**January 23, 2024; 1000-Noon (ET) – Telephone Gap IRP Full IDT Meeting Notes**

**Rochester RD Conference Room & TEAMS Conference Call**

**Facilitator**: Jay Strand | **Note taker**: Jason Pietrzak

**Objectives for the meeting:**

1. Intro and words from Chris
2. Review project status
3. Understand next steps and expectations to complete 30-day comment EA

[**TEAMS meeting recording**](https://usdagcc-my.sharepoint.com/personal/jay_strand_usda_gov/_layouts/15/stream.aspx?id=%2Fpersonal%2Fjay%5Fstrand%5Fusda%5Fgov%2FDocuments%2FRecordings%2FTelephone%20Gap%20Full%20IDT%20Meeting%2D20240123%5F100949%2DMeeting%20Recording%2Emp4&ga=1&referrer=StreamWebApp%2EWeb&referrerScenario=AddressBarCopied%2Eview)

**Participating:**

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| Jay Strand | X | Suzanne Gifford |  | Sue Staats | x | Ryan Hughes |  |
| Chris Mattrick | X | James Donahey |  | Jen Edmonds | x | Heather Hansen | x |
| Jason Pietrzak | X | Jeremy Mears | x | Jacob Carringer |  | Tami Schroeder | x |
| Lindsay Rae Silvia |  | Nate Blanks | X | Allison Borchers | X | Greg Gustina | X |
| Phil Macaskill | x | Mel Green | x | Joy Phelan | X | Briana Graham | X |
| John Mccann | x | Karen Bucher | X | Katherine Budreski | X | Ethan Ready |  |
| Dave Donahue | x | Dave Haberl | x | Sarah Skinner | x | Jeff Hammell |  |
| Jessie Prucnal | x |  |  |  |  |  |  |

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| **1000-1010** |  **Topic:** Intro and words from Chris **Lead:** Mattrick* Review meeting objectives & agenda
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**Notes:**

We’re in the final phases of editing all reports for incorporating into the draft preliminary EA. Many factors, including the President’s Executive Order on mature and old-growth (EO14072), the national FP amendment to conserve and steward old-growth forest conditions, transition to a new Regional Forester, etc. may all be coming together to slow our timeline outside of control.

On the other hand, GMFL is setting the standard with our unprecedented level of carbon analysis with the assistance of NIACS and OSC staff.

**Current target date for a public release of the 30-day comment preliminary EA is February 28th, 2024.** The heavy lift is over for most of us. The next major effort will be related to reviewing and assisting with the Response to Comments document which will be prepared following completion of the preliminary EA.

**Action item:** Please prioritize addressing questions and requests from Jay until the preliminary EA is released. Completing the EA is our top priority.

Assuming we meet the current 2/28/2024 release date, public meeting would occur mid-March. Keep in mind these dates may be delayed but we need to be ready to proceed if given a green light.

**Action item:** Please be prepared to attend a public meeting during evening hours sometime in mid-March. Those who attended the public meeting during scoping are expected to be available for the March meeting.

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| **1010-1025** |  **Topic:** Project status  **Lead:** Strand* [Review timeline](https://usfs.box.com/s/ayqajqobpkzip1w1rlbdre9jviw3eo00)
* [Review IDT members & roles](https://usfs.box.com/s/5cwvf814uy5xgq9g70wx0s2hqhwe7k5b)
* 30-day EA status
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**Notes:**

Reviewed current revised project timeline dated 1/11/24. Our target is to have the final draft of the preliminary EA ready for internal review by February 5. Jay is reviewing each resource analysis framework and effects templates completed by specialists – and summarizing/formatting for incorporation into the EA. February 5 is also the target date to have all complete, final versions of specialist documents (analysis framework and effects templates), supporting docs, responses to comments, story map, and all other loose ends. Want to be ready in case green light comes earlier than 2/28/24.

Formal 30-day comment period would be triggered by public legal notice in Rutland Herald.

Public meeting would be on the week of March 11th at the Barstow Elementary School.

