

SSAG Meeting Minutes

10/30/20, 8:00 a.m.—11:30 a.m. MT

Boise, Capitol Building, EW-42 Meeting Room and via Zoom Web-conferencing

Acronyms:

Idaho Department of Lands (IDL)

USDA Forest Service (USFS)

Attendees:

In-Person: Governor Brad Little, Brian Wonderlich (Chair; Governor's Office), Dustin Miller (SSAG Member; IDL Director), John Roberts (SSAG Member; Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership), Jim DeMaagd (SSAG Member in proxy; acting USFS Region 4 Deputy Regional Forester), Ara Andrea (SSAG Member; Idaho Statewide Shared Stewardship Coordinator; IDL), Nate Fisher (Governor's Office), Lynn Oliver (South-Idaho Shared Stewardship Coordinator; USFS), Tawnya Brummett (Forest Supervisory; Boise National Forest; USFS), Katie Wood (Emmett District Ranger; Boise National Forest; USFS), Susan Howle (Deputy Forest Supervisor; Payette National Forest; USFS).

Via Zoom Web-conference: Steve Vick (SSAG Member; Idaho State Senator), Sage Dixon (SSAG Member; Idaho State Representative), Dan Dinning (SSAG Member; Boundary County Commissioner), John Robison (SSAG Member; Idaho Conservation League), Knute Sandahl (SSAG Member; Idaho Lands Resource Coordinating Council; State Fire Marshall), Curtis Elke (SSAG Member; Idaho NRCS State Conservationist), Tom Schultz (SSAG Member; Idaho Forest Group), Kurt Dyroff (SSAG Member; National Wild Turkey Federation), Anna Torma (SSAG Member; PotlatchDeltic), Tim Garcia (SSAG Member; USFS State & Private Forestry), Frank Beum (Regional Forester; USFS Intermountain Region), Leanne Marten (Regional Forester; USFS Northern Region), Greg Becker (Acting State Resource Conservationist; Idaho NRCS), Jeff Lau (North-Idaho Shared Stewardship Coordinator; USFS), Craig Foss (Idaho State Forester; IDL).

Welcome—by Brian Wonderlich, SSAG Chair

Brian Wonderlich welcomed everyone; expressed his appreciation for everyone's attendance. Brian expressed how encouraging it is to be part of an organization that has an opportunity to help protect Idaho from the types of catastrophic wildfires that are destroying other parts of the West—and to be an example to other states. He then led roundtable introductions, and asked for comments on, and approval of, the 7/28/20 SSAG meeting minutes. A motion was made by Knute Sandahl to approve the meeting minutes, seconded by John Roberts; minutes were approved unanimously.

Shared Stewardship Progress Report

Ara Andrea, the new Idaho Shared Stewardship Coordinator, presented an overview of the meeting's objectives and gave a progress report on Shared Stewardship cross-boundary projects, and marketing and outreach efforts. She presented a video showing progress on planned and implemented projects and unveiled the new *#NoBoundariesForestry* website. Finalization of this website is underway, and it will be publicly accessible in November.

Ara illustrated the “why” behind our collaborative, cross-boundary work—that while we cannot change some contributing factors to our increasingly damaging wildfires, we can use silvicultural techniques to modify the behavior of wildfire once ignited. Using post-fire photos from the 2020 Hunter II Fire in Bonner County, she showed photos of the wildfire that had burned through a managed/treated timber stand (with relatively little damage to the productive overstory) and the complete mortality that occurred when this same fire spread to a nearby unmanaged stand.

Ara gave updates showing the IDL Shared Stewardship positions that have been hired/are being hired—including her new IDL position, IDL’s two GNA/Shared Stewardship forester positions, and the USFS-IDL shared positions—the North-Idaho and South-Idaho Shared Stewardship Coordinators, Jeff Lau and Lynn Oliver, respectively—who now work in IDL’s staff offices. She then gave an overview of Shared Stewardship funding support: 1) Ongoing annual state General Fund support of \$250,000/year; 2) \$800,000 of USFS grant funds; and 3) \$125,000 of salary support of IDL Shared Stewardship positions by Idaho NRCS.

