

BITTERROOT RESTORATION COMMITTEE (BRC)

December 14, 2009

Session Summary

SESSION OBJECTIVES

1. Update each other including anything new related to biomass.
2. Review the latest information regarding access in the Butterfly Creek project area.
3. Hear and discuss progress on the Darby Lumber Lands.
4. Identify and discuss other possible projects.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Bill Grasser

Chris Clancy

Mike Jeffords

Paul Moore

Ron Porter

Steve Powell

Kirk Thompson

Virginia Tribe – Facilitator

(Several members of the Committee were absent due to illness and travel; those members attending agreed to move ahead with the meeting regardless of numbers present.)

TECHNICAL ADVISORS/OBSERVERS

Dave Campbell

Julie King

Dan Ritter

Ed Snook

Ruth Wooding

Bitterroot Forest Engineer (apology that I don't have the spelling for the name)

COMPLETED AGENDA ITEMS

Review of the Bitterroot Restoration Committee Governance Framework

Bitterroot Restoration Committee Charter

The Bitterroot Restoration Committee will function, in cooperation with the Forest Service, to ensure diverse and knowledgeable community engagement in the selection, design and monitoring of restoration projects on the Bitterroot National Forest.

Discussion Ground Rules/Process Agreements

The Committee established and uses these ground rules/process agreements to encourage productive, “safe” discussion and operations throughout the process:

- Extend courtesy to all Committee members and non-members.
- Contribute to an efficient process by being on time; being prepared when you walk into the meeting; and being succinct in your comments.
- Recognize the facilitator as the meeting manager. The Committee will designate 2 Co-Chairs to provide a communication link with the MFRC. Those Co-Chairs will attend Montana Forest Restoration Committee (MFRC) meetings and report back to the BRC.
- Raise your hand to speak; avoid side conversations.
- Recognize that consensus is the strongest form of agreement. Commit to using collaborative behaviors and communication that encourage consensus. The facilitator will use interest-based tools and exercises to move the group toward agreement.
- When a member cannot attend a Committee meeting, he or she may provide another member with a proxy. Without a proxy, absence is considered agreement with the group.
- Committee members will be seated at the table. Observers will be recognized by the facilitator and are asked to honor the ground rules.
- Committee members have the right to respond to the media when contacted – but are encouraged to be respectful of other members and not state opinions as if speaking for the Committee. The Committee will issue press releases when appropriate.
- E-Mail addresses for Committee members will be made available for between-meeting communication. Committee members are encouraged not to build alliances outside the meeting regarding Committee projects.

Approving the Summary of the November Meeting

BRC members approved the November 9 summary without revision.

Updates

Committee Co-Chairs' Reports

Bill reported that he attended the MFRC monthly meeting and had discussion about the difficulties the BRC was having with access on the Butterfly project. The MFRC arranged to have Jason Todhunter, a Montana Logging Association representative, look at the project area and give the BRC some feedback. A summary of his whitepaper observations are recorded later in these notes.

News from the MFRC Coordinator

The MFRC Coordinator was not able to attend the meeting.

Project Work

Butterfly Creek

Summary of Whitepaper Observations from the MFRC Montana Logging Association Representative regarding Butterfly Access (The full whitepaper and map is available through Paul Moore)

1. Regardless of whether this project is completed as a restoration project or larger landscape project, the Butterfly area is going to have the same road access issues.
2. In comparison to other areas, this may not be a high priority for the Forest Service because of size, cost and access issues. If initially lumped into a larger project, the Butterfly portion may be dropped because of access issues.
3. Acknowledging current MNP's and the SMZ law, there may still be times when using an existing road (in this case, adjacent to a creek) at certain times of the year and with reasonable preventative measures, may be the lowest impact access available. That alternative could be further explored.
4. There is a possibility of constructing about a half mile of new road (see full report and map) that would give good access to this site and allow the Forest Service to utilize the existing road infrastructure that is already in place in this area and treat forest health concerns as well. By building this road, you not only allow the Butterfly project to advance, but allow future forest health issues to be addressed.
5. Forest health and restoration is needed in this area whether it is a Committee project or part of a larger Forest Service project. Regardless, something needs to be done to protect the healthy stand of mature and regenerating Ponderosa Pine and address Dwarf Mistletoe and Spruce Budworm in the area.