End of March would be the end of the comment, followed by ~3 weeks of comment content analysis to identify any gaps in our analysis that may need supplemental analysis for the final EA.

By end early June we would issue final EA and draft DN, triggering a 45-day objection period. We anticipate multiple objections. Objection may bring up further issues that need to be addressed.

Final DN would be complete by 9/20/2024.

Update to IDT roles: Borchers and Carringer have moved on from our project. Joy has taken over for Diane Burbank (retired). Ryan Adams is gone, and John McCann is covering soils until a new soil scientist is hired.

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| **1025-1115** |  **Topic:** Next steps to complete 30-day EA (complete by 2/4/24) **Lead:** Strand* Resource effects section reviews
* Review completed final draft 30-day comment EA
* Check design features & mitigation measures for consistency
* File all supporting information, documentation, references & maps
* Story Map
* Response to Comments
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**Notes:**

30-day EA/Preliminary EA/Draft EA -

Jay underestimated how much time it would take to review specialist analysis documentation and incorporate them into the EA. Everybody has done an incredibly thorough job conducting their analyses! As a result, those reviews, when dropped right into the EA, reach about 250 pages (we’re limited to 75 by CEQ NEPA regulation, not including figures, maps, tables, appendices). Jay is editing the reports down to summarized versions to meet page limit requirements.

When Jay sends his summarized versions to you for your review, confirm your analysis and conclusions are not mischaracterized and address any questions or gaps identified. You are the resource experts, but the analysis needs to meet “plain language” standards.

Sections still needing to be summarized: Recreation, Heritage, Ecology/Forest Habitat & general Wildlife. Jay is nearly done with the carbon analysis but still needs to complete Roadless section.

The level of analysis related to the carbon resource has been a big task. The analysis needs to follow new (2023) CEQ guidance to address carbon emissions and greenhouse gases. We’re the first in the Forest Service to analyze and disclose **quantitative** biogenic carbon emissions from timber management and prescribed burning. Previous projects have used a qualitative analysis. We’re also quantifying emissions from fossil fuel combustion for all activities (e.g., burning fossil fuels to harvest timber, prescribed burning, construction of roads, trails, parking, etc. There’s extra attention focused on this project and a lot of effort to complete this analysis. NIACS and OSC staff have provided hours of assistance and are nearly complete with emission calculations derived from the latest modeling and science available.

**Comment from Mattrick:** This standard-setting level of analysis has been a big source of delay for the project. State of Vermont may be facing similar request for this level of analysis for their current Worcester Range Unit Management Plan public involvement process.

To recap:

* IDT members need to verify Jay’s summarized version of their resource analysis is accurate and complete.
* Target date 2/5 to have complete final draft EA ready for IDT review for accuracy/consistency across all resource areas. Reasoning and conclusions in different sections must be aligned.
* Target date 2/9 to have all IDT feedback incorporated into the EA so it can be formatted/prepared for public release by mid-February.

**Action item:** Prioritize thoroughly reviewing your respective sections of the EA & turn around to Jay quickly so he can incorporate your analysis into the final draft of complete EA by 2/5.

Additional needs while reviewing draft preliminary EA include:

* Review design features (part of the proposal) to make sure they still make sense & are implementable.
* Review mitigation measures (developed in the process of specialist analyses) to make sure they still make sense & are implementable.

Together with FP S&Gs, these protective measures ensure we’re not crossing a threshold of unacceptable adverse effect and ensure we’re in compliance with all law, regulation, and policy.

**Action item:** Review final draft of the preliminary EA the week of 2/5 and provide needed edits by COB 2/9. Prioritize thoroughly reviewing your respective sections of the EA but make sure it is consistent with other resource sections. Ensure design features and mitigation measures are consistent and implementable.

After reviewing draft preliminary EA:

* File all supporting information (maps, references, documentation, reports, important emails) in your respective workspace folder. Anything references in your effects template need to be filed as pdf.
* Ensure consistency between what ends up in the EA v. specialist framework analysis and effects templates. Specialists will need to edit templates to match EA before its public release.

