

# South Sacramento Restoration Project Workshop March 15-16, 2017 Cloudcroft, NM Meeting Summary

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## Purpose of Workshop

- To inform stakeholders about the landscape scale project
- Develop ideas for restoration
- To develop partnerships for implementation

## Introductions, Welcome & Meeting Objectives:

After introductions and outlining the expectations for the two days, Lincoln NF Supervising Officer, Travis Moseley, welcomed the participants and staff to the two-day workshop. Mr. Moseley noted that with new funding opportunities the South Sacramento Restoration Project holds the opportunity for large-scale restoration at the ground level. The NEPA process will be inclusive but will be big-picture oriented to maximize the ability to adapt treatments as needed. There are good examples of large-scale restoration projects that have been funded in New Mexico and Arizona through the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration projects which funds large scale projects nationally as well as the Collaborative Forest Restoration Program which is specific to projects in New Mexico. The focus of the South Sacramento project will be on innovation and a large-scale approach to restoration.

Mr. Moseley noted that this project will feel very much like doing things with a left hand which may be awkward but will produce innovative projects and will be outcome focused.

Mark Cadwallader, Lincoln NF Partnership Coordinator Key gave an overview of the key project elements. He noted that it was like looking backwards to determine Reference Conditions – the current reality which is Current Conditions and Desired Conditions which begs the question, “What does a healthy forest look like?”

## Specific Project Information:

- **Southern Sacramento Restoration Project Area designated as insect and disease treatment area** under Section 602 of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act
- Designated area is approximately 140,000 acres
- Vegetation management activities proposed on this area:
  - lands suitable for commercial Timber/ Fuelwood management
  - land suitable for mechanical and hand vegetation treatment
  - lands suitable for prescribed burning



- **Insects and disease have reduced the overall health and productivity of the stands in this area for some time**
  - Stands (Douglas Fir, White Fir, South Western White Pine, Ponderosa Pine) visited within the project area have had chronic infection from **Dwarf Mistletoe, Blister Rust, Broom Rust**
    - All stands visited in this project area rate either moderate or high hazard for susceptibility to insects, **Fir Engraver, Bark Beetle**
    - Mixed conifer stands often had species composition and multiple canopy layers conducive to further infection and attack from insects
  - Insect and disease-induced mortality is contributing to increased surface fuels; changing forest structure in the project area is leading to increased ladder fuels
- **Presence and potential habitat for some Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive (TES) Species and Management Indicator Species (MIS) are known to occur in the potential project area**
  - **T&E:** New Mexico Meadow Jumping Mouse, Mexican Spotted Owl, Sacramento Mountain Thistle
  - **Sensitive:** Northern Goshawk, Sacramento Mountain Salamander, Peregrine Falcon, Bald Eagle, Gray Vireo, Townsend Big Ear Bat, Spotted Bat, New Mexico Shrew, Peñasco Least Chipmunk
  - **MIS:** Pygmy Nuthatch, Mexican Vole, Red Squirrel
- **Watershed improvements have been occurring on National Forest System lands**
  - Much of the improvements on Forest Service lands have occurred through mechanical mastication
- **Most of the project area contains a well-developed road system;** primary Forest Service (FS) roads are in good condition
  - Secondary FS roads would be brought up to standard as required to implement project activities
- The Lincoln National Forest is preparing an environmental impact statement to determine the impacts of the Southern Sacramento Restoration Project on the Sacramento Ranger District. The project is being developed under Section 602 of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA), also known as the Farm Bill authority. The 2014 Farm Bill provides opportunities to identify priority areas for treatment due to threats from forest insects and disease. The SSRP project area is experiencing declining forest health and is at risk for substantially increased tree mortality due to insect and disease infestation. Other project goals include reducing fire risks across the landscape and improving wildlife habitat and watershed conditions.

**The two-day workshop was focused on specific presentations; small group work and discussion. The purpose of the guided questions was to help develop ideas for a proposal that could be evaluated through the NEPA process in a timely and expedited manner. A synthesis of the discussion and ideas from groups is organized below.**

### **NEPA Overview:**

Peggy Luensmann, Lincoln NF Environmental Coordinator gave a broad overview of the process and noted that it will be important to have “upfront discussions” about what needs to go into the proposal that will follow the NEPA process. This is a very aggressive timeline with a decision by June 2018. Contract labor will be used to develop the proposal which will be more “granular” and broad scale “desired condition.”

