

What we heard at the Applegate AMA public meeting

BY DON BOUCHER

The US Forest Service (USFS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) would like to thank those who attended the September 2, 2015, public meeting to discuss forest resiliency in the Applegate Adaptive Management Area (AMA). More importantly, we would like to let those who attended know how much we appreciate your continued passion and enthusiasm to stay involved with the



At the September 2 public meeting, Nikola Smith, US Forest Service ecosystem services specialist, discusses how benefits provided by nature can be part of designing desired outcomes in the planning process.

management of these important public lands. It was a great opportunity for the agencies to share information regarding new efforts to prioritize forest resiliency and fuels treatments in the AMA and to hear ideas, concerns, and questions. The group breakout sessions generated a lot of great ideas and comments.

Following is a recap of some of the issues we heard at the meeting:

- Frustration with the length and amount of the planning process that has occurred in the AMA, and a strong desire for us to get more work done on the ground in alignment with the *Applegate Adaptive Management Area Guide*.
- A strong desire for the public to play a more active role during implementation.
- High importance placed on the use of an integrated approach and the leveraging of existing work and knowledge.
- Frustration in long-term participants with the frequency of agency turnover.
- Concern that all interested parties will have a voice.
- Concern regarding the commitment of the agencies to follow through with the AMA vision.

In light of the ongoing drought in southwest Oregon, anticipated climate change, and the noticeable increase in fire size and severity throughout the Pacific Northwest, both USFS and the BLM are in agreement that there is a need to rejuvenate the spirit of the AMA that brought so much energy to earlier efforts to manage for resilient landscapes across boundaries.

The goal for this AMA planning effort is to develop an integrated

strategy for the Applegate AMA that incorporates an all-lands approach to address landscape resilience to disturbance and climate change and utilizes collaboratively developed projects that recognize the connection between ecological conditions and a sustainable flow of goods and services.

To address some of the concerns we heard, the agencies plan to solicit input from interested citizens to help in the development of a long-term strategy for implementation in the Applegate AMA. This strategy would build off the 1998 Applegate AMA Guide that identified two primary goals. We think these goals are still relevant today.

Goal 1: Achieve healthy, diverse, and functioning ecosystems that are sustainable over time, in order to foster healthy social and economic systems. We want to:

- Understand the relationships between sustainable resources and sustainable economies (supporting sustainable communities).
- Develop clear criteria and indicators of sustainability reflecting shared values, and monitor measurable criteria over time.
- Enhance the relationship of agencies to the communities adjacent to the AMA. We want to create a climate of trust and cooperation between agencies and private citizens.
- Contribute to the economic well-being of communities where possible.

Goal 2: Create adaptive organizations. The BLM and USFS are responsible for management of the Applegate AMA and want to help create a learning environment that is accessible and responsive. We want to:

- Improve the capacity for local, public problem-solving across boundaries.
- Gain understanding, cooperation, and mutual respect among the federal agencies and between agencies and citizens.
- Use resources efficiently.
- Apply ecological principles.
- Use adaptive management principles of testing, monitoring, and learning, and share this learning with all partners.
- Share knowledge freely and effectively.

An important role of the agencies in the AMA is to facilitate collaboration, mutual learning, and innovation. While many are concerned that this may be difficult to achieve, particularly with changes in Resource Management Plans and land allocations, the AMA is really about how we communicate and work together to find common ground, resolve differences, and work toward successful outcomes. We have the ability as agency and community members to create and maintain an atmosphere of collaboration and learning.

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Applegate Adaptive Management planning: Where do we go from here?

BY DON BOUCHER

The question when faced with a large task is always “Where do we begin?” As the US Forest Service (USFS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) learned from our public meeting in September, there is frustration within the Applegate community with the length and amount of planning process that has occurred in the Applegate Adaptive Management Area (AMA), and a strong desire for agencies to get more work done on the ground that is in alignment with the AMA Guide. The challenge is developing the long-term strategy for the AMA and initiating needed, and in some cases overdue, restoration work within the AMA. To accomplish this, we envision a parallel effort where we develop the long-term strategy (where and how to implement restoration across the AMA), as we also begin to implement needed restoration work.

