

## **Catalina-Rincon FireScape Meeting Notes**

**July 1, 2010**

**9:30 am at The Nature Conservancy, 1510 E Fort Lowell, Tucson**

**Attendees:** Cori Dolan, Brooke Gebow, Stan Helin, Austin Hilkeyel, Kristy Lund, Janel McCurdy, Dan Montez, Steve Plevel, Jennifer Ruyle, Randall Smith, Chris Stetson, Joshua Taiz (notes by Cori Dolan and Brooke Gebow)

### **Fire updates**

Stan and Kristy were monitoring a new start in Happy Valley that morning and were pretty distracted. Looked like rain hit that area hard in the afternoon (says Brooke after passing by on the way back to Cochise County).

### **Finishing the fuels map**

There will be a fuels meeting on July 13<sup>th</sup> at 9:30am at the State Office to fill in the remaining Existing Vegetation Types (EVTs). Chris Stetson, Perry Grissom, Jim Malusa, Don Falk, Craig Wilcox, Matt Littrell are set to attend. Mark Pater and RJ Estes from BLM and Brooke and Tessa Nicolet (RO) may also be able to attend. Once the EVT's have had their model assignments tweaked, Chris will send the information to Joe Scott and Don Helmbrecht to make the final fuel map. **Chris will follow up with Don and Joe to get a delivery date of the final map.**

The next step will be basic fire behavior modeling and a more detailed fuels analysis for NEPA. Brooke has been trying to engage Randy Hall, who is trying to retire, but who did the fuels and air quality analyses for Huachuca FireScape and PERP. A suggestion that came up at the Chiricahua Dragoons meeting (June 30) was to pair Randy with Don Helmbrecht, who knows the ins and outs of the fire behavior and effects models, to work on the fuels analysis. A similar setup could work for Catalina-Rincon. It was also suggested that Chris work with Randy to take on some of the fuels analysis in-house. **Brooke will keep working on Randy. Janel will look into the budget to see how much time we have with TEAMS for this kind of effort.**

### **PIL and Proposed Action development**

Janel needs the names and acreages of each vegetation type by jurisdiction to get started on the Proposed Action. **Cori will show her where to find some of this information on the FireScape website.** Janel will also be writing the Project Initiation Letter (PIL). Non-federal personnel cannot be named on the PIL, but Brooke is covered by her agreement with the USFS. Janel sent the Chiricahua PIL to Stan and Cori via email as an example of what she needs. **Stan will provide a list of internal USFS personnel and their roles to Janel by July 9<sup>th</sup>. The goal is to have the PIL issued by July 16<sup>th</sup>. Janel will try to have a Proposed Action drafted by August 5<sup>th</sup>.** Jennifer will clarify who can do what without violating FACA (Federal Advisory Committee Act).

### **Biological Assessment organization**

It was decided to find a TEAMS biologist to coordinate all sections of the Biological Assessment (BA). **Cori will act as dispatcher for the TEAMS and federal representatives. While we are waiting to identify a TEAMS member Josh will gather materials (e.g. previous BAs, Biological Opinions, species lists, etc) and will contact Natasha on the NPS side to do the**

**same. TEAMS was used for the Huachuca BA and Janel will try to find out how long it took biologist Brian Logan as a template of what we might need.**

Randall explained the current regional Mexican Spotted Owl status. There is a limitation on the total “take” for our region and we are running up against the limit already with other projects. The Basin and Range West region is allowed a “take” of 16 owls over 10 years. However, some sorting out of temporary harassment from more serious harm is reasonable, and USFWS seems willing to discuss these things. Ultimately, with recent lawsuits/appeals, we may not be allowed to be seen as “taking” any owls with our treatments. The Region has reinitiated consultation, but that process has moved extremely slowly. Thus PERP has yet to receive its BO.

