

Restoration Steering Team Meeting

February 7, 2011

12:30-4:00

Attendees: Marisue Hilliard, Terry Seyden, Sheryl Bryan, Dave Casey, Dale Remington, Steve Lohr, Jason Rodrigue, Randall Burgess, Carolyn Wells, Gordon Warburton, , David Ray, Steve Novak, Hugh Irwin, Mary Noel, Chris Frisbee, Judy Francis, Josh Kelly, Hugh Irwin, Heather Luczak, Jonathon Horton (UNCA Professor), Jim Borawa(Equinox Env), Ruth Hartzler (Carolina Mtn Club), students from UNCA Ecology class

Introduction

Welcome from Marisue Hilliard. Brief history of the steering team and restoration efforts of the NFsNC.

Working Group Updates

- **HWA** (Hugh and Dave Casey)
 - Two new field crews were hired last fall with the primary focus on HWA treatments. They will finish up trts in May and July.
 - The 2010 HWA EA has improved hemlock conservation in the last year– more ability to focus on Carolina Hemlock, additional trt options (use of Safari and additional beetles), additional trt areas.
 - A lot of reconnaissance was accomplished this last fall –a helicopter was used on the Nantahala to identify new treatment sites (36 new areas). Plan on using helicopter on the Pisgah prior to leaf out.
 - Working group met recently to develop decision criteria to rate treatment areas. 212 new acres of treatment were identified on the Nantahala (Dave’s data table). Also setting up monitoring plots when applying the treatments. Will share the treatment area prioritization decision criteria with the steering team.
 - Been finding some Carolina sites that are still in good condition, idea is to add a significant # of Carolina hemlock sites. It is desirable to make this a multiyear effort and continue treatments with a concentrated effort into the future.
- **NNIS** (Carolyn Wells)
 - Working to integrate the priorities of the Southern Appalachian Cooperative Weed Management Partnership (www.sacwmp.org) which incorporates establishment of focal areas – both on and off the NF.
 - Cheoah River invasives project, 9 miles of treatment

- Early detection rapid response approach on Roan Mountain.
 - Nolichucky River – reconnaissance, Japanese knotweed threatening Virginia spiraea populations.
 - Possibility of treatment in Linville Wilderness using fire and herbicides.
 - Wilson Creek (National Wild and Scenic R.)(NEPA complete)– need assessment of the area. Nature Conservancy willing to help move this effort forward. May be a great case study to demonstrate the value of partnerships.
 - What do we need to do as a working group to move the MOU forward ??? Not sure why this hasn't happened yet. Gary meeting with Nancy Fraley to discuss the language/focus of the MOU.
 - Treatment in Linville Wilderness – what is the status of the NEPA and/or the holdup of getting this complete? The Forest should be initiating the NEPA process for treatment in the Wilderness this spring. It will take a forest plan amendment as well as coordination with the regional and Washington offices to get this approved.
- **Wildlife**(Gordon)
- Working group met in Nov. to look at Brushy Ridge project on the ground. There is a proposal to focus management efforts on the golden-winged warbler (gwwa). This species was identified as a priority species by the Appalachian Mtn. Joint Venture (AMJV) (<http://www.amjv.org/>)
 - AMJV has an established gwwa working group that the Wildlife restoration working group plans to work with to bring planning efforts to forest projects. (see meeting notes on FS website).
 - The gwwa working group is working with multiple grants that are focused on gwwa habitat and conservation plans.
 - Western NC is one of the prime areas for gwwa migration. Decision was made to move forward with gwwa planning conservation areas. Focal area in SW NC that the Audubon has also identified.
 - Lidar imagery may be useful for gwwa habitat planning.
 - Franks creek area was identified as an area to possibly initiate some gwwa conservation. Next step is to meet with the Franks Creek ID team (contact Dave Casey) to discuss opportunities as part of the Frank's Creek project.

- The golden winged warbler has pretty specific habitat needs but there are a number of other early successional species that will benefit from the conservation of gwwa habitat. Need to keep the species associations in mind when doing this conservation.
- There is a need for individuals that are interested in bird surveying and vegetation inventory.

Discussion

How was golden-winged warbler identified as a species of focus as opposed to a different species that has mid to late successional habitat requirements?

AMJV has ranking criteria for species, and golden-winged warbler and cerulean rank out at top of list. This species is dependent on early successional habitat which has consistently been an issue of disagreement among steering team members.

There may be opportunities in the future to look at other wildlife species identified by the AMJV that have mid to late successional habitat requirements.

