



for the greatest good



BLUE MOUNTAINS FOREST PLAN REVISION - 2015

Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman
National Forests

Meeting Notes

Public Workshop on Access and the Blue Mountains Forest Plans
Hosted by the High Desert Partnership and Malheur National Forest
John Day, OR / Grant County Regional Airport
July 7, 2015

These notes reflect the best efforts of notetakers to capture the discussion of meeting participants, but in no way are these notes a word-for-word transcript as the notetaker(s) may have unintentionally missed some statements or dialogue.

Attendees (as listed on the sign-in sheet): Gary Jacobson, Marlene Greer, Chris Labhart, Larry Blasing, Judith Beaudet Reed, Robert Reed, John and Lindy Bartion, Roger Lang, Sharon Lang, Judy Kerr, Ramona Creighton, John Creighton, Frank Mason, Ronald Phillips, Vicki Heckman, Carl Heckman, Mike Moore, Ron Greb, Sally Greb, Scott Myers, LG McLoed, Mark Webb, Dave Traylor, Gloria Johnson, Steve Johnson, James Terry Sproul, Mike McGuire, William Gibbs, Dennis Lynch, William Fields, Dennis Dougherty, Jim Spell, Robert Armbruster, Boyd Britton, Carl Stinnett, King Williams, Bob Flat, Angel Carpenter, Brooks Smith, Howard Geiger, Frances Preston, Billie Jo George, Dave Hannibal, Tinka Oliver, Bruce Ward, Bill Ables, Ryan Nehl, Sabrina Stadler, Greg Burns, Peter Fargo, Jack Southworth, Steve Beverlin

Organizations represented: Grant County Court, Grant County Public Forest Commission, Grant County Access Advisory Board, High Desert Partnership, US Forest Service (FS), Citizens for Public Access, Forest Access for All, Blue Mountain Forest Partners, City of Sumpter, Blue Mountain Eagle, Idaho Aviation Association, Oregon Pilots Association, Recreational Aviation Foundation, Oregon State Snowmobile Association, and others

Introductions around the circle: What are your concerns regarding the access portion of the Blue Mountains Forest Plan?

- When is the Forest going to address comments submitted? That's what we need addressed, before making any new comments.
- Same as above. What do they want from us?
- Raised in logging community. Presented 57 page document in August 2014; has not received response. NEPA being used to protect environment at expense of civilization. Desired Condition of local residents not represented.
- 10th meeting like this. 1300 comments and no response from the FS. This is a waste of our time; our numbers are whittling down; 100 at the last meeting; 50 this time. I'm tired and feel like I should just go home and fight from home.
- Our family has 100 years in Grant County. Mountains are important. FS needs to take into acct history in road closures. Where are the answers to comments?
- Oregon State Snowmobile Ass'n – looking for a reasonable approach to access.
- Just here listening.

- Sumpter City Council. Economic impact statement submitted to FS to substantiate needs of people in Blue Mtns.
- New to Forest Plan Revision meetings. Here to listen and then speak later.
- Spy cameras in the woods. Why are they spying on citizens?
- City Council member: Too many penalties when accessing the Forest. Would like to see grandkids not have fear of reprisal or concern about violating the law. Only the most fit citizens can access the Forest. Roads closed for no particular reason; they could close themselves. Citizens paid to have roads built. Maintenance is a challenge. Who are we saving this pristine forest for? It's burning up. FS sometimes does the opposite of what they say. Stop closing roads. Let grandkids and kids enjoy the Forests. I want to enjoy too.
- Who writes the rules/regs that we have to abide by?
- Here to head off questions. Things are going down fast. Greater road closures mean less access for fire fighters and ranchers.
- Involved in FS planning since 2003. Wants a better plan.
- Grant County; privilege to meet everyone; here to observe.
- Respectful dialogue; listen to each other's concerns.
- 5 comments – no response. Honesty went out the window. Forest Service works for us; elected officials work for us. We don't need to be talking about access.
- Blue Mountain Eagle
- Forest Service isn't listening to us; FS does as it pleases; these meetings are just to pacify the peasants
- Want access. Here to learn about the Forest Plan, to be heard, and to participate.
- 4 wheelers and Rhino; want to keep enjoying Forests.
- Have access to our forests. Plan needs to move forward; our comments need to be included.
- Need to keep roads open to maintain forests. Grant County has high unemployment / low income; only 19 counties are worse off than Grant. Who really owns the land? Who has authority/right to administer the land. When we have these meetings, need to make sure something gets done.
- Access issue starts in DC and works down, not locally and then up.
- Looking to see if questions can be answered
- Wants a plan that avoids road closures.
- Keep forests open; don't close to snowmobiles / ATVs.
- We have had 6 Forest Supervisors in the last 11 years, but we have to live with the 10-year plan. Wants something we can all live with. Roads that don't need to be used will close themselves. Everyone here uses ATVs. We've always been able to go cross-country. Some bad eggs tear things up, but most people are responsible.
- ATVs and hunting/fishing in forests.
- Here to listen/learn.
- Who gives them the right to close our roads? We get this dog & pony show, and the FS does what they want.
- Travel Management should come after the Forest Plan.

