

Cherokee National Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative

Steering Committee Meeting Notes

Erwin Senior Adults Center

Thursday, September 2, 2010

Steering Committee Members Attending:

Joe McGuinness, Cherokee National Forest; Steve Henson, Southern Multiple Use Council; Alex Katherine Medlock, The Nature Conservancy; Steve Novak, Wildlaw; Parker Street, Ruffed Grouse Society; Dwight King, Volunteer Logging Company/Sullivan County Commissioner; Catherine Murray, Cherokee Forest Voices; Region 4; and Danny Osborne, Tennessee Division of Forestry. Terry Porter, Tennessee Forestry Association and Facilitator: Karen Firehock

Members not attending:

Mark Shelley, Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition; and Dennis Daniel, National Wild Turkey Federation, Geoff Call, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, John Gregory, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency,

Observers Attending:

Alex Wyss, The Nature Conservancy, Mary Noelle, USFS Representative

Introductions:

The meeting began with opening remarks from project facilitator Karen Firehock, followed by the introduction of the Steering Committee members, observers and an opportunity for observer comments. There were no observer comments.

General Committee Business:

Katherine Medlock asked members for suggestions for where Steven Simon might stay during his field work, especially in the southern portions of the Northern Cherokee which are more remote. Members made several suggestions and Ms. Medlock will and follow up on recommendations and coordinate with Mr. Simon.

Review of Proposal for Enhanced Conservation Action Planning (E-CAP) and Data Sources

Ms. Medlock noted that Mr. Simon is beginning his field work and that his scope of work for determining forest types is the same as what the committee received. Since no one commented on the proposed scope, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) continued with putting Mr. Simon under contract to do the work.

In response to a question on whether the E-CAP process will be using ecological zones or biophysical settings, Ms. Medlock responded that biophysical settings would be used since that is what the Nature Serve software requires.

A few participants noted a concern with "lumping" too many forest types together and wondered how they could be "unpacked" later when we want to know an accurate number for the percentage of a

particular forest type. Ms. Medlock explained that while Mr. Simon does use the types most relevant for the Cherokee, some of the types have to be collapsed into a more broad category. For example, three types might end up being combined as one or two. This is due to the fact that the Landfire Model cannot handle all the potential types. This may mean that some specificity will be lost, or that a particular forest type could be listed as more abundant than it actually is because it was combined with another more abundant type. One participant noted that Oak Hickory Forest could seem overabundant when the several types present in the Cherokee are lumped together.

Katherine Medlock emphasized that the Landfire Model should not be altered unless there is a very compelling reason, since much collaborative work was done to create this nationally-accepted model. However, Jim Smith from Landfire, Greg Low from TNC and Steve Simon have been in communication on how best to apply the Landfire Model to the Cherokee. One issue remains concerning FS Veg data (formerly referred to as CISC data) as it needs to be rasterized in order to use it. Another concern is whether the FS Veg data will be updated in time to use it in this project.

Ms. Medlock reviewed the fact sheets sent earlier for each of the Landfire Biophysical Setting Models. She noted that what was sent earlier was the entire list and not all of those are relevant for the Cherokee so she will send a smaller set that will be used in this project. She explained that each fact sheet on the biophysical settings includes what is known about the geographic range and description, who the modelers were and the information that was used (e.g. a peer reviewed journal article). She emphasized that the information available and utilized for each setting can vary. The committee should review each of the fact sheets and determine if they have concerns, questions or recommendations. She also suggested that members consult their own experts to determine if the settings are accurate. This will be the primary topic for the next meeting and committee members can bring their own resource people or experts to the meeting to provide background information.

Ms. Medlock gave an example of wanting to change a fire return interval as a change that could be requested. A request to make changes would need to be backed up by relevant journal articles, expert testimony or other reliable source that is acceptable to the committee and to the modelers. She also reported that the U.S. Forest Service has indicated that any changes also need to meet the agency's standards if the information is to be utilized for forest management.

In response to a question concerning what is collected at each plot, Ms, Medlock noted that this was sent as part of Mr. Simon's scope of work. She also noted that he will not be doing core samples to age the trees.

