

**INFISH FIELD REVIEW
FREMONT AND WINEMA NATIONAL FORESTS
OCTOBER 7-9, 2003
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Background:

The Inter-agency Implementation Team (IIT) sponsored a field review on the Fremont and Winema National Forests (F-W) on October 7-9, 2003. The field review was focused on the Fremont National Forest. Most of the Winema National Forest is covered by the Aquatic Conservation Strategy of the Northwest Forest Plan. There are no anadromous fish on the Forest, so PACFISH does not apply. The BLM manages lands adjacent to Forest lands, but does not participate in INFISH, unless bull trout are affected. There are no bull trout affected by BLM management activities in the Lakeview District. The Fremont National Forest is working with a 1997 BO regarding grazing and associated activities affecting listed suckers within four watersheds, and a 1998 BO for bull trout which are present in three watersheds. The 1998 BO is similar to the prior BO with the addition of bull trout considerations.

Findings:

The F-W has been working with local programmatic Biological Opinions that have a 10 year life. The Forest has coordinated closely with US Fish and Wildlife Service on these, and have demonstrated success. The Forest understands the various tools available for riparian assessments and management, and has developed an effectiveness monitoring program. The Forest demonstrated understanding of INFISH requirements for the grazing program.

While there is good understanding of the local Biological Opinions, and on-the-ground actions reflect these, there is less understanding of the requirements and needs of the LRMP (INFISH) Biological Opinion. The grazing component of the Implementation Monitoring Module is being applied, but other components are not. Along with this, the Step Down Process, the PACFISH/INFISH Watershed Restoration Strategy, and the Road Density Analysis package were not being utilized. That being said, the Forest appeared to be meeting the intent of these processes and products through other collaborative means.

The review included participation by some grazing permittees who contributed very positively to the discussions. There were also some RO/IIT actions identified, including the need for support from the R6 Information Resources organization in loading the Implementation Monitoring database, more training on implementation and effectiveness monitoring, and a more well defined follow-up loop with line managers when problems are identified through monitoring.

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Participants: (Team Members*)

USFS

Jeff Blackwood *Team Lead

Kerry Overton*

Kathy Ramsey*

Mike Nevill*

Nancy Phelps*

Al Reyes, Engineering Staff, F-W NF

Jane Cottrell, Deputy FS

Bill Stover, Fish Bio

Orlando Gonzales, Ranger, Bly RD

Karen Zamudio, Range Ecology

Permittees and Oregon Cattleman's Association

John O'Keeffe

Steve Simmons

FWS

Alan Mauer

Leonard LeCaptain*

BLM

Alan Munhall

General Field Review Objectives

1. Determine if the Biological Opinions have been implemented in accordance with the mechanisms, terms and conditions.
2. Determine if on-the-ground decisions, interpretations and implementation are consistent with the Biological opinions, PACFISH and INFISH Goals and Objectives.
3. Determine if there is any duplication between the PACFISH/INFISH Implementation and Effectiveness Monitoring Modules and all other Forest implementation and effectiveness monitoring activities.
4. Improve and strengthen communication and coordination.

Specific Local Objectives

1. Identify needs for training or guidance associated with INFISH direction, BOs, or monitoring.
2. Identify any barriers to INFISH implementation.
3. Provide feedback to IIT on implementability or other management concerns.
4. Provide opportunities for local permittees to participate in the review discussions.

Additional IIT Objective

Identify items for clarification and improvement at the Regional and IIT levels.

FINDINGS

The Fremont and Winema National Forests have recently been combined under common leadership. The Forests work closely with Lakeview BLM, and share many programs and staff under the Service First umbrella. Combined, the Forests have one of the larger rangeland management programs in the Region. INFISH applies to all national forest lands outside those lands covered by the Northwest Forest Plan. Of particular interest are four listed resident species: bull trout, short nose sucker, Lost River sucker, and the Warner sucker. While there is bull trout habitat on part of the Forest in the Upper Klamath, Sprague and Sycan systems, most, if not all the sucker habitat is downstream and off-Forest.

