



United States Department of Agriculture

## BLUE MOUNTAINS FOREST PLAN REVISION - 2016

Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman  
National Forests

# June Newsletter

## Recommended Wilderness, Backcountry Areas, Wildlife Corridors, and Designated Routes

Hello again from the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision Team. We continue to work toward final Forest Plans for each of the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests. Over the next 15-year planning period, these Plans will guide how the Forest Service manages approximately 5 million acres of public lands in eastern Oregon and Washington. To keep everyone informed on our progress, we are publishing a series of newsletters to share specific changes that are shaping the final Forest Plans and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Please visit our website for more information: [fs.usda.gov/goto/BlueMountainsPlanRevision](https://fs.usda.gov/goto/BlueMountainsPlanRevision).

In the April newsletter we provided a status update on the Forest Plans and announced that we are analyzing two new Alternatives in the EIS. These new Alternatives and other changes are a work in progress. *Please note:* We do not have final decisions to announce, but we would like to share Forest Service staff recommendations that are being considered by Forest Supervisors and the Regional Forester. These staff recommendations are informed by formal public comments, public re-engagement input, and also revised information provided by resource specialists.



Hikers enjoy the Shoreline Trail at Anthony Lake, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.



for the greatest good

This newsletter will focus on topics related to Recommended Wilderness, Back-country Areas, Wildlife Corridors, and Designated Routes. Although we cannot offer a comprehensive treatment of these topics in a newsletter, we are happy to share examples of where Forest Service staff are recommending changes to the draft Forest Plans and/or EIS.

Below is a plain-language summary of the topics covered in this newsletter. Please continue reading pages 3-6 for more details on each topic.

### **Why Forest Plans address Management Areas and Access**

National Forests provide for multiple uses and multiple kinds of access. Using Forest Plans, the Forest Service identifies Management Areas to accommodate these different uses, to help everyone share the land, and to provide consistent guidance to manage similar portions of the landscape.

### **Recommended Wilderness**

The Forest Service follows national policy to identify, evaluate, and recommend lands that may be suitable for the National Wilderness Preservation System. After considering public comments on the Vinegar Hill / Indian Rock Scenic Area, Forest Service staff re-evaluated this Scenic Area and found that it had some conflicting uses and did not meet all of the criteria for Recommended Wilderness.

### **Backcountry Areas**

In the draft Forest Plan(s), there are two types of Backcountry Areas: motorized and non-motorized. Together, these Backcountry Areas generally overlap with Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs). Although the Forest Plans cannot change the IRA boundaries, they can adjust the boundaries of motorized and non-motorized Backcountry Areas to better align with IRA boundaries. Public input led Forest Service staff to recommend the following: (1) Align the boundaries of the Backcountry Areas with the IRAs as much as possible, and (2) fix mapping errors between the motorized and non-motorized portions of the Backcountry Areas to better fit existing uses, roads, and motorized trails.

### **Wildlife Corridors**

In the 2014 Draft EIS, the Forest Service identified areas that might serve as potential Wildlife Corridors. Upon further consideration, Forest Service staff do not recommend including Wildlife Corridors in the two new Alternatives. Instead of Identifying specific, fixed areas for wildlife, Forest Service staff believe that wildlife needs can be met on a project-by-project basis as we restore the larger ecosystem.

### **Designated Routes**

Based on public input, Forest Service staff recommend removing the term “designated routes” from the Forest Plans for the Wallowa-Whitman and Malheur National Forests – yet also stating that the Forest Service is required to manage roads, trails, and areas consistent with national laws, policies, and regulations that govern these National Forests.

## Why Forest Plans address Management Areas and Access

The Blue Mountains Forest Plans affirm that these National Forests are available for many different uses, which may take place in different areas and at various times of the year. For example, some people prefer motorized uses (e.g., off-highway vehicles, snowmobiles); some enjoy non-motorized uses (e.g., hiking, biking, or horseback riding); and many enjoy both motorized and non-motorized uses. Through the Forest Plans, the Forest Service identifies Management Areas to accommodate different uses, to help everyone share the land, and to provide consistent guidance to manage similar portions of the landscape.

