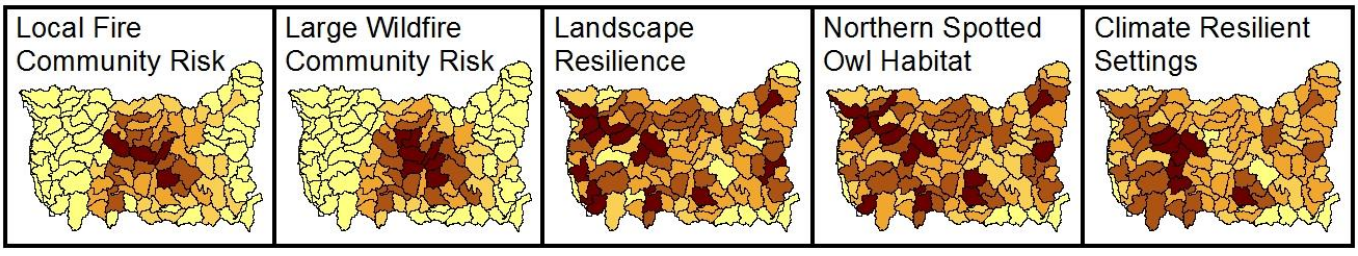
A Cohesive Strategy for the Rogue Basin to Increase the Quality, Pace & Scale of Forest Restoration

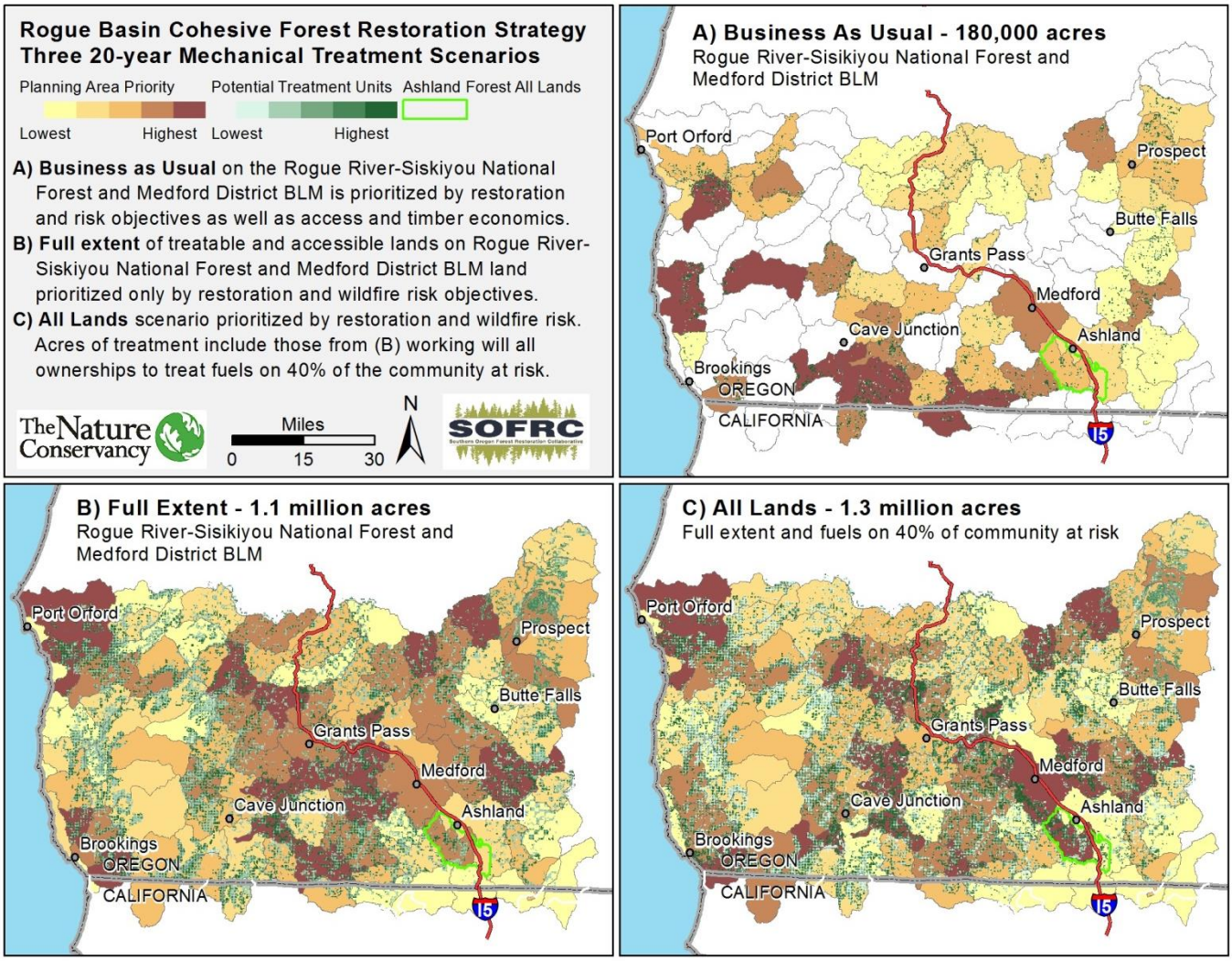
The Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative, The Nature Conservancy and partners are developing a Rogue Basin Cohesive Forest Restoration Strategy (RBS). By integrating wildfire risk and regional restoration needs assessments, the RBS prioritizes planning areas to optimize the reduction of wildfire risk for people and nature. The RBS reflects the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, promotes **diverse habitats**, and delivers **ecosystem services**.

