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Restoration News

ROCKY MOUNTAIN TRENCH NATURAL RESOURCES SOCIETY

Chief Forester awards more timber to Trench restoration

As of Nov. 1, an annual total of 25,000 cubic metres (m^3) of Crown land timber will be made available for restoration purposes in the Trench.

The welcome news came in Chief Forester Jim Snetsinger's announcement of new allowable annual cuts (AAC) for the Cranbrook and Invermere Timber Supply Areas (TSA).

Cranbrook will provide 20,000 m^3 while 5,000 m^3 will come from Invermere. Both TSAs are in the Rocky Mountain Forest District.

When Trench Society Directors met with Jim Snetsinger in Cranbrook last spring, they asked him to increase the timber volume available to restoration projects to 20,000 m^3 a year.

Snetsinger has responded by increasing Cranbrook's annual cut by 4% and Invermere's by 3% to accommodate:

(1) restoration of the open forest and open range ecosystems of the Trench, and

(2) harvest of mountain pine beetle-infested lodgepole pine. The Cranbrook increase will also complete timber salvage from the 2003 wildfires.

"Raising harvest levels slightly gives resource managers the flexibility they need to deal with the mountain pine beetle infestation and restore fire-maintained ecosystems. The result will be healthier forests and rangeland in an area that has immense ecological diversity," Snetsinger said in announcing the new 5-year AACs.

The challenge now is to use the increased volume in the ecosystem restoration program. Although the previous AAC provided for an annual harvest of 3,000 m^3 for restoration, the allocation was never used.

If the Trench Society's Waldo North project proves to be a successful model, it is possible that similar projects could be initiated which would use the more substantial timber volume now available.

Waldo North demo project: progress is slow but steady

By Maurice Hansen

Getting through the planning labyrinth is taking longer than anticipated. Operations were planned to begin in November but as of this writing, the start date remains uncertain. The Society has applied for the licence to cut and submitted the appraisal, the end product of the cruise, to the Ministry of Forests & Range (MoFR) Revenue Branch on Dec. 1. Processing the appraisal and generating the stumpage assessment could take a month.Once the stumpage rate is known, choosing a logging contractor will be the priority. Mid-January is a possible start date but this depends on decisions that await the stumpage assessment.

Quotes for the timber are in hand so once stumpage is announced, we can calculate the dollars available for operations, recovery of planning costs, administration, post-treatment monitoring, and developing and carrying out burn and weed management plans.

The Trench Society initiated the Waldo North project (so called because it's located at the north end of the Waldo Range Unit) as a demonstration project to test the concept of an enhanced rangeland restoration operations model. Agreement from the Rocky Mountain Forest District to launch the project was the breakthrough that allowed the project to proceed. The planning requirements have been rigorous, more so than with normal commercial timber harvesting. At the same time, all planning requirements that apply to commercial harvesting have also been required. Enhanced restoration projects need a planning process tailored to restoration needs and goals. Nevertheless, Waldo North is a demonstration project aimed at showing the benefits of an enhanced, improved project model that can be applied to future restoration projects in the Trench. Learning from Waldo North will contribute to adapative management, the principle intended to guide the ecosystem restoration (ER) program into the future.

THE SITE PLAN

Prepared by forester Mark Hall of Majestic Resource Consulting, the site plan describes how the project area on the northeast side of Lake Koocanusa will be restored to fire-maintained ecosystem structure and function.

The plan maps the treatment units; sets out harvesting and coarse woody de-

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Brief to MLAs gets positive response

The committee of MLAs that solicited public input on how BC should use its billion-dollar budget surpluses says government should spend more on "grass and rangeland management programs."

In making the recommendation to the BC Legislature, the Select Standing Committee on Finance & Government Services quoted the Trench Society's brief:

"The importance of the range resource to the East Kootenay public cannot be overstated. Neither can the difficulty of addressing the fundamental management problems. The Trench Society proposes $80,000 yearly funding to the Rocky Mountain Forest District for one restoration program support staff, and a grant of $80,000 to investigate the potential of smallwood utilization in the Trench."