Different Management Areas are rated as “suitable” or “unsuitable” for different uses as guided by legal and regulatory requirements. However, the suitability ratings in the Forest

Plans will not directly change current uses until modified by future site-specific analysis and decision-making under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). For a list of many of the Management Areas addressed in the Forest Plans, see the table titled Management Area Designation and Name. Management Areas generally range along a continuum from little development in Congressionally Designated Wilderness Areas (1A) to extensive development in Developed Sites and Administrative Areas (5). To learn more, refer to pages 74-97 of the Proposed Revised Land Management Plan, available at [fs.usda.gov/goto/BlueMountainsPlanRevision](https://fs.usda.gov/goto/BlueMountainsPlanRevision).

In summary, everyone uses National Forests differently. Still, we can all agree that nature matters to each of us, and nature also provides for many of our needs. Many of you have contributed your time and knowledge to help the Forest Service develop Forest Plans that better reflect what matters to you, your family, and your community. Thank you for being involved. Thank you also for being patient with us in the Forest Service. It is a challenge to find a sustainable balance between what matters to each person, what matters to others, and what nature can physically provide in the long run. In the Forest Service, we call that “finding the greatest good,” and we couldn’t do it without you.

### Management Area Designations and Names

1A	Congressionally Designated Wilderness Area
1B	Recommended Wilderness Area
1C	Wilderness Study Area
2A	Wild and Scenic River (Includes Designated, Eligible, and Suitable Rivers)
2B	Research Natural Area
2C	Botanical Area
2D	Geological Area
2E	Historical Area
2F	Scenic Byway and All-American Road
2G	Nationally Designated Trail
2H	Scenic Area
2I	Starkey Experimental Forest and Range
2J	Municipal Watershed
3A	Backcountry (non-motorized)
3B	Backcountry (motorized)
3C	Wildlife Corridor
4A	General Forest
4B	Riparian Management Area
5	Developed Site, Administrative Area



## Recommended Wilderness

In the public comments and listening sessions, some people requested no additional Recommended Wilderness Areas in the Blue Mountains. Others requested more Recommended Wilderness Areas. One case in point is the Vinegar Hill / Indian Rock Scenic Area, which is a Recommended Wilderness Area under Alternative E of the Draft EIS. However, some public commenters identified a



Terry Richard / The Oregonian, 2009. Indian Rock Lookout, Malheur National Forest.

contradiction between the criteria for Recommended Wilderness and some of the existing uses in the Vinegar Hill / Indian Rock Scenic Area. These uses include over-snow vehicles and mining activity.

Given this input, Forest Service staff suggest the following:

- *Do not include the Vinegar Hill / Indian Rock Scenic Area as Recommended Wilderness in the two new Alternatives in the EIS, because current uses do not conform with Wilderness character.*
- *Keep the existing Scenic Area designation of the Vinegar Hill / Indian Rock area.*

Staff also recommend retaining Alternative C's suitability rating for winter motor-vehicle use in Recommended Wilderness Areas. Under Alternative C, winter motor-vehicle use is rated "unsuitable" in recommended Wilderness Areas, which is consistent with national policy to not impair the character or eligibility of Recommended Wilderness Areas. As noted previously, the suitability ratings in the Forest Plans will not directly change current uses until modified by future site-specific NEPA analysis and decision-making.

## Backcountry Areas

Forest Plans are required to identify Management Areas, just as many cities and counties are required to identify zones for residential, commercial, and industrial uses. In this planning process, Forest Service staff have made special efforts to define the boundaries of Management Areas to be consistent with current uses. In the Draft Forest Plan(s) and EIS, staff defined Management Areas 3A (Backcountry Non-Motorized) and 3B (Backcountry Motorized). These areas generally overlap with the IRAs designated by the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR, 36 CFR 294).

RACR defines IRAs as "undeveloped areas typically exceeding 5,000 acres that met the minimum criteria for wilderness consideration under the Wilderness Act and that were inventoried during the Forest Service's Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) process, subsequent assessments, or forest planning." With some exceptions, prohibitions to timber harvest and road building apply within all IRAs. Some IRAs do not contain roads and motorized trails and others do. Recognizing

these differences, Forest Service staff applied Management Area 3A (Backcountry Non-Motorized) to the portions of IRAs without roads and motorized trails; staff applied Management Area 3B (Backcountry Motorized) to IRAs that contained existing roads and motorized trails.

While the Draft Forest Plan and EIS were under development, Forest Service staff decided to use the terms Management Areas 3A and 3B instead of “IRAs,” because at that time federal courts prohibited the implementation and use of the 2001 RACR. Ultimately, federal courts upheld the 2001 RACR and determined that the statute of limitations had expired, so the 2001 RACR can no longer be challenged in court. IRA boundaries have been designated by regulation and cannot be changed by Forest Plans.

