GRAVELLY LANDSCAPE COLLABORATIVE

South Tobacco Roots Field Tour September 26, 2019
Ramshorn & Bivens Loop

Attending: Jim King, Joe Sampson, Lucus Bateman , David Stout, Jennifer Boyer, Darcie Warden, Dale Olsen, Dave Delisi, Jenna Roose, Claudia McFarland, Hannah , Clayton Marxer, John Waggoner, Sam Tripp, Patrick Riordan.

Site 1
The Westslope Cutthroat Trout project was initiated when a population of pure WCT was identified during a 2016 survey. The barrier was constructed in 2018 and the first treatment was completed in 2019. The project will ultimately expand the habitat for WCT from .9 to 19.7 miles. Ramshorn Creek is listed on the 303d list for sediment and restoration activities will address this water quality concern and habitat for WCT.
The restoration plan for WCT is to re-establish and protect populations in 25% of their historic range. For the Ruby watershed the Ramshorn and Greenhorn projects combined will produce nearly 60 miles of habitat. Additional places for pure populations are being explored on North facing drainages with good snowpack.


Site 2
Placer mining has had extensive impact on the drainage and has disconnected Ramshorn Creek from its floodplain. Two techniques were used to re-connect the creek to its floodplain, boulder-baffle placement is done by hand and facilitates the meandering process and rebuilding of the floodplain. This technique requires maintenance for 2-5 years until vegetation is re-established. Rebuilding the floodplain was also constructed at a reach

that had excessive erosion and included sod mats and planting alder, willow and water birch.


Site 3

BLM conducts watershed assessments to identify existing conditions, where proper functioning conditions are not met and the needs to reach functions. BLM has been able to include private lands in our projects and the work of Sean Claffey who can work across boundaries and with watershed groups. ***There is also the possibility of working with the Forest Service on NEPA.*** Our focus has been to address conifer encroachment – juniper and Doug fir – with burning and mastication. BLM prefers the approach of mechanical treatment followed by burn. While the work has benefits for sage grouse, it is a holistic approach that benefits multiple species. In 2020 BLM has 13,000 acres of treatment planned to address the conifer encroachment that has dramatically increased due to fire suppression and climate change. BLM also partnering with Montana FW&P to focus on priority drainages. NRCS has 7,000 acres of private lands signed up for conifer encroachment treatments.


Site 4

The culvert that had protected the pure population of WCT was reset and perched to ensure protection. It serves to protect the current population and will also be an upstream back up to the barrier installed at site 1. There is the possibility of road improvements to address sediment input along the road that follows close to Ramshorn Creek.

Timber stand near the culvert was treated in 1980s or 90s. Appears to be a restoration or timber stand improvement goal. The restoration treatments vary based on the type of conifer community. Doug fir are treated by marking individual tress and lodge pole is a stand replacement either by burning or cut, post and pole is also option. Whitebark pine and areas that are wet with spruce are not touched based on lynx habitat since those areas are associated with snowshoe hare populations. Lynx were identified on the Big Hole pass, confirming the need to continued habitat protection.


Site 5

100 years ago the Doug fir savannah had 20-30 trees per acre with rich grass and forbes and an open canopy that was maintained by fire. This habitat type has missed 3-4 fire cycles and has an opportunity for restoration work. The restoration includes cutting trees and this can benefit different species and reduce the risk of high intensity fires. The public message is similar to the sagebrush steppe restoration that Sean Claffey and others are engaged in.


Site 6
Looking for a holistic approach to address conifer encroachment, Doug fir or juniper as you transition through habitats and elevation. The cost varies depending on the treatment, prescribed fire is the most cost effective ($150 / acre) and mastication can run $600-800 / acre. This area of the south Tobacco Roots is highly departed from historic conditions and the habitat changes affect wildlife and the risk of high intensity wildfire. There are a lot of opportunities to work across jurisdictions and achieve landscape scale restoration.