

## **The Path Forward - excerpts from 24 March 2010 4FRI Stakeholder meeting minutes**

### **Path Forward**

#### **Report**

The Path Forward document was begun last May and is an important document to define the vision and direction for the group. The drafting committee completed the document on March 12<sup>th</sup>, including the decision rules. The document had sufficient agreement to move forward, with 2 caveats. 1) GFFP needed to take the Path Forward back to their Board and 2) ERI/Wally Covington asked to confer with his staff.

In the future, documents will be sent out in advance of the 4FRI meeting with the hope that agencies can vet these documents within their organizations, so they can come to the meeting prepared to make a decision. The group can consider it a great vote of confidence if both the NRWG and Board come back with an endorsement. The decision will be discussed at the next 4FRI meeting and the final decision will be made. In the meantime, the group will continue with review /editing of the most recent version.

Still being discussed is how the Path Forward is used, referenced and addressed in other documents, such as the MOU, and the Charter.

#### **Review**

The Path Forward was projected on an overhead screen and the changes that had been made in late November through February were reviewed with the group.

**Section I and II** = No major changes. 3

Section III = added ecological goal #6: "Retain sufficient trees of all size and age classes to assure development of natural stand dynamics." and modified #10: No old growth trees (predating Euro-American settlement or currently exhibiting old growth structural characteristics) shall be cut."

**Section IV** – no changes.

**Section V**– added under Sideboards for Accelerated Restoration. Many sentences in the first paragraph were changed, starting with sentence, "These sideboards are meant to be an initial reflection of social agreement, and an opportunity for continued analysis, refinement, and translation through subsequent planning and design efforts." The word *consensus* was changed to agreement throughout the document. There were no changes to sideboards 1 and 2. CWPPs were added under #3. No other changes to sideboards 3 – 7. Sideboards 8 and 9 – split out old growth and large trees to distinguish the different management objectives. Sideboard 9 was changed to eliminate the strict diameter cap. Exceptions to 16" diameter cap are outlined. Public safety goals were added. Also, the use of best available science with stakeholder discussion was explicitly identified as the basis of decisions. The goal of achieving structural heterogeneity was included.

The idea is that diameter cap would be a limiting factor under all conditions, but would not be mandated. This affords flexibility of the group to discuss the 16" threshold. It places the burden of proof on why that cap limit would be exceeded.

### **Comments and Discussion**

**Comment:** Sideboard # 5 should have some definition of desired future conditions (DFC) – not just sideboards on decisions. Ask the USFS if this is what they need to build into the NEPA process and how they would like the group involved.

**Response:** The purpose of the document is not to comply with the NEPA process. The purpose is to crystallize the agreement of the Collaborative as to how they proceed and how this process can move forward. The relationship between this document and the NEPA process is that it provides a process aid in how the Collaborative can be involved in the development of DFC.

**Comment:** Reminder that these documents are public documents, so they should not reflect the wrong idea. A suggestion was made to possibly change the word *sideboard* because it seems to have a negative connotation. Proposed ideas: DFC or guidelines.

**Response:** The word *sideboard* has some real value to the group because their purpose is to keep people on track. The sideboards are there to help the group navigate where we are going. A word like *guideposts* might be a more effective term when working with the public or the media. The word *sideboard* has been discussed extensively by the steering committee because they are also aware of possible misinterpretations. However, for the time being, it seemed to best connote the reality of the process.

**Comment on #9:** if the group is going to identify specific documents to reference, then CWPPs should be included because they are publically vetted documents. If CWPPs are not included, then don't identify any documents at all.

**Response:** CWPPs were not included because there was such a wide array of documents and loosely defined WUI areas.

### Considerations and Reservations

There was further discussion and proposals for changing the wording on sideboard #9 to address the concern with CWPPs. Reservations on wording in #9 in the Path Forward included: 4

Concern that CWPPs need to be considered in decision-making along with other documents and/or information. Suggestions to that end included identifying CWPPs to be certain they are considered with other information in the decision process. The group needs to address areas that communities have identified.

