Public Meeting for the Spruce Beetle Epidemic and Aspen Decline Management Response Project (SBEADMR) - Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests (GMUG)

Date: December 3, 2013. 9 am – 3:30 pm

Location: Holiday Inn Express – Large Conference Room, Montrose, CO

Purpose: to learn more about the Forest Service's anticipated approach and begin collaborative discussions on the Spruce Beetle Epidemic and Aspen Decline Management Response Project

Notes

To view the meeting presentations, visit the WCLC website at: http://westcolc.org/presentations-from-the-gmug-spruceaspen-project-meeting/

1. Overview of spruce bark beetle and its impact on the GMUG & other forests in the state - Tom Eager, USFOREST SERVICE Gunnison Service Center. http://westcolc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Spruce-Beetle-on-the-GMUG-Tom-Eager.pdf
2. Overview of Sudden Aspen Decline and its impact of the GMUG NF & forests in the state - Jim Worrall, USFOREST SERVICE Gunnison Service Center. http://westcolc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Aspen-Decline-on-the-GMUG-Jim-Worrall.pdf
3. Project Overview and Goals - Carmine Lockwood, USFOREST SERVICE. http://westcolc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Spruce-Beetle-and-Aspen-Decline-Response-Project-Carmine-Lockwood.pdf
4. Utilization and Local Forest Products Industry Needs - Local forest products companies. http://westcolc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Montrose-Forest-Products-Norm-Bircher.pdf
5. Adaptive NEPA Process - Clay Speas, USFOREST SERVICE. http://westcolc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Adaptive-Management-Clay-Speas.pdf
6. Small Group Break Out Sessions on issues/concerns – Multiple Facilitators

Concerns voiced during the small group discussions:

- Ecological:
    - Connectivity of wildlife habitat on a landscape scale—migration corridors, free travel of species so can keep gene pools healthy.
    - Climate change uncertainty
    - Placement of Treatments
    - Overlogging
    - It is not good forest health if we get rid of all of the big trees, they're needed for wildlife, especially some birds and bats.
    - If don't treat, you'll lose your seed source. Could go to aspen or brush and grass—type conversion.
    - Losing large parts of the forest to wildfire.
    - Look at low sideboard – are we doing enough to have a real impact?
    - Concern that past treatments have degraded the landscape, degraded wildlife habitat.

  - Concern of lack of regeneration after treatment
  - Concern that high level of treatment in 20% of the forest will lead to road density, fragmentation.
  - The project is broad and not as sight specific as we are used to. What are the unintended consequences of a project of this scope? (Compounded disturbances of drought, increased temperatures, salvage logging, etc). Are we going to disturb shade tolerant species and natural regeneration with active management?
  - Can we really have an impact on forest health or is this a climate change issue that is beyond active management?
  - Prioritization of treatments. With all of the unknowns, shouldn't we focus on community safety?
  - What are the cumulative effects of this project?
  - Concern that we are assuming that humans can do it better than nature. Shouldn't we let nature take its course?
  - Concern over a lack of regeneration and resource damage due to livestock grazing
  - Is the result sustainable?
  - What is the best vegetation type for carbon storage? And water holding capacity? Adaption – which species should we choose to regenerate if climate is a factor?
  - Given the severity of beetle outbreaks, we should have started this effort 5 years ago.
- Economic:
  - Where do you put the money from timber receipts?
  - Want to salvage dead trees before they lose commercial viability
  - Impact to livestock permitees
  - Concern over a loss in property values due to a loss in aspen and spruce.
  - Colorado economies are highly dependent on tourism and beautiful forests. Inaction will lead to a loss in economic viability for local areas.
  - Concern that this project is driven by economics and the desire to support the local lumber mill, not ecological reasons.
  - Concern of 90-100% mortality, catastrophic wildfire, loss of homes/lives/powerlines/ roads closed/ whole communities at risk
  - We need to keep the lumber mills viable, so we can continue to do forest health work.
  - Historically a huge portion of timber sales have been below cost. Are taxpayers underwriting the true cost of sales? If this is helping the outbreak, that is okay, but is this sustainable?
  - Concerned with fire costs
  - Concerns = coal
- Accountability
  - Something is lost in the transition from the Record of Decision (ROD) to actually getting something done on the ground (implementation); important to bridge that "gap"
  - Concern over a lack of transparency
- Utilization:
  - What will be done with the slash and non-commercial wood 'waste'?
  - Excess slash remaining after treatment inhibits regeneration and pile burning is costly and wasteful

