

## **BITTERROOT RESTORATION COMMITTEE**

June 22, 2009

### **Session Summary**

#### **SESSION OBJECTIVES**

1. Present final recommendations on the Butterfly Creek Project to Forest Service representatives.
2. Move forward on the Darby Lumber Lands Project.
3. Affirm the calendar.

#### **COMMITTEE MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE**

Wayne Hedman	Mike Jeffords	Gary Milner	Paul Moore
Ron Porter	Adam Rissien	Kirk Thompson	
Virginia Tribe - Facilitator			

#### **TECHNICAL ADVISORS/OBSERVERS**

Dave Bull	Dave Campbell	Chip Fisher	Julie King
Dan Ritter	Ed Snook	Ruth Wooding	

#### **COMPLETED AGENDA ITEMS**

##### **“Ratifying” the May 2009 Meeting Summary:**

Restoration Committee members approved the May 18 meeting summary acknowledging that some edits needed to be made in the final Butterfly Creek Recommendations. Those edits are reflected in the attached Butterfly Creek Proposed Project Consensus Comments and Recommendations.

##### **Report from Committee Co-Chairs**

Adam reported that Marnie Criley has officially moved into the Montana Forest Restoration Committee Coordinator position (and is currently on her honeymoon). Another local Restoration Committee will be added in the Flathead Swan area – bringing the total to 5 with the Bitterroot, Lincoln, Lolo, and Helena. He attended a portion of the May 20 annual meeting.

Per news releases, the MFRC is working toward a process that can provide a consistent approach. The Bitterroot members unanimously suggested a news release and contact with Kevin Mackey (KUFM) to publicize their work and consensus agreement on the Butterfly Creek project. The facilitator will contact Julia and/or Marnie to get advice on how to proceed. Adam agreed to draft a news release and distribute the draft to Bitterroot Committee members for their input and eventual approval. Once the process is discussed with the MFRC, the final news release will be sent out.

### **Review of the Facilitator's Approach for the Bitterroot Committee's portion of the MFRC's Annual Report**

Committee members concurred with the facilitator's approach which will include a brief description of the Committee's work in 2009; the final Butterfly Creek recommendations package presented to the Bitterroot National Forest; and the Committee's plans to move ahead with the Darby Lumber Lands.

### **Reviewing/Final Edits to the Butterfly Creek Recommendations Package; presenting the Butterfly Creek Project recommendations to the Forest Supervisor (See final approved package at the end of this document)**

- The facilitator will type the final edits to the recommendations and send them to the Forest Supervisor as an addendum to the package.
- As one of the Committee Co-Chairs, Adam presented the package to Dave Bull, the Forest Supervisor.
- Pictures, hugs, etc....

### **Moving Ahead on the Darby Lumber Lands Project**

#### **Where are we today?**

- Ed Snook, Bitterroot National Forest Hydrologist, presented maps and information to help the Committee better understand the condition and needs of the Darby Lands. He explained that the lands are generally in Forest Plan Management Areas that are available for timber/fiber production. He also described the surrounding area including the roadless Sleeping Child acres and private lands managed for agriculture. He also described the Forest's current actions including the creation of an Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) for the area.
- Committee members:
  - Affirmed their May 18 Darby Lumber Lands draft collaborative framework (see attached) and asked Ed to present and explain it to the IDT.
  - Asked that they be considered a body with whom the IDT would have general discussion about the area; use as a sounding board for considering alternative management actions; and receive their input openly as a collaborative group representing many interests in the area and the Valley.
  - Suggested that the checkerboard Forest Service lands in the project area be included because they are generally burned over and in need of some restoration.

- Ed agreed:
  - And stated that he would add the Forest's Environmental Education Coordinator to the IDT.
  - And suggested that the IDT attend the July Committee meeting.

### **Funding Update on the Darby Lands**

- The RAC grant of \$ 10,900 was approved and will be used for inventorying the area. Ed asked if the Committee if they were still comfortable with the Lidar flights for initial inventory of the area and the Committee concurred.
- Ed also discussed the possibility of significant funding through a federal process that is available for Forest restoration as part of the Stimulus framework. The Darby Lands are a strong candidate and are being supported by the Region and the MFRC. The Bitterroot Committee agreed to write a letter in support at their July meeting.

