

Chiricahua FireScape Meeting Notes

Tuesday, September 13, 2011

9:30am to 12:30pm, The Benson Center Cochise College (1025 S Highway 90, Benson)

In attendance: Cori Dolan, Bill Edwards, Don Falk, Brooke Gebow, Joe Harris, Jason Jimenez, Bob Lefevre, Matt Littrell, Chris Lohrengel, Ann Lynch, Jim Malusa, Ruben Morales, Mark Pater, Marc Stamer, Chris Stetson, Craig Wilcox, John Windes (notes by Cori Dolan and Brooke Gebow).

Update on Horeshoe 2 Fire

Brooke opened the meeting by explaining that FireScape includes a whole mountain, landscape-scale analysis of fuels and vegetation and big-scale NEPA and other compliance to cover a wide range of treatments. The purpose of this meeting is to regroup after the Horseshoe 2 Fire.

Bill presented a Powerpoint on the progression and after-effects of the Horseshoe 2 Fire. The fire started on May 8 (human caused) and concluded on June 28, 2011. It burned approximately 223,000 acres total, and almost entirely in the FireScape project area. Conditions were ultra-dry with 97th percentile Energy Release Component. Early goals of fire management were to protect private residences, maintain the economic viability of the surrounding community, and minimize impact to high elevation conifers. The footprint of the Horseshoe 1 Fire, which was a relatively low-intensity burn, was crucial in protecting the community of Portal.

Mark Stamer and his team mapped burn severity after the fire completed progression. About 12% of the burn area had high soil burn severity (measured by using remote sensing images of vegetation that is ground-truthed by hydrologists and soil scientists). Overall, there was a good mosaic of burn severities. Some of the hottest fires were in the oaks. There were 28 injuries out of 10K firefighters, which is a testament to the strategic placement of firefighters. Mark S., detailer from the San Bernardino NF, reported on the BAER process/post-fire activities: create BARC (Burned Area Reflectance Classification) map, create soil burn severity map, determine what values-at-risk exist (human life, property, natural and cultural resources), propose treatments to mitigate effects on values at risk, design treatment package to reduce impacts to values-at-risk. Initial report contains a summary of specialist reports plus funding request to regional and national office. The report is then handed over to the implementation team. Recommendations included: bridge and channel clearing, road and trail stabilization, HAZMAT removal and stabilization, closure/warning signs, gate installation, MCH application (protection for trees from beetles to protect remaining MSO habitat), hazard tree removal, aerial seeding (5-6K acres have been seeded already), and flood patrol and response. Cochise County and NRCS have been leading private property site evaluations and flood mitigation. The area has experienced some post-fire flooding, but not bad, around Turkey Creek and Pinery Canyon (more on west side than east side of mountain). They are already seeing some undergrowth of herbaceous material.

Two mastication areas were used as anchor points for firefighters and kept the fire on the ground. Treatments at Johnson Peak, Whitetail and the Brushy Fire in Rucker Basin (lightning fire

managed to 6K acres) all saw good fire behavior. Bill is interested in having a student to compare treatments/fire combinations (only burn vs masticated/burned vs Rx fire/burn, etc).

Jason Jimenez with Cleveland NF is working on the BAER team and reported on what is ahead for monitoring. Currently they are working on new gates so they can close areas as needed to protect life and property. Noxious weed monitoring is being worked on by a contractor. The next big step for BAER is an effects monitoring plan to measure if the treatments are effective (e.g. seeding, stabilizers, MCH).

Regroup on Proposed Action

- Brooke reported on where we were before the 2011 fire season. We completed scoping where we laid out primary and secondary treatments for each ecological system with no specific blocks of treatments. Chris and Ruben developed draft treatment units based on natural topographical features to overlay on the ecological units. There are 15 large units, including one private land unit. Chris will get with Mark P. and USFWS (Leslie Canyon) to get input on treatment unit map.
- Post-fire thoughts on treatment priorities – when we get our fuels map updated with 2010 and 2011 fires, we are still looking at the same menu of treatments. Chris reported that he is in contact with Don H. about updating the map. He said it should be a relatively easy process since we already have a starting point. The timing of the update may be helped by the current update being done to the Total Fuel Change Tool (TOFU – delta). Don H is in contact with TOFU folks. Don H. feels that we can do the update remotely/virtually.

Chris will set that up with Don H.

- Remapping needs – Jim Malusa reported that we will not need to remap the area post-fire because the BpS designations will remain the same. Jim offered to revisit sites and take photos for ecological system descriptions. **Jim will send Brooke and Bill a cost estimate for that project.**
- Brooke and Don had a conversation with Corbin Newman, Regional Forester, that confirmed the Coronado is unlikely in the near future to receive major funding for implementing new, big initiatives due to the budgetary demands of two Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Projects. However, the analysis team provided by the Region that is assisting the Four Forest Restoration Initiative is actually a statewide resource that Jim Upchurch can request.

New outreach needs/opportunities

Affected landowners were in contact with USFS during the fire, but Joe re-engaged with some private landowners post-fire. Bill and his team have given the Horeshoe 2 Fire presentation to the Malpai group, an ornithological meeting, and TNC volunteers. Bill will be giving presentation to a UA class and AZGFD. AZ Illustrated will be doing a piece on the fire as well. John Windes recommends contacting NRCs. Bill will add FireScape component to these presentations and highlight the past treatments that saved communities during the Horseshoe 2 Fire. **Cori will contact Heidi to work on outreach opportunities.** Craig suggested we look into using TEAMS to create factsheets or web-related materials. Don F. reported that he received money from the Southwest Fire Science Consortium to create and distribute educational materials based on lessons learned from the 2011 fire season. **Don and Cori will meet to discuss how these two needs may parallel.**

Update on departure analysis

Craig spoke to Don H. September 12th. Don H. has been working with Jim and they are nearly finished. Craig is developing a crosswalk between the Landfire biophysical units and our ecological units to bring this analysis into our system.

Status of Owl Surveys

Mexican spotted owl surveys were contracted to begin this past spring, but were never started due to the fire. Bill reported that they got some post-fire information on the condition of nest sites. They did find successful nests with young. The survey team will go out next year for certain and hopefully for the next three years because more funding was obtained post-fire. MCH pheromone treatments to protect Douglas-fir from bark beetles in owl habitat is scheduled for next spring. (The substance fools beetles into thinking habitat is occupied, and they go elsewhere.)

Private lands analysis

Don Decker reported (by email) that the NRCS is still interested in working with FireScape. They were involved in Horseshoe 2 Fire by means of the Emergency Watershed Protection program with Cochise County. NRCS provided 75% of the funds towards protecting home sites with temporary flood control structures. NRCS has traditional project funding mechanisms such as EQIP and WHIP. These programs depend on applications which come directly from the land owners who own the private land and hold the leases. These are the entities that they eventually develop contracts with for addressing resource related concerns that have been identified in a coordinated resource management plan.

Next steps

Cori will work with Janel on getting meetings set up for TEAMS IDT in November plus field trips for interested specialists. Dec 3rd Craig is helping organize a small business forest products workshop in Safford where FireScape could provide information. Our next steps include finalizing boundaries for treatment units, updating the fuel map, and getting the departure analysis finished. **Cori will call Don H. to see what he needs from the Chiricahua group to finish departure analysis.** Craig and Matt will work on Vegetation and Fuels report, will try to have a draft by early November for the IDT meeting. Bill is interviewing to fill the vacant Biologist position on the Douglas RD.