**Notes from SBEADMR Working Group Meeting**

October 29, 2015

The thirteenth meeting of the SBEADMR Working Group was held on Thursday, October 29, 2015 in the Pioneer Room at Montrose County Fairgrounds. It was duly noted that this October meeting represented the first anniversary of the SBEADMR Working Group!!!

**Item No. : Overview of Process Used in Identification of Priority Treatment Areas**

Forest Planner Sam Staley provided an overview of how the Forest Service, in cooperation with the SBEADMR Science Team, had applied the GIS optimization tool to help focus and prioritize treatment areas within the original SBEADMR opportunity areas.   For both commercial and non-commercial treatments, the Science Team used multiple variables to perform the GIS optimization exercise at the landscape-scale. After refining the original area with the GIS modelling to an area approximately 2 times the extent of actual proposed treatment acreage, Forest Service resource specialists’ working knowledge of the ground was incorporated to fine-tune and validate the priority treatment areas based on additional operational considerations and forest conditions.

Sam noted that the exercise responded, in part, to public comments on the DEIS and reflected input from stakeholders on variables to be used in the prioritization exercise. Her presentation follows up on Steps 1 and 2 of the GIS optimization model that was presented by Dr. Jason Sibold and Dr. Mike Battaglia, CSU/SBEADMR Science team, at the 9/17/2015 meeting (see 9/17/2015 notes from SBEADMR Working Group) with the additional steps applied to determine priority treatment areas. All the documentation and maps used in the process are available to the public online at:

[www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=42387](http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=42387)

* Go to Analysis >> Draft NEPA Documents >> Priority Treatment Areas.
* The file [SBEADMR Priority Treatment Areas\_Process & Results\_10.26.15](http://a123.g.akamai.net/7/123/11558/abc123/forestservic.download.akamai.com/11558/www/nepa/96623_FSPLT3_2578267.pdf) is the narrative describing the process in detail.
* All other files are maps.

The primary purpose of Sam’s presentation was to show the group how to access the website and how to find the different GIS data input maps, the GIS maps showing priority treatment areas for commercial and non-commercial treatment and detailed documentation of the steps used in the prioritization process. The maps on the website are PDF files and not GIS shape files or raw data used in creating the GIS maps. Groups or individuals need to contact the FS directly if they would like to have access to GIS shape files or raw data.

Five steps were used in the exercise for both the proposed commercial treatment area and the non-commercial treatment area. Each step is described in the detailed documentation of the process steps on the above referenced FS website.

Step 1: Determine initial analysis extent

Step 2: Identify variables

Step 3: Determine input data for variables and derive scores

Step 4: Identify first cut priority treatment areas

Step 5: Validate final priority treatment areas

The following notes reflect some of the key discussion points during the presentation for both the commercial and non-commercial priority treatment areas:

Commercial Treatment Areas:

Step I: Initial analysis extent: (Map 1a)

* Initial analysis extent was limited to Engelmann spruce and aspen-dominated forest with suitable timber, outside designated Colorado Roadless and Wilderness, and all Engelmann spruce and aspen-dominated forests (regardless of timber suitability) within ski area permit boundaries in the GMUG.
* Refined initial analysis extent to exclude areas with past treatments that would eliminate the need for additional commercial treatment over the next 10 years
* Final analysis extent of 322,740 acres

Step 2: Variables identified for the commercial treatment optimization:

* Accessibility (distance to existing roads)
* Fire risk in WUI
* Drainage density
* Lynx use
* Gunnison sage-grouse habitat. Gunnison sage-grouse was added as a variable in response to a comment from Colorado Parks and Wildlife to include an analysis for sage-grouse in aspen stands adjacent to sage-grouse habitat. In the final analysis this had little impact on the outcome in areas for commercial treatment.
* Variables were selected as result of filtering process through a set criteria established for prioritization of variables.

Step 3: Determine input data for variables and derive scores

* Input data maps for commercial treatment areas are labelled with “a” and non-commercial data input maps are labelled with a “b”.
* Parcel density derived from County parcel maps was the highest input data for determining fire risk. Other data used for determining fire risk in weighted order were fuels, slope and aspect.
* A 1 mile buffer from certain private land and/or utilities/communication sites was used for this fire risk analysis. If a community has its own Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) that will be taken into consideration at the project specific level.
* Individual scores for each attribute were combined in a weighted score to get final score for each area of analysis.

