

Grant County Collaborative (Little Canyon Mountain Group)

Tour Sept. 11, 2006 Notes Rough Draft

Grant County Forest Restoration Collaborative

Field Tour Summary of Discussion

September 11, 2006

The following document summarizes the discussions, issues, and ideas that emerged during a one-day field tour held in Grant County, Oregon on Monday, September 11, 2006. Several specific follow-up action items were agreed to at the end of the meeting; they are listed below. If you have any additional ideas or recommendations please submit them when you respond to these action items. Thanks!

ACTION ITEMS

The group decided to hold a second field tour in mid-October to discuss possible projects to work through the collaborative process. To prepare for this, the following next steps were defined:

- A subcommittee was identified to work with the Forest Service on selecting a list of possible projects for the group to visit on the next tour. The subcommittee has representation from each interest group, and includes: Jeff Fields, Walt Gentis, Royce Dotson, Matt Carter and Dennis Reynolds.
- Participants will provide guidance to the subcommittee on types of projects to select. Participants should send this information to Karen Steer by September 20.
- Participants will develop a list of information they would like to have on-hand (or beforehand) at the next tour. They should send this request to Karen Steer by September 20.
- A date for the field tour was not determined. Participants will send Karen S their black-out dates by September 20. Right now, the week of Oct 16 (with preference on the 17 or 19) looks most feasible.

Background

A diverse group of community leaders and members, government officials, businesses, and representatives from the timber and environmental community have been meeting regularly over the course of the past few months at the Outpost in John Day to discuss opportunities for achieving priority ecological and community goals in the region. This group has been convened by Mike Browning of Grant County and facilitated by Sustainable Northwest, a nonprofit organization based in Portland. As part of this collaborative process, a one-day field trip was scheduled as a way to discuss some of the issues that have been raised to date. The objectives of the field tour were:

- to gain a better understanding of the forest condition and needs
- to learn about the different perspectives, concerns, opportunities, and areas of general agreement surrounding forest restoration and community economic development
- to strengthen relations and promote productive dialogue among participants
- to help in selecting possible projects to work on as a collaborative group.

Field Tour participants

(see attached list for participant affiliations as well as list of all individuals invited to the tour)

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Jeff Fields	James Johnston	Scott Myers	Dennis Reynolds
Emily Platt	Lisa Doolittle	Russ Lane	Dan Bishop
Art Andrews	Royce Dotson	Matt Carter	Glen Johnston
Karen Coulter	Susan Jane Brown	Boyd Britton	Karen Steer
Mike Browning	Diane Browning	Mark Webb	Walt Gentis
Charlie Ororke	Dave Traylor	Steve Cossette	Stan Benes
Patty Hammett	Bill Toop	Gregg Jackson	Asante Riverwind
Rick Brown	David Johns	Richard Corshene	Tim Lillibo

Agenda and key issues

(see attached agenda for complete itinerary)

Stop 1: Swick Old Growth

Visit to old growth stand to discuss management of the area given the need to maintain old growth, the high density of ladder fuels, limited snags, and implications of active restoration that involves old growth. Key issues raised:

- Lots of ladder fuels that need thinning and related safety concerns
- Need to create more snags and the possibility of topping trees in order to maintain viable snags while providing some economic value from utilization of the top.
- Loss of old growth due to fires
- Importance of re-growth to maintain stand integrity
- Economic viability of logging old growth
- Economics need to be part of the discussion when designing forest restoration treatments; projects need to be economically viable

There was general agreement around the need to treat the high density of ladder fuels, and that the Malheur National Forest is overstocked.

Stop 2: Private land adjoining public in the Flagtail Fire Area

This stop focused on the difference in fire behavior when reaching private, maintained land. The different forest types were discussed, as well as the role and effects of fire on the forests. Comments included:

- Fuel loads were more severe on public land and burned more severely
- Bug infestations on public lands threaten private land. Infestation caused from fire and/or overstocking of trees
- Erosion into streams is a concern
- It is important to distinguish between different fire regimes. The higher elevation stands had stand-replacing fires every 100-300 years, while the lower elevations have less severe fires more frequently
- The definition of a WUI needs to be clarified. The congressional intent had a population designation, while the Grant County CWPP defines the WUI in areas with smaller population centers but still adjoining private land. There is some concern regarding this use of the WUI designation.

