Finding Common Ground, Exploring Differences

and Searching for Missing Information

Summary Statement

The intent of the survey was to take a temperature read on various positions in the group. Eight people responded and completed the survey. While eight surveys doesn't reflect the views of the entire work group, the respondents do represent a majority of people focused on the issues important to the South Fork area of the Mill Creek Watershed.

In the following pages, I will provide a summary of the views and positions without betraying the identity of those who responded. My hope is that this summary will give everyone a picture of the conflicting views, as well as, areas of influence or non-negotiable items.

An additional intention was to test for what new information could surface that might influence positions. In reviewing the responses, I saw little indication that people would alter their view, at least on the part of those who take the polar opposite position from each other. In my reading, I made two interpretations. The first is the likelihood that even if new information surfaced, it would either reinforce the position for which the information supports or be discounted by those who hold a different view. The conclusion I reach is that collecting more information at this time would not bring the group any closer to a recommendation for action. My second interpretation builds off the first by seeing the working group as ready to negotiate toward recommendations. This is not a call for people to give up their positions, nor to find a consensus. Unanimous agreement was never the goal of the working group. Rather, I suggest that we move toward negotiation by putting on the table what are people's primary interests, concerns, negotiable and non-negotiable items. In going forward, the final recommendations may come from a majority view, but it will be equally important to address the concerns of those whose interests are not reflected in the final recommendation. Lastly, it is my understanding that the group's recommendations are the next step in the process and not the final word or solution.

Stated goal for working group in South Fork

Goal: Make recommendations for protecting the South Fork drinking water supply in the event of a severe wildfire.

Modifications to goal

A number of respondents suggested specific courses of actions, i.e. reducing fuel loading. A course of action is one objective that can help meet the goal of protecting the South Fork drinking water supply. A course of action is not a goal, so I excluded the comments that suggested concrete courses of action.

Most modifications had to do with expanding the goal beyond just protecting the water supply or emphasizing the degree of preventing fire. An example of going beyond protecting the water supply was the request to include the concept of 'forest health' as a more expansive goal. A similar response was 'that the forest ecosystem comes to resemble historic natural conditions." An example of emphasis is removing the word 'severe' and consider protection of water quality at all times by protecting the watershed from any fire or at least the effects of an unmanageable, high intensity wildfire.

Other modifications made slight changes to the language, i.e. rather than "in the event of a severe wildfire" change to "by reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire."

Basic Operating Assumptions

- We will never be able to predict the exact conditions of a wildfire.
- A clear agreement does not exist among the experts and science on the impacts /risks of management actions.
- There is no single solution.

Other operating assumptions added:

- We will never have complete, perfect information
- The information we do use must be applicable to drier-type forest systems
- It will be difficult to visit every area of the watershed, so finding 'typical' conditions may prove allusive. There are no clear constants
- This is a process where everyone involved is learning 'as we go.'
- Past fire suppression techniques have been part of the present day problem
- Cannot reduce fire risk, but can create conditions where fire behavior is lessened
- All courses of action have ecological tradeoffs
- Fire is a natural phenomenon and integral part of a healthy forest system

I. Area

These are the identified areas that if a severe fire struck, it would pose the greatest threat to the water quality.

Dog River Drainage; Crow Creek Dam and its seasonal tributaries; South facing slops on the North side of the drainage; steep slopes above the larger tributaries; untreated areas above (west of Rd 1721); Riparian areas; headwaters of watershed; high fuel areas.

II. If a prescribed treatment was recommend, how extensive of an area

In this section, there was a wide range of views from fairly extensive, do as much as it takes to it not being possible to treat areas, but one must think landscape. Specific proposals suggested treating the hilltops first, then later modifying the fuels in the specific areas. There was a caution against logging in riparian areas; the logging activity will have a greater impact on water quality than fire, as well as an expressed need to accommodate the displacement of wild life. In riparian areas, no treatment because of habitat for spotted owl.

Question for further discussion:

- **Are there buffer zones that lay around these areas that can be treated?**
- **Since it will be impossible to survey each acre in the watershed, can the group come up with a description of existing and desired future conditions that can be used as a criteria for treatment or no action?**

III. Mill Creek under Class Condition 3

All but one respondent designated Mill Creek as being half to 90% in the Class Condition 3; the break down was:

Little to a quarter (1); Half (2); Half to ¾ Quarters (1); ¾ Quarters (1); ¾ plus (1); 90% (2)

IV. Areas within the watershed in which you have specific questions

There were several good questions. Uncertain whether these questions were addressed on the field trips:

- Curious about the upper watershed and wetter forest types. Do they have naturally longer fire regimes – may not be possible to effectively manage for fire;

- In the areas that would impact the water quality, need to know from Dave Anderson what modifications can be made to fuels, road density and other disturbances that would adversely affect the water quality

- The Dog River Drainage – is this area included within the project area? Is it an area that the City is concerned about?

V. Possible Course of Action

Thinning (2)

Brush Removal (1)

Prescribing Burning (1)

A combination of all three (5)

None of the above, no action

Alternative mowing, pruning; removal of dead and downed wood; thinning of larger diameter stand, removal of large snags that extend above the canopy; maintain ground tankers, identify areas where fire retardant can be used without harming water quality; confidence in local officials and managers who know area.

