

**Payette Forest Coalition
Meeting Notes
February 17, 2022**

Desired Outcomes

- (1) Consider ways to address concerns about the PFC and its relationship with the Payette National Forest.
- (2) Understand what led to BFC's Sage Hen objection and explore ways to avoid something similar here.

PFC Concerns, PFC Steering Team

MAIN POINTS

- Small, limited-scope projects do not fit well with PFC goals, are not apparently connected to a larger landscape, and (in terms of veg-only projects) cannot address catastrophic wildfire threats at the landscape level. At same time, the inevitable need for the Forest to take on smaller projects because of insect and disease outbreaks, post-fire salvage, etc. is understood.
- PFC exhibits characteristics of an organization in decline (people lose interest, purpose seems unclear, progress isn't being made, little sense of accomplishment, dissension increases, it isn't fun anymore). Observation made there are a number of things going on which could also cause these symptoms, however. Examples: the loss of LCBC probably hurt more than many realized; the pandemic has disrupted relationships, isolated everyone, and made working together difficult (i.e., not enjoyable); and turnover on the Forest has made it hard to build and maintain the PFC/PNF relationships. It was also pointed out that the PFC has continued to meet and do what it can in spite of everything that has happened. This suggests resilience.
- Lack of face-to-face interaction and capacity issues generally constrain PFC/PNF efforts. Forest mentioned that a major hurdle to hiring is the fact that housing is either unavailable or unaffordable.
- Observation made that when leadership leaves, things seem to slow or stop. There is worry that knowledge (gleaned from interactions with PFC) also goes with that person and is not transmitted to those coming in. Linda Jackson talked about how outgoing leadership takes care to bring incoming people up to speed but recognizes that a person can only absorb so much.

KEY MESSAGES

- General sense that concerns and potential solutions posed by the Steering Team (appended to [February 2022 agenda](#)) are on-target. The following are suggested priorities that might help alleviate some of the concerns and/or be generally helpful in strengthening the relationship between Forest and collaborative. *Note: Bullet points with stars by them come from the Sage Hen conversation which sparked more ideas about this agenda item. They have been moved here for clarity.*
 - A visual representation (interactive map) might do a better job of showing what has been accomplished, how limited-scope projects are connected to each other and the larger landscape.

- In similar vein, a roadmap showing what is next and the connectivity between projects on each landscape would help PFC make choices about where and when it wants to engage. Question posed: To what extent would the Forest be willing to include PFC in prioritizing which landscapes (and/or portions thereof) get treated? Forest asked for time to think about that.
- There is a need to figure out how to increase the scale of projects, particularly when it comes to questions of catastrophic wildfire. How can this be accomplished?
- *A 1-page document describing the PFC and key historical milestones could be prepared and given to incoming personnel. When overwhelmed with information, something like this would be easy to digest prior to the more comprehensive conversations outlined below.
- *Steering Team and key longtime members should meet with new leadership to talk about PFC's purpose, key pieces of its history, milestones, agreements and expectations (between Coalition members as well as between the PFC and Forest). Would also serve to gain a sense of the incoming person's priorities as well as how they (and PFC) view collaboration, what it has been in the past, and whether change should be expected.
- Some analysis/diagnosis of why PFC is struggling and subsequent suggestions for remedies is needed. No clear consensus on whether to do this in-house (Facilitator has a tool and process) or bring in outside resources.
- Some analysis/diagnosis of following questions (and likely others) is called for. Agreement that the Forest and PFC must have this conversation together. No clear consensus on whether this should be done in-house or by a third party. Some worry this could be too dicey a conversation to have without outside help. Has the nature of collaboration between the Forest and PFC changed? How do the Forest and PFC each define collaboration? In the past PFC members have felt they were empowered to influence decision making. How do they feel now? Do members want to be empowered collaborators or do they want to play a different role?
- The upcoming April IFRP conference will feature some discussions about maintaining the health and wellbeing of collaboratives. Members are urged to attend.
- Linda Jackson stressed the value of PFC to the Forest and its strong desire to participate with the Coalition's efforts to address concerns. She expressed appreciation for today's conversation and noted the fact that it being openly done shows all care and want to find solutions.

