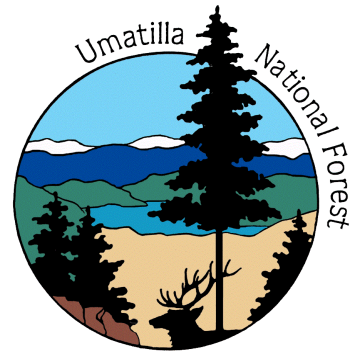


FIELD TRIP NOTES

Potamus Fuels Reduction Project

June 8, 2009
Heppner, OR
10:00 AM – 3:00 PM



Meeting Facilitator: Joani Bosworth

Participants: Tom Mafera, Brian Spradlin, Janet Plocharsky, Dale Boyd, Carrie Spradlin, Dave Powell, Bill Aney, Randy Scarlett, Ken Franz, Bruce Young, Stanley Boatman, Dick Myers, Ron Haguewood, Steve Cherry, Tom Bennett, Steve Rhea, Angie Johnson, Steve Peck, Kelwayne Haguewood, Jeff Cutsforth, John Luciani, Pamela Williams, Brian Reel, Terrie Myers

Introductions

(Tom Mafera – District Ranger – Heppner RD)

Tom Mafera welcomed the public participants to the Potamus Field Trip at Penland Lake Campground. Individuals introduced themselves and briefly described their interest in being part of the group of collaborators for the Potamus Fuels Reduction Project. Tom gave a brief discussion about the background of this planning area including the Morrow County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (MCCWPP), the Federal Register listing of the Penland Lake Community as “at risk” from wildfire, and the unique planning process used for this collaboration.

Overview of Previous Meetings

(Brian Spradlin – Fuels Specialist – Heppner RD)

Brian Spradlin gave an overview of the past two public meetings and the existing conditions on the landscape. The overview included discussion of historical large scale insect disturbance, the existing fuel load resulting from insect outbreak and fire suppression, Fire Regime location and typical fire severity within those regimes, and a description of what we will see during the field trip.

Field Trip Objectives

(Tom Mafera – District Ranger – Heppner RD)

Tom summarized the objectives for the day in terms of the stops planned on the field trip and keyed in on a few questions to think about during the field trip to help with developing the Proposed Action on this project. The questions to think about are listed below:

- 1) *Is it important to treat around private land? If so, what are your thoughts on intensity of treatment and distance from the private boundary?*

- 2) *Is it important to treat hazardous fuels along evacuation and travel routes in the area? If so, what do you think they should look like (e.g. how many feet should be treated on each side? only one side?) Are there other travel routes other than those identified in the Morrow County Community Wildfire Protection Plan you would like to see treated?*
- 3) *Is it important to treat the landscape outside of the “Red Zone” to facilitate landscape integration of strategic fuels breaks? What type of treatments do you think would be appropriate? Should they be as comprehensive as those adjacent to private land? Does an integrated landscape fuel break strategy make sense?*
- 4) *We would also like to know any additional information you have concerning the planning of this project. What other resources are important to you? How do you think we should address those resources in our planning effort?*

Question

How is this project tied into treatment on private land?

ODF Answer - (Angie Johnson)

Federal grant availability to private landowners is prioritized based on adjacency of private property to treatment on public land (e.g. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management). Future private land grants will be supported by the MCCWPP and the treatments proposed under this planning effort.

Stop #1 – Penland Lake Wildland Urban Interface Unit #4

(Tom Mafera – District Ranger – Heppner RD)

(Dale Boyd – Fire Management Officer – Heppner RD)

(Angie Johnson – Unit Forester – John Day, OR)

Penland Lake Unit # 4 was treated last operating season to remove surface and ladder fuels of commercial size. A follow up treatment will occur this operating season to masticate residual surface fuels and non-commercially thin the understory trees. This unit is located directly on the property boundary between Forest Service and private land.

Angie Johnson described funding options available to the ODF to support private landowners treating their properties to provide for public and firefighter safety and defensible space in the event of a wildfire. Treatment objectives include fire safety (for public and firefighters) and fire behavior treatments to reduce surface and ladder fuels and overstory continuity in the case of crown fire. Under the grant/cost-share process the landowner provides 25% of the funding and the grant will pick up the remaining 75%.