- Don't close roads. They will close themselves.
- Roads will close themselves. Read FOIA paragraph about citizen rights to government records. If we're not in litigation, we should have access to draft documents.
- Want kids/grandkids to have access to explore forests.
- We deserve response to comments. We have lost the trust with you.
- No answers to previous comments on Forest Plan. Disappearing access to forests. With each turnover in FS staff, things change that don't need changing.
- No respect for the FS. I want to help, but I don't think you listen.
- Forest Road closures are illegal. Take the signs down.
- We shouldn't have to fight to re-open roads.
- Ditto. Here in support of the county.
- Shouldn't have to pay to park at trailheads. We pay our taxes. Ranchers need access to cattle / allotments. Burnt woods are a waste. Need to prevent catastrophic fires.
- System is broken on how we're closing roads; we need a new system that works for people.
- All we need is a simple discourse; we have that opportunity with this new Forest Supervisor.
- Grant County is one of largest counties in the state of Oregon, but smallest population. How much negative impact can the roads have? People come from outside (west side) and use the forests. If we have to close roads, will the maintenance pick up? Currently there is no maintenance. This community is not the problem.
- Concerned that dialogue won't be productive. Hope we can have a respectful discussion and make progress.
- Plan doesn't mention aviation and airstrips. Need to maintain the roads.
- Aviation/airstrips is only in the Plan once. Need to ensure air access.
- Positive experience with FS. Took a 40-mile ride with a group of motorized enthusiasts from John Day to Seneca. We did it legally and had a great time. Let's improve the roads with good maintenance.
- This is just another dog & pony show.

--

Facilitator, Jack Southworth: I heard two things -- (1) Lack of trust, (2) roads aren't being managed well. First, we need to understand the trust problem. What's one thing the FS can do to address your concerns?

- You need to respond to my comments. Some concerns sound like they are being met, but there are no assurances. I have written to Washington DC, Tom Montoya (Wallowa-Whitman NF Supervisor), the Regional Office to tell them our land doesn't belong to the federal government. It's our land.
- Lack of transparency. What's going on? What happened to our comments? When the FS moved out of Unity, OR, it became a ghost town. Will land be maintained / taken care of?
- Could not find public comments on FS website. FS has to have the paperwork/records. Tell the people what's going on – early and often. Rather than waiting 6 months, group the public

comments, then consolidate and share them, so people can look. The FS needs to think at the local level.

