

BOULDER RIVER PROJECT

Informational Meeting Agenda

March 21, 2011

6:00 – 8:30 p.m.

6:00 – 6:30 **Welcome and Opening Remarks** – Janet Krivacek, District Ranger
Agenda review

Meeting ground rules

- Respect other perspectives
- Do more listening than talking
- Try to address other interests as well as your own
- Keep comments succinct so others can get some air-time too

Introductions – Forest Service specialists and meeting participants

Why are we looking at the Boulder River Area? – Janet Krivacek & Chuck Mark, Deputy Forest Supervisor

6:30 – 7:30 **Presentations about the Boulder River Area - Forest Service specialists**

6:30 Vegetation conditions (Anton Brennick)

6:50 Fuels and Hazard Reduction (Kevin Smith)

7:00 Recreation and Trails (Jocelyn Dodge)

7:10 Wildlife security (Jay Fredrick)

7:20 Aquatic Enhancement (Darin Watschke)

7:30-8:20 **General Discussion with participants**

About an hour

- What do you know about the area?
- What do you think are the highest priority treatments for the Boulder River landscape?
- How would you like to be involved in the development of a proposal?
- What new ideas would you like to bring to the group?
- What hasn't worked in the past?

8:20-8:30 **Proposed Schedule for Future Meetings - Janet Krivacek**

- Decide on next meeting date and propose schedule for next steps
- Meeting summary will be prepared and posted on BDNF website
- Thank you for attending!
- Adjourn

Boulder River Project

March 21, 2011 Meeting Notes

OPENING REMARKS

Why are we looking at the Boulder River Area? Givens:

- We have a new Beaverhead Deerlodge NF Forest Plan.
- The Forest recently completed a forest-wide vegetation rapid assessment that looked at the bark beetle affected areas but also conditions of other vegetation types. The Boulder River Landscape was identified as the highest priority landscape to look at from a bark beetle perspective because it has some of the oldest infected trees on the forest.
- The Forest has a TEAMS contract to assist with the environmental impact statement that will be initiated this late summer/fall.
- The Forest Plan identifies an objective to reduce open motorized road and trail densities to provide for wildlife secure areas.
- The Forest Plan identifies in the Boulder River Landscape, some key watersheds for both fish management and restoration activities.
 - From on the ground knowledge, we know there are some isolated pure strains of westslope cutthroat trout in some of the drainages.
 - From on the ground knowledge, we know there are at least some of the roads and trails that are contributing to stream sedimentation.
- The Boulder River Project area does not include the whole Boulder River Landscape.

PRESENTATIONS:

Vegetation:

- Lodgepole pine (larger diameter, sawlog-sized trees) - ripe for treatment due to >90% mortality in 5" diameter trees and larger due to mountain pine beetle. TARGET(S): Salvage dead and dying lodgepole pine to supply wood to the forest products industry; bring areas into managed condition; and maintain/improve resilient forest conditions.
- Lodgepole pine (smaller diameter trees) - ripe for treatment due to past timber harvest activities (1960-1980's) and the presence of mountain pine beetle. TARGET(S): maintain/improve resilient forest conditions in LP communities and manage stands to maintain long-term sustained yield.
- Douglas-fir - ripe for treatment due to the presence of insect and disease (i.e. Douglas-fir beetle and Western spruce budworm). Currently, many of the stands have high densities and stocking levels, which is conducive to insect and disease progression. TARGET(S): maintain/improve resilient forest conditions in the large size classes of dry forest communities.

- Douglas-fir Encroachment - ripe for treatment due to Douglas-fir colonization into unique habitats (e.g., dry grasslands and sage communities). TARGET(S): the reduction of conifer encroachment and to manage forested vegetation within the historic range of variability (HRV).
- Aspen (Conifer Encroachment) - ripe for treatment due to diminished patch size and distribution since circa 1900, plus conifer encroachment. TARGET(S): cut encroaching conifers around aspen clones for approximately 100-150'.
- High Elevation Mixed Conifer - ripe for treatment due to mortality of lodgepole pine and whitebark pine in mixed conifer stands. TARGET(S): regenerate whitebark pine largely via fire without affecting pre-existing live whitebark pine.

Fire and Fuels

A Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) does exist for the project area. Many counties are currently pursuing re-writes of their plans. Treatments could be identified to coincide with areas identified in the CWPP. Prescribed fire would be the primary tool to achieve the vegetation objectives identified above, either post commercial harvest, or in areas identified as potential "natural fuels" with the goal of fuels reduction.

