

Best Practice: The Value of A Simple Field Exercise

Summary

Collaborators gained knowledge and understanding of a forest restoration project and of each other's perspectives through a hands-on activity during a field trip

Keys to Success

Facilitation in the field, hands-on activity, review of the basics to develop common technical understanding

"It's always good to have a conversation around a campfire, rather than a court room."

*—Maret Pajutee, Ecologist,
Deschutes National Forest*

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Many collaborative groups have learned through experience that sitting in a room and talking for hours can sometimes lead to frustration. Field trips are a common strategy for getting collaborators out to look together at the same landscape. One group has taken a creative approach to make the most of their time in the field.

In the late fall of 2007, a group of environmentalists, timber industry representatives, local residents, and the Forest Service visited the 1,200-acre Glaze Forest Restoration Project (also called the Black Butte Project) near Sisters, Oregon. They started by looking closely at a ½ acre-sized area of old growth, counting the remaining pre-settlement trees, stumps and stump-wells (depressions in the ground showing where an old tree was present in the recent past). Each person was instructed to envision what the forest looked like before fire suppression, logging, roads and grazing, and to pay specific attention to the structure, tree density and tree spacing.

The group then went back through the same patch of forest, and counted all of the trees to compare the past (pre-settlement, large trees) to present. On average, people counted 35-45 old trees per acre, and 300-350 total trees on the same acre (this included many small trees that have grown in since fire suppression).

Then, for the third part of the exercise, each person flagged which trees they would leave standing in an adjacent second growth stand if they were making the decisions on which trees would be thinned. The exercise was successful in spurring discussion, increasing understanding of differing perspectives, and providing information about how decisions regarding which trees to cut relate to the overall vision of restoring a forest mosaic.

When planning a field trip for your collaboration, think about how to jumpstart sharing and learning among participants through a hands-on activity.

Benefits

- When everyone is looking at the same thing, sharing and learning from others offering different perspectives often increases.
- Marking trees provided a tangible way for participants to link their varying approaches to achieving a common vision.
- Moving from abstract discussions to being very specific can expose assumptions and clear up misunderstandings.

Links

Glaze Forest Restoration Project

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/centraloregon/projects/units/sisters/glaze/index.shtml>

Oregon Public Radio 10/4/2007 story

<http://news.opb.org/article/black-butte-forest-project-serves-wildfire-model/> 6/08

Field trip helps forge trust among diverse interests

By Kate Ramsayer / *The Bulletin*

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BLACK BUTTE RANCH — The 20 or so people — from the U.S. Forest Service, timber industry, conservation groups and some who just live nearby — stood in the ponderosa pine forest next to Black Butte Ranch.

Armed with 11 different colors and patterns of marking tape, they set out with a goal — to flag which trees they would save, with the other ones left to be cut, if they were making the decisions.

“I can only mark six trees?” asked Marilyn Miller with the Sierra Club, who was walking around with white tape in an area that would be thinned sparser than other sections. “Six just isn’t enough.”

But she marked the biggest ones she could find, and then moved to an area where more trees would be left standing. There, she used her tape to mark ones that might make a good wildlife habitat cluster.

During the daylong field trip to the 1,200-acre Glaze Forest Restoration Project site Thursday, participants got a glimpse of the current state of the forest, what it could look like in the future and how project organizers are planning to get it to that point.



Anthony Dimaano / *The Bulletin*

Marilyn Miller of the Sierra Club marks a tree during an exercise demonstrating how the Forest Service chooses which trees to cut, and which to leave, near Black Butte Ranch.



One objective point of the Glaze restoration project is to thin trees and do other management treatments to generate new old-growth forests, possibly creating an example for other areas to follow in the process, said Maret Pajutee, district ecologist for the Sisters Ranger District.

But the goal for the day was to have people see how decisions are made about which trees to cut, learn from each other and share ideas, and perhaps build trust between the different groups and the Forest Service, she said.

And putting in time on the ground with different groups at the beginning of the process, she said, could help avoid time-consuming appeals and lawsuits at the end.

The Glaze restoration project was actually first pitched to the Sisters Ranger District by Cal Mukumoto, manager of Warm Springs Biomass, on the timber industry side, and Tim Lillebo, with the conservation group Oregon Wild. While the district originally had other priorities, once Mukumoto and Lillebo built some community support for the project and raised money, the agency got on board. Now, a draft environmental assessment of the project is expected early next year.

