

Notes from SBEADMR Working Group Meeting

January 22, 2015

The seventh meeting of the SBEADMR Working Group was held on Thursday, January 22, 2015 in the Pioneer Room at the Montrose County Fairgrounds.

Item No. 1: Presentation/Discussion of GIS Map Layers – Clay Speas and Kathy Abramson

Program Manager Clay Speas introduced Kathy Abramson, FS GIS specialist who presented an interactive GIS demonstration of the different coverages the Forest Service has provided to the Enterprise Team to complete its analysis of the proposed action and write the DEIS. The focus of the coverages presented was on a broad scale for purposes of identifying priority treatment areas. Some of the coverages displayed included:

- Tentative suitable timber
- Vegetation
- Existing road systems
- Lynx habitat
- Areas excluded from the project area, i.e. wilderness, roadless areas
- WUI area
- Wildlife habitat
- Watersheds

In response to what other layers might be available, Kathy noted that a layer of past activities over the last 25 years could be generated.

Clay reiterated that the coverages presented were at a broad scale for purposes of looking at the landscape across the Forest and not at the project specific level. That level of detail will occur at the project level when initial inventories and site surveys are conducted and analyzed as part of the adaptive management approach for the project.

Following the presentation, the working group was asked to list specific attributes that they felt the Forest should consider when identifying the priority treatment areas. In listing the attributes, the group considered them as “coarse filter” attributes for the landscape scale or “fine filter” attributes more appropriate for a project specific scale. Results of the brainstorming session were:

Coarse Filter Scale (Landscape Scale)

- Public Safety
 - Road corridors
 - WUI areas
 - Emergency ingress and egress
 - Recreation sites, i.e. campgrounds, picnic areas
 - Communication sites
 - Power lines
 - Infrastructure, i.e. admin sites, ski areas
 - Source water
 - Hazardous tree fall
 - Defensible space (wildfire mitigation)

- Historical sites
- Opportunities to manage large fires (“relative ignitability concept”)
- Tentative suitable timber acres
- Tree Mortality (length of time since trees died)
- Non-System Roads
- Economic benefit and/or feasibility
 - Value of timber acre
 - Productive timber sites
- Existing transportation systems in place (Level 3 roads/economic feasibility of a project??)
- Wildlife
 - Elk migration
 - Elk calving areas
 - Safe cross areas
- Historic range of variability – applicable to aspen cover type

Fine Filter Scale (Project Specific Scale):

- Diversity – important for resiliency
 - Age class
 - Species
 - Level of dead/live trees
 - Wildlife
 - Tree species/proportional relationships
 - High productivity sites
 - Field sample of vegetation
 - Rehabilitation of non-system road opportunities
- Aspen stands – consider impact of climate change on elevation of aspen stands
- Prevailing winds/slopes
- Cumulative impact in areas already disturbed, e.g. gas development activities, coal mines

At the end of the meeting there was general discussion about various attributes for further clarification. Some of the key discussion points were as follows:

- Merrill Kaufmann pointed out an important question to ask: “Are we getting the ecology right?”
- Opportunity to manage fire was seen as a “coarse filter” attribute for managing for future large fires is an essential part of the broader landscape. In addition to protecting infrastructure and ensuring fire fighter safety, the Forest would like to look at future opportunities to manage fires in different ways than just suppression to include taking advantage of the benefit of a large fire. For instance, the Forest has not had the resources to go out across the landscape and identify an opportunity to create a barrier to prevent a fire from crossing a road, i.e. Divide area, or the opportunity to allow a fire to grow where there is an opportunity to gain 3,000 acres, for example, of ecological benefit from a managed fire. The EIS provides an opportunity to look at such opportunities on a landscape level; the EIS is not about a decision on how to manage a fire.
- Issue of timber sales within a WUI versus outside of a WUI. Norm Bircher responded to Stu Krebs’ question of whether industry could meet the volume needed by just harvesting in the WUI areas. Norm responded that the volume per acre within the WUI was insufficient. Norm

explained that the cost of timber harvest in public safety projects, e.g. Hwy 149 project, is much higher because of such factors as a limited season of operation, having to shut down operations every hour to let traffic pass, provide flagmen, signage etc. He noted that being able to mix the volume from public safety projects with volume from other suitable timber acres that need to be salvaged helps to dilute some of the costs. He further noted an unintended consequence of not being able to meet volume requirements is that industry has to move to green timber sales elsewhere. He opined it would be preferable for all parties to be able to use the dead timber in both WUI and other suitable timber acres outside a WUI before going to green timber – the latter being our future forest.

- Historic range of variability. Carmine clarified that the discussion of historic range of variability and succession stage distribution applies most to the aspen treatments where the Forest is proposing a mix of treatments to get more young aspen on the landscape. In the spruce-fir, the focus is on the commercial salvage of dead timber and to use that value in certain areas to accelerate recovery and reforestation. The Forest is not proposing to change the succession stages of distribution in the spruce-fir stands.
- Importance of considering climate change and elevations where prioritizing treatment areas in aspen stands.

Clay concluded the discussion on attributes by noting that the list of attributes generated will be included in the DEIS and will help guide the Forest in determining the priority treatment areas. Then, as part of the adaptive management process, the public will be invited out in the field to provide input on which treatments will be applied and precisely where within the priority treatment area.

Item No. 2: Online Mapping Capabilities of Google My Maps and Lessons from Interactive GIS Mapping Project – Kristen Pelz, Colorado Forest Restoration Institute

Kristen Pelz of the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute presented a “virtual” demonstration of an online mapping product (Google My Maps). She also shared lessons learned from a mapping project with another collaborative forest management group. Kristen cautioned that it is important to have a goal in mind of what you want to use maps for before you ask for multiple GIS coverages. She also shared that CSU has additional ArcGIS licenses for online use and has the capability of providing access to a “cloud” to host interactive GIS mapping. She recommended the group work through local extension offices to inquire about that capability if interested.

Item No. 3: Follow-Up on Items/Questions from Earlier Meetings

- 1) Draft Language for First Objective under Goal of Recovery – TABLED
- 2) Coarse Filter versus Fine Filter – covered above under Item No. 1
- 3) Follow-up on Question regarding range of alternatives

This item led to an explanation by FS staff of the line officer’s prerogative to look at the range of alternatives that have been analyzed in the DEIS and to pick components out of Alt. 3 and pick others out of Alts. 2 and 4 and recommend a “preferred alternative” which can then be analyzed as part of the final EIS. For instance, an alternative with a novel component for aspen could be considered as part of the final EIS. It was suggested this discussion be continued further at the February meeting.

4) Follow up on Question on Adaptive Management Approach - TABLED

FS Planner Sam Staley suggested that it may be helpful to separate the spruce-fir discussion from the aspen discussion in terms of considering attributes to determine priority treatment areas in spruce-fir versus aspen stands. Concerns were expressed that there are areas of overlap with the two species.

Emily Horner suggested three different categories to consider in terms of where there seems to be general agreement versus areas that need further information and deliberation:

- Treatment of spruce –fir stands in WUI areas
- Treatments in spruce-fir outside of WUI, balancing economic equation of mixed treatments
- Treatment in aspen stands

Item No. 4: Schedule Next Meeting and Identify Items for Agenda

At the previous meeting, the group had agreed that February 19th was the preferred date by the majority for the next meeting. Agenda items may include following up on items that were tabled and continuation of the discussion of the range of alternatives. In addition, the conservation community may present an overview of its comments/concerns for the DEIS.

After a round of closing comments by participants, the meeting was adjourned at 4:00 PM

Notes submitted by Susan Hansen, Facilitator