### **Wilderness needs**

Brooke reported that we have the option of putting wilderness documentation in the main body of the NEPA document as opposed to doing a separate Minimum Tool Analysis. The Chiricahua-Dragoons FireScope project will be using this method. Jennifer recommended at least going into detail on wilderness boundaries to nail down the “where” of treatments, leaving more flexibility with the “what” and “when” of treatments. Randall mentioned including thinning and prescribed fire in our documentation, which requires more detailed analysis. Josh showed on the map that the packets of wilderness in our analysis area are fairly small. It was decided to wrap the project boundaries and the menu of treatment options into the main NEPA document. Kristy recommended the best course of action is the one that allows for treating in wilderness areas now so as to avoid the increased level of vegetation destruction and increased threats to firefighter safety that occur with response to emergency situations. Though our fuels analysis should be strongly influencing which treatments happen where, we can begin to lay out likely treatments for specific areas (like thinning stringers in drainages that lead to sensitive areas).

Randall reminded the group that our analysis area also includes a Research Natural Area (RNA) which may have stronger restrictions than wilderness. There is a process for determining exceptions, which includes going to the director of the Rocky Mountain Research Station and the Regional Forester. Steve also mentioned the Wildland Urban Interface is an issue around the same areas where there is wilderness. He mentioned that the Summerhaven CWPP needs to be updated, there’s a new fire chief, and he suggested this would be a good time to coordinate with the community on setting new WUI boundaries. We discussed that the WUI boundary is realistically within, rather than on the edge, of the Pusch Ridge Wilderness. This situation strengthens the case to treat within Wilderness.

**Josh, Kristy, Craig Wilcox, and Chris will meet to nail down the wilderness blocks and possible treatment options. Cori will coordinate the meeting.**

Kristy brought a copy of a burn plan for the north slope of the Rincons. Kristy gave her copy to Stan as an example of a programmatic Minimum Requirements Decision Guide (MRDG) that outlines how to go in small and light. **Cori will email Kristy and ask her to send an electronic copy to Stan and Brooke.** We discussed who would be the best person to write our MRDG and we decided to look for someone who has wilderness expertise. Jen Morrissey of TEAMS was mentioned and Janel sent an email memo to find out who would be available.

Chris mentioned that he has two examples of other wilderness analyses and has sent them to Janel. Randall has a third example from Texas.

### **Desired conditions update**

Cori is working on matching the USFS Forest Plan desired conditions with our Ecological Unit descriptions. These descriptions will hold various information including treatment options and special features. There is a question on fire return intervals. The USFS Forest Plan includes intervals that don't match the intervals in the Schussman et al. literature review we have been using. Jennifer explained that the lower elevation Forest Plan intervals come from observations from sites considered to be healthy by experts. **Cori will contact Don Falk and Tom Swetnam to confirm what fire return intervals are appropriate.**

### **Outreach**

A first priority is to meet with environmental groups and any other interested parties to explain the FireScape process, roll out the fuels map and model runs, and elicit feedback.

Steve recommended we identify the groups who need to be invited to the first round of meetings and the FireScape contact who is/will be working with those groups. **Steve also requested that if a FireScape representative contacts a group or individual, that representative email Cori with the name, organization, date contacted. Cori will keep a database of people contacted.**

Groups mentioned were National Wild Turkey Federation, Mule Deer Foundation, Sky Island Alliance, Quail Unlimited, Wildearth Guardians, Sierra Club, Center for Biological Diversity, Tucson Audubon, Maricopa Audubon, Western Watersheds Project, Phoenix Zoological Society, Friends of Redington Pass, and the Cascabel community that mobilized around the Sun Zia transmission line project. We also went through the contact list and identified FireScape contact people for each of the groups. **Cori will coordinate a UA sponsored/hosted biologists meeting with these groups and anyone interested invited to attend.** Don Falk was identified as a good spokesperson for this first round of meetings.

Cori and Averill Cate are redesigning the website to showcase all FireScape projects in the region. Before beginning major work on this, **Cori has asked all FireScape website users to take a short survey.** The survey is posted on the website and asks two major questions: who do you think will be using the website and what kind of data/info do you foresee needing to put on the website? Once we survey results, Averill and Cori will begin moving things around. It was also suggested that the website could be a repository for materials that may be needed over time for presentations and meetings (e.g. PowerPoint slides, brochure pdfs, posters, etc).

**Next meeting Thursday August 5, 9:30 am, TNC**