.
 - ✓ The number of acres roughly projected to burn each year is 20,000 acres.
 - ✓ Thom explained that the “effective treatment” acres total is less than the “actual treatment” acres because of acreage overlap in treatment methods.
 - ✓ If the Phase II Amendment to the Forest Plan adjusts the acres for timber harvest, the acres reflected here may also be adjusted. The funds here do not reflect any of the receipts from timber sales.
 - ✓ Funds used for fuels treatment, tree thinning, and forest health areas are congressionally appropriated funds. The Forest Health Program focuses on insect related projects.
 - ✓ How are encroachment and vegetation restoration issues addressed through this strategy? Those are not addressed in this handout but will be included in the final report.
 - ✓ The seven-year accelerated option will require substantial additional appropriated funds.
 - ✓ Thom provided an explanation of the difference between fuels treatment and tree thinning. The numbers in this strategy are specific to the Black Hills National Forest (BKF).
 - * The ten-year strategy has the following points for discussion:
 - ✓ The tree thinning acres are adjusted slightly from the seven-year plan. Forest Health Program acreages include planning acres and need to be adjusted to remove these acres from this option.

- ✓ The maps showing the high-hazard acres within the forest boundary are included in the PowerPoint enclosure to these notes.
- ✓ Considerations for discussion follow:
 - Both options treat nearly 100 percent of high-hazard acreage.
 - Wildland-urban interface and key resource areas will receive emphasis for first treatment.
 - Research indicates that treatments on 20 to 50 percent of the landscape will reduce the risks for catastrophic fires.
 - Both the 7- and 10-year strategies exceed, by approximately 18,400 acres/year, the current estimated treatments identified in the 1997 Forest Plan (2-5x).
 - These options exceed current workforce and administrative capacity.
 - *These workforce considerations need to be addressed in order to successfully meet this option. Resource specialists and project planners as well as fire support personnel, landscape architects, archeologists, and wildlife biologists will be needed.*
 - Unit costs reflect the latest experience from FY2003. Costs could increase with project completion.
 - Can a business plan be developed identifying the positions and personnel needed?
 - *Development of a plan is possible. Consideration of other planning aspects needs to also be considered. Speaking practically, it would be extremely unlikely that the Forest would be able to meet the 80,000-acre target due to additional NEPA requirements.*
 - At what point/level do the additional workforce concerns become critical?
 - *The increased acreages in the ten-year plan may be possible through FY 2007 before additional workforce becomes necessary.*
 - Is it possible to add the field-level employees to get the work done and keep the higher GS count down?
 - *Additional GS-7 and -9 employees at the field level also need to have the higher level supervisory GS-11 and -12 positions to administer the plans and contracts. Currently the natural resource fields within the BLM, USDA, DOI, etc. lack the personnel necessary to accomplish this work.*
 - Can industry meet the increases associated with these plans?
 - *Locally there would likely not be a concern, but regionally the concerns could be greater.*
 - What is the “ramp-up” period for training to the GS-7 and -9 levels? Are there opportunities to obtain the workforce through land management universities?
 - *Increasing attrition needs to be accounted for, and any “ramp up” needs to also include contracting skills. These skills are not necessarily quick-learn*

skills, and would take two to four years for a skilled forester or fuels specialist and longer for contracting skills.

- Efforts need to be made to attract the skilled employees already working within the agency but currently working in areas where their skills may not be fully utilized.
 - *This is being done internally already and will continue to be a focus for the Forest.*
- * Thom's recommendation is to adopt Table 3 from the Draft Forest Health Strategy (presented to the NFAB on October 14, 2003): This is the "Increased Program" in the draft strategy, but the projected acres would increase from an estimated 300,000 acres to 358,000 acres (add about 4,000 acres/year for thinning and 2,000 acres/year to forest health). This would treat about 61 percent of the high-hazard acreage.
- * This program level fits more closely with the current workforce and administrative capacity.
- * A summary of BHNF Proposals follows:
 - ✓ Insects and fire are natural processes. Our management actions can change outcomes.
 - ✓ Any option should consider alternate biomass products or programs.
- * Questions from the Board addressed to Deputy Regional Forester Richard Stem:
 - ✓ Are the costs-per-acre on the BKF higher due to fragmentation?
 - *No, the costs are reflective of start-up costs associated with accelerated programs and really are lower on the BHNF.*
 - ✓ Wouldn't it be advantageous for the Region to support the accelerated program on the BHNF?
 - *This is not necessarily a black/white issue. The Region needs to look at what the effect to the rest of the Region might be for earmarks identified to go to the BHNF. Questions that the Regional Forester and Deputies need to consider areas follows: What is the long-term effect to the Region and also to the BHNF as part of the Regional unit? The BHNF got a head-start on the rest of the Region 2 Forests in this process, but every Forest is expected to submit five- and ten-year strategies to the Regional Forester on January 13.*
 - ✓ If we don't plan, and we don't ask, chances are it won't get done, isn't that correct?
 - *Yes, that is correct, which is why every Forest is involved in the Regional Initiative and will submit plans to assist the Regional Leadership in making decisions to benefit individual forests and the Region as a whole.*
 - ✓ Restoration is perceived by the public as a restored balance and reduced risk of fire. Is the regeneration a concern that means we will be in this same position again in 20 years?