## **Group Discussion: What are thoughts about the greatest need and concern?**

### ***Needs:***

- Priority treatments need to be given to areas near private lands and infrastructure as well as to areas away from private lands because if a fire gets started in those areas, it could spread to private lands.
- Wildlife hunting is different from recreation and needs to be pulled out
- Watershed function and restoration:
  - needs to remain the highest priority of this project.
  - High country is main drainage – watershed for the Pecos – should be a huge concern and priority
- Widen the ROW for OCEC; increase width of the powerline ROW throughout the Lincoln to facilitate infrastructure and getting power to all of those in need
- Maintain the ROWs, especially with adjacent thinning which can serve as effective fire breaks.
- Thin surrounding/adjacent areas so that fires are easier to control

### ***Concerns:***

- Recreation is not addressed and should be especially because recreation drives economic concerns and processes
- Dead trees are not aesthetically pleasing to view and should be removed as appropriate
- Watershed Restoration:
  - Concerns are not limited to the boundaries of the 140K project, LNF or Otero County
  - Too many single issues – want to be sure we are building the proposed action and emphasis with all the resource considerations
  - Fuel load is heavy and tightly packed - reducing the fuel load is important to also reduce potential for fire
  - Deeply incised canyons – high elevation, highly erodible soils – all contribute to catastrophic flooding. Actions should include reducing or minimizing flooding on the ground
  - Curtis Canyon and the Curtis Dam is one of the most at-risk dams in Otero County due to water flooding above and the values below – health safety/infrastructure
  - Cox Canyon and access issues and roads that contribute to the sedimentation and impacts to natural resources
  - We cannot treat like Mescalero which was very aggressive because we have more diverse stands and access is a concern.
  - From the perspective of the Electric power company, hazardous trees; power poles and power line and the ROW which is not wide enough or big enough. More removal and thinning of hazardous trees next to the ROW.
  - OCEC is concerned with fire danger and downed trees as well as those threatening infrastructure – especially around Cloudcroft and other municipal areas. There is concern about sparks that start fires. Addressing impact of fires is important for senior citizens who rely on the power for health and safety (oxygen, heat etc.) Using generators during these times is not good for the environment and increased impacts to climate emissions.

## **Ecosystem and the ability to treat- The big picture**

### **Broad Overview of Ecosystem Issues in the Project Area**

#### **Group Discussion: What does a resilient Forest look like to you?**

- The ability to withstand anything that is thrown at it (like a Timex) - drought for example which has added to the bark beetle outbreaks. There will be mortality but not several thousand acres. Like a retirement portfolio – diversity with structure.
- Reduction of Dwarf Mistletoe infection which means removing trees to reduce the infection.
- It may be a different type of forest that can adapt to climate change – may mean oak/shrubs or other adaptive species on standby to take the opportunity to take over stands.
- Mixture of open forest, some dense forests and mixtures of clumps with open glades.
- Healthy riparian areas with water flow that includes willows and sedges
- Large mature trees and clumps of understory, grasses and clumps of saplings
- Removal of diseased trees
- Ponderosa pine needs to have sentinel trees and clumps with diversity of grasses and bunch grasses with a reduction of invasive species
- Slow disease down, keep fires at low to moderate intensities. Diversity in trees, species, age classes and growing spaces.
- A healthy forest has different ecosystems with mosaics of different vegetation and trees. A healthy forest is a combination of these things.
- Fire can play a natural role in a resilient forest and avoids extremes.

#### **Group Discussion: What does it take to get to a desired condition?**

- More open stands allow for more sun to the ground, water availability, less large scale outbreaks, healthy tree stands, different age classes, clearly defined transition states (this is not healthy- there should be an integration/intermix of vegetation types without lines, no monocultures. Densities are too thick. Active management will reduce mortality and extreme measures.
- Limited by the time it takes to grow trees. It would be difficult to get back to pre-settlement conditions. We can open things up and become more resistant. We can use more prescribed burning, tree thinning. It depends on the type of tools that we have available. We can get to an open stand easily in some areas but in others it can be difficult due to what is nearby like residential areas. Where we are in the landscape verses where we are going. Create a sense of place.
- Open the PJ for hunting opportunities and habitat for large game animals; work with NMDG&F and HSP and Habitat Enhancement dollars. Perhaps there are additional dollars that could be sought to add to the funding mix. However, be aware of where there are funding opportunities – alternatively be aware of the influx of out-of-state dollars that could affect local issues.
- Mark the trees to be left and take out the rest – high density and ladder fuels need to be reduced
- Thin areas next to roads for visibility and to be able to use these as firebreaks. Identify infrastructure (roads, trails, powerlines) to maximize thinning opportunities.
- Work with powerline ROW for opportunities for increased thinning and hazard tree removals in a widened ROW
- Need a suite of desired conditions directly related to the values at risk (health, safety, property, infrastructure, natural resources)
- Increase treatments in WUIU areas “smoke issues – address these”
- Stop using corridors around camping, day use, and trails – do active management and thinning and use these areas for public awareness and education