The Fremont National Forest received a biological opinion from formal consultation on grazing associated activities affecting the listed suckers within four watersheds on the Forest on May 22, 1997. On October 28, 1998, the Forest received a biological opinion for bull trout for these activities. This second BO built on the first. Since then, the Forest has completed programmatic consultations for roads and road maintenance, and several other forest related activities. The Forest has developed an effectiveness monitoring program for these functional BOs, since they were developed for a 10 year timeframe. The purpose of the effectiveness monitoring was to assure desired outcomes from the BOs were being met over time. The Forest Plan (LRMP-INFISH) Programmatic Biological Opinion for Bull Trout applies specifically to the Fremont NF in systems where bull trout may be found, including the Upper Klamath, Sprague and Sycan drainages.

COMMENDATIONS

- The Forest and FWS should be recognized for the effectiveness of their ten year programmatic consultation. This demonstrates a high level of trust and accomplishment between agencies. The Forest put into place an effectiveness monitoring procedure and created understanding and confidence beginning in 1996. The F-W created a riparian ecological type classification assessment protocol that parallels the effectiveness monitoring (EM) portion of the IIT monitoring. The F-W is tying the effectiveness monitoring sites to key areas. This process should be reviewed by the Region and the IIT for further application.
- The F-W should be recognized for understanding the various tools available for riparian assessment. It is clear that the development of an all encompassing assessment process has been a strength resulting in big picture understanding of successful riparian management. This includes the development of their own Meadow Riparian Monitoring Guide (February 1997), and other Regionally recognized protocols and procedures.
- The F-W demonstrates understanding of the standards and guidelines for grazing in INFISH and the Biological Opinion. The F-W also applies INFISH grazing Standards and Guides in conjunction with other processes to learn and understand the overall functioning of aquatic systems.
- The F-W should be recognized for using a multi-faceted process for developing project priorities, including the biological, social, political, and economic considerations to maximize their funding availability, and on-the-ground accomplishments.
- The F-W is developing productive partnerships with REACH and others to accomplish work in a cost effective manner.
- The F-W are full participants in the Klamath Coordinated Assessment process. Coordination on public and private land issues is leading to better use of restoration funding and accomplishments.
- The F-W has a good working relationship with the permittees that interacted with the team, and collaborate to achieve needed monitoring of grazing use. These Permittees contribute ideas, resources, and experience in resolving management challenges.
- On the projects we visited, there appeared to be early and often involvement with FWS in the level 1 team and in implementing the streamlining process.
- The Forest and FWS staff that participated were very helpful and supportive of the review process.

OBSERVATIONS AND PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Observation 1 – There are two reporting systems for grazing, one for IIT implementation and one for the local biological opinions. These include implementation and compliance and periodic effectiveness, each with separate reporting dates.

Recommendation – It is the intent of the Regional Execs to efficiently conduct monitoring activities, focusing on the IIT modules with common reporting schedules. The Level 1 teams are expected to review local BOs regarding needs and the IIT monitoring requirements, identifying areas of duplication, and recommending any changes to the Level 2 team. Requirements that are in addition to IIT are intended to be exceptions, based on local circumstances and needs. The goal is to have one corporate reporting system for implementation and effectiveness monitoring.

Observation 2 - The F-W has actively gathered significant data under Effectiveness Monitoring (EM). There is a possibility that when compared to IIT EM efforts, there could be conflicting approaches or information gathered of questionable use.

Recommendation – The IIT EM team has completed a lot of validation work for EM procedures and parameters to address natural and sample variability, especially for the types of data needed to reach desired outcomes. The Forest should coordinate with the IIT EM team to compare procedures, utility of data gathered, and reliability of use. The F-W may benefit from interactions with the IIT EM team to help focus effectiveness monitoring efforts on those parameters that can result in tangible and reliable interpretation over time.

