

# **Wildlife Issues**<sup>1</sup>

## **Workshop on Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat September 11, 2002**<sup>2</sup>

### **Goals**

1. Secure the engagement of wildlife/habitat managers, agencies, representatives and advocates in Upper Joseph Creek Community Planning effort.
2. Review the state of knowledge concerning wildlife species, habitats and conditions relevant to the Upper Joseph Creek watershed.
3. Identify key issues pertinent to the watershed analysis, and the formulation of recommendations for restoration and management action.

### **Community Planning Process**

#### **Background**

The Upper Joseph Creek Watershed Assessment is taking place by mandate of the Wallowa County Board of Commissioners. The Steering Body is the Natural Resources Advisory Council, with Wallowa Resources appointed to coordinate and facilitate the working groups in the assessment of: (i) forest condition; (ii) range condition; (iii) riparian condition; and, (iv) road and recreation use analysis.

#### **Progress to Date**

- Forest Condition: data collection is finished; completing map generation; continuing analysis
- Range Condition: data collection is finished, working on summary set to tie to satellite imagery and analysis
- Riparian Condition: collected flow and temperature data this season; updating 1995 analysis with temperature trend data, developed database of riparian restoration projects in the watershed and new maps
- Road & Rec Analysis: using the North Umpqua roads analysis spreadsheet (cost vs. benefit), will look for possible road closures in the watershed; field work finished; next step is analyzing the evaluation criteria

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<sup>1</sup> A separate wildlife working group was not formed. Instead, a workshop was convened to identify major wildlife issues. This section contains the minutes from that workshop.

<sup>2</sup> A list of participants in this workshop can be found in *Appendix 2: Participants*.

## Review of Salmon Plan

Nils reviewed issues listed in the Wallowa County-Nez Perce Tribe Salmon Habitat Recovery Plan analysis for Joseph Creek:

<b>High Priority</b>	<b>Low Priority</b>
Water temperature	Tree density
Excess fine sediment	Compaction
Herbicide/pesticide use	Fuel density
Riparian vegetation	Channelization

## 1995 Analysis

Ralph Anderson reviewed the 12 issues outlined in the Upper Joseph Creek Watershed Analysis Report (1995) in relation to wildlife concerns (handout). Since that analysis, new analysis has been gathered from project driven surveys, database compilation, and systematic bird and bat monitoring.  
From Ralph's discussion:

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Discussion</b>
1. Structural Stages	Wildlife habitat in forested land falls into three main categories:  Coniferous forest - mid and low elevation Deciduous forest - cottonwood, aspen, & willow carrs Brushlands – alder, hawthorne, talus garlands  Concern: the deciduous forest (all native hardwoods including willow carrs) have become almost nonexistent as habitat.
2. Insects and Disease	From a wildlife standpoint, insects and disease are not necessarily bad as they can be habitat producing and prey bases. Concerns: epidemic infestations, introduced and exotic species.
3. Fire and Fuels	For wildlife habitat, all fire is not good, and all fire is not bad. There are differences in prehistoric, historic and current fire periodicity. Concerns for reducing fuels are: striking a balance between hazard and risk, natural fuels vs. harvest fuels
4. Rangeland Vegetation	Three important references for wildlife habitat are:  Existing conditions Reference conditions Desired future conditions  Concern: may be missing information about historic conditions
5. Stream Conditions	Key characteristics identified:  Vegetative conditions Channel morphology (pools, bank stability, width to depth ratio) Temperature

	<p>Large woody material</p> <p>Restoration efforts could include beavers vegetation, and large woody material.</p>
6. Riparian Dependent Species	<p>Three groups:</p> <p>Aquatic species Emergent (invertebrates) Terrestrial vertebrates (beavers, water voles, water shrews, weevils, red-eyed vireos, yellow-bellied chats, catbirds, yellow-billed cuckoo)</p> <p>Concern: the most challenged bird species seem to be those that depend on riparian habitat</p>
7. Old Growth	<p>Functional old growth abundance is of primary concern. This structure is deficit in comparison to HRV for both warm/dry and cold/dry environments. A range of species key into this habitat.</p>
8. Big Game	<p>Specifically, deer, elk, bighorn sheep, and antelope. Most of the antelope habitat within the UJCW watershed is on private land – a reintroduction concern.</p>
9. Grassland Habitat	<p>Issues:</p> <p>Distribution Species of concern (including Native American gathering species: camas, wild onion, and wild carrot) Condition and trend Invasive species</p> <p>Concern: need more data and a good definition for desired future condition</p>
10. Scenery	<p>Wildlife and wildlife habitat contribute to overall sense of place an inherent scenic attractiveness. Concerns: increasing diversity (seems to be suffering), and minimizing management impact</p>
11. Recreation	<p>A few activities that can impact wildlife and their habitat are: camping, viewing, forest product gathering, and hunting.</p>
12. Access and Travel Management	<p>In addition to prehistoric, historic, and current access and travel within the UJCW watershed, desired future condition should also consider buffers, open road densities, ATV's, and snowmobiles.</p>

