

BITTERROOT RESTORATION COMMITTEE

May 18, 2009

Session Summary

SESSION OBJECTIVES

1. Approve/finalize written recommendations on the Butterfly Creek Project and agree on the future role of the Committee regarding the project.
2. Get started on a Darby Lumber Lands Project.
3. Evaluate the process and the continued role of the Bitterroot Committee.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Chris Clancy Wayne Hedman Mike Jeffords Gary Milner
Paul Moore Ron Porter Steve Powell Adam Rissien
Kirk Thompson (Craig Thomas sent a text message from Kansan where he is working)
Virginia Tribe - Facilitator

TECHNICAL ADVISORS/OBSERVERS

Julie Altemus Dave Bull Dave Campbell Jacquie Paxon
Chuck Oliver Dan Ritter

COMPLETED AGENDA ITEMS

“Ratifying” the April 2009 Meeting Summary:

Restoration Committee members approved the April 29 meeting summary.

Report from Committee Co-Chairs

Bill Grasser is in Alaska until the end of the summer. Adam will continue to represent the Bitterroot group at the Montana Forest Restoration Committee meetings and reported that he attended their April meeting. Their annual meeting will be May 20 – and everyone is invited. The Bitterroot Committee facilitator will stay on until February 2010,

“Transitioning in” New Members

No one attended as a new member.

Finalizing Butterfly Creek Project Recommendations

Committee members approved the final recommendations (see attached at the end of this document).

Getting started on a Darby Lumber Lands Project (*Committee additions/changes made at the May 18 meeting are in italics bold*)

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., off road 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.

Additional Data Needs Regarding Darby Lumber Lands

The following requests were made of the Forest Service for the June 22 meeting:

- ***Description of the Forest Plan management areas covering the Darby Lands***
- ***Maps that will help educate the Restoration Committee (boundaries; important fisheries; road information; vegetation information; logging history; wildlife areas; known trails, etc.)***
- ***What management areas are assigned to the Darby lands and what does that mean in terms of management expectations?***
- ***What do management strategies look like on National Forest lands surrounding the Darby Lands?***
- ***What management strategies and conditions exist on private lands adjoining the Darby lands?***
- ***How were the Darby lands treated in the Travel Plan?***

Do we still want to draft a Committee "Bio-Mass" statement?

Wayne volunteered to draft a bio-mass statement for the Committee's review and discussion at the June 22 meeting.

Comments to the Montana Forest Restoration Committee

- Committee members are comfortable with each other – we have reached that point. Now – how do we get the best results from that “good will”?
 - Members who must interact with an outside group are in a different position than those at the table representing themselves or are part of an Agency involved in managing the resources (e.g. FWP).

- At this point in our process, we are evaluating the “proper stage” for useful involvement with the Forest Service.
 - Would it be better to have the Forest Service initiate a project and we give comment and recommendations on direction early on... or later?
 - Should we be more involved in helping identify projects specific to the wildlands-urban interface?
 - Should we be trying to generate support/resources for project (e.g., Darby Lumber Lands)?

- The process is frustrating because the pace is slow; the group basically has no decision authority; and the recommendations must fit within other processes such as NEPA and its public involvement.

- Forest Service staffing at the meetings is high and we wonder if the output of this Committee warrants the cost of their presence.

- We're not always clear on where Forest Service standards and processes come into play – how they will eventually effect our collaborative recommendations.

Affirming the Calendar

- The Committee will meet June 22 at the Bitterroot River Inn in Hamilton – 5:30 snacks; meeting 6:00 – 8:30 PM.
- Committee members would like to continue meeting during the summer if dates can be found that work for everyone. The calendar for the remainder of 2009 will be set at the June 22 meeting.

**CONSENSUS COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
TO THE BITTERROOT NATIONAL FOREST
Butterfly Creek Project**

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.

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".

Final Recommendations

- Consider the following Collaborative Framework developed by the Committee for the Project area.
- Whatever the eventual access strategy, design it so that:
 - It supports creating conditions that make the site better able to tolerate a wildfire or prescribed burn without losing old growth character;
 - It provides low impact, long-term access for ongoing maintenance of the area.
 - Is not located next to Butterfly Creek.
 - It does not become part of the Forest Service road system – but is “closed” as a motorized access route but can continue as a stock and hiking trail.
 - Look carefully at the possibility of reconstruction on the “old road bed” in the area – before deciding to build the short section of new road.
- The Willow Creek road needs restoration regardless of what happens with this Project.
- Recognize that this is not an area for ORV use.
- Evaluate whether a Stewardship Contract would be appropriate for the Project.
- Continue to involve “the Committee” as the Project moves forward.