State Forests Stewardship Coordinating Committee – June 28, 2011

Committee Members Present -- Ray Abriel (by phone), Dick Courter, Peter Daugherty (Chair), Joe Holmberg, Jim James, Derek Johnson, Jim Johnson, Rod Krahmer, Lois Loop, Craig Rowland (for CalLee Davenport), Misty Seaboldt, Bruce Taylor (by phone) and Jon Weck.

Committee Members Absent – Clint Bentz, Ken Bierly, Jim Geiger, Chris Jarmer, Dan Logan, Steve McClure and Owen Wozniak.

Staff Present -- Jim Cathcart, Oregon Department of Forestry

Guests Present – Rick Fletcher, Oregon State University Extension Service

Public Present – Mike Barsotti (Oregon Tree Farm System), Alan Christensen (Western Rivers Council), Crystal McMahon (Klamath Lake Land Trust) (by phone) and Evan Smith (The Conservation Fund)

Attachments – See: ftp://maps01.odf.state.or.us/Private_Forests/SFSCC_6_28_11_Meeting_Summary_Attacments.zip

  Item 01 – Agenda 6-28-2011
  Item 02 – FY 2011 Forest Legacy Funded Project List - Final
  Item 03 – Oregon Forest Legacy Areas 2011
  Item 04 – Uniform Resource Plan and Endorsement System – Fletcher
  Item 05 – Oregon Uniform Forest Management Plan Checklist
  Item 06 – Oregon Uniform Forest Management Plan Guidelines June 27
  Item 07 – Oregon Uniform Forest Management Plan Template June 27

Public Comment – There was no public comment.

Next Meeting:  10 am to 3 pm, Wednesday September 7, 2011, Oregon Department of Forestry, Salem.  PLEASE MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

September Meeting Dates (Forest Legacy Project Review) – Wednesday, September 7th (Presentations) and Thursday, September 29th (Ranking).  These meetings will be held in Salem. PLEASE MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

JUNE 28, 2011 MEETING SUMMARY

Forest Legacy

Jim Cathcart briefed the Committee on Western Region Forest Legacy Program Managers Meeting, held June 14-16th in Lakewood Colorado.

• This meeting occurs every other year (leap frogs the year a National Forest Legacy Program Manager meeting is held) and consists of the USDA Forest Service Forest Legacy Program Managers from the western regions and corresponding State Forest Legacy Program Coordinators.  This year's meeting was hosted by the Colorado State Forest Service and the USDA Forest Service, State and Private Forestry, Rocky Mountain Region (Region 2).
• The group got out and toured two funded Forest Legacy Projects – The Spruce Mountain Project (Douglas County, Colorado) and the Snow Mountain Ranch Project (Granby County, Colorado). One thing that was striking was just about every forested draw that had private lands in it had some form of subdivision or housing development surrounded by federal forestland. The first project (fee acquisition) protected key open space land along a forested bluff and was leveraged with Douglas County’s Open Space and Conservation Initiative. The property is actively managed by the County for wildland fuels and aesthetics. The second project (Conservation Easement) was secured through in partnership with The Conservation Fund and protected forestland surrounding a YMCA ranch – providing a much needed and actively managed forestland buffer between developed areas and National Forest.

• The big topic of discussion was the results of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 appropriation for Forest Legacy. Total funding was $55 million; but only 12 projects were funded due to the size of allocation to each project (see Item 02 - FY 2011 Forest Legacy Funded Project List – Final). With the current federal fiscal crisis it is doubtful that Forest Legacy Program funding will increase. The issue is that while Forest Legacy Program funding has remained fairly constant ($50 to $60 million per year), the number of participating States and US Territories has doubled (from 26 states and territories to 49). This combined with the increased ceiling on how much a project can request in a given year ($7 million) – means fewer projects funded (and only a handful of states being successful). Smaller projects (less than $3 million in requested funding) are being left out of the equation. Options discussed at the Western Region meeting included:

  Divide the competition for funds into two categories – large projects and small projects. That is, small projects (say less than $3 million in request) would compete by themselves for an allocated portion of the funding; similarly for larger projects. The feeling is that with more smaller projects being funded, more states would be successful in getting funds.

  Lowering the maximum amount a project could request from below the current level of $7 million.

  Dropping the current ceiling for all projects combined from $10 million per state (maximum of 3 projects) to $7 million. This would force a state to decide to fund either one big project or up to 3 smaller projects.

  Keeping track on how long has transpired since a State or Territory got funding and give them a bye to the National Ranking – ensuring their “top” project was funded every 5th year of not receiving any funding.