As shared in our AMA public meeting article on this page, the goal for this AMA planning effort is to develop an integrated strategy for the Applegate AMA that incorporates an all-lands approach to address landscape resilience to disturbance and climate change and utilizes collaboratively developed projects that recognize the connection between ecological conditions and a sustainable flow of goods and services.

To achieve this overarching goal, we plan to work with interested individuals to collaboratively develop this long-term strategy. This strategy would build on the 1998 Applegate AMA Guide that identified two primary goals. We think these goals are still relevant

today. These goals are (1) achieve healthy, diverse, and functioning ecosystems that are sustainable over time, and (2) create adaptive organizations.

This strategy will help guide future actions as we move toward restoring the AMA to a more resilient condition. There are few areas in the AMA that do not currently require some level of restoration. The AMA interdisciplinary planning team (IDT) of the USFS and BLM resource specialists identified a set of criteria that was used to select a starting point. The following criteria were used by the IDT:

Cross-boundary treatment opportunities. This criterion prioritizes areas where there are opportunities to enact treatments across administrative boundaries. This was weighted toward areas where the USFS and the BLM could potentially treat across boundaries. This criterion also considered adjacency to private lands, though it must be noted that these opportunities are at the sole discretion of the landowner.

Ecological restoration of pine and oak ecosystems. This emphasizes areas where pine and/or oak ecosystems are in need of restoration, primarily due to encroachment by conifers.

Opportunities for treatment of mid-closed seral state stands. Based on analysis by the Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative (SOFRC), this stand condition is one of the higher priorities to treat and is the condition that is most abundant throughout most of southwest Oregon.

Restoration opportunities on ridges

and warm mid-slopes. Ridges and warm mid-slope settings are a strategic place to enact fuels treatments.

Fire risk to communities from large and local fires. This criterion looked at areas at high risk from wildfire and is based on extensive fire-risk modeling completed by the SOFRC.

Following a review of these criteria and working through a mapping exercise utilizing spatial geographic information, the Upper Applegate watershed was selected as the initial planning area. This 52,300-acre planning area includes the Beaver Creek, Palmer Creek, and Star Gulch Creek drainages along the main stem of the Applegate River north of Applegate Lake. The area provides a great opportunity for coordinated cross-jurisdictional management in the Applegate AMA. On both USFS and the BLM lands, there are project areas that have a current decision document where limited work is currently in progress. Work can be accomplished and used as an example as we begin a project planning process on the Upper Applegate watershed.

The next steps in this process are to begin to understand the planning area and collaboratively develop goals and objectives specific to the watershed. As we discussed in the meeting last month, we want to provide an opportunity to engage as we determine those goals and objectives and ultimately develop a project proposal or multiple project proposals.

Under the overarching goals described in the Applegate AMA Guide, the following draft objectives were identified by the IDT for the Upper Applegate Planning Area:

- Reduce risk to communities and other developed areas from uncharacteristic wildland fire.

• Restore landscapes to more resilient conditions.

- Maintain watershed health, including water and site productivity.
- Mitigate stand conditions that contribute to insect and disease outbreaks.
- Develop and maintain complex forest habitats.
- Maintain or improve big game winter range habitat conditions.
- Maintain a sustainable flow of goods and services.
- Maintain stream flows for anadromous fish populations and clean water.

The objectives listed above need much more refinement and specificity, but they are the starting point. We use the words “collaborate” or “collaboratively developed” often when we discuss work in the Applegate. Those words can mean different things to different people based on their own observations, experiences, or expectations. What those words mean to us is that we work side by side with interested participants to develop objectives and design projects and more importantly monitor those projects to see if we did what we said we were going to do and whether we get the results we expected.

By the time this issue of the *Applegater* is published we will have had a public field trip on Saturday, November 7, to discuss examples of restoration, what we learned from the work, and what lessons can be applied to future work. In the Adaptive Management Area, we only fail if we fail to learn.

We hope to plan more trips as we continue engaging with residents and interested participants. If you have questions or would like more information, contact me at the phone number or email address below.

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