

April 9, 2012 4FRI Public Meeting – Monthly NEPA Update

Present: Dorothy Holosek (phone), Dick Fleishmann – 4FRI, Henry Provencio-4FRI, David Seesholtz – PNWRS and NEPA Process Improvement Team (phone), Ed Smith – TNC, Sara Reif –ADGF, Alicyn Gitlin-Sierra Club, Amy Waltz – ERI, Paula Cote-4FRI, Bill Noble – 4FRI, Mary Lata-4FRI, Neil McCusker – 4FRI, Mark Nigrelli – 4FRI, Scott Harger – NRCS, Pascal Berlioux – Forest Restoration Products, Cindy Cole – AZ Daily Sun (phone), complete name of one phone participant (Matt) was not captured adequately.

Agenda

The group reviewed the action items from the March, 2012 NEPA update meeting and added items for the agenda. The agenda included: (1) CEQ Venue Draft Submittal; (2) Teleconference with David Seesholtz; (3) Stakeholder Progress Report; (4) 4FRI Analysis Progress Report.

CEQ Discussion/Report-out

What will CEQ provide? Will it result in a change of NEPA-related regulations or legal re-interpretation?
Not likely

For CEQ venues – make sure there is coordination with the stakeholder communications group to avoid duplication. The group reviewed comments related to coordination with the State legislators and AZ Cattleman’s Association and found that recent presentations had been made by members of the stakeholders including Dave Tenney (Eastern Counties Board of Supervisors)

FS reported out that the draft venue paper went to CEQ from WO last week (prior to finalizing or getting Forest Sup approvals) – WO wanted CEQ to have an opportunity to review while it is in draft form

David Seesholtz – FS Social Scientist and team lead for NEPA for the 21st Century Working Group

David Seesholtz – Pacific Northwest Research Station social scientist and NEPA for the 21st Century team leader – looking at how FS completes NEPA, what could be improved on, works with external consultants to facilitate surveys

2011 – worked with Ecosystem Management Coordination at the Washington office to evaluate how NEPA process could be improved with a key link to regulations – 3 groups evolved out of this that address 3 topics: (1) adaptive management (AM), (2) focused EA’s, (3) iterative EAs and EISs - some relationship to CEQ but not direct

For adaptive management (AM) – interviewed forests in 2011 to gauge whether am was really being used = group is currently compiling the lessons learned, team is currently providing consultation for current projects and compiling literature on AM, key elements:

- (1) Have to identify the uncertainties – each analysis will be different; (2) how will conclusions be tested? What are the triggers? Triggers should be categorized with the “IF this, then that” approach; are timeframes accurate? Has enough time been provided to really show a response or demonstrate effectiveness?

Meeting the hard look – site specificity: analyses may have to be structured differently than what we are used to meet the hard look requirement in NEPA

Action Item: Amy requested the literature list when available

David may need to discuss with 4FRI what the feedback loop will be – how the group comes together to move forward – have to avoid FACA but the feedback loop is important as it promotes social trust

Translating an analysis to the implementation plan is difficult- beneficial to establish a round table advisory committee that facilitates the feedback loop – for 4FRI this is the multi-party monitoring group – see example from Colorado Pike-San Isabel NF- contact is Sara Mayben – District Ranger on PSI

A review of case studies with FS and stakeholders is underway

2-week notice needed for David to review documents- will do a Video Tele-conference, we will need to get together and review the effects analysis with AM Plan as a group

Henry noted 4FRI may not be doing AM – David replied it is more of a passive than active AM approach – range of intensity is built within the actions – both types of approaches exist

Stakeholder Updated – Amy Waltz

Matt Williamson will be part of the Science and Monitoring Group

Co-Chairs meet on Wed (4/11/2012) and the full group meeting is in the next 2 weeks; a relevant topic would be operations (Dick). Dick Fleishmann reported out on the development of the 10-year operating plan and stated he will work with the landscape working group as he would like to validate that the candidate Landscape Strategy priorities remain the same as displayed in the document. Dick noted that this process is separate from the NEPA analysis which had to make key assumptions in terms of all implementation occurring within 10 years. The NEPA analysis could not assume that there would be a prioritized sequence for implementation.

