

APPENDIX 1 – COLLABORATIVE GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS TO USDA FOREST SERVICE

North Fork Mill Creek Collaborative Working Group – Final Forest Management Recommendations

The following report from the Mill Creek Collaborative Working Group presents conclusions and recommendations for which there was the greatest general agreement among participating stakeholders and should therefore be viewed as the highest priority for implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Wildlife Habitat Restoration:

Deer and Elk Winter Range – Portions of the North Fork Mill Creek and Mosier Creek watersheds have been identified in the Mt. Hood Forest Plan as B-10 Winter Range. The collaborative group recommends improving elk security by closing all trails and roads within the B-10 winter range area from December 1-April 1. The USFS should also improve deer and elk forage where possible.

Snag and Down Wood Wildlife Species – The collaborative group recommends using variable snag and down wood densities. The Northwest Forest Plan and Mt. Hood Forest Plan standards for snags and down wood should be used as starting points and adjusted using the DecAID wood advisor tool.

Old Growth Habitat – The collaborative group recommends retaining or improving all old-growth habitat (i.e. ponderosa pine stands). [This is intended to be a broad recommendation. The USFS will make proposals on a case-by-case basis and the collaborative group will have a chance to review and comment on any proposals during the NEPA phase of the process.]

Fire/Fuels Treatments:

Consider using prescribed fire or a combination of prescribed fire and mechanical treatments for restoring stand health. The intent is to restore fire to its historic role. Prescribed fire should be utilized in areas that are ready for it. Mechanical treatments that have a low impact on soil quality could be used to reduce down woody debris to forest plan levels and to masticate brush in the preparation for prescribed fire. [Mechanical treatments is meant to be fairly wide open and could include: chipping, mastication, removal of dead wood, etc.] The stands in the lower elevations would be the priority for fuels treatment (such as prescribed burning).

Vegetation Management (Thinning):

In the upper elevations, defined in the watershed analysis as zone 3 and 4 (fir dominant), we recommend the USFS restore the plantations. Many of the plantations are infected with root disease. In these plantations, we recommend variable density thinning the entire stand and having small patch openings where root disease pockets exist. These areas would be planted with resistant species. We do not recommend stand-scale clear cutting, but saving the best of what's left in the stands (recognizing in some areas, it's not great habitat). The definition of plantation would be carried over from the South Fork Recommendations. ["Stand of trees initiated: a) through direct or indirect seeding; or b) by planting seedlings following any harvest method, including salvage logging, that removed more than 90 percent of the over story of the original stand on contiguous areas larger than 5 acres. There was not agreement among Working Group members on the issue of whether stands with less than 90% over-story removal, such as shelter wood harvests, could be considered plantations."]

In the lower elevations, defined in the watershed analysis as zones 1 and 2 (pine/oak dominant and dry Douglas-fir respectively), we recommend thinning the young, small diameter in-growth that is a result of fire suppression. All of the largest diameter class trees shall be retained, and any thinning shall leave variable tree density and meet forest requirements for snags. There was agreement that the largest diameter classes would not be cut within the stands proposed for restoration.

In both the upper and lower watershed thinning treatments, restoration and enhancement of legacy features is the goal; if there is a commercial by-product we are ok with that outcome—however, commercial outputs are not the goal. Thinning recommendations should be coupled with the fuels recommendations where compatible.

Meadows and Aspen:

We recommend the use of prescribed fire to perpetuate existing areas of meadow and to stimulate and create openings for existing aspen clones. Some remnants of aspen grow in the planning area. Because of the shallow aquifer in some of the planning area, we see this as an appropriate area for aspen to thrive in small stands where ground water is present much of the year.

- In the area with a wood products emphasis, we recommend that heavy machinery be kept on existing road surfaces, to protect perennial grasses and forbs from being ripped up, so as to limit additional conversion to annuals and invasive species.
- Meadow margins should be thinned of young conifers, so as to restrict encroachment, and to prepare for reintroduction of fire.
- Cattle grazing should be closely monitored for negative impact on meadows. Cattle grazing should be limited to the drier areas. Origins of streams should be fenced from cattle so as to allow for riparian growth for fish, avian and amphibian habitat. Meadows should be included in prescribed fire program, or let burn if a wildfire occurs. Only with these caveats do we support continued grazing of the grazing allotment.

- Meadows in the deer and elk winter range should be left to burn if a wildfire occurs, so that grasses, forbs and shrub communities are perpetually healthy in the mix of ecosystems there.
- The goal is to restore aspen stands and meadows and where possible to introduce new aspen groves. Aspen groves should be managed for longevity in the planning area. Three to five groves should be fostered in the area. If trees, then thin conifer competition and include in prescribed fire program. If latent suckers, then fence from ungulates, include in prescribed fire program, and manage toward the goal of a stand of multi-aged aspen trees. Other manipulation techniques may be used, at the discretion of the silviculturist, as long as it supports these goals. Any techniques would be submitted as proposals during the NEPA phase of the process and the collaborative representatives would have the opportunity to review and make any comments at that time.
- Where trails come upon meadows, they should be skirted along the margins and shall not harm aspen groves. Motorized trails shall not be permitted in meadows.