Angie provided maps showing individual tax lots and Penland Lake Homesites to illustrate the location of structures and ownership adjacent to Forest Service land. These maps will be available on the website. Project funding has moved away from structure by structure funding and moved towards landscape level strategic treatments to provide maximum impact and efficiency in providing a firesafe community.

NRCS Comment:

Tom Bennett of the NRCS talked about the grant funding options available to private landowners through their authority. The cost share program is branching out to include firesafe treatments on private property. The focus of the NRCS funding is commercial property, but opportunities exist for recreational owners as well. The new Farm Bill will clarify and provide more direction and/or funding for the next fiscal year projects.

Public Comment:

Jeff Cutsforth applied and received funding with NRCS last year and is waiting to receive the funding to complete treatment on his property.

Question:

What types of treatments are covered by the NRCS funding program?

NRCS Comment:

Thinning and Fire Safety treatments are two funding levels supported by the NRCS grant authority. The funding is primarily for working lands versus homesite/recreational lands. There is an opportunity to combine funding resources from both ODF and NRCS where available.

Public Comment:

The Penland Land Coop. is currently treating some of their lots for removal of fuels within the private ownership around Penland Lake.

Dale Boyd described the treatment objectives for Penland Unit # 4 as a reduction of surface fuel and removal of ladder fuels to facilitate defensible space adjacent to private property. The prescription in this area was to remove any tree that had a diameter at breast height of 7 inches or less as these were considered ladder fuel components of the fuel bed. Additional removals were based upon trees with diameters up to 14 inches and branches within 7 feet of the ground directly under the dripline of the dominant overstory. These are also considered ladder fuels and their removal will facilitate a reduction in fire severity. An overview of the 4 fire safe principles was given to illustrate how the treatment will affect wildfire behavior and increase suppression effectiveness.

Question:

I see many of these trees (Engelmann Spruce) have dead branches that are within a couple of feet of the ground – won't these lead to torching of those trees and contribute to fire spread?

FS Answer:

Spruces are tree species that are intolerant to fire and conducive to torching. Their physiology and fire adaptations produce a “replacement” type effect meaning that when they encounter wildfire they suffer high mortality. In this landscape we are comfortable with the relative number of spruce trees versus other species and on this particular unit spruce will not contribute significantly to fire behavior and spread.

The removal of surface fuels will help prevent torching from occurring and enable our suppression forces to keep the fire on the ground and prevent it from reaching the crowns of individual trees. The idea is to break up the continuity of fuels throughout the unit so as to create a defensible space between Forest Service land and private property we are comfortable that this treatment has accomplished those objectives – especially after our follow up mastication treatment this year.

Question:

After masticating this unit do you think you will use prescribed fire to help reduce the immediate increase in fine fuels?

FS Answer:

We are not planning on using fire on this particular unit because we feel that fire in this type of environment and given tree species composition will result in higher than acceptable mortality. The snow load after a couple of years will help compact the relative increase in fine fuels. Compaction will effect a change in the fuel bed structure and reduce flame length and severity in the event of wildfire.

ODF Comment:

These (Penland 4) types of projects do meet the CWPP intent. The CWPP is a document that should be revisited periodically (i.e. every 5 years). One of the goals of this review would be to make more specific recommendation for fuels reduction activities or safety measures.

ODFW Question (Steve Cherry):

How large of an area do you need to treat to protect the cabins? Two miles?

FS Answer:

As a federal agency we are treating only federal lands. If we treat more intensely near the cabins and the private land is not treated it may be possible for high intensity fires on private land. One approach could be less intense

treatment as we move away from cabins which would be used to slow fire movement. Integrating previous treatments into this project would be important. Also, the amount of treatment across the landscape depends on the risk people are willing to take when it comes to fire, resources, and private property.

ODFW Question:

The Forest Service doesn't have enough money to treat every acre, so what is your thought process as you move forward? What are you thinking strategically? You have a Dedicated Old Growth area adjacent to private lands. Will it be beneficial treat more intensively in other areas?

Public Comment:

Jeff Cutsforth and the other cabin owners he has talked to are pretty happy with what has been done here.