Jeff Lau gave a brief overview of project progress in the north-Idaho Shared Stewardship Priority Landscape, including the Kilroy Bay fuels-reduction work adjacent to the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF) Buckskin project. 21 acres of hazardous fuels-reduction work has just been completed around this small community, with 20 more adjacent acres planned for treatment. Jeff summarized the IPNF Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership (Joint Chiefs) proposal, encompassing 6 national-forest projects and surrounding private and state lands—with 90% of this proposed project area falling into wildland urban interface (WUI) areas. Jeff explained how several partners, including IDL Forestry Assistance programs, Bonner County Office of Emergency Management, Bonner and Kootenai Counties’ NRCS Districts, and IDL forest managers, have come together to schedule cumulative treatments on over 75,000 acres. Jeff explained how partnerships developed in our Shared Stewardship efforts are critical to the success of competitive applications like this—as well as important for paving the way forward for future work.

Lynn Oliver gave an overview of progress on projects in the south-Idaho Priority Landscape. He reported that at the end of July, fuels-reduction project work was started on private lands (homesites) around the Tamarack ski resort, carried out by Valley County and contracted operators. On the Emmett Ranger District of the Boise National Forest, Shared Stewardship partners are approaching nearby private landowners to acquire interest in getting treatments done. These national forests are experimenting with new authorities, like reciprocal fire agreements and the Wyden Authority, to help adjacent private landowners get these needed treatments done. Shared Stewardship partners are drafting a Joint Chiefs proposal for the 170,000-acre northern focal area within our south-Idaho Priority Landscape on the Payette National Forest and surrounding private forestlands.

Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) applications were submitted to support projects on the Boise and Payette National Forests—and on the Idaho Panhandle National Forests. These CFLRP applications have all been recommended for funding, but final funding is still dependent on a finalized federal budget. The advancement of these applications show how Shared Stewardship efforts are making Idaho more competitive.

Leadership Remarks

Governor Little commented on the make-up of ownership of Idaho's forestlands—and how it is impossible to effectively work on silviculture, water quality, wildlife habitat, and have thriving communities with all of these arbitrary boundaries that exist on Idaho's forests. The triggering events of more and bigger fires made it clear that this Shared Stewardship approach was the right thing to do. He talked recently with USDA Undersecretary Hubbard about forest recreation issues and discussed how this Shared Stewardship model (or approach) might be the best way to also address other forest-management issues. He stated that in his experience, change is hard and the no-action alternative is easy—but that his goal is to make Idaho a place where people want to come and stay—which means that clean water, wildlife habitat, thriving communities—and especially mitigation of the increasing wildfires—need to be supported. To do this successfully, we need to increase and maintain capacity in our timber industries. He said that Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) and Shared Stewardship are the right way to address these issues. Governor Little expressed his excitement at what Shared Stewardship efforts have accomplished so far and stated his desire to continue to “scale this up.” He said that he thought this is one of the few things that will not change—even with a potentially changing President—because it is the right thing to do—the natural thing to do. Questions the governor posed to the committee in the interests of moving forward: *What's the next barrier we need to address? How do we prevent people from feeling excluded from the process? How do we keep good laws and rules from turning into blockages for us to get our work done?* There are several environmental acts that are used to litigate and keep us from doing this needed cross-boundary work. Governor Little expressed his belief that we need to fix these laws so they are not in conflict with each other and with our efforts to improve forest health. He thanked committee members—and committed his support for continuing our Shared Stewardship efforts.

Brian Wonderlich offered two points: 1) Land management is something that Governor Little has done his whole life, and he cares about this immensely and will continue to support Shared Stewardship, and 2) Brian thanked the participating state legislators for supporting funding of the Shared Stewardship efforts.

Dustin Miller stated his perspective that a busy fire season highlights how we need to keep going with these Shared Stewardship projects—and how we need to keep collaborating to get work done on the ground. He said that we had a great day on the field tour the day before on the Sage Hen and Packer John units—and that the Boise National Forest, IDL and neighboring land managers have collectively done a great job on reaching common goals of salvaging defoliated timber and reducing fuels. This shows the level of coordination and communication that is leading to success—because none of us can do it alone. Dustin observed that together, we're finding creative ways to figure out how to carry out these cross-boundary projects—even with different laws, policies and processes attached to different forest ownerships—to coordinate and share resources to get the job done. A big part of this success is due to increased communication—and what we've accomplished so far is just the tip of the iceberg. Dustin expressed that we're getting dialed in and getting more focused in a relatively short amount of time. He closed by saying that we have a long road ahead of us—but there is a strong commitment from everyone (including the governor) to support this effort.

