

Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative
Joint Rigdon Collaboration Committee and Interdisciplinary Team Meeting
Wednesday, April 3, 12:30 – 4:00

Facilitator: Sarah A.

Young's Rock Rigdon - Wildlife/project purpose and need/proposed action
SWFC working with Forest Service since 2016 on this project; entering NEPA phases

Summer field trips - Outreach to the public via planning committee
Article recently published for *Western Forester* about the Rigdon project

Shooting for end of May for the scoping

- Public field trip during open comment period so people have a chance to see scoping notice and have time to offer comments

Wildlife

- Associated with historically much more open canopy forest
- Red tree voles – ground surveys and climbing to nests
 - “uncommon” species, some sites can be declared as not needing protection
 - Utilizing new process – networked areas currently protected, new high-priority sites, and connectivity corridors (at 5th field watershed, approx. 100,000 acres); must go through NEPA process
 - Team developed draft strategy

Discussion

- Connections to Umpqua but not Deschutes watershed – no habitat on the eastern side of crest (nor along crest)
- roads through connectivity areas would be a gap greater than the permitted 100 ft
- Continuing survey/management in places where there isn't suitable habitat?
 - Too fragmented
- Can red tree vole be relocated?
 - They are territorial but could be relocated
 - Assume a lot of the habitat is occupied
 - Would be more vulnerable to predation
- Pink areas on map?
 - Forest plan designations that would provide for red tree vole
 - Special interest areas/LSRs
 - Are any timber activities allowed within these areas?
 - No, not really; most don't have stands within them
 - Main concern would be road construction, some limited fuel reduction
- Are red tree voles food for spotted owls?
 - 4% of the diet when examining pellets; flying squirrels and wood rats tend to be much more their main food source

- Designation as high priority even if we don't know that they're occupied? Has any field checking been done?
 - It's based on habitat characteristics; high relative density of red tree voles and therefore likely to be occupied
 - Red tree voles need Douglas firs; this is characteristic of their habitats; high-quality, old growth reserves (100 ft tall trees, etc)
- High priority sites are the only areas that need three connectivity corridors; reserves have fewer
- What about the high priority sites that are overlaid with riparian areas? Are they 600 ft instead of the usual 300 ft?
 - HP sites are 600, but need to revisit the overlays
 - Connectivity is only 300 ft
 - Floodplain restoration would be incompatible with high priority sites, so many are moved away from riparian zones
- What does GNN stand for?
 - Greater nearest neighbor?
- How does tree vole density here compare to other areas?
 - This is the core/high density red tree vole habitat
 - On what scale? Across the range (Western Oregon)
- What % of model compared to historic habitat would be RTV habitat? Fragmenting something we're trying to restore
- 10-25 acre high priority sites seems very small. Would this be more effective if areas were larger? Long-term persistence of healthy populations?
 - There's definitely more habitat outside of those high priority sites
 - Surrounding habitat is not likely to be removed
- Can we compare maps of RTV plan and overall Young's Rock Rigdon action/treatment areas?
 - What's the likelihood that a new project will come along and will look for a new red tree vole strategy?
 - Landscape is not recovered yet
 - Priorities are persistent and well-developed habitat
- Managed under Northwest Forest Survey and Manage not ESA
 - Differs from/adds a new tool to current management direction
 - Managing a network rather than distinct sites
 - In forest over 80 years old, density is 8 nests per 10 acres
- Historical perspective –
 - Jim's Creek surveys – all animals put on list were perceived to be rare
 - Red tree voles were determined not to be rare based on surveys, but then they were put back on the list
- Spotted owls –
 - Only one successful nest site found in the survey territories
 - even/odd years – no weather events that would have predicted a bad year for breeding pairs
 - Presence of barred owls has an influence
- What is the elevation limit for the owls?

- Not the same 4500 ft limit as red tree voles; they go much higher
 - Mountain hemlock/pacific silver fir zone tends to be the line
 - Owls nest more in the Doug fir areas
 - Back to red tree voles – should there be no holes larger than one square kilometer?
 - Not every kilometer on grid had to have red tree vole habitat to be considered well distributed; some gaps of low-quality habitat exist
 - Good habitat areas were not left out
 - Some areas were impossible to get good connectivity corridors into and were therefore left as survey & manage
 - Riparian areas with openings greater than 100 ft were considered barriers; crossings considered at areas where tree cover gap is less than 100 ft
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First draft went out in November, with a substantial volume of comments discussed in December

RLA identified degraded portion of the landscape, which would be good to include in the second sentence of the purpose and need document; this was a main driver for the project

Concern that “foster and manage” will lead to a large number of alternative actions

- Statement wasn’t reflective of a lot of the discussion that happened in November/December
- Many of the restoration and recreation concerns are covered under existing NEPA
- Language will be changed in next iteration to narrow down the statement to make it more specific to scope
- NEPA process is to address to public the projects that need approval but don’t yet have it – large recreation section in the FLAD
- Focus on trail and dispersed recreation sites within Young’s Rock Rigdon
 - Wheedled down to being not very useful?
 - Need legal approval for trail, don’t need to ask for it on broader areas/stewardship grants
 - Concern about what happens in 5 years when new people come in to manage and don’t understand the history of the project
 - FLAD should tell that story
 - Zones of agreement, clearly identified the work to be done through NEPA
 - Defer to forest service about what needs to be included
 - Keep talking about it w/ FLAD and during planning meetings
 - Proposed action includes foot bridges and other specific elements that do need approval
 - Need to be able to minimize alternatives to a number that can be effectively analyzed
- What about cultural uses?
 - Consult with tribes prior to any public scoping
 - Working with Klamath tribe

