

McKenzie Stewardship Group Meeting Notes

March 27, 2008 6:00 pm—8:00 pm

Vida-McKenzie Community Center

Participants:

Bert Sandker	Blue River Reforestation
Bill Barton	Native Forest Council
Bob Kintigh	
Carol Ach	IRA
Chandra LeGue	Oregon Wild
Cliff Richardson	McKenzie High School
Craig Patterson	
Darin Stringer	
George Regas	USFS, McKenzie River Ranger Station
Greg Wagenblast	ODF
James Rudisill	USFS, McKenzie River RD
Jeff DeVore	McKenzie Flyfishers
Jim Baker	Blue River CDC
Johan Hogervorst	USFS, Willamette National Forest Supervisor's Office
John Pine	ODF
Karl Morgenstern	Eugene Water and Electric Board
Ken Allison	KS Restoration Unlimited
Kurt Steele	USFS, McKenzie River RD
Larry Six	McKenzie Watershed Council
Marcus Kauffman	Resource Innovations
Mary Allison	USFS, McKenzie River RD
Mei Lin Lantz	USFS, McKenzie River RD
Monty Wilson	Resident
Nancy Toth	Eugene Water and Electric Board
Penny Harris	USFS, McKenzie River RD
Rachel Barton-Russel	Infraspect Environmental Auditing
Ryan Ojerio	Resource Innovations
Shane Kamrath	USFS, McKenzie River RD
William Blair	Infraspect Environmental Auditing

Upcoming Events

	Date	Time	Location
Logistics Committee Meeting	April 9 th	3:00 PM – 4:30 PM	EWEB
Stewardship Group Meeting	April 24 th	6:00 PM – 8:00 PM	Leaburg
Field Trip – Bridge Thin Project	May	TBD	TBD

Review Agenda

Marcus started off the meeting with a brief round of introductions and a quick summary of the group's background and purpose.

This meeting had two main agenda items. The first item was to learn about the science of forest thinning, and the second part of the agenda was dedicated to developing group structure, specifically developing ground rules and a decision making process.

A participant asked why the agenda didn't address questions posed at the last meeting about the definition of stewardship. Ryan said that he had scheduled topics over the course of the next few meetings to address written questions and comments received at the last meeting.

The Science of Forest Thinning – Guest Speaker Dr. Paul Anderson

Dr. Paul Anderson from the Pacific Northwest Research Station gave a presentation on the scientific research that has been conducted on various methods of forest thinning.

First Paul talked about the different stages of stand development, noting that these stages are observed in both natural stands following a disturbance and in managed stands that regenerate following a harvest.

Then, Paul discussed several different thinning methods and their effects on the forest. Early research focused on thinning to enhance the volume and quality of wood in a stand, but more recent efforts have focused on variable density thinning to promote biodiversity.

Large scale experimental plots (100 acres) have been treated using different thinning methods in an effort to measure how such treatments affect species diversity, forest structure and susceptibility to wind damage. Not all taxa (groups of organisms, i.e. salamanders, herbaceous plants, fungi etc.) respond in the same way to thinning treatments. For example where one thinning treatment, might result in greater diversity of herbaceous plants, the number of different species of fungi may decline.

“Leave Islands” or “Skips” are patches that are not thinned and “Gaps” are patches where all the trees are cut. Current studies indicate that creating a mix of habitat types by incorporating “Skips” and “Gaps” in a thinning treatment is more effective at promoting biodiversity than a uniform treatment across the landscape.

Standing snags and downed wood are also important components of a forest that provide habitat for many species. Thinning reduces competition between trees for sunlight, nutrients and water. Thinning decreases the phase during which such competition causes high rates of mortality and stress on surviving trees. Studies suggest that such thinning can accelerate tree growth and ultimately yield larger trees that would persist in the forest as snags or downed wood, longer than smaller trees.

Paul finished his presentation by highlighting some of the gaps in scientific knowledge about forest thinning. The processes of stand development occur over many decades, but studies of thinning and its effects, particularly variable density thinning are only 5-10 years old. Climate change may also alter how scientists should model predictions of stand development over time.

Q and A

Q: Is the increase in plant diversity following a heavy thinning due to invasive weeds?

A: Non-native plants can colonize a space created by a heavy thinning, but over time competition from the native vegetation reduces non-natives to previous levels. Invasive weeds are another matter and would require some sort of active management.

Q: What is the rationale behind cutting a stand thereby destroying the diversity that was there only to thin it later to try to restore it?

A: Our studies are of stands that were previously managed for timber production, so it is a response to changing management objectives.

Q: Why might a thinning treatment be proposed for a riparian area?

A: The principle goal in thinning in a riparian area is typically to promote the development of large wood that would, in the future, fall into the stream and add structural diversity.

