

COPWRR Project-Level Ecosystem Monitoring Report - Summary

Project Evaluated: Newberry Project

Field Visit Date: September 17, 2007

Units Visited: 3, 4, 5, and 6

1) Summary Comments on Implementation and Effectiveness

Field review participants visited all four of the main units in the Newberry Project and made the following observations:

- **Treatments**: For two of the four Units, the treatments that were implemented on the ground did not correspond closely with the treatments that were described in the Categorical Exclusion (CE) document. More and bigger trees were removed from Units 3 and 5 than were expected based on reading the CE. Field review participants had some concerns about the ecological consequences of the aggressive treatment, but they were more concerned that there was a mis-match between the CE and the implemented treatment, raising concerns about agency transparency.
- **Management Measures**: Protective Management Measures that were specified in the CE were adhered to during implementation. One variation was that in two of the Units wildlife leave patches were left in a mosaic of many small patches instead of a few large contiguous blocks. Field review participants liked the mosaic approach and were not concerned about this variation.
- **Purposes and Needs**: The project effectively addressed the Purposes and Needs set out in the CE, including protecting and restoring old-growth ponderosa pine; increasing the resilience of forest stands; improving forest health; reducing the risk of uncharacteristically severe wildfire; and enhancing aesthetics.

Field review participants were impressed with the results of the project on at least two of the units and on the other two they understood what the BLM was trying to accomplish and felt that the treatment was a reasonable effort to address the Purposes and Needs. The major concern was the disconnect between the described treatment in the CE and the implemented treatment.

2) Considerations for Future Project Planning

This field review allowed the participants to explore many challenges of forest management in Central Oregon. The project area is complex and the BLM was working with a short time frame under a new authority, Categorical Exclusions, to implement a treatment that was needed quickly to protect the community. The COPWRR Ecosystem Monitoring Committee requests that the BLM consider the following topics in planning similar future projects:

- A) The level of public consensus on how to manage lodgepole pine forest is much lower than for ponderosa pine in Central Oregon and the field review participants definitely found the site difficult. Balancing wildfire risk, wildlife cover, forest health and aesthetics while trying to bring lodgepole stands back into a more “natural” historic condition and cycle of disturbance is a real challenge. The hope is that project planners can be very explicit about what we are trying to do with

the lodgepole and why so that the public can understand management efforts, offer input, and support implementation.

- B) The group had many concerns and questions about the use of Categorical Exclusions that are worth reviewing. Broadly, there was a question about whether a very streamlined NEPA document can effectively address the complexity and the diversity of a project area like this, with lodgepole and ponderosa stands swirling together, WUI issues, wildlife cover issues, and many other aspects. The group would have liked to see management objectives specified for each of the very distinct units that were visited instead of just having a general prescription for all. They would have also liked to have seen more background/contextual information provided for the project area, including information about site productivity and habitat characteristics and wildlife use (particularly for non-game species). In addition, there were requests for more specific habitat goals and numeric objectives for snag creation. Some participants also expressed concern about the short review and comment period associated with a CE NEPA process. The overarching question was: can we come closer to the rigor of an Environmental Assessment NEPA process without making the CE process as slow and ponderous as a full EA process?
- C) Field review participants expressed concern about the way that the burn would be implemented on Unit 4, both for ecological reasons and community perceptions. There was concern that underburning in old-growth ponderosa has the potential to result in lots of old tree mortality if fuels around the base of the trees are not carefully tended to. But there was also a concern that it would be challenging to do the prescribed burn because the site is so close to Newberry Estates and there were worries that the neighbors might not understand the treatment and be alarmed.
- D) In similar project sites in the future the field review participants would like to see more intensive road closure efforts. However, it was also recognized that to do more intensive road closure would have required more intensive NEPA work.