

Cherokee National Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative

Steering Committee Meeting Notes

Erwin Senior Adults Center

Tuesday, July 27, 2010

Steering Committee Members Attending:

John Gregory, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, Region 4, Mark Shelley, Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition; Joe McGuiness, Cherokee National Forest; Steve Henson, Southern Multiple Use Council; Katherine Medlock, The Nature Conservancy; Parker Street, Ruffed Grouse Society; Dwight King, Volunteer Logging Company/Sullivan County Commissioner; Catherine Murray, Cherokee Forest Voices; Danny Osborne, Tennessee Division of Forestry;. Facilitator: Karen Firehock, E² Inc.

Members Absent: Steve Novak, Wildlaw, Dennis Daniel, National Wild Turkey Federation, Terry Porter, Tennessee Forestry Association

Observers Attending:

Geoff Call, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Susan Shaw, Cherokee National Forest (CNF); Hugh Irwin, Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition; and Greg Low, the Nature Conservancy (by phone).

Introductions:

The meeting began with opening remarks from project facilitator Karen Firehock, followed by the introduction of the steering committee members, observers and an opportunity for observer comments. She reminded the group that minutes are approved on-line unless there is strong disagreement requiring in-person resolution at the next meeting.

Observer Comments:

One observer expressed concern that the Landfire Model¹ is not accurate enough for use in the Cherokee; specifically that it is not able to distinguish differences at higher elevations and that there are numerous eco-zones that whose criteria may need to be better refined to use in this process. The committee responded that these issues are a concern and that they would be addressed in the upcoming meeting discussion.

Presentation of Enhanced Conservation Action Planning (E-CAP):

Katherine Medlock of the Nature Conservancy (TNC) presented her findings concerning the use of an Enhanced Conservation Action Plan (E-CAP) process for the Cherokee. She explained that she had already met with the members who were not able to attend this meeting to address their concerns and

¹ http://www.landfire.gov/products_overview.php

that they concluded that their concerns had been resolved. They recommended that the E-CAP process can go forward, as long as the members present at this meeting concur with that.

Ms. Medlock reminded the group that the E-CAP process is designed to determine what is there, what is the natural range of variability, is there a problem (yes/no) and can we do something about it? The enhanced aspect of the E-CAP process is adding a cost benefit analysis to help evaluate the benefits of choosing one approach over another. The E-CAP process provides a way to seek agreement, to model management scenarios and to evaluate costs and benefits.

One member asked how the natural range of variability (NRV) is determined. Ms. Medlock replied that it is determined from the Landfire Model. She noted that these values can be changed. She noted that some of the ecological zones used are well known and peer reviewed, but that not all of them have been fully vetted and the committee will need to review them. One member asked whether the group would use Ecological Zones or Ecological Systems (from NatureServe). Ms. Medlock replied that TNC uses NatureServe but the group can choose to use a different one. She noted that the process of evaluating each of the zones or systems would take several months and members are free to consult their own experts or seek peer review. The criteria for using new information and expertise will need to be determined so that the committee can agree on a consistent approach for what data to use to inform changes to the NRV classes.

In response to the question posed earlier about the reliability of the Landfire Model with respect to forest types, Ms. Medlock noted that it was developed for national application and is not very accurate at the ground level. The reason for using Landfire is that it has a predictive capacity, so different scenarios can be run and outcomes evaluated before choosing a particular solution. She noted that Steve Simon found its accuracy to be around 45 percent; similar to flipping a coin. However, his work on the Nantahala/Pisgah National Forest in North Carolina could be applied to the Cherokee, since these forests are similar. Another option is to add 300 to 400 plots within the Cherokee to bring the accuracy up to 80 percent. These plots can be used to further calibrate the model.

One member asked if the additional Forest Inventory Assessment (FIA) plots for the Cherokee could be added into the model. Several members responded that the model first needs to be refined using the forest plot data collected by Mr. Simon and then the FIA plots can be used to evaluate the model's reliability and to further improve its accuracy if necessary. This timing may also work better since the new FIA plots are not yet completed. The new FIA plots are established at one plot for every 2000 acres, as opposed to the normal scale of one plot for every 6000 acres.

One member also noted that the Continuous Inventory Stand Conditions or CISC data (now referred to as FS Veg) tends to overestimate what is out there and it will be very important to get more accurate information about forest age classes present in the Cherokee for each ecological zone. Ms. Medlock noted that LIDAR data provides greater accuracy, but it is very cost prohibitive.

One participant asked how the data could be field checked to increase the model's accuracy. Ms. Medlock replied that Steve Simon's data from his work in the Nantahala/Pisgah Forest could be used as a surrogate for the Cherokee, or he could be tasked with collecting more data in the Cherokee, depending on how accurate the group wants the data to be.