- Increase opportunities to work with municipalities and increase public awareness of active management
- Pre-settlement conditions may not have supported the grasses and conditions for grazing, but the desired condition perhaps should include this for allotment grazing.,
- Keep management tools available including mechanical, burning and organic.
- Mechanical tools should include thinning, clumps, creating openings, using machines, mulching, log and scatter, fuelwood, cut and leave, helicopter, cable logging, horse and mule logging, mastication, ROW clearing, hazardous tree removals.
- Burning should include broadcast, pile burns
- Managed grazing should be included as a range-land science tool. Managed grazing could open canopies for grasses.

## Fire & Fuels

### Group Discussion: What do you consider is the role of Fire and how do we live with fire?

- We need to let it play its role in nature since it is an essential part of the ecosystem. It will be important to educate the public about the importance of fire and acceptance of it as part of the natural ecosystem even though it is a threat. The Smokey Bear Fire was a good example of not enough public education about fire even though there is more now. This includes educating the media who only talk about the human impact and not about the good things fire can accomplish. Perhaps putting the drip torch in the hands of the reporter. Never been done but maybe should be.
- The public also needs to understand the economic impacts of treating acres vs. fighting fire which is reactive rather than proactive.
- Look at examples of the Cibola for partnership funding to treat the land.
- If treatments can reduce catastrophic fire then we can effectively manage lightning/man made fires more effectively. Share the story and show the benefits. Thin more than the historic range of variability (HRV) in some instances because there are more resources at risk. Even if we treat to the HRV we are still looking at potential for catastrophic wildfire. If we do manage to HRV and the stand is healthier then we can prevent catastrophic wildfire. Treatments are reducing risk. Manage it to be a smaller fire.
- Living with smoke is an issue. Perhaps we can compensate people like what was done with the Wolf example. Perhaps education which includes notification and adaptation and understanding that the Clean Air Act must be followed for prescribed burns. Use test burns as a means of educating; involve youth in programs; Change Smokey's message.
- Use the Firewise Program to educate people who live near or within the forest and prepare them for when a fire happens.
- It would be helpful to change the conditions to be representative and able to sustain the fire dynamics
- Studies on the west side of the Sacramentos, indicates that the large fires are getting back shrub fields that are persistent for 50+ years – this is not a temporary setback but a permanent condition – there is no seed source anymore. Need expensive treatment to bring back the forest to pre-settlement conditions.
- Every discussion heard talking with the agencies, what is not brought up is cost benefits. Cost benefit analysis can be overdone – but can also be done efficiently What are the economic tradeoffs? However at least a basic attempt at cost-benefit should be included in the NEPA process. What will it cost to NOT treat these acres? In a resource-constrained environment, must start counting what will be lost to not treat and compare the cost of doing the treatments vs cost of no-

treatment. This should be brought in for fire treatment. (Comment – this is done for BAER team reports and cost justification.) Need to also consider the potential cost of fire suppression if not treating. Need a value for estimating ecosystem and natural resource services

- 80% of the water for the Pecos below Santa Rosa originates in the Hondo and Penasco watershed. Protecting the watershed is a huge issue and should be prioritized
- One issue: Cannot put a value on human lives.
- Prioritize the treatments based on the values at risk and location of those values and prioritize the treatments based on available resources.
- Strategically place treatments on the land where it has the most benefits
- The cost-benefit contrast can also be used to justify treatment
- The cost-benefit contrast can also be used as justification for funding and budgetary requests
- This can and should be used as rationale for congressional budget presentations.
- Inholdings are an issue, and these will continue to be an issue. Inholdings – the current second-growth forest is a big issue and is not the desired condition. In holder – “my” forest burned in the Penasco fire, and it is important to restore these areas and treat areas. That way fires can be used naturally in the forest as part of the ecosystem
- Bring public awareness of the value of thinning and burning to bring the forest to resiliency
- Would be good to tie in with the state education department – watersheds, water, fire, ecology.
- Would like to see state forestry take this on as well
- Fire and Current Conditions - Should change the rules and regulations to allow more fire. It is not so much the rules and existing regulations. The issue is that the conditions in the forest itself is limiting the treatment. Hope to retain the rules and regulations, but treat to be able to burn more areas and maximum use of prescribed burn.
- Fire and mechanical treatment. Fire is limited with the current conditions, but more cost effective.

