

Panhandle Forest Collaborative
March 20, 2014 meeting

Present: Glen Bailey, Phil Hough, Laura Wolf, Liz Johnson-Gebhardt, Mike Sapp (for Bob Boeh), Mike Petersen, Bard Smith, Paul Sieracki

Forest Service: Chad Hudson, Jason Jerman, Val Goodnow, Barbara Hansen, Ryan Foote, Clint Scott, Ana Cerro-Timpone, Will Young, Sarah Jerome

Facilitator: Karen DiBari

Minutes approved for February 12, 2014

Chad Hudson reviewed the Bottom Canyon project purpose and need statement.

1. Establish and maintain resilient stand structure and species composition; existing condition is that the area is missing the older, larger component; desired condition is to increase white pine and early seral species, reduce grand fir.
2. Improve water quality and habitat: desired condition reduced sediment, TMDL for sediment, reduce road crossings,
3. Provide forest products

Discussion:

- How do we know what was here? White pine dominated the landscape. 1910 fire reduced white pine, and as it was regenerating, blister rust came in and impacted ability for it to recover. Fire suppression also increased shade tolerant species. White pine requires more sun and openings in order to successfully regenerate.
- Thinning of grand fir and doug fir doesn't help white pine recover. The stand "falls apart".
- Project area – have shade-loving species like grand fir, hemlock and Douglas fir that are in a cycle where the shade continues and without a major disturbance, there isn't likely to be a change in species. Little bits of larch and white pine sprinkled through. 94-95% warm moist grand fir. Very little dry. Great regeneration rates in area.
- White pine is a desirable species due to its ecological value.
- Once brush takes over a site, very hard for reseeding to happen. Vegetative conditions are pretty much grand fir and hemlock.
- **ACTION: Chad will send Karen Art Zack's presentation on white pine to share with the group.**

Discussion of time frame

- How will treatments play out over next 100-200 years? Will take time to develop old characteristics. Also need to plan for future events like windstorms, etc.
- What is the intention for long-term actions or lack of actions?
- What is the vehicle for long-term action? Is it more than the 5YAP or the Forest Plan?

- Jason: operational prescriptions (system that is used that includes maintenance, intervening treatments over time with at least one or two steps beyond initial treatment). Iterative process over time. NEPA analysis informs what goes into the operations framework based on desired conditions.
- Science behind root rot is still developing. Learning as we go.
- Should we turn this project into a large-scale experiment? Try out different approaches in different units? Not the intention of this project.
 - Experimental forests offer good lessons.
 - Lots of variables with regard to white pine; there have not been clear patterns that have emerged in science.
- Likely that pre-commercial thinning will be needed in 30-40 years. Pruning of white pine has been shown to help resist blister rust. Infection rates in white pine are highly variable.
- Desired conditions:
 - Purpose and need, Forest Plan are references
 - Priority places: easier to operate with equipment, brushy areas
 - Support landscape resiliency as well as species resiliency (patchiness, mosaic)
 - Can't control fires so it's almost not worth trying
- Stewardship contract approach (10-year) – committee has discussed

GIS Review and Discussion of Treatment Units

Paul Sieracki showed the GIS layers on the project area.

- Units that NW Mgmt picked for haul routes are in red
- Roads – many are un-driveable
- Units overlay with old growth in some cases (Revised Forest Plan – in order to go into old growth, 1) must leave stand in old growth condition and 2) purpose and need must be to increase resiliency of old growth)
 - Adjustments have been made to the old growth layer – some stands previously allocated were removed and others added; 500 acre net gain in old growth acres
 - Areas removed from old growth layer with recent assessment need to be field tested to verify condition.
 - None of these old growth areas are dry; all have root rot
 - Reasons for going into old growth would be for restoration outcomes, not timber production;
 - South side of project – north of Lone Cabin Creek – old growth overlaps with treatment areas
 - Clean up on stand boundaries needs to be done because there are areas of OG not included (visible on google earth).
 - Right now 14% of the 11,000 acres is old growth; Jason could do an analysis to forecast old growth conditions in a future scenario (ballpark)