Another member suggested contacting W. Henry McNab with the Southern Forest Research Station for his advice about what data are available. An observer also noted that there is a paper authored by Steve Simon and others that explains how the ecological zones have been determined and this can be shared with the committee.

A committee member asked how data collected by Cherokee Forest Voices and the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition would be used. Ms. Medlock replied that this information could be used to further calibrate the model. She reiterated that this would be determined based on the committee's evaluation of which ecological zones need more information to better inform their accuracy. The process and criteria for adding other data sources can be determined by the committee at their upcoming meeting(s).

One member asked if the group would be evaluating the forest ecological zones to make sure they are adequate and include all the forest types in the Cherokee. He used the Table Mountain Pine community as an example. He could not determine that it fit neatly into any of the categories. Ms. Medlock replied that the group would be taking a look at each of the zones to determine if they make sense for the Cherokee.

After some discussion, the group agreed that having the best accuracy possible is important to ensure that the projects determined later meet a well understood need. Understanding the current forest condition will be critical to developing useful projects to restore the forest. Therefore, the committee agreed to ask Mr. Simon to prepare a proposal that includes having field plots in the Cherokee to ground truth and recalibrate the model. The committee would like him to create a proposal within the next two weeks, if possible, and then to have a follow up conference call to review the proposal and agree on getting the work started.

On July 22nd, prior to the Steering Committee meeting, Katherine Medlock held a conference call with the three members of the Steering Committee who could not attend the meeting on the 27th. The same information presented in today's meeting was presented to the group on the call the week prior. After some discussion, call participants agreed that the increased accuracy of having Steve Simon put in plots on the Cherokee National Forest was preferred for this project. She noted that one member, who participated on the call expressed some concerns that the group be sure to allow ample time in the schedule for the committee's discussion and debate, in addition to having additional time for data collection.

New Committee Members:

Katherine Medlock presented her recommended new committee member Geoff Call, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (U.S.FWS) as a candidate to add to the Steering Committee. Karen Firehock reminded the group that they can add members at any time but the preference is to add potential members early on in the process, so that they will have had the benefit of deliberation concerning the Cherokee Forest prior to evaluating potential forest restoration projects. She also noted that the committee membership has a cap on how many members may serve on the committee.² Currently there are 12 members so adding Mr. Call will bring the group to 13 members, which is still below the maximum allowed. She also reminded the group that the criteria for addition of new members to the committee include the standard that they are added to represent an interest or perspective that is not represented currently.

Ms. Medlock referenced the email sent earlier concerning Mr. Call's qualifications and background and she explained that, even if Mr. Call were not added, he would still play a role in the process since the U.S. FWS already reviews potential projects in the forest. She suggested that adding Mr. Call now would allow the U.S. FWS to participate in the process of creating projects and that might serve to facilitate a

² The committee membership cap was incorrectly stated in the meeting as 20. The number in the committee's protocols is 15.

supportive review later on. After some discussion, everyone agreed to add Mr. Call and welcomed him to the committee.

Ms. Medlock then explained why the agenda noted new members as plural. She told the group that she is planning to be on maternity leave for three months of the project from January through December and that, given TNC's role in convening the group, she would like someone to substitute in her absence. She recommended that Alex Wyss of TNC serve while she is absent. Ms. Firehock noted that this circumstance was not included in the group's operating procedures but that the group could determine that substitution is appropriate, given that TNC staff will be continuing to assist with the data analysis for the committee. After some discussion, the group agreed to add Mr. Wyss for the period when Ms. Medlock will be absent. Ms. Medlock noted that in order to facilitate a smooth transition, Mr. Wyss will attend the meetings just prior to her departure.

Next Steps:

The Steering Committee next discussed its work plan. The public meetings have been moved to October to ensure adequate time for preparation. One member suggested that those should be scheduled as soon as possible. Ms. Firehock offered to create a master meeting list and send a doodle poll to the committee in order to determine the best dates for future meetings through 2010.

Ms. Firehock reported that the interviews had been mostly completed (28 of 30) and the assessment report of those findings would be sent to the committee as a draft report in August for discussion at a later meeting. She noted that the findings would also be used to inform the public outreach strategy.

Ms. Medlock will contact the Forest Service concerning using the FIA data for groundtruthing the model and she will ask Mr. Simone to prepare a proposal to share with the committee within two weeks.

The web site is completed and Ms. Firehock will send the committee a link to it.

The on-line survey will also be drafted and developed in August with input from the committee. It will be made available to the public before and after the October workshops.

Attachments

- Draft Ecological Zones and NatureServe Ecological Systems Crosswalk
- E-CAP Deliverables
- Work Plan Schedule (excel spreadsheet)

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