

1/7 Spruce Meeting Notes

Thursday, January 6, 2022

4:40 PM

Spruce IDT Meeting: Logistics and Project Coordination

January 7, 2021

Attendees: Krueger, Underhill, Leingang, Daily, Lowell, Hermandorfer, Davis (B), King, Miller (K), Miller (T), Mihich, Jackson, Seale, Davis (T), Middlebrook, Hittner,

Meeting Objective: To discuss project management logistics (filing structure and location, operating procedures, timeline, roles and responsibilities, etc.) and to better understand the specifics of the proposed action as we know it today.

Notes

Message from DFS: Universal support for this team and project. Jerry's personal cell number if you don't have what you need, someone isn't responding, etc.: 605-440-0262.

Please let Jodi know if you contact Jerry.

Introductions

Jerry Krueger: BH Deputy Forest Supervisor

Jeff Underhill: BH Silviculturist

Tom Lowell: Enterprise Silviculturist

Mary (Beth) Davis: R2 ST NEPA Planner (Acting)

Matt Daily: BH Resources Staff Officer

Pam King: R2 ST Communication and Engagement (Acting)

Kim Miller: R8 Silviculturist

William (Bill) Jackson: Recreation

Martha Mihich: Cultural Resources

Patty Lynch: BH Mystic District Biologist -- Dropped off meeting. Will be on the Westside Meeting.

Larry (Don) Seale: Hydrologist

Terry Miller: R2 ST Botanist (Acting)

Chad Hermandorfer: R2 ST Hydrologist (Acting)

Doug Middlebrook: R2 ST Wildlife Biologist (Acting)

Luke Hittner: BH South Zone Archeologist

Tim Davis: Data Management and Stewardship (GIS)

Jodi Leingang: R2 ST Team Lead (Acting)

Project Team Logistics and Infrastructure

- R2 NEPA Strike Team MS Team and Spruce EA Channel Introduction. Beth Davis walk everyone through the Team Channels and resources.
- Iterative Project Charter. Beth Davis walked everyone through the IPC document. The document is a project specific one-stop-shop and project tracking tool. Beth walked the team through the document and the vision of the document.
- Folder Structure and Channel Posts: Pam reviewed the folder structure and how to enable channel posts notifications.

- Tom asked if Lit Cited references should go in separate resource folders under the Lit Cited Folder. Jodi supported this idea and resource folders will be created.

The Project

Leaders Intent: Create a Forestwide environmental assessment, condition-based project to treat Spruce across the forest. Stated purpose is to

- provide saw log products to support industry,
- Pine Aspen Restoration: to treat spruce encroachment
- Create more diversity in size and age class in Spruce stands
- WUI protection: Black Hills is a very fragmented landscape. Will exceed the 40 acre openings restriction.

Developing Proposed Action

There is overlap between Spruce EA and Westside EA and a third EA. These other projects are looking at treating Spruce too.

We have talked to the public and their collaborative about Spruce EA.

Suggested by Beth: To help focus the projects, maybe simplify these projects where Spruce EA focuses on the Spruce treatments and the PAR treatments. Westside and the other projects focus on the other stands.

Decision point needed: Jerry will meet with staff on this.

Underhill: Where we are at--

PAR (Pine and Aspen Restoration) was originally a separate project (pulled back after scoping) that is being expanded out to include WUI and structural diversity as part of this Spruce EA project. This will include updating PAR Design Features, and define target descriptions and directions for the other two objectives (WUI and Diversity).

Lowell: Prefer to treat PAR areas aggressively to achieve more pine regeneration.

Concerns with true spruce stands are limitations tied to steepness where those stands occur.

Jerry noted that a feasibility of steep slope logging was just completed for the Black Hills. The analysis did show it to be pretty limiting. The pure spruce stands that he is mainly talking about are the logging areas that are feasible or not on the steep slopes.

Will need to apply or review wildlife filters and or design features to ensure we minimize or balance effects.

Timeline

Scoping: Jerry preference to scope soon.