- *An accelerated plan will need to be continued beyond either of the options presented here in order to establish a maintenance level that averts returning to the high-hazard levels we see today.*
- ✓ I like the idea of an accelerated program, but when we begin scaling down are we also looking at the economic and sustainability needs of our communities to insure that we are not setting ourselves up for future failure and increased costs because we have scaled back so far that we have lost the community resources needed to address high hazards? Do we need to look at a more level approach and look beyond the seven- and ten-year picture?
- ✓ With the risk identified, is it feasible to establish a fire-use plan where we could utilize wildfire to meet some of the fuel-treatment acres?
 - *This has not been investigated fully on the BHNF due in large part to the highly “roaded” condition of the Forest.*
 - *Stem further explained the level of impact to the Region if one-third of the Regional fuel treatment budget is given to the BHNF to meet the accelerated levels. That leaves two-thirds of the budget to be split between ten additional forests and Regional program managers. The Region is actively working to find a way to increase funding levels. Additional clarification is needed as to whether additional funding levels will be appropriated by Congress.*
- * Chairman Yelick stated that the NFAB is aware of the implication of earmarks at the Regional level; however, this Board was established to provide recommendations for management of the BHNF. With the implications derived from national decisions (i.e. Mount Rushmore) that put added emphasis on this area, the Board believes that the Region and national officials have additional opportunities to gather more funds for management of this high visibility area. The Board believes their decisions need to be based and recommendations made on all aspects of an issue – socio-economic and forest health. The Board asks, “What do we want the BHNF to look like?” and then drafts their recommendations to ask for that rather than focus on the political implications. Does this get us back to looking beyond an accelerated plan to a maintenance plan for Forest Health?
- * The Chair requested a decision as to whether this board would submit a recommendation at this meeting or delay the recommendation until March. Based on the Forest’s need to submit the final strategy to the Regional Forester within the next week, the recommendation was made to request a vote toward recommendation at this meeting.
- * FINAL STATEMENTS/QUESTIONS PRIOR TO MAKING A RECOMMENDATION TO THE FOREST SUPERVISOR:
 - ✓ Vice-Chair Teupel made a motion that the Board recommend the ten-year plan as presented today and advise the Forest Supervisor to seek the necessary funding to accomplish this, which Kloss seconded. This recommendation is based on Thom’s presentation and the belief that the ten-year plan is more logistically executable than the seven-year plan presented today. The acreage increase and additional cost of

going with the seven-year plan leaves some major concerns about making this feasible.

- ✓ Question from Blair to Thom: At what level in #5 do we need to look at increased staffing levels?
 - *Approximately 20,000 acres.*
- ✓ Kloss stated he had provided the second to the motion because of the well-thought-out process identified with this process and the potential impacts of both plans at the Regional level.
- ✓ What concerns are associated with the ten-year option presented when compared to Table 3 in the draft presented on October 14, 2003?
 - *The ten-year option is more aggressive than the Table 3 option that Thom recommended, but he agreed that setting the level higher may provide the long-term benefit.*
- ✓ Margadant stated his belief that the Board would be criticized by the regional environmental organizations that he represents for recommending a plan that is “results oriented” rather than placing an emphasis on other resource areas.
- ✓ Everett said he was looking at this from the “other side” of Margadant’s comment. What are the results and how does this equate beyond the ten-year period with respect to the industry levels? Business and the Forest Service all need to know where the end-point is and what the staffing needs are to sustain the levels of forest health this option is designed to obtain.
- ✓ Final comments by Teupel: He agreed with both Margadant and Everett that further analysis needs to be done and would expect this to be forthcoming from the Forest. The Board’s understanding of the forest health and high-hazard conditions that currently exist indicates the Forest needs to move forward with thinning and fuel treatments that will enable the use of prescribed fire without the risk of escaped large fires. He further stated the Board should pass a recommendation for the ten-year strategy.

