

**Panhandle Forest Collaborative
Wildlife Panel**

Wednesday, February 19, 2014

10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. PST

PFC Members: Laura Wolf (presenter), Brad Smith, Liz Johnson-Gebhardt, Paul Sieracki, Cliff Anderson, Phil Hough, Bob Boeh, Glen Bailey, Mike Petersen

Forest Projects Committee Members: Cliff Anderson, Kajsa Stromberg

Forest Service: Chad Hudson, Jason Jerman, Linda Burnhardt, Ana Cerro-Timpone (presenter)

Guests: Joel Sauder, Shannon Ehlers, Mike Hillis, Dennis Riley, Brett _____

PFC Facilitator: Karen DiBari

After everyone introduced themselves, Laura Wolf opened the meeting and reviewed the key questions she had asked each presenter to address:

- Where should wildlife corridors be placed and what size is appropriate?
- How will the wildlife species you are discussing benefit or be harmed by bringing white pine back onto the landscape?
- Discuss edge effects vs. opening size. Larger openings are needed in many cases to successfully regenerate white pine, but may be detrimental to wildlife, at least in the short term.
- How should openings be structured to best suit the species you are presenting (i.e. what size/shape should patches of leave trees within a cut unit be)?
- How might vegetation treatments/timber harvest in riparian areas affect the species you are presenting?
- How does road density affect the species you are presenting?

Please refer to the powerpoint presentations for reference.

Presenter #1: Mike Hillis, Ecosystem Research Group (ERG) consultant; retired Forest Service

Mike introduced himself as a wildlife biologist who takes broad-scale approaches. ERG did analysis of 14 species for the Kootenai- Idaho Panhandle planning effort, which he can share.

- Fire suppression since the 1940s has resulted in conversion from seral species (larch, ponderosa pine, lodgepole) to climax species (grand fir, hemlock)
- Idaho Panhandle a “perfect storm” for root disease
- Species dependent upon seral conifers have declined (pileated woodpecker, flammulated owls, pygmy nuthatches)

- Species not at risk: goshawks, Hammond's flycatchers, black-backed woodpeckers – due to high intensity fires on adjacent forest lands
- Recommendations for intelligent treatment:
 - Design harvest units to mimic historic patterns
 - Retain naturally-occurring habitat components closer to HRV (historic range of variability)
 - Size class distribution
 - Cover type distribution
 - Snags/coarse woody debris
 - Avoid high road densities
- Doesn't see a need for additional allocated corridors
- Sees no down side to white pine restoration efforts because there's such a deficit of that forest type across the landscape
- 40 acre opening in size limitation is inconsistent with forest restoration strategies in the West, in his view – would need to go to the Regional Forester to get approval for larger opening size but not hard to get that approval
- Treatments are needed in riparian areas because they evolved with periodic disturbance (if money is no object, then get in and work in the riparian areas – more expensive due to INFISH and PACFISH requirements)
- Take home messages:
 - Treat aggressively if you want to make a measurable difference in forest health issues at large scales
 - Limit wildlife mitigation measures to the species/habitats that are truly at risk
 - Look at neighboring project areas to see how this 11,000 acres in Bottom Canyon (BC) fits in with surrounding lands in the 5th code HUC

Presenter #2: Shannon Ehlers, Idaho Fish & Game – Goshawks and Owls

Bottom Canyon Project Area Considerations – Northern Goshawks

- Goshawks select nest sites based on size and structure not necessarily species (Squires and Reynolds 1997)
- Edge effects and opening size
 - Increase prey production
 - One study on Clearwater showed that goshawks had moved into clearcut areas to nest
 - Increases in fragmentation may also increase interspecies interactions with other avian sp (Great Horned Owls)
- Increase in roads may or may not have neg impacts

Great Gray Owls

- Not at risk in BC area

- Need heavy canopy to shelter them from heat
- Use snags, old goshawk nests, like interior forest
- Commonly forage in meadows, clearcuts, and open story areas

Could there actually be flammulated owls in the Bottom Canyon area?

- They could be; 12% of forest is Douglas Fir in BC area

How about western screech owls?

- Less sensitive to habitat modifications

How to reconcile lack of goshawks in surveys vs. models?

- Forest Svc did major survey of goshawks; pick a one sz mile of forest, there's a 40% chance of goshawks being detected (through playing "callbacks" and hearing responses from goshawks)
- Goshawks very hard to sample/observe – that's why they're not a species of concern in Idaho because they are likely present but not observed
- Ana – surveyed for goshawks in BC area; did 200 call stations last year and haven't detected any goshawks; did aggressively look for them last year and will do that again this year
 - That info is available to the PFC if the group is interested
- Effective way to find nests is to set up a reward (Moser offered \$200 per siting and located 5 nests in St. Joe area)
- There are no historic nests in the BC area

What is unique about BC that would lead there to not be goshawk nests in that area? Answer: nothing because there's nothing particularly different about BC and there's not a lack of potential nesting habitat

Mike Hillis:

- Where there are clusters of nests located, typically there's a volunteer whose become very good at identifying nests. Feels pretty comfortable that there are good pops of Northern Goshawks in Northern Rockies.
- Clust (Kluff?) found no difference in nest density between logged/unlogged drainages
- Think about project scale, short term negative impacts vs. longer term benefits of treatments

Other considerations:

- What is plan for re-entry after white pine restored? Would white pine restoration result in habitat creation for goshawks? Answer – depends on when logging occurs again.

- Perhaps leave reserve areas of white pine that's blister resistant that can be a "seed source" for long term white pine recovery; could mimic historic events.

