

Meeting Notes Catalina-Rincon FireScape

January 6, 2009

12:30 p.m. at The Nature Conservancy (1510 E. Fort Lowell)

In attendance: Jeanine Derby, Cori Dolan, Don Falk, Brooke Gebow, Stan Helin, Kristy Lund, Jim Malusa, Steve Plevel, Jennifer Ruyle, Chris Stetson, Josh Taiz (notes by Cori Dolan/Brooke Gebow)

Next meeting: Wednesday February 3, 12:30pm, TNC (1510 E. Ft. Lowell)

Review FireScape “Essence:”

Jeanine Derby reiterated the essence of FireScape in three parts. First is the passion to do something that has not been done before—that is the real thrust that moves the process forward. With inspiration from the Malpai Borderlands group, Sherry Tune, and others, the project takes a landscape approach. The beginning of an endeavor like this one has no real target and is not bound by what others have done in the past. Every time a new entity is incorporated into the process, we get new passion and legitimacy.

The second part is the intent to do the right thing at the right time for the right reasons on the land. The Peloncillos gave us the example of using ecological rather than management boundaries. We are also using an adaptive management approach that allows us to incorporate predictable disturbances while still being alert for varying conditions. This part includes an educational component because most people want to see the right thing done and they want to participate. At the same time, we are recognizing new science pathways as we move forward.

The final part is a visionary thinking that recognizes this is not a neat package applied broadstroke. As things change over time, we must know the value of an open, adaptive process. The end result is to be able to continually accomplish conservation and sustainability of landscapes over time.

Don suggested that Jeanine write up these comments and then give them to Darla Sidles to add her thoughts. This could then be the common/shared statement of ideals for the FireScape project.

Brooke and Stan added that in the face of climate change, working on a landscape scale becomes more important. The goal is to be as pragmatic as possible while considering the landscape at the biggest scale.

Steve then asked everyone to briefly share why they are a part of this effort. Responses are as follows:

Brooke: I have experience with this kind of large-scale effort and as a TNC land manager I have a responsibility to look at the landscape as whole.

Stan: Sustainability

Jennifer: To make sure that everyone who needs to know has access to information.

Don: To join science and management at a large scale.

Steve: When you love a place, it's hard not to do the right thing...and this is the right thing.

Kristy: It is part of my job to be proactive about the sustainability of the landscape.

Jim: I like maps. I like making maps accessible.

Chris: I have a passion for fire and fuels management that restores fire to ecosystems.

Cori: As a relative newcomer to the fire arena, I can't think of a better endeavor to lend my hand to.

Josh: To make good on my responsibility to act as a steward of my homeland.

The general consensus is that it is not just a job; it is the right thing to do.

Steve also asked the group to discuss what success would look like. Responses are as follows:

Don: When the landscape could support small lightning fires with little intervention from land managers. He added that success would include the acceptance of a landscape either being resilient to a disturbance or becoming a new ecosystem (i.e. change isn't necessarily bad).

Jennifer: When the project is still moving forward even if the core collaborators have all been changed. She added that success was achieved when the landscape could remain intact even after large-scale disturbances.

Brooke: Helping others in the region break barriers to be able to work at a meaningful scale.

Kristy: When we can do a mix of things regarding fire without losing homes and learn to accept change.

Steve: When we have a common fire management plan for the area as opposed to individual units and when we have regained the trust of the public.

Jim: Success is maps.

Josh: When we can accept ecological processes and the change that is inevitable.

Brief reports on TEAMS meeting: Science presentation Dec 3 (Don)

After meeting with Chris French, Janel McCurdy, and Joe Scott on Dec. 4th, Stan feels that he has a better handle of where the process needs to go. He would like it look as much like the Huachuca process as possible by staying as ecological-unit based as possible. He aims for one NEPA decision that includes maximum Catalina-Rincon area. He also felt we needed to drop any commercial thinning option from the analysis. The question we will be asking is: "Is this area fire-use ready, environmentally and politically?" Stan reiterated the goal that we want to have the NEPA done for at least ten years so that when money comes in, we can do projects. A HFRA (Healthy Forest Restoration Act) process is attractive to Stan, but that avenue precludes dealing with wilderness. Something HFRA-like (in terms of collaboration) that covers as much territory as possible is his goal.

As TEAMS fire/fuels experts see it, we can remain very collaborative and not violate FACA (Federal Advisory Committee Act). Jennifer suggested that we use the clear legal guidance for the 4-FRI (forest restoration initiative) to reduce the risk that our scientific products would not be FACA compliant. She recapped that our sessions were for information gathering to support the decision-making process, but that no decisions are made in meetings with non-federal personnel.

Brooke reported that after meeting with the TEAMS personnel about the fuels determination process, the goal is to have the map of EUs overlaid with fuels characterization by March. Next

steps would be running fire behavior and effects models to pop out high-priority treatment areas. Joe Scott suggested FRCC (Fire Regime Condition Class) as a necessary descriptor, because of its adoption as a national metric.