In response to a question about using the expertise at the Southern Forest Research Station, Ms. Medlock noted that they can help with review. Another participant noted that the group should seek to use unbiased scientific information whenever possible and that the committee will still need to decide what information to utilize and how to apply it. Several members expressed concern that the Landfire Model is not completely accurate for the Cherokee Appalachian forest. Ms. Medlock noted that while the model is far from perfect, it is a tool for decision making. The committee will still get to determine what to make of the model's findings. For example, if the model shows we need more early successional habitat in Oak Hickory Forest, the committee can discuss what are the most necessary prescriptions for improving its abundance. One participant noted that at the end of the day, the implementation of actual projects designed to implement these ideas will still rest with the Forest Service.

It was also emphasized that the local Forest Service staff will also help to ground truth the model. For example, if there was a pine beetle outbreak in 2000 but the model says that forest type is abundant,

the Forest Service would apply their best judgment and local knowledge to determining actual condition. Also, the forest conditions will change. The model and the data used to run it represent a snapshot in time. There will probably need to be a monitoring committee to determine what actually happens and whether predictions were accurate or whether projects implemented are having the intended effect.

Situation Assessment

Facilitator Karen Firehock reviewed the Situation Assessment report. The draft document was sent to the committee a few days prior to the meeting. She asked for comments within a week to allow the facilitation team to incorporate comments in time for the next meeting. In response to a question about what information was included from the interviews, Ms. Firehock noted that the document is a summary; it does not contain everything everyone said. It summarizes the issues that were brought up by interviewees and provides a discussion on issues that seemed to be of importance to many participants. Several participants asked Ms. Firehock to provide a methods section in the document so the reader can understand the organization and why some issues are discussed in greater depth. Active Forest Management is a heading in the document that was indicated as needing more definition. A few participants noted that the document seems to place an overly strong emphasis on the need for tree harvest. A few others noted that the need to conserve wildlife habitats needed more emphasis. Another participant asked what happens to other information or ideas that were not common but might be relevant such as perspectives offered by the tourism department.

Ms. Firehock noted that one challenge in writing such a document is that it can only reflect what people actually said; an issue could be important to the committee, but if no one mentioned it during the interview then it is not included. She also noted that some interviewees were not familiar with issues facing the Cherokee while others sometimes brought up unrelated topics in their discussions. She also reminded the group that an assessment is typically done at the beginning of the process to understand people's perspectives, what are knowledge gaps, what ideas do people agree about and what are areas that may cause conflicts. She noted that it is not unusual to have divergent perspectives at the beginning of a process. She explained that if everyone already shared the same viewpoints across the board, then this committee would probably not be needed to resolve these issues in the first place.

Ms. Firehock agreed to redraft the assessment using the comments from this meeting as well as additional comments received by the end of the following week. She also promised to re-read several of the interviews to glean important perspectives that may need to be added to the summary, given the committee's concerns about ensuring that a broader discussion of viewpoints is included. She noted that this report is not a consensus document for the committee to agree upon, it's an evaluation of the 30 interviewees' current perspectives. The document will be edited and a final version will be sent to everyone who participated.

Questionnaire Design:

The next step following the assessment is to design a broader public questionnaire. This will be done on line using an on-line software tool called Survey Monkey. Committee members asked that the survey help to reveal what is most important about the forest to survey respondents. They also wanted to learn the public's perceptions of whether and how the forest is being managed. Since the assessment revealed that some people were concerned about how restoration is defined, the survey should seek to educate respondents about what restoration is and why it is needed. Another question to ask the public

is how they want to be engaged in the process moving forward. This topic will be discussed at the next meeting.

Public Meetings:

Three meetings will be held to brief the community on the project and will seek to explain the background on the forest's condition, history of management and why there is now a need for restoration, followed by an explanation of the committee's purpose and E-Cap approach. The group agreed that 90 minutes was plenty long for a public meeting. Due to the shortness of time, the committee decided to hold a conference call to discuss details for the public meeting to be scheduled for a week hence (note: this call has been held).

Next Steps

- 1) Committee members to review the biophysical settings models. Ms. Medlock will resend the shorter list of the 15 settings factsheets. Members should review and come prepared to comment on them at the October 4 meeting.
- 2) Ms. Firehock asked the committee to send comments on the Situation Assessment by the following Friday. She will seek to make edits and complete the final document prior to the next meeting.
- 3) Ms. Medlock will confirm Mr. Simon's availability and participation in the next meeting so that he can answer questions on using the model as well as his field work.
- 4) Committee members to participate in conference call within next two weeks to discuss public workshop format and content.

For more information or to suggest corrections to the minutes, contact karenfirehock@gmail.com

Next Meeting: October 4th, Erwin Senior Adult Center, 4-7 p.m.