

July 17, 2008

**Roundtable Upper Montane Meeting
USFS Regional Office – Lakewood, CO
Facilitator: Mary Mitsos, National Forest Foundation**

Overview / refresher of Roundtable 2004-2006 process for determining priorities

- Lisa gives power-point presentation
- Discussion about Roundtable status to date.
- Forest health is different than restoration / risk reduction. We aren't ready to add a third category of broad forest health! This is complicated . . . forest health underlies the concept of restoration but its not the same thing. We have an opportunity here to redefine / revisit our priorities, but we should stick with restoration & risk reduction as our guiding principles.
- We still have questions about what "risk reduction" means in the upper montane. We explored this originally, but settled on the lower montane because there was consensus.
- Last year: roughly 15,000 acres state; 30,000 acres federal were treated.
- What are "other values"? Watersheds, recreation facilities, wildlife habitat.
- There may be new resources available, especially targeted toward bark beetles. We can capitalize on the public interest in the beetle, and the sense of urgency.
- Don't forget that there are 10 recommendations in the report. We are discussing only one of those today, but should consider what the implications are for the other 9 if we make adjustments.

Questions: What does "watershed protection" mean in practice? Is it different in different forest types? Hear from Watershed working group (Dave Hessel, Deb Martin).

- Restoration / Risk Reduction still OK as terms.
- Lower Montane work fits well into a watershed protection strategy. But when we get outside of that ecosystem, it gets more complicated. See handout from watershed group.
- This is about risk reduction, not restoration. Protection of critical water supplies and communities. This is consistent with the RT recommendations.
- Watershed protection is different in different forest types.
- Note that the Watershed group began outside of the RT and was then integrated into the RT working group.

LUNCH BREAK

Discussion:

- Is the watershed group considering water sources on the west slope that provide water for the Front Range? Not yet. Focused on 10-county FR area.
- Is it possible to identify priority areas and then overlay that with the RT priority areas? Yes. This is underway. The methodology is being developed now. Data refinement group is putting together a model. Pilot should be done by August, but

that's only at the 6th level watershed level. Detailed data will be ready in the next year or two.

- Expanded definition of risk reduction. RT identified communities as target. Now expanded to include water supplies. Source water intakes, reservoirs, etc.
- Restoring watershed function sounds like restoration, not risk reduction. But restoration refers specifically to forests that are “out of whack”. This is a different use of the term “restoration”. Source water protection is a priority. Avoid terminology of restoration, but realize how distant watersheds impact water supplies in communities.
- Are we actually talking about intentional intrusion here, to disallow natural fire in critical watersheds? That makes this the opposite of restoration. Community protection is the same! Treatments will not necessarily be consistent with natural processes.
- Remember that our initial priorities were geared toward the double-whammy where we could achieve both outcomes: restoration and risk reduction. This seems to be a departure from that. Maybe, but note that the agency always tries to do its treatments in an ecologically sound manner.
- Note that the public doesn't think of the word “restoration” as meaning only ecological restoration.
- Does the watershed working group recommend re-prioritizing all acres on the Front Range? Or are we talking about a refinement?

Questions: What does the latest science tell us about appropriate management in the upper montane? Is there a scientific consensus on treatment in lodgepole?

Hear from the Ecology working group (Jeff Kitchens, Merrill Kauffmann)

- Lodgepole science is not as clear. There is no consensus about the need for restoration. Beetles, fire, and other disturbances have been part of the system forever. Recent scale is huge, likely unprecedented. Uncertainty about role of climate change in the present or future.
- Protection from beetle using sprays and other responses are impractical on a large scale. Limited use.
- There is a lot more that we don't know than we do know. As an ecology working group and a RT, we need to establish some zones of agreement. We aren't talking about acres or prioritizing treatments; we are talking about the science of lodgepole and the kinds of treatments that are desirable in lodgepole. The working group is putting together fact sheets / summaries on these topics. CFRI will be helping with this effort. Hope to have clearly identified zones of agreement that can lead to message points for the media and the public.
- See handout from Joint Ecology Working Group

Discussion:

- Is this the right direction for this working group? Yes.
- The real question is predictive: what is going to happen with all of these dead trees? Will it pose additional risk to communities or watersheds? We simply don't know. We don't know how severe the fires will be in infected areas. There isn't a

lot of uncertainty regarding the ecology of lodgepole; there is uncertainty regarding risk reduction in this system.

- Where in this issue is a problem clear enough to prioritize resources? Yes, there is a lot of fuel build-up but we don't know that it is going to burn.
- What counts as a "large area"? All the efforts in the world won't touch the millions of acres. We can't even get into 10% of that area. Ecologically speaking, if we stand back and do nothing it's probably the same as if we tried to treat.
- There are also several other similar efforts taking place within the scientific community. These are forthcoming.

Question: Does the advent of Bark Beetles into the Front Range add anything new to the restoration / risk reduction conversation? Hear from the Bark Beetle working group. Hear from Ecology working group. (Jeff Kitchens, Hal Gibbs)