VI. Information to increase confidence in decision for best course of action

The range of responses to this section went from trusting the expertise of those who are familiar with the area (local officials and agencies) to a greater confidence in scientific experts outside of local agency. The former sees the views of local expertise as better than 'data,' the latter sees the local expertise as anecdotal and not hard science.

While it is not uncommon for anyone to positively evaluate information that fits one's own view and discount others as not being as relevant, this dynamic makes for difficult conversations and

stalemates. A different approach is to refrain from dismissing each others information outright. Instead, get a little curious. What leads you or another person to focus on some information and not others? Is there anything in what the other person is seeing that I might be missing in my perspective?

If you want to take it a little deeper, then consider the assumption that no one likes to have the information he or she considers important to be dismissed or minimized. If that is true, then if you find yourself dismissing another person's information as irrelevant, what would lead you to do to another person what you yourself don't like being done to you?

Other responses included:

- plenty of information already
- Assessment documents; soil surveys and makeup of the forest at various elevations and locations, i.e. extent of grand fir encroachment in lower watershed.

VII. What information do you need that would help determine the best course of action

One item was field trips, so hopefully they did help and we will check to see what information and conclusions people drew from having gone on field trips. Other information included:

- Examples of types of prescriptions and technologies available to mimic the beneficial effects of fire.
- What people see as the conditions which they would support active management;
- Any similar collaborative efforts on the east side of Oregon/Washington.

Other requests had to do with more discussion about:

- Clarifying definitions, for example, what is being considered fuel.
- Evidence that fuel treatments have had any effect on past fire behavior. What is their effectiveness?

- What are the tools or methods for forecasting probability and severity of fire in our area?
- What are the tradeoffs between treatments benefits and the ecological costs of the treatments?

VIII. What information may alter your view

This sections gives the group some indication of the areas of influence, but as I read the responses, I found some requested information difficult to access or verify, leading me to wonder if the response had a flavor of "Pretty darn hard to come up with information that could change my mind." ☺

- If the public at larger wanted a 'hands off' management approach;
- If logging or thinning is harmful to animals
- If The Dalles had an alternative water supply to switch to in the event of a 'let burn' approach to the watershed;
- Demonstrate that a severe fire would not put the water quality at risk;
- Examples of successful treatments in upper elevation forests that meet the needs for wildlife.

IX. Under what circumstances would any or all of the course of actions not work?

This question yield responses that have the potential to reveal the concerns and interest that lie beneath the various positions:

- Logging of any kind.
- Prescribed burning or bush removal where mixed conifers exists in South Fork;
- All options should work unless there is a specific exclusion in the forest plan;
- A wind driven fire under severe conditions, it would make it difficult to take effective fire control action;
- If opening up the canopy increases brush growth to the point that fire danger increases rather than decreases;
- Any treatment that endangers wildlife/spotted owl;
- Any treatment that would in itself impact negatively water quality;
- If prescribed burning was the only action taken; avoid burns in soil sensitive areas and riparian areas.

X. What factors in the Mill Creek watershed have the greatest amount of influence on the course of action?

Ranking

The watershed Topography	3, 1, 4, 3, 2, 3, 4
Species	2, 4, 5, 2, 3, 5, 5
Soil composition	4, 2, 2, 5, 5, 6, 2
Rainfall distribution	6, 3, 6, 1, 4, 4, 3
Wind patterns	5, 5, 3, 4, 1, 2, 1
Other:	fuel loading 1; 1; 1; moisture content – how dry the forest is

As you can see, asking people to rank levels of importance/influence doesn't always result in a clear winner. One note of interest is the addition of fuel loading as a write in candidate that received three #1 rankings.

XI. What course of actions would create conflict….?

The responses to this question are where we will want to resume our discussion because it goes to the heart of people's concerns and interest. For example, if someone takes a position of recommending thinning, others hear that as 'logging.' The untested attribution is that the intention is not to truly thin in order to protect the water quality or promote a healthy forest, but generate revenue for the US Forest Service. Motivations and intentions are hard to divine if done in the privacy of one's mind. They are also complex and usually not singular but multiple.

This attribution can be tested publicly, as well as a concrete discussion about what constitutes logging as opposed to thinning. When does thinning look like logging? Can logging be seen from any other perspective or intention other than negative?

Here are the areas where people see potential conflict of interests:

- Thinning (logging), but probably not prescribed burning or brush removal;
- Potentially any action could trigger a lawsuit; logging, machine piling, snag removal, building roads, air quality issues from under burning; clear cuts, removing more than 60% of the canopy; failure to protect the water quality; spotted owl – result of thinning treatments or removing mistletoe; any type of management activity in natural stands.

XII. What could be done to minimize these conflicts?

These are some suggestions to keep in mind as we go forward making concrete recommendations:

- Have wildlife specialist work with a silviculturist;
- Don't cut too much of one forest;
- Stick mostly to precommerical thinning and brush removal.;
- Don't adopt any recommendation if it is in obvious conflict;
- Continue to involve different parties and hope for the best;

XIII. Final question: non-negotiable

Here are the non-negotiable:

- New road building anywhere (2)
- Any thinning in LSR or riparian areas,
- Thinning in mixed conifer zone;
- Taking no action and study the process to death (3)
- Long term fire protection for the South Fork;
- Must protect the spotted owl habitat conditions;
- No large clear cuts

As you read these non-negotiable items, are there any recommendations you are thinking about that might bump up against these non-negotiable items? If so, is there any way you can modify your recommendation that takes into consideration the interests or concerns behind these non-negotiable items?