

USFS Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision Meeting | March 31, 2014 | Portland, OR

Notetaker: Melissa Thom, EnviroIssues

Approximate Attendance: 50

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

Q&A/Comments

Q: I'm concerned because the Forest Service has been and will continue to use modeled suitable habitat in lieu of actual population studies to determine how focal species are doing, which is supposed to show how other species are doing. What is the actual management difference between focal species and management designations? Why the change and how does it fit under the National Forest Management Act? Will population studies be used to demonstrate viability threshold and etc.?

R: There are required indicators for focal species, which are for habitats only. We don't measure populations well. I encourage you to speak with our wildlife specialist in the open house.

Q: How are focal species addressed in the alternatives and do focal species become management indicator species?

R: They are addressed in the alternatives, and focal species do not become management indicator species. There are only three focal species for each forest. We used around 20 focal species for the viability analysis.

Q: Are any roads included in the proposed wilderness areas for Alternative E?

R: I don't believe so. Most of the recommended wilderness came out of our roadless area maps. For management area 3A, we will continue to refine the maps. In the FEIS we can adjust boundaries as needed to allow necessary access.

Q: We've been noticing on our drive to the coast, a lot of closed roads that are not allowing public access. Why are these forests being closed to us? Who is really getting access to the lands?

R: You're noticing variability among who has done travel management planning already. Some forests have implemented TM so they have gate closures, etc., which can be done individually for a project, and sometimes roads are closed for specific reasons and then opened again. There are seasonal closures because of wildlife and hunting concerns, etc.

C: The public isn't getting access to those lands.

R: That depends on the TM rule. For example, a seasonal closure for wildlife might mean not allowing vehicle use during wildlife mating seasons. Sometimes closures are for resource protection and hazards, etc.

Q: How much does this project cost?

R: The whole planning process costs \$770,000 for this year for the three national forests.

C: Most use of these forests is from people outside Eastern Oregon. There are 14 public meetings and this is the only one in Willamette Valley? I suggest you expand to Salem or Eugene.

Q: In our lifetime we will be threatened for adequate access to drinking water. In the alternatives you have watershed management under ecological value?

R: It's under economic well-being as well.

Q: What's the dollar value to the communities for clean water?

R: The economic analysis is in the plan – not sure economic value of water is there. But managing watersheds is a high priority. We want to protect and manage lands to protect that flow. We want to ensure our mission of clean and high quality water.

C: Water should be listed as a value under economic well-being as it's a benefit. Thank you for the great presentation.

Q: For wilderness recommendations, did you also look at trails and old roads used by snowmobiles during the winter?

R: We looked at currently designated routes and the matrix for suitable uses shows what would be suitable in the wilderness.

Q: Does that include over the snow vehicles?

R: Yes, those are included.

Q: How many man-hours are spent in a general forest and how many spent from the public in the wilderness? How much use occurs in wilderness and how much in general forest areas? How many hours are people out there?

R: General forest is far more populated with users.

C: You're looking at making more wilderness, but the use of the forest is increasing and the places we can access is getting smaller.

C: There is so much history in the WW Forest, with old gold mines and activities we've had since before the FS even existed. We're losing that access to history and the Forest Service is destroying roads that were opened and old mines that took out 127,000 ounces of gold in three years. You folks have taken the signs down, and we feel that we are losing our history. You're not paying attention to old county roads, which are RS2477 designated and used for hauling commercial products out of the area. We are losing that part of our history and it's very important.

R: History is important and important in our plan. I hope you look at how it's treated in there and give us some advice.

Q: I'm concerned about scrapping of the 21-inch diameter restriction. If you scrap that and base it on old growth, how will you provide for viability of small mammals and others that are depended on large trees?

R: We need to restore the old forest conditions that were there. We have been amending the forest plan when we try to remove trees that aren't necessarily old but do impose a threat because of increased fire severity. The idea there is to give us some flexibility for old growth wherever it occurs. Want to manage for old trees wherever they occur.

C: There's not a clear set of guidelines or distinctions between moist mixed conifer and dry pine, and they don't have the same thinning needs. Science doesn't back thinning in mixed conifer the same way it does in dry forest. We could lose big conifers which are not a threat and are habitat for animals that are in a deficit.

R: The division of management of areas that you are suggesting is typically done at the project level. We would apply different descriptions as called for. We can go in and thin to reduce fire risk in dry pine; there are some cool moist areas there that you may or may not propose treatment based on what it looks like. The plan level is to advise on desired conditions, while site specific treatments occur on the ground at the project level.

Q: I'm equally concerned that there is significant shortage of old growth, so then why more flexibility to cut timber? What happened to the Malheur NF and why is there so much general forest and so little recommended wilderness there? There is not a lot of balance there. Our members are concerned that the area won't be protected by this plan.

