WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
Natural Resources
Peter Goldmark - Commissioner of Public Lands

Forest Health Technical Advisory Committee
February 27, 2012 Meeting Notes
Ellensburg, WA

9:32 am Aaron Everett called the meeting to order.

Introductions

Committee members present: Aaron Everett, Reese Lolley, Greg Morris, Bill Gaines, Robert Gara, Connie Mehmel, Dave Peterson, Scott Ketchum, Doug Daoust

Others present: Karen Ripley (DNR), Chuck Hersey (DNR), Jeff Jones (consulting forester), Mark Hicks (Dept. of Ecology), David Whipple (WA Fish and Wildlife), Phil Hess (consulting forester, landowner), Maurice Williamson (consulting forester), and Dave Werntz (Conservation Northwest).

Background: insect and disease damage trends, forest health law overview, ongoing DNR actions and programs.

Aaron provided an overview of insect and disease damage trends in Eastern Washington. Spruce budworm and pine beetles are the two main damage agents in Eastern Washington.

Aaron then provided an overview of the forest health law. Forest health law was amended in 2007, the Commissioner of Public Lands was designated as the state's forest health lead. Forest health law has three tiers of action: Tier 1 monitoring and technical assistance, Tier 2 forest health warning, and Tier 3 forest health order.

Law is concerned about "uncharacteristically severe" damage. Appoint technical advisory committee to evaluate threats and recommend actions. Goal is to raise the profile of the issue and focus the efforts on a specific geographic area. Aaron anticipates having three technical advisory committee meetings and developing recommendations by the spring of 2012. Committee is also responsible for monitoring progress on recommendations and to what level and detail needs to be determined.

Doug Daoust asked about the difference between a warning and order. Aaron stated that an order can be issued before a warning, but the usual process is to declare a warning and then issue an order later if conditions warrant.

In 2011 Washington's Legislature made a $2 million capital investment in forest health treatments in Eastern Washington. Capital investment resulted in forest health treatments on 7,500 acres of state trust lands, 1,300 acres of private forestlands and 1,600 acres of Colville National Forest lands.

Dave Peterson asked how DNR prioritizes applying forest health treatments to state trust lands. Aaron stated that the DNR has analyzed state trust specific inventory data to prioritize treatments and that the 2010 statewide Forest Resource Assessment and Strategy helped to develop priorities services intended for State and Private forest land.

Bill Gaines asked what scale will the TAC be focused on? Aaron replied that the initial "coarse" scale will evaluate Watershed Resource Inventory Areas based on extensive factors such as tree mortality, future risk and opportunities for management activities. Additional "fine" scale evaluations will consider more detailed information about stand conditions and opportunities for remedial action.

Bob Gara asked how integrated are forest health and fuel reductions treatments? Each treatment type can achieve multiple goals (fire and forest health). Sometimes treatment types are limited based on requirements of funding source.

Doug Daoust is wondering if enough energy has been spent on Tier 1, focusing on education. Are we going to Tier 2 or Tier 3 too quickly? Aaron stated that the most likely outcome of the TAC process is not initiating Tier 3. Legislative funding commitment to Tier 1 initiatives has not been at a level that can sustain change through education and voluntary actions.

Scott Ketchum believes it would be difficult to go to a Tier 3, especially for private owners when most of the forest health problems are on federal lands.

Greg Morris asked if the TAC developed recommendations, who on DNR or Forest Service staff would implement the recommendations. He commented that there is a lot of work that needs to be done and the human resources are not available to implement the needed practices.

Primary responsibilities, draft process outline and key decision points

Aaron outlined the process for the technical advisory committee:

1. Evaluate the threat
2. Is a warning or order warranted
3. Develop recommendations to reduce the threat
4. Monitoring progress and results

It would be helpful to have some desired condition recommendations and some specific recommendations that a landowner or land manager can implement.

Scott Ketchum believes it is important to estimate the economic impact of trees lost to forest health issues. What is the average value of timber lost per year due to forest insects and diseases?

Doug Daoust we should get better detailed risk data for the three to five focus areas.

Scott Ketchum would like clarification of what is included in the risk models. Is it insect, diseases, and/or fire? Answer: The National Insect and Disease Risk map only models mortality due to insect and

diseases. Dave Peterson believes it would be easy to acquire/add fire models. Reese Lolley suggested we should also include forest type, soil and site class data.

11:30-12:00 Preliminary coarse scale landscape priorities

Aaron reviewed individual forest health spatial layers: cumulative mortality, defoliation, NIDRM, FRCC

Aaron stated we may need to review the new 2012 FRCC data and add that to our analysis. Reese Lolley states there are some significant differences in the old FRCC data and new FRCC Data.

Aaron provided an overview of the initial coarse scale landscape priority selection process.

Karen clarified that the mortality data come from the annual aerial survey and depict areas with cumulative mortality greater than 10 trees per acre from 1996 to 2010.

The purpose is to select a few watersheds as an initial coarse filter and then develop a more detailed analysis of those select watersheds to develop finer scale focus areas.