Dry Forests in Jeopardy: The RBS evaluates 4.2 million ac of forestland centered on the Rogue River Basin and including all of the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest and the Bureau of Land Management Medford District (FS/BLM) land. Increasingly large and severe fires threaten dry forests and the security and well-being of communities. A key regional assessment[1] shows the need for thinning or low-severity fire to restore open forest on 2.1 million acres. Climate change, predicted to increase forest mortality, wildfire risk, fire size and severity, magnifies the urgency for action. Collaboration on a 20-year "all lands/all hands" program of work builds **public resolve** and **capacity** to manage risks and achieve desired outcomes at a pace and scale matched to the need.

Landscape Strategy, Priorities, and Return on Investment: The collaboratively developed landscape design integrates diverse prescriptions to advance three overarching goals 1) **protect local communities**, 2) **protect and promote complex habitat** for Northern Spotted Owl and other species, and 3) **achieve the appropriate balance of open and closed forest.** The RBS provides managers with an **interactive model** to prioritize project areas by objective (below) and predict the acreage and economics of fuels work and restoration thinning. Implementing the 1.1 million acre strategic footprint on accessible FS/BLM land would restore late seral open forest, reduce wildfire risk across the landscape, promote large tree growth and complex habitat development, each in the settings best suited. The restoration would produce 2.1 billion board feet (bbf) of byproduct timber. Economically viable restoration thinning on 206,000 acres of the total footprint could produce 0.9 bbf of timber, generating revenue to defray costs on other acres, including sub-economical restoration thinning on 800,000 acres with 1.2 bbf of byproduct timber, and strictly non-commercial fuels reduction on 108,000 acres.



[1] Haugo, R., C. Zanger, T. DeMeo, C. Ringo, K. Blankenship, M. Simpson, K. Mellen-McLean, A. Shlisky, and J. Kertis, Mark Stern. 2015. A new approach to evaluate forest structure restoration needs across Oregon and Washington, USA. **Forest Ecology and Management** 335:37-50.



Optimizing Wildfire Risk Reduction and Restoration: The RBS has at its core a uniquely collaborative wildfire risk assessment. Diverse stakeholder participants in a series of local workshops validated and refined fuel data for fire behavior modeling, identified High Value Resources and Assets, established the likely wildfire responses for each, and determined their relative importance. Wildfire risk mapping has set the stage for a progressive fire management strategy. The RBS used optimization software to select where landscape objectives are most effectively met with mechanical treatments.

Community Resolve to Align Objectives and Resources: Ongoing community engagement reflects the performance of management scenarios (above) based on stakeholder's indicators, including risk, economics, and habitat protection to maximize **return on investment**. The collaborative is developing five- and 20-year plans of work and finance considerations. The RBS build on the highly successful 50,000 acre Ashland Forest All-lands Restoration project, expanding it across the Rogue Basin , to set in motion a new paradigm of forest landscape management which **increases climate adaptation, returns landscape resilience**, **reduces wildfire risk**, **develops and protects complex habitat**, and **promotes regional economic and workforce viability**.

Report available at http://sofrc.org
Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative: George McKinley, george@jeffnet.org
The Nature Conservancy: Darren Borgias, dborgias@tnc.org