

MEMORANDUM

To: Tenmile South Helena Forest Restoration Collaborative Committee, the City of Helena, resources, members of the public, and media

From: Ecosystem Research Group

Date: September 1, 2015

Re: Summary and notes for the August 12, 2015 meeting of the Tenmile South Helena Forest Restoration Collaborative Committee

SUMMARY OF TENMILE COLLABORATIVE MEETING

Wednesday, August 12, 2015. 1:30 to 3:52 pm. City - County Building Room 426.

Attendance

Collaborative Committee Members – Vice Co-chair Jordan Alexander, fire community representative; Vice Co-chair Mike Bishop, citizen-at-large representative; Jeff Chaffee, commercial use representative; Chairman Joe Cohenour, conservation organization representative; Gary Marks, commercial use representative; Eleanor Morris, conservation organization representative; Mike Murray, county government representative; Doug Powell, citizen-at-large representative; and Leonard Wortman, county government representative

Resources – Roy Barkley, U.S. Forest Service Trails Coordinator; Doug Dodge, Jefferson County Department of Emergency Services Coordinator; Sarah Elkins, City of Helena administrative point-of-contact (POC); Gayle Joslin, Helena Hunters and Anglers Association; Rocky Infanger, Tri-County FireSafe Working Group; Ben Irely, Ecosystem Research Group facilitator; Cory Kirsch, Jefferson County Commissioner; Brad Langsather, City of Helena technical POC and substitute for committee member Ron Alles; Shannen Lewis, Sen. Tester's Regional Director; Pat McKelvey, Tri-County FireSafe Working Group; Robert Rasmussen, Prickly Pear Land Trust Trails Director; Jenny Sika, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks Wildlife Biologist; Sonny Stinger, Tri-County FireSafe Working Group; Dick Sloan, Montana Department of Environmental Quality

Members of the Public – Doug Abelin

Media – None present

Absent – Ron Alles

Decisions

1. The minutes from the July meeting were adopted.
2. Brad Langsather may vote as a substitute for Ron Alles.
3. Substitutes for Committee members will be evaluated by the Committee on a case-by-case basis.
4. Commissioner Wortman is resigning from the Collaborative Committee.

Action Items

1. The Committee should revisit its charter regarding replacing Committee members and substitute voting.
2. Jefferson County Commissioner Cory Kirsch will apply to the seat vacated by Commissioner Wortman.
3. Commissioner Wortman will write a letter to the Mayor, supporting the application of Commissioner Kirsch.

34 4. Chairman Cohenour will file as an interested party in the big game amendment to the Forest Plan
35 when the public notice is posted.

36 **Bin Items**

- 37 1. The Committee would like more information about how resources are affected by the nine key issues
38 and concerns.
- 39 2. Does using a tracked vehicle in a roadless area jeopardize the roadless designation?
- 40 3. For the two types of prescribed fire proposed, what percent of the area would be burned?
- 41 4. What types of trees will be left as snags in the proposed treatments?
- 42 5. Will areas treated before prescribed fire is introduced have enough fuel left to carry the prescribed
43 fire?

44 **MEETING NOTES FOR WEDNESDAY AUGUST 12, 2015**
45 **CITY-COUNTY BLDG, RM. 426**

46 Meeting called to order at 1:30 pm

47 **1.) Welcome, introductions, and approve meeting notes by Chairman Cohenour. Decisional.**
48 **Objectives: Welcome. Committee members and attendees introduce themselves. Approve notes**
49 **from previous meeting.**

50 Meeting attendees briefly introduced themselves.

51 Committee approved the meeting notes for the July 8, 2015 meeting.

52 There will be an Objection Resolution Meeting for the Divide Travel Plan and associated Forest Plan
53 Amendment for Big Game Security on August 19 from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM at the Helena National
54 Forest Supervisor's Office. Chairman Cohenour will be in attendance; if Committee members have
55 anything they would like Chairman Cohenour to address, please email him those items.