ACTIONS

- Actively explore possibility of in-person meetings and/or field trip/meeting combinations. Meetings would need to be held off-site as the SO will not be open.
- Start mapping out field trips very soon. Facilitator noted this is possibly on the agenda for March (more likely April given what's coming next month).
- Monitoring Committee should reconvene soon. If field trips are part of that equation, it should play a role in the bullet above. Facilitator will follow up with committee members and Wendy Green about this.

- Facilitator pledged to reach out to Jeff and Dana soon to ask what they would like to know about PFC and, if he cannot provide that information, will connect them to a Coalition member who can.
- Facilitator will connect with Randy Fox about resources that could be helpful for the last two bullets in Key Messages. He will also send the tool he mentioned above to PFC members.

Sage Hen, Rachel Vandenburg

MAIN POINTS

- Project began Fall 2012. Numerous field trips taken during initial assessment of the area. Original footprint was 100,000+ acres and offered very diverse set of restoration opportunities. Ultimately split into two pieces (north and south) because data lacking on northern portion. Focused on southern area (High Valley) while data gathered.
- Northern landscape (Sage Hen) work delayed by Pioneer Fire. BFC actively provided input for salvage and restoration and supported Forest during litigation. Sage Hen restarted in 2018 when BFC was presented with a draft scoping document. Was not asked to engage during NFMA. Various portions of landscape subsequently treated using smaller projects to address insect and disease concerns.
- Submitted [scoping comments](#) May 2020 and spent summer trying to address concerns. Some were addressed, others were not.
- Draft EA came out late 2020. There was one action alternative and no public comment period was offered (went right to objection period). BFC's objection letter may be seen starting on page 5 of the [following document](#). It also subsequently submitted a follow up letter after the objection resolution process and which is at the end of the above-referenced document.

KEY MESSAGES

- No single event or action led to the objection; it was a combination of many things over a number of years. These included loss of key people on the Forest (Supervisor, District Ranger, BFC Liaison) who understood the project's history and knowledge of BFC's work on it. This suggests the importance of new leadership being aware of such things and the importance of those who transition out and/or remain to educate newcomers. Relationships between a Forest and collaborative are also key; collaborative members with links to past can help bring newcomers up to speed.
- When there are pauses over the life of a project, it is critical to review "where we left off" before starting up again. Helps ensure that all are on the same page.
- In regard to deciding when a collaborative has opportunities to engage on a project, a NEPA roadmap can be tremendously helpful (no surprises, everyone understands what is going to happen and when).
- Good documentation can help review past agreements, mutual expectations, etc. between Forest and collaborative

News and Updates

Implementation update, Paul Klasner

- Paul will try to create a visual representation of implementation in the future. Winter, so things slow right now. FY 2021 highlights included: 1100 ac of prescribed fire in Rock Flats and Brundage areas; timber sales under contract were Rusty Goose, GNA Rocky Goose and Brundage Bear Basin; watershed restoration had delays in 2021, but they will finish up the Bear Basin project this year; non-commercial thinning awarded 6,000-7,000 acres on various projects for 2022; recreation has been very active with the Avalanche Program and snowmobilers have had two recent fun runs; they already have 2,000 acres on the list to award in 2022 for 2023. The full report has been posted to [the PFC's CFLRP library](#).
- JI Morgan in New Meadows closing its doors and that will definitely impact industry capacity. Forest talking to other contractors. Some discussion about whether industry as a whole has the tools to carry out veg and timber work and if there is enough work to sustain them. Suggestion made that it would be helpful for the Vegetation Committee flesh out who that question is directed at and what the overall purpose of the discussion would be.

Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

Members are urged to check out Dennis Murphy's [Storymap](#) describing Title VIII of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. It has significant implications for restoration work. There are a number of upcoming discussions related to it and understanding a bit about it will be helpful. Members may also want to look at two additional pieces of information that help explain various aspects of the Act: A summary of the bill provided by Darren Parker (appended below) and a link to the [Forest Service's 10-year Wildfire Strategy](#) from Brian Harris. Brian notes that although the [Wildfire Crisis Strategy](#) is the initial plan for moving forward and pieces of it might change in the future, it does create a way forward for addressing the wildfire threat across the West.

Congressional Update, Darren Parker

When Secure Rural Schools was reauthorized last year, no money was allocated for county search and rescue. A fix for that is quickly working its way through Congress and should be completed soon.

Potential March meeting agenda items

Major items include Railroad Saddle proposed action (30-day comment period), Cold July EA Decision (45-day objection period). Both are expected to be released the first week of March. Suggestion to discuss logistics for decision making and submitting comment and support letters at the March Steering Team meeting.

Adjourned at 12:15 a.m.

Next meeting: March 17, 2022

Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill Summary

Note: Some of these items may have requirements/authorities associated with the money that may not be the same as the underlying program.

- \$3.369B to FS and BLM for Wildfire Risk Reduction for FY22-FY26. Of this amount:
 - \$100M for CFLRP – Includes facilitation.
 - Extends SRS for three years at FY17 levels with no ramp down. RAC members must be approved within 30 days otherwise deemed approved.
 - \$400M for FS for mechanical thinning, timber harvest in an ecologically appropriate manner that maximizes large tree retention as appropriate for the forest type.
 - \$480M for federal wildland firefighter's salaries and expenses.
 - \$50M to train non-federal firefighters.
 - \$500M for community wildfire defense grants.
 - \$250M for Prescribed fire.
 - \$250M for fuel breaks.
 - \$100M for the removal of vegetation that will employ young adults, Native youth or veterans to produce biochar. (Youth Conservation Corp.)
 - \$100M for post fire restoration.
 - \$8M to provide feedstock for firewood banks.
 - Creates a new position within FS and BLM – the "Wildland Firefighter".
- \$2.130B to FS and BLM for Ecosystem Restoration for FY22-FY26. Of this amount:
 - \$150M to FS and \$100M to BLM for landscape-scale contracts, including stewardship contracts, to restore ecological health on federal lands (10,000 acre minimum). Creates the Working Capital Fund to cover cancellation costs.
 - \$160M for FS to help states and tribes implement GNA.
 - \$400M to USDA for financial assistance for facilities that purchase and process byproducts from ecosystem restoration projects (i.e. biochar).
 - \$50M for state and tribes to establish a rental program for portable skidder bridges to minimize stream bed disturbance.
 - \$100M for invasive species eradication.
 - \$100M restore or adapt recreation sites that have experienced overuse.
 - \$100M to restore vegetation on previously mined lands.
 - \$130M for revegetation.
 - \$80M to establish a collaborative based program that will restore water quality or fish passage on federal land.
 - Create new CE for fuel breaks that are up to 1000 feet in width.
 - Codifies the Joint Chiefs Program.
 - Emergency Actions – (separate and in addition to the existing emergency action authority under NEPA). If Secretary of Agriculture determines and EA or EIS is an emergency action, the agency will only analyze two options: the action and no action alternative. Public comment is required. Actions under this section are not subject to the objections process and cannot be enjoined if it is unlikely the plaintiff cannot succeed on the merits.

- Requires FS and BLM to treat 10 million acres located in the WUI or a public drinking water source.
- \$360M for Capital Improvements and Maintenance – to build temp roads for forest restoration activities or reconstruction and maintenance of existing roads.
- \$250M for Legacy Roads and Trails Program
- \$84M per year for the Recreational Trails Program

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