

Upper Applegate Watershed planning

BY DON BOUCHER

Multiple public workshops have been focusing attention on the Upper Applegate Watershed. A consistent theme is the importance of looking back, as we get deeper into the current planning for the Upper Applegate, at the goals identified in the Applegate Adaptive Management Area (AMA) Guide, prepared in the late 1990s. This guide is the product of some very thoughtful and forward-thinking collaborative work, and the goals it presents can be guiding principles regardless of any current land-use allocations. The primary goals identified in the AMA Guide are (1) to achieve healthy, diverse, and functioning ecosystems that are sustainable over time, and (2) to make public agencies, e.g., US Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM), more adaptive and improve community engagement in planning, implementing, and monitoring.

Concurrent with the preparation of the AMA Guide was the Applegate Valley Strategic Plan, finalized in July 1997. The visions and goals identified in this plan demonstrate public concerns about and awareness of the interconnections of the social, economic, and natural systems. The strategic plan identified the following vision for the Ruch/Upper Applegate area: "Our forests are healthy, natural systems managed for a variety of resources including wildlife, birds, and wood products. We protect our old-growth forests and we have introduced fire into the forest ecosystem. We have created cathedral forests near homes to reduce the risk of destructive fire. Our rivers are healthy productive places that are free from development and contain abundant fish."

The reason for looking at this work, completed almost 20 years ago, is that it is still relevant. We have not yet achieved the vision outlined in the strategic plan. Our current planning process is designed to move toward that vision. Planning on the Upper Applegate Watershed continues following a meeting nearly a year ago January in which the community was asked to identify benefits from the land, threats to those benefits, and possible management actions to mitigate the threats. That was followed by a workshop in April where agency resources specialists and several community members shared information about the current condition of the Upper Applegate area. Since those meetings, the USFS and the BLM have hosted two workshops to focus discussion on the Upper Applegate planning area. The purpose of these workshops was to further clarify community values

(August 3) and to identify the important threats to maintaining those values (October 4).

Values identified by the community were arranged into five main categories with elements that either represent the value of the landscape or identify important areas on it in relation to the value. These elements were mapped by agency specialists and can be viewed in an online map. This map is still a work in progress and will be updated as mapping is completed. It is available for viewing by the public at arcg.is/2cLIWj5.

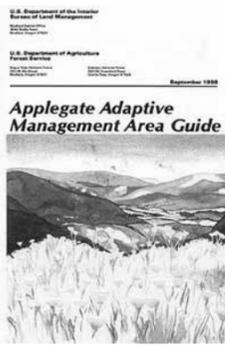
The work before us now is to identify a suite of actions that will address the most serious threats. A public workshop was held on November 9 to discuss how we (the community and agencies) address in the near term the most important threats. We are using an approach that looks at ecosystem services, or what we are calling "benefits from nature." These are the goods and services that people receive from natural systems. A number of good comments were received and some potential management actions were provided by the community. The agencies are now working to compile all of the notes and organize them into themes to bring back to the community in a meeting that will be scheduled after the holidays in January 2017. There we hope to continue a collaborative effort to identify a suite of management actions that will address the more important threats to nature's benefits.

As stated in the AMA Guide: "Goals can only be achieved when citizens, resource managers, and governmental leaders work to support and sustain an open process of integrated community and ecosystem planning." The key to successful collaboration really rests in our ability to communicate and work together to find common ground, resolve differences, and work towards successful outcomes. We are working to build a transparent process that integrates community and agency values.

If you have questions, comments, or other thoughts, please feel free to contact me.

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Nedsbar Timber Sale: Next steps

BY KRISTI MASTROFINI

The Nedsbar Forest Management Project, located in the Little Applegate and Upper Applegate Watersheds, was planned under the 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plan (RMP) and was designed to meet multiple objectives including managing forests to promote tree vigor and growth, improve forest stand resiliency to natural disturbances such as fire and insects, provide for the conservation and recovery of the northern spotted owl, reduce hazardous fuels, and produce timber products in support of the Medford District's 2016 Allowable Sale Quantity.

As designed, not all objectives would be met on every acre; the intent is to meet these objectives at the landscape scale. The design of the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) proposal incorporated the intent of Recovery Action 10 of the 2011 *Revised Recovery Plan for the Northern Spotted Owl*, which recommends conserving spotted owl sites and high-value spotted owl habitat. This substantially reduced the acreage proposed for forest thinning from BLM's original proposal that initiated public outreach in May of 2014.

As many in the community are aware, the Nedsbar Timber Sale did not receive any bids at the timber sale auction held in September 2016. After some consideration, the BLM decided to withdraw the sale a few days later. While there are always a number of factors contributing to the salability of timber, one of the main factors considered by the potential bidders was the economic challenges associated with the large proportion of helicopter logging (about 50 percent of the sale) combined with a low average volume per acre across the sale area and the small average diameter of timber to be removed (about 12.8-inch average diameter).

The Nedsbar Timber Sale will move forward again soon, but may look a little different. The analysis that went into the decision-making process remains sound and it incorporated the input of not only BLM resource specialists but many members of the Applegate community and other interested stakeholders. In fact, a dedicated group of local citizens, the Applegate Neighborhood Network,

worked very closely with BLM and contributed their own Community Alternative. The BLM fully analyzed this Community Alternative in its environmental assessment (EA), known as Alternative 5. The strength of the overall analysis through all alternatives provided the decision space to make positive management choices for our public lands in the Nedsbar planning area. While I did not select the Community Alternative, I did incorporate several aspects of that alternative, including reducing road construction, deferring treatment at this time for some of the stands, and altering treatment prescriptions in others.

Because the EA analysis remains valid and treatment needs still exist, the BLM plans to move forward with a reworked Nedsbar Timber Sale that would include changes to improve the economic viability of the timber sale. These changes will likely include dropping some of the units with the highest logging costs, primarily those associated with the helicopter logging. Any changes would, of course, be within the scope of the existing environmental assessment. Work not included in the repackaged timber sale may be deferred for future consideration or developed into future stewardship contracts, BLM fuels reduction contracts, or small commercial timber sales designed to provide opportunities to the local community.

The Nedsbar Timber Sale was planned under the 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plan (RMP) and the planning area was then designated as an Adaptive Management Area (AMA) where the testing of new management approaches to integrate and achieve ecological, economic, and other social and community objectives was encouraged.

Although the 2016 Southwestern Oregon RMP no longer has an AMA land-use allocation, the BLM continues to encourage community involvement and collaborative processes to support local land-management projects.

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— McKee Bridge Centennial Celebration —

Planning is under way for McKee Bridge's 100th anniversary celebration on Saturday, June 10, 2017, from 11 am to 3 pm. Mark your calendars and plan to join us for a grand celebration of McKee Bridge and its part in the history of the Applegate.

Food, music, historic displays, vintage cars, and steam engines will be featured at this family-friendly event. For more information, contact Paul Tipton at ptipton@frontier.com or 541-846-7501.

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