- Treatments in lodgepole may be different if you are trying to specifically address MPB. For example, if you want to maintain tree cover in areas with lots of dead ponderosa, maybe we want to plant Douglas fir.
- N. FR MPB working group formed outside the RT. Membership has grown and participation has expanded. Goal of the group is communication. This is different than the other working groups. Need to communicate between agencies and with the public.
- Group has produced a number of products, developed a website, put together a powerpoint.
- Does the MPB add anything to the restoration / risk reduction conversation? We still don't know if it is going to shift into ponderosa on a broad scale. Current efforts in ponderosa are good for improving resilience. We still don't know how effective this will be over time, but it's a good start.
- For the lodgepole, we have mass mortality. Task for the RT could be to ask about building resilience into regeneration planning over the long term. What should the future forest look like once all that lodgepole is gone? But this isn't a restoration issue in the traditional sense.
- In terms of timing, the Front Range is about where Grand County was in 2002. Rising awareness at the local level but still no recognition of the scale of this. Next year we will see more red trees so the general public will start to notice. Lodgepole is in a lot of trouble.
- In terms of risk reduction, there is a hazardous fuels issue. But we already have this problem. RT report talked about this in detail. Yes, the MPB might make it worse, but it's not substantively new or different. Even green lodgepole at a certain age is high hazard. So MPB doesn't greatly change that.
- But MPB is creating new hazard trees. This is an issue at recreation sites, with wind-throw, access. Addressing that issue will cost a lot of money. This is competition for scarce resources. Removing trees from campgrounds is expensive! Huge need for this.
- During the last pine beetle outbreak west of Boulder county treated 40,000 acres. They spent the equivalent of our current annual budget! Funding is limiting what we can do. Mid 1970s.

- Social and political pressure is intense to do something. This pressure is more intense than to do basic restoration or deal w/ hazardous fuels. Restoration is important, but the public pressure comes from the sight of dead trees.

Discussion

- Is the CSFS doing a risk assessment for the Governor? Yes, just finished the annual assessment. But what's new is the result of the new S&PF programming plus the push to look at Colorado's forests at a landscape scale. This will be an assessment of the state's forests to be delivered to the FHAC so they can develop strategies for the future. It isn't really a risk assessment. This will bring together a few other assessments that are ongoing. Will help us focus our efforts on legislation.

Questions: Given this new information, is there a need to revise and/or refine the Roundtable's priority recommendations? Are we still comfortable using "restoration" and "risk reduction" as categories for framing this discussion? Discuss.

- Is increasing resilience a risk reduction or a restoration strategy? Maybe we don't have real clarity about what these categories mean. Be careful, resilience can mean lots of things; ecological resilience is different from community resilience, etc. Can we tighten these definitions? What do we mean by "other values"?
- HRV isn't useful anymore because climate change irrevocably changes things. We can be mindful of the past, but it cannot be used to predict the future.
- For there to be risk reduction, we have to agree on the risk. Do we agree that there is a risk to the upper montane?
- Seems we are not in the right place to revise / refine our recommendations. All of these working groups are still gathering data and building information. Can we really say that what we have prioritized now are not the right acres? It's not too early to ask the group about embracing the concept of risk reduction & restoration in the upper montane. Let's not re-define these terms. HRV still functions as the basis for common knowledge within this group. We don't need to add another category. Reforestation or stand replacement is outside the purview of this group.
- We have goals for the lower montane. These are different than the upper montane. Leave the lower montane goals alone. This is like building blocks. It's a totally different system, can't be integrated. Must deal with them separately.
- You can see the upper montane as a large infrequent disturbance (LID) regime. As managers, there isn't much you can do to address that. So the question is how to build adaptability into the system. Agreed that this is a separate issue.
- Proposal: change the definition of risk reduction to include watershed infrastructure and other elements. Expanded analysis using 6th level watersheds. Data is available at this level.
- Conceptual agreement. Follow-up questions: (1) specific watershed infrastructure only? Or other components of the water supply? (2) the RT has framed risk reduction as identifying a value and then conducting activities in the immediate vicinity of that value. Does this still hold? Yes. Generally talking about stand-level treatments to protect infrastructure. But sometimes the infrastructure may be

downstream from the fire, so we need to protect upstream too. How do we decide where the priorities are? We can look at soils to help determine risk.

- This is a refinement of the RT priorities, not a revision. But if we go through and refine the data, we should also include what's actually treatable (back out wilderness, slope, etc.). The first part of the analysis identifies critical watersheds and the second part addresses which parts are treatable.
- The existing definition of risk reduction is good, but we haven't expanded on "other values" enough. We spend two paragraphs on human life and property.
- Strategic treatments create speed bumps to break up the fuels. Treat a small percentage of the landscape but have a significant impact. How effective are these speed bumps in a crown fire in lodgepole? Be careful communicating this with the public; it really depends on conditions. On the flip side, it's hard to sell doing nothing to the public. We are not just looking at the fire, we are also looking at what could happen following the fire such as erosion, etc.
- Should we invite an advertising company to the table to help us communicate with the general public in terms they can understand? This is a complex issue. It's not all about the MPB and we need to get the public to understand. Communications sub-group in watershed group is dealing with this.

Next Steps

- We can refine the RT report pretty quickly (one year).
- RT meets quarterly; working groups meet monthly or more.
- Communication with the RT and the watershed working group has been poor. How can we improve this? We can build consensus. Ask the RT to accept the goals of the working group; ask the group to respect the RT consensus.
- All the working groups are doing good work. They want to be part of the RT and the RT wants them to exist. Can we get the working groups to send a representative to each Core Team meeting and give a quick update to open communication? Yes. We will add this to the monthly Core Team agenda.
- Maybe we can produce a supplemental document to better include upper montane & watersheds. Disagreement. Adding priorities gets confusing and we lose value. Maybe this an internal document from the watershed group, not a full report supplement. This is a white paper.
- Note that the chart has lodgepole in the sub-alpine. Upper montane is the transitional area. We are talking about both.
- We are putting our limited investments into limited priorities. The watershed group is doing the same thing, by narrowing in on priorities within the landscape.
- What does the RT want from the watershed group? Need guidance in terms of what the product is.
- Agreed: for the Sept. meeting, the Watershed group will produce:
 - Maps and layers of information for a pilot area in the Upper South Platte. We will use these maps to compare with existing Roundtable priorities, and this will help us identify how much overlap exists.
 - A draft white paper to summarize the watershed issue, with attention to the questions raised today.