Our Mission

“Blue Mountains Forest Partners is a diverse group of stakeholders who work together to create and implement a shared vision to improve the resilience and well-being of forests and communities in the Blue Mountains.”

Full Group Meeting Agenda

Meeting Overview:

- Date of Meeting: October 15, 2015
- Time: 4 - 7 pm
- Location: Grant County Airport Conference Room
- Facilitator: Mark Webb
- Minutes Scribe: James Johnston

CALL TO ORDER, INTRODUCTIONS, APPROVAL OF MAY MINUTES (ALL)

Ops Update: Ops committee got an update on CFLRP Forest Vegetation and Fuels (FVF) work from James J. Had a conversation with Ayn Shlisky and Mike Brown with Blue Mountains Team. Discussed salvage research proposals. BMFP is doing well financially and the Ops Committee discussed future funding opportunities.

Forest Service updates (Amanda Lindsay): Big Mosquito decision signed. Draft Magone EIS will be out in December. Working through North Finger Range Allotment objection. Working on Starr Aspen comments. Camp Lick is on hold. Ragged Ruby also is being pushed back. We need to reschedule field trips to these areas that were canceled due to the Canyon Complex Fires. Mark W., Zach W. and others: We may rescheduled for November or early next year.

Summitt Fire field trip report (Mark and Trent): Large fire that burned in 1996. Extensively salvaged logged. We got a good sense of what it looked like 15-20 years post-salvage. Forest Service shared research results from studies of salvage and un-salvaged areas. Ed Clark and Amanda shared their vision for salvage that would restore desirable successional dynamics in burned forests. We talked about snag dynamics over time. There were lots of snags, more than a lot of folks might have expected. A large portion of snags that remain are larch. James J., Eric. W., Dave H. and others: Whether salvage was “heavy” or there were “lots” of snags remaining is a subjective judgment. We saw little standing or down wood in some areas. The Forest Service salvaged approximately a third of the area and left quite a few areas untreated. We saw a lot of variability in forest regeneration and dead wood.
• **More Forest Service updates (Dave H.):** Working on BAER restoration. Got most of the funding that was requested. Testing aerial applications of slope stabilizing material. Got approval for some straw applications. Huge amount of straw waiting for application. Working with ODOT to replace Hwy. 395 culverts, which will close the highway from approximately November 4-November 14. Presentation at the High School tonight to discuss efforts to mitigate flood risk. Lori Stokes and her team have been working hard on salvage options. Project file will be completed tomorrow. Using an emergency consultation process with USFWS. Consultation will be completed within a week and a task order for roadside salvage issued in early November. Waiting to hear from BMFP how we want to proceed with salvage research.

• **Ayn Shlisky and Mike Brown discuss the Blues Restoration Team’s strategy and upcoming proposed action for the Malheur National Forest.** Mike Brown (Blue Mountains team physical scientist): Blue Mountains Forest Resiliency Project is a work in progress. Don’t have a proposed action and are here to share information and get input from BMFP. Team is tasked with producing an analysis product. The decision will be made by Steve Beverlin, MNF Supervisor.

Background: In 2012 the eastside restoration strategy prioritized Blue Mountains, in 2013 a dedicated team with large geographic scope and narrow focus on planning was established, in 2013, three projects were selected (Lower Joseph, Strategic Fuels Breaks, and Dry Forest Restoration). Working on Dry Forest Restoration project now. Purpose is to conserve and restore forest resiliency across four Blue Mountains national forests with dry forests and fire management as highest priorities. Other goals related to socio-economic resiliency, tribal and cultural resources, social values, and testing new planning procedures to increase pace and scale of restoration. Resiliency is defined as providing a range of geophysical and biophysical features.

Pam H.: Should perhaps also include traditional definition of resiliency—the ability of systems to recover from disturbance. Mike and Ayn: Definitions will be refined.

Strong need for action on the Malheur. Current pace and scale of restoration is not adequate to meet need. Need to create more late seral open forest structure. There are many tools appropriate to meet need, including stand improvement (thinning small diameter material), prescribed fire, thinning, mastication, pile and burn, and passive management (let trees grow).

