

Site-level Committee Meeting Summary

MN Interagency Fire Center, Grand Rapids, May 11, 2011, 9:30 am – 3:30 pm

Members present: Dale Erickson, Bob Lintelmann, Dave Parent, Shawn Perich, John Rajala.

Members absent: Mary Richards, Gene Merriam

Staff: Rob Slesak, Sue Burks (DNR)

Guests: Tim O'hara, Dave Chura

The meeting began with a discussion on biomass harvesting guidelines (BHG) at salvage sites. Rob reviewed the Council decision in 2007 not to treat salvage harvests differently than other harvests, and presented some of the reasons why that decision might be reevaluated. Much of the initial discussion focused on determining what a salvage harvest is, as members clearly had different perceptions of what "salvage" entailed and the associated ramifications (e.g., fire vs. windthrow salvage). There was general agreement that operational constraints and the potential for ecological impacts would vary depending on salvage type, but no clear consensus on how or if these variable conditions should be addressed. Dave Parent proposed applying the pre-BHG slash guidelines to salvage harvests, which initiated discussion on the differences between the BHG's and the larger set of guidelines. The Committee decided to move on and discuss incorporation of the BHG's into the guidelines before addressing the salvage question.

Rob reviewed the issues of incorporation that were discussed at the previous meeting, and reemphasized that the main purpose of incorporation was to clarify that the minimum level of slash retention recommended in the BHG's applied to all harvests (excluding the identified exceptions such as when ETS are present), not just those where biomass is harvested for energy. The initial discussion focused on if there was a difference between traditional harvests and biomass harvests, and members agreed that all harvests are the same but vary in the amount of biomass (including merchantable timber) that is utilized. John asked Tim if there was a problem with viewing all harvests the same, and Tim responded that MFI members view biomass harvests and other harvests as separate operations. Shawn commented that the land does not care what the biomass is being used for, and that it would make more sense for MFI to support the 1/3 retention for all harvests, rather than the 100% slash retention generally recommended in the pre-BHG guidelines. Dave Chura commented that slash is not created in whole-tree operations, so retention and scattering of slash would not apply. John asked how many loggers were whole-tree harvesting, but no clear answer was provided. Rob stated that there would still be a very real concern of impacts to biodiversity in whole-tree operations, and that the Committee should approach the issue from a statewide perspective that incorporates a range of conditions and operations rather than focusing on one specific type of operation. After more discussion, the Committee generally agreed that the BHG's should still be retained as standalone chapters, but were unsure which guidelines to reconcile. Dave Parent instructed Rob to identify all guidelines in need of reconciliation, and to develop new language for each reconciliation that the Committee could evaluate before making a decision.

The committee then evaluated development of a guideline to encourage matting down of moss in forested wetlands to promote regeneration. Rob reviewed some literature related to the suggestion, noting that the shearing/compression of the moss layer may promote regeneration in specific cover types (e.g., b. spruce) from seed, but be detrimental in other cover types and forms of regeneration. The committee generally agreed that this topic was too specific for the guidelines, and unanimously agreed not to recommend creation of the guideline. However,

members agreed on a recommendation by Dale to create a sidebar to discuss the benefits of surface soil disturbance in some silvicultural applications. The committee then evaluated development of a rutting metric, beginning with review of the existing rutting guidelines in the guidebook and the more detailed metric used by DNR Forestry. In general, the members were not supportive of establishing a detailed metric for a number of reasons including uncertainty of impacts to soil, economic impacts of assessment, unconvinced rutting is a big problem, and a need to keep the guidelines general for application to range of conditions in the state. The Committee unanimously agreed not to recommend creation of a rutting metric.

Sue Burks then presented some information related to invasive species to provide the Committee members with a general background on the topic prior to their evaluation of invasive species guideline development at the next meeting. Her presentation included a review of general concepts related to invasive species, identification of specific species of concern, statutory authority of State agencies, and an overview of DNR and WI guidelines development and scope. Sue stated that there is a strong need for broader guidelines in Minnesota, and recommended a blend of DNR and WI guidelines (i.e., scope and focus) with more detailed priorities, but a broader strategic approach to management planning. Sue then answered several questions related to DNR time spent on invasive species management, utility if the DNR's guidelines in application, challenges to guideline development, and other topics.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 pm.