



Eastern Idaho Aspen Working Group Group Memory



BACKGROUND

The Eastern Idaho Aspen Working Group met on Thursday, August 10, at IDF&G's Upper Snake Regional offices from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. The meeting was attended by: Denise Adkins (Natural Resources Conservation Service), Bud Alford (Palisades Ranger District), Lynn Ballard (Caribou-Targhee National Forest), Dr. Dale Bartos (Forestry Sciences Laboratory), Bob Brammer (Idaho Department of Lands), David Burton (Aspen Delineation Project), Bill Davidson (Idaho Wildlife Federation), Gregg Dawson (Idaho State Department of Agriculture), Ron Dickemore (Palisades Ranger District), Kari Dingman (Sand Creek Wildlife Management Area), Aren Eddingsaas (Shoshone-Bannock Tribes), Don Edgerton (Natural Resources Conservation Service), Mark Gamblin (Idaho Department of Fish and Game), Scott Gamo (Idaho Department of Fish and Game), Mark Hiatt, Marv Hoyt (Greater Yellowstone Coalition), Keene Hueftle (South East Idaho Environmental Network), Jennifer Jackson (Idaho Department of Fish and Game), Kim Jackson (Harriman State Park), Mike Jackson, Ron Kay (Idaho State Department of Agriculture), Darwin Jeppeson (Bureau of Land Management), Curtis Keetch (Dubois Ranger District), Joe Lowe (Bureau of Land Management), Theresa Mathis (Bureau of Land Management), Bill McKee, Kay Merriam, Darryl Meints (Idaho Department of Fish and Game), Rob Mickelsen (Caribou-Targhee National Forest), Jennifer Miller (Idaho Conservation Data Center), Chris Morris (Idaho Department of Lands), Mark Orme (Caribou-Targhee National Forest), Garth Ross (Oregon Bureau of Land Management), Al Ruberry (Idaho Department of Lands), Steve Schmidt (Idaho Department of Fish and Game), and Larry Timchak (Caribou-Targhee National Forest). The meeting was facilitated by Wendy Lowe from P2 Solutions. This document summarizes discussions that occurred.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives for the August meeting of the Aspen Working Group included the following:

- Receive presentations about aspen ecology, biodiversity, treatment options, and monitoring
- Discuss options related to the tour for the next day.

ASPEN ECOLOGY

David Burton began by congratulating the Working Group on how well it had announced this meeting. He reported having tracked the news media that had picked up the article that was originally published in the Idaho State Journal; the article was published by news outlets all across the country, including the Seattle (WA) Post Intelligencer, Houston (TX) Chronicle, San Jose (CA) Mercury News, Biloxi (MS) Sun Herald, Fort Worth (TX) Star Telegram, Fort Wayne (IN) News Sentinel, and The Benton (Iowa) Crier. He observed that the work of the group is focused on a species that is beloved by people in many different parts of the country.

In summary, Mr. Burton presented information about the following:

- Aspen are important for game and non-game wildlife species, domestic livestock, and people.
- Aspen are challenged by fire suppression activities, invasive species, habitat fragmentation, and energy development.
- Aspen can thrive in a wide range of temperature regimes and elevations.
- Aspen require sunlight to thrive and they are sensitive to competition from shade tolerant species.

- Aspen reproduce primarily through root suckering – which is stimulated by hormonal (auxins and cytokinins) fluctuations. Hormones fluctuate in response to disturbance. Aspen are adapted to fire.
- For suckering to be successful, there must be sunlight and moisture.
- Aspen suckers are attractive to browsing animals, and therefore, protection may be needed for suckers to grow and develop.
- Management options include timber cutting, mechanical root stimulation, removal of competing vegetation, protection from browsing animals, and prescribed fire. These can all result in suckering.
- Monitoring of performance according to objectives is critical to understand the response to management.
- Management should agree in advance to appropriate responses should monitoring reveal that objectives are not being achieved.

In summary, Dr. Dale Barto's presented information about the following:

- Values that are associated with aspen communities include aesthetics, livestock forage, wildlife habitat, small wildlife, hydrology, recreation, and wood products.
- A clone is a group of trees that are genetically identical. Clones can be up to 200 acres in size. Aspen have been on the landscape for thousands of years.
- Aspen reproduce primarily through suckering from the parent root system in response to a disturbance. Disturbance is necessary to stimulate regeneration and aspen communities cannot be reestablished through normal seeding processes.
- Aspen have declined in all portions of their original range. Currently, Idaho has just over 600,000 acres of aspen; historically, Idaho had over 1.6 million acres of aspen.
- Declines can be attributed to a lack of burning, excessive use by livestock, and excessive use by wildlife.
- Die-off occurs when the parent trees die and no longer produce suckers.
- Decline of aspen results in loss of water, forage, and biodiversity. Conifers use more water, so aspen communities allow more precipitation to go into the water table.
- Aspen communities support much more lush undergrowth than is supported under conifer stands. Aspen produce more forage for wildlife and domestic species.

The two presenters brought copies of the following articles for those interested in further information:

Bartos, Dale L., and Robert B. Campbell, Jr. Decline of Quaking Aspen in the Interior West – Examples from Utah. Rangelands 20(1), February 1998, pp. 17-24.

Burton, David. "An Implementation Monitoring Protocol for Aspen." Transactions of the Western Section of the Wildlife Society. 40: 61-67.

Burton, David. "Development of a Protocol for the Ecological Assessment of a Special Species." USDA Forest Service Proceedings RMRS-P-34. 2004.

Jones, Bobette, Tom H. Rickman, Alfred Vazquez, Yakako Sado, and Kenneth W. Tate. Removal of Encroaching Conifers to Regenerate Degraded Aspen Stands in the Sierra Nevada. Restoration Ecology, Vo. 13, No. 2, pp 373-379. June 2005.

Shepperd, Wayne D. "Techniques to Restore Aspen Forests in the Western U.S." Transactions of the Western Section of the Wildlife Society. 40:52-60.

In addition, Dr. Bartos brought copies of the video called "Fading Gold: The Decline of Aspen in the West" produced by the USDA Forest Service.

Copies of the articles can be requested from Wendy Lowe, the Aspen Working Group's facilitator. The video is available for loan, also upon request to Ms. Lowe.

STATUS OF PLANS FOR THE ASPEN TOUR

Rob Mickelsen proposed two alternative itineraries for the aspen tour for the next day; one option would be to go north and visit various aspen stands in the Dubois Ranger District and other was to go east and visit various aspen stands in the vicinity of the Tex Creek Wildlife Management Area. The group favored the northern option. All agreed to meet at 8:30 a.m. the next day.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Eastern Idaho Aspen Working Group will be in November. Per discussions at the July meeting, Wendy Lowe will begin planning for a presentation of other perspectives (not yet discussed by the Aspen Working Group) so that the Working Group can develop an understanding of the full range of perspectives on aspen management.

Individuals wishing to talk to the Working Group's facilitator, Wendy Lowe, can contact her at (208) 523-6668 or wendy@p2-solution.com.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Wendy Lowe will prepare and distribute a group memory of the August 10, 2006 meeting.
2. Wendy Lowe will begin planning for additional presentations to the Working Group.
3. Wendy Lowe announce the next meeting of the Working Group with the help of Idaho Department of Fish and Game staff.