Vegetation Management in the Rainey Creek Watershed
Public Meeting Notes
Wednesday, March 27, 2013
American Legion Hall, Swan Valley, ID

Presenters:

Deb Flowers- General options for vegetation treatments
(No questions)

Shane Roberts- Wildlife in the Rainey Creek area
(No questions)

Jim Robertson- Existing vegetation in Rainey Creek
Q- Would species be immediately be replanted if they are removed by fire?
A- Not necessarily. Most species will regenerate by seed.

Greg Hanson- Cattle & sheep grazing in the Rainey Creek area; Noxious weeds & their treatment
Q- Is there no spotted knapweed? There's some in Palisades Creek area.
A- Not in the Rainey Creek area.

Deb Flowers- Fire history of the Rainey Creek area
(No questions)

Q&A Time

Q- What is the plan? What is it that you want to do?
A- This is a collaboration meeting to share information about current conditions in the Rainey Creek area and gather ideas about potential restoration opportunities from those interested in Rainey Creek. We are here to see what this group would like to have happen in this area. There are a lot of options for restoration, and a lot of opinions on what should happen. This collaborative approach is a new way of working with interested publics to develop restoration plans.

Comment- There are areas that could be burned, but there are also areas that could have marketable timber. There are concerns about smoke in the valley.

Q- What is the alternative to burning? How much of the timber is sellable?
A- There may be some biomass value. Probably no saw timber potential. Some of the area is in a roadless area.

Q- What kind of time frame are you looking at for completing this project? Spread it over several years, then there is less of an impact from smoke.
A- That is an option. There have been projects spread out like that with implementation over several years.

Q- Will a lot of things be decided tonight?
A- We are just beginning the planning phase for this project and would look at implementing at the earliest in fall 2014.

Q- What is the plan if a fire starts there now?
A- It depends on the specific conditions, location and how it started. We would evaluate the conditions and would decide if it was feasible to let it burn in part or put it out, but if there was a threat to private lands we would put it out immediately.

Comment- What about the area south of the Snake River? That area needs to be looked at for fuels treatment.

Q- Concerns about health issues from smoke impacts.

A- That is one of the things we consider in planning. Smoke management is part of the burn plan. We don't light prescribed burns until we get the approval from the DEQ air quality.

Q- Seems that the problem is the mahogany & juniper. What is the plan for the mahogany & juniper? How much will be left to feed deer & elk?

A- The desire is to make some openings in the juniper and mahogany to open up the stand and allow the sun to reach the ground to benefit other vegetation (shrubs and grasses) increasing the diversity of the area. Historically there was more fire in the landscape, but years of fire suppression have changed the conditions and we now have a higher density of juniper and mahogany than historically. We want to increase diversity, not eliminate any native species completely.

Q- Do you think you can get a fire to burn up there? Mahogany is hard to burn. Using just mechanical or just burning isn't going to work- it'll need to be a combination.

A- There will likely need to be some slashing done prior to burning.

Comment- We are in favor of improving winter range.

Q- How much money is there in the budget to do this?

A- We have opportunities to use collaboration with other groups to get funding. Partners such as Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation or Mule Deer Foundation may help fund this type of work. Our planning will include a financial analysis of all alternatives

Q- What sage brush dependent species use the area?

A- Probably no species that are completely sagebrush dependent. There are many species using all of the various types of shrubs, including sagebrush. The landscape is not really conducive to sage-dependent species. It's a mountain shrub community, not a sagebrush steppe.

Comment- Soil stability/ water quality is important for fisheries.

A- At the next meeting we will have presentations from our Forest Hydrologist, Fisheries biologist, and Soil Scientist.

Comment- We would like cost information for the different alternatives.

Comment- Aerial photos from the past were taken during a time when there was alot of grazing in the area. That probably suppressed some of the undergrowth. The junipers adjacent to the roads and trails were heavily harvested for fence posts in the past. That has changed in the past 50 years. That could be why things look different.

Spencer- Smoke management trade-offs. We could leave things to mother nature & have the possibility of larger fires & longer durations of smoke. The option of using prescribed burns and mechanical treatments would result in smoke impacts for a shorter amount of time.

Tracy- The goal of these collaborative meetings is to gather together people with an interest in a particular landscape, with a wide variety of interests and opinions, and discuss existing conditions and possible treatments that the group can agree to. We hope you all will join us in the second meeting and participate through the entire process, but some of you may not be interested. I also hope this process can be repeated as we look at other areas around the valley. Next meeting April 30, same place/time.