

USFS Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision Meeting | March 19, 2014 | Long Creek, OR

Notetaker: Zack Ambrose, EnviroIssues

Approximate Attendance: 20

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

C: Thank you for putting in the amount of time you have to do this plan. I've never seen anything this large and detailed. I know that on page 126, it says "no adverse civil rights are anticipated to populations or communities," and with that I would take some exception. While the entire document appears to be transparent with detail, my question has to do with the category of access. I know over the last 15 years there have been approximately 2,000 miles of roads closed on the Malheur out of 11,000 miles of total roads. I know that the document says that there is some issue between roads, water, and watersheds, and the closing roads to affect water quality is minimum. Road closures are a big issue and this dovetails into my question: the document seems to be missing a critical element, which is any definition or exposition of Agenda 21. When I spoke to the Forest Service a few years back, the Forest Service was implementing Agenda 21. I'd like to see that every definition and every aspect of Agenda 21 be made apparent so the public is aware. I realize that the project covers 50-70 years. I consider this document to be extremely important and that there is a balance between people and the environment.

R: Your last statement about balancing people and environment is what we are trying to achieve. Thank you for your comment.

C: I'd like to have that noted as an objection.

R: You need to submit a substantive in order for you to have standing to object when the time comes.

Q: Do the standards in the proposed forest plan follow national regulations?

R: Yes.

Q: Along with that, does the plan follow the local laws and do they have equal standing with national laws? Grant County has a Road Closure Ordinance that I brought to you on Monday night. I'd like to read it for you (commenter *proceeded to read the ordinance*), "...for the safety of Grant County, shall remain open consistent with Grant County Plans unless authorized to be closed by the Grant County Court." I want to make sure that this document is included in the plan as it is the law in Grant County, Oregon.

R: Thank you for your comment.

C: The road closures are mismanagement. I don't think you're doing a good job.

R: We want to hear your comments to improve the plan.

C: You can't just leave big trees and leave the land like it is, it will burn.

R: These comments are the reason that our timber targets are increasing. We recognize the need to increase the pace and scale of our restoration process.

Q: So you are not going to close roads after logging activities? Is there going to be a tradeoff between access to roads and logging?

R: We have to maintain an infrastructure in order to log, and we can't close roads to do that. We have temporary roads that we create for logging and I don't think there is a tradeoff. We couldn't provide all of these activities if we did that.

Q: Why is the area behind our property blocked off? The Forest Service has blocked the road and I can't access it because it is considered a non-motorized use area. I'm concerned that once logging is over the roads will be closed.

R: The plan does not cover these site-specific projects. You are able to comment about the criteria for site specific plans through this process however.

Q: I'm concerned about road closures.

R: You are talking about a specific area where some of the roads that are adjacent to streams that cause sediment to these streams will be decommissioned. New roads will be built to provide access. This is our conceptual idea. We're trying to manage the roads but still want to maintain access to the area.

Q: There are guidelines in the plan to help us manage grazing areas, and this guideline is really low. The utilization of streams is going to be close to 40% without the impact of cattle. We have to be careful. I understand that these are guidelines.

R: I've asked the team to consider the biological opinion but please comment about this specifically.

Q: During the 90-day comment period, all of us are going to submit substantive comments. What's the process after the 90-day comment period, for incorporating our comments into the document, and for the record of decision?

R: The initial phase will include a content analysis where we will group the comments and try to create responses to help people understand the specifics of our answers. We will then start working with the forest leadership teams to discuss the nuances and decide whether comments are addressed through another alternative or if we should modify the preferred alternative. We will be working with our regional office at that point. We want to have a robust plan and evaluate it as best as possible over the course of a year. Once we have an alternative or modify the preferred alternative, we will explain our reasoning to the public. We're hoping it will be done over a year or year and half, depending on the length of the analysis process. The key is

that the content analysis will group similar comments together that will be addressed by the team, while truly unique comments will be addressed separately.

Q: I remember when the forest had a good supply of logs for three mills and the forest was healthy. Now we're down to one mill.

