**Notes from SBEADMR Working Group Meeting**January 8, 2015

The sixth meeting of the SBEADMR Working Group was held on Thursday, January 8, 2015 in the Pioneer Room at the Montrose County Fairgrounds.

**I. Lessons Learned from the Front Range – Dr. Merrill Kaufmann**

Merrill Kaufmann gave a PowerPoint presentation highlighting lessons learned from his years of research in forest ecology and fire regimes on the Front Range. He shared his perspective on similarities and differences between the Front Range Forests and the GMUG and provided some additional slides on the concept of a landscape assessment approach and adaptive management. The PowerPoint presentation can be found on the PLP’s website at [www.publiclandspartnership.org/projects/sbeadmr under the01/08/2015](http://www.publiclandspartnership.org/projects/sbeadmr%20under%20the01/08/2015) SBEADMR working group meeting agenda and attached materials.

In response to a question of what he felt was the most reasonable area to focus on given the three goals of the proposed action. Merrill responded that in his opinion public safety was the most important. He did not feel that fire would be as threatening in the spruce-fir stands on the GMUG as in the pine forests on the Front Range. Nor did he believe it was clear that any real problems occur as a result of commercial salvage operations if done properly and responsibly.

Hinsdale County Commissioner Cindy Dozier countered Merrill’s opinion regarding the threat of fire citing the Rio Grande fire of 2013 (date?) which resulted in serious flooding in the aftermath of the fire. She stated that fire was a huge issue for Hinsdale County. Merrill acknowledged that the threat of fire is dependent upon where you are and the conditions. FS Program Manager Clay Speas noted that a focus of the proposed action is to create defensible space in certain areas to protect infrastructure from fires.

**II. Discussion on Different Perspectives of Scope and Scale of Proposed Action**

Facilitator Susan Hansen introduced this discussion topic believing that it was timely to begin to get a better understanding of the different perspectives, i.e. Forest Service, conservation community, timber community, recreation community, etc., on the “scope and scale” in terms of interests, issues and opportunities to influence the “scope and scale” of the proposed action. In the interest of time, it was suggested that the Forest Service provides its view of “scope and scale” at this meeting and other interests could address the questions at a later date when more specific information was available.

Clay Speas reiterated that the scope is focused on spruce and aspen to address spruce beetle infestations and aspen decline. The scope includes areas for public safety as well as areas for commercial harvest that might be outside of public safety areas, i.e. areas identified in the Forest Plan as tentatively suitable for timber production. Scope also includes treatments on slopes over 40% where non-commercial mechanical as well as prescribed burning treatments are allowed. The focus of those areas would be designed to primarily help regenerate some aspen on the landscape – the latter representing a very small area of opportunity. In addition, there may be opportunities where commercial harvest could occur and be followed up with use of fire – in areas of mixed stands for instance.

The proposed scale of the project provides for commercial harvest of up to 60,000 acres over the life of the project and non-commercial mechanical treatment and/or prescribed burning on up to another 60,000 acres over the life of the project. Although 10 years has been put forth as the proposed timeframe, the life of the project will actually depend on the availability of funds (budgets) for the treatments as well as the volume of commercial timber production. It could be completed within 5 years or take more than 10 years to complete.

In terms of opportunities to influence the scope and scale of the proposed action, Clay noted that part of the process is to help identify priority treatment areas on the landscape as the project progresses. At the 1/22/15 working group meeting, the FS plans to introduce a GIS exercise bringing GIS coverages that could be used to help identify the priority treatment areas, i.e. public safety layer, WUI layer, areas important to wildlife habitat, roads, etc. Clay hopes that information will help the working group provide input on what criteria should be considered in the DEIS to identify priority treatment areas.

Clay’s comments elicited some questions as follows:

Q: Are there set times when commercial versus non-commercial treatments will occur?

A: Treatments will be based on an ecosystem management approach for each priority treatment area. Treatment will consist of a combination of considerations for the specific landscape, i.e. public safety, commercial harvest, benefits to wildlife, opportunity for aspen treatment, etc.

Q: How will timber sales that have NEPA clearance interface with the proposed treatments and/or opportunity areas in the proposed action?

A: Any existing NEPA ready commercial harvests will be considered as part of the DEIS analysis for the proposed action.

Q: Is it feasible to be able to complete the projects that have NEPA clearance and the treatments proposed simultaneously?

A. Current timber harvest projects that have NEPA clearance will be completed by 2016. Although planning for the treatments in the proposed action may begin as early as summer, 2015, it is unlikely that any of them would be ready for implementation until 2016 once the larger sales are completed. In the Gunnison Basin, for instance, there are no timber projects with NEPA clearance beyond 2016. This proposed action would enable getting future projects NEPA approved and “on the shelf” for future implementation.

Clay commented further that should the landscape scale/adaptive management approach as proposed be litigated or fail – the Forest will still move forward doing the work in priority treatment areas using the more traditional NEPA approach of EA by EA across the landscape. It was further noted that the FS could utilize a Categorical Exclusion (CE) as authorized under the Farm Bill for this work. Even though that provision was not funded the mechanism is in place for utilizing a CE.

Q: Is it be possible to say that the proposed “scope” is up to 120,000 acres (including both commercial and non-commercial treatments) but the actual “scale” for implementation could be anywhere between 0 and 120,000 acres?

A: Possibly – the challenge is to find that “sweet spot” between enough acres with high volume/low costs for commercial harvest to generate funds necessary to complete treatments in the more expensive parts of the project. Federal budgets are not there to do all the work that needs to be done.

Finally, there was continued concern expressed for the vagueness of the proposed action and a need for more specific information in order to continue a meaningful discussion about “scope and scale”. The GIS data to be presented at the next meeting should provide more specific information for further discussions at a later date.

**III. Follow Up Items From Earlier Meetings**

Facilitator Susan Hansen posed the following questions as follow up on discussions/items from following questions for a “thumbs up”/”thumbs down”/”thumbs sideways” poll:

1. Does the working group feel it has enough information to make a recommendation to the FS for further analysis in the DEIS

 UP 4 DOWN 12 SIDEWAYS 0

2. Based on the information you have to date, do you feel the three action alternatives proposed for analysis based on the public scoping represent the full range of alternatives?

 UP 12 DOWN 1 SIDEWAYS 4

3. Are you comfortable with the Ground Rules that we have agreed upon to date – excluding the two items that were tabled?

 UP 14 DOWN 0 SIDEWAYS 0 ABSTAINED 1

4. Draft Language for First Objective under Goal of Recovery: Robbie LeValley has drafted a revised objective statement and will have that available for review at the 1/22/15 meeting.

**IV. Future Meeting Schedule:**

 January 22, 2015 – GIS Coverage and Interactive Mapping Project

 February, 19, 2015 – Agenda to be Determined at Next Meeting

 March, 2015 – One meeting in March. Date and Agenda to be determined.

Meeting adjourned at 4:00 PM

Susan Hansen, Facilitator