## Wildlife

### Group Discussion: What are your values specific to wildlife?

- Spiritual – like Native American Tribes – belief that messengers of bad news are Owls
- Diversity of wildlife is important for medicinal purposes
- As a private land owner – over 50% of megafauna is on private land in NM
- Private land owner – mixed bag – scared to have T&E species on private land
- Have a bias against wildlife in local population (human)
- T&E issues alienating people
- Elk vs Cattle issues
- Waters for cattle being used by deer and elk
- Ecosystem services provided by ranchers to wildlife – forage and water
- Love to watch elk and deer – childhood memories of hunting, fishing and trapping
- Aesthetic value
- Retirees and tourists love wildlife
- A lot of people spend a lot of money to keep elk out of the orchards
- Elk and deer crashes
- Science values include research
- Commercial Value – hunting and fishing
- Commercial Value – meat to survive
- Commercial Value – birdwatching and watchable wildlife

- Wildlife in Ecosystem Management – browse and grass control
- Spreading seeds, pollination
- Endangered species and keeping biodiversity
- Feral Horse/Feral Hogs are a concern. These should be removed because they destroy the habitat and destroy wildlife.
- Issue – educate the public on benefits of wildlife, but also on overpopulation issues
- Educate the public on what local landowners and ranchers provide for wildlife
- Educate the general seasonal visitors on wildlife interactions – don't feed the wildlife
- Fire Benefit to wildlife – burning vs biomass removal – burning stimulates blooming and forage
- Having successful treatments in MSO packs will open doors to restoration and treatments of more and larger MSO packs.

#### **Group Discussion: What would healthy habitat look like to you?**

- Diversity and structure in the habitat has been overlooked. Having a more diverse landscape there is a lot more of everything and this is more sustainable
- It does not do the owl any good if we burn up all the PACs. Shift in thinking on managing habitat. Make allowance of treatment to build quality and resilience.
- Treating where it makes sense. We can't just do fire to do the work when it is not attainable. There has been a lot of give and take, for example timing restrictions.
- Managing for avoidance is not the answer. More adaptability with testing for impacts with monitoring of treatment. Monitoring for specific future actions. Not going back to the same arguments. Monitoring must be focused, relevant and show specific trends.
- Functional watersheds that provide water for wildlife

#### **Group Discussion: Collaboration, Working with our partners**

- Commercial Development Partnerships and Small Business should be Encouraged - Would like to see more commercial development and markets to support taking the trees both small diameter and large diameter as well as slash.
- Very little of what is on the ground or standing dead is commercially viable – pallets, pellets.
  - Need the industry to make use of the small diameter material. High supply and dependable.
- The entrepreneurial aspect is lacking and the FS can facilitate, but industry needs to step up.
- These businesses should be guaranteed a source of wood or a source of materials.
- NEPA document must be complete to guarantee the materials
- Make sure the small businesses are aware of these materials and stock.
- Pallets, pellets, bio-gen, co-gen
- Would like to see more partnerships with municipalities such as Cloudcroft, Alamogordo to be better fire-wise and more supportive of thinning and burning to reduce fuel loading. Working with the council and the citizens to be more aware of the issues. The Forest Service needs to point out that mistakes will happen. However, it is important to simply own up to those and in the meantime treatments should occur.
- Department of Defense could be a partner in restoration efforts.

# March 16, 2017 - Day 2

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## Existing Conditions/Departure

- Existing forest and woodland conditions are greatly shifted from desired conditions
- Project will focus on outcomes rather than outputs
- Project goals are to maintain/restore ecological integrity

## Overview of Proposed Action Development

A proposed action includes:

- Specific actions we want to take
- What actions are appropriate under certain circumstances or in certain locations
- Measures that we would need to take to protect resources, infrastructure, etc.

How do we design *this* Proposed Action?

