

EASTSIDE ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT PROJECT

Jeff D. Blackwood and Thomas M. Quigley

Most of the activities that we conduct on National Forest Lands, and those managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), are guided by management plans. These management plans have quite a history of origin. BLM plans have been developed and signed over the past few decades. Most of the forest plans in eastern Oregon and eastern Washington were signed in 1989 and 1990. Since these plans were signed, some changes have occurred on the landscape and within communities in eastern Oregon and Washington.

Some of these changes include the listing of the Snake River salmon as endangered, new information on forests and various species, the insect and disease situation, and recent fires. Additionally, two years ago, the Chief of the Forest Service (USFS) instructed the USFS to begin management under ecosystem-based strategies and policies. The BLM has also moved in that direction. So, a lot has changed since our plans have been signed. A lot more is involved than just the "people-tree" issue that we tend to equate with forest management. Everything that happens within the land areas we manage, and that our public enjoys, is involved in forest management.

In April 1993, when the Forest Conference was happening in Portland, Oregon, there was a lot of interest in including the eastside of Oregon and Washington. There was also a lot of interest in not including the eastside, recognizing that the ecosystems there are vastly different from those on the westside of Oregon and Washington. There was so much interest in the eastside that, when President Clinton made his announcement last July (1993) about the westside plan, he also instructed the USFS to develop a scientifically-sound, ecosystem-based strategy for management of eastside forests. Shortly thereafter, System Secretary Jim Lyons made an announcement here in Spokane that an environmental impact team would be created in either Spokane or Walla Walla, Washington. Then Dr. Tom Quigley and I were contacted to do some preliminary work to get this going. We were also asked to try to include some of the changing conditions and new information with which we are dealing.

Early on, we recognized that there was a need to involve other agencies. In eastern Oregon and Washington, the USFS manages about 15 million acres and the BLM also manages about 15 million acres. A lot of these watersheds are intertwined. The BLM tends to manage lands that are drier, more of a grassland type, but there are a lot of intermingled ownerships and watersheds that are tied together from the highest to the lowest point. So, we had early commitment from the BLM and the USFS that this needed to be a joint effort.

We also realized, very early, that there were a number of other federal agencies that had responsibilities or regulatory authori-

ties when it came to developing management strategies or activities. This slide does not represent an inclusive list of those agencies. Since this list has been put together, we have had a lot of interest from other agencies that we have not added. We have members on our EIS team and our science integration team from these other agencies that will be helping us in Walla Walla. Not only is there a lot of federal agency interest, but also a great deal of interest at the county, local, and state levels. And, as most of you know, just about all of the lands managed by the USFS and the BLM in eastern Oregon and Washington are lands that were ceded to the federal government by Native American tribes back in the 1850s and 1860s. When those lands were ceded to the federal government, the tribes reserved certain rights and established trust responsibilities. So, the tribal governments are also extremely interested, and have a stake, in what happens on the eastside.

Our charter was signed by the Chief of the USFS and the Director of the BLM back in January, 1994. In the charter there are four things we have been asked to do at Walla Walla over the next year and a half. The first one is to produce a framework for ecosystem management. The goal is to articulate the ecosystem management principles and processes that are applicable to planning, analysis and management at various scales on which we operate; from the large regional scales down to the project scales. This really has not been well-articulated before. This is intended to be a science product and a recommendation to management. Our original time frame was to produce a working draft in three months. We are approaching that deadline this week and our draft should be in the mail by the end of the week. We call it a working draft because we expect that it will be altered and changed throughout the process. We are encouraging many reviews and expect to write additional versions.

Moving on to the scientific assessment, the second product, we have heard a lot about different kinds of assessments over the past two days of this symposium. What we are working on is a very integrated assessment of the interior Columbia River Basin and portions of eastern Oregon; from the crest of the Cascades east through Klamath Falls, Lakeview, Burns, Vale, etc. In the assessment, we are looking at the functions and processes relevant to social, economic, and biological systems that are interactive with management on USFS and BLM lands. This will be a snapshot of what is happening within the larger ecosystem, such that when we get to making decisions on those lands, it can be done within the context of the larger scale.

In addition to a snapshot of those processes and functions, the assessment will also do some scenario planning. By that I mean looking at possible outcomes based on different assumptions about the future. For instance, what would happen if we continue

with the existing plans? What would happen under a different set of assumptions? This will be a scientific publication that should be available to other government entities, private landowners or anyone that is interested.

The third product is the environmental impact statement (EIS). This is the vehicle that would probably lead to adjustments of the existing management plans. In the EIS we will develop an array of various ecosystem management strategies appropriate for management of BLM and USFS lands in eastern Oregon and Washington. When the EIS team develops that array of alternatives, and we have buy off on those alternatives, we will give the EIS to the science integration team. Then, they will do a scientific evaluation of the effects of implementing each various strategy. That will be wrapped back into the draft EIS.

Our timelines are tight and ambitious. We are working hard to meet those timelines. The working draft for the ecosystem management framework is just about ready to go. We are looking at having the draft assessment out in November, 1994. As that draft assessment is being developed, our EIS team will be working with the science team so there are no surprises as they develop the draft EIS. The draft scientific evaluation of those alternative strategies will be tied in with this time frame also.

We have two sides to our overall project team at Walla Walla, Washington. One side is our science side, the other is the management side. I serve the role as project manager for the Eastside Ecosystem Management Project. I report to an executive board composed of the three regional foresters in Portland, Ogden and Missoula, the two research station directors, and three BLM state directors. The deputy project manager is Pat Geehan from the BLM. We have the EIS team lead by George Pozutto, our communications team led by Patty Burrel, Cathy Wiese is our administrative leader, and Ralph Perkins is our tribal liaison.

We recognized from our discussions that there is a clear need to do this project as a partnership between science and management. We also recognize there is a need to have some type of separation between science and management, so there is no perception of undue influence either way. The science products of this process will be done through contract between the science integration team and the management side. Our contract is the charter. We can make that charter available if you have not seen it.

We have talked quite a bit about the role of science and management during this symposium. There are a few things we have clarified as the role of science. One is the assessments, looking at trade-offs, consequences, potential outcomes, and interactions in the ecosystem. Another role of science is the critical evaluation of scientific and technical information. Questions come up all the time about whose science is best. What we are looking at is critical evaluation of all science and then trying to integrate it. A third role is documentation of findings through scientific publications and making recommendations based on those findings. A fourth role is the transfer of technology, to outside entities, to the public, and to our partners.

The role of management is to be involved in the decision processes as we move forward.

We have had a number of challenges at Walla Walla. We have been up and running for about three months now. Some of the challenges come from rumors and baggage from other projects; expectations and all kinds of horrible things that may happen. The only thing I can do is encourage you to interact with us and see for yourself. Private land issues are big; the potential for the Eastside Ecosystem Management project to impact private land. Another one is the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). FACA is great for assuring equal access to all, but it is not conducive to collaborative decision-making. We are trying to work with that. The open public processes we are trying to operate in Walla Walla are a different way of doing business, for both the science integration team and the rest of us.

This is an evolutionary process. It has been an exciting process, but very challenging. I think the last major challenge we have, along with trying to meet all the regulations and rules, are the expectations that people have. There are tremendous expectations of our project and we are hoping we can come close to meeting some of those.

Authors

Jeff D. Blackwood
U.S. Forest Service
Umatilla National Forest
2517 SW Hailey Avenue
Pendleton, OR 97801

Thomas M. Quigley
Blue Mountains Natural Resources Institute
1401 Gekeler Lane
La Grande, OR 97850