- Sabrina Stadler, FS team leader's response: All comments are on the website, and you can read them there. There will be a response to the comments we received on the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in the final EIS.
- Quit lying. We were told FS had NEPA documents; they didn't. We FOIA request; we got back lies.
- When you say you're going to answer questions at a meeting, keep your word. Don't leave early as some have done in the past. Answer our questions. Whose forest is it? It's the people's forest, but doesn't appear to be. I'm scared I will get in trouble if I do what I like to do in forest. I like the FS staff, but their hands seem tied.
- Tell the truth. You said "road density" language had been removed from Forest Plan, but it's not completely out yet. Remove road density language and "designated route" language.
- Respond to all 1300 messages sent on first go-round. Mail everyone back (not everyone has email). Take road closures out of the Plan if you want to get it done. No more logging. Keep the forest open. Everyone should have the right to access it. I have the right to access my mining claim.
- Show respect. Be active listeners. Give us verbal feedback. Tell us the truth, please – not just what we want to hear. Tell it like it is. We can deal with it. Life is hard in Eastern Oregon, but don't take care of us. Care for the land and love the people.
- Asking for road closure reports (via FOIA). Takes months to go through FOIA, so agency needs to be honest and just provide the information.
- Let locals inform the desired conditions: better conversations, better outcomes.
- Keep roads open for fires and search/rescue. Roads open should be fair for everyone.

Response from Steve Beverlin, Malheur Forest Supervisor:

- We need to do a better job helping people find the comments on our website.
- We've removed most of the references to road density in the Plans.
- We don't own the land; we manage the National Forest System in trust.
- Q: Why NEPA every new project? Every project is under NEPA law. We need to analyze the environmental impacts of every new action.
- Q: Grant County passed an ordinance about forest access. Is it legal? Will you abide by it?
Steve: Our General Counsel says it's not enforceable – only a small subset may apply: RS2477 is a legal process that requires a judge to make a ruling on roads.

Q: How do you personally feel about road closures?

- FS team leader, Sabrina Stadler: I use the forest roads. I like to huckleberry / deer hunt / hike / mountain bike. I also understand if there is a resource concern and a need to close some roads.
- Malheur Forest Supervisor, Steve Beverlin: I like to ATV on forest roads. I like to hunt elk and carry them out on my ATV.

Comment: FS is using same science as 50 years ago; time to update. I say no to specific routes. Grant County citizens need to have their say in desired conditions.

Forest service maps don't agree. How can FS or anyone do their jobs without accurate maps?

Q: Umatilla is further ahead. Why is travel management not done equally by all forests?

Q: Is it not true that a lot of these guidelines in the Plans are driven by environmental groups?

- Response from FS team leader, Sabrina Stadler: Not necessarily. We incorporate feedback from everyone.

Q: What aspects of the Land Management Plan affect access? We need to start with this overview to inform people's input. What about priority watersheds? Special Areas, Management Areas (non-motorized)

Response from FS staff, Dennis Dougherty: There are very few changes to existing uses (access) in the management areas of the Proposed Revised Forest Plans.

Comment: We can't solve the problem without the facts. Let's start there.

Q: For roads that are open now, will road maintenance occur? FS – Steve Beverlin: We do have a dedicated road crew, and they will do as much as possible. One participant noted that they graded the road to his campground.

Q: When will travel management begin? FS – Steve Beverlin: Subpart B – will begin after the Forest Plan is complete.

Comment: On the local level, the FS needs to be more personable. Email/phone doesn't always work. The Collaborative is a good way to work with the FS. The County has no authority over FS.

Comment: The County ordinances are law; they should be obeyed.

Comment: Encourage more guidelines / fewer standards. This gives local decision-makers more flexibility to respond to local needs. Look at indicator species and heritage.

Goal of the meeting was to close the gaps. In past meetings, people didn't feel they had closure. If we don't get feedback from what we do in these meetings, trust will not be enhanced at all.

Forest Service is made up of a lot of good people. Decisions are best made at this level (local) – not the folks up there. Easy to lose touch with grassroots. The further up you go, the less understanding of local issues.

Freedom of forest access is imperative to a "mountain quality of life", is it not?

Q: Why hasn't the FS responded to 1,300 letters received last year?

Response from FS team leader, Sabrina Stadler: We wanted to have the comments coded by October 2014, but the service provider who coded them didn't expect the volume or complexity of comments. We now have the comments coded, meaning comments are categorized into like groups. Responses will be provided in the final EIS, after these meetings and after revisions have been made.

We can get a lot done by collaborating. Get involved in Collaboratives. Extremes don't work. We're not going to get everything we want.

Cooperation is what works best. Blue Mountain Eagle prints op-eds of extreme perspectives. We need to work together to get the job done.