Where do we go from here with Butterfly?

After further discussion, Committee members agreed to give the project as described in their Butterfly Creek Project framework (see at the end of this document) to the Forest Service and ask them to move it forward in their environmental analysis process and report back to the Committee. Alternatives to explore might include:

- Adding the adjacent area that is heavily infested with mistletoe to improve the project's economics;
- Using the road along the stream with seasonal restrictions and preventative measures that would protect the Creek and not violate BMP's or the SMZ laws;
- Having the Committee's Butterfly "project" be part of a larger landscape Forest health project including limited road construction/reconstruction.

Darby Lumber Lands

- Forest Service personnel updated the Committee on the Interdisciplinary Team's progress regarding the Darby Lumber Lands including data collection and condition of various sections in the area. GIS flights have been delayed until spring. The Committee views their timeframe for the Darby project as approximately now through September 2010.
- After discussion with Forest Service personnel, the Committee agreed:
 - That they want to explore a section(s) that is not in good shape as well as an area(s) in better condition so they will have diverse issues to address and resolve as a group.
 - To ask Forest Service personnel to key in on sections 1, 2, and 3 (and others if they think useful) and bring issues to the Committee for their discussion, problem-solving and recommendations.
 - Upon further exploration of the area, revisit their initial Darby Lumber Lands collaborative framework.
 - As part of the process, explore a possible "decision tree" and/or criteria for classifying roads and their management.
 - To read the Bitterroot Forest Plan Management Areas that relate to the Darby Lumber Lands.
- At the January 2010 meeting, Mike will report on the inventory done by off-road recreation organizations.

Exploring the Possibility of a "3 Saddle" Area Project

- The Forest Service would like to have the Committee involved in the "3 Saddle" area project they are initiating. Committee members agreed.
- The Agency intends to have the project analysis process completed and able to move ahead on the ground within 18 months (June 2011).
- Dan Ritter will bring specific information about a potential 3 Saddle project to the January meeting including the restoration issues from the Forest Service perspective.
- The Committee will use that information to get started on a collaborative framework and identify issues from their point of view.

Where do we go from here?

Making the Transition to a New Facilitator

- Virginia Tribe is moving into retirement and consequently will not be renewing her contract with the MFRC.
- She has suggested a replacement and if it works, the Committee agreed to have the person present at the January 2010 BRC meeting to start the transition.

Affirming the Calendar through February 2010

- The BRC will meet from 6:00 – 8:30 PM (with snacks shortly before 6):
 - Tuesday, January 19
 - Monday, February 8
- Committee members expressed a desire to meet at the Bitterroot Forest Supervisor's Office if possible. If not available, they will meet at the Bitterroot River Inn.

Butterfly Creek Project Collaborative Framework

The BRC arrived at their consensus recommendations through a mutually established collaborative framework that assisted them in resolving issues and exploring options that were not oppositional and often complimentary. Their agreements offer a supported framework within which the Forest Service can analyze and design a project. Their collaborative framework is stated below.

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

Committee members share 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 for the area: A healthy fire-resistant area with a preponderance of large Ponderosa Pine and some Douglas fir; uneven vegetative age class; a well-established, managed fire routine; a low impact access strategy for ongoing maintenance; improved watershed function in the Butterfly Creek area.

Project 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.

General and Specific Consensus Recommendations

- Honor the intent of the Collaborative Framework developed by the Committee for the Butterfly Creek 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. Fix/pull the culverts on the Butterfly Creek Road where the road is being obliterated.
- 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 and provides low impact, long-term access for ongoing maintenance of the area.
- 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.
- After further discussion regarding current understanding and new information about access, Committee members agreed that the access design for the Butterfly project represents a new phase of the project. Consequently, they will, where useful, continue to explore and discuss the project and access options within the Forest Service analysis process.