Step 4: Identify first cut priority treatment areas

* In process of going from Step 3 to Step 4 considered everything with a cumulative score of 1.5 to be within a priority commercial treatment area (132,847 acres). Used that number as a threshold of where to make the first cut.
* Areas that did not make the threshold cut of 1.5 could be considered in the future for commercial treatment under a separate NEPA process
* Absent an existing aspen market, suitable/commercial aspen were removed from commercial treatment area and moved into the non-commercial clusters of high-scoring aspen where most likely to be treated
* Pulling those aspen stands does not mean that they would never be commercially harvested but in the near term they were pulled from analysis in commercial treatment areas
* Largely spruce-fir stands in the remaining 128,985 acres proposed as priority commercial treatment

Step 5: Validate final priority treatment areas

* As part of the final validation, Forest Service District personnel (timber management zone managers) reviewed the priority treatment maps/areas in terms of what they had been thinking about treating based on local knowledge of resource conditions, concerns and operational considerations. The maps showed very good validation compared to what the timber managers had been thinking. This final step resulted in minimal fine-tuning of the final prioritization map to show what is on the ground, i.e. existing roads, watersheds, higher quality treatment areas,
* 45 final commercial treatment areas were identified for a total of 112,880 acres (Map 5a)
* Areas outlined in purple on Map 5a represent the highest scoring commercial treatment areas

General Comments/Questions on Commercial Treatment Areas

* Concern expressed for including areas shown for treatment that the FS has been unable to get access to in the past
* FS trying to be responsive to comments that initial scale for commercial treatment was too large. Trying to focus on priority areas for this given period of time. Not to say that other suitable/commercial timber areas could not be treated in future under other NEPA.
* Focus reviews on Maps 3a, 4 and 5a. Biggest difference between Map 4 and Map 5a is that Map 4 reflects the first cut treatment areas for both commercial and non-commercial whereas 3a and 5a refer only to commercial treatment areas.
* This exercise represents the process undertaken to take the proposed commercial treatment areas to the next step of implementation. The maps represent the areas likely to be treated over the next 10 years under the SBEADMR project.
* Recommended that stakeholders refer to the Vegetative Treatment Matrix, a key component of the EIS, for a detailed explanation of the different types of treatment that may be utilized.
* Areas identified for commercial treatment have been identified as high risk for beetle infestation; but that doesn’t mean that they will die.
* Scoring system was derived independent of whether there has been an invasion of beetles.

Non-Commercial Treatment Areas

Dan Huisjen walked through the same steps and methodology for determining the priority treatment areas for non-commercial treatment as described in detail in the process documentation on the FS website.

Step 1: Determine initial analysis extent

* Limited to spruce-aspen and aspen mix forests outside of Colorado Roadless and Wilderness, and outside of all forest included in the commercial treatment optimization.
* Recent treatments were excluded from the potential treatment area, for a total analysis extent of 252,191 acres (Map 1b)
* High scoring suitable/commercial aspen areas identified by the commercial analysis were incorporated into the non-commercial analysis.

Step 2: Variables identified for non-commercial optimization

* Presence of sudden aspen decline – evidence of determined high/low
* Fire risk in the WUI – exact same layer as used on the commercial analysis
* Gunnison sage grouse – limited application – aspen/sage interface

Step 3: Determine input data for variables and derive scores

* Variables were scored from 0 to 4, with higher numbers representing values that were more desirable for non-commercial treatment.
* Individual scores for each attribute were combined in a weighted sum to obtain a final score
* Total scores ranged from 0 to 3.7

Step 4: Identify first cut priority treatment areas

* All non-commercial spruce-aspen and aspen mix forest with a score of 0.9 or above were considered to be optimal for non-commercial treatment, as well as all commercial aspen areas with a commercial score of 1.6 for a total of 176,079 acres.
* The non-commercial threshold score was selected in order to identify approximately 2 times the extent of area that SBEADMR proposes to non-commercially treat (60,000 acres)

Step 5: Validate final priority treatment areas

* GMUG District personnel reviewed the first cut priority treatment areas for further fine-tuning and validation based on specific criteria outlined in Step 5 of the process for non-commercial treatment including:
  + The need for regeneration of aspen, primarily for long-term wildlife habitat, but also to improve the age-class diversity of aspen, and
  + The need to include logical control lines for prescribed burning around each treatment area. Dan drew a map to illustrate how this resulted in areas being “expanded” to include roads, drainages, ridgetops or other potential control lines so that prescribed burning could be effectively and safely utilized to manage the target vegetation types and take advantage of the control features on the landscape
* In the final analysis 145, 429 acres were identified for non-commercial treatment; of which approximately 50,000 acres would be treated as part of the proposed SBEADMR project.

General Questions/Comments

* The issue of climate change will be addressed when looking at specific stands. The key will be considering the resiliency of aspen stands in light of climate change.
* Non-commercial treatment of high scoring aspen stands would include prescribed burning, thinning of aspen stands to cut out encroaching spruce/conifers
* If the aspen market comes back and if the “on the ground” impacts of commercial treatment of aspen would be substantially different than the impacts analyzed for non-commercial treatment than new NEPA would be required. Otherwise, the adaptive management approach accounts for changing conditions over time.
* In response to a question regarding use of watersheds for treatment areas, Clay Speas responded that had been considered when they were doing the GIS modelling and determined watersheds would be more appropriately addressed at the project specific level. The FS has information on watersheds that was completed during the assessment for Forest Plan revision. That information is available at dispatch center in the event of a big fire event and is available for use by resource advisors. Hydrology and geology data has been gathered in planning for catchment areas.