Fish Habitat Restoration:

Some of the top priority projects for this area from a fisheries perspective lie outside of the North Fork Mill Creek Planning Area boundary and outside of the Mt. Hood National Forest boundary. These projects would benefit fish within the planning area, however. For example, the correction of fish passage problems would allow anadromous fish (steelhead) to access high-quality habitat within the planning area, and would also allow resident fish (coastal cutthroat and redband rainbow trout) to move more easily within their range.

Projects may include the replacement or removal of culverts that are partial or complete barriers to resident fish passage (redband rainbow and/or coastal cutthroat trout). It is also recommended that the Forest Service examine whether or not roads upstream from culverts are needed for future use or could be closed or decommissioned. If thinning or other timber activity is planned along North Fork Mill Creek or West Fork Neal Creek, the Forest Service could look at improving fish habitat (place LWD in the stream) simultaneously. Also, some areas may benefit from riparian thinning (by mechanical removal or prescribed burning), which would, over the long term, increase the size of riparian trees. These trees would provide shade (decrease water temperatures) and also would eventually fall into the stream as LWD.

Priority Projects

Priority 1: Replacement of culverts on Mill Creek

Replacement of culvert at River Mile (RM) 5.2

This culvert is located on North Fork Mill Creek at River Mile (RM) 5.2 (approximately 1.2 RM below the Forest boundary on Mill Creek Road, a county road, near the Harrington's house). The recommendation is to replace the culvert with a bridge or bottomless arch (culvert). Surveys completed in 2002 found it to be a complete barrier to juvenile fish and partial barrier to adult fish based on the steep grade, small size, velocity and pressure.

Replacement of culvert at the mouth

The Mill Creek culvert under Interstate 84 is a 900-foot-long unlighted culvert with a submerged mouth. Although some fish are able to navigate the culvert, replacing it would

improve passage for steelhead, coho, chinook, and lamprey. ODFW and ODOT have identified this culvert as a priority for replacement along I-84 and are working together to replace this culvert with a bridge. Given the fish passage projects that have already been completed or are planned to be completed upstream (the culverts at RM 9.5 and 5.2, respectively, on North Fork Mill Creek), eliminating passage issues at the mouth would allow fish to take full advantage of access to high-quality habitat that is accessible to them higher in the watershed.

Priority 2: Replacement/removal of culverts for resident fish

North Fork Mill Creek

- Culvert at 1700-660 crossing (on-Forest)
- Culvert at 1700-663 crossing (on-Forest)

Alder Creek

- Culvert at 1721 crossing (on-Forest, in The Dalles Municipal Watershed)

West Fork Neal Creek

- Culvert at 1700 road crossing (on-Forest)
- Culvert at 1710-710 road crossing (on-Forest)
- Culvert at 1700-641 crossing (on Forest) – needs to be resurveyed to identify passage status
- Culvert at 1700 road crossing (~0.5 mile downstream of Forest boundary)
- Culvert at 1700-630 road crossing (~0.5 mile downstream of Forest boundary)
- Culvert at 1700 road crossing (~1.5 miles downstream of Forest boundary)

Tributary to West Fork Neal Creek

- Culvert at 1700 road crossing (~1.25 miles downstream of Forest boundary)
- Culvert at 1700-730 road crossing (~1 mile downstream of Forest boundary)

Neal Creek

- Culvert at 1710 road crossing (~1.25 mile downstream of Forest boundary)

In addition, stream crossings that are associated with the recreation and trail proposals developed as part of this planning process should be identified. Culvert passage issues could be corrected in conjunction with converting roads to trails or constructing trails (for example the proposed motorized trail that crosses the headwaters of North Fork Mill Creek). Fish passage should be maintained in areas where new stream crossings are constructed.

Priority 3: Stream restoration

The reaches of both North Fork Mill Creek and West Fork Neal Creek that lie within the planning area do not meet the forest standard for amount or size of large woody debris (LWD). The standard is 106 pieces per mile (this includes the medium and large size categories for the east side). Medium is >12” diameter at 35’ from the large end and length >35’ or 2 times bankfull width. Large is >20” diameter at 35’ from the large end and length >35’ or 2 times bankfull width).

If thinning or other timber activity is planned in these riparian areas, one option is to improve fish habitat (place LWD in the stream) simultaneously. Also, some areas may benefit from riparian thinning (by mechanical removal or prescribed burning), which would, over the long

term, increase the size of riparian trees. Any riparian thinning would need to be consistent with the NWFP. These trees would provide shade (decrease water temperatures) and also would eventually fall into the stream as LWD.

The collaborative representatives acknowledge that a number of these projects fall outside the watershed, but the group supports them and would like to see them move forward, if that means working together with watershed councils.

Road Density:

The current road density in the North Fork Mill Creek Watershed is twice the recommended road density for this region. Lowering the road density will enhance and restore wildlife habitat, which has been prioritized by this group. The science is virtually unanimous that elk need security, and the best way to provide that security is by creating roadless areas. This is especially true during calving season. Taking out roads will also help reduce erosion potential, and thus restore in-stream fish habitat and water quality.

