

Cherokee National Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative

Steering Committee Meeting Notes

Jonesborough Visitors Center

March 16, 2010

Steering Committee Members Attending:

Mark Shelley, Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition; Joe McGuiness, Cherokee National Forest; Steve Henson, Southern Multiple Use Council; Dennis Daniel, National Wild Turkey Federation; Katherine Medlock, The Nature Conservancy; Steve Novak, Wildlaw; John Gregory, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency; Parker Street, Ruffed Grouse Society; Danny Osborne, Tennessee Division of Forestry; Dwight King, Volunteer Logging Company/Sullivan County Commissioner; Catherine Murray, Cherokee Forest Voices.

Members not attending: Terry Porter, Forest Tech Resources Solutions

Introductions:

The meeting began with opening remarks from Katherine Medlock, followed by the introduction of the Steering Committee members and the new project facilitators Karen Firehock and Melinda Holland of E² Inc. Both Ms. Firehock and Ms. Holland introduced themselves and noted that they were looking forward to working with the group. Ms. Firehock offered to send bios for both facilitators so everyone can get to know them better.

General Committee Business:

Katherine Medlock reminded committee members about filling in their volunteer time logs which is necessary to demonstrate the in-kind matching funds for the project grant. There was some discussion of assigning specific hourly rates to individual members in order to accrue higher value on their in-kind contributions. Time donated by professionals can be billed at the individual's usual consulting rate. Ms. Medlock stated that she would look into this to ensure the group is meeting its maximum qualifying match amount.

Ms. Medlock also mentioned that the cost of running advertisements in the six local newspapers has turned out to be beyond The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) budget capability and she raised the question about the committee's level of comfort with having the Cherokee National Forest (CNF) pay for the advertisements. After some discussion, the group concluded that having CNF place and pay for the ads was acceptable.

Restoration Funding

Ms. Medlock briefly reviewed the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLR), which has 10 million dollars in funding for fiscal year 2010 and 40 million in 2011, for restoration and treatments on National Forest lands. She read an excerpt from the President's budget language. She noted that there will be two restoration project proposals per region. While this CNF Landscape Restoration

Initiative is not eligible for CFLR funding this year, future restoration projects which flow from this initiative will be eligible.

Ms. Medlock also mentioned the Collaboration Cadre Southern Appalachian Ecological Restoration effort which is underway, which further indicates the importance of restoration to the Forest Service at the regional level.

Preparing for the Situation Assessment

Karen Firehock and Melinda Holland gave a brief presentation on the situation assessment process (a copy of the presentation and handout is attached to this summary). The facilitators will interview up to 30 individuals. The purpose of the situation assessment is to understand the key issues concerning the Cherokee National Forest, especially with respect to issues that may engender conflict and thus need more care and attention during the process. The outcomes of this assessment will be reported to the committee and used to design the remaining work plan and public engagement process. The timeframe for the situation assessment is three months.

The committee also requested that committee members themselves be included as part of the initial list of 30 people. Ms. Firehock and Ms. Holland agreed to take that approach and they reminded the group that this leaves 18 people to choose to interview for the remainder. Ms. Firehock explained to the group that there will also be other ways to solicit input on the process. There will be a survey on line that can be used by the committee to get answers to more general questions such as, how do people currently use the forest or what are their top priorities for restoration?

Ms. Firehock and Ms. Holland then facilitated a discussion amongst committee members about the types of information they would like to see gathered in the assessment and the categories of stakeholder interests who should be interviewed. Ms. Firehock explained to the group that there would be different questions asked during the assessment phase than would be asked for more general purposes to gauge public understanding about forest issues. Those who will be interviewed for the assessment are assumed to have a higher level of knowledge about the forest since this is why they are chosen for the interview. Those who might be surveyed later, through an on-line survey, could be asked more general questions and there is the option to get a much higher number of respondents.

In response to one participant's question concerning whether a web-based survey could show the percentage of people who use the Cherokee, Ms. Firehock clarified that neither the interviews nor the web survey would be a random sample so they could not be extrapolated to represent the general population. Those who log on to fill in a survey on line will be somewhat 'self selected' since they are already interested in the Cherokee by virtue of the fact that they have logged on to take a survey.

The following list contains suggestions from committee members for the possible questions and things to learn through the situation assessment Interviews or a general survey:

What is the general level of knowledge concerning pests and pathogens in the forest and is there an acceptable level of risk?

What do people know about fire and fire wise management?

What values do people place on species and how should they be protected or restored?

How do people think we should prioritize forest uses such as clean water, timber, habitat recreation etc.?

Do people have an understanding of the difference between the National Forest and the National Park in terms of their missions and responsibilities? Similarly, do they know the difference between the designations of wilderness versus national forest?

Do people have an understanding of the concept of ecological restoration and the need for it?

What are the threats and opportunities affecting the forest and what is the level of knowledge of the general public concerning them?

Do people have a grasp of forest dynamics and the timeframes that may be needed to achieve “restoration?”

Do people view the Cherokee National Forest as important for wildlife habitat and if so, what habitats are most important?

How many in-state residents who live nearby actually use the Cherokee National Forest? (Note: the facilitators clarified this percentage cannot be derived from a qualitative survey).

Is there a strong potential to use the forest for biomass and where are the plants located that would do this (how proximate are they to the forest)?

Are there forest edge impacts, such as from encroaching development or roads?

Next Steps

A Committee conference call was scheduled for Tuesday, April 6th at 3:00 p.m. to refine the list of who will be interviewed in the assessment and the topics to be covered.

The next committee meeting was scheduled on Friday May 7th at 3:00 p.m.; the location will be at the Adult Center in Erwin, TN. Proposed topics for that meeting include: a review of the facilitators draft time line for the entire Initiative, an update on the status of the situation assessment process, and a discussion of possible Web-based survey questions.

It was noted that October 2nd and 3rd is the Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough and the group was advised to avoid scheduling meetings near those dates during the fall.

Attachments

- Stakeholder categories and possible interviewees (excel spreadsheet)
- Power point presentation on situation assessment

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