

**USFS Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision Meeting | March 25, 2014 | Baker City, OR**

*Notetaker: Melissa Thom, EnviroIssues*

*Approximate Attendance: 150*

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

**Q: Should I make my comments specific to each forest or can I address all three? Can I comment on what I like about the different alternatives?**

*R: Comments can be made by forest or for all forests, just be specific about which forest you are talking about when you address specifics. In telling us what you do and do not like about the alternatives, be as specific as you can about your rationale and propose a solution.*

**C: When the John Day Wilderness was made, Senator Hatfield spoke about it and there weren't supposed to be buffer zones and now there are buffer zones in roadless areas. The Dutch Flat area, if it becomes wilderness, will extend to the North Fork, and there is some of the Umatilla that will extend into the North Fork. Understood from Hatfield that that was a compromise and wouldn't change. Your staff here tonight is very young so they don't remember the bill that we worked hard on. How can you justify making more wilderness when there was a compromise and Senator Hatfield allotted that much wilderness then, why more?**

*R: Different alternatives responded to comments that came in, and some people didn't want any more wilderness and some wanted a lot more. The different alternatives have different recommended wilderness.*

**C: We do not need any more wilderness; we have way too much as it is.**

**Q: Baker County prepared Alternative D, so please consider it as a comparison to Alternative E. We have requested an additional 90 days in the comment period to review the document. Would the Forest Service consider holding a meeting mid-way through the comment period to clarify our issues before we prepare our comments?**

*R: We will work with the regional forester to extend the comment period. Though we do not have any other firm public engagement plans, there will be lots of time for further discussions throughout the comment period. We are also tracking common themes we've heard in the meetings and will provide that information on our website. If any specific issues come up a lot, we could hold a workshop around that topic.*

**Q: Under themes, what do you consider a viable community?**

*R: Vibrant community, but viable too. We live here too, so what I think is that a community that is vibrant and has services, whether big or small. Do people want to live and work here, send their kids to school, can we shop locally, new housing, real estate market, etc.*

**Q: If a community sends their school children into Baker City, would that still be viable?**

*R: I'm not exactly sure what the terms are, but whether a community is self sustaining, so a town could be viable even when you pool your school system.*

**Q: I'm concerned about transparency of the expenditures. Where can we get a cost breakdown on what's being spent on this EIS, this plan, research, etc.? I want a clear picture of how many millions of dollars are being spent here, as a tax payer.**

*R: It's your money; it's available to the public. We try to answer budget questions, and anything is freely available because of FOIA. Call the Forest Service office and we will provide you the resources.*

**C: The budget needs to be broken down and ready for the public at all times.**

**Q: Minerals are not addressed in the plan – how does the plan reflect statutory requirements and demonstrate how you will comply with CFR requirements for mining, sustainable timber use, and other resources?**

*R: Appendix D outlines our legal framework and which rules will be followed for each resource.*

**Q: Does this plan follow RS2477 road and continue to allow access along those roads?**

*R: This plan is not site-specific, but we do work with counties on RS2477 roads.*

**C: Roads are the jurisdiction of the County, and can't be closed by the Forest Service's plan.**

**C: I want to speak to transparency and accountability. We have a nice building on the thorough-fare, but this location was chosen for a purpose because people don't know where it is. Releasing this document on March 14<sup>th</sup> and then having first public meeting on March 17<sup>th</sup> – there is no time to regroup on 1,200 pages.**

**Q: Who inventoried the roadless areas and who determined that they are roadless?**

*R: Inventoried roadless areas were identified through a mapping exercise and evaluation process; this information was used in designating areas in the 1970s and 1980s.*

**Q: So at the time you mapped there were no roads there?**

*R: By definition they are roadless, even if there are some roads.*

**Q: What is the definition of climate change and how was it used throughout the proposed plan?**

*R: Climate change is what is taking place in earth's climate over the long term. We have gone through many changes over history of the earth, so climate is long term record of weather. As it changes, whether warming or cooling - that's climate change. Anyone can look up types of changes in climate and precipitation, and the consensus on that is what we're using. We will continue to see change throughout the century. That's the bottom line, and each resource section shows how those changes will affect the specific resources.*

**Q: Thank you for considering an extended comment period. Is there any hidden information or information not included about Alternative D? Because it looks pretty good. Is anything in Alternative D illegal, meaning you wouldn't actually be able to do it?**

