# BMP Working Group Meeting Notes – October 30, 2009

Gary Frank talked about the history of BMPs – developed by the Cumulative Watershed Effects Coop, in part to be proactive and to pre-empt any developing forest practices legislation. 1988-89. BMPs are for water quality and developed under the authority of the Clean Water Act. Audits occur every 2 years. This program has been successful. We have lots of buy-in due to the voluntary nature of it, and over 90% compliance in audits for several years now.

Jim Durgalo talked about how the tribal forestry program addresses biomass. The main concern area for too much getting removed might be in WUI sites where they take everything to reduce fire danger. Highlights the fact that you can't manage for all values on every acre – that the purpose of activity and landowner goals need to come into play.

Meredith Webster, Bruce Simms and Carla Monismith talked about FS approach. Soils standards established to sustain productivity, deal with % of detrimental disturbance, displacement, rutting, bulk density, etc. A new protocol for monitoring will be out soon.

DNRC also does soil effects monitoring – looking at different logging systems, slopes, soil types. Jeff Schmalenberg would be able to give the group an overview of their findings.

Need to include fire/fuels people in our discussion so we consider the issue of fire danger and interaction with our state hazard reduction law.

Current BMPs address wildlife, habitat connectivity. FSC also has habitat connectivity guidelines – this applies on some industry lands in MT. SMZ law addresses water quality. It's legal authority is the Clean Water Act. Wildlife guidelines have been published as a voluntary part of this.

Question raised about language in SMZ law – specific issue of what can be removed in streamside areas? Concern about songbirds that utilize shrubs and small trees along streams. We reviewed p. 14 and discussed the language. It reads that no submerchantable material can be removed in the SMZ. What does this mean? Law defines as less than 8" dbh. If markets develop for material less than 8" do we have a problem – i.e., does it then become "merchantable"? A small group will review the language in detail and discuss whether any changes are recommended. (Len Broberg, Roger Zeisak, Julia Altemus, and Jason Toddhunter).

Discussion of how biomass harvesting may or may not differ from what we are doing anyway. If we'd typically be doing whole tree removal with slash piled and burned, the biomass removed is no greater if we grind it instead of burning. Impact on the site would be the absence of scorched areas from burn piles. History of whole tree yarding – in the 70's and 80s this was a concern and there were studies, workshops, conference proceedings published, etc. The Forest Guild document that we read reviews biomass removal guidelines – it is primarily focused on Northeastern/Midwestern US hardwood forests. Our sites and what we have been doing is very different.

On the other hand, with the current focus on hazard fuels reduction, and potentially in the future, with shifting energy values/markets, there may be economic and other incentives to leave less material left on the ground than is typically being left now. What are the potential impacts to small animals? Soil flora and fauna? It may be true today that it is not practical, do-able, economically viable, etc., to remove every stick, but what about in the future as energy markets evolve (cap and trade, etc.)? That is the primary concern of environmental groups and is why we feel we need to be proactive in addressing this in MT.

Question raised about the extent of potential impact? How much or little of the landscape is being treated w/mechanical systems? FS has 12+ million acres in MT suitable for timber harvest – the 10-year average of acres receiving mechanical treatment is around 12-15,000. That's about 0.1 to 0.2% annually. At that rate it would take 800-1,000 years to treat the 12 million acres of nonreserved timberland. So what is the geographic and chronologic extent of impacts? This should be considered in addition to the severity question. That is, even if some detrimental impacts from harvesting timber or biomass occur, how large are those impacts and for how long will they be detrimental? What are we comparing this to? Need to also consider what else could happen on MT's forested acres – severe wildfire or land conversion to development – and how these impacts compare in severity, duration, extent?

Group expressed general agreement that current guidance and practices appear to sufficiently address water quality and CWD for wildlife habitat. That our first priority should be to focus on the fine woody debris component. Although it would not be economical to pick up and remove this kind of fine material currently, that could change if economic values for renewable energy shift dramatically (e.g., under cap and trade or climate chg legislation).

FS mentioned that our soil standards were not written with fine woody debris removal in mind.

NRCS has mapped soil types statewide and developed guidance for rangelands – might be useful to involve them.

This issue is infinitely complex due to variation in soil types, forest habitat types, stage of succession, historic fire/disturbance regime, current condition class, etc. For example, what about the role of understory vegetation, nitrogen fixing, etc.? This group could be useful in recommending research goals for long term effects monitoring. MSU could possibly develop an extension publication. There is an extension pub out of Pacific NW "Managing organic debris for Forest Health: Reconciling fire hazard, bark beetles, wildlife and forest nutrition needs."

FS is also looking at this – forest productivity guidelines. Terrie Jain at Rocky Mt. Research Station and Meredith Webster, R1 Soils Scientist. Looking to develop guidance similar to Graham et al. for CWD.

Discussion of what form this should take? Does it need to be in law, regulation, or should it be a guideline? Part of what is driving this effort is that national BMPs for biomass are being discussed. Given the site specific nature of impacts, that doesn't make much sense. If we are proactive and can show we've addressed this in our state, any national restrictions would likely defer to states that have already addressed these questions. Our group's role would be to develop

recommendations for the formal BMP working group to consider. We don't have power to decide if it is a guideline, etc., but we can recommend.

We need more information about our current state of knowledge on these issues, specifically removal of fine woody debris. What does our monitoring show? What about FIA data? Impacts to wildlife? Fuels/fire danger? Productivity? Soils? Which soil types are of concern? What % landscape is this?

Invite guest speakers for next meeting, ask them to focus on fine WD:

Role of fine WD; define fine WD; nutrient cycling, soil productivity, interaction with habitat type and disturbance regime; biomass removal – how much is too much?