

BITTERROOT RESTORATION COMMITTEE
November 17, 2008 6:00 to 8:30 PM (with snacks)
Bitterroot River Inn

Session Summary

SESSION OBJECTIVES

1. Continue work on the Butterfly Creek Project and draft recommendations where possible.
2. Say good bye to Cameron and plan ahead.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Chris Clancy	Bill Grasser	Wayne Hedman
Mike Jeffords	Gary Milner	Paul Moore
Cameron Naficy	Adam Rissien	Kirk Thompson

The Committee said goodbye to Cameron who will be leaving in early December for his Fulbright in Argentina.

TECHNICAL ADVISORS/OBSERVERS

Dave Bull	Dave Campbell	Dan Ritter
Ruth Wooding		
Virginia Tribe - Facilitator		

COMPLETED AGENDA ITEMS/OBJECTIVES MET

Moving Ahead with the Butterfly Creek Project

Collaborative Framework

The Committee agreed to the following Collaborative Framework for the Butterfly Creek Project (see Attachment A):

Issue Statement

There is an opportunity to improve the fire resistance of an area with many large Ponderosa Pine and improve the overall health of the area.

Interests

It is in our interest to:

- Protect and restore old growth Ponderosa Pine stands by making them more resistant to fire.
- Protect water quality threatened by catastrophic wildfire and road reconstruction /use.
- Maintain visual quality from the Valley floor and from adjoining areas.
- Enhance recreational opportunities because of improved habitat and visual quality.
- Provide for low-impact, long-term access for ongoing maintenance.
- Consider use of an improved road for recreation.

Moving Ahead with the Butterfly Creek Project cont.

Guiding Principles

- We believe that we need to enhance and retain old growth Ponderosa Pine characteristics because it has these components but need to be managed to enhance and retain them.
- We believe in keeping sedimentation to a minimum because we value fisheries and healthy streams.
- We believe in retaining existing recreational uses because treatments should not preclude future use in this area.
- We believe in approaches that reduce long term maintenance needs because the Agency needs to reduce its deferred maintenance backlog and it has limited budget.

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
- Low impact access system for ongoing maintenance
- A well-established fire routine.
- Where desired, carefully constructed, effective ORV.

Objectives

- Assure long term access for future management.
- Retain large diameter Douglas Fir and Ponderosa Pine.
- Create conditions so that the site is better able to take a wildfire or prescribed burn without losing old growth character.
- Keep soils/sedimentation out of streams in the area.

Ideas about Prescriptions

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 (see Cameron’s discussion at the end of this document – Attachment B)
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”.

Moving Ahead with the Butterfly Creek Project cont.

Initial Brainstorming/Discussion/Options regarding Access

- The Committee wondered “how much of a road would have to exist” to meet the long term maintenance objective as well as the other objectives they established for the project. They also had some discussion about what that maintenance would look like on the ground.
- Generally, the Group agreed that it is less than desirable to have road access next to or very close to the stream – particularly if there will be future access requirements. Some options brainstormed are:
 1. Use the existing road on a one-time, short term basis only – with full restoration.
 2. Consider a new road that is narrow and can be classified as a trail until needed again. (There is some reservation about narrowing the road and having to widen it in the future.)
 3. Reconstruct the existing road with full mitigation techniques. Gate the road after use.
- The Forest Service agreed to further explore access options with their engineers and be prepared to have some broad discussion about access at the December Committee meeting.

Preliminary Thoughts about How to Proceed with Other Projects

The Committee postponed their discussion about forming sub-committees for the following potential project areas:

- Darby Lumber lands
- Douglas Fir mistletoe area near the Butterfly Creek Project
- Riparian area on Willow Creek

Adam asked for – and received, the Committee’s endorsement in moving ahead on applying for Forest Service grant dollars as potential funding for the Darby Lumber lands. He will report on progress at the December meeting.

Where do we go from here?

- The Committee will meet on Monday, December 15 – 6:00 to 8:30 PM at the Bitterroot River Inn. The facilitator will bring Holiday snacks. The agenda will concentrate on:
 - If possible, finalizing recommendations to the Forest Service on the Butterfly Creek Project including access.
 - Forming sub-committees for the Darby Lumber Lands, the Douglas Fir mistletoe area near the Butterfly Creek Project, and possibly the riparian area on Willow Creek.
 - Extending the calendar beyond the scheduled January 26, 2009 meeting.