56 There will be a Helena and Lewis & Clark National Forests Community Conversations on Forest Plan
57 Revision meeting held in a series of locations between August 10 and August 20. The Helena meeting
58 will be on August 19, 2015 from 5:00 PM to 8:00 PM at the MACO conference room at 2715 Skyway
59 Drive.

60 **2.) Fuel treatments in the project area by Ben Irely. Informational. Objective: Committee**
61 **discusses the site-specific proposed treatments with special attention given to treatments in roadless**
62 **areas.**

63 When discussing topics for this meeting, Marshall Thompson, liaison for the U.S. Forest Service (USFS),
64 suggested that the Collaborative have a discussion regarding proposed treatments within the roadless
65 areas. That is how this agenda item came about. The table within the Helena Ranger District's document
66 titled "Tenmile - South Helena Project: Detailed Information" provides the detail behind the legend items
67 on the "Tenmile South Helena Project Proposed Action Map for Scoping".

68 Proposed actions within Roadless Areas include two types of commercial harvests: improvement harvests
69 and regeneration harvests. There are also two types of prescribed fire proposed, including: low severity
70 prescribed fire and mixed severity prescribed fire. Lastly, there are two types of non-commercial
71 treatments proposed, including: private land buffers and precommercial thinning.

72 Improvement harvests are described as thinning from below and removing overstory trees in order to
73 reduce density and crown fire potential. Substantial amounts of green, healthy large diameter trees would
74 be retained in these dry or mixed forests. Snags would be retained according to the Forest Plan.

75 Regeneration harvests would include three types of specific actions, including:

- 76 1. Clearcuts with reserve trees, followed by site prep burn. This is described as cutting dead and dying
77 lodgepole pine while retaining all other conifers, primarily Douglas fir, spruce, and subalpine fir.
78 These units will naturally regenerate with lodgepole pine. Snags will be retained according to the
79 Forest Plan.
- 80 2. Cut dead and dying lodgepole pine. Retain 10-20 trees per acre of well-distributed healthy Douglas-
81 fir and ponderosa pine to provide seed. Natural regeneration will be promoted, though ponderosa may
82 be planted. Retain Forest Plan required snags.
- 83 3. A mix of dead lodgepole and other species will be cut. Retain about 20-50 trees per acre of healthy
84 Douglas-fir to provide seed and shelter for seedlings. Natural regeneration will be promoted, though
85 ponderosa may be planted. Retain Forest Plan required snags.

86 Low severity prescribed burns are proposed to improve dry forest and grass-shrub areas. In forest areas,
87 savannah conditions would be created with understory ladder fuels and crown fire potential reduced by
88 the treatments. In non-forest areas, encroaching conifers would be reduced. Mechanical and hand
89 rearrangement of fuels will occur, with smaller diameter (<12") trees strategically slashed or thinned to
90 facilitate prescribed burning. This treatment type also includes facilitating strategic buffers for containing
91 aerial ignition zones for mixed severity prescribed burns.

92 Mixed severity prescribed burns are proposed as a way of producing a mosaic of prescribed fire types and
93 intensities resulting in a strategic landscape mosaic of fire effects. About 40% to 60% of each unit would
94 be burned. Mechanical rearrangement of fuels will be required to contain aerial ignition zones, which are
95 principally dead lodgepole stands. Units proposed for mixed severity prescribed fire include strategic
96 buffers of low severity prescribed fire for managing the mixed severity fire.

97 Private land buffers treatments are proposed to reduce hazardous fuels on USFS lands creating a buffer
98 zone near private lands that have structures. These treatment will include opportunities for residents who
99 have completed fuels reduction or defensible space treatment on their property to extend treatments onto
100 public lands where it meets land management objectives. Treatment includes a wide range of hand and/or
101 mechanical activities to rearrange and remove hazardous fuels and reduce crown fire potential by thinning
102 trees. Buffers in the South Helena portion would extend up to 100 yards from private boundaries onto
103 USFS lands. Buffers in the Tenmile portion would extend up to 200 yards from private boundaries onto
104 USFS lands.