R: I'm not familiar with those details on the Malheur, but the management areas are derivative of inventoried roadless areas. Good candidates for wilderness are addressed in the range of alternatives. The balance may not be as well represented on the Malheur in this alternative. I suggest you speak with the specialists during the open house.

Q/C: I have been going out to NE Oregon to backpack, bike, birding, etc. and have spent a lot of money there. So I'm interested in the economic analysis in the DEIS. I think it's good to compare recent past conditions up to today, but it doesn't look at the arc of where economics and demographics of the region is going. What assumptions do you make today about jobs in the area changing inevitably over time? Forest jobs aren't what they used to be with automation and de-unionization. It takes more timber to produce the same income. What will that look like 5-10-15 years from now? The DEIS assumes jobs will be created now, but I'm not sure. Demographics are changing and there will be new values there. DEIS should take more account of that. FS budgets, too, road mileage exploded in 1980, doubled. Most of those roads should have been closed and you didn't have the budget to handle it properly. What's the likelihood of budgets in the future to manage?

R: The economic analysis isn't spot on with predicting how many jobs. It's useful to compare among the alternatives for what the alternatives will do. We're concerned about maintaining the forest industry sector to complete the restoration work we believe needs to be done. We work in

a forest collaborative and there are zones of agreement about what needs to be done. We don't want to lose the infrastructure because when they tried to restore ecological integrity in Arizona, the first thing they needed to do was convince someone to open a mill. Can't predict what will happen, but we still have the infrastructure that we believe will support the work that needs to be done. I'm an optimist about the budget; I have to think about the mission of the FS and Gifford Pinchot had it right about greatest good. I have to be able to put my evaluation of what may and may not happen with budgets aside. We will do the most important work first.

Q: Is recommended wilderness treated as wilderness until Congress designates it?

R: I think certain activities can continue in recommended wilderness even after it's designated. Probably couldn't do a huge timber sale, but the way it's currently being used would continue.

Q: So while the land is in recommended status, any over-snow-vehicle activity is still allowed?

R: Yes. We've spoken about it not becoming wilderness as soon as it's recommended, and I think there are examples of this. Need to maintain the status quo.

Q: Does this plan close roads to 1.5 miles per square mile?

R: That's a desired condition for wildlife corridor management areas and will take a while to get to. We want to use process orientation and not density measuring. Looking at how roads connect across the landscape and look for bad actors rather than use road density. There are densities in there now related to wildlife, but anything to get down to that would have to go through site-specific analysis. Want to go that way because lots of places where road density is 1.5 miles and a problem and other areas where it's more than that but it's functioning well. We want to build on identifying the process so the ecosystem functions correctly.

Q: Is there a chapter and verse or article and section with Constitution that gives the federal government rights over state sovereignty and the lands of who actually owns them? What from the constitution provides that right?

R: It's been decided by the Supreme Court.

Q: The interpretation of state and federal constitutions should be understood by all citizens. When we're talking about ownership of land, go back to the creation itself and where it says in the scripture that the lord is the owner. For your research and analysis, you should search out the scriptures as well as what our constitution states. It should be included. Is scripture and constitution in the plan?

R: No.

Q: One of my concerns is about the research. 80 percent of use of the forest comes from local residents, is that correct?

R: I won't argue that. But I don't know off the top of my head.

Q: In reading through the document, I went through the 2010 proposed action, and there have been tweaks. Page 104 of the current plan says reduce road densities, which means closing roads, and reducing hydrological impacts from the road system. There are 35 miles of road surface treated, and “closed or obliterated” was the phrase in the former action. If we treat or close those roads, how will that affect local economies and citizens?

R: It would depend on where they were and what maintenance level they currently are and the effect on the resource. Areas where we are going in and treating roads, whether that's closing or fixing them to provide different access and understanding where people need to go and how they get there, that's a site specific decision. Those locations will vary by forest and that gets taken into account then.

Q: Oregon Wild said we need more balance and I agree. Maybe we can go back to Congress and get some wilderness de-designated on the WWNF? Because we have too much of it already. Has Congress ever de-designated before?

R: I don't pretend to speak for congress, so I don't know. I suggest you contact your congressman and see how the process works.

C: When I was a kid, in the 1960s the first wilderness was designated. We thought it was great and that was plenty. It's huge on the map; there's nothing left other than wilderness. We don't have anything left. We need to take some of this back. That's balance.

Q: There's a modest amount of addition for wilderness proposed. What's the number of wilderness currently and the percentage increase proposed?

R: In the preferred alternative, 90,000 acres recommended to add on for Congress to consider in addition to the one million acres already designated wilderness.

Q: Your modest increase is about 9% then?

