

**USFS Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision Meeting | March 17, 2014 | John Day, OR**

*Notetaker: Zack Ambrose, EnviroIssues*

*Approximate Attendance: 100*

*Questions (Q), Responses (R), and Comments (C)*

**Q: If I'm not ready to comment tonight, who would I talk to when I am or when I have questions?**

*R: There are phone numbers on documents, including a "Guide to Commenting" at the comment table, there are phone numbers on business cards where you'll reach Forest Service staff who can help steer you in the right direction. We are going to be taking questions at all of the meetings and create a "frequently asked questions" document for the website, too.*

**Q: Will the presentation be available on the web?**

*R: Yes, it will be on the web soon.*

**Q: Are you saying that roads won't be closed as part of this decision?**

*R: The forest plan does not close any roads or trails.*

**Q: Doesn't John Laurence say that the forest plan is the foundation for closing roads?**

*R: I have not heard John Laurence say that the plan is the foundation for closing roads. The plan is the foundation for designating management areas that could be non-motorized. The site specific plans and the transportation plans actually determine open and closed roads.*

**Q: The plan is not site-specific, yet it says that Greenhorn area can be proposed as a wilderness area?**

*R: The plan recommends wilderness, but the existing uses remain until the wilderness is designated by Congress, if it ever does. The plan incorporates all of the uses or activities in the wilderness areas that are currently grandfathered-in until Congress designates wilderness.*

**Q: The plan talks about changing the amount of roads per square mile of forest, specifically reducing mileage in certain areas. Even though it is not a designation, it is a reduction.**

*R: The plan is aspirational, with desired conditions; it does not close any roads. When we get to site-specific analysis, we'll need specific / substantial comments from the public.*

**Q: At what point do we become concerned with which road will be closed or open? If the plan doesn't do this, what does?**

*R: We will meet with users during a site-specific analysis, and decide which roads should be open, closed, built, etc... We can get you on a mailing list to be involved in those discussions, and you can tell us now about specific areas of interest for you.*

**Q: The forest plan isn't the mechanism to open and close roads, but it is the portal by which future decisions could be contemplated?**

*R: Yes*

**Q: Since activities can continue in areas that are being recommended as potential wilderness, does that mean timber harvesting can be maintained in these areas?**

*R: Due to the high cost of infrastructure to harvest timber in inventoried roadless areas, there isn't a huge impact on that volume of timber harvesting as we wouldn't likely harvest in these areas. Most of the inventoried roadless areas were analyzed in 1992. In some areas, there were timber harvest areas identified through the 1990 plan. It is important to comment about special areas that are important to you and tell us why that area is important to you if the management areas aren't consistent with the uses you have enjoyed previously– it may be because you've camped there before etc., these are the types of comments that help us understand why certain changes affect you.*

**Q: Has there been any attempt to address fire salvage in the future?**

*R: The plan doesn't specifically address it. One thing that is helpful is the current farm bill that allows us to salvage harvest areas. Management areas suitable to timber harvest and timber production are identified in the plan. There are certain guidelines about how much dead timber we should leave related to fire salvage.*

**Q: In regards to the recommended wilderness, the current plan also had recommended wilderness. How many of these areas in the current plan are still recommended for this next plan?**

*R: The current plan doesn't recommend wilderness. In 1990, potential areas had just been identified and more areas were not recommended at that time. In the new plan, we are proposing to recommend wilderness areas.*

**Q: How many people are still working on the plan from 7 years ago?**

*R: Only one person has been on the team since the beginning. Just because people have retired and moved on doesn't mean planning has stopped, it is the very nature of this long-term process. New team members take the previous person's analysis, incorporate public comments and create the EIS.*

**Q: The understanding of the forest staff is not from the beginning of the plan?**

*R: Absolutely. You in the room have more information about the forest, and that's why we need to hear your comments.*

**Q: This is a forest plan revision for the big picture. You stated that you are looking at this at a local level. How do you combine the visions of three forests while making it tailored for individual forests?**

*R: The team gets to attend all of the meetings and hear the comments across the board. They are able to see consistency or discrepancies. What allows us to be unique is that each forest will have a record of decision and an individual forest plan. This helps us to be site-specific for each forest. We're doing one big analysis for the forest but individual plans will tier from that analysis to allow us to be specific to each area.*

**Q: That means each forest could have different approaches to address the same problems?**

*R: I think the process allows us to be unique. We try to be consistent so that it isn't a "penalty" here and a "reward" over there for similar actions. It is important for you to make those specific comments for each forest.*

**Q: At the end of the comment process, is there an opportunity to challenge the decision?**

*R: We are using the objection process. After the comments, there is a draft decision and you are able to object. We will sit and talk with you and take your concerns into consideration and try to resolve them before the decision is final.*

**Q: Have you used this process before?**

*R: Yes, we used it on the Emigrant Creek project last fall.*

**Q: Is Alternative E the preferred alternative?**

*R: Yes*

**Q: Can the Malheur designate wilderness study areas?**

*R: I don't know that for certain. I know that the BLM has areas. It is a Congressional action to designate wilderness study areas. The Forest Service does not have that authority.*

**Q: Did you use budget constraints or anticipated constraints, and did you feel like you had to, when creating the alternatives?**

*R: Yes we did and yes we didn't. Most of the budget is considered flat and was used for Alternatives A,B,C. Alternative D had no constraints on vegetation treatments. Alternative E and F looked at doubling the outputs for forest restoration.*

**Q: I'm encouraging you to not let budgets constrain you in the planning process.**

*R: We agree. The pace and scale we are moving at has an amount of risk; budget or otherwise.*

**Q: I think folks need to understand that comments need to be specific because if you want to file an objection later it does make a difference.**

