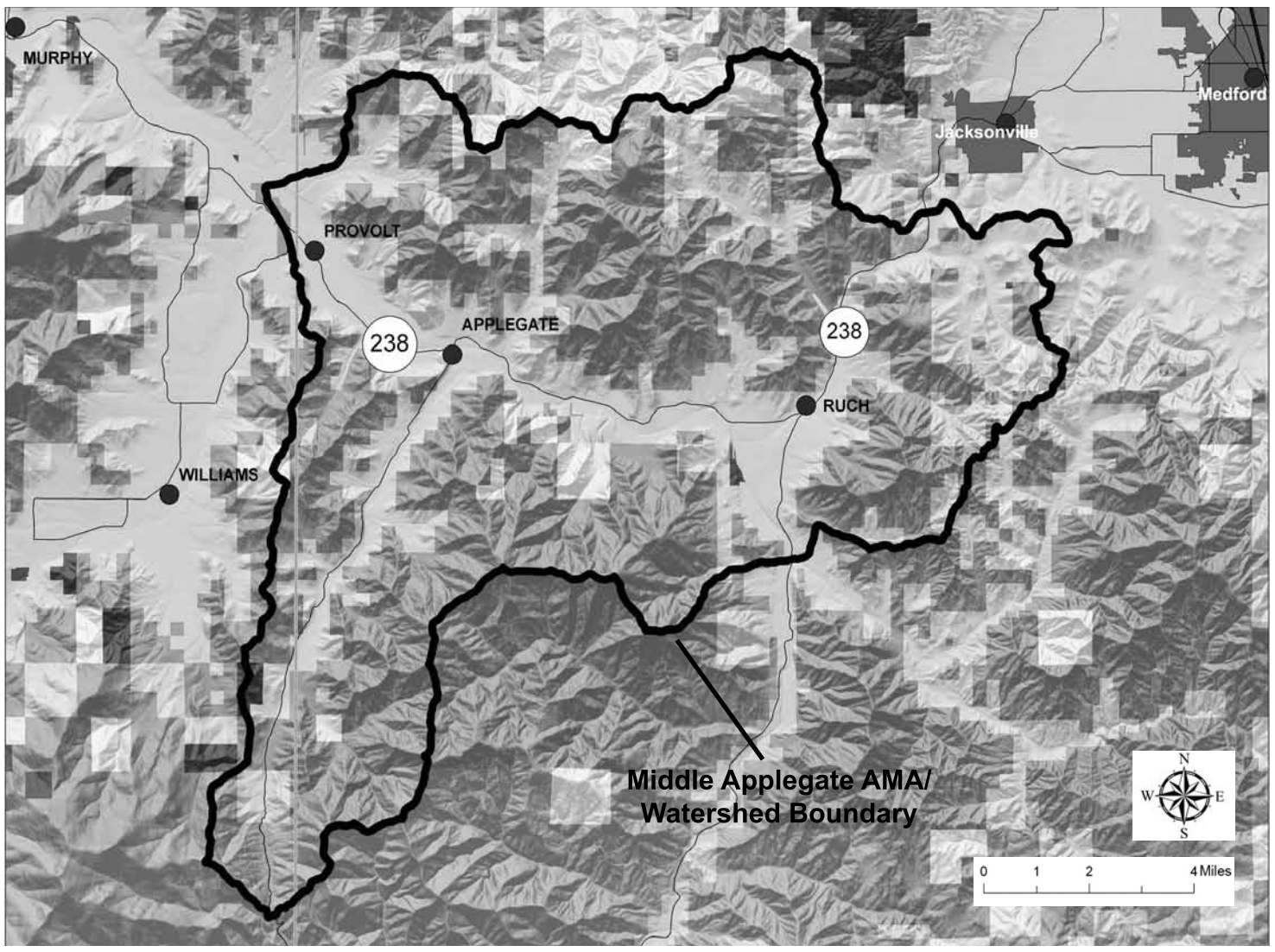
Applegate Dry Forest Restoration Pilot



The Middle Applegate Watershed Landscape Restoration Pilot Project:

An opportunity for forest restoration, spotted owls and collaborative planning

The Middle Applegate Landscape Restoration Pilot Project will be an adventure in collaboratively-designed and adaptively-managed forest restoration. The project will emphasize the use of active management to restore forest resilience. Proposed forest treatments will be guided by existing regional knowledge and experience linked to the restoration principles of noted forest ecologists Jerry Franklin (UW) and Norm Johnson (OSU). A strategic focus will be close consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife to integrate northern spotted owl recovery and habitat needs into ecological forestry restoration practice. The pilot project will also provide a transparent and inclusive planning and implementation process to promote community dialogue.

In February 2010, the Southern Oregon Small Diameter Collaborative and Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council submitted a request to the Secretary of Interior to develop a community-initiated pilot project. Recently, the Collaborative and Partnership worked with the Medford BLM, Rogue-Siskiyou Forest, US Fish and Wildlife, Southern Oregon University, and community partners to host the October conference, *Solutions for Forests: Active Management Perspectives for Southwest Oregon*. Through presentations, field tour and group discussions, the conference informed and advanced shared understanding on the role of active management in forest restoration, and engaged participants in outlining steps for potential landscape restoration projects, including the Middle Applegate Pilot.

