

**Southwest Crown of the Continent Monitoring Committee
December 17, 2010
Meeting Notes**

Present: Ilana Abrahamson, Tom Bansak, Travis Belote, Jill Belsky, Megan Birzell, Jim Burchfield, Renate Bush, Anne Carlson, Beth Hahn, Jon Haufler, Dick Hutto, John C. Ingebretson, Amber Kamps, Joe Kerkvliet, Andrew Larson, Adam Lieberg, Cara Nelson, Tom Parker, Bruce Rieman, Jim Rittering, Keith Stockmann, Susan Sweet,

The meeting was called to order at 1:10 p.m. on Friday, December 17, 2010, at Lubrecht Forest.

The agenda identified three scheduled objectives: (1) consider and refine the objectives and indicators for restoration drafted by working groups; (2) review the desired qualifications, duties, and responsibilities of a monitoring coordinator/GIS specialist to manage monitoring data; and (3) decide on steps to ensure the 2011 monitoring program can be completed.

The agenda was reviewed and approved.

The December 1, 2010, minutes of the Monitoring Committee were approved as written.

The committee reviewed the objectives for restoration of the respective working groups and discussed issues relating to the development of indicators and measurable standards for each objective. Jim prefaced the discussion by reporting that the full SW Crown Collaborative had agreed and appreciated that the Monitoring Committee would undertake the task to articulate as closely as possible restoration objectives, acknowledging that they may be amended at a later date.

Jim also noted at this point that the Collaborative had authorized the Committee to proceed with the process of hiring a Monitoring Coordinator, keeping in mind the necessity of submitting to the Collaborative a detailed budget and position description before publishing the position announcement.

The review of objectives for restoration began with the reminder that land management requirements already included in other established plans must be adhered to. Additionally, the 2008 un-adopted revision of forest plans should be kept in mind and could prove helpful in many cases.

Bruce Rieman presented to the Committee the key points developed through discussion

within **the aquatics team**. The first of those points was the need to engage a larger group, including specialists from each relevant forest/district, from Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and from other organizations, in order to benefit from their professional expertise, historical knowledge, and familiarity with ongoing activities. Len Walch (Helena National Forest), Liz Rohde (Flathead), Ray Callery (Helena), Ron Pierce (FWP), Ladd Knotek and Leo Rosenthal (FWP) were named as participants whose participation was considered especially important. Representation from the Swan Ecosystem Center (SEC) and the Blackfoot Challenge were also considered of great importance.

The second key point noted in the aquatics team discussion was the need to expand the monitoring lexicon to include implementation, effectiveness, collateral damage, and validation, and to endeavor to include all in the planning of monitoring.

The team agreed that time is a pressing issue in the need for a guiding restoration strategy and spatially explicit identification of restoration actions. Local details were deemed necessary for a meaningful monitoring program. Differing conceptual models among districts regarding what is most necessary for restoration and conservation may preclude arriving at a single general approach for the entire project.

The fourth key point noted was that multiple levels of monitoring may be necessary to assess the success both of individual projects and of the cumulative effects of all restoration activities within a watershed.

The team suggests building off of and expanding existing and ongoing monitoring and research efforts to get the most out of new monitoring funds/efforts. The Pacific Inland Biological Opinion (PIBO), particularly, was discussed in this regard. An expanded, targeted PIBO could be particularly useful.

The last of the key points raised by the aquatics team was the understanding that monitoring cannot be done at all locations for all things. It is essential therefore that careful and thorough consideration be given to site selection, metrics implementation, and comparison selection in order to effectively link results to actions.

The aquatics team suggested several possibilities for work that should commence or be further developed now. Bruce reported that the most critical was believed to be addressing fish habitat and water quality based on the existing PIBO approach and established sampling sites. The team also agreed that local population level fish population trends should be maintained and refined and that “secure” and “at risk” populations should be determined

where not already. New genetic tools should be explored for implementation in select streams. Large scale temperature networks and model based evaluation of climate and local drivers for stream temperature should be pursued. Consideration should be given to site level effectiveness monitoring where significant manipulations are planned.

The aquatics team recommends that DEQ style water quality and limnological monitoring not be relied upon, although such other monitoring efforts should be documented in order to provide contextual information.

In the discussion that followed a strong interest in the use of PIBO was expressed and note was made of the significance of the problem of differing visions of restoration among the various basins. Jim suggested that consideration of the latter be on the agenda of a future Monitoring Committee meeting.

Joe Kerkvliet and Jill Belsky reported on behalf of **the socioeconomic team**, which had identified seven issues to address in relation to the CFLRP points of cost of fire management, restoration, and the social economic well being of rural communities. Those issues are 1) whether the public will accept and support natural or prescribed fire treatments inside and outside of the WUI and whether the level of acceptance will change after treatments occur; 2) whether SWC fuel reduction activities encourage fire safety activity on the part of private landowners; 3) whether SWC activities will affect the decisions of fire managers, resulting in increased options and lower costs; 4) determining the costs of road decommissioning and the variables that determine those costs; 5) methods by and degree of accuracy to which the economic impact of forest restoration can be projected; 6) whether long-term activities will encourage contractors and mill owners to invest capital and human resources to accomplish restoration; and 7) whether residents of the Southwest Crown support the activities and funding criteria of the SWC proposal.