*R: To have standing, you have to have a substantive comment recorded – here or through other means. If you have a doubt, put a substantive comment in with your contact information and you will have standing to object when that draft decision is released.*

**Q: When does the old-tree criteria change? 150 years? 160 years?**

*R: I don't think there's a magic year – the plan is to look at old age characteristics to determine an old tree. It's not age and it's not size. If you have comments about that, please let us know.*

**Q: With the site specific areas, in making decisions about roads, is safety vehicle access considered? Is there a conversation with the county court?**

*R: When we get to this point, we do meet with the county court / sheriff's department. In an emergency situation, please go behind the closed road to save people. As a follow-up to an incident, we can discuss what should happen next regarding road access.*

**Q: You say our input is important, but we've seen over the last 20 years that the forest planning process has not translated into on-the-ground management. How can we trust that our comments tonight will be heard?**

*R: That's the razor-wire that we walk as public land managers. I can't comment on anything that's happened in the past but I know since I arrived here, through the Galina project, we heard specific projects that people wanted and tried to modify the plan based on these comments. That's why we're taking these questions and comments right now to inform the plan. We do have a table just for this purpose. If you want to be effective, it might be helpful to run it by our staff and see if you're on the right track. If it's site-specific it may not be under this plan. We're really at a strategic level with this plan to guide the future management of the forest.*

**Q: "For the Greater Good," Economic, Social, Environmental – Who is the greater good for?**

*R: The expression comes from the founder of the Forest Service, Gifford Pinchot. It's the greatest good for everyone. The direct impact is with the people who live here. That's why we've increased our timber production to support Grant County. You are directly impacted.*

**Q: The frustration is that the things we want to do here do not have more standing than someone from somewhere else.**

*R: The local comments are generally more meaningful to us.*

**C: Folks that don't live here don't have to live under the impacts of the forest conditions.**

**C: Our unemployment has affected our schools, our government – people need to be involved. We can't find people to volunteer for fire departments or jails. Our unemployment is through the roof and we have so much public land that could be put to use and jobs created.**

*R: I agree. We've tried to increase the pace and scale of our program here. I agree with you 100%. I hear the stories and we're trying to actively engage and take people into account.*

**C: One of the other things that comes to mind – the cities are coming to the counties for money and are broke. We're timber dependent and logging is not a pastime, cattle grazing is not a pastime and we are public land dependent and do not need any more restrictions.**

*R: We recognize that. We authorize more cattle than any other forest. We have a start and will certainly take your comments into account.*

**Q: Have you seen a road that has been closed for ten years? How many days will it take to cut the road back? Why not leave those roads open? Let citizens cut them back if it means keeping the roads open.**

*R: We'd love help maintaining our roads - we'd love for the county to help. The roads that are used and available for the public are remaining open. The ones that you're describing will take time if it needs to be reopened.*

**Q: Why don't we increase timber sales and dispersing the money from them rather than taking money from the government? Why wouldn't the Forest Service want to increase timber sales?**

*R: We are implementing timber sales, but the returns are not that robust. The money isn't there as much as it used to be. During the sales, the timber purchasers maintain the roads. We are gradually increasing our timber targets.*

**Q: What is being done about big game habitat? I'm concerned that harvesting all of the timber decreases the habitat. Years ago we used to manage our timber and thin trees. Now they're cutting them down for fire control. We need to go back to leaving some habitat for our game animals, especially mule deer. We need some escape cover.**

*R: We're trying to increase our activities across a broader swath of the forest to increase habitat.*

**C: A lot of the timber harvesting is not taking habitat into consideration.**

*R: We have project design criteria that are supposed to take this into consideration.*

**C: Wilderness is designated by Congress but that map comes from the Forest Service. How many logs were pulp logs and not subsidized? I think we should return to a system of cutting larger trees.**

**Q: What's the difference between roadless and wilderness areas? We use some of those areas for snowmobiling.**

*R: Roads are different than over-the-snow travel. Over-the-snow travel is acceptable in some of the inventoried roadless areas in the preferred alternatives; however over-the-snow travel is not*

*allowed in wilderness. There is no impact to the over-the-snow travel as of now because site-specific NEPA still needs to occur, including public engagement.*

**C: Why we can't log hasn't been addressed tonight. It's not the Forest Service, it's the environmentalists. If we don't do something about the environmentalists, than nothing will get better. No game – we can't blame that on the Forest Service. The Game Commission is why we don't have game.**

**Q: What's the deal with roadless areas with roads in them?**

*R: There are roads in certain portions of our inventoried roadless areas. These could be historical roads that are grown over or they are roads that could be used regularly.*

**C: I live near the recommended wilderness areas in Alternative C, and there are open roads that would be affected.**

**C: I've heard a lot of people talk about a lot of different things and how this impacts them. I'm a representative of the Blue Mountain Forest Partners. For those of you that are very passionate about the forest, we're having these types of conversations to find a win-win-win for all of us. We want to let you know that you're always welcome to join our meetings.**

**Q: Where do our comments go? Who is making the decisions? What's the local decision piece of this?**

*R: The folks in blue [Forest Service Plan Revision Team] will analyze specific comments for their resource areas. They synthesize and present them to the forest supervisors. The forest supervisors make a recommendation along with the team to the regional forester, who signs the decision based on this analysis. It's not just this team but also other analysts.*

**Q: As a forest supervisor, does Steve have a say?**

A: Yes.

**C: This forest once supported six sawmills. What has happened to John Day? This forest could produce the same amount of timber. Timber, cattle, mining are what we have here. I want to see these resources used.**

**Q: Who do we send our comments to after this meeting?**

*R: You can bring it to the front desk of Forest Service offices and we will get it to the appropriate people.*