Doug Daoust asked if we plan on using USFS planning units in our analysis. US Forest Service Planning Areas are individual National Forests' and Districts' five year vegetation planning areas. These are areas where National Environmental Policy Act planning has been or soon will be initiated. They are the best available representation of where the Forest Service intends to perform management activities. Aaron stated we will be using the USFS planning units for the next level of analysis.

Scott Ketchum recommended we incorporate market accessibility for forest products into our analysis. Are there markets to sell material from forest health practices? Aaron said we will consider that at our next level of analysis.

Scott Ketchum and Reese Lolley recommended analyzing what areas are too far gone versus what areas are greatest at risk of an outbreak. Doug Daoust asked if we could increase the amount of cumulative mortality to identify areas that are too dead (20 trees per acre or some other number) to make treatments worthwhile. Would request the technical advisory committee to help assess a benchmark. DNR can develop an analysis of the number of acres that have 10, 20, 30, trees per acre etc… Doug Daoust suggested 25 trees per acre cumulative mortality is a good benchmark. Aaron suggested that some areas that are 'far gone' still are in need of management activity to restore forest health and reduce fire hazard.

Action: DNR will produce a histogram that shows the distribution of cumulative mortality per acre.

Dave Peterson asked if it would be helpful to incorporate increase in temperatures or long-term droughts into risk models. How can we incorporate drought, precipitation and climate change into models?

Reese Lolley said that we are missing a map of desired future conditions based on site conditions.

Doug Daoust gravitates to areas where multiple land ownerships are already working together to help solve some of these issues.

Reese Lolley would like to see a weighting to favor areas that are not in federal reserve areas.

Five major things we will consider:

-markets/economic

-intensity of management (USFS planning areas, FPA, etc…)

-increase cumulative mortality to 25 trees per acre

-Overlaying USFS Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration areas (CFLRs) as a different scale of analysis to compare with WIRA analysis.

-include update to FRCC, possibly include other fuel/fire layers.

-Get vegetation layer from Reese Lolley.

Dave Peterson: We should use economic feasibility as a source in our initial analysis (distance to mill, mill capacity etc…) Scott Ketchum said if he moves pulp more than 70 miles it generates a negative return.

Reese Lolley recommends looking at plant associations (forest types) to help model fuels . Dave Peterson said the Fuel Characteristic Classification System (FCCS) would be more helpful at a finer scale.

Can overlay FRCC data with a forest type layer to refine the coarse scale analysis. Use forest type layer as a mask for FRCC data. Reese Lolley will provide data set to DNR to mask out high severity fire types (lodgepole, etc…)

Scott Ketchum recommends giving a greater weight to risk rather than cumulative mortality. Aaron responded that the evaluation metric enables adjusting different weight factors. In the initial analysis, risk was given an extra weight of 50%.

1:45 – 2:30 Process and considerations for evaluating warning or order options

Dave Peterson: Of all the lands we would like to treat, how much is practical to treat on an annual basis? Last year the USFS treated about 15,000 acres with forest health treatments. A comment was made that we need to at least double that level of treatment. Develop estimates of stand densities and treatments for the different ownership types that are currently being accomplished each year and compare to the rate needed to achieve desired condition to reduce threats to forest health. We need to develop an estimate of the number of acres that need to be treated per year to achieve a desired future condition. We could also evaluate the cost of an initial treatment plus the cost of subsequent treatments over time.

Doug Daoust said if we have not done much in an area in regards Tier 1, we should start there and then go to Tier 2.

Aaron stated that the purpose of Tier 2 is to raise awareness of the forest health threats in an area and to focus DNR efforts in that area. Karen said Tier 2 is a way to leverage resources and concentrate efforts in a specific area; it highlights the need in an area. Tier 2 would help to focus resources and hopefully leverage new resources to make a significant difference in the forest health of an area.

-Develop estimates of recent forest management activity for different ownerships.

Bob Gara recommended incorporating fire history into the analysis.

David Whipple recommended taking into consideration the major T&E species. It is a challenge to manage for forest health and spotted owl habitat. Do you go in owl range or avoid it? Bill Gaines said most wildlife analysis should occur once we have narrowed our focus to specific areas so we can incorporate the habitat needs of species in the area.

Mark Hicks said that in terms of water quality that there are risks for no action and risks associated with action and we will need to weigh those risks to develop viable recommendations.

Bob Gara recommended incorporating logging history into the analysis. The Yakama nation has a good history of forest composition.

Doug Daoust wonders how much of this analysis is being done by the Tapash Collaborative. We could just give a warning to the collaborative as opposed to individual landowners.

2:30 – 3:00 Wrap-up, logistics, set next meeting date

Next Meeting Date: Wednesday, March 28, 2012. Location to be determined.

Aaron will send out an email including information on travel reimbursement (per diem rates, etc…)

Public comments can be emailed to Aaron Everett: aaron.everett@dnr.wa.gov