Recreation and Trails

Both developed and dispersed recreation occurs in the Boulder River landscape. The Electric Peak Proposed Wilderness is included in the area along with a roadless area in the Little Boulder River country. Developed recreation includes Lowland, Whitehouse, Lady Smith and Mormon Gulch campgrounds and Sheepshead, Maney Lake and Freedom point group day use sites. Many motorized and nonmotorized trails exist including the Continental Divide Trail that bisects the landscape. A number of the trails are located in the drainage bottoms in close proximity to the streams. There are opportunities for rerouting portions of these trails to reduce impacts to streams.

Wildlife

Wildlife habitat changes over time, and our infrastructure influences the use of habitat by wildlife at a broad scale. We have limited actual control over vegetation. What may appear static is actually in a state of constant flux. In addition, we actually enter a fairly limited percentage of any landscape. In the Boulder River Landscape our database indicates there are over 500 miles of open motorized routes. This translates to roughly 32% of the landscape is wildlife secure areas. The other landscapes across the forest average is substantially higher in wildlife secure areas. The Boulder River Landscape is currently above the Forest Plan objective of 1.9 miles/square mile, and we would like to move toward this goal through travel management over the next few years. Through this project, we have an opportunity to move towards meeting this Forest Plan objective by thoroughly reviewing the existing inventory and possibly closing open motorized roads and trails that are not needed for recreation or other forest management.

Aquatic Enhancements

- Water Quality - Most of the drainages in the Boulder River Landscape are on the 2010 MT DEQ 303d list. Beneficial uses impaired included aquatic life, cold water fisheries, and drinking water. The probable causes for these impairments include mining agriculture, grazing, and roads.
- Westslope Cutthroat Trout - WCT populations persist in headwater reaches of the Little Boulder River, Red Rock, Rock, and Thunderbolt creeks, and Sullivan Gulch.
- Aquatic Restoration Opportunities – are primarily focused on reducing sedimentation from roads and trails. Opportunities include: road and trail reconstruction to improve surface drainage, upgrading drainage features, route re-alignment or reconstruction to increase route proximity to streams, reductions and improvements to stream crossings, and improve surfacing.

GENERAL DISCUSSIONS:

- Where is the most convenient place to have the meetings? Butte, Whitehall or Boulder. Suggest rotating between the different locations. Have next public meet in one month on April 18th in Whitehall 6pm-8:30pm.
- Project timeline – The start of NEPA and scoping will be late summer / early fall 2011 – with a projected decision in 2013
- Need a field trip May / June to start looking at things.
- This will be a multi-year effort.
- Time is limited because the trees are dead. Should do an intensive management study so we can maximize the dead trees to be removed.
- How much of the project area is going to be treated?
- How long will the project last? (ie. How many decisions, sales, contract)?
- Contract type? Stewardship or regular timber sale.
- What is overall goal of project?
- Where are the roadside hazard reductions sale locations?
- May be some opportunities to do vegetation treatments in conjunction with BLM around Boulder- Straight. Creek area.
- Trout Unlimited would like to know specific locations for improvements.
- Would like to see protection of trails when trees are removed. Have seen where trails get obliterated and then user groups need to re-establish them.
- How can pasture fences and water developments be addressed with the amount of dead and dying trees. A lot of investment in these infrastructures that are been knocked down or destroyed.
- Need to address conifer encroachment in the riparian areas. Taking up a lot of the water.
- The May 15th open date for areas can be too early because conditions are still wet - causes some resource damage.
- Would like to see a connector trail developed to the Continental Divide Trail in the Cottonwood Lake area.

- Double up with fire breaks and with habitat improvement projects: Willow, Aspen, Sage
- Whitetail / Pipe Collaborative Process had an agreement - where does it stand?
- What is the conflict with elk and roads?
- Elk security has been reduced by beetle kill thus impacts road density issues
- Need to look at elk and private land interactions.
- Security: (too much) – lack of food value and nutrition for wildlife; proposed burning riparian areas and project wide
- Specific road closures – Where are they located specifically?
- Should have FWP game warden involvement (include enforcement officials) in the collaborative effort.
- Whitebark pine regeneration.
- Quaking Aspen decreased from historical
- Aspen prescription – benefit multiple resources
- Large DF, thinning smaller diameter material from below?
- Explore volunteer work!
- Look at the current mortality in the smaller diameter lodgepole pine on the field trip.

Reminder: Next public meet is April 18th in Whitehall @ Whitehall High School 6pm-8:30pm.