Concern with the boundaries that were identified in many of the CWPPs. Specifically, concerns with the breadth of the boundary areas identified because there was no clear guidance in their development.

The original intention in drawing the boundaries was for a wood biomass utilization study, and they do not necessarily reflect accurate areas of high risk in need of WUI treatment prescriptions.

Concern that the distinction be maintained between the goal of public safety and risk reduction versus true restoration. Suggestion was to keep wording in #1 and #2 separate to maintain the intent of the two areas separate.

Concern that the point needed to be made that the treatments will be compatible with the CWPP goals. Suggestion was that wording be included to require the group to use the CWPPs to establish priority areas of treatments. Those designing treatments will make a distinction in the prescription for restoration within areas established as risk reduction areas.

**Reservations:** the Path Forward is written as guidance – but these are natural systems, so there are always exceptions to bounds or guides – always goes outside the bounds, so this is fairly rigid way of addressing a natural system.

CBD does not agree with all the compromise language, but they will support moving forward with the collaborative.

GFFP – voted on Path Forward, and had general support. They also have some reservations, but will support moving forward.

NRWG – will support or not based on vote in next meeting , but in either case, they will not adopt these sideboards into their protocols.

TNC – same concern with compromises. Some of the TNC members agree and some don't. Some concern with guidelines, but they will be addressed at the ground level.

Agreement The final change the group deliberated and agreed upon was to add the following wording under sidebar #9: "... and where stakeholder agreement identifies priority areas within approved CWPPs"

The full group reached agreement with reservation/acquiescence on the entire Path Forward document, with the changes to wording in #9 noted above. The reservations are noted above. Groups who want to submit written reservations can send them to Ethan Aumack. [Written reservations are attached at the end of this document]

Without Reservation– 9  
Reservations = 13  
Acquiescence = 1

The NRWG will be looking at the document in their April meeting to discuss and determine if they will support. The Monitoring Board will meet the same day as the NRWG, so they will make a combined decision. However, the whole group agreed not to wait until the next meeting to decide on adopting the Path Forward, except to record NRWG's and WMSC Monitoring Board's reaction.

Written reservations re: agreement on the Path Forward document:

Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership:

1 - Mixed vote of Partners, SO NO CLEAR #1: 6 w/o reservations @ #1; 2 w reservations @ #2; 1 abstain & 1 opposed @ #3; 0 @ #4

2 - Functional concerns

\* Sideboards too restrictive to accomplish ecological restoration across the landscape

\* Functional if not "strict" diameter cap fixed @ 16", especially since exceptions (other than CPMZ's) can be opposed/blocked

\* Post-treatment conditions from WSS still too limited/simple/constrained

\* Approved CWPP's not emphasized enough

GFFP looks forward to the 1st meeting when the Path Forward is not on the agenda.

Coconino Natural Resources Conservation District:

"CNRCD agrees with reservation to the subject Path Forward, subsection V.9., with the reservation being that to harness our future analysis and research, NEPA and otherwise, to the arbitrary definition of large trees, is contrary to efficient and effective management and contrary to accelerated treatment. Despite this, I believe we can work with this and succeed

We do not see significant socio-political consensus for making 16" dbh a unique or fundamental decision point for NEPA or other analysis. We know of no science based reason to do so. Including this in the Collaborative charter, or by reference, goes against Path Forward section IV, "...mechanisms that support highly efficient and effective program implementation.", and against Path Forward section V subsection 10 in its entirety."

Arizona Game and Fish Department:

The Arizona Game and Fish Department welcomes completion of the *Path Forward* document, dated March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010. We appreciate the commitment and time invested by all stakeholders, setting the stage for successful implementation of the Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4FRI). The Department supports the *Path Forward* at Level 2, "Agreement with Reservations." In accordance with decision rules adopted by the 4FRI collaborative, we present the following documentation of our reservations.

