

Briefing Paper

Pacific Northwest Region – Regional Office

Topic: The Eastside Restoration Strategy

Date: October 14, 2014

Issue: The forest restoration programs on the federal forests in eastern Oregon and Washington are not keeping pace with forest growth. Eastside forests are typically drier forest types with much more frequent fire return intervals and a greater urgency for accelerated restoration. With climate change, insect and disease outbreaks, and a general decline in forest health we are experiencing larger, more intense and dangerous wildfires. To address this condition, the PNW Region of the Forest Service is engaged in a landscape level approach, engaging and learning with forest collaborative groups and scientists, and developing, demonstrating, and evaluating more efficient planning processes. At the same time, we are working to more efficiently *implement* forest restoration projects – we are trying to change the game!

Background: The FS has made a deliberate choice to place our initial focus of ‘accelerated restoration’ on the eastside of the Region. The region’s strategy includes several efforts: coordinating 5 CFLR projects, engaging in a Cohesive Wildfire Strategy Pilot in northeast Oregon, investing in planning and implementing projects that double the amount of activity on the Malheur National Forest, and the use of a dedicated Blue Mountains restoration team to plan large, landscape scale projects across the Blues.

Partnerships: The state of Oregon is a significant partner in the pursuit of tools, methods, and processes that accelerate restoration in eastern Oregon. In addition to supporting local collaborative groups, state funds are being used to increase the pace of implementation for NEPA-ready projects by assisting with pre-sale activities to bring projects into the contracting stage. They are also being leveraged to test new approaches to collecting and evaluating data in support of planning large scale restoration projects on National Forest lands in the region.

Blue Mountains Restoration Team: see sidebar for a description of the three projects assigned to this team. In the end on this three-year experiment, the products this team leaves behind will be implementation-ready NEPA documents **and** processes, tools, and methods that are useful in large scale project analyses. For example, they are currently involved in LiDAR collection and analysis, climate-informed modeling of treatment effects, focused project-scale socio-economic analyses, and evaluation of the current and future distribution of culturally important plants through state-and-transition modeling – all approaches and tools that will have utility for project planning across the region.

The Blue Mountains Restoration Team:

- The Lower Joseph Creek project is a 100K acre area, with 20-25K acres of mechanical treatment and ~90K acres of burning. This first project was developed in cooperation with the Wallowa County Natural Resources Advisory Committee, and the draft EIS is scheduled for release in November.
- The Blues-Wide Strategic Fuel Treatments Project (#2) is in Proposed Action stage to treat 150,000-200,000 acres and set up landscapes for safer, more effective management of wildfires.
- Dry Forest Restoration is the third project, building off Projects 1 & 2. This project may cover as much as 500,000 acres of dry forest across four National Forests.

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