

## Notes from SBEADMR Working Group Meeting

September 17, 2015

The twelfth meeting of the SBEADMR Working Group was held on Thursday, September 17, 2015 in the Pioneer Room at Montrose County Fairgrounds.

### Item No. 1: Presentation and Q&A regarding Priority Treatment Area Mapping and GIS Optimization

Dr. Jason Sibold and Dr. Mike Battaglia, CSU Science Team, provided a PowerPoint presentation to share the preliminary work that had been done to date to develop a GIS optimization model. When fully developed, the model could be utilized as a tool to help select high priority treatment areas on the GMUG landscape within the parameters of the SBEADMR DEIS. The purpose of the presentation was to demonstrate what the optimization exercise was trying to accomplish, receive feedback and address questions from the group.

Jason prefaced the presentation with the following points:

- This is a computerized mapping exercise conducted at a pixel scale and not at a watershed scale.
- The model uses existing spatial datasets (e.g. forest cover types) and a multi-objective weighted optimization framework within a GIS system to compare the suitability of different areas of the GMUG landscape.
- The map is a representation – not the detail of the “real” world. The “real” world is incredibly complex and there is no way that all the variables used in the model could be mapped – lynx habitat as an example.
- Maps are not the “end all” – they are a tool that can help guide people but they are not meant to be a substitute for field knowledge or field experience. Gathering information from people who know the landscape and/or work the landscape is critical for we don’t know how well the map represents the “real world” until we drill down further and/or do field work.
- At this point the model is still fuzzy. The Science Team had just met the previous week with the FS to review their work and jointly further develop details of the model. A more complete map will be available in late October.
- Variables that the Working Group had identified early on as coarse filter attributes for determining priority treatment areas were considered in the development of the model.
- The presentation is intended to be a prioritization exercise – it is not the final product. The model is dynamic and can be updated when new information is available and/or new information comes in from the field, i.e. new layers can be added to the model.
- The point of the exercise is to come up with a composite prioritization that will point towards broad areas of the GMUG landscape where there is agreement that if doing treatment this type of treatment is the ideal place to do it. Conversely, it can point out red flags of areas that we want to stay away from or do not have enough benefit to justify treatment.
- This exercise focused on determining areas for commercial treatment only; there will be a separate map areas for non-commercial treatment

Jason then proceeded to walk the group through the PowerPoint presentation:

Step 1: Look at the whole GMUG landscape and exclude areas that cannot be included in the context of the SBEADMR proposal. Areas that were excluded include:

- Wilderness areas
- Roadless areas
- Anything deemed “unsuitable timber” as defined in FS database
- Also excluded certain types of past treatments, i.e. some sites that were deemed not commercially viable since they had been treated within the last 10-15 years. It was noted that even though such sites may be excluded from the SBEADMR proposal it does not mean that they are permanently excluded from future treatment as part of the FS suitable timber program

Step 2: Identify variables to be used in model and assign values to the different categories. The variables selected for this exercise were:

- Accessibility – existing roads, skid distance, distance from treatment site, ability to build roads
- Drainage density – number of streams within a square mile; related to road network
- Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)
- Wildlife Variables – either concerns or concerns that needs to be treated

Accessibility - In terms of giving a value to each category, Jason provided the following example for accessibility: If a good road exists within skid distance (within 1/4 mile) of potential treatment area it would rank very high; whereas a road might receive no value points if it was 10 miles away, needs major improvements.

He pointed out that you need to consider the relative value of each variable to one another; think through how to value – twice as valuable or equal value to another variable. Each category needs to be valued and weighted to determine priority treatment areas. Overlay layers of variables to begin to see where to concentrate treatments to maximize benefits and minimize impacts.

Other examples for assigning values to selected variables are:

Drainage density –Low density (fewer streams) would receive higher value than higher density (lots of streams) for example because it is more complicated to do a job in higher drainage density areas, i.e. for a timber sale, for example, it could mean more stream crossings, higher environmental impact, etc.

WUI Risk - In the absence of mapped structures or improvements, the Science Team used parcel maps from different counties and made assumption that a parcel could represent a structure. They looked at the density of parcels within a 1 mile radius for each point on the landscape. Assigned a high value if lots of cabins next to forest. Also included communication sites, powerlines, and some recreation sites in this variable.

Wildlife - Jason noted that wildlife is more complicated because wildlife moves around on the landscape. It is much more difficult to say this is where they are and this is what is good or bad for them. An example: Gunnison sage grouse habitat was given a high value because treatment could improve the habitat; whereas if area was not sage grouse habitat it may not get a high score. In contrast, some wildlife categories, i.e. elk calving area may be more appropriate to consider at the project level rather than the broader landscape scale. Clay Speas noted that in considering assigning the values for wildlife the FS was trying to be responsive to comments received from Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW)

In wrapping up his presentation, Jason pointed out that this model is not designed to tell how to prioritize or rank the variables used to select priority treatment areas. It is designed to show what it might look like. He reminded the audience that this was not the final map product. The presentation was intended to be an exercise to demonstrate how a higher cumulative score for an area may push it towards treatment and a low score may not.

