

## Payette Forest Coalition

Thursday, November 17, 2022 – 10:00 am to 2:00 pm

Hybrid meeting: in-person at Idaho First Bank Community Room, 475 Deinhard Lane, McCall, ID 83638  
and [Join Zoom Meeting](#): Meeting ID: 815 3909 0811 Passcode: 703461  
One tap mobile: +13462487799, 81539090811# US (Houston)

### Desired Outcomes

- (1) Reach consensus on what Farm Bill funding priorities PFC should recommend and submit.
- (2) Receive briefing from PFC Steering Team on pace and scale discussions with Payette National Forest.
- (3) Elect a new PFC Steering Team.

### Agenda

- 10:00 AM Introductions, review agenda and desired outcomes
- 10:10 AM Farm Bill funding priorities
- 11:10 AM Briefing on pace and scale discussions, PFC Steering Team
- 12:10 AM Lunch
- 12:40 AM PFC Steering Team elections
- 12:50 PM News and Updates
  - Granite Goose proposed action status, Jenni Blake, 20 minutes
  - Wildfire crisis strategy next steps, Garret Visser, 10 minutes
  - Road brushing FY22-23, Ben Dreier, 10 minutes

### *References for Meeting*

[October 2022 meeting notes](#)

[Farm Bill funding priorities background and survey questions](#) (see 2023 Farm Bill thread)

Straw man proposal for PFC recommendations on Farm Bill funding priorities (please monitor the [Forum](#))

October Steering Team meeting notes (appended)

[PFC Steering Team election thread](#)

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### **Topic Information sheet**

#### **Farm Bill funding priorities**

Senator Risch's office is looking for input from Idaho collaboratives on what priorities should be included in the 2023 Farm Bill and has asked for IFRP's help to gather that information. Background information about the Farm Bill and the survey's questions have been posted to the PFC Forum. Risch's office has expressed that it would be preferable for coalitions (rather than individuals) to indicate what those priorities should be. The Steering Team will draft a straw man proposal and post it to the Forum prior to the meeting. Members are asked to review and comment on it using the Forum and come prepared to discuss. The objective will be to reach consensus on changes (if needed) and whether to submit it to IFRP.

#### **Pace and Scale**

The PFC Steering Team has had discussions with Payette National Forest leadership about the pace and scale of restoration work and how that could be increased. Steering Team members will brief the Coalition on those conversations. In addition to sharing this information, the objective is to see if PFC members have additional ideas about how the Coalition can help the Forest increase pace and scale. Members are asked to review the October Steering Team meeting notes appended below which provide context for this discussion.

#### **Steering Team elections**

Four Steering Team members' terms will end this December (Ron Hamilton, Garret Visser, Sandra Mitchel, Rick Tholen). There is a thread on the new PFC Forum for posting nominations. Steering Team members serve a two-year term and are elected by simple majority vote. Any PFC voting member may nominate a candidate by 1) contacting the candidate to receive their consent, and 2) submitting the candidate's name on this thread. Nominations may also be made from the floor on the day of elections. If you plan to do so, please contact that person in advance and gain their consent. Roles and responsibilities of Steering Team members can be found [here](#) starting on page 2 of the document titled "Organizational Structure."

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### October 11, 2022 Steering Team Meeting Notes

#### Pace and scale discussion

PFC ST members outlined rationale for today's discussion.

- Perceived disconnect between actions needed to address the wildfire/forest health crisis and level of investment being made to do so and what is actually happening on the ground—project planning and implementation seem to have slowed.
- While the investments are helpful and needed, lack of key staff required to do the work puts even more pressure on the PNF (and other Forests--this is a nationwide issue).
- PFC wants to advocate for needed staff. Projects seem to lose momentum when key staff and Rangers leave. Without them it is hard to do the work all recognize is needed, build relationships and trust with temporary staff, and temporary staff don't know the Forest the way permanent staff do.
- Large-scale projects are preferred, smaller-scale projects are okay. There is a strong desire for them to be diverse (diverse projects are the glue holding the Coalition together and they make consensus building easier) and for them to be done concurrently versus in a series.
- Conditions Based Management was developed by the Forest Service for the situation we are experiencing on the PNF, and specifically in the Granite Meadows area. While PFC understands the desire to know about these stands before a proposed action is developed, there is doubt doing so will save much time on the implementation end. The effects of ongoing insect and disease infestations is changing conditions very rapidly, particularly the BWA. Stand exams have a short life span because of the rapid changes in these stands. Having solid information about current conditions doesn't mean you won't have to re-inventory those stands during the implementation phase: given the pace of change, you will, which adds time and cost to these projects.
- There is a sense that procedural requirements for selling timber on National Forests slows pace. While PFC supports full utilization of timber when it's economical to do so (i.e., there is profit), treating all timber like a commodity that deserves rigorous volume determination and value appraisal slows down identification and removal of this material which is essentially fuel. This is particularly the case with BWA-killed subalpine fir. PFC would like to see the PNF, Region 4, or National offices find ways of calculating volumes and values and marking this material for removal rather than just following the timber sale manual.