- Specific areas of trail are priorities for them
 - Will extend invitations for field trips to them
- Comments on mixed conifer to be handed off
- What historic point in time is targeted?
 - Desired condition is the priority rather than a specific moment in time
 - Can't say it's exactly what existed in 1850 v 1890 v 1910
 - May never be achievable with climate change
 - Resiliency is the major consideration
- Additional concerns should be relayed to Sarah/brought up at planning meetings
 - All collaborative members should do their homework and read drafts/emails as they come up

Reminder – zones of agreement

- Might need to have more discussions that are project-specific; landscape level may be sufficient, but it's always possible to have deeper discussions and the project level

Understory fuel treatment areas strategically placed adjacent to private lands

Breakdown of early versus second growth in commercial harvest

- “fire regenerated stands” is a misnomer; “natural origin” may be a better term
- “second growth” is also confusing in a non-plantation context
- How were stands selected for treatment?
 - Mixed conifer – older stands that had dense doug fir with scattered legacy trees rather than classically open, diverse stands
 - Composition and structure considered
 - Openings in map are literally openings in the canopy (rock slides, etc.)
 - Areas not selected for treatment were more complex, younger, or otherwise didn't meet the same criteria for treatment
 - What's in green is potential commercial harvest
 - Understory burning and other treatments would be a possibility elsewhere
 - Young pine plantations proposed for non-commercial treatment? Could get at goals of project
 - Covered under pine grass plantation CE
 - Not needed under this NEPA analysis
 - Need to be considered under retained receipts
 - Would be helpful to see where past treatments were done and where others might be done that are not considered in this NEPA
 - Past, present, and reasonable future section of EA will include that information
 - Some types of stands with big pines, oaks, and grass excluded from pine grass because they were too complex
- Some trees that are considered for thinning are up to 150 years old
 - How much of the volume? All of the volume in the natural origins stand

- Similar to Jim's Creek
- Cessation of underburning created these stands; they were never logged
 - James will be talking about this at length during next planning meeting
 - 1881 (130 years)
- Removed some trees around legacy trees
- Some burning in 1870s with construction of military road/Klamath tribe
- Young pine stands that were too old for pine grass – is there capacity for surveys of those to be included with this NEPA?
 - To do so would delay this EIS by a year
 - This is the first project but will not be the only one within the landscape
 - Opportunities to inform future projects
- Jim's Creek – 12 legacy trees left per acre, historically 15 on average
- Dominant tree release would happen within managed stands
 - Gaps within plantation and natural origin stands, some structure would be maintained; might leave more live trees in these gaps
 - Include oak – especially older oak, along with ponderosa and sugar pines
- Planting included in floodplain restoration?
 - Likely – cedar, willow
 - Regeneration of native species exceeded expectations
- Is thinning in riparian zones including trees over 150 years old?
 - Yes
 - Aquatic rationale? Still having that conversation
 - Some of the material may be permitted to be used for floodplain mitigation (consideration of commercial thinning & riparian restoration still on the table)
- Is dappled light better for milkweed?
 - Disagreement whether dappled is better or fully open areas
 - Monarch meadow is bare of milkweed in the middle
 - Issues with encroachment
- Who is working on the trail project along Military Wagon Road?
 - Chloe is primary contact, Kevin (trail specialist) also
 - May be more of a heritage question
- Management of dispersed recreation along river?
 - Plan to evaluate each site and look at roads for storage/decommissioning or leaving open
 - A lot of those roads are in the floodplain
 - Subcommittee meeting next week; will be documenting conversation and providing rationale
 - Working to balance recreation and road strategy
 - Some sites are maintained better than others
 - Some sites may be made hike-in only
 - NEPA “respect the river” initiative ~a decade ago would be good to revisit rather than reinventing the wheel
 - Information is being pulled for the meeting next week

- Proposed action as a whole – recreation paragraph is very specific, whereas harvest paragraph (1) is less detailed
 - Emphasis should be placed on what the treatments are and what they mean
 - Make it easier for public consumption/understanding to generate substantive responses
- Include relationship between cessation of fire and thinning in purpose and need
 - Last date of fire should not be used as rationale for why a tree should be removed – more nuanced; grazing, precipitation also heavily impacted forest growth
- Re-engaging story map over the next 1-2 months

To-dos for collaborative

- Region 6 meeting, so no Rigdon planning meeting
- May 2 Fires and Special Habitats meeting
- Late May/early June road-by-road, stand-by-stand
- Push meetings by a week
- Steering committee position open
- Might need to start meeting monthly rather than 5x a year
- Trying to have recreation meeting before start of summer
- Storm impacts to upcoming surveys?
 - Discussion of having a flight to see what areas were affected – happening Thursday or Friday depending on weather
 - Low and mid-level elevations more affected
 - Low-med-high priority map – highest is opening roads
 - Press release that firewood will be increased from 6 cords to 12 per household this year
- Coal Creek re-route – was that postponed? TBD
- Lots of trailwork going on every weekend