



United States Department of Agriculture

BLUE MOUNTAIN FOREST PLAN REVISION - 2016

Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman
National Forests

April Newsletter

Dear Friends of the Blue Mountains,

We are writing to share an update on the revision of the Blue Mountains Forest Plans, which will guide the management of approximately 5 million acres of the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests. To begin, we want to acknowledge those who have been involved in this Forest Plan Revision process: We have been encouraged by how much you value your public lands, and we thank you for helping to shape how we manage these National Forests on behalf of the American people.

Over the past year, as part of a public re-engagement effort, we have visited with over 700 individuals in 24 public listening sessions held in communities across eastern Oregon, eastern Washington, and western Idaho. Although we have heard differences of opinion about how to best manage these spectacular landscapes and ecosystems of the Blue Mountains, most agree that these National Forests should continue to be managed for the many uses and benefits they provide, both now and into the future.

We found the input shared during the public re-engagement process to be very helpful, and we are using this input in a variety of ways. For example, the public listening sessions have brought additional context to the 2014 formal comments and have given us a better understanding of how different Alternatives may affect our diverse publics. In response, we are currently crafting two new Alternatives, which we will analyze in detail in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS):

The first Alternative will emphasize restoration and has been informed by formal public comments, re-engagement input, and revised recommendations by Forest Service resource specialists.



Members of the public talk with Plan Revision Specialists at a meeting on Access and Wilderness held in Ukiah in July 2015



for the greatest good

The second Alternative will build upon the first. This Alternative would considerably increase the pace of forest restoration during the plan period (15 years) by moving a larger portion of the forested landscape toward the Desired Conditions – i.e., thinning densely forested stands, reducing fire severity, and decreasing the risks posed by insects and diseases

We will provide public updates with new information as we develop these additional Alternatives and continue with the analysis of other Alternatives within the EIS. While we seek to be responsive to all of our diverse publics, any Alternative we consider must be analyzed for compliance with federal laws, regulations, and policies governing National Forest management. Also keep in mind that the Forest Plan Revision is still a work in progress, and the deciding officer (the Regional Forester) has not made any final decisions.

We are currently crafting two new Alternatives, which we will analyze in detail in the Environmental Impact Statement.

What are the next steps? The final products of this Forest Plan Revision process will include three separate Forest Plans – one for each of the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests. Before these Forest

The final products of this Forest Plan Revision process will include three separate Forest Plans – one for each of the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests.

Plans can be finalized, we will consult with federal agencies on the Endangered Species Act and continue our government-to-government consultation with appropriate American Indian Tribes. We will also continue to address questions and concerns from all of you who continue to be interested in the Blue Mountains Forest Plans. When the final EIS, three revised Forest Plans, and three draft Records of Decision are ready, these documents will be available for public review for 60 days during the objection period. Individuals and entities that submitted substantive formal comments (36 CFR 219.62) during the opportunities for public comment may file an objection (36 CFR 219.5) if they do not feel their issues were satisfactorily addressed. Once the objection process is finished, the Regional Forester will sign each Forest's Record of Decision.

In closing, we would like to express our appreciation for your involvement in the stewardship of your National Forests. We are committed to using the information you have provided to shape the revised Forest Plans. Over the coming months, we will strive to keep the lines of communication open through the sharing of information via email, mail, phone, and the web.

Please refer to www.fs.usda.gov/goto/BlueMountainsPlanRevision for the most up-to-date information, and if you have any questions, please email bluemtnplanrevision@fs.fed.us.

Sincerely,



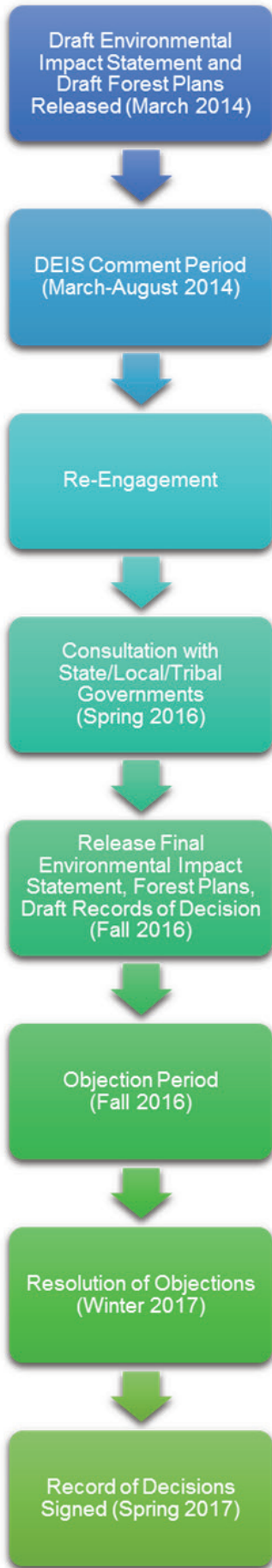
STEVEN K. BEVERLIN
Forest Supervisor
Malheur National Forest



GENEVIEVE MASTERS
Forest Supervisor
Umatilla National Forest



THOMAS MONTOYA
Forest Supervisor
Wallowa-Whitman NF



Where have we been?