Observation 3 – The Forest received training and demonstrates understanding of the grazing portion of the 2003 PACFISH/INFISH integrated land use Implementation Monitoring (IM) Module, however, it appears that other components, including the vegetation, fire, recreation, and roads, etc. have not been implemented as per Regional Exec direction.

Recommendation – The F-W needs to support implementation monitoring beyond the grazing component as per Regional Executive direction. Line officers should become aware of responsibilities to implement all components of the IM Module, and support the necessary training and work needed to do this task. The F-W should designate a Forest coordinator to facilitate training, implementation, and tech transfer for full application of the integrated IM Module. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service should be included at key points, including training and implementation.

Observation 4 – Within the area covered by the Bull Trout LRMP (INFISH) Biological Opinion the Forest is not using the PACFISH/INFISH Watershed Restoration Strategy developed by the IIT and approved by the Regional Execs.

Recommendation – The Forest should consider the Strategy as they set priorities for restoration work when working within bull trout subbasins, since development and application of the Strategy was a Term and Condition of the LRMP (INFISH) Biological

Opinion. The designated Forest coordinator should make this report available to line management and staff involved in project planning and priority setting.

Observation 5 – The F-W could take advantage of the feedback loop provided in the Implementation Monitoring process. This information could be useful in setting priorities, communicating needs, and local accountability regarding meeting the expectations of the LRMP (INFISH) BO for Bull Trout, or other local stream-riparian implementation monitoring.

Recommendation– The F-W should establish an annual review of the results of the Implementation Monitoring with the Level 1 and Level 2 teams. The focal point of discussion should be the results of the annual IIT IM Report.

Observation 6 – The level of coordination between the specialists, e.g. biologists, rangeland management, fisheries, could be improved. Coordinated goals could improve the data, information, and outcomes and provide more integrated project actions. An example was conducting instream structural work within a reach where long term monitoring was being conducted creating a conflict and loss of important data.

Recommendation – The level of coordination between specialists, e.g., biologists, rangeland managers, fisheries managers could be improved during project planning, to assure integrated outcomes.

Observation 7 – We visited a developed recreation site at Willow Creek where the Forest was contemplating expanding the campground within an RHCA.

Recommendation – This is a small developed site. In expansion planning, consider development away from the RHCA. Also, consider upgrading the fence or other physical barrier that would reduce the impact of use between the campground and the creek.

Observation 8 – The F-W was not specifically using the step-down process as outlined in the LRMP (INFISH) Biological Opinion for Bull Trout in setting project priorities and deciding where work should occur in subbasins occupied by bull trout.

Recommendation – Since the IIT step down process was developed, many other processes and players have entered the picture. Continue to meet the intent of the LRMP (INFISH) Biological Opinion for Bull Trout by using a coordinated prioritization process that includes results of watershed analysis, the IIT Watershed Restoration Strategy, watershed councils, SWCD priorities, and other partnerships and opportunities. When projects are proposed, they should have a clear definition of “why here, why now”, and how will the project contribute to meeting Bull Trout LRMP BO expectations.

Observation 9 – On Deming Creek, we observed quality work in the restoration of land and roads to accommodate recreation access and activities around a high value bull trout stream. Some mistakes were made, but through adaptive management, they were quickly recognized and remedied. We also discussed the potential replacement of the culvert just below the

developed parking area which is a suspected fish passage barrier. In addition, we observed inappropriate road blading practices in the Deming Creek RHCA up to the creek crossing.

Recommendation - Even though there have been measured reductions in sedimentation, it appears that there is continued potential for surface flows and erosion. We recommend continuing efforts to restore the area through use of seeding to obtain successful revegetation. This will armor the area against invasive weeds (which are in the vicinity) and control further sedimentation. Regarding the culvert, we recommend that the issues of bull trout population size and fragmentation be thoroughly evaluated in light of the potential brook trout interactions/invasion. We suggest reviewing the publications by Adams, Dunham and Rieman at the following web site: <http://www.fs.fed.us/rm/boise/teams/fisheries/publications.htm>.