105 The proposed precommercial thinning units will thin young mixed conifer trees in old harvest units to: (1)
106 reduce stand density, (2) enhance growth and vigor, and (3) lessen the risk of potential mountain pine
107 beetle caused mortality and stand-replacing fire in the future. Small diameter trees would be cut, leaving
108 about 100-200 trees per acre of the best-formed trees. The limbs and tops of the fallen trees may be
109 lopped and scattered to speed decomposition. Hand or machine piling and burning of piles would be
110 completed where the fuel loading poses an unacceptable risk.

111 Only the units proposed for improvement harvests and regeneration harvests will include removing
112 materials from the site. The other proposed treatments will rearrange fuels and burn piles. Prescribed fire
113 treatments will rearrange fuels, burn piles, burn the understory, and in the case of mixed severity
114 prescribed fire treatments, broadcast burn. For mechanical treatments, tracked feller bunchers will most
115 likely be used. Hand treatment of fuels may be less disturbing to the soil, but mechanical treatments can
116 be minimally disturbing if done in the right season. Cost and safety likely plays into the use of
117 mechanical versus hand treatments.

118 **Q:** Does using a tracked vehicle in a roadless area jeopardize the roadless designation? If you are looking
119 at Black Mountain or Jericho Mountain areas, those are proposed Wilderness Areas. At the last meeting,
120 did John Gatchell say that mechanical treatments could only be done on the edges of roadless areas?

121 **A:** We should ask John Gatchell these questions [see agenda item 6 on the July 8, 2015 Collaborative
122 meeting notes].

123 **Q:** For the two types of prescribed fire proposed, what percent of the area would be burned?

124 **A:** Some of those places are pretty wet, I could see it being difficult to get fire to carry through. We will
125 find someone that can answer this question.

126 The previous Collaborative's report recommended mechanically treating outside of roadless areas and
127 seeing how that goes before deciding whether to mechanically treat fuels within Roadless Areas.

128 **Q:** Will the proposed actions on the map change in the Draft EIS (DEIS)?

129 **A:** This map was put together for scoping, it most likely will change in the DEIS when it appears as an
130 alternative. There will be one alternative that is similar to this proposed action, a no action alternative,
131 and at least one variation on the proposed action alternative.

132 **Q:** What types of trees will be left as snags? If they are ponderosa pines, it has been my experience that
133 they do not stay standing for much longer than six years.

134 **A:** We will find someone that can answer this question.

135 **Q:** Why is it proposed to plant ponderosa pine in areas where the predominant regeneration is Douglas
136 fir?

137 **A:** Historically those sites were dominated by ponderosa pine. Douglas fir has encroached, in part, due to
138 fire suppression and wetter years. The USFS is probably trying to put these areas back into a ponderosa
139 pine dominated forest.

140 **Q:** There have already been significant treatments done within the project area. Do those treatments plus
141 these proposed treatments add up to significant cumulative effects on wildlife?

142 **A:** We should defer to our next speaker, Jenny Sika, to answer that question. Also, this will be addressed
143 in the DEIS.

144 The density of roads and site characteristics, including vegetation, all affect elk security, according to the
145 Hillis paradigm. Ben Irey recently asked Mike Hillis what he thought about treatments to reduce fire
146 intensity and its effects on elk security. Mike said that it is perfectly rational to think about the security
147 that you would lose due to a fire without treatment and compare that to the security you would lose
148 through treatments. Can the proposed treatments mitigate the effects of fire? Would the proposed
149 treatments provide better security than if the area burned as modeled?

150 **Q:** Will areas treated before prescribed fire is introduced have enough fuel left to carry the prescribed
151 fire?

152 **A:** We will find someone that can answer this question. For mixed severity prescribed burn, the USFS
153 says that 40-60% of each unit will burn. For non-commercial treatments, fuels will be piled and burned.
154 For low severity prescribed burn treatments, it sounds like fuels will be rearranged, probably meaning
155 piled, and then burned. Those units may also be underburned. It sounds like mixed severity prescribed
156 burn treatments will be the only treatment that includes aerial broadcast burning.