* VOTE: YEA – 6 NAY – 2 (Margadant and Olson)

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Thom asked if the Board would provide some information/guidance to Staab, wildlife biologist, regarding the information they seek regarding “fragmentation,” as this is the identified topic for the March meeting. The Board members indicated they are interested in the land ownership and cost patterns relating to fragmentation. (Urbanization is another term that may be used for this discussion.) Staab asked if she could contact some of the Board to gather additional information. Everett, Kloss, Paulson, Olson, and Margadant all agreed to talk with Staab. Staab will obtain the contact information from Ernst-Ulrich.

- Chairman Yelick asked Stem for any final comments.

- * Advisory Boards were previously established in Washington and Oregon and these are still operating. Experience with these boards is that they took from a year to a year and a half to become functional and to get beyond specializations, specificity vs. general, etc. Stem recommended that when recommendations are made to the Forest Supervisor, the Board needs to also go to the next level and make a conscious effort to assist the Forest to attain the goal of the recommendation, saying, “This is what we recommend, but in addition to asking you to review this recommendation, please review our thoughts on how we can assist you with reaching this goal.”
- * Stem said he is proud to be in Region 2 and takes pride in the role the Regional Directors and Forest Supervisors took in stepping forward and stating their desire to move forward with a Forest Health Strategy. This is why the Regional Forester’s Team has requested the strategies from the Forests and provided a timeline to accomplish the strategy. When you get to the step of how the NFAB can help the Forest attain its goals, then you will really begin to see the impact and importance of this board.
- * A focus to staff up at the Forest levels and hold the Region staffing levels flat has been in place for the past three years, and Regional staffing levels will continue to remain flat for the next couple of years.
- * Stem expects than any additional funds received in the Region will be directed to the Forest level. The possibility exists that the allocation of the fuels funding may be shifted nationally based on the Regional responses to the fuels threat and the request for strategies. We need to wait and see how this plays out.
- * Question for Stem: What is your familiarity with the RMRS located at SDSM&T? Limited – The rumor is that Denver continues to attempt to close the lab located in RC and if Stem has any pull at that level, we would appreciate him making it clear that the BHNF and our cooperators utilize this resource heavily and appreciate having it here and would really hate seeing it leave.

CRITERIA FOR REALLOCATION OF FUNDING:

- People
- Frequency of fire
- Track record for productivity
- Infrastructure to be able to implement the program (criteria in 2004, but will not be in 2005 and 2006)

FINAL COMMENTS:

- Twiss – Looking at Forest Plan and how we can incorporate this Strategy in the current amendment – Would like to see this incorporated while the focus is clear at the Regional and National levels and while Congress is also interested.

- Paulson – TNC and Forest Service Fire Program has identified that the BHNH has lost its “fire culture” and Paulson believes implementation of the accelerated strategy will be a step forward.
- Greg Johnson (member of public) - Need to follow-up from the last meeting on the suggestion to educate and involve the public in forest health, i.e. bringing a bug tree into a public forum and educating them on what attracts the bugs, how their attack affects the tree, how their effects are spread.
- Kloss – Thoughts are heavy on this area, and we need to look toward opportunities to increase stewardship and education in the communities.
- Teupel – Information opportunities are available through the Dakota Digital Network (DDN) into the schools as a curriculum opportunity. This is an effective and cost efficient manner for getting information into the schools.
- Thompson, Mystic District Ranger – Employees of the Mystic Ranger District are part of the DDN. Thompson and Carroll are actively looking at ways to increase the opportunities provided by DNN and to make it even more cost efficient.
- Everett - Are we looking at ways for the Board to go into the communities/schools? Individually the groups go into the schools and speak to the public, so the question is, “Are you asking specifically for the Board to focus on this subject and look for a consolidated means to get information to the public?”
- Teupel - Mining Matters was a means the mining industry used to get information out (especially to East River), and Twiss recommends that the timber industry explore similar opportunities. Carroll will pursue this in a future meeting.

NEXT MEETING: March 17, 2004 at the West River Ag Center

Everett moved for adjournment. Chairman Yelick adjourned the meeting.