Why are we here? FS isn't listening.

Steve Beverlin, Forest Supervisor: Based on your input, we'll modify existing alternative or analyze a new one. Final plan in 2017, unless we have to pursue new alternatives.

Facilitator, Jack Southworth: **How do you feel the meeting went and were you heard?**

- I learned a lot about a big issue; no suggestions.
- I learned a lot too; I hope the FS is listening and not just doing this because they have to.
- I hope we're not being strong-armed by the government. Actions like the stewardship program created a monopoly and put small operators out of business. Now it's just one giant, unproductive tree farm.
- Great meeting: a lot of good input/output; I think we can get along with Steve (Malheur NF Supervisor). Let's keep listening, stick together, and get things done.
- Don't feel you're listening. Environmentalists influence the plan/process, and I think you have your own agenda.
- This has been very informative; I learned a lot. But ODFW out of control; FS too. We're losing freedoms and rights. Steve has a higher person to answer to.
- Learned a lot. You may be hearing us, but our input won't make a difference with this big process and Plan. These eons of meetings feel deliberate. You are hearing us, but are you really listening?
- The local FS people are doing a good job, but nothing will change. We're not going to be able to stop this. The federal government (on the east coast) is going to close our roads.
- Big government can be influenced; they can change. We need to help FS to help us. We can tell them what we want/feel, but their hands are tied by edicts from DC. The battle is not won here; the battle is won in Washington. Contact your Congressional reps. Thank you for the meeting tonight.
- We need to do something different. Same conversation from 4-5 years ago. This could blow up in our face. Tension is high; people are mad and aren't going to take it anymore. We need a different approach to get something done, or everyone is going to lose.
- Be transparent; do not keep us in the dark; be accountable to our comments. Proud to see that you care about Eastern Oregon.

- Instead of cooperate/collaborate...let's coordinate (everyone has equal standing).
- Thank you to Forest Service. They have been in a tough spot and hope they're listening.
- If we can get rid of the roads language in Forest Plan, we'll succeed.
- Here is an idea that may work for all of us: Don't close any more roads until Forest Plan is final. You don't have a plan right now.
- Sabrina: From my perspective the communities are being heard. For example, the preferred alternative removed the "road density" language and instead focused on addressing hydrologically connected roads – roads where the stream is being impacted. There are still some road densities for wildlife corridor, Management Area 3C. The preferred alternative has a small amount of wildlife corridor in the area between the three portions of the North Fork John Day Rivers. Road densities are already low there.
- Thank you. Focus advocacy work at the DC level
- Thanks to Jack for facilitating. Help to increase respect among the population.
- We need to see a spark of energy/urgency among the rank & file. Effort of civil servants should match their salary. Idea: Simplify access for us. FS, BLM, and ODFW maps differ. We need a single map that tells us where we can ride / where we can't.
- How is this access meeting going to be addressed in the 2nd revision? Will you send us an email of what you recorded, and how it will be used?
- Transparency, honesty, communication. Listen to what people say. I have been lied to by FS employees. Don't lie to me.
- Great job tonight, but you need to upgrade the plan from F. I hope we'll see these comments in the final plan...a new alternative if there is one. Continue to care for the land, serve the people.
- We need better maps. These current ones can be dangerous as many roads don't show up.
- Close the gaps. There are negative consequences to not having these kinds of meetings. Eliminate the designated road terminology.
- I have seen agency people see litter from past users and walk by it, and I was the only person who picked it up. We need to leave the forest in a better position than when we took over. It's up to us.
- It's a challenge herding all these cows and cats. I think you're doing a good job, but these meetings started 12 years ago, and they go on and on with no end in sight. We need to do better.
- Thank you.
- Transparency and trust are important. These meetings are unprecedented after a formal comment period, so we should take advantage of it. FS needs to learn how to engage the *local* public differently – not just the general public. We ask the FS and State to do a lot; we need to help them engage in ways that are helpful to us. Success will be a plan with people at the center of it.
- More public announcements about progress, procedure, public announcements. I would like to prove wrong the naysayers.