

Lemhi Forest Restoration Group (LFRG)

Meeting Summary

Wednesday, January 21, 2015

9 am – 12 pm

Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Salmon Region Conference Room

Our Mission: Enhance forest health and economic opportunities in Lemhi County through collaborative engagement of restoration projects and Wildland Urban Interface/community protection using stewardship contracting and other tools.

Action items emphasized in underline.

Participants:

Beth Waterbury – Idaho Dept Fish & Game (IDFG)

Kim Murphy – National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)

Bob Russell – Citizen

Ken Gebhardt – Salmon-Challis National Forest (SCNF)

Gary Power – Salmon Valley Stewardship (SVS) board

Gina Knudson – SVS Staff

Jerry Hamilton – Citizen

Karin Drnjevic – Lemhi County

Lynn Bennett – SCNF

Michelle Tucker – SVS Staff

Doug Leyva – SCNF

Tyre Holfeltz – Id Dept of Lands (IDL)

Jim Roscoe – High Divide Consulting

Louise Bruce – High Divide Consulting

Riley Rhoades – SCNF

Suzy Avey – SVS Staff

John Jakovac – Lemhi County Commissioner

Mike Smith – SCNF

Bob Cope – Citizen, Retired Lemhi Co. Commissioner

Christine Droske -- SCNF

Large Landscape Approach - in the style of Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP)

Gina briefed the group on last spring's LFRG meeting when we discussed CFLRP. The program was intended to encourage collaborative groups to bring projects to larger scale. Multi-year funds granted for these projects cannot be used for planning, but are used for implementation and monitoring. The first two program rounds were in 2010 and 2012. The Forest Service has significant resource

commitment to these large, multi-year projects, so the likelihood of a new round of funding being announced in near future is slim.

That being said, landscape scale projects proposed collaboratively seem to be the new way of doing business. By going through process of completing a CFLRP application, we are preparing our group for future funding, which may be CFLRP or other competitive funding.

The CFLRP requires defined landscape scale project boundaries that are collaboratively designed. Last spring the LFRG committed to a project area boundary that would encompass Lemhi County.

Ken is very supportive of the landscape approach, but reminded the group that if selected as a CFLRP, that project impacts the entire forest and can pull resources from other forest priorities. The group agreed that these are important considerations.

Ken is excited about mapping resource issues and conditions on the SCNF, and using the map to identify where there are overlapping priorities to target future projects. This information can help guide the forest 5 year plan. Christine presented a map to demonstrate how the landscape map can be used.

GIS data goes back into the 90s on SCNF. Ken is proposing a forest wide map for previous 20 years that includes information such as the national watershed condition framework (WCF) as well as national terrestrial data available. Ken anticipates that overlapping polygons/areas will represent resource components and provide direction for treatment and establish priorities. Doesn't preclude small project where an area needs help.

Cope feels this is a great step and will have good support from landowners. Sage grouse is very important in this process. He cautions not to tie into condition class too much. WCF does answer some good questions but wants to take to a broader scale. Cope feels we need general overarching goals. John J. agreed this map could help prioritize and define specific goals. Gary thinks birthdates for previous treatments are very important to re-assess if needs are being met. Items considered for landscape map include WCF, historic range of variability,

Governor's priority insect/disease layer, community wildfire protection plan, fire history, as well as planned, present and past projects.

Michelle mentioned that similar landscape mapping exercises are being conducted by other partners such as Office of Species Conservation and Upper Salmon Basin Watershed Project. Jim R. pointed out that most Land Use Plans revisions and Resource Management Plans (RMPs) are large mapping exercises. All of these efforts could contribute to or benefit from a comprehensive map.

Jim R. voiced concern for forest staff capacity and bottle necks are limiting what we can do. With landscape scale how do collaboratives come into play? Gina agreed that collaboratives can create work but can also help address other capacity issues if strategically approached. Tyre recommended state support such as Idaho Forest Restoration Partner (IFRP) participation. State may be able to pull in larger groups to help.

Kim mentioned that with increased scale agencies don't always have the capacity to monitor and meet the needs of endangered species consultation monitoring. Collaboratives have opportunity to support monitoring workload. Much of the monitoring required by consultation could be supplemented by assistant or programmatic support up front with umbrella monitoring that complements all.

Consultation monitoring requirements drive project planning. Current approach and limited staff capacity are causing federal land management agencies to fall behind on requirements. Could the collaborative convene federal land management agencies and regulators and help find a streamlined approach that still met priority monitoring objectives?

