

Chiricahua FireScape Meeting Notes

Wednesday March 2, 2011

10:00am-1:00pm, The Benson Center Cochise College (1025 S. Highway 90, Benson)

In attendance: Andrea Campbell, Mark Crites, Don Decker, Cori Dolan, Bill Edwards, Brooke Gebow, Joe Harris, Matt Littrell, Ruben Morales, Linda Peery, Craig Wilcox (notes by Cori Dolan and Brooke Gebow).

Conversations with Jim Upchurch

Brooke and Bill reported on their conversations with Jim Upchurch. Jim had questions about FireScape staffing needs, given other Coronado priorities and long-term prospects for implementation funding. There were discussions about pulling back on broadscale NEPA to focus more on WUI using simpler NEPA vehicles. Bill reported that at this point there are not that many Supervisor's Office personnel involved in report writing. Brooke reported that we've spent money on Janel, Don H, Joe S, and the initial visit for the specialists, but most of the TEAMS funding remains. Local staff would mostly be needed for information transfer and editing, so Bill feels we should stay the course and has relayed this to Jim. **Brooke will get an update on the TEAMS budget and send to Bill.**

NRCS update

Don Decker from the NRCS reported on a new fire management plan for the Malpai Borderlands Group that will include a few projects, what responding agencies do on the ground, manpower needs, and the wishes of each ranch. This plan will use larger FMAs, like the Bootheel plan (which is also being updated). The Malpai plan boundary may come right to the southern end of the Chiricahua Mountains. Don has been meeting with ranchers to feel out fire perspectives for the new project. His work could help us get in contact with private landowners on the east and south side of the mountain. Wally Alexander is writing the FMP.

Don suggested bringing Emilio Carrillo, area range conservationist based in Tucson, up to speed about FireScape. Joe has been in touch with him. Brooke reported that our mapping products, particularly the fuel map, may help him. **Joe and Don will get together to have a show and tell.** Don reported that federal lands will be incorporated in the analysis but not in planning and they are using topographical features to draw the boundaries. Current NRCS direction lines up with the FireScape vision to look at the larger landscape when planning individual projects. NRCS may be a source of funding for fireproofing range improvements.

Private lands analysis

Joe may revisit with landowners who agreed to allow us access to NRCS information in light of the discussion with Don Decker. Joe will try again to see if there is information (that would help with the FireScape effects analyses) available from ranchers who have participated in NRCS-funded projects. We have some private lands boundary corrections to make. Don also suggested an online tool to convert soil type to ecological type: websoilsurvey.com.

Update on scoping notice comments

Brooke reported that we received one additional comment from the AZ State Forestry Division in support of the project.

Update on TEAMS personnel

Cori reported that Delilah Jordahl with TEAMS has been assigned as our socio-economic specialist. We have also been assigned water, air and soil specialists from TEAMS. We have talked to Jim Malusa about field trips for TEAMS folks (and he is available March 25-28th). Craig offered to stand in if Jim is not available. **Cori will work on scheduling trips with TEAMS personnel.**

Update on Departure Analysis

Don Helmbrecht is working on the departure analysis and suggested a correction exercise (2 or 3 days), either locally or remotely. Craig suggested remotely using WebEx. Don needs to know who should be involved in the exercise. Craig suggested one GIS person to handle WebEx and himself, Matt, Chris, Joe H., Ruben, Perry, Mark Pater, and Brooke. Jim Malusa may also be helpful. **Cori will contact Don to find out how many people are feasible/optimal AND if the Catalina-Rincon project would do this at the same time.** Craig recommends doing it separately for each place if the funds exist: Catalina, Chiricahua, and Galiuros. This information is the foundation for NEPA documents, specifically vegetation and fuels specialist reports. Matt reported that he would not be available for the WebEx exercise March 26 –April 15th.

Update on refining Proposed Action

Bill and Chris met to refine the treatment acres. They set slope limits for mechanical treatments and took out Wilderness acres. Bill reported that Chris would be getting in touch with Matt or Craig to get further input. **Cori will contact Chris to make sure he has what he needs.**

Owl Survey Coordination

Linda updated the MSO survey Scope of Work for internal review. She reported there is a 14-day advertisement period after which they have one week to choose the contractor. Linda also reported that Rick G. said this work will be combined with surveys needed in the Pinalenos. The contract is set for 1-4 years (renewable based on work/time). Bill Radke reported he had someone who might be interested in the contract. Glenn also had an interested party and **Linda will contact those interested parties when the contract is advertised.** The contract is written such that we can give to more than one contractor and split the work. The data collected could affect the size and shape of PACs and the level of analysis required for NEPA documents.

MSO-related treatments

Representatives from Catalina-Rincon and Chiricahua projects met in February to discuss the need to treat in PACs and how to accomplish ecological objectives without treating in PACs. The Recovery Plan recommends not treating during the breeding season, but breeding season coincides with fire season. Brooke reported that the group decided it was beneficial to use our resources to collect and analyze agency and other MSO data from the Sky Island region. Brooke recommends we look into TEAMS money and people to see if they can do that work (TEAMS biologist to analyze owl data from across mountain ranges and jurisdictions). This information could be put into a Monitoring Report. Mark confirmed that the need is due to the fact that the Recovery Plan keys in on Mixed Conifer and Pine types, but we have different types here and need more specific information for our area. Mark reminds us to keep in mind other listed species like lesser long-nosed bat. **Mark will look into how PAC and core area boundaries**

change when new information suggests changing those boundaries from already-established areas. Craig reported that there are 7 “take” left on the table and PERP will use them up. He also feels that Travel Management Plans may change “take” proposals. Mark recommended we consider the differences between short and long-term “take.” Mark also reported that a national MOU does exist between USFS and FWS on how to proceed to conserve Migratory Birds. The MOU states that for any Federal activity, actions will be taken to minimize negative affects to migratory birds. **Cori will send MOU around to group.**

Next steps

The schedule is as follows:

- Refined Proposed Action, incorporate scoping comments, design criteria by February 28
- Vegetation/Fuels Specialist report due March 31
- Other Specialist reports due July 1
- EA complete for internal review by Aug 15
- EA complete for public release by Sept 15
- EA public Comment period starts Oct 1
- Legal notice published in AZ Republic (and others if desired) on Oct 1
- Decision notice /FONSI published Nov 15
- Appeal period closes by end of December

As soon as possible Don H. needs the refinement on the acres. **Cori will contact Chris and Don H. to make sure they have what they need.**

Andrea will supply Bill (and Cori) with Oracle EA for example of how it lays out table of treatments for analysis.

Mark and Andrea reminded the group that formal consultation with FWS begins when FWS gets the BA and then they have 135 days to look at. Bill announced the District Biologist position went out and closes March 22nd. We have Linda until the end of May/mid-July.

Cori will coordinate with Bill and Brooke about setting the next meeting.