There was general agreement around the importance of prioritizing where fuels reduction projects are implemented, and there are many opportunities in the lower-elevation areas. We should not, however, lose site of the need to focus on priority areas and be strategic in our work.

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Estimates of how many acres might need thinning in the lower elevation ponderosa pine stands vary, but the acreage is substantial.

Stop 3: Antelope Valley

At this stop we viewed green stands near the Flagtail fire where mountain pine beetles are killing younger pine trees. Other comments included:

- Residual green trees can be lost due to insect infestation after a fire
- It is important to manage for appropriate amount of snag
- The Forest Service expressed their frustration regarding funding for prescribed burning, and for fuels reduction: these “pots” of money are separate, with separate targets that must be met each year. This situation often does not allow the Forest Service to use mechanical treatment before prescribed fire, which can have adverse ecological effects.
- Post-fire salvage can divert staff and resources that might better be focused on thinning green stands

Stop 4: Pete Timber Sale

We were able to see the land condition that resulted from a mechanical thinning and fuel reduction accomplished by logging in units of the Pete Timber Sale (2000). This was considered a success for the Forest Service and the logger who completed the project.

The comments about this area were generally positive, and included:

- The right amount of thinning was accomplished, although some felt that more of the larger trees could have been left
- There could have been a little more ‘clumps’ left; we need to emulate the natural forest, do some variable density thinning, etc.
- This sale was done economically, with trees removed having 10-11 inch dbh

Stop 5: Wickiup Camp Ground on Canyon Creek

A general explanation of the Canyon Creek WUI (Wildland Urban Interface) was given. This was a project entered into with the Forest Service and the County. There were diverging viewpoints on this project: Commissioner Britton stated that they were very proud of working with the Forest on this project and were expecting positive results upon implementation. On the other side, the Sierra Club and ONRC may file objections on this project because they feel their input was not utilized in project development. While the specifics of the project (both praise and critique) were not addressed, there was general agreement that we look at this as a learning opportunity:

- There were comments that the collaborative group does not have to agree with every project that the Forest Service designs and implements. However, it was pointed out that one of the benefits of the collaborative process is that it provides a forum for discussing issues that might arise, voicing concern, and learning from one another – regardless of the level of involvement of the group on the specific project. *Participants agreed to be open and transparent in their perspectives, and encouraged other participants to engage in dialogue throughout the project planning process.*
- Some recommended that the projects that the collaborative group agrees to work on together should fall within the comfort levels of the group. While participants

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maintain the right to appeal projects, by working out key concerns and issues up-front, the hope is that projects will be planned that all can agree on.

Next Steps

1. Priority projects for the collaborative group

Comments included:

- There is a lot of work to do in areas that everyone can agree on: thinning of ladder fuels in green, lower elevation and second growth ponderosa pine stands
- We need to be strategic about where we work
- Look not just at fuels reduction but at other restoration needs, for example in the riparian zone
- Stewardship contracting can be a useful tool for meeting ecological, community and economic objectives
- Salvage Logging: Some participants viewed this as a separate discussion to have at a later date and not a viable collaborative project; others felt it should be on the table. Members of the collaborative should be involved in planning for postfire management of the Shake Table complex.
- Old Growth: Some participants felt that we should pick a project that deals with the risks to old growth (as seen in a previous stop) and that old growth issues should be addressed regardless of controversy. There was concern that we are losing old growth at a rapid rate and this needs to be addressed. Others were not in agreement about selecting a project that involved thinning in old growth, because there may be a “temptation” to log larger trees in order to make the project economical.
- Roadless areas: not a good idea to work on such projects collaboratively
- We should not focus on a project that needs to have big trees pay for the restoration work
- Project should involve monitoring

Specific areas mentioned:

- Dixie Creek (includes old growth)
- Something similar to Pete Unit (thinning dense 2nd growth ponderosa pine)
- Shaketable Fire area (includes salvage)
- WUI near Seneca
- Highway 26

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For more information

Please contact Sustainable Northwest (Karen Steer or Maia Enzer, 503-221-6911 ext. 109 and ext. 111 respectively, ksteer@sustainablenorthwest.org; menzer@sustainablenorthwest.org) or Mike Browning (541-542-2484) for more information about this tour, or to receive minutes from previous meetings.