Attachment A

Butterfly Creek Project Collaborative Framework (Committee Agreement on November 17, 2008)

Issue Statement

There is an opportunity to improve the fire resistance of an area with many large Ponderosa Pine and improve the overall health of the area.

Interests

- Protect and restore old growth Ponderosa Pine stands by making it more resistant to fire.
- Protect water quality threatened by catastrophic wildfire and road reconstruction /use.
- Maintain visual quality from the Valley floor and from adjoining areas.
- Enhance recreational opportunities because of improved habitat and visual quality.
- Provide for low-impact, long-term access for ongoing maintenance.
- Consider use of an improved road for recreation.

Project Guiding Principles

- We believe that we need to enhance and retain old growth Ponderosa Pine characteristics because it has these components but need to be managed to enhance and retain them.
- We believe in keeping sedimentation to a minimum because we value fisheries and healthy streams.
- We believe in retaining existing recreational uses because treatments should not preclude future use in this area.
- We believe in approaches that reduce long term maintenance needs because the Agency needs to reduce its deferred maintenance backlog and it has limited budget.

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
- Low impact access system for ongoing maintenance
- A well-established fire routine.
- Where desired, carefully constructed, effective ORV.

Objectives

- Assure long term access for future management.
- Retain large diameter Douglas Fir and Ponderosa Pine.
- Create conditions so that the site is better condition able to take a wildfire or prescribed burn without losing old growth character.
- Keep soils/sedimentation out of streams in the area.

Attachment B

Cameron Naficy's Comments/Discussion regarding a Restoration Approach for Low/Mid Elevation Dry Type Forests

1. Restoration projects will have the most value if they maximize their contribution to ecological integrity. One way to accomplish this is to place restoration project areas near existing, ecologically intact wildlands, inventoried roadless areas, and other unroaded areas, especially if located so that they augment connectivity between them.
2. A Roads Analysis Process (RAP) which includes all roads and culverts within a project area should be conducted to identify priority roads and culverts that are most affecting water quality, fisheries, soils, important terrestrial and aquatic animal movement corridors, or would otherwise provide the greatest benefits to fish and wildlife populations and abiotic forest resources.
3. All previously logged areas in project area should be identified. Plantations resulting from even-aged harvests may be priorities for thinning. Other second growth forests, especially those previously treated by uneven-aged or intermediate harvests which still maintain some historic structures, should be evaluated and prioritized for restoration needs. Information on current stand structure and composition should be provided for these stands to enable the design of restoration goals and prescriptions.
4. Prescribed fire should be widely used if possible, as this is the only effective and most ecologically beneficial method of fuel reduction.
5. To the extent possible, wildfire use plans should be crafted for the area that provides a long term management commitment to the reintroduction of fire.
6. If a community is adjacent to or nearby the project area, opportunities for targeted fuel reduction near private structures and land may be evaluated so that goals #4 and #5 may be more effectively accomplished.
7. For previously unlogged forests, the need for restoration and subsequent thinning cannot be assumed. This is where I'm not sure what we want to do. Looking at restoration of structure solely on a stand level always seems silly and flawed to me, but it is what everyone on the BRC and even some scientists are drawn towards. Maybe one approach would be to have a landscape level structural analysis done which identifies unlogged stands that are most likely to have departed from historical conditions. Then we could look at those, or some subset of those, on a stand level basis. Of course the FS will say they already do this, using FRCC. Still this will pare down the number of unlogged stands we have to even discuss. We could narrow this down further by asking them to stay out of old growth, for instance. Or we could try and come up with some alternative approach. Overall, though, I think we should largely avoid treating unlogged stands if we can, at least until we have developed a restoration strategy for unlogged stands that we're comfortable with.

Either way I think restoration needs must be linked directly to specific human activities which have altered them. Furthermore, the specific structural or functional elements of altered stands that resulted from the identified anthropogenic activity must be separated from those that were not altered. If, on a landscape scale, fire can reasonably be assumed to create a mosaic of mortality, stand level structural adjustments may not be necessary.