

Southwest Crown of the Continent Monitoring Committee

Meeting Notes

August 13, 2010

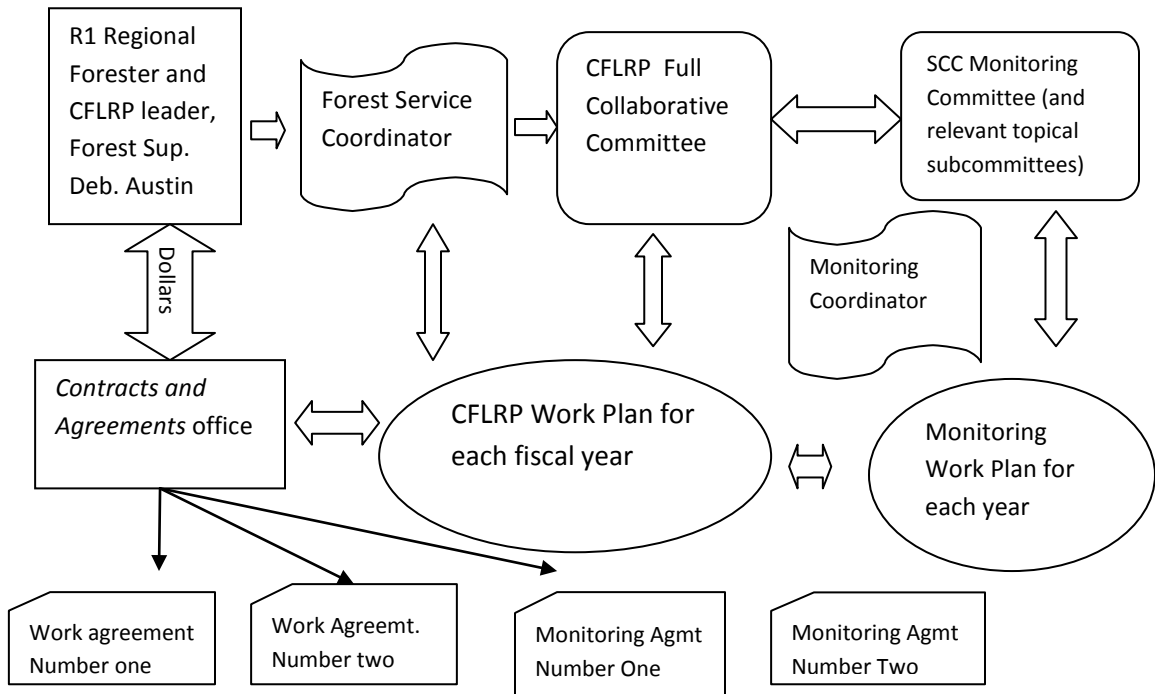
Attending:

Jim Burchfield (recorder)	Travis Belote	Jessica Haas
Mo Hartmann	Anne Carlson	Mark VanderMeer
John Haufler	Cara Nelson	Keith Stockman
Tom Bansak	Dick Hutto	Amber Kamps
Marnie Criley	Matt Thompson	Dave Calkin

The Monitoring Committee assembled in the Lubrecht Forest conference room from 8:30 a.m. until noon on Friday, August 13, 2010. The agenda identified three objectives: (1) To develop a structure for decision-making for monitoring activities within the Southern Crown of the Continent Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Act (SCC-CFLRP or simply SCC); (2) To establish mechanisms for communication regarding monitoring; and (3) To identify steps to complete monitoring work plans for the upcoming year.

Cara Nelson was curious about the authority the SCC Monitoring Committee would possess. Amber Kamps related to the group that the Forest Service retains authority for decisions regarding treatment actions, monitoring programs, and the distribution of financial resources related to the SCC-CFLRP. The SCC Collaborative Group that developed the SCC proposal will make recommendations to the Forest Service for actions taken within the SCC project, and these may or may not be adopted by the Forest Service. Marnie Criley mentioned how this was much like how the Montana Forest Restoration Committee (MFRC) and its regional subcommittees function, and they seem to be working well. The SCC Monitoring Committee recognized itself as a subcommittee to the larger SCC Collaborative Committee, and it anticipates bringing the monitoring recommendations forward to the SCC Collaborative Committee for approval on a regular basis. Additionally, there are likely to be different individuals who serve as coordinators or liaisons between the different organizations, collaborative committees, and other entities involved in the SCC project. To help visualize all this, Jim Burchfield provided a flip chart and allowed committee members to help draw how the overall organization of the project and its participants fit together. Figure 1 makes an attempt to recreate this flip chart drawing, although its simplicity certainly does little justice to the actual complexity of developing project proposals and/or monitoring protocols.

