

Meeting Notes
Westside Project
June 27, 2016 – 6:30 p.m.
Boundary County Extension Office

Attendance:

Dan Dinning, Boundary County Commissioner & KVRI Co-chair
Kevin Knauth, Bonners Ferry District Ranger, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
Jennifer Anderson, USFS
Lee Colson, USFS
Don Gunter, Fire Safe Program
Jim Kibler, Idaho Dept. of Lands
Ree Brannon, NRCS
John Ailport- Fire Safe Program
Patty Perry, KVRI Facilitator & KTOI
Sherrie Cossairt, KVRI Recording Secretary & KTOI
Dave Wattenbarger, BSCD(Boundary Soil Conservation District) & KVRI
Doug Nishek, USFS
John Lefebvre & son
Jim Derrig-IDFG (Idaho Department of Fish & Game)
Vic Amoth- District 9
Suzanne Arbo
Norv & Leslie Allen
David Eby
Tom Ulappa
Tracy & Joe Freeze
Ken Carter-Bucher Properties
Kennon McClintock- TNC
Walt Kirby-Commissioner
Ed Atkins
Erik Olson-BSCD (Boundary Soil Conservation District)
Barbara Castellan
Michelle Rohrwasser, Commissioner's Office
Phil Schneurle
Lee Pinkerton-Commissioner

Opening:

Patty Perry opened and welcomed everyone to the meeting. Introductions followed.

Dan Dinning continued with a brief summary of the Westside Project. In view of the Parker Ridge fire last summer, the Commissioners decided to re-explore the need for treating the Westside face to reduce future fire damage.

This is an opportunity to be informed about the fire reduction management that is available to private landowners in Boundary County. Knowing we can never stop fire, the Forest Service would like to look at these areas of Federal lands and coordinate treatment with private ownership in hopes to reduce the effects of a catastrophic fire. The area covers land on the Westside from the Canadian Border to Caribou Creek.

It's important to engage the public right now because it takes years to accomplish these projects. In order to implement future projects there may be a need to gain foot access across private property or a need for some type of temporary road access to accomplish the tasks that need to be done.

The other piece to this project is the local collaborative Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative (KVRI) is involved with the Forest Service in development of projects in Boundary County and together they have had a very high success rate. The Commissioners along with KVRI want to take a look at this Westside area with the Forest Service and other managing agencies.

Presentations

Jennifer Anderson, USFS

The Parker Ridge fire showed what can happen when we get a fire start in heavy fuels, in steep and rugged terrain, and under periods of high fire danger. From a fire management perspective, many other ridges and drainages are quite similar (fuels, timber types, terrain complexities, access) and may experience fire similar to Parker Ridge. We know future fire is not IF but WHEN. We want to explore opportunities for treatments above the Westside road and along the Selkirk face, to be ahead of the next fire.

The US Forest Service has a responsibility to reduce hazardous fuels especially in the WUI (Wildland Urban Interface) and where values are at risk as they are on the Westside. In doing that it will create safer conditions for fighting fire and expand our options for fire management.

- **Fire History since 1889- 127 years of fires (present concern with the Selkirk face)**
 - Drainages on the Westside are well aligned with general wind patterns.
 - Winds move from SW to NE.
 - Fires move down the drainage, come out of the drainage and move across the face.
- **Forest Service-Ignition Map 1970-2015 (45 years)**
 - 900 fires in the 45 year history; an average of 20 fires per year.
 - Lightning accounts for almost 80% of fire starts; Last year 22 fires, 77% lightning caused.
- **From a future fire management perspective**
 - Research suggests we will continue to experience warmer springs, earlier snow melts, longer fire seasons. Also with the warming climate, air gets more efficient at sucking moisture out of the fuels, making them more prone to ignition and more available to burn. For every 1 degree increase Celsius there is a 12 % increase in lightning we can experience.
- **Natural Fire Regime Map**
 - The vegetation is departed from a natural fire regime.
 - Fire regimes are defined by the natural frequency fires occur & the severity of fire when it does occur. The Westside face is moderately & highly departed areas.
 - The areas have likely missed fire return intervals; at an elevated risk of losing key ecosystem components.
- **Selkirk Face Fuels & Expected Fire Behavior**
 - Untreated forested stands.
 - Forest structures where the tree crowns are dense & there is no void between the surface & crown fuels.
 - Fire can easily move up from the surface fuels into the canopies and spread as crown fires.
 - This type of fire is much more extreme & exhibits a high resistance to control through suppression action.