On the road blading issue, we recommend that a clear understanding of the BMPs and INFISH Standards and Guides regarding sidecasting surface material be required of the equipment operators.

Observation 10 – We observed an active vegetation management proposal within an RHCA on the Barnes Valley-Long Branch Restoration Project.

Recommendation – It appears that this Project is within the scope of INFISH and clearly shows an understanding of the goals of accomplishing healthy watershed conditions. The basis of these discussions could be through the Watershed Analysis Process or use of other acceptable tools to document consistency with INFISH, as described and required by the LRMP Biological Opinion for Bull Trout Term and Condition #2. The Team supports these management decisions.

Observation 11 – The Forest did not send in an IIT IM Report for 2002.

Recommendation – The Forest stated that they completed the IM Excel Module, but did not forward to the IM Team. They will put the information on a CD and mail it in so it can be added to the 2002 IM Report. (The report was received on 10/21/03)

PERMITTEE DISCUSSIONS

John O’Keeffe and Steve Simmons added to the discussions including the following:

The Forest Service needs to find a way to accomplish the AMP NEPA in a timely manner. Permittees cannot afford the risk of not turning livestock on the Forest due to the Forest Service’s inability to complete the NEPA on schedule.

FOIA requests should be better screened, and requesters should be charged a reasonable fee for the expenses of producing documents. Fulfilling these FOIA requests takes valuable time from the key folks on the Forest who need to also be doing the NEPA and field work supporting the rangeland program.

When roads are being considered for closure, assess which roads should contain enough room at the junction to facilitate truck and stock trailer parking and turnarounds and which roads should be available for access to range management structures.

On steep slopes, when roads are closed, consider closing with boulders that allow livestock passage, as opposed to logs or other full barriers.

Permittees discussed innovative ways of improving utilization and distribution, thus reducing pressures on more fragile riparian areas. These included periodic heavy utilization of less desirable species away from the waterway to stimulate growth on other species, juniper removal and meadow encroachment work, and off channel water developments. In addition, they recommended close coordination and responsiveness from local District personnel for approval of improvements that would reduce pressure on riparian areas and help make for more efficient management. More efficient management by the permittee can help meet INFISH goals.

The permittees are supportive of modifying the RMO’s through the Watershed Analysis Process.

RO/IIT ACTIONS

There is a need for additional training and understanding of INFISH goals, Standards and Guides, LRMP (INFISH) Biological Opinion Terms and Conditions and products already developed to assist with BO compliance. The Region should consider a feedback and assessment meeting.

- The RO, through the new IR organization, needs to support the installation of the software for the IM Module on the Forest servers. Other Regions are not having this problem. This needs to be a high priority for this Region. Unless this is remedied, R6 will not have a viable reporting system, and will not gain in efficiencies that have been built into the IM Module Database System.
- IIT should review the utility of the Watershed Restoration Strategy (circa 1999) in light of the current issues and factors affecting priorities.
- RO/IIT needs to set up an EM coordination meeting with INFISH forests such as the F-W.
- AMP NEPA priorities need to be clearly articulated by Region 6.
- FOIA – The Region should review our (national?) policy on payments for FOIA requests.
- In past years, there has not been visible follow-up with the annual IM results by leadership or the IIT with line managers where non-compliance is evident. Although some of this has occurred, we recommend that a more visible process be developed.

The IIT Review Team appreciates the efforts and support of the Forest in the review process. We also appreciate the participation of Leonard LeCaptain of FWS in the review. Leonard's insights and contributions added to the completeness and context of the review. The results of this report will be shared with the Forest, Permittees, Lakeview BLM, FWS, and the Regional Exec Team.