

USFS Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision Meeting | April 10, 2014 | Ontario, OR

Notetaker: Melissa Thom, EnviroIssues

Approximate Attendance: 30

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

Q: Many people believe wilderness is a land of no use, so what's the Forest Service's rationale for adding more?

R: We have a range of recommended wilderness, from zero acres in Alternative D to 500,000 acres in Alternative C. That's based on an evaluation required by the 1982 planning rule, so we went through that process. The recommendation in the preferred alternative is based on what's needed to make administrative corrections. When Congress designated wilderness in the past they drew lines that didn't make sense to us. Alternative E really reflects an adjustment of the current wilderness' boundaries - that is why we made our recommendation.

Q: Your statement is about making adjustments, so what about taking out what doesn't fit right? There are snowmobiling areas that are closed off for no reason. That would be prime snowmobile area and not available for no logical reason other than being designated wilderness.

R: To de-designate wilderness also comes from Congress, not us. I don't believe we can recommend they take it away.

C: The DEIS says bighorn sheep (BHS) in close proximity to pack goats are at risk for disease transmission, but studies do not link BHS disease to goats at all. The results are inconclusive. The problem of transmission is more complex than just goats and BHS. Biologists have stated they don't know how these things interact. There's a new book on environmental habitat-based stressors that shows that although BHS are vulnerable, it's not so simple as exposure to domestics. The national forest proposes to eliminate pack goats from the forest but BHS are not in such a crisis that it would demand extreme measures like removing pack goats. There is no potential risk of contact because goats never leave their owners. They are not a threat to BHS and we ensure they are healthy and don't carry the pathogens. We can travel over 200 miles a summer with our goats, but without our goats there will be no hiking. You would be taking away my hiking in the last years available to me.

Q: I saw a logging truck with large logs that were burnt on the outside. Does this plan cover that particular use of down timber? Burnt timber?

R: That would be a site-specific decision, but we would have to meet the desired conditions for that management area, which is probably general forest. Yes, we can do timber salvage activities under the proposed plan. We just have to make sure we're within the guidelines of what decision is made at the end. The logs you referenced are coming off state and private land in Idaho.

Q: Do you know whether we allow that specific timber use in our region?

R: Currently, yes.

Q: How do you determine what areas will be old growth? There's a big conflict between old growth and healthy forest. What can we do to change those areas of old growth? To reduce them?

R: This plan looks at old forest differently than the current plan in that we don't designate areas of old growth. We just say that we need it across the landscape and it doesn't matter where it occurs because we are deficient in it. We want to produce old trees into the future and are using a different approach.

Q: You want to save old trees, so how did you make that determination?

R: This plan looks at the landscape across all forests. So whatever is out there when we do site specific analysis for a timber sale, for example, is taken into consideration. This plan doesn't have specific designated management area for old growth. I suggest you talk to our silviculturist during the open house.

Q: What does this plan do about the beetle kill occurring in the forest and the wilderness?

R: We are conducting studies on the Malheur NF and Wallowa-Whitman NF to look at beetle kill. That would be a site-specific process. The Eastside Accelerated Restoration Project, which is a separate project and team, is working with insect/disease issues across the forest.

Q: What does backcountry limited motor vehicle use mean?

R: Backcountry limited motor vehicle use is a management area that is currently very primitive and described in the desired conditions, so a lot of those areas are currently inventoried roadless areas, but not all of them. Where they do have roads, backcountry motorized means that we will retain those motorized roads and trails that are already there.

Q: I'm wondering about the management area designation on backcountry limited motor vehicle use. In Alternative A there are 14,652 acres and in Alternatives E and F there is 119,100 acres. Where does that difference come from?

R: The management areas in the 1990 plan are very different and there were more of them. We've condensed them down to five and regrouped them. So the increased acreage would be because certain management areas might not have had backcountry motorized specifically identified, but that use was occurring in them. We can get back to you with a more specific answer.

Q: How will you notify the public on site-specific decision processes based on this plan?

R: Site-specific projects go through a notification to the public, and we do a public scoping process at the beginning. We put an ad in the paper and post it on our website. There are multiple ways we try to notify the public of activities going on out there. On our website we have a schedule of proposed actions (SOPA) which is distributed quarterly, and includes all the site

specific projects scheduled to occur, with the specific contact person. We can put you on our mailing list, as well.

Q: If we have more questions, how do we get in touch with you for clarification as we read the plan?

R: There are business cards at the sign in and comment tables with contact information.

Q: Some people have different interpretations of the terminology you use in the documents, like “primitive” designations. There is a glossary with terms that people should be aware of, and some of those terms have definitions I’ve never seen anywhere else. How does the public make use of that in the process?

R: I would say look at how we define something and if you don’t agree with it, let us know how you would define it differently and why.

