

January 14, 2015

Tenmile South Helena Forest Restoration Collaborative Committee

Meeting 3

Attending -

Collaborative Members: Angie Grove, Doug Powell (left 2:45), Mike Bishop, Ron Alles, Joe Cohenour, Mike Murray (arrived at 2:15), Leonard Wortman (arrived 2:30)

Resources: Elaina Graham (FS GIS Program Manager), David Nunn (FS), Brad Langsather (Open Space Manager, City of Helena), Sharon Scott (FS), Heather DeGeest (FS), Rob Gump (FS), David Fothergill (FS), Eric Neal (FS)

Public guests: Diane Tipton, Steve Balazs

Media: Tom Kuglin (Helena IR)

Notes – Next Meeting is February 11, 2015 beginning at 1:30. Location TBD.

Fire Modeling Presentation, David Nunn (materials attached)

Questions were raised regarding additional 50 plots the Helena/Lewis & Clark Forest (HNF) completed – beyond regional plots. There are now hundreds of plots in this region where data has been collected and analyzed. The plots are randomly selected using a beehive-style shape; HNF wanted more data, another layer of vegetation data and added 50 random plots. The additional data helps build the plans and feeds into the modeling software to offer more accurate modeling and analysis.

Are the photographs on the front of the handout thermal? No – they're regular mapping – but the bottom right photo (orange, green, red) shows potential flame length, green being shortest, red being longest flame length. The modeling the Forest Service (FS) is using is geared toward treatment plans based on current conditions & risk. Another modeling focus is fire behavior, i.e. how long it will take a fire to go from point A to point B, which is geared more toward prediction of an active wildfire season to plan for evacuation and suppression.

Is all of this done internally, or are there outside organizations also providing data and analysis? Yes, outside agencies – peer reviews – go on throughout the planning & modeling. Many additional people from outside organizations are providing their ongoing observations. Many observations of actual fire behavior and incidents go back in to the modeling systems to analyze accuracy of predictions and assist in future predictive information.

Are the many beetle-killed trees well represented in the current conditions for the modeling to be accurate? Yes, the data is current and includes photographs and comparison to fire events in other

similar regions. They are calibrated, looking at how fires behaved in recent years to see patterns & offer insights and predictions for our area.

Does the modeling take into account future landscape issues? Yes, by observing other similar regions and their recent history, and by considering details about the current landscape (difference between a dead tree from beetle vs. a dead tree for another reason); they can generally predict what the landscape will look like in the next 10 years.

What about soil quality & prediction? The modeling can estimate temperatures of fire based on these conditions and can help build predictions for soil effects as well.

The group recognized trade-offs and fine lines between consuming materials vs. leaving them to allow the soil to pull nutrients from them. The Finney model looks at 20-40% treatment – which is huge – and Mike Bishop raised concerns that the general community may not support that large-scale treatment, particularly in IRAs and with large-scale mechanized treatment & timber sales. Heather & David pointed out that as each unit is treated, they can re-run the modeling to find out the impact on the great landscape. This will allow them to adjust plans for surrounding units, minimizing required treatments as much as possible while still meeting purpose & need.

City of Helena received an EPA grant to study the effect of climate change on water quality & water quantity in the Tenmile watershed area. The data they collect will probably be helpful to this project. Sharon suggested the lead for that project, Don Clark, use the FS-collected vegetation data for the project.

Range of Alternatives Discussion, Allen Byrd (materials attached)

Allen described how each comment is read, by whom, and how it is dissected & comments categorized by issue.

What about the idea to create buffer zones around the IRAs but not doing burns or treatments in the internal parts of the IRAs? There are conflicting ideas here, particularly because many private properties are adjacent to IRAs and to create the buffer zone, the outside edges of the IRAs must be managed. Project staff is working on alternatives for work in IRAs because comments on that issue were extensive. Staff will use the alternatives in the modeling program to try to predict what would happen in the case of a fire with those alternative treatments in place.

Does the modeling include areas outside the watershed, such as McDonald Pass? Yes, there is a model called Fireshed that takes into account fire behavior in adjacent areas to the project area.

The draft EIS will be released at the end of April for a 45 day comment period – the collaborative will need to meet before the release and during the comment period in order to provide meaningful recommendations to the FS on the draft EIS.

Rob showed on Google Earth the area of Corral Gulch. He showed dramatically different alternatives, one is a proposed large commercial unit being adjusted to be more hand treatment & some prescribed

fire in the unit. They will model & run effects analysis to show an array of those effects for both alternatives to see if either alternative meets the purpose & need by effectively changing fire behavior.

Question – did FWP provide recommendations or comments regarding bear & moose? Not specifically. Their comments weren't as in-depth as expected; they more generally referred to game & non-game species. It is expected they will provide significantly more comments during the 45 day comment period of the EIS. An example – an area just west and north of Clancy has a large elk hiding area, an alternative might be small, low-intensity burning instead of large scale commercial treatment. The issue is the creation of a road or entry area which makes the elk hiding area not function as its purpose.

Will public comments be available to the collaborative? Heather said the HNF/L&C are trying to make the public comments more accessible to the public and other interested organizations. The difficulty is that the documents are drafts. They will work on having downloads available from the website and will let collaborative members know when they have a strategy for disseminating the information.

Diane Tipton asked if we had any information about the paving of Rimini Rd and the removal of 40 acres of trees mentioned by a contractor bidding on the job. Sharon mentioned that 40 acres is relatively small for six miles of road.

Diane is concerned about the consequences of removing so many trees from along the stream in a watershed, including increased evaporation and warmer water temperatures.

Next meeting in four weeks, February 11th at 1:30:

FS will invite a hydrologist, biologist, and soil scientist for questions at the next meeting.

Still need to fill one more conservation organization position for the collaborative. Any recommendations from members would be great.

Will go through by-laws and procedures, elect chair.

FS will need feedback on the interdisciplinary planning process in about 6 weeks.

FS is requesting letters of support for proposals in the Tenmile & Telegraph areas. Contact her for more details.

The city will request feedback on the facilitator being hired. The city will release a request for qualifications or request for proposals very soon. When responses are collected, they will be screened and the city will request feedback from the collaborative in the selection process.