Forest's reflections on these points:

- Project implementation is occurring, we just don't always see it. Jeff Jones outlined projects being done on MFWR and Huckleberry as examples.
- Linda agreed that much is happening across the Forest and that they need to do a better job of communicating the vast amount of work to the PFC. She understands that there is a concern that pace and scale has slowed, but she believes that the Forest is doing a lot to get ahead. They have a healthy shelf stock of projects, have ongoing NEPA, and are developing new NEPA proposals, such as Granite Goose.
- Linda shared that the Agency, the Region, and Forest have hired more positions in the last year than in the 30 years she has been with the Forest Service. The Forest has received additional funding because of the Southwest Idaho Priority Landscape project, so salary funding is not a current concern. These opportunities have allowed the Payette to hire key positions. However,

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the Payette continues to compete with other Forests and Regions for the same potential employees. Current staffers leave for other opportunities because there are so many available and affordable housing shortages compound the difficulty of getting staff to come. Of particular concern has been the loss of our mid-management forestry positions, which have impacted silvicultural work and layout and prep. The Forest has finally been able to fill two of their four permanent NEPA coordinators. One began this week and the other in November.

By and large, the Forest and PFC see many of the same disconnects and identify similar issues that have the potential to hamper the pace of projects. PFC Steering Team members particularly became concerned about a pace and scale disconnect when the Forest made known that the Granite Meadows project was being broken into three projects. The topic of continuing to use conditions-based NEPA as done with former landscape-scale projects was raised. They had heard that there was push back from OGC and the Region about the use of conditions-based NEPA due to defensibility. Linda said that the reason we were breaking Granite Meadows up was due to internal requests. The Payette has a great amount of former conditions-based NEPA such as LCBC, Huckleberry, MFWF, Cold July, etc. Conditions-based NEPA puts the surveying, stand exams, layouts, etc. workload on the specialists' shoulders after the NEPA is signed. We also have ongoing NEPA that is requiring specialist work, and we have upcoming NEPA that they are trying to prepare. With all three of these NEPA workloads coming to a head, along with the loss of our mid-management forestry personnel, we are shifting how we will attack Granite Meadows.

Key staff perceive they will be less overwhelmed by concurrently-run projects if they can design them with more specific layouts and prescriptions up front and avoid so much of the data collection after the fact. Some back-and-forth discussion about whether that will be the case given how quickly conditions change and the Forest will need to adjust prescriptions anyway. Dana clarified that they aren't abandoning it completely (they recognize adjustments will need to be made) but they do want to get certain things like initial stand exams, unit layout and logging systems defined as much as possible beforehand. Linda stated that future projects will still have a conditioned based aspect to them; it's a reality when analyzing landscape scale projects but they won't be as full-blown conditions-based as the projects previously mentioned.

### **Potential ways of ramping up pace and scale**

*Facilitator note: Those listed in italics are already being done. If I've missed others, please let me know.*

- Contract NEPA Coordinators
- *Use external NEPA contractors who are former federal employees or Forest Service who will understand the agency (e.g., Enterprise Team doing the Forest-wide prescribed fire EA)*
- *Remote positions (e.g., Forest-wide NEPA Coordinator is based in Boise)*
- *Convert temporary housing to permanent.*
- Use retention bonuses to encourage staff to stay here.
- Contract temporary workers and analysts to help gather and analyze data. This should help free up some time for specialists.
- *Use IDIQ and GNA to do implementation work.*
- *Use grazing to manage fine fuels.*
- Require contractors to complete projects within a shorter time frame.

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- Partner with other Forests, industry, IDL and others to accelerate the pace of implementation. In reference to this and the point above, Forest noted that: 1) capacity on the contractor side is often an issue which slows pace and, 2) there are fewer contractors overall and everyone is competing for them.
- Use CFLRP funds to bring in startup contractors. Note: Scott Severs is the IDL contact for startup contractors.
- Use GATES system to show project planning and implementation status.
- Investigate the potential to provide long-term guarantees for minimum annual non-commercial thinning acreage and commercial timber volumes. Guarantees will encourage industry investments that will help with the current shortage of contractors. This item may require some high-level approvals (maybe even legislative) but is worth investigating.

### What PFC can do to help

- Speak to industry and urge them to find ways of increasing their pace. Couch it as doing so protects our communities and forests.
- Speak to the public about the wildfire crisis, the need for restoration work in general, and how widespread use of prescribed fire is a key tool.
- **Action:** Restart the PFC Communications Committee
- Support the Forest when it uses conditions-based management. PFC ST members stated if the Forest comes to the PFC with the rationale for doing so, that will help the Coalition reach consensus for its use (some PFC members are uncomfortable with it).
- Let the Forest know if there are unaddressed concerns. Forest concerned that if they don't know about them the partnership will be negatively impacted. Linda asked all to think about how the PFC and PNF could work through conflicts. Facilitator noted that PFC and Forest did just that today: concerns were brought to the table, participants defined interests and perceptions underlying stated concerns, and with that in hand mutually identified ways to address those concerns and interests.