

Eastside Restoration Strategy Update # 12 September 25, 2015

“Landscape scale problems require landscape scale solutions” Ayn Shlisky

This is the 12th edition of the ongoing ERS Updates. It’s been a while since our last edition so we hope to hit the highlights of this summer, and show you where we’re headed.

The summer of 2015 will be a memorable one for all of us. By many measures, it may be one of the biggest fire seasons in history in the Pacific Northwest. It was certainly a tragic season as we lost three fire fighters, and our hearts go out to their families, friends, and coworkers. By comparison, everything else we work on seems trivial!

In terms of the Eastside Restoration Strategy, there are many lessons to learn and share from the summer. Two of our Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration (CFLR) areas were affected by wildfire (the Colville’s New Vision 2020 project and the Malheur’s Southern Blues project). It should be no surprise that our 5 projects, all in dry fire prone forests, will be in some way affected by fire over the 10-year life of CFLR. The 2015 fires may mean a significant revision to these two CFLR projects.

Several members of the Blues Restoration Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) spent some time helping out with Long Term Fire Assessments this summer, and are hoping to use these assessments to test, validate, and inform assumptions for the Blue Mountain Forest Resiliency Project (FRP).

Also during the summer, the Coalition of Blue Mountains Collaboratives held another meeting, and a good portion of this meeting was spent engaging the Blues Restoration IDT and each other on the Blue Mountains Forest Resiliency Project (FRP). The FRP is unprecedented in terms of the ambitious scale and timeline for planning, and this has required the IDT to explore different models for planning and analysis. In the same way, it is becoming clear that work at this scale will also require different models for collaboration. The team is now heavily engaged in both facets of large-scale restoration planning, discovering what works and what does not work when planning at this scale.

As we move forward there are more bright spots on the horizon. Our Regional Forester Jim Peña recently released his vision and commitment for restoring, maintaining and imparting resilience to Pacific Northwest landscapes. (See the Restoration News section below for the link.) I’m happy to say the Eastside Restoration Strategy is well aligned with his vision, and our focus will continue to be on landscape-scale ecological resiliency and our contribution to the social and economic well-being of our communities as well.

Bill Aney, Eastside Restoration Strategy Coordinator, waney@fs.fed.us



for the greatest good

What we're accomplishing with the Eastside Restoration Strategy:

The Blue Mountains Restoration Team has completed the Lower Joseph Creek Restoration Project (Project #1) Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), and formulating the second project, a large-scale forest resiliency project (FRP) encompassing parts of four national forests in the Blue Mountains of Oregon:

But first, please welcome **Darcy Weseman**, the Team's new Public Affairs Officer and Writer/Editor. She has hit the ground running (like we knew she would). Darcy, with support of the Blues IDT recently produced a "Forest Resiliency Brief" providing a general overview of the project intended for internal and external audiences. It will soon be available for download on the web site. She's also developing a new FRP webpage. Her primary role will be developing internal and external communications strategies, and helping craft concise, publicly accessible NEPA document products from the team's work. She brings recent experience from the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision public engagement effort to the Restoration Team.

- **Lower Joseph (LoJo) Creek Restoration Project (Project #1):**
The draft Record of Decision is drafted, and the FEIS has been reviewed by the Regional Office and the Wallowa-Whitman NF environmental coordinator, and edits have been incorporated as a result of these reviews. Consultation with USFWS is complete, and is in process with NOAA Fisheries. The FEIS and Draft ROD are planned for release once NOAA fisheries consultation is complete. The press release for the signing is also drafted.
- **The Blues Mountains Forest Resiliency Project (FRP):** The Blue Mountains Forest Resiliency Project encompasses parts of four national forests in the Blue Mountains of Oregon and treatments may cover up to 500,000 acres. The Blues Interdisciplinary Team (IDT), in partnership with the Blue Mountains Ecology Program, has convened a group of scientists from USFS Research (PNW and RMRS), Institute for Natural Resources, WWETAC, University of Washington and the Regional Office to provide scientific peer review of the project analysis and treatment design framework, and draft a guidebook or publication describing the process for other project planning efforts in the Blue Mountains ecoregion.

The IDT intends to be transparent about the use and interpretation of science, policy, and social trade-offs within the NEPA process to foster effective internal and external collaboration. Ongoing and Upcoming efforts and scoping include:

- Formal and informal tribal consultation.
- Introduction for the regulatory agencies (NOAA Fisheries, Fish and Wildlife Service).
- Introduction for internal USFS staff.
- The Blue Mountains collaboratives have started scheduling fall workshops with the IDT to learn about the FRP, provide input on the pre-NEPA assessment and first iteration proposed action, and discuss desired collaborative processes as the project moves forward. The Wallowa Whitman Forest Collaborative and Umatilla Forest Collaborative Group have scheduled a joint meeting with the IDT for October 28; the Ochoco Forest Restoration Collaborative and Ochoco NF staff has scheduled a joint meeting with the IDT for November 17, and the Blue Mountains Forest Partners are considering a workshop for mid-October. A

workshop with the Harney County Restoration Collaborative is being considered, but has not yet been scheduled.