Of the above options, the one that seemed to get the most traction by the Western Region participants was lowering the total amount a State or Territory could request from $10 million to $7 million – forcing a State or Territory to choose between one big project or up to 3 smaller ones. The federal Western Region Forest Legacy Program Managers plan to convene to develop a recommendation to National Forest Legacy Program staff on what changes are needed.

**Discussion** – The Committee agreed that having only a few projects funded each year was a concern; for example, Oregon has two projects on the FY 2012 President’s Recommended Budget list – but the lowest (Blue Mountain Heritage) is at the $75 million funding level – a level not expected for FY 2012. **ACTION** – Jim James will work with Jim Cathcart, Dick Courter and Jim Johnson to
DRAFT a Committee recommendation on which of the above options (or some combination including options not thought of to date) for consideration by the Committee at its September 7th meeting. If approved, the Committee would submit its views to the Western Region Forest Legacy Program Managers (through Jim Geiger) as input into their deliberations on how the western region feels things need to be changed to address the issue of too few projects being funded year to year.

- Other topics discussed at the Western Region Forest Legacy Program Meeting were:

  Writing Better Project Briefs – A Project Brief is the formal document used by the National Forest Legacy Evaluation Panel in evaluating and ranking Forest Legacy Program projects.

**Discussion.** Writing excellent Project Briefs is a must and the Western Region Forest Legacy Program Managers have adopted a process similar to what was done by Oregon last year – allowing for a review and critique of an applicant’s Project Brief BEFORE the brief is officially scored to allow the applicant to improve the brief. Regardless of the quality of the brief, evaluation will still be subjective since Forest Legacy Projects come in all shapes and sizes and there is tremendous diversity across states and territories regarding the types of projects submitted. Clearly though, a project with a lousy Project Brief will quickly fall out of the running. Staff Follow-Up – The Committee requested that staff download the Project Briefs from the top 2 to 3 projects that received funding over the past 3 years (e.g., FY 2009, FY 2010, and FY 2011) as well as from the FY 2012 President’s Recommended Budget list. This will allow the Committee to get a feel for what makes a successful Project Brief.

  Office of Inspector General (OIG) Report – This report will soon be available publically and will be distributed to the Committee when it is. The Forest Service has agreed to all the report’s findings and recommendations with the exception of 1 (valuing donated easements or properties for match purposes). Implementing the recommendations is resulting in the following: a) adoption of a record keeping policy for both States/Territories as well as the Forest Service, b) required annual monitoring of conservation easements and required reporting of monitoring activity (expect this to be extended to fee acquisition projects), and c) an annual “Report Card” with respect to Forest Legacy Program requirements; States/Territories getting an “F” will not be allowed to participate in consideration project funding until their grade is passing.

  Appraisals – Yellow book is still the standard but is not favored by many land trusts and conservation organizations – especially when it comes to valuing conservation easements and donated property for non-federal match purposes.

  FY 2013 National Scoring Criteria. The FY 2013 National Scoring Criteria has not been released but a DRAFT version was shared with the group. The only change of substance is to drop the emphasis on “National Importance” under the Importance criterion. Previously, an application had to demonstrate “National Importance” to get the maximum number of points for this criterion. With the proposed change, projects that demonstrate outstanding local or regional importance can still get the maximum number of points for this category.

- Staff completed the consolidation of Oregon’s Forest Legacy Areas from 14 (organized by terrestrial eco-section) to 6 (organized by EcoRegion) per the Committee’s recommendation. See Item 03 - Oregon Forest Legacy Areas 2011. Staff is currently revising the descriptions to align with
the consolidation. Next Step – Once the description work is completed, staff will prepare the Request for Public Comment package for the Committee to review via e-mail.

The Committee confirmed its expectations for the FY 2013 Forest Legacy Program funding cycle. The Committee will review submitted Letters of Interest and decide which applications to invite to develop formal applications.

- Applicants will develop their formal applications in the Forest Legacy Information System (FLIS) and will present their “Project Briefs” (a project brief is the application document produced by FLIS) to the Committee on September 7th. The Committee will then give feedback to the applicants on how they can improve their project briefs. Note – The Uniform Plan agenda item below triggered the desire to have applicants specifically share their forest management plan and objectives with the Committee as part of their presentation even though this is not a component of a Project Brief.

- Afterwards, the Committee will enter Executive Session to discuss the applications in general – for the purpose of ensuring consistency in the Committee’s scoring with respect to the National Forest Legacy Program criteria - Importance, Threat, Strategic and Readiness.

- Applicants will be able to revise their Project Briefs based on the Committee feedback and submit a new version that will be used in the Committee’s evaluation and scoring of applications.

- Committee members will then individually score each application with respect to the FY 2013 National Scoring Criteria.