Tyre thinks we each have a niche that we can specialize with our partners such as key species indicators for treatment. Research is out there, but how do you narrow the scope to make it manageable? Doug pointed out that it is important to determine the metric to look at the issues and find agreement up front for what will be credible and useable data. Beth feels that monitoring for wildlife standards are not always obtainable. A lot of non-game data is lacking but need to consider standards and protocols. Tyre pointed out the importance of defining that process up front to make certain process is sound, repeatable and defensible from the beginning. Kim stated that getting information out to public to garner more support for actions may foster adaptive management strategy. Trust and credibility is important to share on a broader scale.

Jerry emphasized the need to follow the prescriptive process for past treatment. The complications of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) have lessened the chances that this routine maintenance happens. John J. agrees monitoring objectives need to be streamlined. Tyre suggested that modeling may reduce work load and in particular field time. Michelle agreed but wants ground truthing. Jim R. emphasized that local perspectives need to be addressed that modeling doesn't always speak to. Validating on the ground is very important. Jim feels this comes into strategic planning discussion as we consider more responsibility in limited funding and capacity.

LFRG Strategic Plan

Existing LFRG strategic plan was completed in 2008 and intended to provide strategy for 3-5 yrs. Do we need to re-visit? Gina can find assistance to go through a revision or update of strategic plan. Does it feel worthwhile, does the group want that?

John J. feels the plan is still a good representation of our group. He doesn't want to lose focus on our core issues stated in the mission. He feels we are able to meet the goals established with existing capacity. Including a larger Lemhi County Landscape is enough of a challenge for the group at this time.

Gary summarized Rob Mason's recommendations for strategic planning. Rob encouraged the group to expand our influence into other areas such as:

- Greater sage-grouse: How can the most-intact and highest density sage-grouse habitat area be permanently protected in a way that makes sense for ranchers and Lemhi County?
- Cattle grazing: How can we ensure that cattle grazing on public lands will continue into the indefinite future as an important aspect of the economy, heritage and culture of Lemhi County in the face of potential uncertainty from sage-grouse, invasive weeds, and other destabilizing challenges?
- Wildfire Prevention & Suppression (includes Restoration): How do we ensure appropriate wildfire management in order to preserve the native ecosystem?
- Economies: How do we maintain/enhance existing natural resources-based economic opportunities and diversify into new ones?

- Ecological values: How do we best protect and enhance the value of anadromous fisheries, wildlife habitat, and wildlife connectivity corridors into the future, especially in the face of climate change?
- Backcountry/Wildland values: How do we protect the unspoiled and wild places critical to the long-term health of the area and many of the resources that we value?

“The Wilderness Society would like to propose that the LFRG expand the scope of its mission and vision to address all public land natural resource issues within Lemhi County, including but not limited to the issues listed above, using a collaborative-based approach to resolving land management issues.”

Gary noted the existing strategic plan does not represent some issues where we have found agreement (such as wildlife), but he feels the overall core values have remained constant. Gary felt Rob was asking the group to really broaden our scope. He feels we have done a phenomenal job in our area of focus.

Bob noted that we have evolved enough to say who we need in the room at a minimum, do we have these folks and what are our transition strategies?

John J. said there are already several groups working on sage grouse issues, and we should be careful not to duplicate these efforts.

Jim R. emphasized that we need to remind ourselves of the issues we are considering, what are our partner constraints. For example, he asked where is the forest biologist? If we tried to expand as Rob suggests, would we exceed capacity of our existing structure? Jim R. emphasized that with the inclusion of all of Lemhi County we are already taking on an expansion.

Beth feels what Rob is suggesting would stretch our capacity. She thinks it is a good idea to continue to focus on forest and interface with other lands and habitats. Beth recommended that changes to the strategic plan should be minimal revisions and not take too much energy.

Lynn pointed out that when we started we had limited resources and knew we had to be focused and tied to accomplishment. We used a coarse filter approach and focused on structure and process to find agreement.

Gina reminded of the group decision on the Breaks project as an example when we provided support of a project but we decided not to fully engage because the project did not fit with all our filters.

In conclusion, the group agreed that our strategic plan is representative of the group’s values and committed resources. Gina asked all members to look closely at the strategic plan and send in recommended edits. These edits will be available by the next meeting in April 14 for consideration and approval by the group.

Upper North Fork Project (UNF Project)

Ken G. updated the group on the UNF project. The draft 5 year plan presented at our last meeting has not changed much. The 1st sale will be Stateline. The forest is considering using a stewardship contract for this sale. 2nd sale being considered in UNF is skyline work. Ken reported this might not be a good fit for the use of the stewardship agreement. Recent discussions with Lemhi County Economic

Development Association (LCEDA) indicate they don't feel they are prepared for a large project such as Stateline so the stewardship agreement will not be used for this initial work.

