

# BRIEFING PAPER

Pacific Northwest Region - Regional Office

## Eastside Restoration Strategy Update 5

August 20, 2013

*"Whenever you are asked if you can do a job, tell 'em, 'Certainly I can!' Then get busy and find out how to do it."* – attributed to Theodore Roosevelt

**The Blue Mountains Restoration Interdisciplinary Team (IDT)** has been hired and the 7 team members will be in place by the end of September. This meets our goal of having them in place before the end of field season (barely!). The team members are:

- **Neil McCusker** is currently the silviculturist on the 4-Forest Restoration Initiative (4-FRI) project in Arizona, and he will be stationed in Pendleton. He will be the primary silviculturist and brings valuable experience in planning at the large-scale.
- **Brian Spradlin** is currently the environmental coordinator for the south zone of the Umatilla NF, with extensive background in fire ecology and silviculture. He will be stationed in Pendleton, and will be focused on disturbance ecology (fires, insects, disease) and silviculture.
- **Barbara Wales** is currently a wildlife biologist for the PNW region, stationed in La Grande. Barb will stay in La Grande and will focus on large scale habitat modeling.
- **Paul Boehne** is currently a fisheries biologist and T/E species coordinator for the Wallowa-Whitman NF. Paul will be stationed at the NOAA Fisheries Office in La Grande, operating under an Intergovernmental Agreement. His focus will be on fish habitat and threatened/endangered species consultation.
- **Michael E. Brown** is currently the acting District Ranger on the ZigZag RD of the Mt. Hood NF, and holds the position as staff hydrologist on the North Umpqua Ranger District, Umpqua NF. He will be stationed in Pendleton. He will be focused on physical sciences, remote sensing, and fuels management.
- **Jenifer Ferriell** is currently an ecologist with the PNW Ecology Program in Baker City, she will be stationed in La Grande. Her focus will be on landscape ecology and botany.
- **Amy Gowan** is currently the Forest Partnership Coordinator for the Fremont-Winema National Forest in Klamath Falls, and will be located in Pendleton. Her focus will be on communications, collaborative engagement, economic/social assessments, archeology, and tribal relations.

**Collaboration:** The first meeting of the Coalition of Blue Mountains Collaboratives was held on July 22-23 in Baker City, and was convened by the county commissioners of eastern Oregon. Forty-five people attended, representing all 5 collaborative groups in the Blues, state and federal agencies, and a few people new to the collaborative process. The collaboratives shared their successes and challenges, working agreements, and areas of focus. During this meeting, the coalition heard, evaluated, and provided feedback on 7 general project ideas for interdisciplinary team work. The Forest Supervisors heard this feedback, and we have used this feedback to develop the first suite of NEPA projects for the team to undertake – based on meeting ecological, social, and economic goals, feasibility, and likelihood of success.



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**Project Selection:** From the list of seven projects presented to the coalition, the Eastside Restoration Board of Directors agreed to an initial set of three projects to commit the Blue Mountains IDT. The team will start on all three projects right away:

- 1) **Dry Forest Restoration** – this project is a very large scale project focusing on restoring fire-adapted forests wherever they occur across the four National Forests. This project builds on the working agreements being developed (or already in place) for several of the collaboratives, and due to the scale of the project, we have built in time for data collection and analysis. A decision is planned for December 2016.
- 2) **Strategic Fuel Treatments** – this project implements a system of shaded fuel breaks along strategically located roads that could be used to contain wildfires and manage large-scale prescribed fires across all four National Forests. Fuel break width, intensity and type of treatment would vary depending on fuel type, slope, aspect, etc., and once in place the fuel breaks could result in safer, less expensive, and potentially larger, restoring fires. We estimate this project, fully implemented, would treat 150-250,000 acres in the Blue Mountains. Decision planned in December 2015.
- 3) **Lower Joseph Canyon** – Building on the work of the Wallowa County Natural Resources Advisory Committee (NRAC), this project will work with the NRAC to complete the NEPA for a comprehensive suite of restoration projects in the 90,000 acre Lower Joseph project area on the north end of the Wallowa-Whitman NF. Decision planned for December 2014.

These three projects are deliberately prioritized in this order. The large scale “definitive” restoration project (dry forest restoration) will take the most time to complete, and by staging two *potentially* simpler projects first, the interdisciplinary team is afforded the opportunity to build relationships with the collaboratives and the National Forests, become familiar with the landscapes, ecosystems, and data sources in the Blues, and learn to work effectively as a team – while exploring NEPA innovations.

It has become clear that the Eastside Strategy is more than a planning team and project areas. In fact, completing NEPA planning on one, two, or three projects can be seen as a means to an end – the end being the ability to evaluate different approaches to NEPA and share those lessons with other units, in hopes of dramatically increasing the pace and scale of restoration across broad areas. Our objective is to identify and try out these innovations that deserve exploration. The next Briefing Paper will focus on what we are doing differently, beyond the planning of particular projects, that promises to make a long-term change in the way we plan and implement restoration work on the eastside.

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