157 **3.) Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks perspective on the Big Game Security Programmatic Forest
158 Plan Amendment by Jenny Sika. Informational. Objective: Committee gains an understanding of
159 FWP's perspective on the proposed amendment.**

160 Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) commented, objected, and collaborated with the Helena
161 National Forest on the Blackfoot and Divide Travel Plans. FWP supports the current Blackfoot and
162 Divide Travel Plans. Are the Travel Plans ideal from FWP's perspective? No, but with the existing
163 conditions, with the density of roads that exists on the forest, it seems like the best outcomes given
164 existing conditions. One difference between the Blackfoot and Divide Travel Plan is that the Divide
165 Travel Plan has guidelines for cover.

166 FWP's primary objective for collaborating with the USFS on these Travel Plans was to increase the
167 habitat for wildlife from the existing condition. For the Divide Travel Plan, we support Alternative 5 -
168 Modified. This is the alternative we want to see implemented. It is important to remember that these
169 Travel Plans have been a long time coming. We want to see them get implemented as soon as possible
170 because, without a visitor use map, which shows all the routes and what form of travel is permitted where
171 and when, without that map, the regulations regarding travel are not enforceable. That's bad for elk
172 security.

173 What are elk herd objectives for the Tenmile area? Big game security is not about numbers of elk, it is
174 about bull retention on public lands during the hunting season. It is about the overall retention of elk on
175 public lands during the hunting season. Montana has the longest bull hunting season around. To
176 accommodate this, we need bulls to feel secure on public land and to stay on public land throughout the
177 hunting season. We have an objective of 10 to 15 bulls per 100 cows. The South Helena herd is just over
178 that ratio.

179 **Q:** How do you control cow numbers?

180 **A:** By retaining them on public land during the hunting season and issuing permits to hunt them.

181 **Q:** What will happen to elk when these beetle killed trees really start to fall?

182 **A:** Elk can find paths through downfall and can still use those areas for security.

183 **Q:** How do you think the proposed treatments will affect security?

184 **A:** It depends on the schedule for implementing these treatments – all at once would be too much – and it
185 depends on how things look after treatment.

186 **Q:** There have already been a number of treatments in the Tenmile area, if you add the proposed
187 treatments to the previous treatments, wouldn't it add up to significant cumulative effects on big game?

188 **A:** There was a big fire in Arizona in elk habitat, those foresters down there wish that they had gotten a
189 chance to manage the forest before the fire, then they would have elk and forest left.

190 **Q:** When does regenerating lodgepole constitute security?

191 **A:** It depends on the hiding cover quality and the size of the blocks of cover. For example, if the trees are
192 spaced out and there is little understory, you will need larger areas to get the right hiding cover.

193 **Q:** Will elk run from dense understory to insecure, open country when pressured?

194 **A:** No, they want to stay in the secure cover.

195 There is an ongoing study in the Elkhorns looking at how elk use beetle-killed forests. It's too early to see
196 results.

197 FWP's comments submitted to the Forest Service in December of 2014 are available on the Tenmile
198 South Helena Forest Restoration Collaborative Committee's website ([link](#)).

199 **4.) Tri-County FireSafe Working Group perspective on proposed action's effectiveness at**
200 **addressing safety concerns by Vice Co-chair Jordan Alexander, Rocky Infanger, Pat McKelvey,**
201 **and Sonny Stiger. Informational. Objective: Committee gains an understanding of the Working**
202 **Group's perspective regarding the proposed action and its effects on safety.**

203 With the current conditions in the project area, if a major fire got going there, hand suppression crews
204 would not be an option due to the extremely unsafe conditions, i.e. no escape routes, jack straw timber,
205 and no safety zones. If a major fire gets going in the project area, all that down timber will burn hot,
206 close to the ground and will create hydrophobic soils.