- **Website Update** – www.fs.usda.gov/nfsnc
 - Heather gave an overview of the new website and where information on the forest's restoration efforts could be found.
- **CFLRP** (Josh Kelly) –
 - Background of Collaborative Forest Restoration Project (CFLRP) and the proposal that the Grandfather RD is submitting.
 - Proposal is due to the Regional office Feb. 9th.
 - There are requirements for being collaborative and a strong emphasis on restoring natural fire regimes.
 - Grandfather ranger district is important in regards to fire -25% of the landscape in need of restoring fire to the landscape.
 - The Fire Learning Network is looking to address management needs of forests in relation to fire management.
 - Funding through this proposal would allow us the resources to treat all the lands in need of fire on the Grandfather.
 - For more information on the specific proposal contact Josh Kelly or District Ranger John Crockett
- What can the steering team do to support this proposal? Josh- there is still an opportunity to sign the letter of commitment.
- **Prescribed fire Plan Amendment** (Steve Lohr)
 - There are restrictions in the current Forest Plan that limit burning opportunities. (flame length restrictions, seasonality restrictions).

- There is a need to incorporate more flexibility for burning.
- Steve passed out the proposed draft language for the fire plan amendment.
- The completion of this amendment will facilitate projects such as the CFLRP proposal above.
- We are looking for feedback from steering committee on the proposed amendment prior to the initiation of public scoping.
- Question to the group – is there anything missing from this amendment. David Rey - make sure this scoping gets sent to the broader FLN group.
- Do we need a fire management working group to facilitate these discussions regarding fire? Is there a way for the steering team to enhance our collaboration with the FLN?
 - Since there is already an existing structure in place to address the use of fire in restoration (FLN) it was agreed that the Restoration Collaborative did not need to set up a separate fire management working group. Instead, (similar to the approach used with invasive species control (sacwmp)), it was decided that the steering team have a liason to the FLN to better coordinate fire restoration.
 - The FLN meetings are open to anyone to come. Since he is already a member of FLN, David Rey agreed to serve as a representative of the restoration steering team to the FLN. Similar to the other working groups, we also need someone from the Forest Service to work with David in coordinating between the Steering team and FLN.

FY 2011 Integrated Resource Assessments (Dale Remington)

- Dale gave a background of old rapid assessment process
- There is currently national direction that we should be using stewardship authorities more in the collaborative process
- Stewardship as a mechanism to get more funding and input early in the process
- Stewardship allows for the portability of funds across the forest not just within project boundaries.
- Looking to get steering team input early in the planning cycle to provide restoration input for possible stewardship opportunities
- How do we get our projects to be more integrated and get productive collaboration prior to initiating NEPA?
- Have a need to get a 'pilot' project on the ground to better familiarize ourselves with the stewardship process.
- How many FY 2011 projects do we have? No gate 1 projects but we do have some gate 2 projects. Franks Creek, Lower End.
- Is there a way for the steering team to prioritize restoration projects during the integrated resource assessment process?
- At what point does the steering team plug in to this process?
- Concern over having the restoration projects far removed from the actual 'timber sale' area.

- Idea that the steering team should be emphasizing local projects.
- Options –
 - steering team tie into integrated resource assessments
 - Marisue – this group could establish some criteria or types of projects, but not actually propose the specific projects (i.e. does it meet our 6 restoration objectives)
- Carolyn – It is the responsibility of this committee to be more strategic and look at the broad landscape view.
- Hugh – we should be focusing more specifically on the integrated resource areas for restoration projects.
- David Ray- Maybe the role of this committee is to come to more consensus up front on where and how the projects are accomplished on the ground
- Steve Henson – Strong supporter of stewardship contracting. There may be another hurdle when county commissioners realize they're not getting back all the receipts from timber sales.
- Is there an opportunity for the steering team to prioritize order of entry into areas.
- Steve Henson to share 'something' with Terry to circulate with the group.
- Josh – The forest to prioritize what areas are in most need of silvicultural restoration? And what are the areas of greatest need for other restoration? Because timber is ultimately what pays for a lot of these restoration opportunities. Discussion regarding having An Enhanced Conservation Design (Grandfather District) which looks at how departed certain forests are from the desired condition.
- At the next meeting we will discuss a set of criteria for how the identified collaborative restoration priorities could best be utilized in the Forest's integrated resource assessment process. Volunteers to work on furthering this as an agenda item for next meeting– Judy Francis, Dale Remington, Gordon Warburton, David Ray.

Additional input from the group

Trails Evaluation Project – more info to Carolina Mtn. Club – Ruth Hartzler

Replacement Steering Team Member

- Consensus on keeping the USFWS engaged in this group
- There is also a need to include someone with plant ecology expertise.

Next Meeting May 2nd