

Chiricahua FireScape Meeting Notes

August 4, 2010

10:00 am to 2:00 pm at the Valley Telecom Building (752 East Maley Street, Willcox, AZ)

Note from Brooke: I am hereby shortening this project's name to Chiricahua FireScape. It was about to become Chiricahua-Dragoon-Dos Cabezas-Pedregosas-Swissshelms.... (plus all the ranchers' names), and I would have been tempted to make all that into a terrible acronym.

In attendance: Mark Crites, Cori Dolan, Bill Edwards, Brooke Gebow, Joe Harris, Ann Johnson, Glenn Klingler, Bob Lefevre, Matt Littrell, Janel McCurdy, Jesse Minor, Dan Montez, Ruben Morales, Mark Pater, Doug Ruppel, Randall Smith, Chris Stetson, Craig Wilcox (notes by Cori Dolan and Brooke Gebow)

Updates

Bill let the group know that Danielle Foster will be moving to Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. A replacement for her at the Monument has not been named. [Superintendent Kym Hall is headed for Glen Canyon NRA on a 4-month detail and asks we keep acting Superintendent Brad Travers in the loop—brad_traver@nps.gov / 520-824-3560 x 202.]

Randall filled the group in on the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP). Congress enacted the CFLRP to encourage the collaborative, science-based ecosystem restoration of priority forest landscapes. The Coronado submitted a proposal for the Pinaleno Ecosystem Restoration Project (PERP). The Four Forests Restoration Initiative and Santa Fe (Jemez) proposals were selected for funding during this first round. Randall is waiting for feedback as to why PERP was not selected. Randall suggested that we keep the CFLRP in mind down the road for the Chiricahua FireScape project. Match requirements and how the Region/Forests will avoid depleting funds for other projects to support the CFLRP awards are still being sorted out.

MSO Design Criteria (everyone + Mark Crites)

When the proposed action is finalized and the project parties produce a Biological Assessment (for T & E species compliance), Mark Crites from FWS Ecological Services reported that he would be working on the Biological Opinion (BO). The Chiricahua BO will likely parallel the Huachuca BO, but there is room for improvement. The discussion centered on Mexican Spotted Owl (MSO). Glenn pointed out the need for a FWS-protocol survey for MSO in the Chiricahua Mountains because the last information he can find is from 1997. Mark C. and Randall strongly agree that a current forest survey is a high priority to identify the PACs (Protected Activity Centers) and core areas. The monument is up to date on surveys for its 2 PACs. Randall reported that there is about \$60K in the TEAMS budget for miscellaneous expenses and contract costs that might be used to pay for the survey. We estimated it would cost \$10-20K locally to contract directly. **Janel will look into who at TEAMS could do the survey and whether we can hire a local contractor with the funds. Glenn will get a scope of work with deliverables for a MSO survey to Janel.**

Brooke asked Mark C. what the shelf life of a comprehensive, 2-year survey (completed by 2012) would be. Mark C. reported that his office strongly recommends surveying in areas where

no owls are found during the initial survey after a reasonable number of years to confirm that there still are no owls present. Resurveying known PACs is less important—once established, they persist a long time and can be assumed occupied. Bill reminded the group that restoring natural fire regimes means putting fire on the ground in late May/early June, which coincides with MSO breeding season. Mark C. reported that the FWS is not necessarily against those actions, but encouraged us to make the Proposed Action as specific as possible wherever we vary from the recommendations in the Recovery Plan and provide thorough justification (especially for in-season treatment and for treating in core areas).

The group also went through the design criteria from the Huachuca Plan, which did not include intensive treatments inside PACs. Bob pointed out that our project differs from the Huachucas in that we have owls in high, dense coniferous forest that needs treatment. The group went through the Huachuca criteria and made changes where applicable in order to make the criteria specific to our region and achievable by fire operations personnel. **Brooke will update the design criteria table for Chiricahua FireScape.**

Region 3's re-consultation about MSO take

Randall and Mark C. updated the group on the region-wide re-consultation. The FWS is pushing forward to get an opinion on the MSO issue and is working to better define “take.” Randall reported that PERP put the region almost at its limit for “take” but the FWS may be willing to remove some of those historic “takes” based on the new, more specific definition. Randall also suggested that using the fuels map over-laid with MSO habitat will aid in determining where some of the MSO issues might be.

Jim's new ecological map—scheduling accuracy session (Brooke for Jim)

Brooke reported that Jim Malusa has agreed to do the new ecological map for the Chiricahua FireScape project. Currently there are 12 vegetation types; we agreed that most riparian acres could be included in the adjacent vegetation type. Janel pointed out that these 12 ecological units represent a finer scale than the original set. Craig suggested that we crosswalk Jim's acres with the USFS mid-scale types so as not to lose those properties. Jim is available to work on the vegetation map after August 13th. He has requested a meeting with landscape experts to look at his lumped ecological units (correct the ones that we can and decide which ones he needs to go check). It was decided that the meeting would be August 16th at the Valley Telecom Building in Willcox from 9 am-4 pm. **With Danielle leaving, Ann Johnson will look into finding someone who can talk about the vegetation layout at Chiricahua National Monument.**

Fire histories in the Chiricahuas (Jesse)

Jesse is trying to put together a GIS map of what has been done in and what has been published (literature review) about the south and east part of the range. He also reported that he would start the Dragoons in the near future. Jesse is uncertain about obtaining sampling permits for dead vs. live wood samples. He prefers dead trees whereas live trees would require chainsaw sampling. Randall pointed Jesse to Duane Bennett as a contact for permitting questions. Jesse reported that he is going for a broad spatial scale and across vegetation types. **Chris and Ruben will provide maps of historical fires.**

Proposed Action/public scoping schedule (Janel)

Janel reported that she is still waiting to hear from Bill Radke about treatments in the refuge. **Brooke agreed to contact him again.** Janel's goal is to be ready for public scoping by September. She needs the desired conditions for the 12 ecological units and wilderness and jurisdiction acreages. **Mark P. will send desired conditions for BLM lands. Chris will coordinate with Randall's office or TEAMS to get the acreages needed.** Brooke reminded the group that the acreages we have now are estimates until we get Jim's final map. The group then went over the treatment acreages (typical/approximate single project acreages) and treatment menus and made corrections. Janel also asked if BLM and NPS want to sign the scoping documents, **Mark P. and Ann will find out from their respective supervisors.**

Ranchers & effects analysis (Joe)

Joe reported that there was varying interest across the ranchers he spoke to regarding sharing effects analysis information from NRCS-funded projects. Some said "yes," but Joe isn't sure how detailed or useful those reports will be. **Joe will draft a letter to ranchers outlining upcoming compliance steps and send it to Brooke in two weeks.**

Monitoring Needs (Chris S + Glenn)

Chris reported that the USFS standard is forest-wide effectiveness monitoring to determine if the treatment accomplished stated goals and showed us some new protocols for forest and range. An interdisciplinary team has formed to tweak existing tools/protocols to adopt and adjust for specific needs on the Coronado. We discussed a rule of thumb to apply 10% of a project cost to monitoring, but it is frequently unclear who will do this work. **Mark P. and Ann will get direction from their agencies on how USFS monitoring protocols fit with what they need.**

Other

- 1. Brooke will solicit agency mailing lists for scoping.**
- 2. The next meeting is Wednesday, September 1st at the Cochise College Benson Center (1025 S Highway 90, Benson) from 9 am - noon.**