- The Committee will convene on September 29th to determine the Committee’s overall scoring and ranking. The Committee decision on September 29th is to decide which applications to forward for national funding consideration and the priority rank of each application submitted. (Oregon can submit up to 3 applications up to the limit of $10 million in Forest Legacy Program funds being requested; with no more than $7 million being requested for one project.)

- Four applicants submitted Letters of Interest in response to the Call for FY 2013 Forest Legacy Program projects:
  - **Blue Mountain Heritage** – Conservation Easement, 1,462 acres, Union Co., Blue Mountains Forest Legacy Area (FLA) ($1.5 million)*
  - **Gilchrist Forest** – Fee Title Acquisition, 25,831 acres, Klamath Co., East Cascades FLA ($3 million)*
  - **Hood River Forest and Fish** – Conservation Easement, 18,000 acres, Hood River Co., West Cascades FLA ($12 million phased up to 4 years)
  - **West Klamath Lake Forest** – Conserve Easements (3 tracks), 1,887 acres, Klamath Co., East Cascades FLA ($5.661 million phased up to 2 years)

*Contingency applications. Both projects are on the President’s FY 2012 funding request for Forest Legacy so the amount requested could be lowered or the project withdrawn based on the amount appropriated by Congress in the federal FY 2012 budget.

All four projects have previously applied for Forest Legacy Program funds. MOTION (By Jim James) – Invite all 4 projects to formally develop applications for consideration for the FY 2013 funding cycle. Seconded (by Dick Courter). Motion passed (unanimously).
Uniform Resource Plan Project Update

Rick Fletcher updated the Committee on the current status of the Uniform Resource Plan and Endorsement System Project. See Item 04 - Uniform Resource Plan and Endorsement System – Fletcher. Also, see Item 05 - Oregon Uniform Forest Management Plan Checklist, Item 06 - Oregon Uniform Forest Management Plan Guidelines June 27 and Item 07 - Oregon Uniform Forest Management Plan Template June 27. Discussion:

- The endorsement piece to the project is to ensure the various partners and agencies advocate to keep the uniform planning process going – by developing quality assurance and quality control mechanisms that can be monitored.
- The editorial style of the guidelines (first person, second person, third person) needs to be cleaned up and made consistent.
- Struggling with the distinction between the Woodland Discovery and Core Planning phases of developing a management plan – not that I do not like the distinction, but it is an innovative idea that needs some more thought to get my head around.
- The project is valuable work – good to see the progress being made. Could prove to be the answer for the Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP) requirement that suppliers of biomass have a “conservation plan”. BCAP requires that the conservation plan address the activity of biomass removal and necessary environmental protections. Still waiting for National Office direction on this.

Roundtable

Jim Johnson – Positive budget outcome for Oregon State University Extension Service. Instead of taking a decimating $20 million dollar cut, forestry extension was cut by only $8 million. Sign of the times when “less of a cut” is a positive. Still, the Extension Service is having to adjust to a lot of budgetary change over the past 2 bienniums (2009-11; 2011-13) – 26% reduction overall. Instead of 36 part-time County Administrators, there are now 12 full time Regional Administrators. Jim expects to lose a couple of forestry extension agents to Regional Administrator appointments (i.e., Clackamas County). Not sure how the loss of forestry extension capacity is going to be filled.

Jim James – Kudos to the Uniform Plan writing team for the good work they are doing.

Peter Daugherty – The Department of Forestry fared “unbelievably” well budget wise for the 2011-13 biennium:

- Fire Protection – Budgeted at Current Service Level with 50-50 Public/Private cost split
- State Forests – Were able to hang onto vacant positions so division could increase capacity to put up timber sale once markets improve.
- Private Forests – Got a increase in Full Time Equivalent (FTE) positions (+28) which effectively restores the cuts endured over the 2009-11 budget.
  1. It is quite clear the Legislature wants the Department to rebuild a Forest Practices program different from the past.
  2. The Department will immediately fill 12 Stewardship Forester positions to shore up Forest Practices Act capacity. Additional hiring of Stewardship Foresters will follow the Department’s evaluation (by a third party) of need program efficiencies.
  3. There are two budget notes – the first addressing compliance auditing (and performance measuring) needs for the Forest Practices Program (to be contracted out to a third party)
and the 2nd addressing improvements in the use of technology and other program efficiencies (which are to be assessed by a third party contractor).

Other important legislation that passed:

- Fire Fighter Legal Defense Bill
- Forest Practices Act Modifications Bill eliminating unnecessary written plans and slightly lengthening notification review timing
- Biomass Bill that clearly specifies biomass removal as an operation under the Forest Practices Act. (Note: This should help implementation of the Biomass Crop Assistance Program in Oregon since the necessary environmental protections for biomass removal from forestlands will be provided by Oregon Forest Practices Act requirements.)

Report prepared by:

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