Public Comment (various participants):

- *Strategically this area is important for escape routes.*
- *Fire Breaks would be a good idea. Open and closed roads could serve as fire breaks and could be a life line for fire fighters.*
- *Road maintenance has been reduced so fire breaks would be even more important now. Perhaps road work could also be funded.*
- *Can we do any kind of treatment in the Dedicated Old Growth? We are concerned about its fire risk and adjacency to private lands.*

The group then moved into the lodgepole stand in the treatment area which was harvested in 1985 and pre-commercially thinned in 1998. The fuels treatment removed some true fir and lodgepole but was relatively light compared to other sections of the treatment area.

Public Comment:

Fire safe forests will require continuous re-entry (based on stand type) to maintain the treatment depending on growth rates and understory regeneration. This type of management will cost a significant amount of money. Is it cheaper overall to use multiple entries to maintain a stand?

The group discussed specific treatment costs for fuels treatments in the recent past including service and stewardship contracting. Service contracts generally cost \$800 - \$1,000 per acre and stewardship contracts sometimes come close to breaking even.

Stop #2 – Multi-strata Moist Upland Forest

The group then moved on to our next stop located on the 2153 road near the 044 gate. This moist forest stand is a multi-strata old forest. Dead and down material contributes an estimated 30 to 40 tons/acre. Brian Spradlin (Fuels Specialist) discussed the fire history and fire regime in this stand. Carrie Spradlin (Silviculturist) touched on stand

structure, age, and tree species diversity. Randy (Wildlife Biologist) talked about wildlife uses of this stand including cavity nesting focal species and elk and the wildlife management emphasis of this area. This area was affected by the spruce bud worm (SBW) epidemic of the past decade but the stand is still intact (as compared to other SBW attacked stands). The stop generated many questions from the public and discussion among field trip participants when answering these complex fire behavior and forest ecology questions.

Question:

How much down wood do the woodpeckers need?

FS Response:

Models differ but 5% cover of down wood is a general guide in an area like this.

Public Questions:

- *How large of a fuel load is this? FS: 35-45 tons*
- *What would be the effects of a plume dominated fire in this stand? FS: Discussion on complexities of fire behavior.*
- *How large would patches need to be to be effective for slowing down a flame front? FS: Discussion on complexities of fire behavior and ecology.*

Public Comments:

- *I like the patchwork effect because it could benefit multiple resources.*
- *We need to break up the continuum of fuels.*
- *I have concern for the Pacific Yew- what happens to it with overstory removal?*
- *If we don't treat this old forest all the old forest in the area could burn up and be gone.*
- *The Forest Service should run models to see if fire effects change before and after treatments.*
- *The Forest Service should consider values at risk if you don't do anything.*
- *Treatment near the cabins should be a higher priority than this stand.*
- *Treat from the "bull's-eye" out.*

Question:

If you let the natural cycle occur what will we get – also considering changes in climate?

FS Answer:

With the presence of spruce bud worm legacy materials in these stands leading to high fuel loading and the evidence that some of these stands have missed one or more fire cycles it is likely that the historical fire regime has been altered and that wildfire occurring in this stand would have more severe effects than one might have seen in the past.

The group moved out of this stand to discuss evacuation routes and fuel breaks. Basic principles of safe evacuation routes were discussed. Fire break attributes were also discussed and commented on. The CWPP has identified evacuation routes and much of their length lay within private lands.

Steve Rhea – Heppner Fire District:

Access for structural fire fighters should be important to home owners in the area. If ingress/egress routes are too narrow or vegetated fire fighters may not feel safe protecting a home due to access limitations.

ODFW:

How wide of an area do you need for a fuel break? Our concern is that these treatments could increase visibility of elk making them vulnerable to road hunting. Fire breaks on closed roads would reduce elk vulnerability.

FS Comment:

Designing effective fuel breaks to protect this area will require strategic location that may or may not align with existing open or closed roads.

Public Comment:

I would like to see a large scale fuels break strategy on the landscape.

Stop #3 – Dry Upland Forest

The group then moved on to the last stop of the day in upland dry forest stand. Brian Spradlin and Carrie Spradlin discussed the existing fuels and vegetative condition of typical dry upland forest stands in the planning area. Randy Scarlett discussed wildlife uses in stands like these. Dale Boyd talked about using prescribed fire as tool to reduce fuel loading in these stands.

Tom Mafera closed the day by thanking participants for attending the field trip and encouraged everyone to come to the next meeting on July 2 at 6:00 pm. We will meet at the Heppner Ranger District to discuss defensible space strategies, evacuation routes, landscape level treatment and design and other resource interests in more detail.