Now is a Good Time

Many southwest Oregon forests, as well as the resources they host and the values they reflect, are at significant risk. This is particularly the case for dry, fire-adapted forest types common to the Applegate Valley. Past land-use decisions, fire suppression, stand development trajectories; and expected climatic impacts paint a scenario in need of attention and action. Many forest managers and community members share recognition of these factors and the pilot project will provide an opportunity to translate recognition into action. In addition, Secretary of Interior Salazar supports a Medford BLM collaborative pilot that provides timber resources in the near term and informs long-term sustainable forest management that is socially acceptable, ecologically sound, and economically viable.

An Opportunity for the Middle Applegate

The projected Applegate pilot is in the Applegate Adaptive Management Area (AMA) created by the Northwest Forest Plan (See map above). AMA's were created to demonstrate, test and monitor collaborative approaches to forest management, similar to that of the proposed pilot. AMA's provide the context for transparent innovation. The middle Applegate also includes significant contiguous BLM forest and substantial dry forest acreage. The pilot will share assessment findings and coordinate management activity with adjacent public and private land managers.

What's next?

An existing collaborative framework will advance the emerging pilot. The Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council is a community-based organization of long-term commitment and wide-ranging action, and the Southern Oregon Small Diameter Collaborative (aka, the Knitting Circle) is a regional collaborative with broad perspectives working to advance restoration for forest and community benefit. These related efforts have developed principles for active forest management and will provide community outreach and education to inform and build support for the project, as well as cultivate regional and national interest group commitment.

The Medford BLM's success with small diameter, stewardship and biomass utilization will be incorporated into pilot planning, and industry representatives, restoration practitioners and local foresters will be consulted to maximize economic efficiency. The Rogue-Siskiyou National Forest and US Fish and Wildlife will be key partners, working to model agency coordination and cooperation.

Existing agency data, current landscape assessments (e.g., The Nature Conservancy Applegate Fire Learning Network, Applegate Fire Plan, Small Diameter Collaborative) and the Franklin and Johnson restoration principles (See Sidebar right) will be used to create a rapid landscape assessment within six months. This assessment will be a key early step to inform where restoration treatments are most appropriate and which treatments should be prioritized for implementation. The pilot does not intend to treat the whole middle Applegate, but to provide a strategic blueprint that clearly identifies where the need and opportunity for restoration exists. The project will generate a series of timber sales, stewardship projects, and service contracts beginning in fiscal year 2012.

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Information on the Solutions for Forests Conference, Franklin and Johnson Principles, and other reading:
www.solutionsforforests.org

Notes for Applegate Field Trip on Dry Forest Restoration

Dry Forests include sites that are characterized by the Ponderosa Pine, Douglas-Fir, Oregon White Oak, and Jeffrey Pine Series as well as the dry plant associations belonging to the Grand Fir and White Fir Series.

Dry Forests were characteristically:

- Subject to frequent, low severity, and mixed severity fires;
- Open forests or savannas (also, stands that are apparently first-generation forests occur frequently in southwestern Oregon);
- Dominated by small population of old and large trees of drought-and fire tolerant species;
- Spatially heterogeneous (structural mosaics, often including openings); and
- Spatially and temporally continuous (didn't usually experience stand replacement events so multi-aged forests typical and stands poorly defined).

Elements of silvicultural prescriptions to restore dry forests:

- Retain older trees (conifer and hardwood) and improve their survival potential by eliminating nearby competing vegetation and ground and ladder fuels.
- Retain other key structural/compositional elements in the stand.
- Leave areas in the stand untreated ("skips") to provide:
  - —Diversity in structural conditions (e.g., heavily shaded areas);
  - —Retain desirable snag and down wood features;
  - —Provide hiding cover and break up visuals (e.g., for wildlife); and
  - —Protect sensitive areas (e.g., seeps, rock outcrops).
- Thin remainder of stand (after old tree protection and skips) to:
  - —Favor more drought-and fire-tolerant tree species;
  - —Protect hardwood species with high wildlife value (may require removal of some dominant/co-dominant [but never old] conifers);
  - —Increase the average diameter of the residual stand; and
  - —Reduce overall stocking levels to a target basal area or density.
- Option: Create some small openings for intolerant tree regeneration (e.g., pines) and plant if seed sources are limited or absent;
- Treat activity fuels, such as by broadcast burning or pile-and-burn; and
- Enhance heterogeneity and avoid creating homogeneity within stand.

Portions of Dry Forest landscapes need to be retained in denser forest states to provide for a diversity of forest structural conditions, including habitat required by specific species, such as the Northern Spotted Owl and its prey species.

There is no single "correct" silvicultural prescription, especially regarding the thinning component! There are many variations that can achieve the ecological restoration goals, such as tradeoffs between basal area, species, and DBH targets.

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