

Eastside Restoration Strategy Update #8

June 1, 2014

How we're learning with the Eastside Restoration Strategy:

Shiple Group's Recommendations for the Malheur National Forest's NEPA Analyses of "Accelerated Restoration" Projects:

The Malheur NF contracted with the Shiple Group to assess the efficiency of the Malheur's NEPA analysis process. Shiple Group's Senior Consultant Rhey Solomon conducted a diagnostic visit to the Malheur NF on March 17, 18, and 19. His visit included the following meetings:

- Approximately 25 employees at the District, Forest, and Regional offices.
- Three project team leaders for current restoration projects.
- Forest decision makers at three Districts.
- Project writer/editors and NEPA coordinators/planners.
- Three facilitators from public interest groups who are collaborating on restoration projects.

Rhey's evaluation was undertaken from a broad project/program perspective and not with a more narrow view of environmental document preparation for NEPA compliance. The relevant project management topics included (1) team management, (2) authorities/responsibilities and scheduling (3) process management, (4) communication, (5) collaboration and regulatory coordination, and (6) document management within a collaborative team environment. Rhey also reviewed five recent NEPA documents from the Forest for readability, organization, and legal adequacy. He also reviewed a prior investigation of NEPA efficiency at the Malheur NF, completed in August 2011. George Meredith conducted this earlier investigation, with cooperation from the Forest Service and the Blue Mountains Forest Partners.

Steve Beverlin, Malheur Deputy Forest Supervisor communicated to Forest employees that Rhea presented his initial impressions to the Forest Leadership Team (FLT) on March 19. Of the 28 recommendations, it came as no surprise that he emphasized two important points to the FLT:

- Our ID Teams work extremely well together - much better than most other units (Forest Service and other agencies) he has worked with; and,
- Harney County Restoration Collaborative and Blue Mountain Forest Partners are very supportive of the Forest and employees – he stated we have an excellent working relationship.

Gaining Efficiency:

- ❖ Discussions continue on and between Forests in the Blue Mountains to gain NEPA efficiency and share ideas across the landscape to increase the pace and scale of restoration. Topics include how the Decision AID (DECAID) analysis is used at the project level for green restoration projects to influence or inform decisions; are goshawk surveys necessary during project planning, or can they more efficiently be run during implementation?; examining the T/E consultation workload/prioritization; and potentially increasing the size of project planning areas.



for the greatest good

- ❖ Other eastside forests in the Region are engaged in similar discussions to look at their restoration pace and scale strategies, stewardship contracting ideas, and NEPA efficiencies.

New Employee Orientation:

This year's New Employee Orientation training in the Regional Office featured a collaboration panel consisting of:

- Lynn Jungwirth, Senior Fellow for Policy and Development - The Watershed Research and Training Center.
- Nils Christoffersen, Executive Director – Wallowa Resources.
- John Squires, Charter member – Pinchot Partners.
- Dr. Emily Jane Davis, OSU Extension, Collaborative Natural Resource Management.

This panel described the history, legislation, value, success stories and future challenges of collaborative efforts for the Pacific Northwest. They provided new employees to Region 6 an understanding of collaboration to take home and apply at the landscape, Forest and District level.

Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration (CFLR) Network:

The CLFR Network held its second meeting in Hood River on April 1-2, 2014. More than 75 people participated in this annual event representing all five CFLR projects in Region 6, as well as other representatives from collaborative groups on Forests without CFLR projects. Each CFLR project presented on the progress and challenges they were experiencing. Highlights include: 1) Collaborative group agreement across Washington State to work together to see how they can create a Federal-State partnership to advance landscape scale restoration; 2) Continued strong interest in monitoring, particularly socio-economic monitoring and effective ways of documenting project impacts; 3) Focus on the use of stewardship contracting and opportunities to structure contracts to maximize local benefit; 4) Strong interest in maintaining collaborative involvement throughout the planning process; and 5) Continued interest in, and support for accelerated restoration work across the eastside, recognizing that the Blues IDT, the Malheur effort and the CFLRs are all models that can work in the right place and time. [Contact: Bill Aney]

How we're engaging in the Eastside Restoration Strategy:

East Face Cohesive Wildland Fire Policy Pilot:

