

# **Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy for Advancing the Pace and Scale of Restoration**

## ***Meeting Summary***

*July 22-23, 2013*

### **Overview:**

The Eastern Oregon Association of Counties convened the five collaborative groups working across the Blue Mountains in Baker City, Oregon on July 22-23, 2013. More than 45 individuals (listed in Appendix B) from collaborative groups and Forest Service staff from the Wallowa-Whitman, Umatilla, Malheur, and Ochoco National Forests. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss how to:

- Increase the scope and scale of landscape efforts to restore fire-resilient forest landscapes to provide clean air, clean water, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and other critical ecosystem services in a manner that will support the economies of local communities through work in the woods, retaining and creating infrastructure, and developing common ground.
- Design effective and practical communication channels to ensure cross regional learning and rapid adoption of successful innovative practices and lessons learned.
- Create an opportunity for peer-to-peer exchange that will increase community capacity, maintain, strengthen, and broaden the zones of agreement between communities, interest groups, and federal, tribal, state, and county agencies around public land management.

### **Outcomes:**

The meeting had presentations, small and large group discussions and good participation from attendees. The result of the meeting included feedback from the collaborative groups on suggested filters and criteria that the Forest Service can use to select projects for the Blues Strategy (listed below). In addition, the group provided feedback on the project ideas (found in Appendix A).

The group also discussed the merits of having five collaboratives meet together in the future to share information and lessons learned as well as to discuss the projects in the Blues Strategy. The next *meeting is tentatively scheduled for early November*. More details are below.

### **Collaborative Group Report Outs**

The five forest collaborative groups gave presentations on who they are, the work they have accomplished and the projects they are currently working on. The collaborative groups that had members present included:

- Harney County Restoration Collaborative
- Blue Mountains Forest Partners
- Ochoco Forest restoration Collaborative
- Umatilla Forest Restoration Collaborative
- Wallowa Whitman Forest Collaborative

Power point presentations for four of the collaboratives can be found on Sustainable Northwest's website: <http://sustainablenorthwest.org/blog/posts/blue-mountains-restoration-strategy>.

### **Suggested Filters/Criteria to be Used in Selecting Projects**

Members of the forest collaboratives provided the Forest Service with suggested filters and criteria that can be used when selecting projects for the Blues Strategy. The filters/criteria below

are not representative of all points raised during the meeting, but are a summary of the general areas that had broad support.

**Administrative effectiveness and efficiency:**

- Has a three legged stool approach – ecological, economic and social aspects
- Work on two or three projects at once
- Demonstrate a more efficient and effective way to complete NEPA
- Develop an approach that can be replicated and/or shared lessons
- Tries new ways of doing things
- Uses the talent and horse power of the ID to do something the Forests would not have the resources to accomplish themselves
- Advances both the development of shelf stock and accelerates the accomplishment of needed existing work that is waiting to be done

**Ecological:**

- Moves the landscape towards resiliency
- Restore landscape to a more natural fire regime.
- Reduce the impact of uncharacteristic fire
- Moves us forward in getting a “significant” amount of the landscape restoration
- Will it improve and/or increase needed habitat for wildlife and fish?
- Are rangeland and ranching included in this approach (i.e. holistic restoration across resources)

**Economic:**

- Creates significant work in the woods for the full range of activities (surveys, logging, noxious weed treatments, etc.) in order to create more local employment
- Produces a variety wood products (small diameter and saw logs) that can be utilized by local mills
- Supports the development of markets and local utilization/processing of biomass material

**Social:**

- Has broad social agreement
- Has no preexisting red flags or serious concerns
- Has the potential to expand and broaden the zone of agreement
- Will be conducive to knowledge transfer to other places and/or shared conditions

**Collaborative:**

- Uses the agreements and success of existing collaborative groups as a foundation
- Engages the collaborative groups throughout the program
- Will add value to the work of the place-based collaborative groups (i.e. make it possible for the groups to address the full range activities they want to address)

**Discussion of future collaborative involvement and organization:**

- Value for the collaboratives and the Forest Service in having collaborative groups getting together sharing what they are doing
- How to identify the collaborative groups’ needs and how to address them
- Sharing zones of agreement to collectively advance work in the Blue Mountains

- Developing ways to communicate effectively with our Forest Service partners and with the greater public
- Assist the Ecosystem Workforce Program in developing a Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy monitoring program

**Next steps:**

The Blues Strategy ID Team will work with Sustainable Northwest to share relevant information with the collaboratives on the Blues Strategy. *A meeting is tentatively scheduled for October* and will focus on: 1) discussing where the Blues Strategy is to date, 2) provide information on the science synthesis paper on moist mixed conifer and 3) share aspects of advancements in the collaborative groups for shared learning.

## Appendix A: Possible Projects and Discussion

Bill Aney of the Forest Service presented seven possible projects that the ID Team could work on for discussion with the collaborative groups. These project ideas were formed with discussions from the Forest Supervisors in the four national forests and from past experience on other forests. The descriptions below were provided by the Forest Service with collaborative feedback below. Similar to the filters/criteria above, the collaborative feedback listed below are not comprehensive of all the comments made during the meeting, but an attempt was made to summarize the feedback for the Forest Service.

Conditional-based NEPA: the overall topic for projects below that have this programmatic NEPA approach (aspen, dry pine forests, strategic fuel breaks).

