

COPWRR Project Level Ecosystem Monitoring Report - Summary

Project Evaluated: Crescent Lake WUI Project

Field Visit Date: September 9, 2009

Units Visited: EA Units 2, 7, and 90 with informal review of 3 other units

1) Summary Comments on Implementation and Effectiveness

After visiting 3 of the units on the Crescent Lake WUI Project, field review participants concluded

- that where treatments had been implemented they were implemented as planned and described in the Environmental Assessment
- that Project Design Considerations and Mitigation Measures specified in the EA had been adhered to; and
- that the project addressed the Purposes and Needs specified in the EA and advanced the Management Objectives specified for the units visited.

Treatments that had been implemented were implemented as described and had the desired results. The major concern raised during the field review was that significant portions of the treatments outlined in the EA had been deferred for future implementation and the time line for that implementation was uncertain (see below). The project succeeded in reducing fuels and lowering fire risks to people and resources. It also enhanced the growth and vigor of overstory trees in a variety of stand types. With this project the Forest Service succeeded in conducting fuels reduction work in an area that really needed it but where treatment had not been attempted earlier because of site challenges such as wet soils.

2) Considerations for Future Project Planning

Both field review participants and Forest Service staff were impressed with the results of this project. We had a unique opportunity to witness firsthand how fuels reduction activity had helped to reduce the severity of a wildfire and aid in containment of the fire, saving many structures in the community. The group explored a number of topics that are worth documenting so that future management efforts can thoughtfully address them:

Funding for Non-Commercial Thinning in Riparian Buffers and Beyond:

Treatment of riparian buffer areas and other sensitive sites that require expensive manual thinning and do not generate any kind of wood fiber product was largely deferred on this project. These areas remain not just a fuels hazard but also an unrealized ecological restoration opportunity. Without disturbance to open up spaces in the riparian corridor, we will not regenerate the hardwood plant community that should be present in far greater proportions along our small streams. This hardwood component is a critical habitat element for a range of species. The major question is how can we generate the funding to implement these ecologically important non-commercial treatments? There are COPWRR stakeholders who would like to work with the Crescent Ranger District to identify and secure supplemental funding for these kinds of treatments.

Strengths and Limitations of Different Implementation Authorities:

Within this one project stewardship contracting, timber sale, Stewardship Unit Block (SUB), and commercial firewood small sale authorities were all used to implement treatments. Each one was particularly well suited to certain sites. Timber sales work when market conditions are strong enough and where there is sufficient saw log volume to cover costs of both the sale and post-sale work. Stewardship contracting works well for sites where there are lots of small trees or dead/down material and value can be generated to help pay for treatments. SUB arrangements can work where

there are motivated and diligent adjacent private property owners. The commercial firewood sale which we visited was a good way to get a sensitive area treated with lighter disturbance to both ground and nesting birds.

Matsutake Mushroom Production:

There is still much that we do not know about managing Matsutake mushroom habitat. The Crescent RD has tried to be protective of the mushroom by limiting soil disturbance and maintaining canopy cover in key production areas. But these measures can impact our ability to achieve other management goals. More scientific research on the needs of the mushrooms could really help to both preserve the resource and also let other important management activities proceed.