

**Payette Forest Coalition  
Meeting Notes  
April 20, 2023**

**Desired Outcomes**

- (1) Decide whether to submit a letter of support for the Railroad Saddle draft Decision Notice.
- (2) Understand what rehabilitation actions PNF is considering for the Four Corners Fire landscape.
- (3) Understand the PNF's plans for fuels reduction projects on the Payette National Forest.

**Railroad Saddle**

**MAIN POINTS**

- PFC understands Forest's approach of not altering commercial treatments planned under LCBC (because they are already under contract) and largely tiering non-commercial ones to what was previously planned. Members observed, however, that:
  - From a lay person's perspective, the EA is written in a way that is very hard to understand.
  - Treatments seem light, particularly when looking at the project's Storymap. How will this create landscape-level resiliency?
  - Of all the types of vegetation treatment proposed, only commercial thinning can change important metrics for improved conditions including lower canopy density and larger tree size class in both the short and longer term (25 years). The relatively small amount of improvement (movement toward desired conditions) in these metrics is a direct result of thinning only a small percentage of stands in PVGs 1-6 commercially. Removing large trees using commercial treatments is the only way to open up the canopy. Rx Fire and NCT will not accomplish this.
  - Concern expressed that: 1) Planting [Whitebark pine \(WBP\)](#) in modeled habitat versus where it actually exists has the potential to create future conflicts, 2) [Current proposed WBP treatments do not address fine fuels management in those areas](#), and 3) [Wildfire is one of the major threats to WBP survival, particularly to the young regeneration stands](#).
  - Forest Service (FS) made aware that additional comments about the project were posted on the [PFC Forum](#).
- In its draft EA comment letter, PFC requested that FS report vegetation treatment acres by PVG. Request was not met. Did FS misunderstand what PFC was asking for? Observation made that FS had the data because wildlife reports, for example, show treatment acres by PVG.
  - Underlying rationale for the request was: 1) acreages help PFC members understand the footprint and aggressiveness of proposed treatments in each PVG and, 2) acreages help PFC gauge whether proposed treatments are consistent with recommendations.

**KEY MESSAGES**

- FS did not address PFC's request to report treatment acres by PVG because doing so would have delayed the project (i.e., would have required pulling the Silviculturist off Granite Goose to do this and that would have taken a lot of time).
- FS identified treatment impacts that will probably affect things such as tree size and stand canopy closure in the Decision Notice instead of the vegetation section of the EA as PFC requested.
- FS added a project design feature for Elk security in areas where commercial treatments occur. PFC had debated whether to request this in its draft EA comment letter and ultimately decided doing so could be problematic.
- PFC requested that use of Rx Fire in favor of livestock grazing be limited in whitebark pine (WBP) stands. Forest could not commit to that because grazing falls outside of the project's scope and consultation with US Fish and Wildlife—not the Forest's decision making—will dictate what treatments can be done.
  - Discussed whether some mention of grazing will be included as a fine-fuel treatment tool in future projects such as Granite Goose. Observed that FS had previously agreed that targeted grazing could be cited as a tool because it does not change existing permits or trigger new NEPA. Is that still the case?
- Question whether project would be held up if consultation requires FS to change its treatments from what was planned. Answer: 1) the Decision Notice will go unsigned until consultation on the project is complete (FS expects all Forest-wide consultation to be done by early July), and 2) if changes are required, project design features will be added rather than redesigning the entire EA.
- Roll call vote whether to submit the draft letter which asks for a seat at the table should there be an objection to the project and includes a statement of support for the EA/FONSI/Decision Notice: 9 voting members present, 8 enthusiastically support, 1 can live with it.

## **ACTIONS**

- FS will present the next version of the project's Storymap to PFC for feedback before it goes live.
- Forest will report treatment acres by PVG on Granite Goose.
- The Vegetation Committee will meet with the Forest's Silviculturist to explain its rationale for acres by PVG request to ensure PFC and Forest are on same page.
- Dana will consult with Linda about whether grazing will be included in future projects.
- Facilitator will submit the letter to FS on behalf of the PFC.

