



Eastern Idaho Aspen Working Group Group Memory



BACKGROUND:

The Eastern Idaho Aspen Working Group met on Thursday, June 22, 2006 at IDF&G's Upper Snake Regional offices from 6:30 to 9:10 p.m. The meeting was attended by: Bryan Aber (Island Park Ranger Station), Denise Adkins (Natural Resources Conservation Service), Derrick Attebury, Bob Brammer (Idaho Department of Lands), Don Edgerton (Natural Resources Conservation Service), Mark Gamblin (IDF&G), Kim Jackson (Harriman State Park), Curtis Keetch (Dubois Ranger District), John Kidd (Dubois Ranger District), Rob Mickelsen (Caribou-Targhee National Forest), Mark Orme (Caribou-Targhee National Forest), David Ovard (Caribou-Targhee National Forest), Kim Ragotzkie (Idaho Department of Fish and Game), Steve Schmidt (Idaho Department of Fish and Game), Terry Thomas (Idaho Department of Fish and Game), Larry Timchak (Caribou-Targhee National Forest), and Paul Wackenhut (Idaho Department of Fish and Game). The meeting was facilitated by Wendy Lowe from P2 Solutions. This document summarizes discussions that occurred.

REVIEW OF LAST MEETING:

It was agreed that the Group Memory from the May 11, 2006 meeting met participants' needs and that it had been received by all in attendance. Wendy reported that she had added quite a number of names to the mailing list based on input at the last meeting.

OBJECTIVES:

The objectives for the meeting of the Eastern Idaho Aspen Working Group included:

- Learn how the Forest Service identifies, develops, and implements aspen projects
- Learn about the Raynold's Pass project
- Provide input on the Raynold's Pass project
- Discuss:
 - How the Working Group should define success
 - What sorts of products the Working Group might produce
 - What the Working Group's Charter should address
 - Next steps that are needed to allow the Working Group to develop the capacity to do its work
 - How the Working Group should make decisions
 - Possible information presentations/field trip for August
- Agree on:
 - Action assignments
 - Upcoming meeting dates

GROUND RULES AND DECISION RULES

Participants agreed that the Ground Rules adopted at the first meeting remain acceptable and appropriate. They were posted on the wall for reference.

Decision rules will be discussed at the next meeting.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS USED BY THE FOREST SERVICE TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT ASPEN PROJECTS:

Bryan Aber (Island Park Ranger District) provided a presentation about how the Forest Service develops and implements aspen projects. As a federal agency, all projects must be evaluated in terms of potential environmental impacts and then appropriate documentation must be prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act. There are three different levels of federal actions and each requires a different level of environmental documentation.

Some projects are considered to be routine and necessary given the mission of the federal agency. They are defined as “categorical exclusions’ and do not require environmental documentation. Projects that do not meet the definition of a categorical exclusion require the preparation of environmental documentation. An Environmental Assessment results in a decision that a proposed project will not result in significant environmental impacts and is eligible for a “Finding of No Significant Impact.” Projects that could result in significant environmental impacts require an Environmental Impact Statement.

All decisions can be appealed, and the Forest Service must respond to such appeals.

The timeframes associated with preparing documentation were outlined as follows:

	Categorical Exclusions	Environmental Assessments	Environmental Impact Statements
Initial analysis	Six months to one year	Six months to one year	One to three years
Scoping	30 days	30 days	30 days
Public comment on the draft document		30 days	45 days
Appeal period	45 days	45 days	45 days
Decision responding to any appeals that have been filed	45 days	45 days	45 days
Days to implement			5 days
Total	120 days	150 days	170 days

THE RAYNOLDS PASS PROJECT:

Bryan Aber (Ashton/Island Park Ranger District) provided a presentation a new aspen project, called the Raynold’s Pass project that is in the final planning stages.

