

Cherokee National Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative Meeting

Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, Morristown, Tennessee

Steering Committee Meeting Notes

Tuesday, January 24, 2012

9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Committee Members Attending: Josh Kelly, at large; Danny Osborne, Tennessee Division of Forestry; Dwight King, Logging Company/Sullivan County Commissioner; Steve Henson, Southern Multiple Use Council; Mark Shelley, Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition; Joe McGuiness, Cherokee National Forest (CNF); Catherine Murray, Cherokee Forest Voices; John Gregory, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency; Katherine Medlock, The Nature Conservancy; Geoff Call, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Committee Members Not Attending: Dennis Daniel, National Wild Turkey Federation, Terry Porter, Tennessee Forestry Association, Parker Street, Ruffed Grouse Society.

Staff Attending: Karen Firehock, facilitator; Melinda Holland, facilitator.

Observers Attending: Roberta Willis and Christopher Liggett, USFS Southern Region; Leslie Avriemmo, Cherokee National Forest (CNF); Terry Bowerman, CNF; Stephanie Medlin, CNF; Don Palmer, CNF; Mark Healey, CNF; Tom Speaks, CNF.

Karen Firehock began the meeting with introductions of the committee members and the observers, and reviewed the meeting agenda. There were no observer comments.

Agenda Item 1 – Public Response Document

The committee reviewed and discussed in depth the draft public response document developed based on the committee decisions for responses from the December 5, 2011 committee meeting and sent to the Cherokee National Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (CNFLRI) members for review two weeks prior to today's meeting. The document was edited further during the meeting to reflect additional responses and corrections to language. The committee members present agreed to the final version of the document. This public response document will be provided to those who submitted comments on the committee's draft recommendations report and will be posted on the CNFLRI web site (<http://www.communityplan.net/cherokee/news.htm>) until April 1, 2012.

Agenda Item 2 – Report Review

Next the committee reviewed the final draft of the recommendations report and edits which had been suggested in response to public comments. This document was edited at the meeting and agreed to by all committee members present. The final report will be distributed and posted on the CNFLRI web site (<http://www.communityplan.net/cherokee/news.htm>) until April 1, 2012. In response to members concerns about any additional grammar edits needed, Ms. Firehock noted that one last review by a technical editor would be made to ensure correct grammar and punctuation, but no additional substantive changes would be made.

Agenda Item 3 – Funding Needs and Strategy for Plan Implementation

This topic had been postponed from the December meeting. The goal was to discuss how the committee might capitalize on the CNFLRI's recommendations and help find funds for implementation of the committee's recommendations which require resources beyond what is available currently. This will likely be an on-going effort and committee members can decide whether or how they are able to support efforts to obtain additional funding.

The group discussed the grants and initiatives for which the Cherokee National Forest (CNF) could be eligible and the importance of having a coalition that can continue to support funding restoration initiatives. The committee agreed that they need to identify potential funding vehicles with input from the USFS. Involvement in federal budget process for CNF, support for staff increases for CNF, Healthy Forests, Forest Legacy, lobbying efforts (ex. Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Projects) were among the opportunities discussed by the committee.

It was noted that many federal grants require matching funds. Group members commented that prior successful restoration projects have had the support of a diverse group of stakeholders and this labor can be used as a source of matching for some federal grants. Committee members suggested seeking additional participation of nonprofit organizations, schools, and others to join the committee's efforts in seeking resource support for implementation.

Committee members noted that many other national forests and state programs are watching the CNFLRI to determine if this initiative succeeds. Future similar efforts may be launched if the CNFLRI process is successful in helping the Cherokee Forest move forward with restoration approaches. This means that continued collaboration to ensure restoration projects are funded and implemented will be very important for not just the CNF, but also for other forests in the southern region.

A committee member suggested holding a forum to develop a strategy for long term implementation funding. It may be important to engage agency directors and other senior staff who can gain support at the regional level. He offered to invite his wildlife agency director to attend the fundraising strategy and if successful, the director could propose this approach as a priority to the south east regional wildlife agencies. He noted that other wildlife agency directors would like to see more improvements in habitat in national forests around the U.S. The Appalachian Mountain Joint Venture is another group where state wildlife directors have been influential in getting broad implementation support.

Another committee member suggested the National Forest Foundation could be a possible source for seed money. A committee member stated that he believes that CNF has existing resources for many implementation activities but they may need help speeding up the process and reducing barriers to getting projects ready by doing assessment work early on. Another committee member stated that CNF can afford to implement some of the committee's recommendations, but will need more resources to fully implement all of the recommendations. The CNF was encouraged to move ahead as soon as possible on projects that they can do with existing resources and the committee will also seek additional funding to help find additional funds, volunteer labor and partnerships as needed. It was noted that the first restoration projects implemented by CNF will be very important for providing evidence for the success of this collaborative approach.