FACA Charter Collaborative: Charter was just renewed. At the point of member selection. Will not be done in time for this project.

Jodi Timeline

Scoping 1/25: Several members are nervous about this deadline. Coordination with the public engagement

Public Comment Period 4/18

Decision 9/12

1/13 Spruce Update Meeting

Thursday, January 13, 2022

12:32 PM

Items to Discuss: Purpose & Need (PN), Proposed Action (PA), Scoping, Timeline

What else does the team need (data, documents)?

- Jerry: This is the BHs first attempt to propose management in white spruce. There's not a lot of reference material on local spruce treatments.
- GIS needs: Tim to pull queries based on BA, etc.

Tom Lowell: He and Jeff Underhill did a lot of the heavy lifting for PAR. This project will be similar.

- They are all on board with the proposed action
- Tom posted veg treatments to the Teams channel (everyone should've received a notification)
 - Team should look at this file
- **For PA (Tom):**
 - In stands with over 80% BA in spruce:
 - 3-5 acre patch cuts... priority given to areas where spruce is dominant over ponderosa pine or aspen
 - Spruce dominated areas in or in close proximity to WUI and/or critical infrastructure will have regen harvest; shouldn't need the +40-acre allowance
 - Will retain reserve trees; want to restore ponderosa pine as much as possible.
 - Mixed-conifer stands (50-80% BA in spruce w/ ppine & aspen):
 - Regeneration harvests; post-treatment there won't be enough existing ponderosa pine to call it a fully-stocked stand.
 - Will need the +40 acre allowance
 - We will plant if stocking doesn't meet requirements in ponderosa pine (is this correct?) *Discussion about regeneration harvest...*
 - Reserve all pine and aspen (minus hazard trees, temp roads, etc.)
 - Will have riparian buffers and other resource design elements/mitigations
 - Ponderosa pine stands where dominant in the BA
 - Thin from below in these stands
 - Residual stands will be variable based on current conditions
 - Jerry: Forest-wide, conditions-based; desired conditions will be the driver

Q: Doug M.: how are we going to define WUI? **Jerry:** We're not sure yet but we're looking at a larger buffer based on recent-past fires (maybe a ½ mile buffer)

Q: Tom: When we have aspen inside any of these stands, we will be doing aspen enhancement?
Jerry: Yes

Q: Jodi: How are we pulling all of this together for the PA? Tom, Chris, Tim and Doug to get all GIS layers overlayed so we know our stands, management areas, etc. And whittle down the treatment acres (estimated acres/treatment). Tom (gone until 1/18) is fine with Jeff Underhill stepping in for him (or Jerry)

Q: Tom: Project area... how large for effects consideration? Will it be Forest boundary or just spruce stands? **Jerry:** Didn't have the best idea where all the stands were located in BHRL. It isn't the Forest boundary but spruce is scattered. He wants to be able to treat the spruce that needs

treatment. Jodi: we have to have treatment boundaries but we don't have to have a "project boundary". Sometimes use geographic boundaries... but we describe what we'll treat in conditions-based and that guides the treatment areas. Treatment areas is the spruce GIS layer.

- **For PN:**
 - Problems we're trying to solve? Fuels problem and stocking problem (*did I get that right?*)
- **Project Design Features/Elements**
 - TBD
- **Scoping**
 - Pam needs direction from Jerry and Jim G. on scoping and tribal engagement
 - Messaging regarding Forest Plan revision process and projects
 - Look at PAR scoping package

Q: Tom: We'll have a Forest Plan consistency check with scoping? Jodi: we typically do not. Jerry: Spruce isn't spoken about much in the FP; may have inconsistencies with pine marten corridors or raptor nests.

Q: Jodi: What is the real timeline for a scoping package? Tom: 2 weeks (end of January)

Matt: BHRL boundary was Forest boundary. There were commercial activity boundary... Include all spruce cover-type stands for this but we may not have all the data we need/accurately enough to define the mixed con stands with spruce (for example)

Jerry: Describe the "kinds" of stands/locations where we intend to treat. There's a geographic definition of treatment areas.