## Review of Key ESA Issues and Guidelines

Catherine Broyles (NMFS) described the ESA Consultation Process for proposed projects (handout). For projects proposed in the UJCW Assessment, consultation will proceed easier with NMFS early involvement in the planning process and keeping in mind guidelines found in the 1998 Steelhead and Critical Habitat EO and the 2001 BO.

Key issues from *Biological Opinion: Land and Resource Management Plans for National Forests and Bureau of Land Management Resource Areas in the Upper Columbia River Basin and Snake River Basin Evolutionarily Significant Units* (2001):

Section 7 (a) (2) of the ESA requires Federal agencies, in consultation with NMFS, to ensure that any action it authorizes, funds, or carries out, is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any listed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat.

Within the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, those species are Snake River salmon and Snake River steelhead.

Listed salmon and steelhead and their habitat may be adversely affected when project design does not adhere to the protective criteria in PACFISH and the 1995 LRMP Opinion.

NMFS considers six key aspects of plan level or related direction where improvements are proposed or already underway which should result in projects more consistently compatible with the survival and recovery of the listed anadromous fish species. These are considered key outstanding items needed to ensure that PACFISH-amended LRMPs sufficiently protect the listed species and designated critical habitat during the extended period for which PACFISH would apply:

- a) Prioritization of subbasins for special management;
- b) Accelerating restoration of anadromous fish habitat;
- c) Increased implementation of watershed analysis;
- d) Grouping projects by watershed;
- e) Unroaded area;
- f) And subbasin review/assessment.

## Open Discussion

### Terrestrial species

Vic Coggins began our discussion, stating that since 1965, he has seen conditions improve tremendously in both range and riparian areas of the UJCWW. Some of the first riparian exclosures in Northeast Oregon were along Elk, Chesnimnus, and Peavine creeks.

Elk are important economically and culturally (more tribal hunting is done here than any other unit in Wallowa County), and maintaining their habitat is a concern. Annual elk trend data has been collected since 1969. Currently, calf mortality rates are high and have been since passage of state law banning hunting cougar and bear with dogs. (Also affecting mule and whitetail deer). Thus, ODFW is managing for reducing the number of those large predators. Changes in elk distribution (more time spent in the flatter uplands vs. lower canyons) could be related to predator pressure (visibility) or grazing (seeking succulent regrowth). Additionally, ATV use is increasing in this area because of its existing extensive road system and accessibility. Designing and designating an ATV trail system should be done carefully because of the potential for elk displacement.

Restoration efforts for bighorn sheep continue and UJCWW watershed can be a migratory area for those animals as they move between Imnaha and Lower Joseph Creek watersheds. ODFW would also like to establish a small self-sustaining population of pronghorn antelope in the Zumwalt area.

The UJCW is good habitat for upland birds. ODFW is working on restoring Columbian Sharp-tailed grouse and those efforts may extend to the Zumwalt prairie. To succeed, they must have excellent range condition for hiding cover as the prairie also has a large concentration of raptors.

Mountain quail has been petitioned for listing as a threatened species. These birds require complex contiguous deciduous vegetation (riparian shrubs). The habitat concern here is the loss of cover, contiguity between patches of cover, and the intrusion of grass – 30-50 meters constitutes an interruption.

A few other species discussed:

Lynx – elevation too low

Reptiles and Amphibians – loss of toads (reasons not clear) and lizards (cheat grass)

Bobcat – good habitat, doing well

Otter – seem to be coming back

Beaver – recognizing that they probably played a much larger historical role in the watershed, the problem with reintroducing them is food. Major vegetative restoration must occur before beaver will be successful.

Whiteheaded woodpecker – trend probably down

## **Aquatics**

Major concerns are temperature, road density, and sedimentation. Several miles of exclosures exist in riparian pastures, and provisions should be made for their continued maintenance. At the same time, those exclosures have concentrated large herbivores in smaller areas for watering. With that increased pressure, the water gaps have become sources of sedimentation from hoof action on the streambank.

