**Forsythe II Multiparty Monitoring Group (MMG)**

**Summary of Group Discussions of Units 1 and 2**

*Note: This document summarizes MMG discussions of Units 1 and 2 of the US Forest Service’s (USFS) Forsythe II project. Discussion points are grouped by meeting date and are drawn from anonymized meeting summaries written by Peak Facilitation Group between February 21, 2018 (the first MMG meeting in which the units were discussed) and February 25, 2019.*

**February 21, 2018**

The USFS and a Design Advisory Team (DAT) member provided an update on the DAT’s input to the USFS regarding Units 1 and 2.

* The update included information on the history and purpose of the DAT, its membership, and its objectives (viewshed protection and fire risk mitigation). The DAT recommended 4.5 acres of patch cuts within Units 1 and 2 that were designed to increase ecological heterogeneity and create a fire break around Nederland.
* The DAT member and the USFS said that they would work to continue to refine prescriptions for Units 1 and 2 and would bring the recommendations to the Nederland Board of Trustees for further review. The USFS stated that it would consider the DAT’s recommendations along with other sources of input like MMG feedback.
* The DAT and the USFS indicated that they would take a field trip to the units to see what treatments would look like on the ground.
* MMG members agreed to submit comments to the DAT on its recommendations by March 15 so that those comments could inform the field trip.

**March 14, 2018**

N/A

**April 15, 2018**

The USFS and Peak Facilitation briefed the MMG on the March 22 DAT field trip (which they attended).

* The tour group visited Unit 1 and identified areas that seemed suitable for patch cuts (e.g., lodgepole pine areas) and areas that seemed important to maintain (e.g., an old-growth area and a nearby spring). In Unit 2, the group recommended piling wind-throw, enhancing aspen, and harvesting additional fuels.
* MMG members noted that elk migration corridors run through areas around Units 1 and 2.
* There was concern among MMG members about the amount of clear cutting that the DAT recommended in Units 1 and 2. There was some support for deferring to the Town of Nederland’s interests in some parts of the project area and encouraging the USFS not to conduct the most extensive treatments in others.

**May 21, 2018**

A DAT member presented the DAT’s treatment recommendations for Units 1 and 2 to the MMG (see May 21, 2018 meeting summary).

* The DAT member also provided background information on the history of the DAT, its process, and its role in advising the USFS on Units 1 and 2.
* There were concerns about the DAT’s role and its relationship to the MMG and USFS. The USFS stated that the agency had designed Unit 1 within the town’s boundaries, so it was ultimately the town’s prerogative to provide some input (although all treatments will need to comply with the project’s Final Decision Notice).
* MMG members expressed concern about potential runoff from the treatments in Units 1 and 2, which lie close to Barker Reservoir. MMG members recommended patch cutting in irregular, parallel shapes to block the wind and reduce erosion. Members also recommended that USFS and Boulder County hydrologists examine the runoff issue.
* There were concerns that the USFS underestimated the erosive potential of winds in the area.
* MMG members asked why the DAT was recommending a patch cut in the northeastern corner of Unit 2 (which is close to a spring and a trailhead with willows, aspen, and spruce). The DAT member said that this area was selected because it did not create difficulties for firefighting. The USFS said that it was legally prohibited from patch cutting too close to a spring and so would ensure that the planned cuts were not too close.
* The DAT member stated that two landowners with property near the recommended patch cuts agreed to talk with the USFS about possibly extending the cuts into their 300-foot treatment buffers. If they allowed the USFS to do so, the USFS would subtract that new acreage from the 4.4 acres it would treat in Unit 1 as a whole.
* There were questions as to why the USFS planned to use patch cuts in Unit 1 rather than thinning and removal treatments. The USFS stated that thinning and removal could increase the risk of blowdown and the corresponding risk of a fire.
* MMG members discussed the points that they had submitted using a mapping app (Avenza) to the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI). These points noted the presence of limber pine on the eastern edge of Unit 2, gullies where the MMG advised against placing patch cuts, and areas with social value.
* The USFS confirmed that only lodgepole pine would be treated in Unit 2.

**June 20, 2018**

The USFS briefed the MMG on the visits its resource specialists had made to areas of concern identified by group members in Units 1 and 2.

