

**Chiricahua FireScape
Interdisciplinary Team Meeting
Meeting Notes**

January 6, 2011

The Benson Center at Cochise College (1025 S Highway 90, Benson)
9am-5pm

In attendance: Andrea Cambell, Cori Dolan, Bill Edwards, Brooke Gebow, Joe Harris, Don Helmbrecht, Glenn Klingler, Debbie Kriegel, Bob Lefevre, Donna Mattson, Janel McCurdy, Ruben Morales, Janet Moser, Mark Pater, Ryan Pitts, Bill Radke, Craig Wilcox (notes by Cori Dolan and Brooke Gebow).

Progress to Date

Participants on Board

Bill E. reported that the USFS is the lead agency for Chiricahua FireScape with NPS, FWS, BLM, and 10 private land owners as partners. Bob mentioned that Jeff Hoff on Cottonwood Creek (Turkey Creek drainage on W side of Chiricahuas) may be interested.

Joe will try to make a connection with Hoff and Cottonwood area landowners. Bill E. reported that private land owners have been invited to participate to allow for cross jurisdiction land management and to help landowners with future grants. Some private landowners were invited but opted not to participate. Mark reported that the BLM will sign their own Decision Document as will the NPS. **Bill R reported that he does not know how Leslie Canyon NWR will handle a Decision Document, but will look into it.** Brooke reported that we will do a Biological Assessment (BA) with FWS and also consultation with SHPO for cultural resources. Mark Crites is our FWS representative and has been to some meetings; we have drafted design criteria for sensitive resources in the past year.

Ecological Mapping

Brooke summarized the evolution of the ecological mapping. We did not replicate the Catalina-Rincon process but rather focused mainly on vegetation, given the time and budget available. We hired Jim Malusa, a botanist at the University of Arizona, to pull all existing vegetation layers together to make a map at a scale that is useful to us. Jim used Landfire, ReGap, and USFS mid-scale maps with ground-truthing to create the final map. He used the ecological systems in Nature Serve to give us 12 ecological systems over our 500,000 acre area. We use these ecological systems (ES) to talk about what treatments we want to do. We have a treatment menu for each of these types given the condition we want them to be in. This map is the basis for laying out treatments, desired conditions, and effects.

Desired Conditions

Brooke summarized the creation of desired condition statements that help us determine treatments for each ES. We have desired condition statements for each ES across four jurisdictions: USFS, BLM, NPS, and FWS. The USFS desired conditions are tied to the Forest-wide mid-scale information. The BLM statements come from the Resource Management Plan and the Wilderness Plan for the Dos Cabezas Mountains. Bill Radke provided the desired conditions for Leslie Canyon while the NPS statements are from the Chiricahua and Ft. Bowie Fire Management Plans. The statements are broad but help guide whether treatment is necessary and to determine treatment options.

Fuels Mapping and Analysis

Don H. reviewed his involvement with the project and presented fuels mapping information. Don H. got involved about a year ago (with Joe Scott) through TEAMS to look at options for mapping fuels to model fire behavior and fire effects. They began with just looking at the Catalina and Rincon mountains, but soon added the Chiricahua and Dragoons mountains. Then participants decided it was little extra effort to include the entire Coronado NF and lands in between. They started with data from Landfire, a national program to map vegetation and fuels data at the 30m scale. We used the fuel map layers in Landfire and critiqued and corrected them for our area. In April 2010 we held a local fuel model calibration workshop to make adjustments for our area: 1) corrected canopy cover; 2) created a management unit using the Total Fuel Change Tool (TOFU Δ); 3) critiqued and modified fuel model rules to adjust the fuel models that Landfire automatically assigns; and 4) updated for fire disturbances and invasive species (in the Catalina-Rincons only). This information is used to create fire behavior fuel model maps. We can use this information to look at how fire behavior affects the specialists' areas, including MSO PACs, and to answer management questions on the compliance side. Don H. also reviewed what this information is NOT: it is not vegetation, hazard or risk, or a departure analysis. Chris Stetson is the keeper of the data. Brooke reported that we have ecological information and fuels information. The challenge becomes how to put those together to guide management, especially in light of climate change. Craig reported that the USFS has new guidance regarding climate change coming. In general, the goal of future projects should center on more resilient ecosystems rather than exact models of what they were pre-settlement. **Craig and Don H will get together to discuss/coordinate how we model change in vegetation due to climate change.**