Coordinator Maurice Hansen, who presented the Society's views at a public hearing in Cranbrook, told the committee the Trench restoration program would be more effective if it had a full-time Ministry of Forests & Range administrator, as well as reliable long-term markets for small-diameter trees and biomass. The latter would also aid interface fuel reduction programs, he said.

After reviewing the record 4,436 submissions made this fall during the month-long consultation process, the MLAs said the public had sent a clear message that they want more strategic government investment in a variety of environmental stewardship programs.

The BC Government had a budget surplus of $1.9 billion in 2004-05 and is projecting surpluses of more than $1 billion in each of the next three fiscal years.

This is the second time the Trench Society has appeared before a pre-budget consultation committee. Keeping restoration issues front and centre with MLAs and cabinet ministers is part of the Society's ongoing effort to promote the economic, environmental and social benefits of healthy grassland ecosystems.

WALDO PROJECT UPDATE *continued from front...*

bris objectives; establishes maximum allowable soil disturbance; shows where roads, skid trails and landings will be located; directs the rehabilitation of skid trails and landings; and shows setbacks for no-operation zones around riparian areas, wet meadows and wildlife habitat (specifically eagle and Lewis's woodpecker nesting sites). The Trans Canada Trail, which passes through the site, is recognized. The plan calls for harvest treatments on sufficient frost or snow to minimize ground disturbance and protect potential archaeological sites but, in a worst-case scenario, it's possible that neither frost nor snow will be sufficient for this purpose. Thus, it's possible that an amendment to the plan may be required and, depending on the sensitivity of archaeological sites, an impact assessment may be required for specific sites.

The total project area is 1,768 hectares (ha). Monitoring control plots, wildlife tree patches and wetlands remove 238 ha from this total, leaving 1,530 ha of operational area, which makes Waldo North the biggest restoration project undertaken on Crown land in the Trench. Within the operational area, 1,055 ha will be treated to meet Open Range stocking standards and 475 ha will be treated to Open Forest standards. The project area is divided into 38 standards units (SU), each of which has a stems per hectare (sph) stocking and distribution objective and a treatment plan. There's not a great deal of stocking variation among the Open Range SUs; most are designated for the low end (5-20 sph) of Open Range tree density. Most Open Forest SUs are also designated for the low end (20-50 sph) of that category, the exception being some small areas near Lake Koocanusa.

After logging, the Waldo Range Unit will be dramatically more open across the entire 1,530 ha. All aspen, cottonwood and spruce will be left while the much reduced number of remaining trees will generally be the largest diameter ponderosa pine, larch and Douglas-fir. All lodgepole pine will be removed, except lone "wolfy" stems on Open Range sites.

THE TIMBER CRUISE

Interior Reforestation executed the cruise. Net merchantable timber volume on site is 74,577 m3. Of this, 13,045 m3 are classed as pulp; 21,117 m3 as ponderosa (yellow) pine; 15,675 m3 lodgepole pine; and 24,720 m3 Douglas-fir. Summary data from the cruise goes into the appraisal which has been submitted to MoFR's Revenue Branch, the outfit that generates the stumpage assessment.

OPERATIONAL FORECAST

It is possible that a high stumpage rate will stop the project. Should this happen, a strong case for reversing stumpage will need to be made to government. This will take time and have an uncertain outcome. The sawlog and pulp chip markets are not strong right now. If stumpage is low enough, however, the project could break even despite depressed markets. So whether or not the project will work on its own merits remains to be seen.