207 This Collaborative needs to decide what their objective is for these treatments. Is it to improve elk
208 habitat? If yes, then manage for elk habitat. Is it to improve recreation? Than manage for recreation.
209 My understanding is that the primary objective is to protect our drinking water, if so, this Collaborative
210 should primarily be managing for water quality.

211 We are in contact with Dana Hicks in British Columbia. They are about five years ahead of us, as far as
212 beetle kill. According to him, these areas will burn hot.

213 There recently was a fire in Colorado Gulch. The modeling showed that if the firefighters hadn't gotten it
214 before it got into the timber within two hours it would have made a run up Colorado Gulch and would
215 have burned several homes.

216 **Q:** How effective will the proposed treatments be for allowing firefighters to suppress fires in the project
217 area?

218 **A:** From a fire perspective, these treatments need to create a situation where we can get in there and fight
219 fire.

220 **Q:** How can we manipulate fuels while doing the least amount of damage to the other values in the area
221 (wildlife, recreation, etc.)? Where have we seen treatments like this that have been successful in making
222 things safer for residents and fire suppression efforts?

223 **A:** There have been several research papers on this topic, every one shows that fuels treatments will save
224 lives, save other natural resources, and save homes. These papers have been very positive about the
225 effectiveness of these types of treatments to reduce the threat of wildfire to lives, property, and natural
226 resources.

227 It seems like we are looking at the same map and little progress has been made. This is a valuable piece
228 of land and is important if you live in Helena and use the trail systems. The challenge is to manage elk,
229 people, and a healthy ecosystem. There are a lot of people living within the wildland urban interface of
230 the project area. The first Collaborative was dealing with 29,000 acres, not the 69,000 acres.

231 There have been lots of fire models run for this area and every one of them takes the fire right to the
232 backside of Helena. Every one of them.

233 The previous Collaborative agreed to no new roads in roadless areas, but we would go in and do pre-
234 treatments that would allow for prescribed fire in roadless areas. The City Commission signed off on this
235 agreement.

236 **5.) Recreationist's perspective on proposed action's effects on recreation by Roy Barkley, USFS**
237 **Trails Coordinator. Informational. Objective: Committee gains an understanding of the potential**
238 **effects of the proposed action on recreation.**

239 The project area is showing increased recreation use, which will need to be managed. At the same time,
240 with the beetle kill and our current capacity to manage the trail system, it is getting harder and harder for
241 us to manage the trails. Local organizations are a very important part of maintaining the trail system.
242 Some trails have been closed for safety concerns.

243 The proposed treatments will have an impact on the visual landscape and that area is in high demand for
244 recreation. The number of visitor use days will probably continue to grow, regardless of the treatments.
245 From a recreation perspective, treatments should avoid very noticeable swaths of treatment. The edges
246 should be feathered and slope breaks should be used to keep the treatments looking as natural as possible.
247 Treatments should avoid making a mess of trails and other recreation sites. The USFS is using viewshed
248 analysis and the landscape architect is involved in this project. This project does not propose to create
249 any new trails. The DEIS is scheduled to be out in about two months.

250 **6.) Public comment and meeting summary, by Joe Cohenour. Informational. Objectives: Allow**
251 **time for the public to comment on Committee business. Summarize the meeting.**

252 **Q:** Does anyone have any proposals for guest speakers at upcoming meetings?

253 **A:** Dick Sloan is available to present information on mines and mine cleanup in the project area. Maybe
254 we could get a botanist to come in and talk about biodiversity of the project area. Perhaps a motorized
255 user group could present their perspective.

256 The Subcommittee will schedule a meeting and invite members of the previous Collaborative to 'pass the
257 torch', if you will.

258 The next meeting of the Tenmile South Helena Forest Restoration Collaborative Committee will be held
259 on September 9, from 1:30 to 4 pm in Room426 of the City - County Building.

260 **Public comment:** Doug Abelin from Capitol Trail Vehicle Association, said that, in his experience,
261 collaboration is the key to success for getting work done on projects like this. We all need to work
262 together, for the benefit of the Tenmile drainage.

263 Meeting adjourned at 3:52 pm.