



# Blue Mountains Forest Partners

## Our Mission

*“Blue Mountains Forest Partners is a diverse group of stakeholders who work together to create and implement a shared vision to improve the resilience and well-being of forests and communities in the Blue Mountains.”*

## Full Group Meeting Minutes

### Meeting Overview:

- **Meeting Date:** May 18, 2023
- **Time:** 4:00 – 7:00 pm
- **Location:** Grant County Airport Conference Room
- **Facilitator:** Mark Webb
- **Minutes Scribe:** SJ Brown

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- **Call to Order (all):** introductions. Agenda moved approval, seconded, approved unanimously.
  - **Approval of August 2022 Full Group minutes (all):** minutes moved approval, seconded, approved unanimously.
  - **Ops update (Pam):** discussed updating our CFLRP monitoring plan; advocating for BIL and IRA funding for the Malheur; and discussed the Southern Blues Partnership Joint Chiefs project involving NRCS, USFS, BMFP, and others for restoration work primarily on nonfederal lands. BMFP held its annual board of directors election, and elected slate 1: Pam Hardy, Glen Johnston (President), Dave Hannibal, and Mark Cerny. The membership also elected Roy Walker to the board.
  - **May workshop update (James):** had a number of presentations from researchers working on the Malheur and similar forests. There is ample evidence that our restoration work is reducing wildfire risk, benefiting wildlife, and restoring aquatic habitat: we still need more time to fully understand the impact we’re having on the landscape. Wildfire can be a beneficial tool, but it is indiscriminate when it comes to altering species composition: mechanical treatments are needed to make this shift. Discussed a number of new tools and processes that help us work across ownership boundaries.
  - **Forest Service project work updates (BMRD & PCRD staff):** Prairie City: working on Upper Bear Lake with scoping starting in June/July 2024 and a decision expected in June/July 2025, have added additional capacity in several positions but are still down 10 vacancies for full time employees (40% non-fire workforce deficit). USFS is using a “new” NEPA process developed through the EADM (environmental analysis and decisionmaking process) that hopes to reduce planning timelines to 1 year from scoping to decision. Agency is using a template for EAs and undertaking trainings for new NEPA staff. Blue Mountain:



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hiring 12 new permanent staff, which will bring the district up to 85% capacity. Austin DEIS is nearing completion and will be out for comment around July. Offering two new timber sales in June and July, including the Laycock Creek Firewise project, a lot of precommercial thinning contracts, aspen restoration, and aquatic restoration projects (culvert replacement, instream work, floodplain restoration, meadow restoration) funded by several different sources. Blue Mountains will have a youth crew this summer, but is having a hard time getting youth to apply for the positions: please let the Forest Service know if you have youth in mind who might be interested in participating! Wild horse draft EA will be going out for public comment in early June.

- **Collaborative opportunities to participate in a post-fire recovery decision support tool project (Dr. Michelle Steen-Adams, Washington State University):** Dr. Steen-Adams presented to BMFP about her project, which seeks to develop a decision support tool for working in post-fire environments. We are seeing a lack of conifer regeneration post-fire as a result of increasing wildfire severity and climate change, and although there are a number of decision support tools, the real question is the right mix of these tools for the Malheur. Dr. Steen-Adams' approach will collaboratively develop useful tools that will produce actionable science for use in post fire environments. Discussion followed. How might BMFP engage with the Forest Service to include guidance for post-fire management in the upcoming forest plan revision process? USFS is interested in any tools that expands the agency's flexibility to work in post-fire environments and across boundaries/forests. Accountability is also important, because without accountability there won't be social license to implement treatments.
- **Wildlife Habitat ZOA discussion and vote to approve (Trent):** Trent shared a presentation updating BMFP on the proposed Wildlife ZOAs, work that started in 2018 with field trips and discussions with BMFP. Most of BMFP's work has focused on vegetation, fuels, and wildfire, so this ZOA fills in a missing piece to our restoration work. Existing USFS practice was to analyze the effect of our restoration projects on 50+ species, which was onerous and didn't reflect the best available science. The Wildlife ZOA approach recognizes that our existing restoration work already has a lot of benefits for wildlife, and that for a much shorter list of species, only a few missing habitat components needed to be address to fully account for wildlife needs: our existing approach is working, and only needed an additional lens to pick up missing habitat components (generally, snags). The Wildlife ZOA uses a filter approach also used in the 2012 planning rule: coarse (plant communities and seral stages = vegetation conditions), meso (after coarse filter, some species need particular structural elements), and fine filter (coarse + meso + specific habitat elements). 74% of the wildlife on the forest are addressed just with the coarse filter, and are of low risk concern; 25% of the wildlife on the forest are addressed by meso filter components; 1% are fine filter species (Pacific marten and pileated woodpeckers).