**Item No. 2: This item was tabled in the interest of time for remaining agenda items**

**Item No. 3: Update on Status and Release of Final EIS/draft ROD**

Clay Speas gave a brief report on work being done to complete the FEIS and draft ROD. Lots of comments were received on the DEIS and the FS is trying to update certain components of the FEIS to address comments received. The current plan is to release the FEIS/draft ROD by February 1, 2016. The ROD is considered as a draft for the release of the FEIS/draft ROD starts the 45 objection period. Given all the procedural work that has to be done following the objection period, the final ROD is not expected to be released until sometime in April, 2016.

Clay reported that the Science Team is currently compiling all the data that was collected this summer. Also the FS should be receiving a report on the key finding of the literature review in November. Once the FS has that information it will take that information and compare with what is being proposed. There will be another meeting with the Science Team this to consider next steps.

**Item No. 3: Subcommittee Report on Recommendations for a Collaborative Adaptive Management Group (AMG)**

A. Determine Informal or Formal Relationship between Forest Service and AMG.

Mary Chapman and Susan Hansen had the opportunity to visit with Tony Cheng, Director of the CSU

Colorado Forest Restoration Institute, when he was in town recently for an Uncompahgre CFLRP meeting. The purpose of the meeting was twofold: a) to explore various models of collaborative groups and key components to their agreements; and b) to review the schematic in Appendix E of the DEIS – “Public Engagement in Adaptive Implementation”. Tony advised the first question to ask is if the relationship between the FS and the AMG was to be informal or formal. If it was to be informal there was no need to look at formalizing the relationship. On the other hand if both parties agreed a more formal relationship was beneficial then the group should be formally organized and develop operational procedures.

Carmine Lockwood was asked to express the FS’s interest in a formal vs informal relationship. Carmine noted that Appendix E is a formal commitment to public participation and collaboration. That commitment will be legally binding and will be part of the ROD. He stated that going forward into implementation the GMUG would prefer a formal structure to have meaningful engagement, dialogue, and deliberation on determining priorities of where to go with treatments. He concluded by noting that a diverse, inclusive and comprehensive AMG that has reached strong zones of agreement will carry a lot of weigh into implementation of process.

This position reflected an earlier recommendation by the SBEADMR Working Group (SWG) that going forward into implementation a collaborative group should be more formally organized. To that end a subcommittee had been appointed to look at various models of collaborative groups and bring recommendations back to the full SWG.

Mary Chapman reported on the work of the subcommittee to date. The subcommittee had reviewed several different models and identified the Blue Mountains Forest Partnership in Oregon as most closely aligned with what the SWG might envision as a more formal organization in terms of organizational structure, communication and decision making process. Mary highlighted the important elements of an agreement for a collaborative AMG as follows:

* Purpose: A stated purpose that all members of the AMG must be willing to agree to; purpose statement would be developed once the final ROD was released
* People: Diverse representation of interests, voting privilege
* Process: Decision making process - defined consensus – different levels of agreement
  + If you disagree need to come up with a different solution
  + Use of minority and majority position approach to articulate the positions
  + Basic rules of collaboration

A “thumbs up – thumbs down” poll was taken of the group for the subcommittee to continue to craft a template for an organizational structure and operational procedures for an AMG based on the FS interest in a more formal relationship and the subcommittee’s research to date. It was a unanimous “thumbs up”. It was noted that this would only be a suggested template at this point until the ROD was released and a group was actually identified. That group would then be the body to adopt in full or in part the specific components of an agreement.

Following the poll, there was a general discussion about some of the challenges going forward, i.e. both agency and stakeholder capacity issues, building relationships and trust with stakeholders in the various timber zones where treatment would be occurring, stakeholder “burn out”, how representation to the AMG is determined, geographic diversity, ensuring “fairness” in representation on AMG.

B. Appendix E – Public Engagement in Adaptive Implementation

The subcommittee had also reviewed Appendix E and specifically Figures 1 and 2, schematics that illustrated the proposed Adaptive Management Cycle (Fig. 1) and the relationships between stakeholders, Science Team and Forest Service (Fig. 2). Jonathan Greenspan reported that the subcommittee would like to see additional opportunities for stakeholders to have more of a proactive role early on in the adaptive management process than is currently reflected in the schematics. He noted that in the narrative of Appendix E there is reference to such opportunities but they are not apparent in Fig 1. He also noted that the subcommittee found Fig. 2 to be confusing. He pointed out specific “boxes” on Fig. 1 – where additional input from an AMG or stakeholders may be appropriate.

FS staff was very open to the comments for improving Appendix E and encouraged the SWG and subcommittee to articulate the specific decision points or “touch point” on the schematic for inclusion of input. The subcommittee agreed to take on that task and report back to the SWG in a final meeting of the SWG early January before the release of the FEIS/draft ROD.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:15 PM after a final round of closing comments by participants.