The major species of concern is steelhead (redband lumped here and bull trout not a concern). In a recent culvert survey, it was found that 80% do not pass fish.

A lot of work has gone into improving in-stream structure in the UJCW, and trying to achieve criteria developed on the West side may not be attainable. However, the Forest Service does have the ability to tweak the matrix to better reflect conditions here, and this community planning process may provide the best opportunity for adjustment.

Key factors in temperature and sedimentation improvement: riparian vegetation, bank protection, in-stream structures, road closures, road maintenance, and map updates.

## **Weeds**

Upper Joseph Creek is in relatively fair health but threatened. Maintenance is critical. Weeds of primary concern: sulfur cinquefoil, yellow starthistle, and rush skeletonweed. The range inventory group has a record of the weeds they encountered (however, not recorded in the forest analysis).

## **ATV's**

Right now, ATV riders can legally ride anywhere, including closed and off-road situations, when green-dot closures aren't in effect. The local ATV club has identified all of the routes they would like to see in a possible trail system. There is an opportunity to work with them in this process— they understand that all of the routes may not be possible due to several concerns (wildlife, tribal rites, etc.), and in exchange for a trail system, the ATV clubs could possibly help maintain roads and be the “eyes and ears” for possible weed situations. A few concerns expressed specific to roads and ATV's:

- Keep any designated trail system as close as possible to existing main roads.
- Make the largest possible non-roaded areas.
- Extend the green dot system to the entire hunting season (use Boise Cascade road-closure system as a model)
- Possible locked gate system

## **Slash Burning**

ODFW would like to see controlled burns in spring or late fall (not during hunting season) – difficult to spot/glass for game in haze. Also concerned about the overall effect of slash burning reducing shrub cover.

## **Tribal Rights**

Relic grass communities, traditional gathering species and areas, and access for hunting are important. Don't lose sight of cultural interest species in focus on habitat types/typing or T&E species.

## **Land Ownership**

The possibility of increased fragmentation of land ownership (new law allowing splits if 160+ acres) has the potential to also fragment habitat.

## **Restoration Investment**

How many years of riparian investment do we do until we can just back off and let heal on its own? For example, restoration work has been done in Peavine Creek since 1965 and in Elk Creek since 1974, and might be at that point.

## **Positive Highlights**

- 30+ years of improving riparian habitat
- Collaborative, creative, candid discussion of ATV's and their use
- Opportunity for private/public interaction and collaboration, including tribal participation

## Issues to Follow Up

- Opportunities within this assessment:
  - Showcase restoration successes (i.e., Elk Creek, other upland habitats)
  - Tribal rights – tell the story for increased public awareness
- Riparian condition – temperature, localized sedimentation, bank stability, lack of beavers, restoring native vegetation in headwater areas
- Roads/ATVs affects on: riparian areas, sedimentation, treaty rights, habitat
- Inventories:
  - Data gaps and funding sources to accomplish
  - Upland water sources
  - Gaps between riparian exclosures
  - Distribution of T&E/sensitive plants
  - Old growth dependent species
  - Upland deciduous plants (i.e., native hardwoods)
  - Areas subject to subdivision and possible effects
  - Historic beaver occurrence/effects
- Gaps between riparian exclosures – documentation of role and amount in sedimentation and possible remedies (i.e., hardening, fencing, developing alternative, off-channel water)
- Impacts of prescribed burning – opportunity to look at the ecological effects
- Timing of water release may be off by one month from historic conditions – verify this and possible causes (up-stream storage, stand density management, lack of beavers?)
- Wildlife corridors/linkage zones – monitor and assess their utility (what species use them, when are they used, and how important are they?)
- Culverts and road drainage maintenance
- Weed strategy development (public meetings emphasizing prevention, protection, and treatment options)– addressing now is the most effective
- Better match of plants to site for revegetation in future restoration efforts
- Range
  - Understanding the affects of timing of seasonal grazing by cattle and elk on restoration efforts
  - Interpreting C&T and I plot data for trend
  - Conditions on private ground may be better than anticipated, but there are hot spots
  - Range condition for sharp-tailed grouse habitat
  - Basin wild rye re-establishment
- Restoring stand resiliency to fire – old growth systems in particular
- Bats – what have we learned, what does it mean – interpretation for general consumption
- Monitoring for neotropical migratory birds, rare fur bearers (i.e., wolves, wolverine, fisher, lynx), and old-growth Ponderosa pine dependent species