**Cragin Watershed Protection Project (CWPP)-1st Stakeholder Meeting**

**Wednesday September 9th, 10AM-1PM**

**Blue Ridge Community Church: 856 Coconino Loop**

**Welcome**

National Forest Foundation will be leading this short-term collaborative effort in advance of Forest Service planning and implementation.

**Participants**

See Appendix A.

**Introduction to CWPP**

***Marcus Selig- National Forest Foundation (NFF), Charlie Ester- Salt River Project (SRP), Buzz Walker (Town of Payson), John McGlothlen - Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), Scott Russell - Coconino National Forest (COF)***

* ***Context, history, roles and partnerships –***
	+ NFF: Forest condition poses a threat to watersheds, discussions began among partners on how can we protect the watershed, 2 years ago we formal discussions initiated about what could be done, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) came out of this between NFF, BOR, SRP, COF, Town of Payson. NFF’s role in this project is promoting collaboration and financial disbursement.
	+ SRP: Operates and maintains the Cragin Reservoir and needs to address water rights and distribution concerns – give Payson a sustainable water supply. In the threat of catastrophic wildfire, fuels treatment (triage before round 2 of 4FRI) is needed.
	+ Town of Payson: We are the “Gateway to the Rim,” we are heavily tied to the watershed and the Cragin area for 3 reasons:
		- We depend on tourism
		- We recreate on the forest
		- We depend on the water from the reservoir
* BOR: Western Watershed Enhancement Project engagement – watersheds will have greater challenges with global climate change, if we can make the watershed more resilient then the watershed will be able to absorb and maintain the water that does come. Healthy inflow of water to the reservoir is key.
* USFS: Partnership came about with the same interest, but different missions, creating momentum to get work done on our national forests. We have to work collaboratively in order to get meaningful work done on the forest, we need you all to talk to each other, not just to us, and we can move ahead with recommendations made by this partnership. Get more done, faster. Not about positions, but about interests. There is a real sense of urgency on this project, so we want to go fast, but we want to make sure that we are inclusive of interests and do it together.

**Why here, why now?**

**Polly Haessig and Jeff Thumm- Coconino National Forest**

* Purpose and Need and Existing Conditions **– See website**

**Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Process**

* CWPP is a project that is being planned under the HFRA authority. Good fit for HFRA due to the following:
	+ Municipal watershed supply; the entire project area and District is covered in the Blue Ridge-Mogollon Rim District Community Wildfire Protection Plan; project area is in WUI or outside the WUI in Condition Class 2 or 3 and Fire Regime I, II or III.
	+ Speed of implementation
	+ Actions that are not considered fuels reduction can be absorbed into 4FRI or under can be done in other NEPA (CEs or EAs) on the District
	+ Up-front collaboration
	+ Need to only analyze an Action and No-action alternative- NEPA efficiency
	+ Fuels reduction activities, not full restoration (focused and strategic treatments)
	+ Fuels reduction can restore large acreages in this project that have crown fire risk
	+ Projects outside of fuels treatments will be limited in scope
* NEPA timeline – **see website**
* Q&A
	+ Can we use the work/existing agreement done on 4FRI Phase 1?
		- Yes, we can where there is appropriate overlap with CWPP, such as following old growth guidance and protecting old and large trees. These aspects are important to HFRA as well as 4Fri.
	+ How do the agreements of how to treat MSO PACs influence this project?
		- USFWS has been actively engaged on CWPP to date on how to protect and treat MSO PACS within the CWPP area
	+ Do we need 2 years to complete an EA? Or should we be more aggressive?
		- Yes, this is a large project size on the District; there are a lot of complications due to T&E species and difficult terrain.
	+ Will this EA be independent of the existing 4FRI “green areas?” (see map on powerpoint presentation). These areas are within an existing task order.
		- The answer is yes. This project is independent and embedded.
	+ Will this be a more “shovel ready” project at the end of the planning (and EA versus the EIS of 4FRI)?
		- It will have to be staged for implementation, and there may be more than one contract prepared for implementation. In addition to layout and contract preparation processes, there will be pre-implementation archeological, wildlife and other surveys based on time and location of treatments, which should not delay the project.

**CWPP Collaborative Process**

**Andi Rogers (Southwest Decision Resources) and Ron Klawitter – (Salt River Project)**

* Stakeholder interview summary: **see website**
* Online survey summary: **see website**
* Collaborative process map: **see website**

**Topical Small Group Discussions:**

Based on stakeholder feedback (via interviews and online surveys) project partners facilitated small group discussions on topics of most interest. Small group discussions were guided using the questions below:

**Fire/Fuels**

1. ***Which areas would you be most concerned about uncharacteristic wildfire entering in to?***
	1. Homes and communities in local subdivisions
	2. Wildfire Urban Interface (WUI) boundary – 38 miles of WUI perimeter in the project area
	3. Protecting PACs, old growth and T&E habitat from unnaturally severe wildfire, but do not exclude low severity fire from these areas
		1. Treatment in PACs and adjacent to PACs
	4. Highly erosive areas
2. ***What are your concerns about smoke as it relates to:***
	1. Generally, the local community is accepting of smoke from prescribed and managed fires. They understand the trade-offs and are willing to deal with the smoke.
	2. Prescribed fire – a desire to accomplish more prescribed and managed fire, with hope to expand the amount of acres burned by burning in different seasons.
	3. Desire to reduce smoke from pile burning through the removal and utilization of biomass
	4. Concern that increased burning activities could cause air quality issues (i.e., exceedance of National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS))
3. ***Other issues***
	1. Need for proactive communication and education about smoke and fire from the USFS – work with media in the Phoenix area
	2. Coordinate treatments (mechanical and fire) with grazing permitees - mesh with grazing allotment management
	3. Desire to clean up slash quickly after treatments to improve grazing and forage; and reduce fire risk
		1. Could be accomplished by using whole tree skidding and biomass utilization
	4. As haul distance between project site and biomass facility increases, the need for subsidy may arise to accomplish biomass utilization.
		1. Novo Power may be able to haul from as far as the Happy Jack area without subsidy
		2. Paving FR300 (Rim Rd) would increase haul efficiency and may negate the need for a subsidy associated with biomass utilization at this project