Restoration News is published by the Rocky Mountain Trench Natural Resources Society, a partnership of organizations dedicated to restoring the grasslands and open forests of southeastern British Columbia. Society members are:

- Cranbrook Archery Club
- East Kootenay Wildlife Association
- Kootenay Livestock Association
- Rocky Mountain Naturalists
- Southern Guides & Outfitters Association
- The Land Conservancy of BC
- Waldo Stockbreeders Association
- wildsight (formerly EKES)
- Windermere Farmers Institute

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Rocky Mountain TRENCH NATURAL RESOURCES SOCIETY

Bob Bjorn appointed Treasurer

Bob Bjorn has accepted an appointment as Treasurer of the Trench Society. Bob is the Waldo Stockbreeders' alternate rep on the Board of Directors and a long-time Bull River area rancher.

He retired recently to an acreage in Wycliffe, having sold his Picture Valley Ranch to Lonnie and Jamie Jones. Bob takes over the Treasurer's position from former Director Tara Szkorupa.

Also serving on the Board are:

Chair Kathleen Sheppard representing The Land Conservancy of BC, Vice Chair Peter Davidson and alternate Jim Duncan (Rocky Mountain Naturalists), John Bergenske and alternate Dave Quinn (wildsight), Marty Cloarec (Cranbrook Archery Club), Bill DuBois (Southern Guides & Outfitters), Gordon Edwards (Waldo Stockbreeders), Don Lancaster and alternate Harlan Bradford (Kootenay Livestock Association), Ivar Larson and alternate Andy Pezderic (East Kootenay Wildlife Association), and Brian McKersie (Windermere & District Farmers Institute).

Society looks to expand

Directors plan to launch a membership campaign in the New Year.

The Society's biggest asset is often said to be its success in bringing together a group of people representing diverse interests who work collaboratively in support of grasslands restoration in the Trench. The Board wants to attract new members to broaden the Society's representation.

Since 1996, when it was founded to carry on the work of the East Kootenay Trench Agriculture/Wildlife Committee, the Trench Society's coalition of ranchers, hunters and environmentalists has grown to encompass nine East Kootenay non-governmental organizations.

Adding more members will strengthen the Society's influence and effectiveness.

Directors propose range stewardship project to ease Trench forage crisis

The ecosystem restoration program is a long-term solution to restoring the health and productivity of the grasslands and open forests that make up the East Kootenay's Crown range.

In the short term, though, there is a forage supply crisis in the Trench that could bring on a repeat of the bitter range-use conflicts of the 1970s and 80s. Society Directors believe immediate action is needed to head off that eventuality, or an equally unacceptable alternative: reducing current numbers of cattle, deer and elk dependent on Crown range.

"We need to create more grass, right away, quick. The ranching industry, guide-outfitters and elk don't have the luxury of time," one Director said in summing up the situation. The Board, which has been considering the problem for some months, held a special meeting Nov. 8 to work out a strategy to produce immediate range benefits for stakeholders. They concluded that managing the Crown range resource for greater efficiency and effectiveness was probably the best bet.

The Society will meet with BC's new Director of Range, David Borth, in December to propose an experimental range stewardship project on the Cherry-TaTa Range Unit. (Before joining the MoFR, Borth was general manager of the BC Cattlemen's Association.) The project proposes to use intensive management in conjunction wtih progressive, proven techniques to increase grazing access for livestock producers and improve wildlife habitat.

Typically, grazing rights on a range unit are let to individual ranchers who must develop and implement approved range management plans. Under the Trench Society proposal, the range unit would be made available to a grazing cooperative comprised of multiple users. Range management, both planning and on-the-ground activities, would be contracted out. Grazing fees, supplemented by additional fund-raising, would fund the management contract, maintenance and improvements to water developments, fences, cattleguards and domestic grass seeding. Directors have identified Cherry-TaTa Range Unit as an appropriate site for the pilot project because it is not currently let out as a grazing tenure.

Several factors have come together in recent years to put exceptional pressure on Crown range: drought, the BSE crisis, expanding populations of deer and elk (particularly homesteader herds), and wildlife exclusion fencing around significant amounts of cultivated private pasture. With the ongoing impact of forest ingrowth and recreational/residential development, the cumulative result is grazing demand on Crown range that surpasses sustainable levels.

