

OPINION

Pilot Joe Treegate

BY JOHN GERRITSM

The cutting of two old-growth trees on the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Pilot Joe project are opined to be the trust-buster with the Applegate community according to Luke Ruediger’s opinion in the last issue of the *Applegater*.

As an integral part of the Pilot, the BLM requested and funded a multiparty monitoring effort led by the Southern Oregon Restoration Collaborative (formerly Small Diameter Collaborative). Part of the monitoring effort is the establishment of plots for pre- and post-data gathering on the Pilot Joe. It was during the establishment of one of those plots that the group came across a questionable mark of what appeared to be six to eight large trees on unit 26-1A. Along with the monitoring group that day in the field was the current Applegate Partnership president, Aaron Krikava. Aaron photographed and documented the marked trees and through the Applegate Partnership forwarded the information to me. Seeing what appeared to be a questionable mark on at least some of the six or so trees in the photos, I arranged for Nate, my silviculturist (who writes the stand prescriptions and marking guides), to have a look. Two days after receiving the information from the Partnership, Nate field checked the situation.

BLM uses orange flagging to denote a unit boundary prior to finalizing a boundary with orange paint. Noting an orange flag line adjacent to the trees in question, Nate surmised the boundary was not fully marked with paint at that location, and filled in the boundary with paint, which effectively excluded the photographed trees from the unit to be harvested. I reported the information back to Aaron and others. The purchaser of the project was about to begin cutting in that unit, so I felt satisfied the situation had been resolved and the trees would not be cut.

In an effort to provide Aaron a learning opportunity about the project’s implementation related to cable corridors, I invited Aaron to go along with the logger and my sale administrator in unit 26-1A during the corridor layout and approval process. Upon reaching the questionable trees, the group discovered a much different situation than what was surmised and reported to me by Nate. A purchaser will flag in his cable corridors, in any color but orange, for approval by the sale administrator. In this particular (rare and only) instance, the purchaser used orange flagging, which created the confusion for Nate that caused him to deduce the boundary of the unit had excluded the trees in question. In reality, the flagging was only a logging corridor, and not a boundary. The bottom line is that six

or so trees in question were designated for cutting. Thus, about two weeks had passed during which time I reported the trees to be excluded from harvest, only to find out at the end of the two weeks such was not the case.

It is also crucial to note that the sale is under contract, and the purchaser (Boise) must agree to any adjustment in trees designated for harvest. They were only willing to give up the larger of the questionable trees, and proceeded to cut the remaining ones, including two trees that were afterward determined to be of old-growth age (i.e., older than 180 years old). Whether there was one day, one week, or one month before cutting when the trees were detected, only the purchaser can relinquish trees they have under contract in circumstances such as the one at Pilot Joe. Therefore, allegations that BLM did nothing, despite pleas from the community, are completely false. BLM was unable to do anything. The remaining trees cut in the group were under 150 years of age and therefore within the age criteria for harvest. However, the size of the trees compared to the surrounding trees would lead one to deduce such trees would stay under the Pilot Joe prescription, and a re-reading of the detailed prescription confirmed the error in not designating all six or so trees to be retained from harvest.

It was never BLM’s intent to harvest two old-growth trees and the adjacent younger but large trees. While I don’t wish to diminish the value of an old-growth tree or downplay that BLM made a mistake, the BLM marked some 22,000 trees in that sale. An error rate of six or so trees out of 22,000 is certainly not a poster child for what is wrong with BLM’s Pilot Joe project. It should simply have been a joint effort between BLM and the collaborators to fix what was necessary to not repeat the event.

So, the unintentional harvest of about six trees discovered by a multiparty monitoring effort paid for by the BLM is reason for Luke to conclude that the BLM can no longer be trusted. Those who wish to make the “Pilot Joe Treegate” an incident with consequences far beyond its real significance will do so for ulterior motives. The rest of us will continue to strive toward meaningful community involvement and learning to continually improve the implementation of the restoration principles. That is why the rest of us will continue our collaboration effort on the Applegate Pilot.

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A more progressive approach to forest management

BY CHERYL BRUNER

The Williams Integrative Vegetative Management (WIVM) Environmental Assessment (EA) was made public on December 18, 2012, and a decision is expected in a couple of months. The WIVM is a 10-year, 6,604-acre Bureau of Land Management (BLM) forest-management project that includes hazardous fuels reduction as well as commercial thinning. Since the introduction of the project in April of 2012, the Williams community has participated vigorously in the assessment and submission of comments to BLM. The Williams Community Forest Project (WCFP) and the community are promoting a more progressive approach to forest management that would embrace local values.

The bulk of the commercial timber volume for this BLM proposal will come from plantations that are less than 60 years old. We are supportive of such timber extraction, as well as certain proposed variable density logging in some areas, as BLM proposes. However, we do object strongly to BLM’s cutting of trees over 100 years old in natural stands. BLM wants to log trees up to 150 years, like they did in the Pilot Joe timber sale. The average age of trees in our area, as determined by BLM, is 102 years. We are disappointed in the BLM who, despite several meetings and field trips, refuses to modify their original proposal or develop prescriptions for thinning with a 100-year standard.

In addition, the EA proposes fuels treatment and commercial logging immediately adjacent to the recent Riggs Lone Creek 250-acre clear-cut. Claudia Beausoleil, WCFP vice president, says, “We are shocked that the BLM EA fails to acknowledge the Williams IVM Scoping comment letter of June 14, 2012, to drop treatments adjacent to private land clear-cutting.” We recommend that units adjacent to this clear-cut have no treatment to provide a refugia for displaced animals and mitigate edge habitat, effects and fragmentations as clear-cut areas recover. Treating BLM areas adjacent to this recent clear-cut exacerbates local cumulative impacts. These effects are negative to

many species in terms of population densities, gene flow and local extirpation of populations.

The proposed WIVM also includes forested areas that were part of the BLM Scattered Apples Forest management plan in 2004 that was protested by the community because of its aggressive approach in northern spotted owl habitat. The BLM is again proposing commercial thinning in this area, which has a lack of hazardous fuels and provides nesting, roosting and forage habitat for the spotted owl. It would be foolish and wasteful to degrade spotted owl critical habitat and log century-old trees that have almost no chance of burning.

WCFP is requesting that the BLM include citizen monitoring as part of quality control. As an Adaptive Management Area, the Williams IVM could be a model for effective collaboration among stakeholders. The Williams Community is home to a diverse group of citizens who have intimate relationships with the forests. Their knowledge and reliance on the forests makes them uniquely qualified to help the BLM stay on track with management goals. Citizen monitors could help prevent socially unacceptable cutting that does not follow prescriptions. This collaboration is timely as socially acceptable forestry management becomes more mainstream.

These issues are vital to the Williams community who have chosen to live here because of the amazing mountains, trees, plants, and wildlife.

The Williams Community Forest Project will continue to sponsor community meetings to provide a forum for communication regarding the WIVM and the establishment of a monitoring program. Refer to the website at williamscommunityforestproject.org for information regarding the WIVM.

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