Bridge Thin – Project Update

The EA for the Bridge Thin Project is out for public review. The public comment period ends April 9th. Please submit comments in writing or by email. The webpage to view the EA documents is: http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/willamette/manage/nepa/current_mckenzie.html

Even if you decide to come in and talk with Shane, it is also a good idea to write your comments to make sure they're captured correctly.

Decisions are typically made a couple of weeks following the end of the comment period and will be published in the Register Guard.

Submitting comments during the comment period creates standing to file an appeal to the decision maker which would then initiate a review process by a third party.

Discussion

Participants had questions about the amount of timber that the Bridge Thin Project would yield in relation to the amount anticipated in the stewardship agreement, the definition of a heavy commercial thin, and concerns about impacts to the visual corridor and impacts to recreation.

The Bridge Thin EA states that approx. 47 mmbf would come out of the project. But one participant noted that the agreement signed by the Regional Office authorizing the use of the Stewardship Authorities estimated that 8 mmbf would be produced through stewardship contracts.

Shane noted that only a portion of the Bridge Thin project will be offered as a stewardship contract and that portion is anticipated to yield 15 mmbf. James did not have the exact prescription for a heavy thin. (a later review of the EA states that a heavy thin would yield stand density between 17-34% Maximum SDI¹). One participant commented that it is important to remember that the stewardship portion of the sale is in second growth stands that were previously managed for pulp.

A participant asked if the Bridge Thin project would impact the Hwy 126 visual corridor in a similar way as recent cutting on Rosboro lands. Shane replied that it was addressed in the EA and that the impacts would be much less. However, there would be a prescribed burn at the Oak savannah site near Hwy 126 that would cause visual impacts.

Another participant had questions about unit 100 and wanted to know why it had been targeted for fuels reduction work when it was not directly adjacent to the road or developments. As well there is a trail nearby that could be impacted. Mei Lin responded that the unit was selected because it was a good candidate to apply a prescribed fire to reintroduce a natural disturbance that had been removed from the ecosystem. She noted that no trees would be removed

¹ The stand treatments developed for the Bridge Thin project units are based on the Stand Density Index (SDI), which is a relative measure of the stand's density with a maximum SDI that varies for each tree species. SDI is based on a percentage of SDI_{max}, which is the maximum stem density a stand can support. At approximately 50% maximum SDI, maximum stand production occurs and individual tree vigor would begin to decline (Long, 1985). Thus, lower levels of SDI should be maintained in order to meet stand objectives, like growth for sustainable timber and mean tree growth for various wildlife habitat objectives.

mechanically and that the light under burn is intended to reduce ground fuels and stand density. Although it is not a high priority for the community, it is a priority.

Marcus closed out the discussion by suggesting that the field trip in May include sites where heavy thinning and prescribed burns have been done in the past.

Group Structure Discussion

After a short intermission the group reconvened to begin discussions about the group's structure. Marcus noted that there are many decisions that the group will need to make in the future and having structure will help the group know how to interact, who participates in decision processes, and when a decision is made. A lively discussion followed with many comments that tended around three themes: participation, representation and power.

A participant asked if the group had been established yet. Marcus responded that meetings are open to the public, but it is up to the group to decide what level of participation warrants decision-making authority and guidelines for participation. For example, you could decide that a person can vote if they have attended four meetings in the past six months.

Someone inquired if the Forest Service staff get to make decisions, which sparked a discussion about differences between public employees that are paid to be there and those that are not. Some suggested an important distinction exists between agency (paid) participants and those that volunteered their time. But others noted that although they are agency staff, but choose to participate in this group voluntarily. And another participant said that it was their job to represent the public interest at these meetings.

One participant expressed concern that the public at large was not adequately represented by the participants in the group and was also concerned that individuals involved in multiple stakeholder organizations could have disproportionate influence over the group. Another followed up asking what criteria the group would use to avoid "dual control" – the concept of one group or agency exerting power over (or through) another to influence outcomes.

As the meeting began to run into overtime, Marcus concluded the discussion by stating that this process will take time over multiple meetings. He asked the participants to review the handouts on decision-making processes and ground rules and be ready to continue these discussions at the April meeting.

Future Meeting Locations

In response to suggestions that the meeting location rotate, Ryan conducted a quick poll of the group to see if there was interest in alternate locations both upriver and downriver. A small majority voted in favor of a downriver location for the next meeting. Ryan will investigate the availability of a meeting space in Leaburg for the next meeting.

Next Steps

- Bridge Thin EA comments are due April 9th.
- Stewardship Group members should review decision-making methods and ground rules handouts in preparation for the next meeting.
- Ryan will send out email link to the Bridge Thin EA website with the meeting notes.
- Ryan will investigate the availability of meeting space in Leaburg and the availability of the Upper McKenzie Community Center for alternating future meetings.
- Ryan will continue to solicit guest speakers to share current science on relevant issues.