

National Fire and Air Quality Workshop
Tucson AZ
January 28 – 30, 2003

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Our Charge: Give you a field example of how “fire and air” collaborated to address issues and solve problems in the LMP process to advance the Agency’s mission.

Agency’s mission: Caring for the Land and Serving People

I have struggled with this topic for a month trying to define what it is a want to leave you with. Dierdre Dether (Boise NF) and I have talked about it for a couple months. What is the essence of what I want to say? What do I want to send with you to your break-out groups?

Where we have gotten so far in the air quality/ smoke aspects of Forest Planning on the Boise, Payette, Sawtooth National Forests is because of folks on the Forests (like Dierdre Dether) who have the passion and energy to want to do it right and to keep asking the question, “why are we doing this?”. Our problem as an agency is that **we have not defined what “right” is; what “it” looks like and why we are doing “it” in the Forest Plan. What is adequate “disclosure” and the appropriate level of analysis for smoke effects at the Forest Plan level?**

Two things that I don’t want to leave you with as you go into your breakout groups:

1) That more technology, information or data will necessarily make your collaboration more successful and your decision making more effective. My belief is we (as an agency) place too much emphasis on gathering more data and information to answer questions that really don’t have concrete answers. We can however, do a whole lot more at connecting and utilizing the information, data and technology that already exists.

2) **Not** collaborating is **Not** an option. One of the biggest benefits the Southwest Idaho Ecogroup (SWIEG) got from collaboration re smoke and air quality was the having the regulators (state, EPA) and the FS (fire, air, planners) in the room at the same time to discuss expectations, to educate each other on agency policy, procedures, planning, nomenclature, and the

scope of the Forest Plan. And to struggle together trying to understand and articulate the knowns and unknowns and short and long term consequences of planning 60 years into the future across 7 million acres. What are the constraints, expectations, opportunities and challenges we all face? We tried to sort this out regarding how Forest Plans fit with Fire Management Plans fit with Project Plans fit with Burn Plans to get a common understanding. Also how the Forest Plans fit with State Implementation Plans. And the significance of EPA's Interim Air Quality Policy on Wildland and Prescribed Fires (which is not published or codified as a Rule anywhere and the Forest Service has not put it in their Agency policy).

Agreements we came up with:

- In the Forest Plan, we would do a qualitative discussion of impacts to air quality and visibility and quantitatively estimate emissions.
 - We would not do an analysis of Regional Haze, visibility, conformity, or global change.
- We would address aspects of the Interim Policy

Through these discussion and agreements we also realized and got more comfortable with the unknowns inherent in the business.

Another benefit of the collaboration is thinking through all the “problems” our “answers” might create and putting it into context. For instance, doing an analysis on acres burned in wildfire and prescribed fire over the last couple decades showed us that we burned anywhere from 3 – 8 times the number of acres in wildfire as prescribed fire. Mapping these acres, one can barely see the prescribed fire acres but the wildfire acres are extremely obvious. By being more constraining on prescribed fire, what will it do to wildfire? And therefore to the ecosystem?

The other issue that typically confronts us is looking at alternatives to burning. When the Forest overlaid slope, with administrative constraints (such as wilderness) with economic market realities, we realized there would be few opportunities for alternatives to burning (e.g. mechanical treatment). So for these Forests, the issue of alternatives to burning to lower or eliminate emissions, may not be the “answer” to the problem of reducing emissions. And could in fact generate other problems (e.g. soil erosion, safety).

But that brings me back to what I believe **is** the essence of me standing in front of you.

1) Between fire and air, we need to **define as an Agency the question we're trying to answer at the Forest Plan level related to smoke and air quality? What is expected in the Plan for analysis?**

2) This week provides the opportunity to do that or at least start that process. When we better articulate and define the boundaries, analysis, and thresholds related to addressing smoke in Forest Plans we will make us all more effective in our jobs. Everyone is inundated with the amount of work there is to do in our day-to-day jobs. No one has time to recreate the wheel and figure this out on their own every time. By getting clearer about our expectations for Forest Plans, it will make us more effective. Being more effective will help us better “care for the land and serve people”.