* The resource specialists examined a drainage off of Valleyview Drive, which includes houses near the southern end of Unit 1. The resource specialists identified a gully feature that appeared to have channeled water during past flooding events.
* The USFS also followed up on a previous MMG discussion about relocating a treatment polygon from the southeastern side of Unit 2 to its northwestern corner, where two landowners might be amenable to allowing the USFS to treat part of their defensible space. The USFS had not yet contacted these landowners, but it said that it could place a polygon there, which would align with the DAT’s priorities and be largely out of view from town.

**September 13, 2018**

The USFS summarized changes made to the original prescriptions for units in Phases 1 and 2, including its planned treatments in Units 1 and 2.

* The USFS planned to treat 15 total unit acres in Unit 1 (excluding buffers). These 15 acres included 4.5 planned treatment acres (30% of the total). Instead, the USFS said it would implement 4.2 acres (28% of the unit total) of patch cuts/clear cuts in Unit 1. Additionally, the USFS said it would treat 2.1 acres of aggregations in the unit (14% of the aggregation total). In sum, the USFS said it would treat 6.3 acres (42% of the unit including aggregations) in Unit 1.
* Unit 1 was one of only three units in Phases 1 and 2 (along with Units 4 and 75) with different acreages as a result of the prescription changes.
* The USFS and several MMG members disagreed on the interpretation of the aggregation clause in the Final Decision Notice and on how it applies to treatments proposed by the USFS, particularly for Unit 1. This remained an open issue for further consideration.
* MMG members expressed concerns about surface fuels, particularly in Units 1 and 2 (which are very close to Nederland). The USFS cannot go beyond the patch cut limits in the Decision Notice, so some deadfall will remain on the landscape. The USFS could issue another Decision Notice to incorporate more surface fuels in prescriptions in specific areas or eventually use prescribed fire to address surface fuel concerns.

**October 11, 2018**

MMG members discussed maps provided by the USFS and CFRI of Units 1, 3, 4, 63, and 107.

* In response to concerns about the lack of erosion control measures for treatments near streams or drainages, the USFS stated that the project’s design criteria required it to maintain buffers near drainages. It also stated that there was no plan for further erosion control measures unless a USFS soil scientist finds erosion problems after treatment.
* MMG members said that when they took a field trip to Unit 1, they found that the mapped boundaries of an aspen aggregation there did not match the edge of the aspen clone itself. The USFS said that it had removed part of the aggregation from treatment because it fell within the buffer of nearby patch cuts.
* MMG members said that protecting wildlife corridors in the western portion of Unit 2 and parts of Unit 1 was a priority for them.
* The USFS said that it was not sure that it needed to replant mixed conifer in Unit 1 after evaluating the unit’s artificial regeneration needs. The patch cuts in the unit were so small that it would have been cost prohibitive to plant trees in those cuts. The species composition and slope of that unit will allow seeds to infiltrate those cuts.
* Some MMG members stated that the USFS is violating the Decision Notice with its approach to aggregations in Unit 1, although it may not be an issue because it has not impacted more units. The USFS said that the rule allowing the USFS to treat up to 30% in a lodgepole unit refers to patch cuts and clear cuts, but not aspen restoration or mixed conifer treatments. The USFS also said that it could treat up to another 30% in lodgepole units with aggregations of different stand types. A possible compromise on the "30% rule" issue could be for the USFS to include aspen restoration treatments (which are essentially donut-shaped patch cuts) in its accounting of patch cuts and clear cuts in lodgepole units. In return, the MMG could allow mixed-conifer thinning to result in more than 30% of a lodgepole unit being treated. There were also suggestions for the MMG to invite USFS lawyers to read the Decision Notice language and see if they agree with their staff’s interpretation of that language.
* An MMG member marked the importance of the viewshed in Unit 2. The MMG member was referring to the beautiful view of the peaks through the trees, but the USFS thought that the comment was referring to a desire for a clear cut to improve the view of the mountains.

**November 19, 2018**

MMG members and the USFS revisited unanswered questions about Unit 1 and the 30% rule for aggregations.

* An MMG member proposed that the USFS drop plans to include a patch cut on the southeast corner of Unit 1.
* The USFS said that it was somewhat flexible in Unit 1 (and may be able to treat the southeast portion of Unit 1 more like an aggregation than a clear cut) but wanted to consult a representative of the Design Advisory Team (DAT) given that they had supported the original prescription for that unit, which is very close to town. The MMG agreed to discuss Unit 1 in more detail at the next meeting.