Some public comments expressed concern about the current boundaries of Backcountry Areas 3A and 3B, because it was not clear where the IRAs were located within and between 3A and 3B. Public comments led Forest Service staff to take a closer look at the 3A and 3B boundaries, and they discovered some mapping errors. In some cases, areas with existing motorized roads and trails had been incorrectly allocated to Management Area 3A (Backcountry Non-motorized), so staff now recommend allocating those areas to 3B (Backcountry Motorized). This way, 3A and 3B would better align with existing uses, roads, and motorized trails.

Additionally, to avoid confusion with IRA boundaries, Forest Service staff recommend aligning the boundaries of Management Areas 3A and 3B with the IRAs as much as possible. If implemented across the Forest Plans, aligning 3A and 3B with IRA boundaries would improve the ability of the Forest Service to manage these boundaries in the future, help to identify these areas in the field for the public, and also facilitate site-specific project analysis. In some cases, Management Areas 3A and 3B may still occur outside of established IRA boundaries where areas with similar characteristics can be grouped and managed more appropriately. For example, if there are two similar areas within one steep drainage, and one area is within the IRA boundary and the other is not, it may be more efficient to manage both areas under the same Management Area designation (e.g., 3A or 3B).



## Wildlife Corridors

The Forest Service received public comments during the scoping period for the proposed action suggesting that the Forest Service create a Management Area for Wildlife Corridors to provide “bridges” between protected areas, such as between two Wilderness Areas. In response, the Forest Service developed Management Area 3C for Wildlife Corridors and considered it in Alternatives C, E, and F of the Draft EIS. Public comments on the Draft EIS were for and against allocating specific areas to Wildlife Corridors. Forest Service staff recommend that Wildlife Corridors (3C) continue to be considered in Alternatives C, E, and F. However, staff do not recommend identifying specific and fixed areas as Wildlife Corridors in the two new Alternatives. The rationale is that wildlife rely on many different habitats and locations within a National Forest during their life cycles, different species have different requirements, and wildlife may not recognize or preferentially use the limited zones identified as Wildlife Corridors. Also, some of the areas identified for Wildlife Corridors are considered



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for the greatest good

**To:**



## **Coming soon!** **Public conference call with Forest Service staff**

**July 13, 2016** ▪ 5:30-6:30 p.m. ▪ Dial: 1-888-844-9904, then enter Access Code: 2651088#  
Forest Service staff will discuss the topics covered in this newsletter and answer questions from the public. **Please email your questions to [bluemtnplanrevision@fs.fed.us](mailto:bluemtnplanrevision@fs.fed.us)** by July 6, and staff will do their best to respond to your questions during the call. This will be a broadcast-style call with one-way audio, and it will be recorded for those who cannot listen to the live broadcast. To listen to the April call's audio recording and read the transcript, please visit [fs.usda.gov/goto/BlueMountainsPlanRevision](http://fs.usda.gov/goto/BlueMountainsPlanRevision) and see "Recent Communications."

wildland-urban interface zones or include existing motorized uses (e.g., off-highway vehicle areas, active mining areas). Rather than relying on Wildlife Corridors, the Forest Service can provide security for wildlife in a variety of ways – e.g., by managing motor-vehicle use over time in key areas. Staff believe that moving the landscape toward the Desired Conditions on a project-by-project basis will provide habitat characteristics that meet the needs of most wildlife.

## **Designated Routes**

Public comments expressed different perspectives about using the term “designated routes” in the Forest Plans. Some opposed the term, because they felt that the Forest Service would be implementing the Travel Management Rule through the Forest Plans. Others thought it should stay in the Forest Plans to show consistency between the Forest Plans and the national Travel Management Rule (36 CFR 212). After considering these different points of view, Forest Service staff recommend removing the term “designated routes” from the Forest Plans for the Wallowa-Whitman and Malheur National Forests. The rationale is as follows: Subpart B of the Travel Management Rule designates roads, trails, and areas for motor-vehicle use, and until the Malheur and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests complete Subpart B, it may be premature to use the term “designated routes” in those Forest Plans. (The Umatilla National Forest is in a different position, because that Forest completed Subpart B of the Travel Management Rule in 2009.) Nevertheless, staff recognize that the Forest Service is required to manage roads, trails, and areas consistent with the laws, policies, and regulations governing the National Forest Transportation System, including the Travel Management Rule. Forest Service staff recommend affirming this ongoing requirement in the Forest Plans based on current regional and national direction.