

REGIONAL NEWS

Field trip inches grazing subcommittee toward consensus

by **Jim Fossett**

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CLE ELUM – Thursday, July 21, the subcommittee charged to develop a grazing management plan for the Teanaway Community Forest moved down the backstretch in a race to produce a first draft suitable for a September review before the Teanaway Community Forest Citizens Advisory Committee.

Deadline for completion of the draft and submission to state agency leaders is in October.

At the July 21 meeting the subcommittee heard from a technical team comprised of members of the subcommittee after the team had taken a closer look at four riparian zones in the Community Forest, including Story, Rye and Middle Creeks, and a spot on the North Fork Teanaway River. A map of the field trip is available via an e-mail request you can send to **Eric Winford**, field trip leader. Send it to eric.winford@dnr.wa.gov.

Findings

The field trip was staged as an exercise to determine whether or not the four ri-

parian zones were in need of restoration, to discuss (at each site) best practice applications of grazing management tools evaluated to date, and to see if members of the group, who represent a diverse range of interests, including fish and cattle, could come to a consensus on the health of each of the four sites.

Because the field trip was an exercise no detailed strategies evolved, but as several stakeholders mentioned, team members came away from the field trip on the same page – a significant turn of events in the opinion of subcommittee facilitator **Jim Huckabay**, who commented, “Thus far we’ve made a huge amount of progress.”

Echoing Huckabay’s remarks, NOAA Fisheries scientist **Sean Gross** said, “I’m pleased with what we accomplished. There was lots learned and we had some [productive] discussions. Our challenge will be to figure out how we expand that effort over the entire Forest.”

Huckabay would say an example of the team’s success is the consensus team members reached on Rye

and Story Creeks: Restoration efforts at Rye Creek (and nearby Camp Lake) would essentially be unproductive and that the riparian zone there is not incompatible with grazing. On the other hand everyone agreed Story Creek ranks as one of the zones in the Forest most in need of restoration and that fencing would be an option.

In terms of fencing it is important to note that when the subcommittee talks about it in the context of the Community Forest, whether that be permanent fence lines or the kind that can be “laid down” to accommodate outdoor recreationists when grazing season ends, everyone

seems to agree that great care should be taken to ensure cattlemen are not fenced out and that the grazing lease is free from the kinds of gauntlets that would make it unattractive to potential lessors.

Sign of good news to come?

Considering the massive job the subcommittee has faced to create an agreement between grazers, watershed restoration managers, fish habitat experts and outdoor recreationists, and putting aside the challenge to find the funding needed to accomplish mandates stemming from legislators who authorized the purchase of

the Community Forest, subcommittee member **Scott Nicolai**, a restoration expert with the Yakama Nation Fisheries, said he remains optimistic.

Said Nicolai, “I really do think we can pull together the framework for a management plan that works for everyone.”

Next up

Evolving from the technical team’s field trip was the need for what has been described as a “conceptual matrix” that would provide grazing managers with a checklist of sorts comprised of applicable tools, specific restoration locations, restoration objectives and metrics for success.

Those charged to create and ready the matrix for the next subcommittee meeting are Eric Winford, the subcommittee’s agency lead from the Department of Natural Resources in Ellensburg and **Jeff Burnham** from the Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Grazing and Land Division. It is assumed the two are at liberty to solicit input from other subcommittee members as required.

Next meeting

The grazing subcommittee meets next in Ellensburg on Thursday, Aug. 11, at 3 p.m. inside the county fairground’s Heritage Center. The general public is invited to observe.



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