There's an Implementation Guide for BHRL and there may be one for Spruce.

GIS

Tim Davis: "kitchen sink" MXD is posted in Spruce; template for specialist MXDs. Doug: Is there an official process for GIS requests? Jodi: Go direct with Tim.

Pam King's Scratch Notes

Tuesday, January 11, 2022

8:34 AM

Past Pine and Aspen Restoration (PAR)

Past Pine and Aspen Restoration (PAR) project was scoped in March/April 2021. Not decision was signed. The Spruce EA encompasses and expands off of this project.

Project NEPA website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=59737>

PALS Number: 59737

Comments were submitted using CARA

1/21/2022 Spruce Draft Meeting Notes

Monday, January 24, 2022

4:47 PM

Attendees:

Lowell, Tom- FS
Miller, Terry -FS
Davis, Timothy - FS
Middlebrook, Douglas- FS
Krueger, Jerome -FS
Jackson, William - FS
Davis, Beth - FS
Stover, Christopher -FS
Mitchell, Caroline -FS
Mihich, Martha - FS
Leingang, Jodi -FS
Hermendorfer, Chad -FS
King, Pamela - FS
Seale, Larry - FS
Underhill, Jeffrey - FS
Marchand, Kenneth -FS

Meeting Objective: The objective of this meeting is to review and discuss the draft P&N statement and the proposed action. I would also like to start the discussion around project design features that may be necessary for your resource, as these are part of the proposed action.

Jeff is running 500 sample spruce stands = 18,000 acres. Tom is developing a treatment key. Will use CSE data to develop conditions in spruce cover type for treatments within and outside of WUI. Pulling together estimates of opportunity acres for scoping.

Marten habitat: Ken and Doug will coordinate for the spatial data

Tom has created a flow-chart displaying the two types of spruce cover types. Will be building out in next couple of days. Discussion around lop and scatter. As a general rule, lop and scatter is not a good idea. Chris Stover cannot endorse L&S. It does not decompose and when it does burn there are high BTUS that result in ground scorching and torching of trees.

Terminology is confusing in terms of use of mixed conifer. Stick with wet spruce or dry spruce.

Discussion regarding WUI buffers: ½ mile from PVT, 300 ft from critical infrastructure. Will be using pod boundaries for operational purposes. Will capture most egress routes. Should have final from contractor next week.

The FP describes WUI as that identified in HFRA. As defined by this project = restoration with a fuels benefit. Restoration activities have the potential to address the fuel concern.

Tom asked about RX burning in drier spruce sites. Tom would recommend burning. Chris is not comfortable with that unless the area is well interior of control line. Tom would like to compel us to burn in dry spruce and is also proposing site prep and planting. Pine restoration and aspen restoration.

Describe conditions for burning for site prep. Describe what it takes to restore the site.

The topic of issues and scoping came up. It is recommended that we craft a brief paragraph that speaks to the issues we are currently aware of and are bringing forward for analysis. We want to be consistent with WS.

Ken Marchand – Marten corridors and GIS. Refer to the FP implementation guide 15 March 2018. Have to go back to the 90s to find evidence of treating spruce. It was the exception, not the rule.

Jeff wants to validate the FSVeg data in relation to stand structural stage, so will be using data from several sources including field observations and CSE. Check with districts to determine if their layers are updated. It would be best to have a forestwide layer vetted by the biologists.

Tom asked if we had to consider marten corridors or marten habitat. Can we treat in habitat outside of corridors? FP refers to corridors. North facing bottoms further assessed by the districts. No particular stream class is identified. Jerry reiterated that he expected our proposal to impact marten habitat to some degree. We may locally impact a corridor, but not likely to jeopardize the existence of marten.

There are currently two cooperators on all projects: State of WY and Laurence County. Driven by FPR. There are webinars scheduled on 2/1/2022 for States and Counties; and on 2/15/2022 and 2/18/2022 for Tribes, to inform of FPR and involvement.

