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SECTION I – INTRODUCTION

This monitoring and evaluation report for fiscal year (FY) 2001 documents the Forest Plan monitoring results for the three Blue Mountain Forests (Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests) of northeast Oregon and southeast Washington. Fiscal year 2001 ran from October 1, 2000, to September 30, 2001.

Report Organization

This report is composed of five sections, this introduction being the first section. The remaining four sections document the monitoring items reported in FY2001. Section C contains the monitoring items which have been coordinated across the three Forests and are reported in generally the same manner. It also includes the results from the Tri-Forest Focus Monitoring completed in FY2001. This effort looked at the effects on the soils resource of implementing various projects. Sections M, U, and W contain those Forest specific monitoring items unique to a particular Forest.

Report Emphasis Areas

Two emphasis areas for this year's report were identified. One was the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requirement to complete a review of conditions on the land covered by the Forest Plan every five years to determine whether conditions or demands of the public have changed significantly. This five-year period review (1996 through 2001) was included in those monitoring question responses where information was available. The other emphasis area was identifying any "need for change" to help lay the foundation for the upcoming Forest Plan revision effort (planned to begin in FY2004).

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation occur at several scales and fulfill many purposes. At the site-specific project level, monitoring is generally focused on determining if actions were completed as specified in decision documents, and if they were effective in achieving specific goals. This level of monitoring is generally not directly reported in this document; although these findings are an important source of information to the level of monitoring this report focuses on, which is Forest Plan monitoring.

The Forest Plans for the National Forests in the Blue Mountains were approved by the Regional Forester in 1990. These plans provide direction for integrated management of resources on the three Forests, and are implemented through site-specific projects designed to be consistent with that direction. Monitoring at this level provides information to the agency and the public about how well the Forests are implementing Forest Plans, and if desired future conditions are being achieved.

Monitoring is integral to the correct and consistent implementation of Forest Plans. It consists of gathering data (generally on a sample basis), collecting and disclosing information, and making observations. Specific monitoring questions have been established by the Forests to ensure that monitoring and evaluation address information needed to measure Forest Plan accomplishment and effectiveness. These questions are identified in monitoring plans developed for each Forest, and are the foundation for this combined annual report. These Forest specific monitoring plans are: Malheur National Forest – *Forest Monitoring and Evaluation Plan 1995*, Umatilla National Forest – *Monitoring Strategy 1994*, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forest – *Monitoring Evaluation Report 1991*. Monitoring items in each plan are identified by number, which are used to track the items throughout this report.

Evaluation is the analysis of data and information collected during the monitoring phase. Evaluation makes the determination if planned conditions or results are being attained and if they are within thresholds established in the Forest Plan. As situations are identified as being outside the thresholds, changes may need to occur. In this sense evaluation serves two main functions; it initiates changes in management practices, and provides a means to adjust Forest Plans; keeping them dynamic and responsive to changing conditions.

There are several types of monitoring. The Blue Mountain Forests program primarily focuses on the first two types, implementation and effectiveness monitoring. The third type, validation monitoring, is more appropriately conducted in association with research and as such is primarily conducted outside the scope of monitoring included in this report. Although each type of monitoring can build on the previous type, they often overlap in time.

- Implementation monitoring – Determines whether activities planned in the Forest Plans have been implemented, and whether the standards and guidelines were followed. It generally answers the “Did we do what we said we were going to do” question.
- Effectiveness monitoring – Determines if the implementation of activities has achieved the desired goals and objectives stated in the Forest Plans. It generally answers the “Are the management practices producing the desired results” question.
- Validation monitoring – Determines if the results predicted in the Forest Plans occurred, and if the assumptions and models used in developing the Plans are correct. It generally answers the “Are the planning assumptions valid, or are there better ways to meet Forest Plan goals and objectives” question.

Why Combine the Monitoring Efforts of the Three Forests

The Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests began a Tri-Forest monitoring program in 1997. A coordinated monitoring program was deemed beneficial for reasons such as follows:

- Monitoring questions and protocols varied widely among the Forests, making it difficult to meaningfully aggregate information into a Blue Mountain or subregional context. Many issues facing managers of the Blue Mountain Forests are most effectively addressed on a broader, landscape scale and monitoring needs to speak to these scales.
- The number of required monitoring items has increased and some of these items can be most effectively monitored systematically on fewer sites across a larger area.
- The three Forests share common publics and issues, and the Forests should respond with similar monitoring objectives and methodology.
- Monitoring and evaluation are key elements of adaptive management as described in the proposed revision of the National Forest System Land Resource Management Planning Rule (36 CFR 219). The Planning Rule considers management at the landscape scale, and as such monitoring needs to be applicable at this scale.

The Forests are continuing to move toward fully coordinating and standardizing the monitoring program. This year’s report has built upon past successes and includes additional combined items as compared to last year’s report.