  - Industry business models must include flexibility to obtain product from non-Federal sources
  - A desire for equity within companies that can be involved in the project. Small diameter trees vs. sawlogs effects who is interested
  - Will there be competition for biomass between traditional and energy companies?
  - Biomass for energy – How does it fit into the project?
  - How can we utilize timber without resource damage (unintended consequences)?
  - How will timber receipts be used for reforestation?
- Consistency:
  - Inconsistencies with this 10-year project and the new Forest Plan when it is prepared.
  - Inconsistencies with this 10-yer project and other Land Management Plans (BLM, counties, etc)
  - I am concerned with the timeframe of this project and with the need for a new forest plan coinciding with that timeframe.
  - Wants flexibility built into new forest plan. Best science, room for evolving science.
- Science:
  - Will there be flexibility in the NEPA to address new science and changing conditions?
  - How do we incorporate new science and lessons learned post decision?
  - How do we deal with conflicting science?
  - What science is this project based on? Are we heading in the right direction?
  - How will we deal with 'junk science'?
  - An issue of trust in what science the Forest Service has access to and how that is being incorporated was expressed. Land managers don't have time to follow all the literature. How can we help them be aware of newest and best science?
  - Is there a true link between spruce beetle mortality and increased risk of catastrophic fire?
  - Concern over finding the balance between science (knowing all the answers) and action (management before we lose the majority of our forest to bugs or fire)
  - Concern that this project is based on economic/political/agency objectives and not on best ecological science.
  - Science isn't clear that thinning will work, doesn't always transfer. Either option may work or not; it seems to be site-specific.
  - Concerned that agency could "box itself in" in terms of a decision that would not allow "adaptive management" given changing conditions or science.
- Public Input:
  - Need consensus on management goals and base actions
  - Desire for stronger public education – communications plan
  - Concern that the project will take on a life of its own and the public will be left out.
  - Given all the unknowns at this time, concern for lack of opportunity for the public to be involved once a decision has been made if circumstances change or new science is introduced
  - Concern that there is no formal opportunity for the public to be involved once a decision is made
  - Concern for relying on collaboration – there is no legal mechanism for public to be involved after decision

  - Concern that people don't get involved early in the process – but wait until a decision has been made and then litigate – public involvement is seldom supportive at that point
- Capacity
  - Does the Forest Service have the necessary personnel, budget?
  - If this (Environmental Impact Statement) EIS is approved, will this take priority over ponderosa pine and Douglas fir work?
  - Concern for agency staff turnover, changing administrations at the federal level, budget uncertainties, and stakeholder turnover/burnout
  - Does the Forest Service have enough personnel to implement sale administration and specialist input and monitoring of this project? This EIS will need some strong promises.
  - Does the GMUG currently have the personnel to administer 5-6,000 acres of commercial treatments and another 5-6,000 acres of non-commercial?
  - Agree with the idea of not having to do NEPA for every small project.

- Roads:
  - How much road will be built and how big (level)?
  - Closure of roads after treatment – what is planned?
  - Will existing roads be closed after treatment? Concern of maintaining access.
  - Concern about construction of new/temp roads remaining open after treatment. How will closures be enforced?
  - What road standards will be provided/constructed for new roads and existing road upgrades?
  - Road maintenance – gravel replacement, etc? Concern that this will not take place
  - What will the road density be?
  - Impacts to wildlife
  - Concern about how to 'reclaim' temporary roads to maintain closures
  - Compliance with Clean Water Act
  - Air quality for roads and travel
  - Concern about construction of new/more roads (permanent and temporary)
  - Maintain roads for access/management closures. The forest should maintain future use options for admin/management by gates/closures of public access
  - Lack of effective closures in the past
  - Increased truck traffic on routes
  - Concerns about level of road upgrades
  - Winter hauling and recreation use
  - Snow compaction
  - Impacts to wildlife through multiple road construction and density of roads
  - Concern of the number of new roads that may need to be constructed
  - Concern of closure of existing roads after treatment and reducing public access
  - Concern of construction of parallel roads
  - Impact on water quality from roads
  - Cost of roads and closures
  - Safety of public on roads (mixed use)

- Increase in road density
- Ability to maintain/manage existing road systems

Ideas for moving forward:

- Public Education:
  - Develop a strong communications plan for the general public
  - Show before and after photos of treatment
  - Field trips to view pre and post treatment
- Monitoring:
  - Need to monitor and evaluate before starting the next cycle, so can make corrections to come out with the best outcomes possible.
  - Articulate the monitoring questions well up front: what are the concerns? Design with within budget and personnel constraints.
  - Could reach out to CSU, CO Forest Restoration Institute, Western State College, Mesa State University, Rocky Mountain Research Station, etc. to help with designing monitoring protocol
  - Can we look backwards: what are people fearing?
  - Citizen science and make recommendations for the future; involve concerned groups
  - Monitor the untreated areas as control areas.
  - Monitor to see if the treatments help with the beetle.
  - Use an independent entity to conduct monitoring and/or check assumptions that may be made in EIS
  - Provide means reporting the results of monitoring efforts to the public
  - Consider citizen-based groups to monitor and/or "ground truth" what is actually happening on the ground
  - Use standard techniques, i.e. common stand exam
  - Having a collaborative stakeholder group allows for continuity of stakeholders and nobody is surprised. This stakeholder group should be public, forest folks as well as regional/Washington Office level Forest Service and other agencies.
  - A monitoring plan should continue to monitor saw log capacity, not just biomass.
  - Monitoring receives the last funding dollars usually, and seems likely to be dropped. This project needs a good system for collecting and disseminating information and using other science.
  - After a threshold is reached – like a certain number of acres, or every 3-8 years, do a monitoring feedback cycle, and possibly a brief report to the steering committee. (unless a major event occurs (like fire))
  - What is realistic for monitoring intensity? A percentage? Try to leverage existing monitoring (for treatment effectiveness monitoring) – like the CFLRP, UP and Grand Valley, because we likely won't be able to see change caused by the SBEADMR treatments for quite a few years.
  - Focus surveys/monitoring in high value areas
  - Be clear on what desired outcomes are! What are measures of success??
  - Environmental Education – involve more youth – as monitors. Citizen monitoring – if budget and capacity of Forest Service are limiting, then using citizens to complete/help with

monitoring makes sense. Try a certification program for monitors. River watch is an example. Could the Forest Service partner with local environmental groups?

- Transparency
  - Record of Decision (ROD) should be very specific as to desired outcomes; where the priorities are
  - The EIS should be very specific about the priorities and what will be accomplished. The logic needs to be clear. Need a robust description of what we're trying to achieve and how we'll know we've achieved it.
  - EIS should state clearly the criteria for site selection treatment and public should have opportunity to comment
  - Use adaptive management – neither collaboration nor adaptive management are linear processes so can work well together
  - If the Forest Service is feeling some urgency – maybe try some things on a small scale. For prioritizing treatment areas – try some small treatments in different ways to learn.
- Utilization:
  - Include in document estimates of available biomass
  - Develop a forest level strategy that considers industry needs
  - In implementation, write contracts that encourage, but don't require, by-product removal
- Science:
  - Allow stakeholders and Forest Service to bring all applicable science together and review collaboratively through a transparent process. Describe what science was not used and why. Describe what science was used and why.
  - Identify where science is lacking and seek research institutions to help address uncertainties and assumptions. Advocate for research that spans all southwestern CO forests impacted by spruce beetle.
  - Learn from past GMUG projects. Review monitoring data and host filed trips to look at past aspen and spruce management. Incorporate lessons learned into this project.
  - Find research/case studies/past management monitoring data that will inform us as to what green stands are resilient to the beetles (both naturally and through management). What can we do to mimic this success in other places?
  - What's slowed beetle damage spread?
  - Demonstrate a willingness to reach out to other specialists – outside of the agency – for information/science
- Economic:
  - Look at the economics of action vs. no action on local economies
  - Look at cost of large fires (suppression, flooding, infrastructure damage, restoration)
- Public Participation/Collaboration:
  - Adaptive Management is benefitted by having the same group of folks involved
  - Involved the public early on. Form a working group to give input prior to the release of the draft EIS.
  - Use same process as Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project – field trips, community monitoring, annual meeting to review monitoring data and identify next year's treatments and monitoring projects.
  - Have a public/stakeholder Steering Committee.
  - Provide a definitive timeframe for public review – minimum of annual review

  - Want to have input into Design Criteria
  - Provide a formal mechanism for public input/review after each phase of the program; before and after implementation of a site specific project/treatment
  - Provide opportunities for public input on (1) the selection of criteria for prioritization and (2) the selection of priority projects
  - Look at different opportunities to educate – not just open houses – but field trips/site visits to observe changing conditions
  - Use a collaborative group to help steer the effort but not get involved in the minutia to avoid getting "bogged down"
- Roads:
  - Identify in EIS what roads (existing) will be maintained for access – preserve access
  - Identify which roads will be closed
  - Identify which system roads will be used and how they might be upgraded.
  - Identify who will maintain roads in perpetuity
  - Concentrate treatments on areas currently accessible rather than new construction of roads
  - Identify standards for road closures
  - Identify miles of temporary roads and long term management of these roads (closure, maintenance, etc)
  - Identify long term desired road density/miles and proper balance for access/backcountry experience. Maintain other values
  - Identify standards for dust abatement/air quality from hauling
  - Complete implementation of the Gunnison Travel Management Plan before any new roads are bult
  - Keep options for future use of roads that are 'closed' for admin use
  - Provide for warning and traffic management on haul roads
  - Seasonal closures for wildlife
  - Work with other users (rec groups) to eliminate/resolve issues
  - Consider utilizing forestry equipment in treatment areas to implement temporary road closures.
  - Economic considerations – focus treatments where existing access can be used rather than new road construction and/or re-opening old 'recovered' roads
  - Continue to implement travel management and identify needed road system to facilitate treatment
  - Maintain areas for elk security in unroaded pockets outside of roaded areas.

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