*R: If we implement these plans, whatever is selected, we like to see those things happen in the alternatives to help us get to desired condition faster. Nothing in the alternatives is illegal. In Alternative D, the riparian buffer zones are based on Oregon State Practice Rules rather than the Aquatic Riparian Conservation Strategy, but for anything we would like to do would have to do site specific NEPA. I believe we could choose the Oregon rules as a management tool. If we want to go in riparian, we have guidelines for making advances in different ways. Alternative D has specific requirements for management areas, the differences and comparisons; it has different management areas than Alternatives E and F based on different constituent interests. In Alternative D the backcountry is motorized and no recommended wilderness. Look to try to distinguish between alternatives, as well as the standards and guides, which are kind of light in D, but E and F address more specific concerns. The nuances – we lean towards E because it's more of a balance between the ranges of what people are asking for. Appendix A is the best source for how to compare alternatives to demonstrate suitability, objectives in different forests etc.*

**Q: Did the Forest Service take into consideration or use comments provided during the previous travel management period to write this document, or was that separate process? Were the comments used in this plan and if so how?**

*R: They were not used in detail because it's a different process. The different desired conditions in the plans were influenced by the travel management comments, but the site-specific comments on travel management don't apply to the scale of the plans.*

**Q: How many amendments have been made since the 1990 plan and are those being considered for this plan?**

*R: 40-50 amendments since 1990. The no action alternative in the DEIS, Alternative A, that's the current forest plan, as amended, as it is currently operating.*

**Q: Is there an alternative that protects our right to open access to the forest other than Alternative A?**

*R: The alternatives don't make decisions about closing or opening anything.*

**Q: But they do designate routes or areas where no motorized travel is allowed?**

*R: The wildlife corridor has something about designated snow mobile routes for winter use.*

**Q: What about designated motorized access routes?**

*R: That has to be a different process, but the document sets the desired conditions.*

**C: I do not feel the Forest Service is meeting the original mandate of the agency. NEPA of 1969 requires that all major forests or actions affecting the human environment be analyzed for the proposed management actions to be considered. The alternatives don't meet that. Desired condition should read this way... Affordable and efficiently managed. The Army came to stop disruption and conflict between users... A system of roads and paths facilitate uses and protect human use of Eastern Oregon. The Blue Mountains have historic value. What kind of process asks for legitimate comments and then tells people to sit down?**

**Q: If you choose at the end of this point a particular alternative, what keeps you from using site specific to go back in and change something or close or make more wilderness to your heart's content? What happens with site specific actions after an alternative has been chosen? This plan has no close or open on road access, which is your opinion, but that sounds like a pat answer that is like a quote that has to be stated.**

*R: The standards and guidelines determine what we have to do, and once we adopt a plan we have to move toward the desired condition. Site specific analysis has to demonstrate how we use that desired condition. If we want to use something other than a particular standard then we have to amend the plan.*

**Q: What might crop up in a plan that doesn't let you do what it says it does?**

*R: The plan was amended in the past to include protectable forest and changes in timber harvest, for example. That's in the plan and every time we want to cut something bigger than what's currently provided (21" diameter limits); we have to amend the plan because we don't have flexibility to manage forest based on new information. We don't want to amend the plan much more. Ambiguity exists because we're operating at different scales. Project level plans have to demonstrate how they're meeting the plan.*

**Q: How is the Forest Service honoring Section 8 of the MOU between the Forest Service and Baker County? Baker County has sovereignty – how is the Forest Service honoring this?**

*R: We have to abide by the laws of the United States.*

**Q: Why are you hosting a meeting in Portland when they don't live here? How do they fit into the restrictions you place on the forests? Portland is a different habitat and they are environmentalists.**

## **Second Round**

**Q: Is the access to federal land a right or a privilege?**

*R: Federal land belongs to all of us. You have a right to use public lands but no one is in favor of abusing our natural resources, so the question is how do we protect and provide access at the same time.*

**C: All of our communities are viable. Historically, mining, grazing, we're losing that. What are you able to do to sustain these uses? You talk about increasing timber but 5% isn't very much. As a business man, I can't open a \$20 million mill based on "maybe" or "it's possible." The economy, everyone here represents an economy of their household. We want our economic opportunities back. But every time you designate wilderness it takes away opportunity and tax base. We have agreement to pay taxes on sale of timber or in lieu of taxes. Our school systems are suffering, jobs, and we know how hard you are trying to accomplish this, but we are all facing losses, so to the best of your efforts, need to stop lawsuits or have congress pay property tax on wilderness and that will stop it.**

**Q: Why doesn't the Forest Service ever bring up mining? They respond to questions about it but they don't bring it up themselves and why is that?**

*R: We are involved in mining right now, filling two open mining positions on the Whitman Ranger District and provide for mining operations on the North Fork. We don't talk about it publically but we do talk about it. We've met with corporate miners and others as well.*

**Q: What is the difference between your policies and the laws?**

*R: There are laws that govern us and then policies and regulations that we tier down from that. Regulations are what the Forest Service imposes on themselves.*

**Q: How many mining plans of operation has the Forest Service approved in 2013 or 2014?**

*R: Twelve-thirteen in the past two years. We have a mining plan of operation starting on the North Fork and 49 other plans of operation.*