The Ashton/Island Park Ranger District of the U.S. Forest Service is proposing to burn approximately 1,180 acres between Kelly Creek and the Raynolds Pass area of the Henrys Lake Mountains. The Raynolds Pass Prescribed Burn Project is proposed to enhance wildlife habitat through aspen and mountain brush regeneration. The project will be implemented as burning conditions allow, concluding by November 2007. The goal is to burn aspen, brush species, and encroaching conifer within three units, known as the Raynolds unit, the Upper Staley unit, and the Staley unit. The project is within the Centennial Mountains Subsection of the Revised Targhee Forest Plan, which is operated under a Semi-Primitive Motorized management prescription. This prescription encourages the use of prescribed natural fire and management ignited fire to maintain fire’s ecological role and to enhance habitat.

The Ashton/Island Park District Ranger has made a preliminary determination that the proposed project meets the Forest Service definitions for a categorical exclusion and that no extraordinary circumstances exist that would preclude us of the category. The Ashton/Island Park District Ranger will make final decisions related to this proposed project in a Decision Memo, which will document findings related to the environmental effects of the proposed project. More information about this project is available on the Internet at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/caribou-targhee/projects/raynolds/index.shtml>.

Project design features will entail up to 6 miles of control lines, full rehabilitation of the control lines after the prescribed burn, no new road construction, some pretreatment (achieved through felling of individual conifers using chainsaws to create jackpot fuels), avoidance of late seral conifer stands, exclusion of domestic livestock, and monitoring for noxious weeds for five years following completion of the project. No commercial timber harvest will occur as part of the project.

Bryan Aber explained that the Forest Service must also prepare a burn plan for the project. The burn plan will outline the conditions (temperature, humidity, wind speed, etc.) that the ignition could occur and dictate the resources that will be on hand to protect human safety and the environment. It is expected that a decision to proceed with the ignition will be made quickly. For that reason, communication with nearby property owners will be very difficult. The two public meetings to date have allowed local residents to learn more about the project and to communicate their preferences for communication.

Mr. Aber responded to questions. He explained that there is no sagebrush habitat in the vicinity of the planned ignition, that cheatgrass is not a problem, that monitoring will allow control of noxious weeds, and that there are no plans for construction of fencing to protect aspen regrowth.

INPUT TO THE FOREST SERVICE RELATED TO THE RAYNOLDS PASS PROJECT:

Bryan Aber asked for input regarding communication with nearby home-owners and resources that should be available. Following is a transcription of input provided:

Advice related to Communication:

- Personal touch is preferable – have Forest Service employees go door-to-door in uniform
- Flyer to all nearby addresses announcing the window of time during which the ignition is planned
- Send emails to those addresses when email addresses are available
- Put pictures on the web – before and after the burn – so people can monitor the recovery
- Posters in high-traffic locations that provide interpretive information

Advice related to Resources:

- Forest Service should request support from highway safety folks (local police/sheriff departments or the State Patrol) in the event that smoke affects visibility of nearby roads and highways

If people have additional comments that they would like to pass along, Bryan Aber's email address is haber@fs.fed.us

DISCUSSIONS OF IMPORTANCE TO THE FORMATION OF THE LOCAL WORKING GROUP:

Time was running short, so meeting participants recorded their thoughts related to the following four topics for future consideration:

How the Working Group should define success:

The following responses to this question were submitted:

- Working Group has reached consensus on aspen management strategies
- Both short-term (5 years) and long-term (20 years) scientifically assessed using botanically and biologically measured plant/animal studies
- Projects proposed, projects started, and projects completed
- Projects approved (number of)
- Projects funded (measure by amount of funding received)
- Projects completed (measured by amount of acres improved each year)
- Reverse the trend of aspen decline in Eastern Idaho by any percentage
- Foster development of aspen treatment projects that involve multiple players
- Collaboratively designed projects that do not fail legal challenge
- By the number of people each member is able to influence on aspen management
- Increased public knowledge/support of aspen management
- Treat 4,500 acres each year of aspen in the Caribou-Targhee National Forest
- Increase public awareness of the importance of aspen and the decline of aspen communities and build support for aspen projects
- Address problems and proposed solutions at the Natural Resources Conservation Service state technical committee
- Increased number of approved projects
- Educate the public to the point that on-the-ground acres of aspen are treated in a timely manner by all land managers (federal, state, and private)
- Working Group has reached consensus on media messages for aspen management
- A high percentage of aspen projects are supported and completed
- How well the Working Group educates the general population about aspen – this could be measured by continued or increased support for projects supported by the Working Group
- Increased public awareness about aspen ecology and succession. A myriad of ways to do this every day
- By supporting good projects, proposing projects, educating the public of the needs
- Funding for projects
- Initiation of a process that ensures aspen will remain viably on the landscape
- Agencies have the resources needed to manage aspen on federal, state, and private land.