### **Bio-Mass Statement**

Wayne will draft a statement for review at the July meeting.

### **Where do we go from here?**

- Committee members are asked to read the Bitterroot Forest Plan as it pertains to the Darby Lumber Lands and surrounding areas.
- Committee members are also asked to visit with the "traplines" regarding the Darby Lands.
- The Committee will meet July 27 and August 24 at the Bitterroot River Inn in Hamilton (unless location change announced) – 5:30 snacks; meeting 6:00 – 8:30 PM.
- Committee members are asked to bring their calendars on July 27 so dates can be set for fall meetings.

**CONSENSUS COMMENTS AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS  
TO THE BITTERROOT NATIONAL FOREST**

**Butterfly Creek Proposed Project**

*Bitterroot Restoration Committee*  
**June 2009**

**CONSENSUS COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**TO THE BITTERROOT NATIONAL FOREST**  
**Butterfly Creek Project**  
*Bitterroot Restoration Committee*  
**June 2009**

**Collaborative Framework**

**Issue Statement**

There is a need and an opportunity to increase the ecological integrity of the Butterfly Creek area. It is the Committee's initial intent to improve the fire resistance of about 250 acres so it can tolerate a natural fire regime without losing old growth Ponderosa Pine ecosystem components and be maintained in the long term, through prescribed fire.

It is understood that an amount of mechanical treatment will be necessary in the first entry to position the area for ongoing maintenance through prescribed burning.

The possibility also exists to expand the treated area to include about 350 adjacent acres.

**Interests**

The Committee shares the following interests regarding the area:

- Protect and restore old growth Ponderosa Pine stands by making them more resistant to fire.
- Protect water quality threatened by catastrophic wildfire and potentially impacted by access for management activities.
- Provide for low-impact, long-term access for ongoing maintenance.
- Maintain visual quality from the Valley floor and from adjoining areas.
- Enhance recreational opportunities with improved habitat and visual quality.

**Desired Future Condition**

The Committee seeks the following desired results:

- A healthy fire-resistant area with a preponderance of large Ponderosa Pine and some Douglas fir.
- Uneven age class.
- A well-established, managed fire routine.
- A low impact access strategy for ongoing maintenance.
- Improved watershed function in the Butterfly Creek area.

## **Guiding Principles**

The Committee believes:

- That in order to retain/enhance old growth Ponderosa Pine characteristics in the area, management is required.
- In keeping sedimentation to a minimum to protect fisheries and water quality.
- In retaining existing recreational uses because treatments should not preclude future use in this area.
- In approaches that reduce long term maintenance costs because the Forest Service needs to reduce its deferred maintenance backlog on a limited budget.

## **Thoughts about Prescriptions that might Achieve the Desired Condition**

1. In a portion of the project area, reduce density of Douglas Fir and Ponderosa Pine (Reduce Ponderosa Pine 8"<dbh; thin Douglas Fir trees up to 16"; leave large trees.
2. In a portion of the project area, apply the restoration prescription developed by the Forest Service.
3. Leave some dense area.
4. Protect large trees from mortality with prescribed fire.
5. Leave snags over 16".

## **Committee Recommendations**

- Honor the above described Collaborative Framework developed by the Committee for the Project area.
- Per access:
  - Reconstruct/construct a suitable minimum standard road access for logging trucks on a route south of and away from Butterfly Creek utilizing existing road prisms as much as feasible.
  - Obliterate an amount of existing unneeded road prism in the project area that is equal to or greater than the amount of new road construction.
  - Obliterate the section of road next to Butterfly Creek to the extent necessary to protect water quality while retaining an adequate horse trail. Obliterate the junction with Road #13111.
  - Use a gate to close the new access road after project completion in a manner that restricts vehicular access except as required for future management; the road should be classified as a Management Level 1.