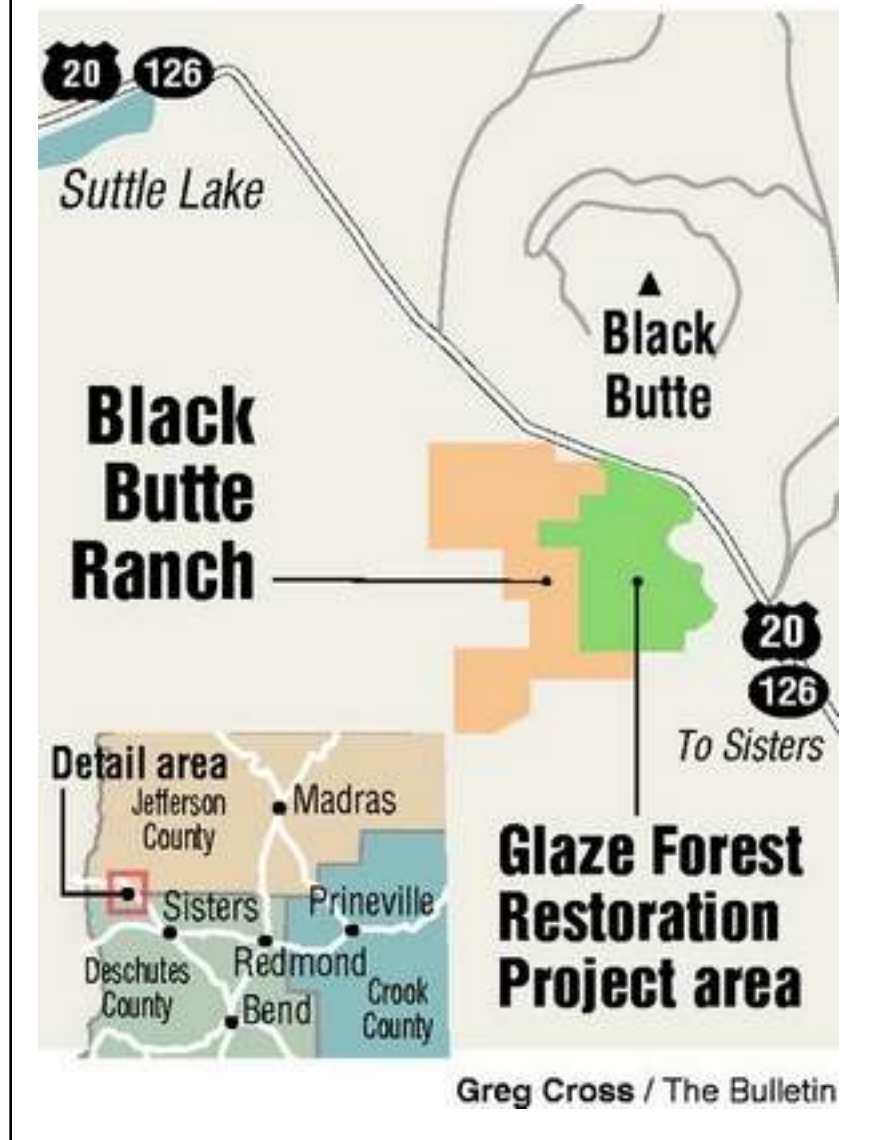
“That has never really happened to us before,” said Pajutee. “It’s really an exciting and unique thing that’s happened here.”

With some work that the Forest Service does, the agency has trust from the public, said Bill Anthony, Sisters District ranger. In other areas, however, like salvaging fire-killed trees, there’s a very low level of trust.

But the hope for projects like this, he said, is to move that trust and understanding along.

Anthony Dimaano / The Bulletin

Hopefully, we’ll have people say, ‘I can live with that,’ Oregon Wild’s Tim Lillebo says of the project.



“What’s unique about this project is the partnership ... with the restoration not only being the outcome, but working together, building trust, working through (issues) constructively instead of with litigation,” said Bill Anthony, Sisters District ranger.

The district wants to avoid situations like with the Metolius Basin forest management plan, where some groups collaborated with the agency, but an appeal was still filed against the project.

“By being open, upfront, by being out on the ground with the different interests, that’s how I think this is going to be a success,” Lillebo said. But there will still be concerns, he said, and times when people don’t agree about whether a tree should be cut.

“The goal was to have an example as a potential model,” he said. “Hopefully, we’ll have people say, ‘I can live with that.’”

But the overall goal, he said, is to generate old growth. Lillebo said he used to be totally against all cutting, a response to earlier Forest Service policies of cutting large areas of forests and growing them back just to cut them again as a sort of tree farm.

“People don’t trust what’s happened in the past, when the whole last 40, 50 years has mostly been cutting the big trees down,” he said.

But now, he said, the science is indicating that some forests are so different from their natural state that they need to be managed by people.

“Uh-oh, maybe we were wrong,” he said. “In a lot of cases, you can’t just leave it alone. Let’s protect the big trees, and come up with a system where you grow back this old growth.”

On Thursday, forestry consultant Darin Stringer explained the strategy that the Forest Service is considering to treat the Glaze project area, parts of which edge right up to houses at Black Butte Ranch.

The idea is to create a mosaic across the landscape, of clumps of trees that are of a specific age or size. While that may require taking out a lot of small trees in areas that already have old growth, it will also mean taking some of the medium-sized, commercial-value trees out of stands to let the remaining trees grow bigger.

To show people how this might be done on the ground, the project organizers hosted the tree-tagging experiment. The results won’t actually be used, but it was a way to let people see what goes into the process, Pajutee said.

While Miller was considering which trees to mark, Scott Melcher of Melcher Logging was explaining to novices how to mark trees.

“You have to look for a lot of things — health, lack of defects,” he said. “If you take this one down, it’ll give this one a better chance.”

Tim Clasen, who lives a few miles south of the area, had come to learn about the Glaze restoration project. He was using his yellow-and-black-striped tape to mark groups of trees, and looking for a good spot to put a clearing that would allow one tree to grow unhindered.

“I really like the idea that they’re trying to coordinate different groups,” he said.

John Morgan, resource manager with Ochoco Lumber Co., said he was tagging the trees with the healthiest, sharpest pointed crowns — the ones that have a better chance of growing big, which adds to the health of the forest but also provides good timber down the road.

If this project is done correctly, it could be a model for future projects, said Miller, who added that she has high hopes that it will be done correctly. She said she had lots of reservations when Lillebo first told her of it, and still has some concerns about things like riparian areas and cutting too much in certain areas.

But if it works, the Glaze restoration project would be something that she could hold up as an example of acceptable ways to do forest management, she said.

“I think it’s kind of exciting,” Miller said, “because you wouldn’t see this five years ago, the Sierra Club and the Forest Service in the forest marking trees.”

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