Future planning efforts outside of 4FRI – stakeholder group to review all projects in the vicinity of 4FRI

A question was asked on when work should start on defining the existing and desired conditions for the next analysis - Henry stated that it is not too early for the landscape working group (LSWG) to start because the first step is to identify the existing and desired condition and define data gaps which will facilitate gathering the data needed. Pascal and Amy asked if this was FS direction to the LSWG – Henry responded that it's not direction from the FS – the stakeholders are the ones to determine this – but the timing is ripe! The group will start working on the lessons learned to inform the 2nd EIS and the issue on preparing for the next analysis (analyses) will be raised at the May, 2012 stakeholder meeting.

Phase 2 of monitoring – creation of the monitoring board including funding, time, and the proposal is under development

4FRI Team Updates- Henry Provencio

Neil McCusker – draft vegetation report is ready this week

David Gifford – will be finalizing the heritage report – former archeologist on the Coconino NF

Draft Botany, Recreation and Scenery, Lands/Minerals, Transportation, and Range reports have been submitted for review

CFLRP Peer Learning Session Webinars – Amy Waltz is coordinating this effort – is the conduit to sharing any 4FRI lessons learned, etc.

Mark Nigrelli stated he was working on making the analysis as interactive as possible (including interactive alternatives and cumulative effects data). Sarah and other noted that ADGF had a very user-friendly interactive map called Habimap.org

The notes from the March 2012 NEPA update meeting were reviewed and information related to any progress or updated was made (as had been requested in the previous meeting): (1) cumulative effects database has been updated and will be posted on the web, (2) plan amendments are still under development and may be ready for discussion at the May, 2012 update, (3) stakeholders were to work on a pre-DEIS meeting that is widely publicized, (4) David Seesholtz was present to discuss national level NEPA including adaptive management (as requested at the March, 2012 meeting).

Wildlife Analysis:

Bill Noble reported out that the wildlife analysis is well underway. Sarah Reif (ADGF) and Chirrie Keckler (Kaibab NF Forest Wildlife Biologist) are working on the Forests' management indicator species (MIS) analysis and Chirrie is also preparing the migratory birds analysis. Cary Thompson (Flagstaff RD, Coconino NF Wildlife Biologist) is preparing the FS sensitive species analysis, Noel Fletcher (Prescott NF Wildlife Biologist) is completing the goshawk analysis, and Bill is writing the Threatened and Endangered, Proposed and Candidate Species evaluation, including Mexican spotted owl (MSO).

Sarah was asked if she feels comfortable with the wildlife analysis as it pertains to providing for heterogeneity. Sarah noted that her initial concern was population-level impacts to wildlife and having a resultant homogenous landscape. However, she is seeing a mosaic patchwork in terms of treatment intensity and the post-treatment landscape when you consider the MSO requirements that are overlaid onto the design of the treatments.

Pascal asked if there was consideration of concentrated treatments in a particular location. Bill responded that the desire is to treat and move on. The wildlife biologists spent several days conferring on how to reduce the potential for road-related disturbance effects. Prescriptions were really driven by wildlife (goshawk and MSO) requirements and meeting the forest plans. It was noted that USFWS has been a part of the evaluation process and contacted on a regular basis. Regarding the smoke issue within or next to a MSO PAC, not an issue if the treatment occurs outside the nesting season – however, the analysis will evaluate impacts from non-4FRI prescribed burning.

Mary Lata, Fire Ecologist, discussed the short falls with the Fire Regime Condition Class (FRCC) model developed at the National level – she is getting assistance from the FRCC board on this issue

Alternatives: Henry reminder all that we have four draft alternatives – Alt D responds to smoke issue by reducing prescribed burning by over 50% and only retains the acres that had a prescribe-burn only objective

Timeline – end of July 2012 DEIS to printer

Cindy Cole asked why the delay in the timeline – much of it is due to taking 8 months (January 2011 to August 2011 when a revised proposed action was made available for comment) to complete enough public involvement that we could get from a draft to a final proposed action and continuing to work on such a large scale – in comparison to other timelines for even EAs, 4FRI is moving at a very fast pace

Issues

FS continuing to work through issues – on **canopy cover** the RO completed a NM and north rim of the Grand Canyon review of relic site data (provided by Center for Biological Diversity) to gauge whether the historic range of variability (HRV) for these sites was useful in informing 4FRI –overall, north rim of the GC had canopy cover percentages that ranged from 40% to 46%, the Gila NF sites were Iron Creek, Mesa, Landis

Action Item: group requested Jim Youtz to prepare a summary report on this process (purpose, data used, and outcomes)

ERI did a canopy cover study (**part of stakeholder report out**) that included measuring certain plots using a densitometer and NAIP aerial imagery that will be available later this week (note FS is using basal area) – used local areas where restoration actions had occurred including Fort Valley –