**Vegetation**

1. ***To reduce wildfire risk, which areas are key to treat using mechanized equipment? How do we strategize treatment placement?***
	1. Upwind of spotted owl PACs, the southwest side of any priority resource
	2. On flatter ground above canyon rims
	3. Consider lightning strike density over time in prioritizing timing and location
	4. Ponderosa Pine predominant areas—Mixed Conifer treatments are more complicated and will require more detailed analysis and treatment planning
	5. Identify areas profitable for industry, with proximity to existing processing centers, without causing negative effects on priority resources/species
		1. Coordinate with A – S NF, Kaibab NF, and Flagstaff District for current contracts to maximize timber processing options
	6. Ridgetop roads for priority of mechanical treatment to minimize the cost and disturbance caused by new road construction
	7. For soil stability – treatable areas which will be least disturbed by machinery to minimize erosion/sedimentation
	8. Engage stakeholders throughout the decision process
2. ***What types of treatments in the project area would be effective in meeting objectives?***
	1. Hand thinning in strategic sensitive areas done by qualified groups such as AZ Elk Society volunteers
	2. Re-vegetation efforts post-treatment should be done with native species
	3. No mechanical thinning on slopes over 40%
	4. Build on 4FRI rules and exceptions and refine as necessary
		1. “clumpy groupy” idea
			1. Regeneration on downwind side of groups and openings
		2. Possibility of 16” tree cap, with clear exceptions
		3. 4FRI oak treatment approach
		4. Linear treatments perpendicular to wind direction
3. ***With a predominance of smaller trees in the project area, what are methods to effectively remove and utilize them?***
	1. Treatment pairing close task orders/timber sales and task orders/timber sales that are further from timber processing infrastructure hubs in Williams and eastern Arizona to average out the costs of hauling timber from forest to processing center.
		1. Include economic analysis with task order
	2. Forest Service timber staff needs to work closely with industry during placement of treatment to ensure it is economically viable
	3. This may be an opportunity to test out the model of payment of watershed services by downstream users
		1. Engaging Arizona Dept. of Water Resources
	4. We need a more strategic approach to dealing with biomass removal in the project area in an economically and physically feasible way.

**Wildlife/Fish/Water Resources**

1. ***What key wildlife and aquatic species/water resources need to be considered in project planning and implementation?***
	1. Threatened and endangered species and headwater draws
	2. Make sure not to value one specimen too much to the detriment of the project and forward momentum
	3. Buffers around riparian areas for water quality and quantity for Little Colorado spinedace – in key areas
	4. Restore structure to a more “groupy” forest type with grass in the interspaces –benefit watershed health for all species
2. ***What kind of treatments (or protective measures) would you like to see in these wildlife/fisheries/water resource areas?***
	1. Pre commercial thinning, ideally with the help of volunteers
		1. Potential funding opportunities with partners
	2. Whole tree skidding is an option
	3. Remove limb piles for skid landings and slash piles in the forest before burning
		1. Getting these products out of the forest and into industry
	4. Knowledge of which stands/areas will be profitable
		1. Utilization of new technology if available and applicable
3. ***What (if any) are your concerns about vegetation treatments and prescribed burning with respect to wildlife/fish/water resources?***
	1. Consideration of treatments above canyons and draws to prevent erosion and disturbance downstream
	2. Partner treatments above the watershed, in the upland areas, with meadow and/or spring restoration below
	3. Improve channels, riparian areas and meadows now or as soon as possible and not leave those areas to be “taken care of” by the next phase of 4FRI
	4. The redistribution of elk and other grazers out of the draws as a result of forest treatments, treatments may also increase areas of snow accumulation
	5. Revegetation efforts need to be done with native species
	6. Carefully planned prescription fire can be beneficial
	7. Steep slopes surrounding reservoir should be high priority for treatment

**Next Steps**

* Field meeting next month
	+ More than 50% indicated (by show of hands) that they would like to attend
	+ Recommendations: Look at the General Fire, dog hair thickets, headwater meadows
	+ FS will likely have a more detailed layout of proposed treatments, potentially polygons of treatment areas and locations
* Get conservation groups into the pre-NEPA process
	+ Wild Earth Guardians should be included/interviewed
* Early review of proposed action documents for stakeholders to provide input
* Get more detailed info, polygons, as to where things are headed to provide more meaningful feedback. Forest Service should provide stakeholders with better idea of where they think treatments may be appropriate given the existing conditions of the project area.
* The goal of this stakeholder group is to provide input, feedback, information and concerns (not a stakeholder document) to the FS as they are developing the PA/EA
* Next stakeholder meeting (after the field meeting) will at the developing PA and getting feedback on that and moving forward quickly.
* Notes to be emailed out and on the website within the next few weeks

**Appendix A. Participant List**

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