## **Four Corners Fire Rehabilitation, Jeff Jones, PNF**

### **MAIN POINTS**

- Jeff referenced this [map](#) in his presentation outlining the Forest's plans for the area. Dark green and blue-orange polygons correspond to the Boise and Payette National Forests, respectively.
- Replacement of fencing exclosures along Sheep Creek, range seeding, and replacement of two spring troughs will be done using a CE. Exclosures will be complete by August 15. Seeding might be done this year, trough replacement next year.

- Reforestation on hold for now. The Sheep Creek drainage burned fairly hot along with some other locations. FS plans to further survey the fire more this year to make determinations for natural regeneration along with possible planting of trees in the future. The fire did not burn hot outside of the Sheep Creek watershed and FS believes natural regeneration will occur in most of those areas.
  - Question whether BIL funding for post-fire restoration (up to 3 years after a fire) being considered for this and other actions. Answer: For reforestation, probably, unsure whether that will be the case for other planned actions. FS has Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) funding for 3 years which is helping for roads (culvert replacement and upgrades over the entire fire) along with some of the other work that the CE's being done will have in them.
- Salvage:
  - Boise National Forest (BNF) working on this within its boundaries. Some decisions were signed before the fire so BNF is either adding more work into them or designing additional CE's.
  - Salvage on Payette side more complex. Yellow and brown units on map have been dropped because it is critical bull trout habitat and yellow area north of Sheep Creek is inaccessible because a previous decision that closed roads into the area and slated them for obliteration. The key issue is >.5 miles of road building would be needed to access the area which exceeds what a CE permits. Only other option would be an EA. and FS does not perceive it is worth the time and expense to do one given the amount of potentially salvageable timber there and the viability of that timber by the time an EA would be done (which would be next year). FS will try to get the salvage out this year using a CE.
  - Blue area on map falls within the Cold Bug timber sale boundary. FS estimates 50-150 acres of salvage will be added to it depending on outcomes of its final recon.
  - Other areas of the fire outside of the Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) are several plantations, RCA exclusions from previous harvest, scattered larger timber that only had surface burning, and small, isolated patches of timber that may have burned. A lot was under burnt. IRA is delineated on the map by light blue with hash marks and mostly falls within the BNF (green/blue with hash marks). Other areas on map on the west side of fire's footprint are either old plantations (nothing to salvage) or IRAs (no access).
- Is there a contingency plan in place to clean and replace culverts in the event of quick snowmelt? Answer: Yes. FS plans to do that this spring (there are 3 to be replaced under a Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation plan).
- Is FS obligated to follow previous decisions regarding obliteration in cases where the roads still exist? Answer: Yes, probably. Will keep looking to see if there is another way in but fact remains >.5 miles of any roadbuilding precludes use of a CE.

**Fuels reduction, Patrick Schon, PNF**

#### **MAIN POINTS**

- Rx Fire fall of 2022
  - Used funding to bring in burn crews, public information specialists, and other off-Forest resources to help plan and implement projects. U of I is helping with post-fire

- monitoring and FS is using numerous agreements with public and private entities including BLM to do work in and outside the Southwestern Idaho Landscape (SIL).
- Cooperators included [ID and MT Air Shed Group](#) which helped guide decision making regarding fire and air quality.
- Just under 10,000 acres of Rx Fire applied last Fall (7950 acres in the SIL, 1600 acres outside).
- Non-Commercial Thin (NCT)
  - 8300 acres of NCT awarded using GNA authority with IDL in Fall 2022, implementation will be this Summer. Planning another 8200 acres for FY 2023 (6000 acres inside the SIL, 2200 acres outside).
  - Forged [Good Neighbor Authority \(GNA\) agreement agreements](#) with Adams [County and in discussion with](#) ~~and~~ Valley County [for NCT work.](#) ~~Have agreements with~~ The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and others for NCT projects. FS will pull people from TNC, BLM, Idaho Conservation Core, and others to do NCT and WBP surveys (latter helps plan fuels treatments in WBP stands).
- Commercial treatments: In [November 2022, 879 loads of logs were hauled off the forest.](#) In December [2022](#), 866 loads of logs were hauled ~~off the forest.~~ *Facilitator note:* A review of [the](#) January 2023 [PFC's](#) meeting notes shows that almost 1700 loads of logs were harvested from November 1 through [mid-the](#) January ~~PFC meeting date.~~

