

Kameron Sam
District Ranger
Barlow Ranger District
780 Court St, Dufur, OR 97021

August 1, 2019

Dear District Ranger Sam,

Please accept the following initial Wasco County Forest Collaborative recommendations for the Grasshopper Planning area. Members of the collaborative attended a field tour in the fall of 2018 and have since met on a number of occasions with your staff and internally to discuss project level agreements related to the Purpose and Need and Proposed Action for the project. Collaborative member agreements are outlined below and organized by issue area.

In addition to the recommendations included here, members of the collaborative are interested in supporting landscape restoration and recognize that management over time is required to maintain benefits associated with fuel reduction and habitat-related treatments. For example, units that are treated for fuels reduction as a result of the Grasshopper decision are likely to need managed fire again in the next seven to ten years. Members of the collaborative understand that a re-entry that far into the future is outside of the scope of the decision document but would urge the Forest Service to contemplate those actions and establish a foundation for future treatments within the planning area. This exercise will help partners think about a long-term restoration plan and establish a strong foundation for future collaboration.

This collaborative agreement document includes general recommendations associated with the following issue areas: terrestrial habitat improvement, water and aquatic habitat improvement, road system improvements, fuels reduction, recreation, and vegetation management. We will provide more specific recommendations once the project is further developed.

Terrestrial Habitat Improvement

There is collaborative support to promote a diversity of habitat conditions throughout the planning area. Specific recommendations include:

- Maintain trees at all ends of the life spectrum. Protect existing snags where possible and create future snags. Leave some pockets of small trees and natural regeneration to maintain future recruitment. Promote tree species diversity, especially those species lesser represented on the landscape.
- Create and maintain high quality early seral habitat. The collaborative would like to work with the Forest Service to better understand where and how this objective may be achieved.
- Install gates, seed close, or decommission roads to improve deer and elk security habitat.

- Conduct oak habitat restoration.

Water and Aquatic Habitat Improvement

There is collaborative agreement to promote the following:

- Riparian, meadow, and aspen enhancement and restoration. This could include restoring beaver habitat in the project area.
- Increase opportunity for snowpack accumulation. The collaborative would like to work with the Forest Service to better understand where and how this objective may be met.

Transportation

There is general support for road maintenance, replacement of culverts, and other activities to reduce ecological impacts associated with roads, along with the following suggestions:

- Use the Travel Analysis Report (TAR) recommendations for this area as a starting place for further discussions regarding travel management.
- Identifying the minimum road system required to ensure public safety and future use.
- Roads management should consider future management, as well as potential future wildfires and how the road system may be used to manage a fire safely.
- Consider the road system in Grasshopper as it relates to the recent Rocky decision.
- Consider placement of gates on roads that may be maintained for future use but that should not be open to the public to address the high density of roads that are impacting wildlife habitat.

The collaborative group has concerns about including the road to Badger Lake within the planning area. Improving the road is likely to increase human use, increase risk of human caused wildfire, and cause other public health and safety issues. The road is also not in a viable or strategic location to engage future wildfires and there is not strong justification for fuels break adjacent to the wilderness along the road prism.

There is support for road maintenance, replacement of culverts, and other activities to reduce ecological impacts associated with roads.

Fuels reduction

There is collaborative support for fuels reduction activities in the dry portion of the planning area. In general treatments should focus on removing smaller trees and retaining larger, more fire tolerant species through use of mechanical thinning and prescribed burning. Collaborative members encourage the agency to develop best management practices that ensure fuel reduction efforts retain the largest and/or most resilient trees in any given treatment unit. This may include prioritizing treatments based on departure from fire regime condition class.

Collaborative members expressed concern that fuel breaks in moist forests may create a long-term impact resulting in higher fuel loads over time if they are not maintained.

Slash piles from previous projects have been left in the Grasshopper planning area, creating heightened fuel issues in parts of the forest and along roads. All slash piles from previous projects should be burned before creating additional slash piles. There should be a plan developed to ensure timely burning or removal of all slash piles created during the Grasshopper project. Collaborative members suggest expanding the project area boundary along the 4880 road to support removal of existing slash piles and to treat old plantations along the road.

- Members of the collaborative have expressed interest in creating fuel breaks along roads where appropriate, in line with the Mt. Hood Strategic Fuel Plan. Proposed fuel breaks along roads should be shared with the collaborative and discussed further.
- Reduce risk of human caused fire associated with recreation within and near the planning area.

There is collaborative support for a community firewood program. Collaborative members suggest falling and decking the material for local community members. Establish designated areas where firewood collection is appropriate and support those activities in places where there is also a fuels reduction and slash removal benefit.

Recreation

General collaborative recommendations include:

- Consider how the designation of the National Recreation Area influences proposed treatments and management activities.
- Consider updating, moving, decommissioning recreation infrastructure such as trails, outhouses, and parking lots that are creating problems or that are not maintained.
- Protect/improve dispersed campsites.