- The team has and will continue outreaching internally with Blue Mountains Forest staffs, welcoming any questions, comments, concerns and opportunities.

Finally, please let us know how we can work together.

How we're learning with the Eastside Restoration Strategy:

The Eastside is a big geographic landscape and the learning landscape is big too. Here are a few highlights:

- **The May 13 Fire Science Workshop**, “Understanding the Effects of Fire on Aquatic Ecosystems,” included expert presentations and panel discussions on how fish respond to the effects of wildfire, how fires affect salmon streams and what kinds of restoration can best help fish and their habitat withstand wildfires that are a fact of life across the Columbia Basin. The workshop was sponsored by the Federal Caucus, an organization of 10 federal agencies with management responsibilities in the Columbia Basin, as well as Ecotrust and Ecotrust Forest Management.
- **Good Neighbor Authority (GNA):** Bill has been working with the Regional Office Staff, and the State of Oregon to help craft a regional approach to implementing the Good Neighbor Authority. The Region has approved templates for Master Agreements and Supplemental Project Agreements, and the Washington Office held two webinars in July on implementing the opportunities this new authority gives us.
- **Project Preparation Strike Team:** The Regional Office has distributed the outreach for the project prep strike team, to be located in the Blues and modeled after the successful Region 1 model. This team is envisioned to be interagency (ODF and FS), and available wherever needed in the region for sale prep, service contract prep, contract administration, harvest system design, surveys, etc., and has a strong component of bringing in and developing future leaders in project implementation. The vacancy announcements for the three permanent positions will be in USAJobs in mid-October with selected individuals being on-board after the holidays.
- **Fuel Treatment Effectiveness on the Corner Creek Fire, Oregon.**
The Corner Cr. fire started by lightning on June 29, 2015 on the Ochoco National Forest approximately 11 miles south of Dayville, Oregon, and grew to over 29,000 acres primarily located on BLM and National Forest lands. The attached briefing paper describes the effect of fuel treatments and invasive species on fire suppression activities.

The Key Points are:

- The presence of fuel treatments provided opportunities for firefighters to control the spread of the 2015 Corner Creek fire and contributed to more favorable natural resource outcomes.
 - Invasive species appear to be altering the landscape by creating flammable fuel conditions on previously barren sites.
- **Fire Activity and CFLR Landscapes:** How much of the CFLR landscapes in the region has been affected by wildfires this year?

- Up to now, the Oka-Wen fires have missed the Tapash CFLR landscape.
 - Currently about 6% of the Southern Blues Restoration Coalition project area (Malheur) is affected by the Canyon Creek Complex. Much of the affected landscape was in areas that were either completing treatments, or where a new contract was about to be let. , Most of the current NEPA and impending decisions are outside of the fire area.
 - About 13% of the New Vision 2020 project area (Colville) is affected by 4 large fires, but most of the burned area lies within areas classified as Potential Wilderness Areas (PWAs). Some contract prep work had been completed in areas burned this summer.
 - One of the biggest effects is a secondary effect – the FS spent all of the agency’s funding budgeted for fire suppression, and by August were using non-fire monies to fund continued fire work. This meant that several projects lost the ability to fund planned CFLR projects towards the end of the summer.
 - Of the five projects in the region, three have had revisions to their project landscape at least in part due to fires (Fre-Win, Deschutes, and Malheur). The Colville is the only forest that has not had a revision up to now.
 - Given that we focused our CFLR work on fire-prone landscapes, it shouldn’t be surprising that fire tends to hit these areas...but still...it’s disappointing, and a lot of work, to have to back up a step or two after the smoke clears.
- **The July 27-28, 2015 Coalition of Collaboratives meeting** in Baker City focused one day on the Resiliency Project, and the role of collaboratives. The following are key lessons learned:
 - Overall the groups felt that the majority of the collaboratives had some agreement around some of the issues, but before the agreements can be applied broadly over a large scale there needs to be more discussion on both a collaborative and regional level.
 - Looking across the Blue Mountains collaboratives, there is some agreement for developing small openings where early seral conditions are below those needed for forest health; and for treatment in Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas, dry forests, rural-urban interfaces for community protection, and designated old growth areas. Forest vegetation treatment in inventoried roadless areas is generally a non-starter, except in some cases for young stand improvement. Forest treatments in Potential Wilderness Areas (PWAs¹) and Other Undeveloped Lands (OUL’s) has either not been discussed or are project non-starters. Agreement regarding treatments in moist forests is either a non-starter; or further discussion is needed. Some agreements have not been discussed, such as cold forest, municipal watersheds, and roads.
 - The collaboratives need to have more time to discuss on an individual collaborative level before they can begin discussing agreements across collaboratives.
 - Collaborative groups prefer to use field trips to see how treatments might be applicable across the landscape.
 - Going from a project level to landscape level is difficult to do. It is difficult to take project level agreements out of context and generalize them to a regional scale.
 - The Forest Resiliency Project is not trying to take the place of the local collaborative work. There are opportunities available at the regional scale that we