R: Yes. Alternative C would add 550,000 additional acres, so it's important to compare the alternatives.

C: Regarding the Malheur NF - a small amount is proposed, but the Malheur is a very different forest than WWNF both climatically and topographically.

C: Concerning the previous comment about 80 percent of the forests being used by locals - a lot of us moved away for financial reasons and plan to go back for retirement. People have been excluded from meetings that may be away in other states. The forest belongs to us all. I have heard a lot of environmental groups that are well funded and take up the sword for disabled animals, like spotted owls. Who is representing disabled humans in the plans? Do you take people with disabilities into consideration?

R: For the WWNF specifically, we take seriously our ability to provide recreational opportunities regardless of abilities. We are working with local groups to provide better access. In terms of who speaks for the various groups, to a large extent the FS is responsible for looking out for interests of American people in putting together these plans and managing our lands. The plan provides a range of options across the landscape, so now is the time for both user groups and environmental groups to have their chance to comment. There is a chance for everyone, everywhere to have access to the plan and make those comments.

Q: How much money is the federal government providing for this project?

R: Our entire budget comes from the federal government.

Q: How will we pay them back?

R: We are a government entity; we're not a business. We provide a service.

C: It is a business when you provide jobs, and get timber. Business will be included in the plan.

R: Those will be jobs in the private sector, and receipts of timber sales go to the treasury for the most part. Private companies will pay taxes to operate in the forest.

Q: How much money is spent on start up costs, maintenance, and repairs?

R: The budget for the WWNF is \$25 million per year.

Q: If OSV will be allowed in proposed wilderness, how will that change when it's confirmed?

R: If Congress designates wilderness, then wilderness regulations will apply.

Q: The moist mixed conifers - why is this considered only at the project scale, because it's an important habitat over a broad range. It provides habitat for a range of species and we want to manage over broad scales for the desired condition. Need clear designations for what is mixed moist conifer and how to manage for its normal fire regime. It's something to consider moving forward. I'm concerned why you manage at the smaller level.

R: We're proposing our plan at the landscape level. We look at everything that occurs in the watershed. We also look at how the different forest types depart from historic variability. It's mostly old forest but depends on forest type. When managing for anything we look at the historic range of variability.

C: About the forest health in WWNF, I spent my entire life in the WWNF and we have a little beetle running around, the pine beetle. Killing old growth and little trees, it doesn't matter which. I have been on fires where it is critical to keep the roads accessible for fire protection. We have to stop the fire before it gets out of control. If we close the roads, can't get in there to take care of fires, like when lightning strikes constantly in the fall. Important roads stay open for access, fire protection, and to get

the dead trees out. They're dry and need to come out. The forest health has declined in the last 20 years, rapidly, and we have to do something to stop that as a community.

R: One of the major focuses of this plan is restoration of forest health and resiliency. The forest needs to be able to recover its function if there's a disturbance. Some forests have intense replacement regimes, others have severe fires where they didn't used to have extreme regimes. Our fire folks are not shy about expressing their needs for the roads, but we also use different means of delivering fire fighters now. They would just as soon use aerial attack than drive down dangerous road.

C: If you look at the map in Malheur, and the Eagle Cap Wilderness, we need to limit the wilderness. To go to Malheur you can see the country still. I don't have time to go to the Eagle Caps if I have to hike 50 miles in. The Hat Point lookout, if you close the road too much, how many people would see the lookout again? If the roads close, we can't get to those places and have to go where the roads are open. We are out there year-round and it's a common thread for us to see road closures, and it's not impressive. Open roads draw us to an area and we do spend money there.

Q/C: Do you know where the name Whitman came from? Native Americans walked all the way from old Oregon country, headquarters at Lapwai and brought the first missionary Jason Lee. Marcus Whitman is a great pioneer for faith and worked great things with natives. We need to keep our word on things promised from the U.S. government. Since they have national sovereignty, we should have state sovereignty, too, because it's in the constitution. Who does the land belongs to? I commend the management and use of the forest, so thank you for the endeavor to do that. I asked about the scripture because if we know about the book of heaven the natives sought for, clearly there was a flood that destroyed the earth and will be another through fire to purify. Fire will restore all things. In my mind, the managing of all this, would be good to understand to use it properly until the coming of the lord. All will be purged in the fire. Encourage us all to do this right.

C: I do live in Eastern Oregon most of the time. In response to what's been said based on conservation biology - keystone species are essential for the ecosystem who will not survive unless we protect more range land, like bears, lynx, moose and bison, etc.. I'm concerned about other species persisting. Concerned that commercial logging is being classified as restoration, it carries its own impacts. Restoration will double under Alternative E. That means commercial logging will double. That's ecologically unsustainable. Tree size is getting smaller and smaller, so the average size is 10 inches. I'm concerned about not retaining large trees. We all need that large structure, including fish. Increased timber will create a tremendous boom and bust in local communities. We can't base that on saw logs as they are currently defined. Pace and scale of logging is going up significantly. What in the forest plan effort will diversify the economies in Eastern Oregon?

