

Chiricahua FireScape Meeting Notes

Wednesday February 2, 2011

9:00 am to noon, The Benson Center Cochise College (1025 S Highway 90, Benson)

In attendance: Mark Crites, Cori Dolan, Bill Edwards, Brooke Gebow, Erika Geiger, Dusty Glidewell, Glenn Klingler, Linda Peery, Bill Radke, Chris Stetson (notes by Cori Dolan and Brooke Gebow)

Introductions: Erika Geiger, a PhD Fire Ecologist with a grasslands specialty may be able to help us with analysis of private lands. Linda Peery joined us as Glenn's replacement. She will be doing a detail as District Biologist for the next 4 months. Linda is on detail from the Supervisor's Office as the Biologist on the Planning team. Dusty Glidewell joined us as a NRCS representative.

Review revised PIL and assignments

With a more defined Proposed Action (PA), a revised schedule, and changes in personnel, the PIL has been updated, signed by Bill and sent to the group. The group discussed changes that need to be made. Brooke's name needs to be added. The Wildlife Consultation will be changed to ESA Consultation and Mark Crites' name added as the FWS representative. **Cori will contact Janel to see about getting a social and economics specialist from TEAMS.** We still have no NPS representative. Chris pointed out that under the Proposed Action we need to change "...five ecological types" to "...eleven ecological types." Mark C. recommended that we double check the time frames for 135 days of FWS consultation and add some time for SHPO. Mark also says that we need to officially request formal consultation by sending a letter when the BA is complete. Mark C. pointed out that consultation formally starts not when we send the letter, but when FWS gets all the information they need. **Cori will consult with Janel to confirm consultation schedule (refer to Catalina PIL schedule).** The group also discussed adding interim dates to the schedule (e.g. adding dates that district reps get information to TEAMS specialists).

Scoping Notice comments

We got 10 total comments in the 45 day comment period. Glenn pointed out that the name of contact #9 is backwards. It should read Last Name Glenn, First Name Warner. The group went through the comments, which had been sorted by category (italicized below) by TEAMS, to look for previously unidentified issues, input affecting the proposed action, possible gaps in analysis planned to date. Acknowledging many other parties will be addressing the comments received, the initial assessment of the group present was:

- Comments regarding *Air Quality* are covered by the NEPA analysis as planned, Arizona forests annual smoke plan, and project operational plans. (Representatives from each forest in AZ meet annually to discuss smoke management.)
- Addressing comments about air quality, commercial utilization, non-fire treatments, Cost, and Best Management Practices will be assisted by an economic analysis component. **Cori will ask Janel to find a TEAMS economics specialist.**
- Herbicide use (*Native and Noxious Weeds*) falls under existing NEPA compliance for treating nonnative invasive species. **Joe, Matt, and Craig will discuss need for and possible approaches to herbicide use on native invasive species.** All chemicals will be used according to label and existing guidance on herbicides. **Mark C. will send pertinent FWS guidance regarding herbicide use to Cori to send out to specialists.**
- We address protection of *Facilities* such as range and wildlife improvements (fences, pipelines, etc) in prescribed burn plans. Pre-work, such as digging lines around structures, is done before the prescribed burn. The USFS replaces what it can with rehabilitation money and stock

materials, but those funds are not usually available immediately after a wildfire. Reconstruction can take as long as a year and is a long-term economic consideration. A cooperative approach to maintenance of all improvements is desirable.

- Comments regarding *Grazing* centered on using cattle rather than fire to reduce fuel loads. Cattle may reduce grass fuel loads, but will not cover all other vegetation types and objectives of the fire management program. Allowing allotments a one-growing-season minimum rest period post fire is the standard, but rest is best addressed case-by-case.
- Desire for *Public Involvement* raised in letters is in keeping with the intent of the project: to coordinate activities with interested private landowners.
- *Recreation and Scenery* questions will be addressed using guidelines in the Forest Plan Revision supported by the existing Forest Plan where needed.
- Following the ADEQ smoke regulations addresses effects to *Health*. In addition, the Forest will notify homeowners, including smoke sensitive community members, of fire treatments as far in advance as possible.
- Comments regarding *Roads* are covered by the fact that we are not proposing to build any new permanent roads. Any temporary roads would be erased.
- Comments regarding *Wilderness* are covered by previous examples of management in Wilderness areas. Our goal is to use active management in Wilderness to maintain wilderness values. We have examples of how this has been approved in other cases.
- Comments regarding *Wildlife* center on obtaining a MOU with the USFWS to promote the conservation of ground-nesting birds. **Mark C. will look into the issue of a MOU at the national level.**
- Substance of comments in other categories generally lines up with the intended project direction.

GIS coordination

Chris, Devin, and possibly Mark Pater can all help with local GIS needs, but we will use Vicki Eubanks from TEAMS as central librarian and map-maker for final documents. **Chris will coordinate with Vicki to make sure she has the information she needs.**

Refine proposed action

The group discussed rules for narrowing down treatment acres. For example, we can take out steep slopes and Wilderness from the mastication acres. There may also be slope limitations for thinning as well. **Chris will coordinate a meeting with Ruben, Craig, Matt and Mark P. to determine the rules for narrowing treatment acres. Linda, Mark P. and Bill E. will get together to determine treatments in owl PACs for the PA.** Mark C. reported that the FWS has concerns about going into PACs during breeding season and encouraged us to be more detailed in our PA. Bill E. reported that we need firm data on nesting sites. The goal is to let natural fire reinsert itself on the landscape, but treatments are likely needed first to prepare those areas. To avoid affecting reproduction, Mark C. reported the FWS will recommend no burning in breeding season without a rigorous justification. Bill E. discussed doing first entries in the cool season then using models to see how those treatments would affect an in-season burn. Mark felt that core areas should only be treated if we can show how we will maintain the characteristics of the core area that brought the owls there in the first place. Mark reported that there is information available on the ranges of characteristics that owls prefer, but that information doesn't fit the situation in Southeastern Arizona. Glenn and Linda feel that we can take some basic vegetation measurements during the surveys to aide in characterization of owl-occupied sites. We discussed hiring Jim Malusa to do this. Glenn asked the question: Ecologically, what is the difference between a June

burn and a September burn (in and out of season)? Bill E. answered that an in-season fire generally precedes the growing season so after a fire occurs we would expect rains that prompt a flush of growth that covers the ground for the rest of season. On the other hand, a September burn may leave exposed soil for months that could affect watersheds in the long-term. From a fuels perspective, a minimum 3 treatment entries are needed to achieve resource goals. **Cori and Brooke will coordinate a meeting across Chiricahua and Catalina-Rincon FireScape projects to work on consistent guidelines for MSO-related treatments that can become design criteria** (Linda, Josh, Cat, Rick G., Kristy, Ruben, and Mark C.).

Glenn reported that he has a contract going out for owl surveys and hasn't heard back. His goal is to check all known PACs this season and next season recheck PACs and survey new suitable habitat. **Linda will follow-up on the status of the contract.**

Private lands analysis

Specialist reports will need to cover private lands, which are generally located in the lowest-elevation ecological types. Don Decker from NRCS is available to help with private lands analysis, and we enlist Erika to help, as well.

Next meeting

By March, we will have an update on the MSO issue, refinements to PA, an update on Craig's vegetation information getting to specialists, an update on the departure analysis (**Cori will contact Don H.**). **Dusty will talk to Don Decker and Jerry to see if they can come to a March meeting. Brooke, Joe and Don Decker will get together and go over analysis areas.**

Due to a scheduling conflict, the March 2nd meeting will be from 10 am-1 pm for THIS TIME ONLY.