

## Central Oregon Partnership for Wildfire Risk Reduction

# Project Level Ecosystem Monitoring Report – Summary

**Project Evaluated:** West Maurys Fuels and Vegetation Management Project

**Field Visit Date:** October 20, 2011

**Units Visited:** Mid Maury II Unit 71 (EIS Unit 375), Mid Maury II Unit 69 (EIS 375), Mid Maury II Unit 36 (EIS 405), Mid Maury Units 6-12, West Aspen Units 3-5 (EIS 445, 476)

### Summary Comments on Implementation and Effectiveness

1. The project was implemented as described in the NEPA documents and silvicultural prescriptions, except where funding limitations have caused stand improvements (precommercial thins and prescribed burns) to be deferred.
2. The first two project purposes and needs – to move seral and structural conditions and fire regimes toward their historic ranges of variability – were met. Prescriptions calling for variable density (patchy/clumpy/groupy) forest structure within units would have better achieved the historic forest structure, and landscape-scale treatments would better affect fire behavior.
3. The third project purpose and need – to contribute to local and regional economic health and provide opportunities for employment and income – was partially met. The project provided several jobs, but the operator lost money because of the long distance to market and because the timber market was depressed.
4. Planning for aspen regeneration helped address landscape-scale forest health goals.

### Considerations for Future Project Planning

**Prioritize funding for non-commercial forest health and fuels reduction work.** Lack of funding for stand improvements is an ongoing limitation to forest health and fuels reduction projects. Commercial thins often leave high fuel loads and unnaturally high small tree density, so precommercial thinning and burning are important. In some cases, it may be feasible to avoid the cost of thinning small seedlings by broadcast burning without thinning. In other areas – for instance on Mid Maury II Unit 69 where there is a high density of trees greater than 21 inches DBH and high levels of surface fuels in the riparian exclusion areas – project goals will not be met without precommercial thinning. Stewardship contracts should be used wherever possible so that service work can be bundled with timber sales. Also,

stakeholders should maintain pressure on Congress and the Forest Service Washington Office to fund non-commercial forest health and fuels reduction work.

**Explicitly plan for and prescribe structural heterogeneity.** Historically, forests on this landscape had more vertical, horizontal, and structural diversity than is now present. As written, prescriptions on these units could be interpreted to call for even spacing between trees. To avoid creating an unnaturally evenly spaced forest, NEPA documents, prescriptions, and contracts should explicitly call for structural heterogeneity, e.g. by leaving a percentage of each unit in wildlife clumps and by clearly describing the desired “gappy/patchy/clumpy” structure. It is important to carry this concept throughout project planning by including it in the EA or EIS, prescriptions, and contracting documents.

**Create snags during thinning.** It is often expected that snags will be recruited by burns after units have been thinned. But sometimes prescribed fires are deferred for a long time, and the resulting density and location of snags on the landscape may not meet wildlife habitat goals. Creating snags during thinning provides habitat sooner.

**Retain trees with old-growth character even if they are smaller than 21 inches DBH.** Prescriptions called for retaining all trees greater than 21 inches DBH as required by the Eastside Screens, but some large trees under 21 inches DBH with old-growth characteristics were cut. Prescriptions should be written to retain trees with old-growth characteristics such as platy bark and well-developed, rounded-top crowns. However, not all large trees are old growth, and in some cases large trees should be cut to protect true old-growth character trees.

**Monitor aspen regeneration.** The aspen regeneration goals of this project are noteworthy. Monitoring aspen response to treatments will provide useful information for future aspen regeneration efforts.

**Keep striving to incorporate understanding of the historic range of variability into project planning and implementation on the Ochoco National Forest.** Use the best available science on historic forest structure, composition and fire return intervals as the basis for discussions about appropriate treatments for the diverse sites across the Ochocos.