Figure One: Schematic of How the Monitoring Committee Might Fit Into the Larger CFLRP Project



Of key concern to the SCC Monitoring Committee will be a work plan for the entire CFLRP. It is understood that most work for the 2010 Fiscal Year is already solidified, based on the very short time left in FY 2010. However, a monitoring work plan will need to be generated quite soon. This monitoring work plan would identify the necessary measurement actions to be taken as well as relevant details regarding necessary knowledge and skills, the recommended actors involved, the methods and standards for data collection, and the protocols for data storage and retrieval. The development of this monitoring work plan and the associated responsibilities to recommend implementation of monitoring actions are perceived by the SCC Monitoring Committee as tasks that it will be empowered to undertake via approval by the larger SCC Collaborative Group.

The Monitoring Committee also engaged in an extensive discussion about the overall purpose of monitoring for the SCC-CFLRP. The group decided to restate the goals for monitoring, so that all participants in the meeting had a clear understanding of the multiple outcomes that could eventually be evaluated to understand the successes or shortcomings of the monitoring effort.

The following four goals emerged as the driving purpose behind monitoring activities in the SCC-CFLRP:

- Learn about the effectiveness of treatments conducted within the SCC-CFLRP project via the collection of information, the tracking of trends, and the analysis of effects that follow the identified ecological, economic, and social interests of the Forest Landscape Restoration Act and the SCC-CFLRP proposal;
- Build citizen capacity for involvement in the management of all lands within the project area;
- Use the results of collected, tracked, and analyzed information to inform management on opportunities for future management; and
- Create opportunities for public learning about forest management.

Although the group agreed that the above goals reflect the purpose of monitoring, there appears to be additional reflection needed on the vision for restoration itself. Both John Haufler and Dick Hutto expressed concerns about achieving clarity on what outcomes could be perceived as desirable. This could be restated as, what are treatments intended to accomplish? Haufler observed that the selection of treatments and their placement on the landscape would need to approach some type of societal demand, and he identified several issues from the legislation that seem critical to address: (1) the management of fuels to reduce suppression costs and reduce risks to residents; (2) the economic benefits of treatments and the potential to use treatment bi-products for biomass energy; (3) the movement of the landscape toward some recognizable, positive, “restored” set of conditions or functionality (what Mark VanderMeer later in the meeting described as ecological integrity, biophysical resiliency, and ecological trends). If we don’t have a defined set of questions to answer about the landscape, then our monitoring could end up measuring interesting, but relatively insignificant attributes.

Cara Nelson helped the group by recognizing that there were three major items to address before the meeting closed: (1) The role of the Monitoring Committee in developing the big work plan for treatments that could come after FY10; (2) The “meta-goals” of restoration; and (3) How the monitoring subcommittee would function as a group. The Committee decided to address the final item first.

The Monitoring Committee entered into a lengthy and cordial discussion on the means to structure the committee and make decisions. It was eventually decided that the group would operate under a consensus decision format, with the widely-used “thumbs-up/thumbs-sideways/thumbs-down” signaling for levels of agreement (even though the Monitoring Committee does not make binding decisions for the SCC project, its recommendations are generated as independent decisions). Although other decision rules (supermajority, majority rule) could be applied, the consensus format keeps the group consistent with the respected Montana Forest Restoration Committee and brings additional credibility to decisions reached. The Committee also affirmed the idea that if a person only