It may be helpful to share some recent history on this Forest Plan Revision process. In 2010 we released a proposed action to begin public input as a part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, and over the next four years we developed a set of Alternatives to address that public input. In 2014, we released the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Draft Forest Plans for the three National Forests, which explained the impacts of the different Alternatives on the many resources, publics, and concerns identified across the Blue Mountains. During the formal comment period, we received over a thousand comment letters, which altogether contained thousands of discrete comments. In the comments many people expressed disappointment with the draft EIS and Draft Forest Plans. This disappointment was polarized around issues identified in the Plans, and people took positions that were opposite from others on the same topic.

Consulting with representatives of our diverse communities around the Blue Mountains, we identified a handful of topics for further public discussion, including: pace and scale of restoration, access, wilderness, and livestock grazing. We decided to “re-engage” with the public on these topics, so people would have additional opportunities to learn from each other and find common ground. We in the Forest Service also wanted to listen for new information, ideas, or solutions that we had not yet considered or received in the formal public comments. Since June 2015, we have participated in 24 public re-engagement meetings in communities across the Blue Mountains region. Total participation in these meetings included over 700 individuals. We listened to what people had to say, we took many notes, and we have shared those notes via email and the project website: www.fs.usda.gov/goto/BlueMountainsPlanRevision.

(Please see the timeline on the left to familiarize yourself with the next steps in the Forest Plan Revision effort.)

How is public re-engagement input shaping the Forest Plans?

We are using the input shared during the re-engagement process in a variety of ways:

- 1) We have been evaluating what we heard in the engagement meetings and how it might lead to changes in the Environmental Impact Statement Alternatives and Draft Forest Plans.
- 2) We have been comparing two sources of information – formal public comments and informal input from the public re-engagement meetings – in search of new ideas and solutions. As we do this overview, the re-engagement input is helping us to better understand, evaluate, and address the formal public comments themselves.
- 3) The benefits of the re-engagement process are not limited to the Forest Plans. Line officers and staff at the Forest and District levels are using the re-engagement input to inform their current and future work, and to be more responsive to their communities.

From: Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision Team
1550 Dewey Ave, Suite A
Baker City, OR 97814

FIRST CLASS MAIL
Postage and Fees Paid
USDA Forest Service
Permit Number G-40

To:



Why do we do Forest Plans?

Why are we investing so much time and effort into these Forest Plans? There is a simple reason and a bigger reason. The simple reason is we are required to do this by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976, under which every National Forest must have a land management plan and update it about every 15 years to address new information and changing conditions on the landscape.

The bigger reason is these plans reflect the mission of the Forest Service. In 1905, the Secretary of Agriculture signed a letter written by the first Chief of the Forest Service, Gifford Pinchot, and that letter included a significant sentence: "...where conflicting interests must be reconciled, the question shall always be answered from the standpoint of the greatest good of the greatest number in the long run." The last phrase, "the greatest good of the greatest number in the long run," is a succinct statement of our unique purpose as an agency. The words "in the long run" are important too, because we manage these landscapes not only for the goods and services they provide today; we also need to manage for the future using a sustainable approach.

As recognized 111 years ago by Gifford Pinchot, working through disagreements and conflicting interests has always been at the heart of the Forest Service mission. We have found that we can only find the "greatest good" by being in community, learning from each other about how nature matters, and understanding how nature also provides for everyone in different ways. This is not easy work, and it never has been. Public lands are shared resources, so we have to work together toward the shared goal of meeting the needs and desires that we all have in the National Forests, both today and into the future.

These are the bigger reasons why we have Forest Plans, and we welcome the spirited dialogue that often comes with them.



Coming Soon!

for the greatest good

Public Conference Call: Update on Forest Plan Revision ▪ April 12 ▪ 5:30 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.

Dial: 1-888-844-9904 ▪ Access Code: 2651088 ▪ Please email your questions to: bluemtnplanrevision@fs.fed.us