*Collaborative feedback:*

- Support for conditional-based NEPA as long as the potential for it to be implemented was high
- Acknowledging that there are unknowns on how these projects would move forward

Aspen Restoration: Where it occurs, restore the health and vigor of aspen plant communities through the removal of <150 year old conifers within the aspen stand and for a determined distance around the stands for expansion. Prescribed burning (broadcast, jackpot, or pile burning) to stimulate aspen and remove slash. Current mapping identifies about 4300 acres of aspen in the Blue Mountains, but this accounting is incomplete.

*Collaborative feedback:*

- Like the concept of condition-based NEPA. Is it implementable?
- Potentially an easy win, maybe too simple. Might include mt. mahogany and larch
- Helpful if it includes a holistic approach (including creating more forage by thinning the forests and reintroducing fire)

Dry Pine Forest Restoration: Where it occurs, restore dry pine stands through understory thinning and prescribed burning, using the collaborative zones of agreement concept. Mapping has identified approximately 462,000 acres of xeric pine and pine juniper plant communities on the four National Forests, outside of wilderness, inventoried roadless areas, and current project planning areas. An additional 435,000 acres of dry Douglas-fir and 380,000 acres of dry grand fir plant communities have also been mapped, and could be the foundation for another project.

*Collaborative feedback:*

- This could produce forest plan amendments that would benefit all forests
- Could be time consuming, might be limited by infrastructure needs on the ground
- Discussions on the possibility to expand to dry grand fir/white fir

Strategic Fuel Breaks: Development of roadside fuel breaks on strategically important roads to serve as locations for management of wildfires and prescribed burns. Fuels treatments in critical wildland-urban interface areas to protect private lands, buildings, and infrastructure. Project area is all roaded areas on the four Blue Mountains NFs.

*Collaborative feedback:*

- Great project for the Forest Service to do irrespective of the Blues Strategy on individual Forests

Joseph Creek Project: Landscape vegetation restoration project focused on removal of shade tolerant tree species, and the release and retention of large, dominant, healthy early seral species in Lower Joseph Creek project area. Project area could be up to 85,000 acres.

*Collaborative feedback:*

- Lots of work has already been done, broad in scope of activities and geography, and private landowners are engaged
- Is information from this project transferable to other Forests?
- WWNF collaborative only working on middle third of the project area. Collaborative may not be ready to take on the range component. Limit project to the middle third.

Bruin/Battle Project Area: Landscape vegetation restoration project in the North Fork John Day River drainage immediately adjacent to the Big Mosquito project area on the Malheur NF. Thinning and prescribed burning to improve landscape condition class in Fire Regime 1 and 3 areas, previously analyzed by the ranger district interdisciplinary team as the Farley Project Area.

*Collaborative feedback:*

- Strong concerns over past litigation on this project area

Young Forest Restoration: Treatment of previously-entered stands (old clearcuts planted to ponderosa pine) to remove off-site tree species; create small openings for forage/browse production and as regeneration sites for native early successional tree species.

*Collaborative feedback:*

- There is support for it and is seen as low hanging fruit
- Questions on whether it would be an economically viable project unless adjacent stands are included

Watershed Restoration Action Plan Projects: Planning to support implementation of watershed restoration projects identified in the Watershed Restoration Action Plans (WRAPs) for high priority watersheds.

*Collaborative feedback:*

- Some would like WRAP projects to address aquatic issues
- Implement existing WRAP projects
- Could address the cool-moist prescription needs and integrate with WRAP

Additional Project Ideas:

- Create a landscape level analysis on one or several forests for many goals
- Take a holistic approach to wildlife corridors and connectivity
- Integrate different management areas in Forest Service: veg & grazing (example)
- Select an area for three forests to benefit reason

## **Appendix B: Meeting Participants**

Scott Fairly, Governor's Office  
Tami Filstad, USFS, WWNF  
Bill Aney, Eastside Restoration Coordinator, USFS  
Kevin Martin, Forest Supervisor, UMN  
John Laurence, Forest Supervisor, WWNF  
Bob Deal, PNW Research Station  
Fred Warner, Baker County Commissioner  
Chris Perry, Wheeler County Judge  
Karen Coulter, Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project  
John Buckman, Oregon Department of Forestry  
Linda Dillavou, USFS, UMN  
Eric White, Oregon State University  
Gary Miller, US Fish & Wildlife  
Raymond Osiparch, Grayback Forestry, Inc.  
Tim Lillibo, Oregon Wild  
Susan Jane Brown, Western Environmental Law Center  
Pete Caligiuri, The Nature Conservancy  
Larry Blasing, Grant County Public Forest Commission  
Irene Jerome, American Forest Resources Council  
Chad Davis, Oregon Department of Forestry  
Maia Enzer, USFS  
Rex Storm, Associate of Oregon Loggers  
Mark Davidson, Union County Commissioner  
Bruce Dunn, RY Timber  
Lindsay Warness, Boise Cascade  
Nick Myatt, Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife  
Brian Kelly, Hells Canyon Preservation Council  
Chris Zanger, The Nature Conservancy  
Amy Gowan, Eastside ID Team, USFS  
Ken Gebhardt, District Ranger, WWNF  
Nils Christofferson, Wallowa Resources  
Mark Webb, Blue Mountains Forest Partners  
Jack Southworth, Harney County Restoration Collaborative  
Sabine Mellmann Brown, USFS  
Miles Hemstrom, Oregon State University  
Gunnar Carnwath, USFS  
Paul Boehne, USFS  
Mike Johnson, Ochoco & Deschutes NF, USFS  
Vernita Ediger, Blue Mountains Forest Partners  
Bill Renwick, Harney County Restoration Collaborative  
Alaina Pomery, Sustainable Northwest  
Patrick Shannon, Sustainable Northwest  
Mike Hayward, Wallowa County Commissioner