- Yarding methods – expect operators to follow FS requirements for cable vs. skyline (this will impact the way skips/gaps/islands are left on the landscape; cable logging would leave strips up and down slopes); can be more creative with a tractor but higher soil compaction
- Northern part of project was removed from consideration due to road needs; perhaps it could be helicopter logged? Chad – unlikely to be a viable option due to economics.
- SE Corner: further data will be collected this summer through common stand exams. NW Management will take another look.
- **CONSENSUS: Remove from consideration the areas that are now old growth that overlap with treatment areas.**
- **NEXT STEPS: Take another look at areas that are no longer old growth for treatment consideration. In areas removed from OG where there are only two survey plots, several members are not supportive until there's more ground-truthing of old growth condition. Request NW Management to look again at areas after the most recent stand exam that might be eligible for treatment.**

Treatment Considerations and Design

- ISSUES:
 - Opening size and shape
 - Bring in scientists' expertise to help design treatments
 - Cable vs. skyline (slopes >35%) logging based on steepness
- Thinning unlikely to work because it won't help with white pine restoration – leaves hemlock, grand fir, etc. that would exacerbate root rot. Wouldn't help meet the purpose and need.
- Objective to increase seed-sap size class. Where to focus? Some of large and some of medium size class. Have to keep creating seed-sap because it is transient on the landscape so it is a maintenance issue. Perhaps select a mix of medium and large size class in order to convert to seed-sap.
- Process for determining treatment units
 - Where are locations that natural openings are most likely to occur? Those could be the units in which there is regeneration harvest. Mike Petersen has a paper written by Derek Churchill that may be able to help with recommendations.
 - Interest in a variety of opening sizes. Mosaic is left on the landscape scale.
 - Maybe already some agreement documented for PFC in the forest plan letter and Forest Projects Cmte meeting notes.
 - Jason Jermain: look at landscape terrain, low points are moist and are likely to be refugia in a map. Then look at what's in between and you can identify skips and then adjust as needed.

Fisher Habitat

- If an area is non-old growth but fisher habitat, what are impacts of logging? Downed structural features, canopy height, etc.
- Important to think about long high quality areas -term habitat needs – for example, if stands are falling apart, then there won't be good wildlife habitat vs. larch/white pine/etc.
- Schwarz study: fisher prefer larger tree diameters
- Joel's recommendation – have only 5% of area in seed sap in complex
- Process: identify what is high and lower quality fisher habitat. Consider having smaller opening sizes in high-quality habitat.
- A lot of fisher habitat – old and medium forest. Maybe we treat more in medium aged/size forest in order to favor fisher.
- Also will be excluding riparian habitat from treatment.
- What is the sustainability of habitat over the long term if the stands are crashing? What are risks of treating vs. not treating?

Raptors

- Suitable goshawk nesting habitat (gaps can mean missing information, not a lack of habitat)
 - Can habitat be ranked for viability of nests?

Summary of potential drivers affecting treatment design

- Slope
- Aspect
- Fisher (larger diameter trees, edge)
- GRAIP – watershed considerations
- Roads
- Raptors

What will the PFC's recommended alternative look like?

Forest Service is open to the format; by this spring, need to have enough information to direct resource specialists this summer

- Brief description of how the proposal was developed, process
- Purpose and need
- Key topics: restoration, old growth, trail systems, silviculture, wildlife
- Map
- Treatment units, roads

- Narrative with treatment descriptions
- If there are stands that there are questions around: set criteria about what would keep it in or out of consideration for treatment (based on field surveys; this needs to be specific and it's not a guarantee that the data will be collected)
- Could also include stand tending in areas that weren't replanted.
- Monitoring

There will be another opportunity to modify the alternative after scoping. Data collection completed in August. Scoping is scheduled for mid-September. Alternative development and writing scheduled for winter months.

Chad Hudson has not yet decided how to handle it if there are two alternatives. Would be difficult to scope two alternatives - most likely will scope one. Much of data collection was completed last summer so hopefully the FS will be able to stick with timeline.

Roads

Considerations for reviewing roads:

- Sediment sources
- Motorized recreation
- Location near old growth
- Burnt Cabin Creek – reclamation
- What roads are needed to address treatment units
- Eliminate core travel routes/arteries and timber management from consideration – ask Tom Crimmins

ACTION: Committee will do pre-work – review map of roads, PDF and table. People will come with their concerns/priorities in order to move the discussion forward on 3/26 and 3/27

Has the FS determined if the project area meets elk security? Too many roads in area. Under new forest plan, have goal to increase elk management subunits – this area is considered low priority because it's close to higher quality habitat. This is more heavy recreation use. Area is open to snowmobiling.

Next meeting is 3/26 at the Fernan District Office from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.