Q: Was Alternative D the alternative prepared by area commissioners? Was it thrown out?

R: Alternative D was based on recommendations by the county commissioners but it wasn’t selected as the preferred, because the regional forester wanted a balance between all the issues. As I mentioned, for example, Alternative D didn’t recommend any wilderness. We received public comment asking us to recommend at least some wilderness. Alternative E is the best balance, in the regional forester’s opinion. But it’s not a decision yet.

Q: Will you have lists and/or categories of allowable activities that can govern your forest rangers and others out there so we all know what we can do out there and what we can’t?

R: Look at page 97 of the DEIS for suitable uses per each management area. That’s a good starting place. If you see something that is unsuitable for a particular area, let us know what you think is more appropriate.

C: I would like to remind the group that if you don’t make comments you won’t have a say in the process after June 16. Get a comment in or forget about saying anything about this in the future. This is the seventh meeting I’ve been to and no one has asked for more wilderness or more road closures. I would think you would start getting the hint.

C: I wonder if the person making the decision might want to consider responding to what the constituents want and need. Why doesn’t the person in charge take into account what the commissioners are saying, because they best represent the people in their area? The decision maker is making a different decision, but we have to answer to the public by vote. He’s hired, not elected. People voted in have a closer relationship to the public they represent and know better what the people desire.

R: We have to strike a balance between all the public we deal with, and there is a wide variety. Hearing everyone and finding middle ground to meet all the needs is the regional forester’s job.

C: I read in the newspaper that all government officials should be race car drivers because then at least we would know who their sponsors are.

Q: You said the plan is for the greatest good – greatest good of who?

R: For all people in the long run.

Q: I went to the Portland meeting and there was a lady there concerned about the diameter of trees for the birds and how to determine it all. My thought at the time was has she ever even been over here? When you're taking comments from others, how much weight are you giving to people who don't even come to the area?

R: Comments are the same no matter where you come from. But the local comments have specific information and more information about special areas; specifics only a local would know are very substantive.

Q: If there is a burn, you will look at it and determine if you will harvest any of the burned timber? How long does that take? The timber will stand there and fall down and won't be harvested because you take too long.

R: We can generally get through the site-specific NEPA process very quickly.

Q: The old timber - are those areas within the wilderness area or general?

R: Both.

Q: In the general area, do they have a special access requirement similar to what you might have in the wilderness area? Obviously old timber is special, so do you have special access or denied access to those areas like you might have wilderness?

R: We have better access to the area outside the wilderness.

Q: Title 16, Section 475 stated the purpose for which the forest must be established and managed. Orders shall be and remain in full force and effect, all public lands hereafter set aside and reserved as national forest should be administered with these provisions: no national forest should be established except to secure water flows and continuous supply of timber for use of citizens. But not to authorize use of lands that are more valuable for agriculture or mineral purposes than forest purposes. Under FLPMA – inventories are required to make those determinations for higher agriculture or mineral purposes. I haven't seen reference to these inventories in your document or for the Forest Service to implement. It's a national directive. BLM was just handed a lawsuit where they were not following the directives of Congress and have been redirected to increase sustainable cut on O&C lands, similar to what is required under the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act. Will these references be included in the final revision? Do I need to present this in a written comment to get a direct response?

R: I would suggest you submit this as a comment. We have to abide by all the laws of this land.

Q: About the log trucks from Idaho – the mills in Oregon would be shut down if not for logs from Idaho because we are not producing enough in Oregon to keep them open. Now we are shipping logs to Idaho because they don't think we can run our own mills. Why aren't logs being milled here and why aren't we producing enough timber to keep these mills going?

R: We have doubled our timber production in the last couple of years, on all three forests. A lot of that is because our regional forester has said we have to accelerate restoration. If we don't do what we need to, it will burn up and we won't have the infrastructure to support the timber harvest.

C: Timber production needs to double or triple.

R: Alternative E doubles it.

Q: How much of the timber harvest will be actual logging and how much will be fire salvage or pre-commercial thinning? How much will you actually log?

R: Under the preferred alternative, the majority of timber harvest will be through logging and providing products to the mills. Fire is important part to maintain in the ecosystem once we get to our desired condition.

C: About pre-commercial thinning – where we like to use the forest and the roads, you've been cutting little trees down, leaving the large trees, and piling and burning the slash under what's left, killing off medium-sized trees. What you have left-over is a nice looking park of large trees. No brush or replacement trees coming up. Pre-commercial thinning to me is making it a park with no replacement trees. I don't like seeing the thinning in our area.

R: We are deficient in older structure forest so that's why you see thinning, to get the landscape into a condition that meets the desired condition.

Q: The larger trees are already there, so why taking out understory?

R: We are trying to change the undesirable conditions that become a fuel hazard. Bigger trees won't survive if we don't thin.