1. Section V.7. We remain concerned by over-extension of results of the *Analysis of Small Diameter Wood Supply in Northern Arizona*. Like other participants in that effort, the Department understood the objective to be estimating the amount of wood fiber that could be harvested under various treatment scenarios. Analyses for the *Wood Supply Study* were relatively coarse, i.e., they were not spatially explicit and did not incorporate the full range of information available to inform ecologically-based restoration (e.g., site-specific reference conditions, range of natural variability in forest stand structure, etc.). Wildlife habitat objectives were not a formal part of the analysis, other than excluding treatments from some areas (e.g., Mexican Spotted Owl PACs). Desired post-treatment conditions articulated in the *Wood Supply Study* are general, hypothesized outcomes insufficient for developing site-specific prescriptions.
2. Section V.9. The 16" diameter limit on tree harvest is an arbitrary, socially-derived number. The available science does not indicate that trees >16" must be retained to restore the structure and function of Southwestern ponderosa pine forests or meet wildlife habitat needs within those ecosystems. In fact, there are many areas (including those identified in the *Path Forward*) where removal of large, post-settlement trees will be necessary to meet wildlife habitat and restoration objectives. The *Path Forward* contains a clause allowing removal of large, non old-growth trees. However, this exception process has yet to be defined and should not compromise attainment of wildlife habitat and other restoration objectives.
3. Section V.10. The same concerns articulated above apply to recommended application of initial sideboards across the 4FRI area.

4. The Department strongly supports a stakeholder-driven, collaborative approach to the 4FRI Initiative. The *Path Forward* document reflects significant efforts by a small and dedicated group of stakeholders. However, we are concerned that the document may not reflect the full range of stakeholder perspectives and could be construed as exclusionary by those who have yet to engage in the 4FRI effort.

#### The Ecological Restoration Institute

The ERI is in agreement at Agreement level 2, Agreement with Reservations, with regard to the Path Forward document presented on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Just to clarify, we agree in general but have some reservations. We recognize that those with reservations must express their reasons and have them recorded. The following articulates those reservations:

- Ecological restoration treatments should be based on a sound understanding of reference conditions, vegetation dynamics, natural variability, and the body of knowledge that exists about the effects of restoration experiments in Arizona and the SW. We feel that some of the language in number 7 and 9 under "Sideboards" does not meet those standards and seems to embrace a "one size fits all" approach.
- Number 7 under sideboards: We object to using the consensus scenario and elements of the Wood Supply Study as sideboards. We feel that this misinterprets what most members of the Wood Supply Study group thought they were agreeing to. The second paragraph attempts to clarify and interpret the side boards but is not sufficient to fully reverse the misrepresentation of the study findings. The study was not designed to place limits on ecological restoration, but instead was just a method for calculating wood volume using different assumptions. Specifically, we disagree that the statements referred to in number 7 under "Sideboards" should be construed as technically/scientifically sound sideboards for area designations, post-treatment conditions, percentage of landscape management areas to be thinned, etc. Much more information and analysis is needed to develop specific and rigorous suggestions for appropriate ecological approaches.
- Number 9 under sideboards: We have the same general concerns noted above, plus the definition of large trees using a static diameter of 16 inches. Despite the statement that there is no strict diameter cap, the result of the large tree retention strategy could be interpreted by some as a 16 inch diameter cap. Such a static diameter definition ignores the fact that trees grow, and therefore that at the very least diameter definitions must change over time. The 16 inch diameter definition has been advocated for at least the past 20 years. Assuming a modest growth rate of 1.5 inches in diameter per decade, the diameter definition should currently be around 19 inches. Putting a 16 inch definition into place now would be an effective diameter retention limit for year 10 of 14.5 inches and for year 20 of 13 inches, a potentially severe constraint on achieving restoration objectives over the 20 yr life of the 4FRI agreement. Further a one size fits all diameter definition ignores the high site to site variability that characterizes the 4FRI landscape. We believe that a scientifically rigorous and technically sound analysis could produce some tree retention guides that would stand up to technical and scientific scrutiny. Absent that, we feel that such a large tree retention strategy could well be ignored entirely.