### **Committee Recommendations cont.**

- Whatever the eventual access strategy, design it so that:
  - It supports creating conditions that make the site better able to tolerate wildfire or prescribed burn without losing old growth character.
  - It provides low impact, long-term access for ongoing maintenance of the area.
- Fix/pull the culverts on the Butterfly Creek Road where the road is being obliterated.
- Restore the Willow Creek road regardless of what happens with this Project.
- Recognize that this is not an area for motorized recreation use.
- Evaluate whether a Stewardship Contract would be appropriate for the Project.
- Continue to involve “the Committee” as the Project moves forward.

### **Draft Issue Statement**

The Darby Lumber Lands have an important history in the Bitterroot Valley. There exists a real opportunity to integrate education, restoration, and recreation to meet all the interests. The Lands are in great need of restoration and can be restored over time. Portions of the old Darby Lumber Lands were transferred to the Bitterroot National Forest without appropriations to address management needs. A majority of roads built by the former company do not meet Forest Service standards and are eroding in places which may be increasing stream sedimentation in Sleeping Child Creek, Cat House Creek and upper Rye Creek. During 2008, the Bitterroot National Forest began inspecting some roads and this project would help complete these efforts. This inspection will assess maintenance needs and help Forest Service officials determine road management objectives for 63 miles of roads.

### **Current Condition**

- Roads don't meet Best Management Practices and road density is too high.
- The current condition allows sedimentation to flow into the streams and existing roads continue to be a problem because of lack of maintenance.
- The Forest Service may contract with the County to evaluate Darby Lands roads. Evaluation will include infra red flight to inventory the water sources, existing vegetation, roads, etc. The Forest Service will then have the data to evaluate specific areas that need on the ground examination.

### **Desired Future Condition**

Restoration of the area would mean return to a healthy, functioning ecosystem with fire playing a useful role on the landscape into the future. Objectives for the area would include:

- Fewer and more stable roads with adequate drainage and improved stream quality and fisheries;
- Recovery of wildlife habitat through restoration of hiding and thermal cover, forage production, and connectivity;
- Environmental education for local schools and the general public.
- Protection of the areas seedlings with appropriate vegetation management and eventual fiber products;
- Well-planned recreation including motorized in some areas and big game hunting opportunities;
- Ongoing local support and appreciation for the area resulting from their involvement in the process;
- A proactive adaptive management strategy in place.

Restoration of the area might be partially funded through education grants and through users (i.e., motorized recreationists, big game hunters, fisheries supporters, upland birds organizations, those desiring ecosystem restoration, etc.). Short term employment in restoration efforts can be an economic boost locally. In discussion about the Garnet Ghost Town area (managed by the Bureau of Land Management), it was agreed that the recommendations be sent to the Lolo *Restoration Committee*.

### **Guiding Principles/Restoration Principles**

- We believe that successful restoration can return the area to ecological integrity and functionality.
- We believe that restoration of water quality and soils are top priority.
- We believe that miles of roads need to be minimized with attention to Montana's Best Management Practices including the necessity for an improved drainage situation.
- We believe the best ways to promote restoration are education and accessibility.
- We believe in monitoring to see if the desired future condition is being achieved.
- We believe restoration processes are experimental and we will learn as we go.

### **"Interests"**

- It is in the interest of the Forest Service to have a project that is sustainable and can be jumpstarted economically.
- It is in the interest of wildlife and fisheries to have habitat restored.
- It is in the public interest to maintain water quality.
- It is in the public interest to improve aesthetics in the area.
- It is in the public interest to improve and restore appropriate vegetation and ecosystem processes.
- It is in the interest of the public to have an area that was not treated well – restored.

### **Important Questions**

- What is our desired future condition and what is the current condition?
- What are the restoration priorities? What is the site telling us to do?
- What restoration principles should be employed?
- What are the causes of those things that need to be restored?
- What are the inventory procedures to be employed?
- What are the measures of success?
- What are the economic options?
- Can we stimulate economics and education?
- What is the story here?
- What options are there regarding the BLM Garnet ghost town?