Oregon Board of Forestry
Federal Forestlands Advisory Committee Meeting
January 7, 2008

Old Growth Meeting Notes

The following notes were synthesized from the discussion at the Federal Forestlands Advisory Committee (FFAC) meeting held on January 7, 2008 by the facilitation team and ODF staff to inform the discussion at the next FFAC meeting scheduled for February 1, 2008. The notes were compiled from the presentation by Dr. Tom Spies, public comment, and Committee discussion.

Developing a Definition – Pros

- Old growth is the root of much litigation and an operational definition could help develop ways to move beyond litigation to common ground
- Old growth has polarized communities and is fundamental to address when making ecosystem management recommendations from a systems perspective
- Old growth is an important component of healthy forests
- Old growth also is a social issue - and conversation about the topic is difficult
- Managers and policy makers need definitions to make decisions on the ground
- Oregon has a strong legacy of older forests and Oregon's old growth is of global significance and is therefore an important issue to address
- Defining old growth is an important component of being able to provide a sustainable timber supply from federal lands
- A definition can provide a third option for adaptive management between reserves and plantations
- The FFAC was charged with tackling the tough issues
- Defining old growth is no different than other topics the FFAC is addressing

Developing a Definition – Cons

- If the process is done poorly it can further polarize communities
- Old growth is a dynamic rather than static concept (understanding and physical location) – and is difficult to define
- Old growth also is a social issue - and conversation about the topic is difficult
- Society will never agree on a definition and it will change

Existing Definitions

- Generic USFS definition – "Old growth encompasses the latter stages of stand development that typically differ from earlier stages in a variety of characteristics, which may include tree size, accumulations of large dead woody material, number of canopy layers, species composition and ecosystem function"

- Process definitions – e.g., Oliver and Larson (1990)
- Structural definition – e.g., PNW Research Note 448 (1986)
- Three current ways to delineate old growth
    - Species approach
    - Historical dynamics approach
    - Socio-political approach

Challenges to Defining Old Growth

- Dynamics
- Legacy disturbance
- Regional differences
- Forest type differences
- Different species prefer different types of old growth (e.g., woodpecker and northern spotted owl)
- Amount of information
- Unpredictable influence of fire
- Definitions by size (dbh) can be misleading – a tree can grow to 30 inches in thirty years
- Disagreement over historical amount
- Potential for a patchwork of definitions
- Need a biological foundation that address variability
- Can be considered differently from each leg of the sustainability stool
    - Ecological
    - Economic
    - Social

Criteria and Indicators

- Invest for the greatest return/forest health improvement – East side and southern dry forest types recommended recognizing that growth rates are low and efforts are currently less economical
- Location considerations
    - East
    - West
    - Proximity to urban area
- Forest types
    - Douglas Fir/Hemlock and Spruce/Hemlock (Coastal)
    - Ponderosa Pine/Mixed Conifer (Eastern Cascades)
    - Mixed Conifer/Evergreen (SW Oregon)
- Elevation
- Historical fire patters / Fire frequency return interval patterns
- Habitat types

- Classification issue – recognize difference between new old growth (just reaching dbh designation) vs. 200+ year habitat
- Understory management
- Management considerations:
    - Restoration/improvement of forest health
    - Old growth stand
    - Old growth as part of a larger stand
- Successional trajectories, which can be further refined by eco-region or community
- Areas where there is infrastructure
- Determine what to protect old growth against (e.g. loss from fire on the East side)

Process Ideas for Developing a Definition

- Three possible approaches to determine how much old growth is needed
    - Species approach
    - Historical dynamics approach
    - Socio-political approach
- Make list of previous efforts to define old growth and do comparative research on lessons learned
- Do not attempt to solve a dynamic problem permanently – focus on tangible actions and priorities that can be achieved in the next 30-40 years
- Set appropriate scale
    - Creation of province-wide plans create an opportunity
    - Recognition that watershed scale is where activities get done through contracts
    - Scale up from community at the district level to national forest to eco-region
- Bus Tour – Put 50 people in a bus and tour the state (different forest types) and come up with a definition for how much old growth is enough
- Work to develop clear/measurable criteria for each appropriate eco-region
- Define in the context of identifying what is desired on the forest landscape and how old growth fits in
- Possible alternatives (from Spies' presentation)
    - Stay the Northwest Forest Plan course
    - Redesign NWFP to focus on timber production in younger forests and plantations while protecting remaining old growth
    - Make incremental/fragmentary changes in federal plans
    - Create goal for distribution of successional stages instead of allocating landscape into reserves and production units

Other Suggestions

- Address juniper in the definition
- Encourage continued technological investment
- Expand use of LIDAR – laser altimetry to map mixed conifer forest types and structural characteristics