Society, Nature Conservancy consider project partnering

The Trench Society and Nature Conservancy Canada (NCC) are looking at the feasibility of a joint restoration project on the NCC's 1336-ha Kootenay River Ranch property and adjacent Crown land, south of Canal Flats.

Coordinator Maurice Hansen and Gary Tipper, NCC's Rocky Mountain Trench Project Manager, met recently to discuss what would be required to get such a project off the ground. Potential additional partners include Tembec, which has timber rights on the Crown land in question, and other private landowners.

NCC's purpose is to conserve and protect ecologically significant private land in Canada. In the East Kootenay, the Nature Conservancy either owns outright or holds conservation covenants on more than 50,000 ha of private property.

Cross-border exchanges benefit restoration

A three-day September road trip to northwestern Montana has provided restoration practitioners in the Trench with an inside look at restoration projects that span decades.

Taking in the field tours and presentations organized by Dr. Stephen Arno were Maurice Hansen and Dave Quinn from the Trench Society, and Greg Anderson and Denis Petryshen from the Rocky Mountain Forest District.

Steve Arno is a retired US Forest Service (USFS) research forester whose 40 years of study and on-the-ground experience have made him an internationally respected advocate of ecosystem-based forest management.

He learned about the Trench ER program last June when he visited Cranbrook to make a presentation at an RDEK FireSmart workshop. Soon after, he contacted the Trench Society to arrange a cross-border exchange of information.

Dr. Arno and University of Montana professor Dr. Carl Fiedler co-wrote the recently published *Mimicking Nature's Fire, Restoring Fire-Prone Forests in the West*, a detailed description of a wide range of restoration initiatives in the western US and Canada. Dr. Fiedler lead the BC group on a tour of UM's 8,000-ha Lubrecht Experimental Forest, where researchers have been implementing and monitoring restoration treatments since 1984.

In northwestern Montana, as in the Trench, the characteristic open forests of ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir and larch were historically maintained either by frequent or mixed fire regimes. Excluding fire for the past century has produced the same sickly, ingrown stands there as it has here.

The American solution is "restoration forestry." On this side of the border, it's known as ecosystem restoration. The ecological outcomes are the same but the driving forces are different. In the US, it's Congressional legislation requiring removal of hazardous fuels to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire. In the Trench, it's the need to improve rangeland for its forage and biodiversity values.

In the Kootenai National Forest around Eureka, the USFS has been practicing restoration forestry since the late 1960s and has treated some 25,000 ha. Their success was dramatically illustrated this summer when a crown fire burning in heavily ingrown timber dropped to the ground after reaching a 250-ha site treated with thinning and prescribed burning a few years ago. Many downwind homes were saved as a result.

A feller-buncher on a restoration project on the outskirts of Missoula removes all stems in one pass, eliminating the need for pre-harvest hand slashing. The prescription – to leave 10' between the crowns of the biggest trees – will reduce hazardous fuels. Harvested trees are sold as sawlogs, pulp logs and hog fuel. The Trench Society hopes to use this harvesting method on the Waldo North project.

Further south, at Seeley Lake, the BC contingent learned about the innovative USFS stewardship contracting program which awards timber sale contracts in exchange for forest stewardship services.

In Missoula, Maurice Hansen gave a talk on the Trench Society to the local chapter of the Society of American Foresters. They were particularly interested in the fact that so many stakeholders here work hand in hand, unlike in the US where restoration projects are more often than not challenged in court by public-interest groups.

Meanwhile, Greg Anderson reports that an agreement is in the works to facilitate cross-border exchanges between the Rocky Mountain Forest District and Washington state's Wenatchee National Forest. "The agreement will formalize what we've been doing for the past five years," he said.

Maurice Hansen, Denis Petryshen and Dave Quinn at an old-growth larch stand in Lolo National Forest near Seeley Lake, northeast of Missoula. The USFS began treatments here in 1995. Restoration is carried out now under the forest service's stewardship contracting program with private logging companies.