Collaborative members generally support recreation in the planning area. . Recreation related development within the planning area should consider the following when enhancing existing recreation:

- Invest in recreation-related development that is strategic and fits within a larger landscape approach.
- Consider how promoting recreation and access may affect the movement of wildlife. Ensure there is security habitat for wildlife maintained in the planning area.
- Conduct activities that consider the maintenance requirements and future budget implications of recreation related infrastructure. Promote volunteerism and partnership to maintain existing and new recreation infrastructure.
- Consider the costs associated with building new recreation infrastructure.

Collaborative members recognize that gating roads within the planning area creates alternative recreation uses. Historic campsites and biking and camping options may become a more prominent use of the area if roads are gated.

Collaborative members recognize issues with the 464 Trail and would like to take a field trip to the area to learn more about the trail. Collaborative members support wilderness hiking trails and want to avoid the impacts of trails on water quality and wildlife. Collaborative members suggested that the recent Wilderness Rangers Retained Receipts proposal could help fix existing issues.

Collaborative members support the existing OHV areas adjacent to Grasshopper but do not support expanding the OHV area into Grasshopper.

Vegetation Management

Members of the collaborative understand that there is a 15 mmbf timber volume target associated with the project. There is collaborative agreement that timber management is a goal in the planning area and commercial timber management is appropriate in Matrix lands, especially in plantations. Collaborative members recommend that the agency be clear about when and where timber volume is the focus and avoid calling timber management “restoration” where ecological benefits are not the only goal of the proposed treatments.

There are numerous old plantations within the planning area that would benefit from active management. Stocking levels are high and mechanical thinning and prescribed burning should be used to restore forest structure, composition, and species diversity within those stands. Fire exclusion has changed the composition of many of the forested stands within the planning area. In the dryer portion of the project, conduct vegetation management treatments that reduce density and select for fire-tolerant species. There is collaborative support to conduct vegetation management in old plantations. There is not full collaborative support to treat portions of the Boulder Creek watershed outside of old plantations that are within Late Successional Reserves and the National Recreation Area. This is a popular, high density recreation site and should be managed for values associated with recreation and aesthetics.

Treatments outside of the plantations (i.e. LSR, NRA, inventoried roadless areas, spotted owl habitat, native stands, etc.) may be supported by the collaborative if there is an ecological case for management; this will be determined on a unit by unit basis after field work. The planning area includes inventoried roadless areas. There is not collaborative member agreement to build new roads in roadless areas. If there are old plantations within the roadless areas collaborative members would like to go on a field trip to visit those sites and discuss the need for restoration. If old plantations are located within a roadless area and there is an old road bed that can be identified and re-used there may be the opportunity for collaborative support. Any temporary roads re-established on old road beds should be decommissioned following any treatment.

The planning area includes an incredible diversity of forest types and a large moisture gradient. Collaborative members recommend placing units to align with the purpose and need. Members also recognize that there will likely be a suite of prescriptions used to meet the various goals of

the project and would encourage the Forest Service to utilize prescriptions that align with conditions on the ground and the restoration or silvicultural need.

Additional general considerations include:

- Determine desired future condition and activities that encourage natural transitions (Site potential in the Future). Consider the implications of increased risk of drought and longer, dryer summers and promote resistance and resilience in the forest ecosystem.
- Clearly define the distinction between dry and moist mixed conifer forests in the planning area. Support shared learning in understanding the transition between forest types in the planning area and appropriate management activities within each.
- Noxious weed treatment
- Non-commercial treatments where needed.

Grazing

The Grasshopper allotment is not active and re-opening the allotment requires a separate NEPA decision. If the Forest Service re-opens the allotment collaborative members recommend developing best management practices for the site to reduce potential impacts associated with grazing.

Collaborative Members

The following individuals were appointed by the Wasco County Board of Commissioners to represent diverse interests at the collaborative table and participated in the development of these collaborative agreements:

Tribal – Bob Sjolund, Warm Springs Tribe

Community Wildfire Protection – Kristin Dodd, Oregon Department of Forestry

State Agency – Jeremy Thompson, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

Private Landowner – Larry Magill, Wamic

Water Resources – Pat Davis, White River Watershed Council

Recreation and Tourism – Harvey Long, OMAC

Local Government – Ryan Bessette, Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District

Environmental – Brenna Bell, Bark

Forest Products – Jeremy Grose, SDS Lumber Co.

At-Large – Rich Thurman, Retired Wildlife Biologist

At-Large – John Nelson, School District 21 Board Member

Thank you for your careful consideration of these collaborative agreements. If you have any questions please contact Andrew Spaeth at wascoforest@gmail.com or by calling 541.288.4107.