Leanne Marten commented, “Look how far we’ve come in two short years.” She said that she has observed a lot of relationship building, figuring out of the different agency cultures and “lingo”—due to our perseverance and work to overcome challenges. She also stated that the Shared Stewardship Advisory Group’s subcommittee work on metrics is setting an example for other states across the country. Leanne expressed that there is “no boundary” when we work together—and are willing to learn from each other and put our resources together (thanking Idaho NRCS/Curtis Elke and recognizing the valuable support from the governor). She told the committee that she and Frank Beum were working very hard with IDL to make sure that as agencies, we are talking “as one.” She asked the meeting participants to let them know what they can do to help. She closed by saying that she was looking forward over the next few months to see how Idaho continues to progress.

Frank Beum pointed out that Jim DeMaagd is acting in Dave Rosenkrance’s stead on the SSAG. Frank asked the committee questions: *How do we change the trajectory of the wildfire situation across the West? How do we approach this?* He said that, in Idaho, with Shared Stewardship efforts enacted under our agreement, he thinks this is a model for the Forest Service of how we address this situation. He said that, in the future, the national forests will look at increasing treatments (timber and fuels work) to address fire impacts. He then stated that this past year, in Region 4, the Forest Service is proud of more heavily implementing more prescribed fire; they completed 120% of targeted planned treatments, treating 87,000 acres in total. Frank closed by stating that “We’re all in it—to work together” and invited meeting participants to call him and Leanne.

(10-minute break)

Shared Stewardship Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) Discussion

John Robison presented the current draft of Shared Stewardship KPIs/accomplishment metrics (which had been sent to SSAG members before the meeting). John pointed out that the overarching Shared Stewardship agreement sets the baseline of what accomplishment metrics look like—and that he wanted to engage in this discussion regarding how these metrics can be our “roadmap” to show that we’re making a difference. He also indicated that these metrics will create a framework of accountability, and how they should comply with SMART criteria. He advocated that these metrics should be based on data that IDL and the USFS can easily access with tools they already use. He then asked SSAG committee members to let us know if these recommended datasets are the best tools to use.

KPI 1) Double the annual acres treated on NFS lands by 2025. This metric focuses on timber removal and fuels reduction. This is the primary goal stated in the 2018 Shared Stewardship Agreement.

* **Tom Schultz:** Are we just going to define how we monitor our work towards our doubling-acres-treated goal—or will there be a plan showing how national forests will reach that goal?

* **John Robison:** Good question. Maybe it can be the Principles or Opportunities subcommittees that can find out if the national forests’ 5-yr action plans are developed enough to encompass an explanation of how they will reach the double-acres-treated goal by 2025—and show that national forests have these planned projects in the NFMA/NEPA pipeline.

* *Tom Schultz*: We need to make a link between the national forest plans and the double-acres-treated goal; define what is planned or achieved to reach those goals. We need to see (detailed) national forest plans to get to “doubling the acres.” We need to see the roadmap.

* *Tawnya Brummett*: The Boise National Forest is trying to balance out being nimble with a 5-year plan that defines specific project goals—how do we incorporate this double-acres goal into our existing 5-yr. plan? The Boise N. F. had to shift and adjust significantly after the Douglas-fir tussock moth outbreak. How do we continue to shift for things like this—communicate these changes—and then come back to our original plan and say, ok...now what? Also...our existing databases (e.g., FACTS) are not really designed to hold and manipulate specific project metrics.

* *Jeanne Higgins*: In Region 1, we developed an outyear planning tool that shows all of our projects and metrics on the IPNF. Now, our plan includes metrics and goals that help us better describe our planned projects. IPNF is currently working on updating its 5-year action plan. The Scattered Lands project area is an example of how our stakeholder meetings resulted in one of our first Shared Stewardship cross-boundary projects. We are varying from our plans (e.g., not doing planned prescribed burning due to COVID, and adjusting to salvage more timber after wildfire damage). We (the national forest) should meet annually with stakeholders, across ownership boundaries, to solve problems.

* *John Roberts*: It’s our SSAG KPI subcommittee’s duty to define metrics to show we’re making a difference—not to make a plan/roadmap to get there. Whether we use all of these draft metrics is another discussion—including how we get funding, how do Collaboratives help, etc. For now, let’s focus this conversation to just the validity of the metrics.