R: We can provide the range of products that can come off the land. I visited the Integrated BioMass Resources facility recently, and they utilize the small timber and products that haven't been able to pay their own way. We need to use the whole set of tools and the appropriate conditions. Hope we can utilize things we haven't been able to in the past, which provides a new

look at the product market. There's a lot of restoration that doesn't have to do with vegetation management, like stream restoration, etc. We're looking at as a whole –the restoration job that needs to be done. Emphasize the commercial aspect and pace and scale. We're hopeful we will be able to maintain the infrastructure by looking at a range of activities.

Q: The DEIS has 759,660 acres of wilderness, and I can't find anywhere on the maps that show current roads and roadless areas. I don't think this reflects the balance of what's been closed to motorized access. How can we get a feel for the balance for what will truly be motorized and non-motorized?

R: We have identified management areas where motorized access is suitable in the Forest Plan. Travel management will evaluate the road system in relation to these management areas. We don't have our travel management map of existing conditions yet; which is a separate NEPA process from Forest Plan revision. When we have our travel management existing conditions maps, we will go out and talk about access on the forest and how it will be provided. For motorized backcountry designation, travel management maps will show the road system that is in that management area. Non-motorized management areas boundaries were drawn specifically to not include roads and areas that are currently being accessed by motorized vehicles. The specifics of what motorized travel will look like in the future will happen over many years.

C: Wilderness.net champions roadless areas, and they have the polygons showing the roadless areas on the map. If you take those numbers and add them on to wilderness, there is currently 79% roadless.

R: Roadless areas are marked on forest maps. Even though they are roadless, some areas of roadless may have roads in them.

C: It's good to hammer out the numbers. The brown on the map is roaded landscape and that's a big part. It's not near 20% but is much higher. The traditional definition of balance is 50/50. On these forests it can't be all logging and road building and it can't be all conservation, so somewhere in the middle is good place to be. Even if you add what you're recommending for wilderness, it will be below 1 million acres, which is part of 5.5 million acres. Please keep in mind what we call balance. To the question of how long does it take to un-designate wilderness – it's not frequently unprotected. From the timeline perspective, when you cut down old growth trees, it takes a century and a half to grow it back. Not everything has to be protected, so we can find a middle ground. No one will get everything they want; we need to truly protect our natural resources.

Second Round

Q: This project costs \$20 million?

R: No, \$25 million is the annual budget for the WWNF. The federal Forest Service budget is around \$5 billion.

Q: Is the land Oregonian or federal land? Do Oregonians lose state rights to the land?

R: Everyone in the country owns the same amount of NF; it's the property of the U.S. You own the same amount of the WWNF as you do in Pennsylvania forests. These are federal lands, just like national parks and BLM land.

C: I'm concerned many are losing their rights because of so much land being taken over by the federal government. I'm seeing how much property and land and regulations are being taken over under federal and then saying well everyone owns it. I do sense and am concerned on how much land is put aside for these parks, Oregon already has a lot. When this happens, probably will, there is more regulation and more pressure on private property owners in the area, will then say you will need their land.

R: Federal lands have been federal property for a long time. The Forest Service started in 1905. A lot of it is land that wasn't taken during homesteading. We're not proposing to take over land that isn't already managed by us for everyone in the country.

Q: What happens during a government shut down? Are there barricades?

R: There's a difference between national parks and national forests, and forests can't really close because we have a lot of roads that run through the forest and can't close them. So during the shut down for us, for instance, I went to work because but no one else could. It depends on the individual place, but specific facilities like campgrounds could be closed. Access roads stay open.

Q: What about the private timber business? Does everyone have an opportunity to bid?

R: We manage the lands for people. Commercial operators come in and bid for the work, mostly. It would be hard for an individual to bid against someone like Boise Cascade. We retain some of the profit for forest funding and the rest gets sent to the treasury. Timber products cannot be shipped immediately overseas; the processing business has to stay in the U.S.

Q: What is going on with all the gate closures?

R: A lot of what you're seeing is probably not even federal forest land. Make sure you're clear on the ownership of the property. Visit your County Assessor's office to learn about specific land ownerships.

Q: State sovereignty is important; how can we make sure we're governing according to the constitution?

R: That's a political issue that you should take up with your representatives.

C: I can't see it being legal for the government to own land when the states have sovereignty in the same way tribes do. It's not the U.S. jurisdiction of land ownership. Want the truth and to do what's right for all.