- Meets the purpose and need
- Meets laws, regulations, and Forest Service policies
- Addresses issues and concerns
- Adaptive

### Planning Timeline:

**Table 1. Phase 1 (Project Development)**

Preliminary Purpose and Need	February 2017
Collaboration Workshop	March 15 to 16, 2017
Existing and Desired Conditions	March 2017
Draft Proposed Action	March to April 2017

**Table 2. Phase 2 (NEPA Analysis)**

Public Scoping (30 days)	April 2017
General Public Meeting	April 26, 2017
Issues and Alternatives for Analysis	June 2017
Second Collaboration Meeting	June 2017
Draft EIS	October 2017
Third Collaboration Meeting	October 2017
Forest Service Review/Edit of draft EIS	November 2017

**Table 3. Phase 3 (Final Analysis and Decision)**

Notice and Comment Period (45 days)	December 2017
Final EIS and Draft Record of Decision	March 2018
Objection Period (30 days)	April 2018
Objection Review Period (30 days)	May 2018
Sign Decision	June 2018

## **Presentation: Tools in the Tool Box and parameters**

Overview of existing programs and tools that are used in restoration efforts.

- Timber sales and commercial treatments that include contracts, agreements with partners; integrated resource contracts and stewardship sales
- Cable logging is possible for ridgetops but will require ground work such as roads to create access
- A current limitation is that local equipment and logging industry aren't geared up or non-existent to take on the magnitude of the restoration work. Potential businesses in the Lincoln should consider submitting a CFRP grant that could pay for equipment for restoration work or utilization of material.
- Firewood for personal and commercial use
- Mastication is effective but has limitations especially site accessibility. Otero County does have one operator that owns his own machine. Mastication can be done on private property and the EQUIP funds could be a funding source.
- Thinning and lop and scatter
- Feller bunching
- Fire both prescribed (intentional) and wildfire which is unintentional
- Develop a suite of prescriptions based on project level descriptions and from there we would develop a site specific prescription.

### **Group Discussion: Do you have concerns about specific treatments?**

- Would like to see more treatments like those used in MSO sites – clear cuts to create openings for forage. Groups and clumps of trees in patchwork design
- Fire use on first entry should be avoided
- Control burning with chemicals provides resistance should be limited use
- Concern about just getting it done – developing markets and reducing transportation costs
- The County needs to be part of these discussions
- Addressing the loss of Aspen and keeping the elk away from aspen regeneration
- Caution about using mastication that could end up reducing needed jobs

### **Group Discussion: you have other Ideas for treatments and tools?**

- Treat in MSO habitat
- Thin trees
- FS initiate thinning to provide an example
- We need help from knowledgeable private landowners to educate other landowners
- Find a common ground to make a forward decision
- Do as much as possible in the head waters, whatever we can do to address these areas first will help.
- Start with the sweet spot where it is easier to tackle things first
- Build roads even if they are temporary to get access to some of these sites
- Do more public meetings and ensure that livestock folks are involved
- Utilize the internet by providing a live feed
- Use Rick's example of showing the devastating effects of fire from not thinning
- Educate about the importance of thinning for wildlife
- Develop respect for others cultures and beliefs
- Experience is a great teacher. Get the news media on our side

- Stream work is necessary to the restoration success of this project
- Starting at the headwaters will be tight areas. It is important to think outside of the box. Treat on 45% slopes. Perhaps prescribed burns for grasses to establish.
- If we have a wildfire get in the NEPA that we harvest everything so it does not go to waste.
- The RC&D is a clear partner and wants to see people working and utilizing a variety of markets
- One of the ways that we got around not knowing who would want a SUP and where, we left it a little vague in the NEPA. You could even include the possibility of a mill in the NEPA
- One of the things that came up in the Klamath NF is nano-cellulose biomass technology. It is a material that is used to strengthen products (car bumpers etc.). the industry is centered in Wisconsin and we brought those folks out to meet with the community. The community received \$2 million dollars from Forest Products Research to develop the plant to produce this material. It takes a lot of biomass to develop this material.
- Utilize the Hydrologic Model of the Tularosa Basin. It might be a good collaborative effort to extend that to the Lincoln National Forest. There has already been funding to the NPS for Mod-flow model, surface ground water model, and basin flow model.
- Start a LiDar user group. The NPS has a continuous contract that reduces the cost to get LiDar information and this information could help with hydrologic modelling and other resources.

## **Integration of resources and benefits**

This project will require tremendous amount of coordination and effort for all. Internally, the Forest Service will need to break down information/implementation silos that will require more internal discussion and planning that includes building multiple treatments. Externally, this project will need to bring in multiple partners, agencies and private property owners to work effectively together including developing funding opportunities.

## **Next steps:**

As we are doing these projects we should set up sorting yards to help with sources to take the harvest etc. for example bear carvers, builder supplies etc.