**December 12, 2018 (Webinar)**

MMG webinar participants and USFS staff discussed Unit 1 in greater detail.

* The USFS stated that rumors that the DAT and the Board of Trustees had veto power over USFS prescriptions for Unit 1 were false, but that it was important for the USFS to consult with them.
* At the November meeting, a group member stated that the DAT only proposed that the USFS cut 30% (the maximum) of Unit 1 because they believed that this was the only option. After that meeting, a DAT member told the USFS that it was known that the DAT could recommend treating less than 30% of the lodgepole in the unit and that any aggregations would be treated in addition to that 30%. The DAT member opposed dropping the patch cut from the treatment and stated that any changes to the current prescription would require more feedback from the Board of Trustees. The USFS said that it would not ask the DAT or Board of Trustees to submit any modified proposals.
* The USFS received feedback after the November meeting on potential changes to the Unit 1 prescription. The USFS requested that the MMG agree upon the Unit 1 changes so that the USFS could ask the Board of Trustees for input on them and make a final decision.
* MMG members noted that they had suggested several possible places where patch cuts could be subtracted in Unit 1.
* An MMG member said that the aspen "aggregation" in Unit 1 does not meet the requirements for aggregations outlined in the Decision Notice. It was suggested that the USFS priority is to thin the area along the road near the aspens, one option would be to patch cut near the aspens and compensate for that new patch cut by not patch cutting somewhere else in the unit. Eliminating the aggregation would remove the need to remove any patch cuts. However, the MMG member who originally proposed dropping the patch cut was open to one being removed somewhere other than the southeastern corner.
* MMG members stated that the southeastern portion of the unit is a fire hazard with fuel on the ground, so it would be preferable to cut there rather than the southwestern portion of the unit near the gully, where cutting could increase erosion. Dropping the southeastern corner’s patch cut would also mean that treatments are concentrated north of the road that runs through the unit, which could mean insufficient cover for wildlife.
* The USFS said that it would discuss this input with members of the DAT and bring a plan to move forward on Unit 1 at the January MMG meeting (which was ultimately canceled due to the government shutdown).
* The USFS said that it would send the MMG a draft treatment contract by December 21. Most of the contract was fairly structured already, but the USFS can control portions of the unit cutting description, slash, and inspection sections. The contract did not include changes proposed in this webinar or any time afterward. The USFS said that there was still an opportunity to make some changes to Unit 1, but that it was out of time to modify other units in Phases 1 and 2.

**February 20, 2019**

The USFS announced the delay of Units 1 and 2 to the MMG via email given the level of controversy and unresolved concerns.

**February 25, 2019**

The USFS stated that it had decided to delay treating Units 1 and 2 pending further consultation with the DAT and Board of Trustees and expressed hopes to address those units in Phase 3 of the project. The USFS also summarized changes made to prescriptions in Phase 1 based on MMG feedback.

* A USFS hydrologist visited Unit 1 to investigate specific MMG complaints about erosion there, but the USFS had not evaluated erosion potential in other units.
* There were questions as to why the USFS accommodated feedback on windthrow and fallen trees in Unit 2 when there is a lot of windthrow in old patch cuts in other units. The USFS said that MMG input on the windthrow problem would have a broader influence.
* The Unit 2 patch cuts in question are enveloped by Units 99 and 100. The USFS described its plans to thin regeneration in those patch cuts and some areas to the north.
* There is not enough regeneration to make enough piles in Unit 2, so the USFS is expanding its regeneration thinning 25 feet beyond the edge of the regeneration where openings exist so that it can preserve more young trees (which could die if all of the regeneration was placed in the patch cuts). The thinned regeneration in Unit 2 will be piled and burned.
* It was suggested that MMG members could help to clean up debris from “lop and scatter” treatments near the edges of clear cuts around Unit 2.

**March 13, 2019**

This meeting was cancelled due to inclement weather. As a result, the USFS announced the delay of additional units (including Units 3, 4, 63, 107 and 24) to the MMG via email due to a number of unresolved concerns and lack of opportunity to resolve them in a timely manner.