Joy Phelan will be taking time to update the Story Map. Comment date periods need to be updated/added.

Response to Comments document will be completed by Jay/Jason before the public release of the preliminary EA since it needs to be available for public review during the comment period. This document will spell out exactly how and where issues raised during scoping were addressed in the EA, and if not – why not.

**Action item:** File all documentation including literature references included for your effects analysis in your workspace project folder by 2/28. Review final draft of Response to Comments for accuracy which should be available for your review by mid-February – needed edits should be provided by 2/23.

**Question from Joy Phelan:** will we need additional map products for public meeting?

Answer: yes. Discussion about this will occur during our scheduled March 4th IDT meeting to prep for the public meeting.

**Katie, GIS detailer, leaving at the end of March** so be sure to give as much notice as possible to Joy for upcoming GIS needs.

**Action item:** Jay to work with Joy EARLY for map needs for public meeting (more than one week in advance).

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| **1115-1130** |  **Topic:** GIS coordination **Lead:** Phelan* GIS expectations for 30-day comment EA
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**Notes:**

NEPA guidance has been updated since last GIS update on 9/4/23. Joy’s main concerns:
1. Is everybody documenting non-GIS-program supplied data? There are regional requirements for this:

 Storing data in the project workspace?

 Documenting your analysis and updating metadata at every step of the analysis?

2. Do not use OneDrive or Pinyon (Box) to access or store NEPA project GIS data

3. At end of each stage (scoping, draft decision, etc) dataset should be archived as “read only”

4. Joy will be sharing guidance on Section 508 and GIS data

5. Region has guidance related to FOIA, there may be file organizational changes coming

Joy has created a flowchart ([link](https://usfs.box.com/s/3uor19dyv8mwcw1pv0belhdeph2zk3pu)) to help herself and others understand this whole process. This is a work in progress and Joy welcomes everybody’s input and suggestions on the flowchart.

Diane provided GIS direction in July 2023 which is still relevant ([link](https://usfs.box.com/s/vyzukl2wru4bv8qo0mxost9t8t4673vm))

**Action item:** Please review Joy’s GIS flow chart and Diane’s GIS guidance for Telephone Gap. Ensure you have GIS data for your effects analysis filed appropriately.

Please submit any GIS requests early, even if some details are still unknown, to give Joy time to plan.

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| **1130-1145** |  **Topic:** Prepare for 30-day comment period **Lead:** Strand* Communication Plan
* IDT meeting to prepare for public meeting (3/4/24 from 1000-1100am)
* Public meeting date (week of 3/11/24 – date & time TBD)
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**Notes:**

Ethan working with region to finalize communication plan. Nobody will be asked to get in front of a mic or talk with a reporter, Chris Mattrick will do that, BUT everybody should still refer to the communication plan to know how we are to discuss the project with the public, even if only in line at the grocery store.

**Action item:** Please be sure to review the communications plan once it is distributed and stick to the talking points in any public discussion of the project.

Public meeting has not been scheduled, but target for an evening during the week of 3/11 – 3/15 at the Barstow School.

**Action item:** If you were present at the scoping meeting in early 2023, you will likely be expected to join for this public meeting.

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| **1145-1200** |  **Topic:** Bin items and final questions **Lead:** Strand |

**Notes:**

Question about carbon analysis. Jay briefly talked about the numbers and providing context to the numbers. The amount of carbon emitted from the project *does* sound high. Equivalent to e.g., ~45,000 passenger vehicles in a year or the fossil fuel heating needs of ~25,000 homes over a year. Compared to the carbon being sequestered by the forest, however, these figures are de minimis. Context is key.

* Target date for final draft of preliminary EA ready for IDT review is February 5.
* Target date for IDT input to complete EA for public distribution is February 9.

**Action item:** IDT set time aside for week of 2/5 to review final draft preliminary EA.

Next Full IDT meeting – mid April: *Review comments received during 30-day comment period & discuss needs for the Final EA.*