

**USFS Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision Meeting | April 1, 2014 | Pendleton, OR**

*Notetaker: Melissa Thom, EnviroIssues*

*Approximate Attendance: 80*

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

**Q: What's the difference between an objection process and an appeal process? How does each affect the litigation process?**

*R: The objection process is new for us; it takes place before we make a final decision, whereas an appeal would be after the decision. It helps us work through issues with the community before a decision is made. You can still litigate no matter which process we use.*

**C: Many constituents would require an extension of the comment period for an additional 90 days in order to work through the documents. I encourage Region 6 to extend the comment period. Copies of the DEIS and Proposed Plan will be available for review in the court house starting tomorrow.**

**Q: How do they determine the number of police in the NF? Does anyone in your department relate directly to USDA?**

*R: Yes, we work for the USDA. The Chief of the Forest Service works for the Under Secretary of Agriculture. Tom Tidwell is the Chief of the Forest Service. The number of police is a great question. It's primarily budget driven. And right now the budget is going down.*

**C: Thanks for filling us in on this and for your hard work. Want to comment that after living here my whole life and recreating and working on the forests, I'm concerned about restoration and it's important that this plan focuses on restoration. I want our forest to improve in all ways and hope that's our result over the next decades. Want to leave the forests in a better condition than we got them in, because they were pretty beat up. Want to look way down the road and leave the water as clean as we can, not get stuck on the near-term economics now. In the US, there are 313 million people today, and in these three counties there are 110,000 people. Majority of people in the US are concerned about water and air and restoration. Hope we work towards that together.**

*R: We hope you look at the plan and give us your thoughts.*

**Q: What makes the people on the forest plan team experts? Where can we learn about their expertise and what qualifies them to make these recommendations? The relationship between the Forest Service and the public has become adversarial over the past 20 to 30 years.**

*R: There is a list of document preparers in the DEIS. It includes team education and years of experience.*

**Q: What happens if we don't make comments in the first 90 days?**

*R: If you want standing in the objection process, you need to make a comment during the comment period. Comments allow you to object and litigate later. The people staffing the NEPA/comments table in the Open House can help you with those specifics.*

**Q: Can you clarify the yellow on the map and what it means for motor vehicle use?**

*R: Some is backcountry limited motorized use, like on the South Fork of John Day. Most of it indicates where there are trails, not roads. We could develop some site-specific trail systems in those areas.*

**Q: Many roads have been closed to users. Why?**

*R: Roads are closed on a site-specific basis, and could be because of reducing fuels, supporting elk winter range, or for non-needed roads after timber sales have been completed.*

**Q: I know you had a meeting in Portland. Will people there be able to comment and make decisions about what happens to those of us who actually live here? They don't live here so that's not a fair process.**

*R: People from all over the US can comment.*

**Q: "Preferred" by whom? Does the term "preferred plan" mean you've already decided?**

*R: "Preferred" by the Forest Service – we are required to identify this in the DEIS. We haven't decided anything -- this is just a draft. The draft management plan is based on the preferred alternative and just shows what the plan would look like if Alternative E is selected. There will not be a decision until later in 2015, and we need your feedback to help us pick the right alternative.*

**Q: Will all 41,000 acres of recommended wilderness on the Umatilla be new wilderness?**

*R: We must evaluate the potential to recommend wilderness as required by the 1982 planning rule. We have to do that process to provide a recommendation to Congress. We took a look at all 5.5 million acres of these combined forests and used our handbook process to help us identify what those potential areas are. When we went out with the proposed alternative, we identified some potential areas that would clean up the existing wilderness boundaries. We rolled that out to the public in process like this called "scoping." Some folks wanted more recommended wilderness; the alternatives reflect that some people wanted a lot, and some people want none. We looked at the spectrum and the preferred alternative at this time includes 41,000 new acres on the Umatilla. Only Congress can designate wilderness.*

**Q: Is any of that proposed wilderness on private land?**

*R: No, we do not make decisions for private land.*

**Q: The forest plan describes a situation that is overcrowded, not healthy and not resilient because of too many trees. The plan charts a course to address that issue and reduce forest density for more open and natural historic range of variation. I'm perplexed because I don't see how we get from where we are currently and make progress in 15 years. Woody biomass is increasing - the forest grows in wilderness and non-wilderness acres. If we take away the wilderness, the forest is growing 760 million board feet of growth per year but you only propose to cut 160 million. That's a 600 million feet per year deficit. In 15 years, we will have 9 billion feet more of woody biomass than we do today. How does more biomass equate to the desired future condition?**

*R: Wilderness areas are not available for harvest, as you pointed out; Congress made that decision. Inventoried roadless areas can be harvested and treated, though it's a very difficult process because it has specific requirements that have to be met under the lawsuit that burned the boundaries of those inventoried roadless areas into the ground for us. The Allowable Sale Quality (ASQ) is developed on those lands that are available for timber production. Also, this does not include other areas, like riparian conservation and special areas that could be available for timber harvest. In our preferred alternative, we want to at least double our allowable harvest from today's numbers. We feel we're moving in a more positive direction.*