Larry B.: How does sustainable logging fit into the picture? Mike: We will satisfy legal requirements. Today addressing ecological context. Ayn: Sustained yield requirement set forth in Forest Plan and we are implementing the Forest Plan. Larry: Sustained yield of wood products is a legal requirement that can’t be ignored. Ayn: We will analyze biomass produced by actions to restore forest resilience. King W.: Need to explicitly address logging as a tool. Ayn and Mike: Trying to get away from the “hows” of the treatment (commercial or non-commercial) and focus on tools that achieve goals. Eric W.: You said you were short of early seral habitat, so why isn’t regeneration being considered? Mike: We will be considering early seral habitat in the analysis. Have not gotten far enough to suggest where it
is most appropriate on the landscape. It’s a complicated issue because we don’t have the social license to use regeneration harvests. Eric: There is social license to do some regeneration in some collaboratives. Mike: We won’t exclude the possibility. Decision is Steve Beverlin’s. Brooks S.: Cannot lose sight of sustained yield legal mandates. Mike: We’re in preliminary stages of planning and don’t currently have information about timber production, but it will come out in the analysis. Dave H.: Frustrated about the vagueness of a proposal that doesn’t explicitly address the BMFP’s concerns, which include socio-economic considerations. Mike: Don’t currently have the information, but it will be included in the analysis. Zach W.: Uncomfortable that economic impacts and timber production is not explicitly a goal of the planning. Mike: We don’t want to create expectations that we can’t deliver on. Need to stay open-minded about the analysis. Treatment of small trees is the biggest need. We understand the need to disclose economic impacts of actions. King W.: Commercial utilization of product isn’t included as one of the appropriate tools. Mike: We can change language to reflect our intention to analyze commercial thinning. Ayn: A lot of passion and interest around this issue. Let’s get together and solve it. We are looking to the collaboratives to help us work through it. Mark W: If you’re talking about a half million acres, it’s important to describe the commercial component, because if you don’t describe it, we don’t have certainty about providing products to the mill and so the action may not fit within BMFP’s interests. Ayn: Upper Joseph was 54,000 acres of forest, volume produced was 5-10 million board feet of timber. Represented a significant increase in total volume produced by the Wallowa-Whitman. Mark W.: Lower Joseph is a productive forest. It’s possible that dry forest restoration won’t produce equivalent volume. To be relevant to the BMFP, we probably need a sense of what sort of products will be produced. Ayn: You just had a bad fire year, and managing fire risk is another important consideration. We need to keep a broad focus. Need includes addressing desired fire dynamics.

Mike: Dry Forest Resilience Project presents many unique opportunities. First, we can leverage funds from State of Oregon. Second, can plan at a very broad scale that allows us to put landscape in context. Can optimize forest structure and habitat distribution. Provides us great flexibility in designing treatments to optimize ecological impacts. Assessment begins with broad scale assessment including departure analysis, fire transmission and exposure analysis, and future climate analysis. Map of focus areas: Dry forest areas that may be a priority for treatment:
An example of how stands will be delineated for purposes of dry forest resilience treatments:

[Image of a map showing delineated areas]

We will minimize focus to dry forests. Eric W.: How does minimizing treatments accomplish fire risk reduction goals? Mike: We would scale treatments appropriately, including potentially outside of dry forests if necessary. We’ll coordinate with district specialists and the collaborative. Nathan P.: This would be an analysis, this is not necessarily dictating what you want to do.

James J.: What if there’s no difference between moist and dry forests as far as fire pattern? Mike: Science suggests dry forests are more departed. Ayn: More social license for operations in dry forests. Trent S.: Dry forests ranges from dry pine to dry grand fir, which may be different terminology than used by the collaborative when it comes to “dry forests.”

Mike: Using physiography to inform analysis of appropriate treatments. Physiography (e.g., plateau vs. canyon) often controls fire behavior and may be useful for planning treatments. Riparian areas and north facing slopes may be refugias. Linear features may be where closed canopy forests can persist.

James J.: What if fire patterns in riparian areas and north facing forests are not decoupled from landscape scale fire. Mike: We are developing tools that can help us identify where that may or may not be true.

Mark W.: Team has access to a rich set of data and models. Pam H.: Excited to learn more about data and analytical tools.

Mike: A proposed action will be developed in Fall 2015, alternatives developed in winter 2015, DEIS in Spring/Summer 2016, Final EIS and ROD in Fall/Winter 2016. Happy to talk to folks in person, so please call or email him.
• **Ann Moote shares her Adaptive Management Phase I research and results.** Ann has considerable expertise and experience in helping collaborative groups develop adaptive management frameworks. Vernita Ediger initially contacted Ann about doing research for BMFP. We are particularly interested in how BMFP can help inform the NEPA process. Ann’s work addresses three questions: How can the Forest Service and BMFP better engage with one another to improve planning outcomes? What sorts of agreements are most useful? What information gaps, if filled, would improve NEPA planning? She conducted 19 interviews of different BMFP and FS personnel and developed recommendations based on interviews. She’s developed a number of recommendations that are found in a report (distributed to groups). She’s focusing today both on areas where interviews may have identified some disagreement, as well as some of the most important opportunities she’s identified.

What’s working well? Inviting scientists and using scientific information. Forest Service finds Zones of Agreement documents to be very useful. It would be helpful to develop new zones of agreement. Field trips are very helpful and useful.