There are 7 zones of agreement: 1) wildlife habitat at the coarse level should be analyzed at the forest level (not project); 2) wildlife habitat at the meso level within upland forest types should be analyzed at the project level; 3) wildlife habitat within aspen ecosystems; 4) wildlife habitat within meadow systems; 5) savannas (transition zones between meadow and forest); 6) snags, defective trees, and downed wood; 7) wildlife habitat at the fine scale level



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(just pileated and Pacific marten) should be analyzed at the forest level to help inform restoration at the project level.

Included forest-level minimum thresholds for structural conditions at 40, 60, and 80% thresholds: 1) 40% of HRV = minimum threshold; 2) 60% of HRV = restoration threshold; and 3) 80% of HRV = CFLRP threshold. This means that at the forest level, and after landscape level restoration projects are completed, total acres of each vegetation type and seral stages with structural conditions needed by meso filter species will be > 40/60/80% of HRV. This is not a ZOA but rather a hypothesis that will need to be addressed collectively as we implement the ZOA. We don't have the data to verify the HRV, but that data would be obtained over time. HRV information comes from our Upland ZOAs (because it is related to vegetation not wildlife).

Intention is not for this ZOA to be burdensome, but rather to inform prescriptions and to defend ongoing work that is having wildlife benefits. For implementation, these ZOAs would be integrated into prescriptions (which are already largely accomplishing our wildlife objectives). To turn the ZOA into prescriptions, BMFP will need to complete the decision support tool; BMFP is pursuing funding to accomplish this objective. The decision support tool informs what is needed for each species.

Discussion followed. How closely are we meeting the 40/60/80 thresholds currently? We have a lot of data already obtained through FVF monitoring, although not enough information about snag density to inform outcomes. BMFP is seeking funding for a snag inventory and HRV analysis that should function to complete this missing piece. This is an iterative, living document that we will revisit over time as we continue to implement projects. ZOA is relevant to forest plan revision, which will use the filter approach.

**Decision: does BMFP vote to approve the Wildlife Zones of Agreement? The ZOAs pass unanimously.**

- **Forest Planning update (Ann):** Forest Service is in the pre-Assessment phase of revision and will run a notice in the Federal Register at the end of June kicking off the process. The Blues Forest Plan Revision team will be integrated with the Pacific Service Group (the new centralized planning team). Working now on identifying Species of Conservation Concern, which will be approved by the Regional Forester; the Wildlife ZOAs have been shared with the planning teams. Also undertaking the Wilderness and Wild and Scenic inventories, which will occur over the summer. When that work is complete, then the agency will move into the Assessment phase and early public engagement. Will be in-person and remote opportunities for engagement. Aiming to complete revision in 3 years. How will the teams use the best available science to inform the revision? BMFP would like a briefing on how the agency plans to integrate BASI into the planning process.
- **Adjourn.**



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## Blue Mountains Forest Partners Vision, Guiding Principles, and Grounds Rules for Collaboration

### Our Vision

*The Blue Mountains Forest Partners represents a broad constituency of stakeholders interested in healthy forest ecosystems, economic vitality and quality of life in Grant County, Oregon. We provide the US Forest Service with proposals for management of National Forest lands, and we support the utilization of forest resources and related opportunities to strengthen local economies.*

### Guiding Principles

- *To promote forest restoration in Grant County, integrating ecological, economic and community needs that have been developed and/or prioritized through collaboration.*
- *To improve our ability to work collaboratively and participate actively in these issues, finding common ground for our work. Our process will be open, inclusive and encourage participation of diverse stakeholders; our meetings will provide a 'safe' space for discussion and sharing of ideas.*
- *To overcome gridlock in forest planning and implementation. The success of our work is tied to long-term sustainability of forests and communities.*

### Ground Rules for Collaboration and Meeting Participation

***Members and nonmembers alike are expected to abide by these ground rules***

- *Respect each other in and outside of meetings.*
- *No backroom deals.*
- *Personal attacks will not be tolerated.*
- *The personal integrity and values of participants will be respected.*
- *Stereotyping will be avoided.*
- *Commitments will not be made lightly and will be kept—agreements will be honored.*
- *Disagreements will be regarded as “problems to be solved” rather than as “battles to be won.”*
- *Participants are representative of a broad range of interests, each having concerns about the outcome of the issues at hand. All parties recognize the legitimacy of the interests and concerns of others and expect that their interests will be represented as well.*
- *Participants commit to keeping their colleagues/constituents informed about the progress of these discussions.*
- *Participants commit to stating interests, problems, and opportunities. Not positions.*
- *Participants will air problems, disagreements and critical information during meetings to avoid surprises.*
- *Participants commit to search for opportunities and alternatives. The creativity of the group can often find the best solution.*
- *Participants agree to verify rumors at the meeting before accepting them as fact.*



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- *Respect the facilitator and meeting agenda.*