

Revitalizing the Applegate Adaptive Management Area

BY DON BOUCHER

The Applegate Adaptive Management Area (AMA) is one of ten AMAs that were part of the 1994 Northwest Forest Plan. AMAs were established to allow innovative and creative approaches to resource land management. The learning from these new approaches was to be exported to other areas to help them be more efficient and responsive.

Adaptive management describes an approach to land management, and an “Adaptive Management Area” refers to a specific place. The Applegate AMA refers to most of the Applegate River watershed, which totals approximately 500,000 acres. Roughly 66 percent of the watershed is federally managed.

In 1998, after an extensive amount of analysis was completed, the US Forest Service (USFS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) developed the Applegate AMA Guide, intended to initiate and guide the planning process. The document was highly visionary and forward-thinking for its time.

Now the Applegate AMA has come to another exciting point as we pick up where we left off, utilizing over a dozen ecological assessments

that were completed between 1994 and 2012.

Though various projects on the Applegate Ranger District (now part of the Siskiyou Mountains Ranger District) were implemented in the late 1990s, there is renewed interest in using the AMA Guide to develop a collaborative AMA strategy to implement needed restoration projects, such as vegetation management, wildlife and aquatic habitat improvement, hazardous fuels reduction in the interface area adjacent to homes, infrastructure maintenance, and other projects that will help maintain a more resilient ecosystem able to withstand major disturbance agents such as fire or insects or a changing climate.

“The forest service is excited to utilize the analysis already completed in the Applegate AMA to develop an implementation strategy for restoration work in the near future. We will build on the great work that has come before and work toward an all-lands collaborative approach,” said Siskiyou Mountains District ranger Donna Mickley.

Many land managers, organizations and individuals

recognize the importance of working together to manage this complex ecosystem including USFS, BLM, the Oregon Department of Forestry, Jackson and Josephine counties, local rural fire departments, the Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council, and Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative, to name a few.

Natural ecosystems are enormously complex. We recognize and assume that we cannot know everything about the Applegate watershed and its ecosystem. Choosing to use adaptive management provides us with an approach that allows us to:

- Be proactive and anticipate new information, explicitly recognizing the uncertainties.
- Design management as an experiment.
- Use information gained from implementation and monitoring to improve management practices.

Recently, USFS formed an interdisciplinary natural resource team to compile existing data and information from the 1990s as well as from current analyses, to become familiar with current management and public values, to reach out to local communities for assistance with establishing priority treatment areas, and to identify what type of partnership and collaborative opportunities will be most effective. The intent is to look at the AMA Guide

through a new lens and implement an all-lands approach that includes not only federal, state and county lands, but also private lands from landowners interested in doing land restoration.

This approach acknowledges the many benefits that nature provides as well as the challenges that we collectively face in today’s rapidly changing ecological and sociopolitical environments, regardless of jurisdictional boundary lines.

The next steps planned for the Applegate AMA between now and the fall of 2015 are:

- USFS/BLM begins engagement with communities and potential partners and collaborators.
- Natural resource specialists complete additional field reviews to refine management needs and objectives consistent with the vision described in the AMA Guide.
- We begin work on a strategy for the entire AMA, focusing on high-priority restoration needs.
- We engage with communities to collaboratively develop site-specific projects to address restoration needs.
- We initiate the environmental analysis process.

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