Where is there room for improvement? There are communication gaps between pre-NEPA discussion and development of alternatives. There could be better communication between the BMFP and the FS in the development of draft NEPA documents. Should involve the BMFP in the “give and take” of internal FS NEPA planning. Any ideas for how to address this challenge? Eric W.: BMFP participation in ID team meetings may run afoul of FACA. Patrick S.: Other collaborative groups participate in ID teams. Larry A.: When the FS is getting into the nitty-gritty of planning, the fewer people you have involved, the faster it goes. Process could take a lot longer. If the collaborative group wanted to get involved in ID team planning, you would need to commit a lot of time. You can’t just pop in and pop out. Roje G.: Asking the FS to address why BMFP recommendations weren’t adopted would reduce frustrations. Trent S.: When we do ask why recommendations weren’t adopted, we get very general answers. We are hungry for the specifics about why the Forest Service made the decisions they made. Also, resource specialists may defer our questions to line officers, which contributes to the perception of a NEPA planning black box.

Ann: What else needs improvement? People are very happy with field trips, but her report contains a number of recommendations for improving field trips. There could be more done to evaluate and adjust projects based on field trips. BMFP interviews would like field trips to better capture the discussions that come out of the field trips so they can influence FS planning. Trent S.: Is it the case that comments don’t get captured as actual recommendations? Ann: Yes. Ann: FS interviews suggest that meetings to memorialize contract agreements may be helpful. Nathan P.: Can field trip comments get addressed within the record like comments on NEPA documents? Pam H.: We need to get stuff from field trips in writing so that the FS can consider them. Mark W.: Field trip notes do inform development of zones of agreement. Trent S.: SJ and he went through field trip notes and areas of consistent agreement were adopted as zones of agreement. James J.: Maybe we can bring bullet-point type recommendations/comments from the field trips back to the group and formalize them as recommendations to inform NEPA or future zones of agreement. Larry B.: We need to keep notes and recommendations simple. Mark W.: We can do a better job...
of sharing stuff out of field trips, but change may happen slowly as part of a larger process. Ryan N.: Need to be careful off-the-cuff comments aren’t taken as official decisions. Patrick S.: Every month we have a field tour to new project and monitoring field trip to past project, is there a way to elevate the notes we take to a couple bullet points we can all agree to and that we can get into future documents? King W.: Need to revisit zones of agreement based on new information and experiences together. Pam H.: As our thinking evolves, we need to document that. Notes can be extremely important when we encounter unexpected circumstances. Nathan P.: If we reference field trips in NEPA discussions, could we capture group sentiments? Pam H.: Field trip comments only represent views of individuals, not necessarily full group. Have to check in with full group. Roje G.: Even if folks weren’t there for field trips, review of notes from field trips can inform consensus.

What sorts of agreements are most useful? People are very positive and enthusiastic about zones of agreements. We’ve transition to issue-based rather than project based zones of agreement. The FS finds specific zones of agreement to be the most useful. Important for Zones of Agreement to be living document that address how recommendations have changed over time. Examples can be used to build documents. Should we have issue based and project based zones of agreement? Trent S.: Riparian zones of agreement is designed to be revisited for each project. Might be modified for individual projects. Ryan N: Knowing that zones of agreement can be revised is helpful. Nathan P.: Blues ID team is directed to conform to BMFP zones of agreement, so they are clearly powerful documents. Trent S.: Riparian zones of agreement was first issue based zones of agreement. There were a lot of general statements that needed to be adapted to specific areas. They would be revisited. And we could submit modified zones. Eric W.: Issue based zones of agreement were a function of accelerated restoration. The BMFP didn’t have time to develop comprehensive site-specific zones of agreement. It was an efficiency measure. Any agreement is useful. Participation in BMFP varies. Zones are interpreted differently depending on how much experience people have with the group.

What information gaps if filled would improve NEPA planning? Issues most in need of zones of agreement in order were: Post-fire salvage, moist mixed conifer, roads access and management, smoke management, goshawk habitat, managing with fire, and rangeland management (first three were cited by a significantly larger number of respondents than the last three). Trent S.: We made a list of ten zones of agreement that have been identified as potentially useful and are pursuing the low hanging fruit. Mountain mahogany and aspen are prioritized. Then we will tackle moist mixed conifer and other more difficult issues. We are planning a science review for connectivity/wildlife issues. Managing with fire, rangeland management, and rangeland management are not on our list.

New research and analysis needs (in order): Large trees and snags, MIS extent and habitat needs, PAG patterns, patches, LOS connectivity corridors, riparian areas and wildfire effects in treated areas. Mark W.: How can we synchronize the interests of the FS and BMFP? Trent S.: What we want to know is never-ending. As a science advisor, he gets a lot of direction from the Ops-Committee. Might be best to prioritize low-hanging fruit and the most important issues. Nathan P.: Most of these issues seem to have a landscape-scale component and hopefully can be addressed in part through the Blues Team analysis.
Over-arching recommendations from Ann: Interviews emphasizes the collaborative’s learning culture. Check in regularly about project status. History of group needs to be part of the culture. Have experienced members remind the group of our history and the context of decisions. Review the trajectory of our work and the progress we’ve made. It’s important for our outreach but also for internal development. Within the Forest Service, honor the Zones of Agreement and reward new thinking.

- There is a monitoring field trip to the Tin timber sale leaving from the SO at 8 AM tomorrow. Meeting adjourned.