Don H. also reported on the possible usefulness of the Landfire-based Departure Analysis. This tool provides for comparing an existing distribution of successional stages with a reference condition (% of landscape in each state) for each biophysical setting (similar to Ecological System). We can show which system is more departed and by how much (trace, abundant, etc) and how many acres are in surplus or deficit. We lack the successional-state existing condition data, but Don believes we can correct Landfire's succession class layer over a few days and then make a disturbance database. Results of this sort of analysis illustrate need to treat, priority Ecological Systems for treatment, and can show over time how treatments (and natural disturbances) push the system towards reference condition.

Website

Cori reported that Steve Plevel led the charge for a Catalina-Rincon FireScape website housed at the University of Arizona. Since then, the site has changed to cover all FireScape projects, including Chiricahua. By the beginning of February, Cori hopes to have the site populated with Chiricahua maps, ecological systems descriptions, and desired conditions. She is working on different UA staffing for project maintenance. We will use the UA site for housing general project information and data products but use TEAMS Base Camp to house documents in progress. **Janel will set up Base Camp for Chiricahua FireScape use.**

Research Underway

Brooke reported on Jesse Minor's research project. Jesse has collected 81 fire scar samples from Chihuahua, Apache, and Ponderosa pine species and some juniper. These samples are from the Chiricahua Mountains only and were not taken from Wilderness. They are from lower elevations than have been studied before. Jesse expects to expand his study area to other mountain ranges and elevations. He is trying to sample underrepresented vegetation types to broaden fire history records. The wood samples are being processed this winter but have not been dated yet. Jesse's goals are to pull together all existing data into GIS, update previously published chronologies, and work on getting permission to sample in the Wilderness.

Review Scoping Details

Bill reported that the scoping notice went out to the public on December 14th. It was placed on the FireScape website and in mail/email to approximately 500 people. The end of the comment period is Jan 31st. To date, two comments have been received: one from ADEQ (smoke and air quality – sent attachments that may be helpful for us) and one from a rancher with questions about grazing. **Janel is the clearinghouse for the comments and will make sure that Andrea and agency representatives see the comments.** Andrea reminded the group that the public comment period is not officially over until a NEPA document is drafted.

Refinements of the Proposed Action (Wilderness Treatments)

Bill E. reports that the upper elevation forests and wildland-urban interface areas are a priority for treatment. The majority of the top of the mountain is Wilderness. The upper elevation vegetation types are most at risk and are mostly in Wilderness. Donna and Janel recommended that we be very specific about how we will be using tools in Wilderness. Donna is unfamiliar with good examples of Minimum Requirements Decision Guides (MRDG) for landscape-scale projects. Bill E. and Ruben report that they have a MRDG for prescribed treatments in Wilderness we can use as an example. The MRDG calls for hand tools to open up trails as control lines and prescribed fire. It does not cover using chainsaws in Wilderness. Donna asked if each agency will create a separate MRDG. Mark reported that for the BLM, decisions that deviate from the Wilderness Management Plan go to the field manager.

The treatment options chart in the Scoping Notice is a framework for the Proposed Action. The chart currently includes definitions of the scale of the treatment actions which represent the

capacity of the organizations right now to conduct individual projects. Further refinement can define the likely total treatment acreages over the 10-15-year life of the project.

NEPA

Landscape Approach

Brooke reported that one goal of using the landscape approach is flexibility to work at a large scale and not have to assign project boundaries. In exchange we are accepting design criteria for T&E, watershed, etc. We have a good list of design criteria but are still working on MSO design criteria. At the time of planning specific projects, staff will need to verify that the analysis still holds and that those design criteria are being upheld. The group then discussed the No Action alternative. Andrea recommended that “no action” in this case means continued individual planned fire projects (fewer than under the FireScope program) as funding and conditions allow. She also suggested posting design criteria with material covering resources affected in the NEPA document (rather than all together in a single place).

Specialists Responsibilities

Janel led a discussion of specialist roles and responsibilities. **Janel will update the PIL with any new information. Brooke and Cori will help get TEAMS specialists the information they need from FireScope counterparts for each specialist report.** The NPS side may take more time as their staff is in transition.