The East Face partners: NRCS, ODFW, BLM, ODF and USFS continue to coordinate on project design, funding and communication strategy. The East Face project was one of 13 projects selected nationwide to measurably improve the health and resiliency of forest ecosystems where public and private lands meet through a partnership between the Forest Service and NRCS. The project area contains high to very high wildfire potential across three WUI zones (including La Grande's municipal watershed), habitat for federally threatened bulltrout, steelhead and Chinook salmon, and the NRCS Sage Grouse Initiative focal area. [Contact: Jodi Kramer]

Fiscal Year 14 Funding includes:

- Allocated to date: \$800,000 Hazardous Fuels; \$200,000 Landline location.
- Potential additional allocations: Forest Stewardship and Cooperative Fire; 2/25/14 FS Washington Office solicited funding requests from the Region.
- NRCS - \$1,680,000.

Eastside Restoration Strategy Leveraging and Capacity Building:

- Working at large scales across landscapes with many partners provides opportunities for investment, challenges in tracking partnerships, and identifies gaps in resource needs. The Blue Mtns Restoration team has conceptualized a model to track and communicate the complex leveraging of resources for Lower Joseph Creek Restoration project. It may also be used to identify leverage gaps, and as a strategic tool for seeking opportunities to partner and participate in landscape-scale restoration. One example is the vast need for heritage resource surveys. Discussions have begun for strategic fundraising and engaging non-government partners in the completing of heritage surveys for Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy projects.
- The Forest Service and ODF have finished the details of the collection agreement for use of state funds for work on National Forests in support of accelerating restoration. The agreement will support collecting LiDAR data on 500K acres on Malheur and WWNF, plus 250K acres on Umatilla that didn't get flown last year – all in support of upcoming NF planning projects. Putting funds towards botany and heritage surveys in support of Blue Mountains Restoration IDT projects, stand exams in support of NF projects, and landlines for FY14/15 sale programs, as well as state employees helping with presale work for FY14/15 projects.

Speaking Engagements and Conference Participation:

- ❖ There's a lot of interest in the Eastside Restoration Strategy and the Forest Service is actively engaging in a variety of venues to describe the goals, objectives and potential outcomes. Some recent engagements include the Northeastern Oregon Timber Operators' meeting, the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) National Coordinators meeting and five-year report to Congress, in the Blue Mtns Adaptation Partnership (BMAP) Climate Change Vulnerability workshop in LaGrande, the CFLR workshop on NEPA innovations, the Western Region Forest Resources Association 2014 Spring Meeting, the Large Wildfire Conference in Missoula, MT, and in particular planning for the Blue Mountains Collaborative Coalition meeting at John Day in July. The meeting has four agenda items:
 - The goals and objectives of the Strategic Fuel Breaks project in the Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy (BMRS)
 - How the five forest collaboratives can best engage with this project as it moves forward
 - A sharing of the collaborative agreements (or those in process) on treatments for moist mixed conifer forests (or cool moist)
 - A presentation and discussion on the baseline socioeconomic data for monitoring the BMRS

Building Internal Support:

Regional Forester Kent Connaughton presented the “Pacific Northwest Region Accelerated Restoration Highlights” briefing paper to the Chief and other Regional Foresters in Denver last month. According to Kent, “the Chief got what he wanted.”

The Region is developing a proposal for national level funding of the eastside work, including the accelerated work on the Malheur, the Blues team, and overall eastside coordination to lessen the impacts to other regional programs.

Collaborating:

Collaborating and innovating as they go – as the Blue Mtns Restoration Team conducts the analysis on the Lower Joseph Creek Restoration project they continue to collaborate and seek methods, models and spread their new learnings across the landscape. The following examples illustrate the concurrent work going on:

- Wallowa-Whitman Forest Collaborative (WAWFC) Steering Committee provided very positive feedback on last month's presentation of LoJo alternatives and effects. They expressed appreciation for having the chance to see early analysis results and specialist's approaches to effects analyses. The Blue Mtns Restoration IDT is continues an open discussion on the strategic fuels and dry forest projects to get early impressions of opportunities and concerns.
- The Blue Mtns Team and the Ochoco Forest Restoration Collaborative are discussing the overall concept of strategic fuel breaks, the Ochoco Forest's proposed plan for strategic fuel breaks, the four-forest Strategic Fuel Break Project, and other opportunities and concerns. Concerns included impacts on IRAs, how to create fuel break networks across private lands, resource availability for fuel break maintenance, the need for strategic fuel breaks to reduce fire suppressions costs, and potential exacerbation of adverse road impacts on wildlife and riparian habitats,
- The Blue Mtns Team, PNW Research and others, including the Institute of Natural Resources have completed climate-informed vegetation models. Once the appropriate parameters are developed, these models for four climate change scenarios and all potential vegetation types across the Blue Mountains will be applied to the alternatives from the Lower Joseph Creek project to compare their relative effects given climate change.
- The Blue Mtns Team is working with The Nature Conservancy staff, R6 Regional Office, NW OR Ecology, and Central Oregon Forests to finalize a joint TNC-USFS Restoration Needs map for the Eastside and SW Oregon. This map improves on the original map developed by the USFS in early 2013. A publication of the methods is scheduled for submission to Forest Ecology and Management by June 2014.

What we're accomplishing with the Eastside Restoration Strategy:

Malheur National Forest:

September 6, 2013, the Malheur National Forest awarded a 10-year stewardship contract for forest-wide restoration to Grant County, OR based Iron Triangle LLC. Significant outcomes to date include: 12,000 acres treated using pre-commercial thinning, biomass removal and commercial harvest restoring the forest to a fire resilient state, and Malheur Lumber Company (a partner of Iron triangle) added a second shift of employees (first increase since 1998). Most importantly, Oregon State Employment Department reported Grant County experienced an unemployment decline of 3.1 percent between September 2013 and March 2014. This was the sharpest unemployment drop of any county in the state.

From the Blue Mountain Eagle, May 27, 2014 12:50PM,

"...Fast forward to this month, and not only is the mill still running, the company is preparing to add 20-30 jobs and a second shift. Let's repeat that: A second shift – something not seen at the mill in about 16 years.

It is a remarkable turnaround – remarkable for the company's persistence but even more so for the efforts of a broad mix of community, county, state and federal players. Daucsavage last week

was quick to credit the support of the community and the Forest Service's accelerated restoration program for playing key roles in the revitalization of the industry here...

"Malheur mill adding 20-30 jobs in John Day," My Eagle News.com, May 20, 2014
<http://www.bluemountaineagle.com/article/20140520/ARTICLE/140529977#>

Blue Mountains Restoration Team:

1. Lower Joseph (LoJo) Creek Restoration Project:

- ✓ The Wallowa County NRAC has provided ~\$25,000 to the IDT for field surveys in LoJo. The NRAC will develop and administer the contracts. The Team is working with the NRAC on survey designs and contract specifications. [Contact: Barbara Wales]
- ✓ The first run of a burn probability model for the LoJo landscape has been completed by TNC and WWETAC. Following the IDT review and validation, this model will be applied across the entire Blue Mountains ecoregion to assess alternative treatment effects on burn probability and the relative effects of fire on high resource values. The model will be a tool available for resource managers for other planning projects in the Blue Mtns. [Contact: Brian Spradlin]
- ✓ The team has revised the LoJo DEIS strategy and deadlines to facilitate more time for field work (LoJo and Projects 2 & 3), and for organizing the June 24-25 field trips (with the Nez Perce tribe and WAWFC, respectively). The new strategy puts them on track to finish the first draft of the DEIS in mid-July and publish the DEIS in early August. [Contact: Ayn Shlisky]
- ✓ **Socio-Economic:**
 - A Cost Reimbursable Agreement with The University of Oregon, Ecosystem Workforce Program to conduct the socio-economic analysis for the Lower Joseph EIS (and possibly the Fuel Breaks and Dry Pine Forests EIS's as well) has been completed and is under review. [Contact: Amy Gowan]
 - A rough draft of the economic analysis conducted by Wallowa County NRAC has been shared with the IDT team. Their findings may be used to inform the Lower Joseph analysis. [Contact: Amy Gowan]
- ✓ **Consultation:** Level 1 Consultation is proceeding with USFWS for fish and T&E plants and animals. [Contact: Paul Boehne]
- ✓ **Heritage:**
 - Ongoing coordination between the four Blue Mountain Forest Archaeologists and R6 Archaeologist to share information regarding forest inventory strategies, data gaps, modeling information and cost estimates for heritage support. Result is consensus on NHPA compliance approach for EIS analysis and project implementation.
 - Consultation with Oregon SHPO has been initiated result in the development of a proposed NHPA compliance strategy that fits accelerated timelines for analysis and implementation.
 - Development of the Lower Joseph Creek IDIQ contract package for heritage inventory and compliance reports are underway. Delivery of contract services will be completed by the end of summer 2014. [Contact: Amy Gowan]
- ✓ **Tribal Relations:**

