

Stewardship Principles

At the beginning of the Upper Joseph Creek Watershed assessment, the Wallowa County Natural Resources advisory committee developed the following principles to guide the collaborative planning process. With time and experience, it is anticipated that agreement will be reached on principles to guide management across the watershed.

The ecological systems in the Upper Joseph Creek Watershed are disturbance-adapted systems. Competition within and between species, and natural disturbance regimes of fire, insects, disease, wind, flood, and herbivory, create mosaics of vegetation cover and structure that change over time and space. The native biological diversity of the landscape is adapted to these dynamics.

In this context, habitat diversity is important. The alteration of disturbance regimes (through the control of disturbance or resource use) can lead to a simplification of vegetation patterns and riparian systems, which may impair watershed functions and jeopardize the persistence of many native species. Processes that lead to simplification increase the risks for larger scale disturbances (such as uncontrolled fire, insects, and disease occurrences).

These principles provide a framework to exercise continuing responsibility for maintaining and enhancing watershed conditions. In some areas, restoration is needed to reestablish both structure and function within the watershed. These principles guide the development of specific management recommendations, and facilitate the collaborative efforts already taking place in the community.

Stewardship efforts should:

- Begin with analysis of the current and historic ecological conditions at the watershed level – ridgetop to ridgetop.
- Incorporate the social, cultural, and economic dynamics of the community;
- Maintain spatial and temporal patterns of species composition, structure, and seral stages that are within a resilient range for the landscape;
- Address not only symptoms, but also the causes of habitat loss and modification which exceed normal ranges and cycles for these disturbance-adapted systems;
- Avoid strategies likely to entail recurring high maintenance costs;
- Define clear, achievable and measurable management objectives;
- Use adaptive and flexible management, supported or modified by feedback from monitoring – with multi-party monitoring being an important tool for collaborative processes on public lands.

Stewardship should draw from passive and active management strategies that address specific issues and conditions within the watershed. A broad range of resource management tools needs to be available, including but not limited to: prescribed burning; pre-commercial and commercial logging; revegetation using both native and non-native plant species; managed grazing, restoring channel morphology and structure, use of herbicides and pesticides; riparian and rare plant community protection; as well as permanent and temporary road closures.