* *Ara Andrea*: I’m hearing that the committee agrees that these two double-acres-treated bullets are the accomplishment metrics for which we need to strive to get accurate data. When we discuss obstacles to acquiring these data, I will list these and bring them to the Opportunities subcommittee.

KPI 2) Jointly identify targeted priority landscapes in which agency resources will be targeted to promote and complete cross-boundary work. Two Shared Stewardship Priority Landscapes are already geospatially defined—one in north Idaho and one in south-central Idaho.

* *John Robison*: The subcommittee felt there needs to be a dynamic process to review and adjust Priority Landscape boundaries to include best available information and, where possible, respond to changing conditions (this is where the adaptive-management approach works). Using the Forest Action Plan, National Forest plans, and the State Wildlife Action Plan—we also need to be able to identify additional focal areas.

* *Dustin Miller*: We need to be mindful how we’re “adapting” with these boundaries; we need to ensure the USFS and IDL are jointly agreeing on boundary changes, and we’re careful not to expand boundaries such that we exceed our capacity. We need to be able to adaptively manage these boundaries as needed (e.g., expanding the south-Idaho Priority Landscape Boundary to include Packer John state forestlands)—but we don’t want these Priority Landscapes or Focal Areas to get so big that we can’t manage the corresponding extension of work.

* *John Robison*: What is our process for, say, incorporating the Packer John State Forest into the south-Idaho Priority Landscape? I’d encourage IDL and USFS to work together to change the boundary.

* *Katie Wood*: I think it was originally left out because it was work already done or almost done.

* *John Robison*: So how can we capture some of this work already done? It allows us to show the public what we've actually done in this Shared Stewardship effort. We can demonstrate what we've accomplished.

* *Ara Andrea*: What I'm hearing is consensus that we can look at low-hanging fruit (like inclusion of the Packer John State Forest unit) and evaluate changing events--then adjust boundaries to incorporate new issues or activities—with both agencies' approvals.

(Audio went out—10 minute break)

* *David Easley*: How does “making adaptive changes” fit into the work of this subcommittee and the whole SSAG group, in cooperation with the national forests?

* *Jim DeMaagd*: It's hard to really make concrete plans that go out five years. We can be adaptive and make changes; we have that flexibility in the Forest Service.

* *Tim Garcia*: From the perspective of the Forest Service Northern Region, with the work we've done to bolster the work of our out-year planning process, we've worked closely with IDL while they created their Forest Action Plan—to ensure their at-risk locations align with the national forest analyses. So as the national forest builds its 5-yr. plan, it is really aligned with these draft KPIs.

* *Tom Schultz*: (sharing screen, showing 5-yr. plan of the Lolo National Forest). You can see this plan (matrix) has timber sales and volumes listed—but no acres listed. It would be good to see number of acres in these 5-year plans—to see through this planning document how the national forest is reaching the double-acres-treated goal. This could be an easy way to capture the national forests' plan to reach this goal—and then, like Jeanne Higgins (the IPNF), have an annual stakeholders' meeting to go over the 5-yr. plan to see if modifications are needed.

KPI 3) Reduce fuels and wildfire risk to communities and promote cross-boundary work on all lands

* *John Robison*: This KPI is capturing the all-hands, all-lands approach. We want to provide incentives to do this cross-boundary work. It is very difficult to capture how we successfully reach these goals. Are these bulleted metrics the best measures of success? (# acres treated on private forestlands, # acres treated on state trust forestlands, number of grants and value of grant awards that fund SS cross-boundary work on non-federal lands). Ideally, we need to develop a statewide geospatial vegetation-management database that includes information from all federal and state management agencies. Who can provide these data?

(Discussion ensued regarding the utility of the USFS FACTS database—not sure how accurate data inputs are; not many people who know how to query it.)

* *Ara Andrea*: IDL can provide some data on private-land work funded by our State & Private Forestry grant funds—but we are also reliant on the USFS FACTS database to show our project outcomes. I think I should initiate a discussion with the appropriate Forest Service personnel to see how the FACTS database, the “database of record,” can truly be used to supply some of these KPI metrics.

* *Tawnya Brummett*: FACTS, in its current form, does not yield data to help with national forests' out-year planning. I think that FACTS can be refined to be better used for querying for these metrics.

* *Curtis Elke*: What do we have already in place showing identification and prioritization of fire risk to communities?

* *John Robison*: The Forest Action Plan geospatial risk analyses defined the high-fire-risk (and high-forest-health-risk) areas identified to delineate the two Priority Landscapes.