- An “Initiation of consultation” letter summarizing the selected three Blue Mountains projects, dated November 5, 2013, and signed by the Umatilla, Wallowa-Whitman, Ochoco and Malheur Forest Supervisors, were sent to the CTUIR, Warm Springs, Nez Perce and Burns Paiute Tribal Chairmen setting the stage for staff to staff consultation.
- Several staff to staff consultation meetings between the Blue Mountains IDT, line officers and the CTUIR, Nez Perce, Burns Paiute and Warm Springs Tribes have taken place since the fall of 2013. Project level consultation is ongoing. The Nez Perce are participating on the Lower Joseph IDT, and the CTUIR have agreed to participate on the Fuel Breaks and Dry Forest EIS IDTs. Meaningful dialog regarding issues, concerns and opportunities have been shared that will inform decisions and relationships are slowly being built between the IDT and tribal staff.
- Team members have prepared the response to the Nez Perce Tribe’s scoping comments, and met with Tribal staff on May 12. Topics included: scoping comments and IDT response, alternative development and analysis, decision criteria, indicators of effects, effects analysis, implementation, and the June 24 field trip itinerary.
- The Team is organizing a workshop (June 12-13 in Pendleton) including the Nez Perce Tribe, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Blue Mountains IDT staff, and others to develop quantitative relationships between forest conditions and huckleberry distribution. The workshop will use empirical data and expert opinion to attribute planning models, which will be used in NEPA analyses of vegetation treatment effects. Application to the Lower Joseph Creek Restoration project will be used as a prototype for potentially broader application across the Blues. [Contact: Amy Gowan]

✓ **Photo Points:**

Six to eight photo points will be established utilizing a micro-purchase procurement with Tom Iraci, Mountain Images in the Lower Joseph Creek project and possibly on the Malheur and Ochoco if the opportunity exists. The objective is to establish “before treatment” points that can be re-shot after treatment(s) to create a series of visual communication tools illustrating the effects of restoration management. Video B-Roll and interviews will also be collected. [Contact: Glen Sachet]

✓ **Funding decision/Oregon State leverage:**

The data collection with prior-year funds is coming to fruition and being finalized. Funds are being allocated to Forests and a cooperative agreement with the State of Oregon is being developed. The Blue Mountains Restoration IDT in partnership with the State of Oregon has a priority data collection strategy which includes LiDAR/stand exams, and botany and heritage surveys across the Blue Mountains to implement this year. The Forest Service has committed \$625,000, leveraging another \$600,000 from the State of Oregon for this effort. The effort includes providing training to IDT members across the four Blue Mountain forests interested in using LiDAR data.

✓ **Grazing Management:**

Grazing allotment Permittee’s in the Lower Joseph Creek Restoration project area, and members of the Wallowa County NRAC met to discuss rangeland and road management with the Blue Mountains IDT, the District Ranger, and District staff. Discussions centered on opportunities for water and other rangeland improvements, and whether this project is the appropriate venue to achieve a large variety of objectives. The Lower Joseph Creek project represents one test of some of the NEPA efficiencies necessary to achieve accelerated restoration. These efficiencies include establishing a relatively narrow purpose and need, such as that published in the Notice of Intent for this project.

Confusion about new ways of completing NEPA planning in support of accelerated restoration highlights the need for frequent communication between IDTs, responsible officials, interest groups, and the public about NEPA efficiency, agency priorities, and alternative ways to plan for various landscape objectives. [Contact: Jenifer Ferriell]

Analysis Tools:

- ✓ The Blue Mountains IDT has been testing the use of Google Earth in roads analysis and riparian condition assessment in the Lower Joseph Creek project area. The accelerated timeframe for planning this large scale project has necessitated creative use of technology to quickly assess conditions and treatment needs, and prioritize field survey needs. Google Earth, combined with Wallowa County field assessments and corporate Forest Service data supported the rapid initial assessment of the transportation needs and limitations for the Lower Joseph project area. From this assessment the Team will be able to more efficiently coordinate their field work to refine analysis and define the transportation needs on the landscape. [Contact: Michael Brown]