Emphasized in the discussion was the importance of addressing the public response to access when considering issues of road decommissioning. Jim noted that the Monitoring Committee needs to be informed as explicitly as possible where the team wants to begin. Suggested first steps included collecting secondary data and available information, and drafting a mini-proposal regarding funding to investigate the first issue (public acceptance of prescribed fire treatments).

In response to the questions of whether any team was addressing the issue of biomass it was suggested that outside of the SWC there is a joint biomass group that should be recruited as a partner.

Jim Burchfield reported that **the fire/fuels team**, having only recently been formed, had defined as an objective the reduction of fuels to natural condition levels within 80% of the high risk distribution of the WUI. Tons per acre would be used as the indicator.

In the discussion that followed it was pointed out that due to multiple interests the reduction of crown fire potential and fire condition class must be considered in addition to tons per acre. Attention was also directed to the fact that there exists in the Swan ten years of vegetation monitoring data that could and should be referenced in order to establish the existing condition.

Dick Hutto reported that **the wildlife team** is in need of more members and had not yet met, but had exchanged email communications. The team had agreed that they see great potential in the PIBO system, particularly with reference to bird survey points. They also agreed that the monitoring of implementation, effectiveness, and consequence were of equal importance.

It was suggested by the committee that it is important to insure that “outside” researchers are aware of SWC Collaborative plans and goals, as they may well have considerable interest in using their own, already-funded, research to support projects of the Collaborative.

Jon Haufler pointed out the importance of identifying which species would be specific targets for restoration, and that while some smaller birds and mammals are suitable for site specific projects those species having larger ranges are more appropriate for habitat monitoring. Beth Hahn noted that when choosing species care should be taken in regard to threatened and endangered species and MIS (Management Indicator Species).

On behalf of the **vegetation team** Ilana Abrahamson presented a monitoring framework template in the form of an Excel spreadsheet. As an illustrative example the template was completed in reference to invasive plants. It included columns for goals of the Act, goals of the Proposal, indicators, types of monitoring, treatment objectives, and other parameters. The template would facilitate the cross walking of frameworks with partner agencies.

Because the template referenced so many parameters some concern was expressed that it might imply too many potential treatments to be realistic. Ilana pointed out, however, that many of the treatments are or can be monitored simultaneously, making the undertakings less burdensome than it might at first appear.

It was agreed that Ilana will circulate the framework template to the members of the Monitoring Committee so that the other teams can evaluate it and provide feedback regarding its usefulness for each team.

Jim expressed appreciation to all the teams for the progress made and hard work invested.

The draft position description for the monitoring coordinator was brought up for review and discussion. Jim reiterated that the Collaborative approved of the Committee's plan to proceed with the process of hiring a Monitoring Coordinator, keeping in mind the necessity of submitting to the Collaborative a detailed budget and position description before publishing the position announcement.

Those present agreed that, for reasons of a secure funding source (a U of M letter of appointment), hiring flexibility, and access to library resources and computer storage, it would be desirable to house the position and the University of Montana, with Jim Burchfield as the position supervisor. Also discussed were the potential advantages of locating the monitoring coordinator's office space in the Forest Service Lab at the edge of the U of M campus, thus facilitating coordination between the Forest Service and other partners in the Collaborative.

After discussion it was agreed that the recommended salary for the monitoring coordinator would be \$45,000 per year, with opportunity to increase in future years.

A search committee for the Monitoring Coordinator position was formed, with Cara Nelson (Chair), Travis Belote, Megan Birzell, and Jon Haufler. In addition, Tim Love and Gary Burnett will be invited to serve. The search committee will devise a detailed hiring budget, recruitment strategy, and finalized position description. Monitoring Subcommittee members are directed to send to Cara, before Christmas, comments regarding the draft position description.

The search committee will select the top 3 candidate choices and make a presentation in that regard to the Monitoring Committee, which will then present to the full Collaborative.

The Committee reviewed the current status of suggested monitoring work for 2011 and the necessary steps and financial needs fulfill commitments.

The weed working group reported that they had participated in a conference call on December 16 for the purpose of producing a weed treatment monitoring plan. The plan

includes implementation, efficacy, and ecological effects monitoring. The methods include approach, replication, duration, and response variables because there will be two kinds of treatments in 2011 (roadside and aerial) with different associated monitoring issues. The plan includes lines defining who will carry out the work and detailing which tasks can be addressed by lay people and which require trained personnel. The \$42,000 budget includes matching and monitoring coordinator time.

The next SWCC Monitoring Committee meeting, which will be held after the January 11 SW Crown Collaborative meeting, will be scheduled after availability information is gathered by way of a Doodle Poll.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00p.m.