begrudgingly accepts a recommendation, that he/she should be encouraged to express their point of view independently as a “minority report.” The Committee also deliberated on the inclusiveness (openness) of the group and agreed that there should be no barriers to participation. Anyone who desires to participate in the Monitoring Committee may do so. Hutto observed that the Monitoring Committee is a listening and learning group, so openness is vital. However, to avoid first-time attendees to subvert progress or block recommendations that had been under development for an extended period, the committee agreed that those who actually vote on a recommendation (thumbs-up, etc.) will have to have demonstrated sufficient commitment to the group via prior participation to be considered a voting member. The group agreed that attendance at two prior meetings would be sufficient demonstration of commitment to allow a person on the committee to be a voting member. This will require attendance records at each meeting, a relatively easy task that can be sustained by the committee. The committee also agreed that there needs to be a leader or at a minimum a contact person for the committee, and the group nominated and affirmed that Jim Burchfield should be the Monitoring Committee Chair for one year. Finally, the group agreed that these rules of committee operation should be articulated in writing, and Burchfield agreed to draft a Monitoring Committee Charter to circulate to committee members for approval at a subsequent meeting.

In addition to a leadership post, the Monitoring Committee agreed that there should be a person associated with the monitoring effort who serves in a data management capacity. There will be a great deal of information generated, and it needs to be stored in a consistent manner and made available to all who might be interested. It is anticipated that there will be so much work just in assembling, cleaning, and formatting data (since it will all be geo-referenced in a GIS system) that these aggregate responsibilities would call for a paid position. Marnie Criley mentioned that there will also need to be someone who pays close attention to the educational goal of monitoring to help make contacts or sponsor workshops with residents and community representatives on the consequences of the CFLRP project. At present, there is a “data management” subcommittee of the Monitoring Committee led by Travis Belote, as well as an ongoing effort, led by Cara Nelson and Ilana Abrahamson, to identify links to existing monitoring information to understand the breadth of current data collection efforts, its archiving, responsible agencies, and gaps. The group recognized that in addition to data management, there will so much responsibility in the communication and organizing of monitoring operations that at some level, perhaps at the larger SCC Collaborative Committee level, there will need to be a monitoring coordinator to ensure that treatments and field measurements for monitoring are sufficiently coordinated to capture information in a timely and efficient manner. Hopefully, the larger SCC Collaborative Committee will address this issue of operational coordination at its upcoming meeting on August 31st.

The group engaged in a brief discussion regarding conflicts of interest between membership on the Monitoring Committee and parties who might conduct the monitoring work. In other words, Monitoring Committee recommendations might benefit the organizations where Committee members work. Travis Belote suggested that proposals for monitoring work might need to pass through some type or review process. Clearly, work will need to be done by qualified groups, and the Forest Service,

with its decision-making authority, will be the entity selecting those organizations to conduct monitoring tasks. The group did not conclude this discussion, and the issues surrounding conflicts of interest will need to be addressed at a later date.

The group discussed the issue of transparency of Monitoring Committee operations, and there was agreement that the proceedings of meetings and other operations of the Committee should be made available to anyone who might wish to learn about the Committee. At some point, it is anticipated that a web portal will be made available to allow reader access to gathered information. The idea that had been suggested previously, to hold an annual public meeting to show results of treatments and monitoring activities, was supported whole-heartedly by the group as an important step for public learning and constructive critique of SCC actions. Additionally, it will be desirable to have a Forest Service representative, such as a line officer, attend the meetings of the Monitoring Committee so that the Forest Service keeps abreast of the context for the recommendations of the Committee.

The Monitoring Committee discussed the integration of new information with data that is already being collected by the Forest Service, both at the Ranger District level and via the Research branch. Dave Calkin discussed new work underway in his project to scale down fire risk parameters for the required "Cohesive Strategy," and this type of integration with mandated estimates of fire risk will allow monitoring information to serve multiple purposes. Bo Wilmer of the Wilderness Society is already tracking implementation monitoring that is completed by the Forest Service field staff, although this is manifest only in the form of project maps. Amber Kamps observed that there are multiple levels of implementation monitoring done by different staff groups of the Forest Service, for example, pre- and post-monitoring of fuels treatments is done by both vegetation and fuels management personnel. Additionally, there are staff groups in both Forest Supervisors' offices and the Regional Office who have data assembly and analysis responsibilities. Amber Kamps indicated that could help be a liaison between these staff groups and the SCC Collaborative Committee. In addition, Cara Nelson and others will be attending a meeting in the Regional Office hosted by Joni Packard to gain a better understanding of Region One's ongoing assessment and monitoring activities.

