

# Briefing Paper

Pacific Northwest Region – Regional Office

## Eastside Restoration Strategy Update 7

13 December 2013

*It always seems impossible until it's done.*

Nelson Mandela

It has been a busy fall for the Blue Mountains Restoration effort, as the planning team members have all arrived and have been spending most of their field time in Wallowa County. Fall is an easy time to fall in love with the Blue Mountains, with crisp, dry days and the bright yellow of larch and aspen splashed against the dark green pine and fir forests – we live for days like that!

We have an ambitious three-year timeline in front of us for the first three projects, and so far we are on schedule, the October furlough notwithstanding. This update will focus on what the team has accomplished and learned thus far, and some of the many faces of collaboration now associated with restoration of eastside forests.

### Environmental Planning

This fall, the Blue Mountains Restoration Planning Team has been working primarily on the Lower Joseph Creek forest restoration project in Wallowa County. This project is unusual in several regards: first, it is a large project area (almost 100,000 acres), and second, it is based on a watershed assessment conducted by the Wallowa County Natural Resources Advisory Committee (NRAC). The team, WWNF staff, and the NRAC are currently developing the proposed action, which will then be presented to the Wallowa-Whitman collaborative group on December 17. The Federal Notice of Intent for an Environmental Impact Statement should be published by the end of the calendar year.

We have faced several important challenges with this project:

1. Transportation system planning – Travel management planning is a sensitive topic in parts of the Blues, and we have run into that issue as we plan work in this watershed. Face-to-face discussions have helped reduce misunderstanding and brought focus to what really matters.
2. Working at large scale – What is the appropriate range of issues and potential activities to cover in the analysis? With limited field time to collect data this fall, how can we make best use, and sense, of the available data, including that collected by the team and data provided by the local unit and the NRAC?
3. Accelerated timelines – The timeline we have presented to the collaboratives and line officers is an ambitious one, and the challenge for us is to maintain meaningful collaborative involvement while still meeting this timeline. This requires us all doing things differently!

We have also started work in the second project in the chute: the Blues-wide strategic fuel breaks project. The initial maps have been shared with the Blue Mountains Cohesive Wildfire Strategy steering committee and Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) staff, and we will be working with ODF to refine and validate this proposal this spring. This project



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## BRIEFING PAPER - (continued)

has received plenty of attention, both from public groups and from within the Forest Service, and we look forward to being able to start work on this project early in 2014 to help explain the idea and its purposes. At a broader scale, team members are working with Blue Mountains silviculturists, area ecologists, and scientists from the PNW station and NGOs to create a landscape scale analysis process that will be useful at multiple scales to help place planning areas in the proper ecological context. The Lower Joseph project will be the first test case. We are also helping develop and test several climate change tools (a vegetation modeling tool and a vulnerability assessment process) to better consider the likely future vegetation reference condition for project areas.

### Collaboration

The work with the Wallowa NRAC is certainly an active area of collaboration. In addition, we have had team members at as many of the Blue Mountains collaborative groups meetings as possible this fall. This allows the team to stay abreast of the discussions going on within each of the collaborative groups, and establishes relationships between the team and the collaborative members.

The coalition of the 5 Blue Mountains collaboratives met immediately prior to the moist forest synthesis workshop in December, and is planning their next full meeting in February. The February meeting will focus on NEPA, and we are planning on a training session taught by collaborative members and the FS. This training will include an exploration of innovative ideas around NEPA that might be useful in planning large scale projects.

We have also been working with the state of Oregon, through the Federal Forestlands Advisory Committee and staff-to-staff discussions, about the use of state funds to accelerate restoration in the Blues. Even this fall, ODF crews helped the Malheur NF validate treatments in areas planned for treatment with the 10-year stewardship contract, and we anticipate more such help this spring in contract area preparation on at least three other ranger districts. Bigger ticket assistance with landline location, botany and heritage surveys, and the like are anticipated this winter and spring, all with the goal of keeping projects moving forward.

### Summary

The team is busy – with project planning, new tools to help larger scale planning in the Blues, and communicating project goals and objectives with a variety of audiences. We are still getting plenty of help from all quarters, and the challenge is to keep focused on the larger goal – approaching restoration at a different scale, in hopes of making a significant change in the condition of our beloved eastside National Forests.

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2013				2014						
August	October	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	April	June	July	Sept	Dec
Project area identified	Describe existing and desired conditions		PA/P&N	Alternatives developed with collaborative		Field review	NOA/Public comment period		Review DEIS	Decision