The committee discussed possible support for increased CNF staffing for implementation. A USFS representative noted that they need longer-term funding commitments; the 2012 USFS budget has a fair amount of funding, but most emphasis on spending for forest health is being directed to western forests for pest control issues. Support for allocation of funds for restoration in CNF would be helpful. It was noted that CNF still does not have a 2012 budget. CNF needs to find non-controversial projects to begin implementation so that they can be utilized to demonstrate success early on. Committee

members can help this process by working to enlist and gain the support of their constituencies for these restoration efforts.

Members also discussed the need for having more 'shovel ready' projects that can be implemented to take advantage of times when markets for a particular wood source may be more favorable. This will require ramping up the level of effort to move projects through the NEPA process. One member noted that some projects will not be "marketable" or self-sustaining, but for those that could be, having projects ready can allow the USFS staff to be more nimble in getting projects going when market conditions are favorable. The CNF representatives noted they can begin an expanded level of effort by using temporary staff and contractors at first for field survey work. If this is a successful approach for getting more restoration projects started, then the CNF can demonstrate its need for new permanent staff in the future.

One member asked about the potential use of the Collaborative Landscape Restoration Program as a funding vehicle. A committee member noted there is no information available on new applications for 2012 funding. He stated that 40 million was allocated in 2012 to go to continuation of ongoing projects or applications received last year. Committee members noted that there may be some champions in Congress that could support expanded resource allocations for the CNF.

The committee agreed on the need for a workshop about funding and support for implementation of committee recommendations. Katherine Medlock agreed to take the lead in considering next steps for the funding issue and what form planning for this should take.

Agenda Item 4 – Watershed Pilot

Katherine Medlock provided suggested goals and objectives for a watershed pilot project. The watershed pilot will be test case for implementing the CNFLRI recommendations at the watershed scale. Lessons learned from this effort will inform the recommendations for the rest of the forest. She noted that the CNF needs to do two watershed assessments each fiscal year and the CNF has already begun the planning process for two 2012 pilots. She suggested that the committee's watershed team participate in one of these assessments and work within the CNF process to help them develop recommendations. There was discussion of the need for another self-assessment by the watershed pilot committee to determine if additional groups, such as local watershed organizations, should be involved. Objectives for the watershed pilot team include:

- Develop achievable monitoring recommendations.
- Use available data within the watershed to help determine collaborative restoration recommendations and develop a model process for other watersheds. Participate in data gathering. (The Nature Conservancy has asked Joey Wisby and Steve Simon to assist with data analysis including use of TN State Wildlife Action Plan model.)
- Participate in CNF public participation process (the watershed team does not plan to do a separate involvement process).
- Develop proposed project recommendations and do sufficient ground truthing before finalizing recommendations to the full committee for review (prior to submitting to CNF).

A CNF representative noted that the public participation process for watershed assessments has of late not been done through public meetings and has been more of a paper process. He noted that the CNF is open to suggestions about public participation. The CNF is performing an FS Veg run first to find uncharacteristic class stands and opportunities for restoration. The CNF watershed assessments are due in February 2012, but they want to test the Committee's recommendations on one watershed, so

there will be a two prong approach, working in a simultaneous fashion. The watershed activities must be completed by the end of the fiscal year. The goal is to identify opportunities for restoration and management in 2012 and conduct surveys, NEPA review and other work in 2013 to develop recommended projects.

The committee discussed the two watershed assessment locations: Paint Creek and the Offset Area. Paint Creek has over 1,000 acres of uncharacteristic classes (U-class), and the Offset Area has much less. Several committee members supported use of Paint Creek for the watershed pilot study. A committee member noted that the two areas have two different types of forest. There is more white pine in Paint Creek's watershed and more hardwood in the Offset Area. A CNF representative noted that the Offset Area needs management of Successional Classes (S-class), and Paint Creek needs to address Uncharacteristic Class (U-class) issues. These watersheds are located far apart from one another. Meadow Creek is adjacent to Paint Creek and was mentioned as a possibility for the next watershed assessment. A CNF representative noted that they have the flexibility to do other watersheds, even ones for which the CNF has already completed assessments, if that is desired and recommended by the committee.

Katherine Medlock agreed to send a doodle poll to determine a meeting date for the watershed team. The team will review watershed data at that meeting in order to chose which watershed to select for the pilot study.

Action Items Summary

- Changes from the meeting will be included in the report and it will be reviewed and edited one last time to ensure that there are no formatting or grammatical errors. It will be posted to the website for public viewing until April 1, 2012.
- The response to comments document will be edited to reflect final section headings of the report that are referenced and it will be sent to those who had offered comments and posted to the web site until April 1, 2012.
- The final report and the response to comments document will be sent to the USFS on behalf of the CNFLRI.
- Katherine Medlock will take the lead on determining next steps on seeking funding for implementation.
- Katherine Medlock agreed to send doodle poll on a meeting date for the watershed team.
- This is the last formal meeting of the CNFLRI.

For questions concerning this summary please contact CNFLRI Facilitator Karen Firehock karenfirehock@gmail.com.