The Monitoring Committee briefly discussed its subcommittees that were established earlier in the summer. Currently, there is a Vegetation/Fuels/Soils subcommittee, a Social/Economic subcommittee, and a Wildlife subcommittee. The group agreed that there would need to be a new water/watershed subcommittee created to cover the critical issues of watershed function, water quality, and fish habitat. Jim Burchfield agreed to contact Bruce Reimers (SP?) to see if he might wish to participate in a water/watershed monitoring group. It was also recognized that if more people get involved in monitoring fire and fuels, then a new subcommittee might split off to address these issues. Ann Carlson and Amber Kamps also volunteered to participate in the water subcommittee.

The group turned to the thorny question of the "meta-goal" of restoration, and the types of questions that might guide the spectrum of treatments and subsequent evaluations that would identify if the SCC landscape is moving in a desirable direction. Keith Stockman identified that there are existing models at the Forest Service Regional Office that are attempting to address the various components of restoration,

the most relevant being the “Integrated Restoration Strategy.” He also mentioned that there are other major models being used to assess the vitality of natural resources. The Wilderness Society, for example, has developed restoration metrics. The National Park Service has a well-developed set of “vital signs.” The State of Montana conducts a statewide assessment that looks at all ownerships. The latter version might have some political advantages because of its link to state agencies, but also because of the recent Forest Service emphasis on “all lands.” Each of these has adopted a different set of assumptions and ways of conceptualizing difficult concepts like restoration or resiliency. Additionally, there has been a series of conversations on the objectives for mixed severity fire regime forest types within the Montana Forest Restoration Committee, with the statewide committee recently adopting a new “mixed severity” principle. Travis Belote suggested that future environmental analyses for the SCC project area should incorporate some common expressions of a desired, restored landscape in their “purpose and need” sections of their NEPA documents. Keith Stockman commented that the Deschutes National Forest (also receiving a CFLRP award) has tied its Forest Plan revision to the aforementioned integrated restoration strategy. Stockman and John Haufler graciously volunteered to examine the various models that are floating around to evaluate what might be the best possible framework for either use or modification by the SCC Monitoring Committee. They could prepare a brief, 10-slide Powerpoint presentation for the upcoming SCC Collaborative Committee meeting on August 31. Cara Nelson cautioned that regardless of the framework selected or invented, at the lowest level, there will need to be data collected to adequately represent the conditions in the project area and the consequences of the treatments.

As a final item the group turned to the development of the work plan for the SCC-CFLRP. Coincidentally, the Committee discovered during the course of the meeting that the SCC-CFLRP had been officially announced as one of the ten projects authorized to proceed, so suddenly work planning becomes more critical. Amber Kamps identified that contracts had already been developed for the slightly over \$1 million awarded to the SCC-CFLRP. In addition, a placeholder amount of \$11,000 had been transferred under an existing agreement to the Blackfoot Challenge to be applied to effectiveness monitoring operations. She also mentioned that our proposal had indicated the intention to match 1:1 all the CFLRP new monies with other resources (these matching resources could be federal dollars, even from the Forest Service, or contributions from other sources). This raised the question of how financial matches would be tracked, especially since many of the matches will appear as in-kind support, such as volunteer labor from students. Accounting procedures will need to be addressed at some future date by the SCC Collaborative Committee.

There was a brief discussion of setting up a Wiki site for the Monitoring Committee. Jim Burchfield said that he would look into the potential to do this through the College of Forestry and Conservation, which has purchased Wiki software for use in classes and other College projects.

The group set a date for the next meeting of the Monitoring Committee. It will meet on Monday, September 13, from 8:30 a.m. until noon, again at Lubrecht Experimental Forest. The meeting was adjourned.