## KEY MESSAGES

- Interest expressed to hear what other sorts of fuels treatments are being done (e.g., targeted grazing, fuel breaks, WUI treatments) and other ways funds are being used given the BIL and IRA provided money for many other things in addition to RX Fire and NCT.
  - FS reported that on top of what is usually received, \$17.8M of additional funding was received and shared with the BNF for fuels treatments in the SIL and \$323M was received for 2023. Among other things, influx of money has allowed Forest to bring in more people and organizations to help [with project planning and implementation.](#) ~~which, in turn~~ [This](#), has helped lower the rate of burnout among [fire personnel](#) ~~our employees~~, enabled FS to do things its staff cannot, and increase the level of public outreach regarding fuels reduction.
- Ideas floated to FS included using funds to subsidize fuels projects (both commercial and non-commercial) that were shelved because were unprofitable or simply unaffordable (e.g., hauling off woody debris for co-gen and other innovative uses for wood products).

## ACTIONS

- Forest will brief PFC on how funds are being used for other sorts of fuels management projects at a future meeting.

## News and Updates

- [Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership \(IFRP\)](#) will host two events. The first is a free webinar on Wildfire Trends, Forest Regeneration and Intervention on May 9, 2023 from 11:00-12:00 MDT. More information can be seen [here](#). The second is this year's

annual meeting in Missoula, MT working in partnership with the MT Forest Collaborative Network. The meeting will be held in-person November 2-3. Travel scholarships will be available. Stay tuned for details.

- Gloria Pippen requested Carl Jorgensen's contact information for a potential insect and disease presentation in Valley County. Chris Clark will send her the information.
- Adams County Soil and Water Conservation District will hold a private lands (fuels treatment) forestry tour in ~~the~~ Meadows Valley, June 14. Wendy Green will send the Facilitator more information once it is put together.
- Mac Lefebvre is leaving Idaho Forest Group at month's end and will take a position with MAST Reforestation. Mike Reggear will be his interim replacement. Thank you, Mac, for your years of service on the PFC and welcome, Mike.
- Jenni Blake is now Recreation, Heritage, Lands and Minerals (RHLM) Staff Officer. Will Perry is detailed into [the Engineering Staff Officer position](#) for the next 4 months. Jason Wright is the ~~current a~~ Acting [District](#) Ranger for the McCall District. A permanent hire has been ~~made and will be announced soon~~ offered and is [working its way through the HR process. Hopefully an announcement will be forthcoming.](#)

**Adjourned at 11:30 am**

**Next meeting: May 18, 2023**

# PFC Meeting Sign-In (Remote) Apr 2023

4/20/2023 8:51:55	JOANN K FLY	JOANN BOOKKEEPING INC.	joannfly@yahoo.com	0	0
4/20/2023 8:55:24	Patrick Schon	USDA	patrick.schon@usda.gov		
4/20/2023 8:56:40	Rick Tholen	SAF			
4/20/2023 8:57:13	Dana Harris	Payette NF			
4/20/2023 8:59:49	Larry Laxson	Valley County			
4/20/2023 8:59:51	Megan Heider	Payette NF		5	10
4/20/2023 8:59:53	Wendu Green	Adams Soil & Water Conservation District		0	0
4/20/2023 8:59:59	Gloria Pippin	Heartland Back Country Horsemen			
4/20/2023 9:02:49	Frank Schwartz	Weiser River Cattle Association			
4/20/2023 9:02:53	Ryan Rambur	Idaho Department of Lands- GNA			
4/20/2023 9:03:10	Michael Gibson	Trout Unlimited		0	0
4/20/2023 9:03:24	Lin Davis	Circle C Ranches		0	0
4/20/2023 9:03:37	Jeff Jones	Payette NF- Council/Weiser District Ranger			
4/20/2023 9:04:09	Tim Leishman	USDA Forest Service			
4/20/2023 10:43:12	Alex Ernst	IDPR	alex.ernst@idpr.idaho.gov		