2/14/2022 Spruce IDT Meeting Notes

Wednesday, March 2, 2022

10:22 AM

Agenda:

P&N and PA

Timeline

Webinar

Participants:

<<2_14meetingAttendanceReport(Spruce Vegetation Management Project - Project Status and Next Steps).txt>>

Jodi shared the final scoping package with the team.

Jerry would like us to include an implementation guide, similar to BHRL, in the appendix of the EA.

Brad Phillips will be the Forest wildlife bio working with Doug.

Jodi presented the updated timeline to the group and asked if there were conflicts or concerns. None were identified.

The group had a short discussion around condition-based management and Jodi asked that team members watch Jamie Rosen's (OGC R5) webinar on CBM before the next meeting.

In this regard, Jerry would like to see a NEPA document that includes the what, why, and general treatments.

2/25/2022 Spruce IDT Meeting Notes

Thursday, March 3, 2022

8:25 AM

The objective of this call is to discuss condition-based management in relation to the Spruce environmental analysis and to start identifying project design features that you may be considering for your resource.

Additional Agenda Topics: CBD FOIA Request, TFPA Opportunities

Participants:

Terry Miller
Chad Hermandorfer
Doug Middlebrook
Pam King
Don Seale
Ben Schumacher
Matt Dailey
Brad Phillips
Beth Davis
Tim Davis
Luke Hittner
Jerry Krueger
Martha Mihich
Chris Stover
Scott Albrecht
Josh Sidon

Scott mentioned that he had arranged for 2 media interviews on Spruce.

We have been informed by the RO that there has been a FOIA request made by the Center for Biological Diversity. The RO is reviewing the request and will reach out to us once the request is officially acknowledged and perfected. No action is being requested by the IDT at this time.

Jerry will be taking an acting assignment and will be available for Spruce transition for the next week.

Luke discussed potential TFPA options for Spruce. A portion of the Pa Slaw Tribal Trust Lands are adjacent to the proposed Spruce project treatments. Luke would like us to consider advertising this potential opportunity as part of this process.

Jerry provided some background and context around TFPA and the BKNF, including support to tribes and the ACES program.

Jerry provided his leader intent around CBM and adaptation.

- We will maintain 20,000 acres of the highest quality marten habitat
- Consider using a moving (roaming window?) polygon to account for changing conditions over time
- Could start with a "touchstone" polygon
- Utilize an implementation strategy/checklist where the habitat would be reviewed prior to implementation to determine the highest quality habitat on the ground in real-time.

Terry discussed the opportunity for him to leverage Doug's work for rare plants as there is considerable overlap/alignment in habitat. This type of analysis would provide the units with more flexibility to implement.

In this regard, Jerry voiced the concern that where there is canopy over mature spruce that we are able to break up the fuels. He did not want to limit the ability to do this.

Don added that this approach also line up with the hydrology and riparian zones. He will be looking at watersheds and the percentages of spruce in each watershed. This will set the scope of his analysis. Could potentially frame the discussion as a flow chart, if this, then that.

Doug and Terry voiced concern regarding the status of spruce in terms of its' rarity on the landscape. The BKNF has avoided working in this vegetation type until now, particularly pure spruce stands. Terry also identified a weakness in stratifying by the two types of spruce, as our ability to know for analysis purposes exactly what type of stand each treatment will occur in, as FsVeg does not provide for this distinction.

Jerry commented that we need to clearly articulate the conditions for each. Jerry also commented that we were breaking new ground by proposing to actively managing for spruce.

Josh mentioned the recent OGC review around CBM and that we will need to be able to respond to the comment that the NEPA is not site-specific analysis.

Maps will be important in this respect.

Spatially discreet potential treatment area

Jodi asked that team members review the CBM webinar and also read the materials provided on this topic for a deep-dive discussion at a future IDT meeting.

The discussion on project design features was deferred to a later date.