Action Item: Henry will send the relic data information to Amy at ERI for consolidation – Sierra Club would like the compiled data

Next meeting to discuss canopy cover: May 5, 2012 at the Coconino NF Supervisor’s Office

Large Tree Retention Strategy (LTRS)

At the request of the Forest Supervisors, Henry sent out the modified LTRS (modified in terms of turning the exception rules into desired conditions) for comment to the Forest’s specialists including foresters, sale administrators, silviculturists, and the District Rangers and Forest Supervisors on the Apache-Sitgreaves, Kaibab, Coconino, Tonto, and Prescott National Forests. The purpose of this was to gauge if there was limitations in terms of actually implementing the LTRS as a design feature of alternative C. Overall, the LTRS was positively received. However, the most prevalent comment received focused on the inability within the LTRS to aggressively address insect and disease (ability to conduct sanitation treatments are not addressed in the document). The 4FRI purpose and need and proposed actions does not propose to aggressively treat insect and disease via sanitation cuts; therefore, the LTRS is consistent with 4FRI objectives and the actions proposed to manage and reduce insect and disease. The work on the LTRS will be finalized and sent out to mailing list for review and a public meeting will be held to discuss the LTRS and how it would inform alternative C design feature and the project implementation plan.

New Planning Rule and relevancy to this analysis

Dorothy Holosek asked if and when this analysis would be subject to the new planning rule. Since the Coconino and Kaibab NFs (and Apache-Sitgreaves NF) began forest plan revision a few years ago, they will be allowed to continue their analysis under using the 1982 planning rule (see Rule transition language). Other forests have been selected as “early adopters” which means they will proceed with revision under the new rule. See the Rule for specific language. We currently are documenting consistency with the existing forest plans and the draft revision plans. Additional information (the Rule) was mailed to Dorothy on April 13, 2012 (see project record for documentation).

Addressing the Effects of Prescribed Burning – Public Health and Safety

Dorothy Holosek provided information on the concern that radioactive isotopes were and could affect the health of the public throughout the State if prescribed burning was allowed. Dorothy stated she (and about 30 to 40 other individuals) supports restoration, but not the prescribed burning that would accompany restoration. She has provided recommendations that include accelerating livestock and goat grazing in response to comments as an alternative method to burning. 4FRI (Paula Cote’) noted that alternative D was developed to respond to the prescribed fire/smoke issue. An alternative that would eliminate all prescribed burning is currently being evaluated as considered but eliminated as it does not allow adequate movement towards the restoration purpose and need. Dorothy asked why she had not received a written response to her comments. Cote responded that the final scoping report was forthcoming and would include a specific response to all comments received; including; how the analysis responds comments through the issues and draft alternatives that have been developed.

Dorothy noted that she did not feel, since the stakeholders are in support of restoration, that the stakeholders would adequately address her (and other parties) concern (paraphrased). Sarah Reif (ADGF) and Amy Waltz (ERI) stated that divergent opinions and beliefs are welcome in the group; the group in no-way has a single collective belief, and, Dorothy’s information would benefit and inform the group. Amy and Sarah welcomed Dorothy’s (and other parties) participation.

Improving public Involvement

Dorothy Holosek stated that all comments should be available on the web for review and that a specific icon should be provided to better locate documents. Henry responded that the icon is the reference to planning documents on the web (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/4fri/planning>) and that we are largely constrained by an established format on how creative we can be. Cote noted that comments received in response to the January 2011 scoping period have been on the web since June, 2011 and in response to Dorothy’s request, comments from the August 2011 scoping period were published to the public reading room on the web in February, 2012 in advance of the forthcoming final scoping report). The link to these comments is: <https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/ReadingRoom?project=34857>. Dorothy noted that there has been a considerable delay in providing a written response to the August, 2011 comments. Cote’ responded that the final response to comments is dependent on finalizing the issues and alternatives. The issues and alternatives have largely been draft up until this point as numbers related to transportation (miles of temporary road construction, miles of decommission), language and acres regarding forest plan amendments, and final design criteria and mitigation were still under development by the team. However, in an effort to better inform the public of where documents are located (in

response to a previous telephone call with Dorothy), the active links to documents (including all scoping letters) was included in a Forest Supervisor letter that was signed on March 29, 2012 and distributed via post mail and email on March 30, 2012.

Meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Notes by Paula Cote, 4FRI NEPA Specialist