Restoring Ecosystems: Fire Ecology, Planning and Application in Western Oregon

Notes:

Session 2 – Working Within Federal Fire Policies

National Fire Plan: A Cohesive Strategy

Louisa Evers, Fire Ecologist, Oregon State Office BLM

- Effort began in 1999 in response to GAO report regarding lack of USFS Fuels policy (Draft Cohesive Strategy)

- Congress asked agencies to prepare a report in response to 2000 fire season when 7 million acres burned (Report to the President)

- NFP is not a single document (2 reports mentioned above + Appropriations Acts of 2001, 2002)

- BLM now also included in NFP (Federal Cohesive Strategy).

- Strategy sets out national, regional, and local priorities areas

- Prime Concept = All land management activity should work to reduce hazardous fuels

- Congress direction = fuels reduction, contracting ($ to community), agency/community collaboration, cooperative agreements, protection of communities at risk

- PNW Coordination Group (state, federal, community) strategy = common implementation policies, local coord. groups, fire hazard reduction for at risk communities, priority setting, streamlined regulatory compliance process, communication

- Much grant $ available ($23 million in 2001) Coordinated projects get priority

National Fire Plan: Fire Regimes and Condition Class

Louisa Evers, Fire Ecologist, Oregon State Office BLM

- Mapping effort (1 km resolut) from Missoula Fire Lab to characterize fire risk based on

  Fire Regime (frequency, predictability, extent, magnitude, seasonality, synergy)
  Condition Class (how much current conditions differ from historical)

- 5 Regimes and 3 condition classes described

- Fire exclusion is the main issue in Oregon (suppression and failure to use as tool)

Wildland Urban Interface Project: Mount Tom Subdivision

Rod Bardell, Forestry Assistance Forester, Oregon Dep't. of Forestry

- A subdivision 10 miles north of Eugene with high fire risk and low emergency response time

- Instead of writing off the area they tried to improve the situation by helping landowners reduce hazard (had high homeowner interest/cooperation)

- Conducted site surveys and then gave homeowners specific suggestions

- Obtained grant $ to help implement treatments (chipping wood, burning slash piles, logging, create fuel breaks)

Session 3 – Implementation of Prescribed Fire for Multiple Objectives

Using Prescribed Fires as a Restoration Tool: Lessons from Thorn Prairie
Jeff Bohler, Wildlife Biologist, Umpqua National Forest

- 2,536 acre area of treatment to manage for shrubland habitat (big game animals)

- Issues = (shrinking availability of shrubland habitat, remaining shrubs decadent, high fuel hazard, reduced ecosystem health)

- 3 prescriptions developed: (1) Regenerate existing shrubland, (2) Reduce conifers & convert to shrubland, (3) Reduce understory encroachment in ponderosa pine stands

- Technique = initial burning and maintenance burning

- Problems = noxious weeds after fire, fuel loading due to treatment, public complaints, mortality continued many years after initial burn

- Lesson learned = prescribed burn works best for larger areas where unforeseen mortality can be tolerated, pretreatment of noxious weeds may reduce post-fire encroachment, fall ignition more effective but more logistics needed

Knobcone Pine Response to Prescribed Fire in the Rigdon Point RNA
John Agar, Resource Planner, Willamette National Forest

- Issue = Knobcone Pine is a fire generated species…losing it due to fire suppression

- RNA established to protect and perpetuate the species. Management plan calls for managed and prescribed fire to do this.

- Need some high intensity fire to consume duff and open cones in crown of seed trees
- This created logistic problems (area is surrounded by LSR) to control fire… large flame lengths due to resinous/pitchy trees

- Small test area (½ acre) burned in 1997.

- Results = 80% of duff removed, knobcone pines seeded in over a series of years after disturbance, seed bank of Deer vetch also released which helped reseeding of pines (provided shade and nitrogen), natural regen of pine highly correlated with exposed mineral soil, buffering site disturbance from roads reduced spread of noxious weeds

Landscape Planning and Implementation for Prescribed Fire: Medford District BLM

Greg Chandler, Fuels Management Specialist, Medford District BLM

- Goals = fire hazard reduction, manage non-native species, use of fire as tool to restore ecosystems

- Interspersed ownership in area of high frequency/low intensity fire

- 1994 began looking at fire as tool to manage ecosystems…not just post-harvest treatment (wholistic view)

- Treatments include PCT, CT, and prescribed fire

- 4 projects of 11,000-14,000 acres each

- 25 acres = average unit size….burned right up to peoples' backyards

- ~$400/acre using manual techniques for fuel reduction and ~$80-250/acre for burning

- Most work accomplished via contract

Agency-Community Collaboration in Fire Restoration: The Ashland Watershed Protection Project

Timothy Ingalsbee, Director, Western Fire Ecology Center
Tom Dorigon, Rogue River National Forest

- BLM project to reduce fire hazard in municipal watershed met with high community resistance (due to use of CT)

- Took 6 years to work with community to create an acceptable solution

- Definition of "restoration" still controversial….environmental grps wary that it's an excuse to harvest

- Line officer risk to accept community generated solution that did not generate revenue (where get $ to fund cost of treatment)

- Success of this effort? Helped restore community trust and increase education. Success of treatment remains to be seen.

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Adam Novick expressed concern that from his experience trying to save oak/pine habitat on private land, private ownership presents special challenges to restoring these ecosystems. He said studies by ODFW and others show that what remains of Oregon's oak habitat is almost entirely on private land. He said that apparently no agency is tasked with responsibility for oak/pine habitat, that virtually no funding is available for restoring it on private land, and that regulatory disincentives discourage landowners from restoring it, due to the risk that regulation under Goal 5 or the ESA may reduce the market value of any private property with significant ecological value. To give an example, he said that as a result of trying to save oak/pine habitat, he is apparently at risk of substantial financial harm from regulation under Goal 5, for the same activities that earlier won him stewardship awards. To illustrate the disincentive that private landowners face, he commented that a local botanist friend told him he was a fool to tell anyone about his restoration work. He said he hopes to increase awareness of this issue and to present some ideas for addressing it. He also offered natural resource agencies a slide presentation on his experiences trying to restore oak/pine since 1998. To inquire about the presentation, or to request a draft white paper that Adam has written on policy for saving oak habitat in Oregon, please email him adama@oz.net.