Several roads were identified for closure or obliteration by USFS resource professionals. We can agree with the roads identified. If these closures or obliterations do not provide enough reduction to be consistent with the Forest Plan for road density, other roads should be closed to meet Forest Plan standards. We recommend obliteration of roads if fish, wildlife and hydrology benefits outweigh the impacts of obliteration. The USFS should explore obliterating the first portion of the road (“Entrance Management”) in areas where recreational roads/trails may lead to those roads proposed for obliteration to ensure that they remain unused.

The roads identified by USFS personnel include:

- Obliteration of the 0.5 mile long sections of roads 1700-663 and 1700-664 beyond the culvert on North Fork Mill Creek at the 1700-663 crossing;
- Closure of the 1700-641 road to benefit fisheries habitat;
- Closures or obliteration of roads: 1711-640, 1711-622, 1711-624, 1710-643, 1710-644, 1700-740, 1710-620, 1700-672, 1700-671 to benefit wildlife habitat;
- Closing *all* roads within the B-10 winter range area from December 1-April 1 to improve elk security.

Recreational Trails:

1) User groups be defined in the following categories and subcategories, to conform to existing standards:

Motorized

- Class 1 – ATV
- Class 2 – 4x4s
- Class 3 – motorbikes

Non-motorized

- Pedestrians
- Bicyclists
- Equestrian & pack animals

- 2) Not all trails will be open to all users.
- 3) Roads open to passenger-vehicles shall be incorporated into the recreational trail system to provide access to the area and to other trail areas, and to provide recreational opportunities.
- 4) Fire access trails shall remain open to all recreational trail users.
- 5) A physical boundary (including, but not limited to, fencing, earthen features, brush, shrubs, and/or trees) shall be maintained along the boundary of The Dalles Municipal Watershed. The funding of the physical boundary is a priority.
- 6) A user education and enforcement program shall be a part of the recreational trail plan. Efforts should be made to form partnerships with local law enforcement agencies, user groups, and adjacent land management agencies. Funding should be sought through appropriations, grant programs (i.e., ATV Fund grants from OPRD), recreational fee programs, and other channels.

The user education and enforcement plan shall consider the following specific methods for achieving its goals:

Law enforcement

- Increased Fire Prevention Officers.
- Increased Law Enforcement Officers (armed)
- Local sheriff deputies
- Posses

Education

- Volunteer Trail Patrol Program
- Posses
- Maps
- Signage
- Outreach through user groups and local businesses

- 7) The USFS shall revisit the 1990 Road Closure decision of Road #662, including an analysis of how that affects the Section Line Trail, and then report back to recreational user group on the rationale for the decision.

If the trail and/or road are to be closed, the trail plan shall be revised so that it will continue to provide sufficient trail opportunities for all users. A revised trail plan may increase the trail density in the northwest part of the trail system, increase new trail construction, increase the number of roads to remain open for trail use, and increase impacts on habitat and wildlife.

- 8) The following trailheads shall be provided for the following users:
Surveyor's North trailhead shall be identified on the trail map. It shall be designated primary parking for hikers and bikers.

OHV Staging Area shall be designated primary parking for motorized users.

Gibson Prairie Horse Camp shall be designated exclusively for equestrian and pack animal user parking and camping.

Education efforts (such as erecting signage and including information on maps) shall be undertaken to inform trail users about this situation, and where parking is allowed.

- 9) The trails in the Winter Range Elk Habitat area may be closed from Dec. 1 – April 1. Education efforts (such as erecting signage and including information on maps) shall be undertaken to inform trail users about this situation.
- 10) Education efforts (such as erecting signage and including information on maps) shall be undertaken to inform all users about methods to reduce the transportation of noxious weeds into the area.

Grazing Management:

The North Fork Mill Creek collaborative group recommends that the impact of cows in the North Fork Mill Creek watershed be addressed by the USFS in several ways. The grazing of cows in the North Fork of Mill Creek has degraded water quality and fish and wildlife habitat, and resulted in a need for restoration and better enforcement. The grazing permit in question is the Long Prairie Allotment. We recommend the following projects be prioritized to maintain the highest water quality possible in order to allow fish and wildlife to recover and thrive:

1. Construction of a one-mile section of fence to restrict cattle from the North Fork Mill Creek drainage.
2. The placement of downed logs along the streambank near the headwaters of North Fork Mill Creek and West Fork Neal Creek where cows have damaged the streambank.
3. Repair fencing to remove the cows from Mill Creek ridge that are illegally there.
4. More enforcement to manage cattle distribution to prevent damage from cattle in identified sensitive areas.
5. The USFS should utilize fences that are effective cow barriers, but have the least impact on other wildlife.
6. Grazing should not be allowed to continue if identified adverse impacts on resource conditions (especially water quality) cannot be reasonably mitigated. This requires fencing projects to be completed in order to prevent cows from accessing riparian areas they are not intended to be in.