**Q: In suitable uses and activities, can you explain more about energy development and the potential for wind towers?**

*R: We looked at all things that might occur on the NF. We don't have to look too far to see the wind towers moving towards us. We identified where they might be suitable and where they might not be. If someone proposes wind towers on the forest, that would be a new project with a site specific decision. This document does not say there will be wind towers here.*

**C: Elk need a variety of habitats during the course of the year. It's important to protect and restore those habitats across the landscape. I want to stress the importance that elk play in our communities. They hit the sweet spot of your three values. I wanted to elevate the importance of elk and their habitat as you try to balance the different uses. Thanks to everyone for making these meetings happen. I know you put a lot of work into putting this show on the road.**

*R: Elk winter range information is available. We include elk in the social piece as well. We want enough of them and in the right numbers so we can see them and hunt them and everything we like to do with elk. They are important in the Blue Mountains.*

**C: I'm happy to hear there is some idea of a plan whether or not it's acceptable.**

**C: I have encountered Forest Service vehicles where no vehicles are supposed to be, and I've been writing down their license plates. Will the plan say how to address this issue?**

*R: The plan does not address Forest Service vehicles behind closures, but let me or my rangers know where there are issues. If Forest Service vehicles are back there, it should be for a good reason.*

**Q: Does the energy section of the plan include consideration for solar resource development, and could you tell us how that development might transpire? Would it occur through a project permitting process? Can private developers ask for a permit?**

*R: That would go through permitting and NEPA process. We do not have a solar section in the DEIS, so that would be a comment that you could provide to us.*

**Q: Does the Forest Service or USDA have a policy on energy development and how that would be reconciled with your plan?**

*R: We are working on a policy now and our plan will have to match that.*

**Q: Our neighbors have cleaned up their property for fuel on the ground. And there is a theme to not leave dead stuff around for fires. But you don't allow us to cut down and dead trees for firewood use. Do you want to take the fuel out of the forest or not?**

*R: The forest plan doesn't get to that detail on firewood cutting, but there is value in removal of firewood and the slash associated with it. Private and commercial users cut in the forest, but the plan doesn't speak to firewood cutting.*

**Q: Why recommend more wilderness when you've admitted to an issue with too much growth and not enough harvesting? Wilderness promotes fire and there is enough in the west already.**

*R: The 1982 rule tells us we have to take a look at recommending wilderness and we did. We looked from a lot of wilderness to none, and we picked in the middle for our preferred alternative. It's a draft and we want your feedback -- there are also people who want more wilderness.*

**Q: How many acres of total wilderness will there be if the 41,000 acres that is recommended is added?**

*R: 310,000 acres total on the Umatilla National Forest.*

**Q: What is the cost for implementing the preferred alternative compared to what we're doing now?**

*R: Budget information is broken down by alternative in the proposed plan and appendix A.*

**Q: Why isn't wildfire included as a main issue?**

*R: Wildfire is a part of it. It's influenced by vegetation so we looked at vegetation management and restoration.*

**C: We've had large wildfires since the last plan came out which have burned a substantial amount of forest and adjacent private lands. The existing budget must be at least half fire related. In recent years, Oregon has had its largest fires ever on both sides of the Cascades. We need to have wildfire as**

**an issue in this plan. Things will get worse with climate change; it will get hotter and drier. There are other disturbance processes as well.**

**C: These are government lands and they are being taken away from me. My children and grandchildren need that use. We own it; it's ours and you want to take it away. Wildfire renews growth. We need to look back at what's gone on to inform how we maintain. We're losing a lot here.**

**Q: Where is there a detailed map of recommended wilderness areas? I can't tell if there are roads in these areas.**

*R: There's a map in the document. If you're looking for a detailed map where roads might occur you can put in a request for more information and we can provide it. You could request a map you just described, and we have been getting requests for that. Once that map is created it will be on our website. We can let you know when it's available. Leave the information with us tonight.*

**C: The maps are not detailed enough. We can't see the road names. I don't want wilderness in my backyard.**

**Q: Does the presence of wolves affect the new plan versus the previous plan which didn't need to address wolves because we didn't have any?**

*R: We discuss wolves in the plan, but the Forest Service doesn't manage wolves. USFWS and the State of Oregon manage those populations. Wolves are listed on Westside of 395 as a federally listed species, so we talk about them in the Threatened and Endangered Species section.*

**Q: Do wolves affect roadless areas or anything?**

*R: No, we see wolves everywhere.*

**Q: Does the plan address the beetle population and how to control for it?**

*R: Insect and disease risk hazard are a part of the DEIS in Volume two, the forest and vegetation section.*

**Q: We have a cabin in the mountains and are worried by not having access in the future because we have to use a Forest Service road to get there. Should we be worried?**

*R: Road closures are not in the plan. Your private land access is protected by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act because you have an existing development.*