

Cherokee National Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative

Steering Committee Meeting Notes

Erwin Senior Adults Center

Monday, October 4, 2010

Steering Committee Members Attending:

Geoff Call, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Joe McGuiness, Cherokee National Forest; Steve Henson, Southern Multiple Use Council; Katherine Medlock, The Nature Conservancy; Steve Novak, Wildlaw; Parker Street, Ruffed Grouse Society; Dwight King, Volunteer Logging Company/Sullivan County Commissioner; Catherine Murray, Cherokee Forest Voices; Danny Osborne, Tennessee Division of Forestry; Mark Shelley, Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition

Consultants: Steve Simon and Greg Lowe. Facilitator: Melinda Holland.

Members not attending:

Terry Porter, Tennessee Forestry Association and Dennis Daniel, National Wild Turkey Federation, John Gregory, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency,

Observers Attending:

Alex Wyss, The Nature Conservancy, Dan Gibson, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency; Hugh Irwin, Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition

Introductions

The meeting began with opening remarks from facilitator Melinda Holland, followed by the introduction of the Steering Committee members, observers and an opportunity for observer comments. Observers asked and Steering Committee members agreed that for this meeting the observers would be able to make comments and ask questions throughout the meeting.

Landfire Biophysical Setting Models

Steve Simon gave a presentation to the Steering Committee about ecological zones (which are equivalent to Landfire's biophysical settings) and the work he will be doing in the Cherokee National Forest (CNF). Steve explained some of his past work of mapping ecological zones in the Appalachian Mountains including: Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia, southern Blue Ridge Mountains, northern escarpment, South Mountain area, and the New River area. He explained that the basic steps he follows are acquiring data on the vegetative community types, creating a digital terrain data base, and evaluation of accuracy. Steve will do extensive field work in CNF to gather this information. Mr. Simon's power point presentation is available on the web site. Steering Committee members were asked to raise their hands if they had issues or recommendations regarding any of the ten ecological zones following. The Committee's votes for each zone are noted below. The committee then discussed the zones in order of highest to lowest number of votes.

1. Riparian – 1 vote
2. SA northern hardwoods – 5

3. Cove forest – 4
4. Spruce fir – 0
5. Bald – 1
6. Flood plain – 0
7. SA oak forest – 5
8. Montane oak forest – 6
9. SA Montane pine – 4
10. SA low elevation pine – 4

In response to a question about where small streams are covered, Steve Simon explained that streams are not an ecological system on their own and are not modeled, but are included in many other ecological systems such as cove, floodplain, etc. A committee member noted that small streams are excluded under the riparian ecological system definition, but are not described in the systems where streams are found. Katherine Medlock noted that it should be made clear where they fall on the map and how they are defined. She also state that the definition of riparian should reflect what is mapped. Steve Simon noted that Virginia has a small floodplain designation which is mapped separately. He suggested that the definition of “riparian” be revised, and will work with Katherine Medlock to review information in the Heritage Program for Tennessee. The revised definition will be shared with the Steering Committee prior to the October 28th meeting.

The key points of the Steering Committee’s discussion of their concerns and suggestions regarding the ecological systems are summarized below.

#8- Montane Oak Forest

- Fire return interval too frequent, needs to be greater than 30 years
- Do a sensitivity analysis of fire return intervals to see if changes make a significant difference.
- Check with Fire Learning Network (FLN) on fire return interval for this system
- Late development or multi-age class needed [class D&E]
- Question the model because have found very old trees in this zone
- Age class distribution – class A is 2%, why not higher?
- How much of a role do rock slides play? (Simon – landslide is not common in this area; ice storm impacts do effect this area)
- The narrative description does not seem to match numbers from the modeling.
- Disturbance descriptions need to cover a wider range – question as to why these values were assigned.
- Consider splitting this one into two, but taking high elevation Red Oak out of this grouping. If spit it into two systems, both must be mapped.
- FLN has a model for both Montane Oak and High Elevation Red Oak – this is a good reference
- Next steps – talk with Jim Smith and the 2 modelers to understand this issue, come back to Steering Committee with more information; ask Smith about possible changes to the descriptions [Katherine Medlock]

#7 – SA Oak Forest

- 3 types of forest fall into this grouping with different vegetation types, wet/dry, etc.

- Simon suggests splitting this into 2 types but he will provide information on 3 types. He notes that mesic oak and xeric oak are different ecosystems and should be modeled differently.
- Need a clearer definition of SA Oak Forest and what Simone's suggested two zones would include.
- Age range needs work given the species present; change age classes. Mid = 11- 90 years, needs more age categories; D & E greater than 91 years; class A should be 1 – 10 years.