¹ Due to new policy, PWAs are now formally called “Areas that may be Suitable for Inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System” (Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 Chapter 70)

would not have on smaller projects, and there was a lot of discussion about the “added value” of the project (i.e., information sharing, new additional science, broad scale perspective, etc.).

- The collaboratives are at different levels of development, so it is difficult to find agreements that span all of the collaboratives.
- While some collaborative members want to take on a project of this scale, the collaboratives do not have full agreement that working on a project of this scale is a good thing; they are not in agreement that they are ready to have that discussion. There is general concern from the group about the collaboratives’ capacity to work on something else, in addition to their project work.
- Some felt it is not necessary to have consensus across all of the collaboratives in order to move forward.
- Many recommended not including any of the “non-starter” issues in the proposed actions for the Forest Resiliency Project, but rather just areas that have broad agreement or are noncontroversial.
- Some members expressed confusion about the objectives of the ID Team and the resiliency project, and what the added value of this effort will be.
- There is concern that when you are working at the large landscape scale, some of the place-specific issues may “fall through the cracks”.
- There were questions about how social, economic and cultural issues will be integrated into the Forest Resiliency Project’s planning process; some collaborative members suggested that social, economic and cultural issues should be incorporated upfront.
- Due to the importance of site-specific issues, collaboration at this scale poses challenges and a need to develop a different model.
- By trying to vertically integrate the work of the collaboratives to a regional scale, we may be over-complicating an already complicated process.
- It is important to build trust between the IDT and the place-based collaboratives. There is trust at the local level, but there is uncertainty, confusion and a lack of trust about the goals of the IDT at the regional level.

- **Planning and Implementing Restoration at Scale: A learning workshop**

Forests around the region are working to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration, and as a learning culture, we need to find ways to share the ideas and lessons learned with each other. Towards that end, the region is hosting a learning workshop this winter, in an environment that fosters dialogue and making connections among practitioners. We are early in the planning stage, but so far the following principles have emerged:

1. The workshop will be focused internally, on Forest Service practitioners that are taking innovative approaches to planning and implementation.
2. The workshop will be small enough to facilitate good discussion and learning, i.e., 3-4 people per forest.
3. The workshop will focus on planning and implementation as it is currently being practiced – sharing what they are trying, what works and what hasn’t worked, rather than what might work in the future.
4. We are interested in making connections and developing interest areas across the region.

Look for the official announcement in the very near future.

How we're engaging in the Eastside Restoration Strategy:

The State of Oregon re-affirms their commitment to landscape restoration, resilience and learning new ways to do business.

- **Oregon Department of Forestry/Forest Service Partnership (aka New Business Model):** The Oregon State Legislature approved a \$5 million budget for the continuation of the Federal Forest Health Program in 2015-17. This package provides funding to reestablish and expand federal forest restoration work. In the 2013-15 biennium, the Legislature provided \$2.885 million in Lottery Funds for the program to provide grants for collaborative groups, contracts for scientific research, and to directly support activities intended to increase the pace and scale of forest product harvest activities on federal lands. Activities funded in the prior biennium were limited to forest lands on the east side of the cascades, primarily in the Blue Mountains. This package expands the work of the program statewide.

Funding in the package is split between collaborative group support (\$1.3 million), state/federal partnerships (\$3.375 million), and program management and administration (\$325,000). Grants to collaborative groups will be managed by the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board.

<https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2015R1/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/79809>

The Regional Forester and State BLM Director will be sending out a “Call for Projects” in the very near future. This approach to collecting project ideas is designed to provide transparency and inclusiveness in soliciting projects on NF land for state funding support.

Restoration News:

Read Regional Forester Jim Peña's statement called “Restoring, Maintaining and Imparting Resilience to Pacific Northwest landscapes.”

http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprd3847673.pdf

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