What else does the Working Group need to do to be prepared to do its work?

The following responses to this question were submitted:

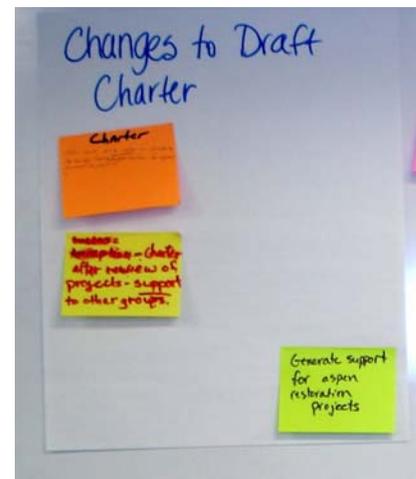
- The Working Group needs to have a better understanding of how and where to secure funding for projects
- Solicit more members from a broader base
- Identify and understand public and non-governmental organizations concerns and opposition to aspen regeneration project proposals
- Need to figure out how to bring a more diverse group to the table
- Develop a well defined goal (and expectations) and identify how to achieve that goal
- Need to have more groups represented
- Working Group activities need to be shared with other agency employees
- The Working Group needs a broader range of interests at the table
- Clear objectives to measure success
- Need experts to educate the group on aspen ecology.



What should the Working Group's Charter address?

The following responses to this question were submitted:

- The Working Group should serve as the center for developing partnership, funding, and volunteer opportunities for aspen restoration projects
- After review of projects, support other groups
- Generate support for aspen restoration projects.



It was agreed that the Working Group should move quickly to finish discussions about how the Group should operate. The next meeting, in July will be dedicated to framing a working charter. All Working Group members who wish to participate in this discussion should plan to attend the July meeting.

AUGUST INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATIONS AND FIELD TRIP

Wendy Lowe reported that Dale Bartos – with the U.S. Forest Service's Forestry Sciences Laboratory in Logan, Utah – and David Burton – with the Aspen Delineation Project out of Penryn, CA – will both be making presentations to the Challis Experimental Stewardship group in early August. She made preliminary contact with the two experts to find out if they would be willing to come to southeast Idaho before or after that presentation. Dr. Bartos could provide a detailed presentation on aspen ecology and Mr. Burton could explain how condition of aspen communities can be monitored and evaluated.

All were quite interested in pursuing this idea. It was suggested that the Working Group could meet for informational presentations one evening and then go on a field trip the next day to look at aspen communities in a range of conditions.

Wendy Lowe will contact both individuals and make additional plans for this event. Every effort will be made to notify the public about this event to ensure a large turnout. Details will be forthcoming.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Eastern Idaho Aspen Working Group will be on Wednesday, July 26 from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. The meeting will be held at IDF&G's Upper Snake Regional offices, located at 4279 Commerce Circle. The objectives for the meeting will include continued discussions to support finalization of a charter for the Working Group. All members of the Working Group with strong opinions about the purpose and goals and operating procedures should plan to attend this meeting.

In addition, an August meeting is being planned to receive informational presentations and participate in field trip. Details will be disseminated as soon as possible.

Individuals wishing to talk to the Working Group's facilitator, Wendy Lowe, can contact her at (208) 523-6668 or wendy@p2-solution.com.

ACTION ITEMS:

1. Wendy Lowe will prepare and distribute a group memory of the June 22, 2006 meeting.
2. Wendy Lowe will announce the next meeting of the Working Group with the help of Idaho Department of Fish and Game staff.
3. Wendy Lowe will contact Dale Bartos and David Burton and make plans for an August information presentation and field trip to expand the knowledge of the Working Group.