

## **COPWRR Project-Level Ecosystem Monitoring Report – Summary**

**Project Evaluated:** Rocky II Project

**Field Visit Date:** October 11, 2006

**Units Visited:** Benefield, Rocky 20, Rocky 17, Rocky 30 (Unit missed due to time constraints - Rocky 21)

### 1) Summary Comments on Implementation and Effectiveness

The monitoring team visited 4 of the 5 identified units in the Rocky II Timber Sale project which is 98% completed. About 60% of all activities in the Mill EIS are completed. Many of the remaining activities are expected to be completed as funding permits. Some of the activities will not be done because of changed conditions (wildfire), low economic value, and an agreement reached with Oregon Natural Resources Council. After the field teams visit, the following summary conclusions were reached:

- Two of the 4 units did not achieve the objectives as described in the Purpose and Need because no treatment was implemented. Unit objectives were implemented as planned and described in Benefield and Rocky 20
- Relevant Management measures from the Mill EIS were not met in the monitoring units because certain stand treatments were either not implemented or completed. This was partially due to cost of treatments as well as funding, legal challenges by outside groups, and Threatened and Endangered (T&E) species surveys.
- The projects cannot fully meet intended purpose and needs listed in the EIS if they have not been implemented or fully implemented.

### 2) Key District Insights from Project Implementation

- Lookout Mountain District Ranger Art Currier, discussed how the litigation spurred interaction between agency and plaintiffs and provided opportunities for developing relationships that resulted in changes. However, while supporting the overall objectives of restoring Historic Range of Variability (HRV), the changes in Unit 30 were not implemented due to budgetary decisions.
- Silviculturist Barbara Fontaine observed that even in areas that were treated to prescription, there was a feeling afterwards that stand thinning could have been a more aggressive. The participants on the field trip generally agreed that more thinning could have been done.
- Even within units that met expectations and management targets, for monitoring purposes it was too soon to see impacts of actions taken (only 3 years since timber sale and one year since pre-commercial thinning with fuels treatment of Rx burn still to be accomplished for slash treatments).
- Climatic conditions are changing and forest managers will need to adapt past prescriptions (e.g. over snow harvest to protect T&E species). Certain Best Management Practices (BMPs) such as over-snow harvest should be modified should those optimal conditions not occur. The snow windows for winter work have not occurred for 3 years.

### 3) Considerations for Future Project Planning: Field visit attendees commended the Lookout Ranger District staff for the management achievements on some of the units observed. However, they also had some considerations which might help the Forest Service to “fully” achieve management objectives on projects like

Rocky II. The COPWRR Ecosystem Monitoring Committee respectfully submits the following opportunities for Forest Service consideration:

A) If budgetary issues continue to halt projects with clear NEPA authorizations, then District managers and silviculture staff need to find alternate strategies to implement projects to achieve forest health goals. Field Participants all agreed that if no treatments (not even PCT) are occurring then some other strategies may need to be found because we are not protecting the old growth trees. The Committee encourages the Ochoco NF and the Lookout RD to discuss with COPWRR Stakeholder group, how COPWRR can aid them in reaching these goals.

B) Treatment prescriptions that call for certain conditions (for example: x inches of snow on ground and frozen before equipment allowed) before harvest or mechanical treatments are initiated must take into account changing climatic conditions and allow for some flexibility for contract implementation so that detail does not compromise harvest or Pre Commercial Thinning (PCT) operations that would benefit HRV and allow for project objectives to be met.

C) When surveys for T&E species of plants or animals are needed to allow harvest operation or completion of the timber sale with approved NEPA, agencies need more options. One option could be to contract the survey when needed or to coordinate with resource partners to accomplish critical surveys in time for other project work to occur. However, should potential habitat for sensitive species preclude work from being started or completed to achieve the larger management objective? Consider the utilization of qualified organizations or qualified volunteers to complete needed T&E species surveys to insure that these do not hold up harvest projects or PCT elements (could be done as a contract).

F) There was observable die-back of large trees after the first harvest entry in Unit 20. Field attendees queried if additional entry trips were allowed under this EIS to do additional thinning in trees less than 21" DBH. It was noted by all that beetle kill and the Hash Rock Fire impacts to this forest should not be underestimated and may not have been valued highly enough in determining prescription for removal in some areas. In those areas waiting for Rx burn treatments, there are significant slash piles that could be utilized for public wood cutting if staffing and oversight were available. Many of the access roads are gated and locked for wildlife habitat protection) and thus the area is inaccessible to the public.

G) The Committee encourages the Forest Service to continue to engage local and environmental stakeholders in onsite evaluations of proposed treatments to develop collaborative relationships and come to consensus on NEPA proposals wherever possible - especially when possibility of litigation is high.

H) Consider waiting longer to monitor units so that full impacts can be better assessed after completed treatments