Jason noted two challenges going forward:

1. How to rank and weight variables
2. How to use this optimization tool

Following the presentation, there was discussion on several different points/issues:

- Forest Planner Sam Staley reviewed the criteria that the FS and Science Team developed internally to select variables that were deemed appropriate to determine priority treatment areas at the landscape scale:
  - Decent data exists
  - Variable is relevant at a broad treatment scale
  - Filtering capacity – can distinguish one area from another
  - Data is relatively static

- There was group discussion on other attributes/thoughts to consider mapping or consider in selecting priority treatment sites:
  - Soil types
  - Water intakes/reservoirs
  - Economic variables, i.e. site productivity, stand age mortality
  - Impact of wildfire on wildlife habitat
  - Timber volume
  - Mix of “low and high” hanging fruit

In response to concern that some factors/variables such as listed above may be overlooked or not accounted for in this model it was stated they may, in fact, be more appropriately addressed at a project scale rather than this landscape scale. This was not to diminish their importance but to consider them at the appropriate scale. Later in the meeting the group took a “thumbs up”/“thumbs down” poll and agreed that the above items would be better addressed at the specific project level.

- How determined WUI at risk – There was clarification that this model is representing potential areas at risk of wildfire because of density; it is not prescribing a certain treatment to reduce risk. Values were assigned to areas of steep slope, fuel types and southerly aspects. Discussion followed to clarify what the FS can actually do to influence risk or severity of wildfire at the landscape or habitat scale. Expecting the FS to change the way landscapes behave in terms of wildfire risk is outside the scope of the SBEADMR project and the FS’s capacity to influence. Need to be careful not to overstate what can be accomplished in the context of this project. Creating defensible space around structures is the best tool for communities
- Accessibility to Raw Data – there was discussion of accessibility of the raw data used in the composite prioritizations so that counties/communities, for example, can understand how the

final scores were reached and then compare with their local knowledge of area. It is important to be transparent and for counties to have access to the various layers in order to show how priority treatment areas were selected in their area. There is a need to pursue what entity can store the information and how it can be accessed.

- Where in the flow chart for the iterative adaptive management approach is the “box” for local input? Is it between identification of priority treatment areas and selection of specific treatment sites – between box # 2 and box #3? Stakeholders want to be more proactive and determine where their comments are most pertinent. Include those opportunities in the flow chart.

## **Item No. 2: Report from “Collaboration Subcommittee”**

Members of the “collaboration subcommittee” gave a brief report on research that they had conducted since the last meeting on examples of organizational and operating guidelines from other collaborative groups. They also identified their next steps in crafting recommendations for how to “tighten up” or formalize a collaborative group for the adaptive management approach for implementation as outlined in the DEIS. Specific topic areas that will be considered are:

- Purpose or Mission – to be based on ROD and agreed upon by all signatories to an MOU or charter agreement
- Guiding Principles
- Organizational Structure – Diverse representation of stakeholders; # of “seats” at the table
- Monitoring
- Process Protocol, i.e.
  - Decision making process
  - Process for addressing conflicts between the agency and adaptive management group
- Communication

The subcommittee will be using the Blue Mountains Forest Partnership’s operating guidelines as a template for addressing the above topics. The subcommittee hopes to have a draft available to share with the SBEADMR Working Group at its October meeting.

Others points shared were:

- Individuals serving on the current subcommittee would not necessarily serve on the “adaptive management group”,
- Intent of formalizing an organizational structure is to add more “bones” to structure to increase confidence and trust in the adaptive management approach
- Consideration of reimbursing members of “adaptive management group” for expenses, i.e. travel expenses
- PLP could continue to provide outreach services to get public involved in adaptive management process
- How to address need/opportunities for broader public process given the role of an “adaptive management group”
- Capacity of some interests/stakeholders to be engaged with “adaptive management group”, larger SBEADMR Working Group and providing comments to FS throughout the process
- Need to be sure that not circumventing FACA

**Schedule Next Meeting:** Thursday, October 29, 2015 from 9:00 AM until 12:00 Noon.

**Agenda Topics for Next Meeting**

- Review and provide feedback on updated map of priority areas based on work that has been done to date
- Continue discussion of other attributes that could possibly be added at landscape level. If people wish to add additional attributes they need to be submitted to the FS by September 25<sup>th</sup>.
- Show how areas were prioritized and related to each other and how values were rated
- Report from subcommittee

After a round of closing comments by attendees, the meeting was adjourned at 4:30 PM

Notes compiled by Susan Hansen, Facilitator

DRAFT