R: We're trying to increase timber production from 29 million to 75 million board feet in 2015, and manage the forest better. I agree with you that when we can manage the forest better, it will prevent devastating fires.

Q: Is the 75 million board feet made up of all saw logs?

R: No, you can't cut all of the same type of logs – you have to cut a variety to make the forest healthy.

Q: I noticed in the preferred alternative that grazing won't be reduced. I was specifically looking for references to the wild horses. They are feral horses and I think the Oregon Game Commission would go along with that. Those feral horses are having a direct impact to grazing. These horses need to be addressed or they will become like the wolves or the spotted owl. They are moving into Bear Valley and will start coming across the mountain and will have an impact everywhere.

R: The forest plan is the broad umbrella document. We're under a judge's order to gather the horses and keep them in this range. We are complying with that order.

Q: The forest plan goes into great detail about climate change and mentions that there is an increase in the CO2 level in the forest, but there is no source in the document that indicates where this information came from.

R: There are dozens of papers on CO2 levels and effects, and we are using data from NOAA. These are being used by the people who are talking about climate change. The data is posted on the NOAA website and you can access it. We're looking at 400ppm currently, and it is expected to double within my lifetime.

Q: Do the studies say what the source of the CO2 is?

R: Humans. Forest fires are a big part of it but it is mostly the burning of fossil fuels.

C: The source needs to be cited in the plan.

Q: A small portion of land is being set aside for a possible wilderness area? There are over 90,000 acres of wilderness proposed over three forests. How many board feet of timber will be impacted by these wilderness areas?

R: I don't know the exact number. The overlap of the wilderness areas is nearly 100% with current inventoried roadless areas. We have to get approval from the Chief of the Forest Service

to harvest timber in these areas, and there is a very small chance that it would be approved. Timber does exist there, but commercially harvesting these areas is difficult to justify.

Q: Once it's locked into wilderness it is not accessible. Do you have the exact number of acres of these timbered areas?

R: I don't have those numbers.

Q: Where are the details on what can be logged and where it can be logged?

R: Patty would be able to discuss this with you and could point you to the right place. She could provide you some resources that would cover the specifics.

Q: What are wildlife corridor areas and how are they managed?

R: Wildlife corridors are not designated on the Malheur. Wildlife corridors are a small amount of land with special management to connect isolated pieces of the North Fork John Day Wilderness together. When managing in these corridors you have to consider wildlife movement – you can still harvest and have roads, but they can't interfere with wildlife movement.

Q: Does the forest plan currently, or will it include, internal management? Things like project selection, how many staff are needed, etc.?

R: It provides us with the desired condition. Indirectly it influences staffing. Based on the management objectives, we would be staffing up for specific projects to meet these objectives and they help create our program of work over ten years or on a yearly basis. There are a number of ways to meet those objectives.

C: My comment would be to include provisions in the plan to accomplish these objectives.

R: We have funding from Congress, but we are also looking at other methods for funding. Nothing is prescribed, which allows us to be flexible.

C: If you state in writing in the plan that you will balance the projects with the facilities / human resources then you are protecting yourself and you are planning better.

R: There are some wage estimates, but it's not a guarantee that we will receive that funding from Congress. These are based on a baseline and if we get the funding to support that work then we will accomplish that work. One of the things that I'm excited about is that we have been able to increase the pace and scale of our restoration on the Malheur. If we don't have to spend half of our budget on fire suppression, then we have a bit more breathing room to accomplish other work.

Q: I know in the plan you mention multiple uses - it's about time. Can you add that back to the forest entrance signs?

R: The Multiple Use Act still applies and we are still the “land of multiple uses.”

Q: One thing that concerns me is the old forest component, which generally means you’re going to try to grow big trees. We can’t grow and save these kinds of trees without disrupting the timber sale program that you have. In order to reach historic stands, you will save certain trees and burn the others. We cannot afford to not manage these kinds of trees. I’m concerned with how this is defined.

R: There is an effort across the Forest Service to examine how we achieve these types of old forest goals. I think there is a change underway.

Q: Managing toward historic stands does not let you do that. You have to reconcile that in the forest plan.

R: Please talk with the vegetation specialist in the open house.