#2 – SA Northern Hardwood

- Fire return intervals – see inconsistencies.
- Simon notes that this type rarely burns as is fire resistant.
- Others stated that fire return interval will not make much difference in the model.
- Age classes – expand mid and late with higher upper range.
- When change age class, need to adjust other parameters like height, diameter, etc.
- Ask Jim Smith how the age classes were determined.
- Did the models rely more on growth rate more than age?

#3 – Cove Forest

- Class C is 100 – 119 years; 30 – 50 meters, same as 30- 90 meters for class B [but base diameter is different], Why? Class B diameters also seem off.
- Review age/growth classes and bring info back to Steering Committee.
- Look at fire intervals.
- Note that there are no reviewers listed for this system.
- Add references for this system.
- U.S. Forest Service has a lot of data concerning Cove Forest systems.

#9 – SA Montane Pine

- Check current literature on fire intervals; those used in these models may be skewed and need updating.
- Steve Novak will send some additional references to be considered.
- Sapling sizes may be missing in structure data.
- Age class [0-15 missing some tree sizes when go to other classes]; how does this relate to structure data? Does it need to be consistent? If not why?
- Class B – fire – hard to have a low intensity fire in pine.
- Simon suggests checking the recent fire literature fire related to SA Montane Pine.

#10 – SA Low Elevation Pine

- There are similar concerns regarding fire as for Montane Pine; check the literature.
- Steve Simon suggests determining which segment of this description fits Northern CNF; the current description is overly broad.
- Short leaf pine is predominant but is included in this description.
- Fire impact on age class? Class A etc. definitions? Why different in various classes and relationship to structural conditions?
- Greg Lowe noted the model looks more at structure than age.

Steering Committee members were encouraged to email Katherine Medlock and Karen Firehock any additional concerns or suggestions on the 10 types as soon as possible. Further discussion on this topic will occur at the October 28th Steering Committee meeting. Katherine Medlock will do an action items/assignment list and email to the members.

Public On-Line Survey Topics

Steering Committee members were asked what they want to learn from the survey. The facilitator cautioned the group that questions need to be answerable by most people (a somewhat informed public) so they must not be overly technical in nature. Questions need to relate to the subject of restoration of the forest. Questions must be phrased objectively. The survey will be designed to take no longer than 15 - 20 minutes to complete. Committee members stated the following as what they want to learn from the survey:

- Reactions to specific management action types – level of support or objection; ex. fire, timber cutting. The responses should help us see where education is needed.
- Specific threats seen by the public; ask them for suggested management actions to address the threats they identify.
- General awareness about current CNF management, conditions; need for restoration.
- Willingness to be involved in our process.
- Rank values they want to get from CNF – timber, wildlife, recreation, water quality, etc
- How folks use the forest.
- Tie how use CNF to the outcome desired from restoration.
- What condition does the public think we should restore the forest to [know this is hard to answer].
- Want to know who responds, ex. if are adjacent landowner, involved in past forest planning efforts vs. general public, tourist. And want to know how they have been involved w/CNF in the past.
- Number of days per year spent in CNF.
- Existence value placed on forest even if don't use it.
- Explain management approach before ask question about if they approve of it.

The Steering Committee wants to see the draft survey questions before it goes final. The Committee would like one week to review the draft. It is more important to them to delay survey going live than to have it ready on October 12th. Perhaps aim to release it at or before the October 21st public meeting and send email reminders to all on our lists when it goes live. Collect email addresses from attendees at the public meetings so we can send the survey announcement to them. The Steering Committee understands that their role is to look to see if topics are covered in survey not the specific wording of the questions.

Planned S.C. Attendance at the Public Meetings

October 12 – Erwin: Catherine, Mark, S. Novak, Katherine, Joe, Parker, Danny, and Dwight

October 14 – DeRio: Steve H; Catherine; Katherine; Parker; Joe

October 21 – Shady Valley: Catherine, Joe, Parker, Danny, Katherine, Geoff

Plus a FS district ranger will attend each meeting and give intro on CNF, then Katherine Medlock will give the Steering Committee presentation.

Situation Assessment

Melinda Holland explained that the revised Situation Assessment Report was sent by Karen Firehock to the Steering Committee on October 3rd. She suggested that Committee members address any additional comments to Ms. Firehock.

Next Steps

- 1) Revise the definition of “riparian” and share with the Steering Committee.
- 2) Katherine Medlock to talk with Jim Smith and the two modelers to understand this issue, come back to the committee with more information and to ask Smith about possible changes to the descriptions.
- 3) Katherine Medlock to review age/growth classes and bring information back to the S.C.
- 4) Katherine Medlock to develop additional action items and share with the committee.

For more information or to suggest corrections to the minutes, contact karenfirehock@gmail.com

Next Meeting: October 28th, Erwin Senior Adult Center, 4-7 p.m.