Bob Lefevre will be doing air and will serve as a point of contact for Eric Moser (hydrology) and Vince Archer (soils). NRCS has soils and other information for private land. **Bob will contact Vince to see if he needs that information. Joe will call NRCS and ask whether they will assist with private lands analysis (and want to attend our meetings).**

Don H. will generate the Fuels report. Andrea suggested the fuels analysis should not be too technical for the public, but rather streamlined. She also recommended not putting model runs in the main document, but in appendices. Craig will serve as the Silvicultural specialist. **Craig says he can get vegetation information started in March. Craig will also get some information to Don H. before then so Don can start putting his report together. Wildlife and scenic specialists requested information from Craig by March 30th.**

Chris Stetson, Devin Quintana and Terry Austin (USFS database operator at the Supervisor's Office) could most likely make maps and provide layers for specialists. **Bill E. will check on Devin's availability.** Mark does not feel that the BLM has GIS layers that would be detailed enough to be helpful. We may still want to use Vicki Eubanks from TEAMS as our GIS librarian and to generate needed materials for compliance documents.

Joe Harris will be the specialist on the noxious weed report. Andrea recommended contacting Sharon Biedenbender about herbicide-use language. The heritage resources specialist is Bill Gillespie. Ruben Morales is named as the Fire Management specialist, but will not be providing a specialist report. Rather he is on hand for expert operational knowledge for design criteria accuracy.

Donna Mattson will be doing the MRDG and specialist report for Wilderness. The Regional Office wilderness specialists may have a useful template. **Donna will contact the BLM and NPS counterparts to see if they have things to include or if their Wilderness is covered by other documents.** Mark is Donna's contact for BLM Wilderness information.

Debbie Kriegel will be doing the two reports needed for Recreation and Scenery and feels she can have her reports done by June/July. Andrea recommended discussing the 1986 forest plan's VQO's then explaining we are using the new plan's Scenery Management System analysis because it is the future standard. Debbie reported that a Scenic Stability report was an additional option for us. Scenic Stability reports provide methods for long-term sustainability of ecological systems and identify areas that are higher priority in terms of scenery. She does them for every project that includes scenery issues. This report can be used as a tool for the impact analysis and/or design criteria. Debbie suggests this is an option for us but would require another helper as she does not have time.

Debbie also asked that we identify who will be doing the Visual reports on non-Forest lands because she cannot do it. **Mark will identify a BLM representative, and Brooke and Joe will talk about what to do for private lands.**

Tyson Swetnam was identified as a possible writer for a climate change impacts discussion for NEPA. Janel has a report that may be helpful. Larry Amel wrote this section for PERP and Jennifer did it for the Forest. Andrea suggested that this section is not quantitative, but covers potential effects of the Chiricahua FireScape on climate-related factors (and vice versa).

R3 EA Template

Andrea and Janel have a template for the EA. ADA requirements dictate specific fonts and styles. **Janel will send this template to all specialists.** The work order provides for Judy York to be writer/editor for draft and final product. Janel has updated Judy with regard to our schedule.

Biological Assessment

Glenn added ocelot to our list of federally listed species. Janet will be doing the BA, BE, Migratory Bird and MIS reports. **Glenn has sample products with these species he will provide to Janet.** Mark will provide information on BLM lands and Bill R. for Leslie Canyon. After Janet prepares the document, Rick Gerhardt and Bill E. will review it, along with the biologists involved (one party from each agency). **Glenn will email an example template of BA to Mark Pater and Bill Radke to see if it covers their needs.** The BA includes plants, so Janet will need water umble information from Bill Radke. Glenn's last day is Feb 8th so Janet is encouraged to contact Rick Gerhardt and Mark Crites after that date. Janet feels that once she gets Proposed Action (which Janel set at the end of Feb) she can have her reports in by July 1st.

Schedule

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

Next Steps

The next step is to put the EA together using the specialists reports and circulate it among managers and specialists. The EA will be put out for public comment for 30 days. There will be a 45 day appeal period if needed. Then Decision on Record is drafted and signed. We also need to start SHPO report, Minimum Requirements Decision Guide, start consultation with FWS, and get a BA submitted. **Janel will redo the PIL and send to Bill for signing and then send it to the IDT group.** Janel reported that the work order allows for up to two field trips for the TEAMS specialists. **Janel asked the specialists to send her the number of days they need so she can double check the budget.** Another IDT meeting may be scheduled for the beginning of May.