Pileated woodpeckers:

- Do pileateds nest in red cedar? General consensus – no.

Presenter #3: Ana Cerro-Timpone, Idaho Panhandle National Forest -- Bats

Provided a list of potential bat species on the IPNF; the following two are sensitive; concern is # of bats, and # of roosts/colonies; no intensive studies done on IPNF (not many hibernacula on IPNF)

- Townsend's Big-eared Bat – S3 Vulnerable (generalists)
- Fringed Myotis – S2 imperiled (dryer site bats) – Ponderosa pine (no habitat for Fringed Myotis in BC area)

Don't have white-nose fungus on IPNF – a very big problem in the East and has killed many bats; likely to come West

- No caves in BC area
- Need roosts, foraging areas, and access to drinking water
- Bats migrate in late Sept/early Oct – some locally, some farther distances
- Forest edges very important to bats, as well as roads/trails, gaps (natural and harvested), riparian areas and ponds/lakes
- Snag clusters are helpful, like large diameter and tall snags surrounded by minimal clutter and near canopy opening; preference for white pine perhaps due to patterns in decay of bark (also likely to be largest and tallest)
- Prefer a mosaic of mature forest, edges and canopy openings; presence of bats highest in riparian areas and mature forest; unclear what size of openings would be useful to bats
- Harvesting in riparian areas could be beneficial to bats in opening up flight paths
- Openings in the canopy/thinning can be beneficial or neutral for bats
- General recommendations are to avoid spring burning when bats are exiting from hibernation, though this is hard because that is the best time to burn
- Project Considerations
 - Large snags and snags in clusters
 - Maintain mature forest
 - Reduce clutter by Rx burning and thinning
 - Create or maintain small gaps
 - Maintain early successional habitat and edges

Presenter #4 -- Joel Sauder, Idaho Dept of Fish & Game - Fisher

- Northern Rockies Fisher – considered a valid, distinct population segment (haplotype) due to longterm separation from other fishers; decisions on whether to list under ESA in the future will be based only on this population; in 2010 rejected for listing; petitioned in 2014 for listing – no finding by USFWS until 2018 because USFWS under a mandated work plan
- Modeling the effects of dispersal and patch size on predicted fisher... Lucretia Olson
- Entire BC project area is the range of one female fisher
- 2-3 kits per birth; survival rate isn't really known; mortality highest in first year. Not many predators but bobcats and coyotes occasionally kill one.
- Core pops found in N and N Central Id
 - Tall mesic forest trees
 - High annual precip
 - Mid-range winter temps
 - Below 4000 feet usually
- BC conditions offer pretty good fisher habitat

How does landscape pattern influence where fishers maintain home ranges?

- Fishers select for home ranges with >50% mature forest (defined as 25 -50m height), with openings in complex shape
- Can better predict fisher habitat based on habitat configuration vs. composition (used LANDFIRE data)
- BC: 1.4% open area; 65% mature forest
- LANDFIRE data is 100 yd by 100 yd stand height; mature forest is 80-85 ft tall
- How accurate is LANDFIRE data? Does have inaccuracy, but is one of the better layers available.

How does landscape pattern within a fisher's home range influence intensity of use?

- Fisher core areas do not have more mature forest or less open area
- Fisher core areas do have moderate amounts of high canopy cover forest, and moderate amounts of forest edge

Site level selection: good resource documents: Key Findings from Fisher habitat Studies and Martens, Sable and Fishers

- Most of the research has been done in the east and in CA, so information not all directly applicable
- Natal dens – large diameter trees and snags with cavities
- Rest sites – large, deformed or deteriorating live trees and snags (cavities, twin tops, broken tops, mistletoe platforms, rust brooms)

- Large coarse woody debris
- High canopy cover

Fisher territories – overlap with other fisher territories

What patch size? Don't have that information yet. Hopeful that radio collar data will

Not seeing any preference for riparian areas based on telemetry data

Recommendations if only thinking about fishers

- 5-7% of total area in open clear cuts (549-769 acres in open area at any one time)
- Snag retention is key!!!!
- Smaller, more irregular habitat

Other questions/comments:

- Should there be fisher analysis areas where management for fishers prioritized vs. other areas like for lynx? Joel recommended against this. Would rather there be moderate-level fisher habitat across the whole landscape vs. pockets of excellent habitat and bad habitat.
- Science isn't clear on what is good or bad habitat; Joel's research is based on the radio-collaring of just two animals; many more research needs
- Fishers probably should receive extra attention on IPNF –but small clearcuts and some other strategies conflict with elk security, etc. May make sense to expand analysis area for better context

Speaker #5: Laura Wolf, Idaho Dept of Fish & Game – Elk, Whitetail Deer, Wolves, Bears

Elk

- Summer range habitat very important; BC is good summer habitat; any work done in area will help improve that habitat
- BC is in unit 3 for calf/cows (calves:100 cows); good ratios
- Laura's hypothesis: Compared to unit 4, where there's very little harvest in recent decades and fewer openings, the elk habitat is better in unit 3 where there has been logging

Don't need to necessarily manage for whitetail deer because of large population

Wolves

- In N. Idaho – good elk habitat is good wolf habitat
- Summer habitat – suggests leaving buffer of trees around wet areas

Black bears

- Very huckleberry dependent for health

- Increasing bear habitat means enhancing huckleberry production (allow fires to burn, prescribed burns, variety of aged cuts...)

Other considerations:

- Fewer entries better
- Green tree retention important
- New forest plan rates areas of the IPNF as areas to reduce road densities to benefit elk; BC is not considered high priority for road density reduction due to proximity to populations and recreation

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