Gina reminded the group that Hughes Creek used both a stewardship agreement and contract. Michelle asked how West Salzar went as it was a stewardship contract and if lessons learned will help move this forward. The forest feels that their contracting office is better equipped to approach Stateline after their experiences on West Salzar. Doug reported that West Salzar had more timber value so Stateline may cost more.

John J. asked if stewardship agreements versus contracts were preferred. Doug and Ken emphasized that all tools would be considered. Ken and Chuck Mark, SCNF Supervisor, are considering an entire suite of options for the UNF Project that will allow the forest to meet collaborative agreements and treatment goals.

The forest has held a couple of meetings with LCEDA and forest contracting. LCEDA and the forest are looking for small sale opportunities. State Line will include the use of 1.2 miles of temporary roads. Retained receipts from the timber sale will be needed to complete other project objectives and restore the road. The forest won't know until contract is bid and awarded if there will be any receipts to retain on the project.

Mike S. pointed out that in the LCEDA meetings they learned they don't have to have a service contract in timber sale in same NEPA assessment area. The Stewardship Agreement with LCEDA is for the entire North Zone. This enables other sales in the North Zone to contribute to the retained receipt value. This must be considered when writing the Supplement Project Agreement (SPA).

Michelle reminded the forest that we had used best value criteria for Hughes Creek and asked that the forest review the socio economic report for lessons learned through this process. She also asked if the forest would continue to use the criteria developed with LFRG and the forest. She emphasized the need of the forest to place a requirement in the contracts to help track socio-economic value that summarizes use of local labor and resource. Cope emphasized the need for this documentation. Gina pointed out that Forest contracting officers should require a summary of how the contractor met best value criteria so socioeconomic monitoring can be accomplished as efficiently as possible. Michelle asked if a collaborative member could serve on the selection committee on Upper North Fork like Karin did for Hughes Creek. Mike recommended we convene our Contracting Subcommittee to answer many of these questions.

The issue of match under the stewardship agreement was raised by LCEDA at the recent meetings. All agree that the organization doesn't have to put match up front, but it needs to be provided over the life of the agreement. Regional forester has discretion to reduce to 5 % from 20% but this has not been done. The group acknowledged how hard the SCNF has worked to meet local economic goals of collaborative, persevering on a very steep learning curve.

Gina updated the group on the potential creation of a statewide stewardship agreement to implement these agreements across the entire state. Id Dept of Lands is taking the lead, but entity would be a new non-profit organization. May help solve the issue of capacity of smaller groups like LCEDA, and industry has shown interest providing cash and in-kind match. This aligns with the Western push for better management and state input for public lands. Montana is already using a similar model

Doug relayed that the Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ) register for timber will expire in next year. Ken realizes it is a challenge to go through the process but he feels it is worth the effort. He encourages the group to work with LCEDA and FS contracting officer Judy Martin to offer training. Small Business Administration may have resources available. This may be released as early as spring 2016.

Multiparty Monitoring

Cope participates in the Western Region Cohesive Fire Strategy committee and reported that adaptive management is being heavily discussed. He asked if we have recently outlined our desired future conditions for Upper North Fork. Michelle reported that most of the monitoring we have done to date was to establish baseline and effectiveness of treatment. Cope agreed that monitoring is impossible without a baseline.

Michelle reported that the last monitoring plan we had was designed by Jake Kreilick (Wild West Institute) for Hughes Creek.

Beth asked about monitoring funding and grant funding. She understands that most funders want to see on the ground work and are not as supportive of monitoring. Michelle reported that the loss of Secure Rural Schools funding (delivered locally through Central Idaho Resource Advisory Committee) was going to be hard on monitoring efforts because they have provided a significant portion of our work to date. Beth asked what we could expect from the forest for help in monitoring and what realistic options are. She recommended we laser in on key issues due to funding and capacity constraints. Cope feels it is important to assess what data has already been collected. Beth said we might need to focus on vegetative treatments as they are what we can manage as a collaborative and tie to our mission. Jim R. stated it was important to pair down to priorities and ensure we maintain credibility. Michelle reminded the group of the Rapid Assessment process being used in Montana. Michelle will send out an invite for a Multiparty Monitoring Subcommittee meeting in the next couple weeks.

Calendar

Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership, Boise, Feb 18-19, 2015. Travel assistance is available.

Next possible meeting dates for LFRG: April 14, 15, 21, 28-30