- ✓ The Team continues to work with the Regional Office and researchers from Oregon State University to develop models derived from detailed soils surveys to refine silvicultural prescriptions and treatment site suitability based on water holding capacity, drought tolerance, stability, and to also draw inferences on historic vegetation patterns. The Blue Mountain ID Team is working with the Remote Sensing Acquisition Center to develop a silvicultural field sampling scheme that will help calibrate LIDAR data that is scheduled for acquisition during the 2014 field season. The team plans to use LIDAR data to support the analysis of roads, water and vegetation in their upcoming projects. A multi-session LIDAR workshop and training is in development for the fall of 2014. [Contact: Michael Brown and Neil McCusker]

- ✓ **Field Trips:**
The Blue Mountains IDT is busy planning two days of field trips to the Lower Joseph Creek Restoration project area (June 24-25). The first day will include Blues IDT and Nez Perce tribal staff specialists, and will focus on field review of treatment alternatives in RHCAs and old forest, access to the tribe's adjacent Precious Lands wildlife area, fire management coordination across the boundary with tribal lands, and conservation of special places, such as Starvation Ridge. The second day will be for the general public, including Wallowa Whitman Forest Collaborative members, and will primarily focus on illustrating pre- and post-vegetation treatment conditions, road treatments, and logging systems. The field trips are opportunities to continue to refine planning alternatives, further zones of agreement on key issues, and network with local publics, governments, and organizations. [Contact: Ayn Shlisky]

2. Strategic Fuel Breaks Project (Project #2):

The IDT has drafted a Purpose and Need Statement utilizing input from the Blue Mtn Forests and Forest Collaboratives and their reviews of the project proposal maps, and will begin reviewing the Statement with Forests and Collaboratives to refine it before publishing. The IDT is anticipating the need for a project initiation letter for the Strategic Fuel Break project from the four forest supervisors this summer to facilitate the completion of a proposed action by the end of the calendar year. [Contact: Ayn Shlisky]

3. Blues-Wide Fire Modeling:

Work is ongoing with The Nature Conservancy and Western Wildland Environmental Threat Assessment Center to develop a Blues-wide fire model that identifies high value resource areas, and a cost-benefit analysis with high risk and high benefit by five intensity levels. This tool should help fire managers develop response and risk management strategies to unplanned ignitions, and in prioritizing treatments. [Contact: Brian Spradlin]

The ID Team and scientists from Oregon State University are working to adapt OSUs Centennial Fire Model to incorporate vegetation models from the Lower Joseph Creek Project as a test of its applicability across the Blue Mountains. The IDT and OSU scientists hope to be able to use the model to calculate relative anticipated fire suppression costs given planning alternatives for all three Blue Mountains IDT projects. [Contact: Brian Spradlin]

Mill Creek A to Z Stewardship Project:

As part of the ongoing effort to increase the scale and pace of restoring forest health and sustainability of the Colville National Forest, the agency developed an entirely new way of accomplishing the work through stewardship contracting. The Mill Creek Stewardship Project was designed so that each step, from pre-National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) data collection to project implementation will be performed and financed by a contractor or their subcontractor. The landscape project is located on the northeast side of the Three Rivers Ranger District in the North and South Mill Creek watersheds.

The solicitation resulted in an arrangement of a single award, performance-based, requirements contract spanning ten years. Estimated total timber volume from the 54,000 acre project is expected to range from 30 MMBF to 50 MMBF. Once a final NEPA decision is made by the Forest Service, the prime contractor will conduct work as ordered by the Forest Service through task orders.

Initial scoping meetings to review the proposed action, answer questions, and record public comments were held on February 24 and 25, 2014 in Colville. The meetings were run by the NEPA subcontractor, and public scoping was conducted from February through March, 2014. Based on the comments received, the contractor prepared the Key Issues Statement, and submitted it to the forest for approval.

The subcontractor's interdisciplinary team is currently collecting field data. Concurrently the subcontractor is working on comment analysis and drafting Chapters 1 and 2 of the NEPA document. The timeline in the work plan submitted by the NEPA subcontractor places the draft environmental document for public review in the fall of 2014. [Contact: Franklin Pemberton]

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