* *John Robison*: how do we create a metric to truly show the cross-boundary work of cooperative work/projects?

* *Ara Andrea*: We are reliant on each land-management agency to get us data from each of their databases/data sources. Our goal will be to create partnership tools to show cross-boundary work data—but how do we get there?

* *John Robison*: There are some cross-boundary funding tools, like Joint Chiefs projects and Wyden Authority cross-boundary projects that will inherently track these cross-boundary metrics.

* *John Roberts*: Remember that we are going to be tracking change across the landscape and across ownerships.

* *Tawnya Brummett*: A metric (related to this KPI) that I would like to see is: are we continually asking, and verifying, that we have all interested participants at the table, or in the conversation? When we manage wildfires, we are doing a continual check to see if we have everyone we need at the table—and we keep track of whether or not they are actually participating.

* *John Robison*: Can we track communications that USFS and IDL have with partners? Is this a measurable behavior?

4) KPI 4: Produce additional fiber and create and sustain jobs in support of forest management.

* *Ara Andrea*: In acquiring these listed metrics (timber volume produced on federal and non-federal land; no. of jobs within forest management industries), I need all of you to let me know how I can best get these data (e.g., IFPC, UI Policy Analysis Group, etc.). I will investigate.

5) Identify land management priorities and desired outcomes by working collaboratively with multiple land-management stakeholders.

* *John Robison*: The Idaho Forest Restoration Partnership (IFRP) will annually administer a partnership-performance survey and adjust this survey to address deficiencies. This survey is intended to capture partners' satisfaction with USFS and IDL in terms of outreach, communications, and inclusion. Within Priority Landscapes, increased use of authorities and tools that include partnerships (e.g., CFLRP proposals, GNA work, Joint Chiefs projects, Wyden Authority projects, Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act, USFS Stewardship Contracts, reciprocal fire-use agreements, NRCS EQIP projects) can assist us in measuring this KPI. Also, the national-forest Collaboratives have a constructive working relationship with the USFS and IDL offices and continue to offer recommendations on project design, implementation and/or monitoring.

* *Craig Foss*: Are each of these metrics intended to be measured for all Priority Landscapes and Focal Areas across the state? Or, are they to be measured just within a defined Priority Landscape?

* *John Robison*: I believe that the intent is that, for most of these, except for KPI #1, they will be focusing on specific Priority Landscapes.

6) Improve forest conditions, watershed health and landscape resiliency.

* *John Robison*: Here, we are moving to outcomes, versus outputs, looking to improve forest conditions, forest health, and watershed health. We want to show that we've decreased the acres of forestland impacted by insect and disease—but recognize that we can only possibly show this where the USFS Forest Health Protection team and IDL already have related forest-health monitoring occurring.

(Discussions ensued about actually measuring these proposed metrics—and who will “conduct implementation monitoring after conducting treatments and evaluate success toward meeting treatment objectives outlined in NEPA or plan documents.” How do we effectively show changes or improvements in “wildlife habitats”?)

* *Ara Andrea*: I will investigate data sources to support these metrics listed in KPI #6. I'm asking all of you (members) to send me prospective data sources that could help us measure these things.

Ideally, we need to show that we're treating X acres—but that this is resulting in Y number of acres that have been mitigated in fire risk.

* *Katie Wood*: There appears to be some redundancy in these KPIs—that could allow us to narrow these down (like KPIs 1, 3, and 6). There are ways to reduce the number of KPIs and make it more concise and less duplicative.

* *Ara Andrea*: I will take acquired obstacles/issues and bring them to Tom Schultz and the SSAG Opportunities subcommittee. I will also send out the IFRP Shared Stewardship Survey responses once the report is finalized.

Next Steps

Brian Wonderlich stated that he liked the model of working on one subcommittees' work per meeting.

Dustin Miller said that we need to stay mindful of each agency's authorities. What may work on IDL's state forestlands may not work on Forest Service lands or private forestlands. Some of these KPIs are more focused on NF lands—or more on private industrial—we can probably refine these some, but we need to make sure that each ownership standards are addressed. This draft of accomplishment metrics is a good start.

Brian W congratulated Ara on her first successful SSAG meeting and field tour. He also thanked John Robison and his metrics subcommittee.

Meeting adjourned at 11:14 a.m.

Meeting minutes respectfully submitted by Ara Andrea.