- **Desired Fuels for Reduced Fire Behavior**

- Components driving fire behavior-FUELS, WEATHER, TOPOGRAPHY.
 - Can only control or change the fuels.
 - Desired fuels: Low-Moderate load, light load of conifer litter and down logs.
 - Reduce or remove ladder fuels, the over story trees spaced out.
- **Why were you invited here tonight?**
 - Forest Service does not have a proposed action to treat any of the FS lands at this time.
 - Actively looking at opportunities for treatment.
 - Access across private land to get onto Forest Service ground to scope it out will likely be needed.
 - Ownership boundary is often mid-slope and on steep ground that will likely make any type of treatment difficult, especially if the private lands downslope aren't treated first.
 - Where land owners would be interested in treating their lands, it would help us prioritize treatments on adjacent Forest Service lands.
 - Larger treated areas have a greater potential to reduce fire severity & disrupt large fire growth & movement, than smaller, disjointed treatment areas do.

Don Gunter-- County Fire Safe Program

- Fire Safe program began for fire fighter safety & to fight fires around communities, buildings, and the urban interface.
- First monies were to reduce fuels in & around those areas defined as defensible spaces.
- In 2007, they began funding fuel breaks for larger areas, reducing ladder fuels, and removing downed dead wood.
- The County applies for Grant money and the WUI (Wildland Urban Interface) Committee decides where the request grant money comes from.
 - There have been 3 different funding mechanisms :
 - Areas near Forest Service projects, that have already had a scoping notice.
 - Stimulus money.
 - Western States Grant. We compete with that, 2 projects are elevated at the state level; Boundary County is getting one of those this year.
- Money is primarily for private landowner, occasionally used on public land but not federal land.

Patty stated that we are hopeful if we can put together some Forest Service projects in areas we want to work in & if there are interested landowners, they may be able to match the program opportunity, if they would like to, and see if we can do a broader landscape approach.

Jim Kibler, Idaho Department of Lands

- Program is for technical assistance and education for private landowners.
- They do not have access to grants, monies or projects to help.
- They help with forest management plans for individual landowners.
- For 10-25 acres, they can help write your own plan; a template is available on their website.
- Having a management plan is a conduit to access funding projects and grant money available through NCRS and the Fire Safe program.
- For more than 25 acres, they suggest the landowners use a forestry consultant firm.

Ree Brannoon-USDA-NRCS (Natural Resource Conservation Services)

- NRCS is an agency under the US Department of Agriculture.

- Authority to implement Farm Bill programs that are useful for private land owners (crop land, livestock, woodlot managers)
- Offer Technical and financial assistance to implement practices to manage your land for forest health, fuels reduction or wildlife habitat.
- Environmental quality incentives program (EQIP); partial assistance for the practices to manage property.
- Practices we look at: fuel break, thinning, pruning to reduce ladder fuels, access control (legacy roads, gates, protect property, unwanted access)
- Conservation District-outreach & education

Lee Colson - USFS

- Access needs of Forest Service on private land:
 - Involves 1 or 2 people to hike private forest service boundary, foot traffic only.
 - No tools, just a camera & notebook.
 - Examine fuel loading, ladder fuels, mechanical access, pre-treatment fuels, opportunity to burn from a specific line.
- A private landowner map was available to view during and after the meeting,
- Lee shared a Google fly over map of the Westside (2014) showing Caribou Creek to the Canadian border and Forest Service boundary lines. It included the Myrtle Creek Burn of 2003.

In conclusion, Patty stated that we are hoping, in the resource community, to encourage the Forest Service that this is a place we need to analyze to the extent that they can get access to do that. It is not a quick process to get through all the challenges the Forest Service has to go through for any project. Therefore the sooner we start talking about it the sooner they can get on the ground. Our goal is to have the dialogue. Bringing the landowners together with the Forest Service and the managing agency representatives will give everyone the opportunity to talk and see what is possible for this process.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m. – followed by a time that specialists were available for one on one dialogue.

Sherrie Cossairt
KTOI/KVRI Admin. Assistant