January Presentations: Governor's Forest Health Council January 14 am: Brooke and Stan will cover the focus and different aspects of the FireScape process and Don will cover the science aspects. **Chris will talk to Brian Lauber and Craig Wilcox to let them know what we will be covering.** Brooke and Stan have scheduled a post-meeting walk up Sabino Canyon as a field trip. Don asked if the group would like a tour of the Tree Ring Lab, and **Brooke will talk to her TNC colleague Brenda to see if there is interest.**

FLT January 19 for an hour at the office downtown: Brooke will take the lead on the presentation. Items will include scale of project, collaboration efforts, and EUs. She will try to keep it short to allow for a lot of question and answer time. Jim may attend to show his mapping efforts. Don will look into his teaching schedule to see if he can also attend. (This just in—**Presentation will run 12:45-1:45.**)

Steve asked everyone to look at the brochure and let him know of any changes so he can have them ready for these presentations. Cori will be the new contact for info@azfirescape.org. It was also suggested that we should add some language of Jeanine's "essence" language to the PowerPoint.

Realigning roles in the new year: Cori will be taking on most of Lori's role, save the contact database, scheduling meetings, keeping the unofficial project archive (will go to TEAMS when official process begins). Cori will also be helping Steve with the website, adding content and fielding the comments/questions that come in through info@azfirescape.org. She will also be editing public materials and putting together a photo archive for the website. Participants are encouraged to let her know how else she can help.

Fuel model assignment update: Don mentioned the upcoming Southwestern Fire Consortium Jan 12th. This is a clearinghouse for fire information between managers and fire personnel. **Cori will send the PDF announcement to the group.** Don will be attending and giving a presentation on FireScape. Steve will bring brochures.

Don asked people to adopt ecological map polygons for the fuel model assignment. So far, Perry and Josh have volunteered. We will start with LandFire because it has improved, has a correction feedback mechanism in place, and is now the standard we need to be using (as demonstrated by Saguaro NP fire staff). Our approach is thus to check and correct the LandFire fuels assignments for our landscape units at the ELT level. Scales are not the same, which complicates reconciliation. Don hopes to have the adopted polygons done by February, but is backing off from the March deadline.

Brooke suggested that TEAMS could help with this assignment (even ground-pounding) to maintain the schedule. **Don will call Janel to request help.**

Jim explained some discord between fuel model and ecological descriptions. The fuel models may not match the ecological descriptions because fuel models are assigned based on fire behavior and not, ultimately, on vegetation structure. For example, areas of desert may be in the low shrub/50% cover fuel model. Even though desert does not have 50% cover of low shrubs, the fire behavior in desert most closely matches that of a low shrub fuel model.

Jim then asked if fire regime condition class (FRCC) needed to be added to the fuel model database. Josh and Don felt that FRCC is too coarse for our purposes and proposed that fire return interval departure (FRID) is a better descriptor. FRID describes departure from desired condition more effectively, and uses burn severity mosaics rather than just fire boundaries. That approach requires historical burn severity data, and we don't know what kind of depth we have back through time for the Catalinas and Rincons. Meanwhile, we can assign FRCC from LandFire if we need it. FRID assignments are not due until later this year, and we need to decide whether we can start analysis for compliance using the fuels data and modeling or whether we need to wait for the FRID layer.

Ecological unit descriptions as repositories for all kinds of information: A possible role for Cori would be editor-in-chief of these documents, on and off the web. Jennifer's desired condition descriptions will be incorporated, as well as the menu of treatment possibilities. The unit descriptions would be a good place to house information on values at risk. Jennifer suggested that the values-at-risk piece could be a GIS exercise because values at risk will change over time.

Desired conditions update: Jennifer reported that Dan Robinett is refining desired conditions for low-elevation vegetation types using NRCS ecological site information. A final draft should be ready by the end of February. Jim did not use ecological site data as he described units, but Larry Laing may have (**Jim will check**).

Website update:

Steve's goal is to have the website live by Jan 20th. Averill Cate, working in the ART lab in SNRE, will replace Mickey Reed as our main web facilitator. Steve announced a series of website meetings to meet the goal of going live:

Meeting 1: Friday 1/8, 10 am

Goal: Review where we are, what information we have and what critical information is still needed. Discuss any changes in format.

Meeting 2: Wednesday 1/13, 10 am

Goal: Review the new information and make sure it's in the right place on the website. Finalize the format (for now).

Meeting 3: Wednesday 1/20 10 am

Goal: Look carefully at what we have and decide if we think we're ready to "go public."

Steve has requested that Brooke attend this meeting.

Still needed: NEPA compliance for us and the general process for other agencies.
An introductory map of the assessment/analysis area

An ownership map that shows land management boundaries

Steve also suggested that meeting with Santa Catalina District and Saguaro NP employees is a priority for the outreach side of the project because they need to be knowledgeable about the FireScape process.

Buffelgrass update: The Buffelgrass Coordination Center is mapping buffelgrass up to 5500 ft and because that area overlaps with the FireScape assessment/analysis area, we will continue to meet with key players. **Don and Gary Christopherson will coordinate on fuel models and mapping, and Brooke will get together with Lindsay Brigham to bring her up to date on bigger FireScape directions.**

Jennifer suggested that we add language to the brochure that explains we are not proposing to put fire in the desert where buffelgrass would carry it through a non-fire-adapted system.

Steve suggested a quarterly Working Group meeting to make sure all the pieces are fitting together and identify the gaps. He also suggested this meeting be open to others to inform and solicit input. **Cori will work on getting a date and venue together during the last two weeks of February.**