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## BLUE MOUNTAINS FOREST PLAN REVISION - 2015

Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman  
National Forests

# Meeting Notes

### Public Workshop on Access, Wilderness, and the Blue Mountains Forest Plans

Hosted by High Desert Partnership and the Umatilla National Forest

Walla Walla, WA / Senior Center

July 9, 2015

*These notes reflect the best efforts of the notetaker to capture the discussion of meeting participants, but in no way are these notes a word-for-word transcript as the notetaker may have unintentionally missed some statements or dialogue. Also, these notes do not attempt to correct or clarify any statements made by participants.*

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**Participants** (as listed on the sign-in sheet): Brian Steadman, Ferriba Steadman, Gary Simmons, Bob Murasik, Cheryl Graham, Dino Graham, Sam Brinker, Randy Norton, Scott Short, Jesse Shaw, Genora Anderson, Don Anderson, Tim Montgomery, Shelley Montgomery, Duane Montgomery, Jim Johnson, Chris Howard, Kate Bobrow-Strain, Travis Gaines, Nathan Bannerman, Doug Morton, Mary Campbell, Jon Campbell, Robert Fullen, Betty Walker, Bret Harting, Pat Rima, Mike Denny, Tom Schrim, Dave Price, Richard Daniels, Gary Humphreys, Veronica Warnock, Richard Jilly, Suni Danforth, Kevin Mills, Tracii Hickman, Jody Norton

**US Forest Service (FS) participants:** Kevin Martin, Joani Bosworth, Mike Rassbach, David Hatfield, Larry Randall, Sabrina Stadler, Dennis Dougherty, Peter Fargo (notetaker)

**Organizations represented** (as listed on the sign-in sheet): Washington State Snowmobile Association, Back Country Hunters and Anglers, Walla Walla County, Blue Mtn. Audubon Society, Walla Walla Community Council, Eastern Washington Dirt Riders Association, Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, Northwest Trail Riders Association, Hells Canyon Preservation Council

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**Introduction – Jack Southworth, Facilitator, High Desert Partnership:** We are here to discuss the access portion of the Blue Mountains Forest Plans. We'll begin with a few words from the Forest Supervisor, and then everyone will have a chance to introduce themselves.

**Opening remarks – Kevin Martin, Umatilla NF Supervisor** (at the time): Thank you for coming, and thanks to High Desert Partnership for facilitating. We're looking for your thoughts, ideas, and solutions. We're hosting a series of community meetings across the Blue Mountains – next in TriCities, Heppner, La Grande, etc. We've been working on the Forest Plans for nearly 12 years. Last year we rolled out a draft plan (draft Environmental Impact Statement), and we got a lot of comments back. Folks generally weren't happy; they didn't think we listened well enough; now we are here to listen. We are looking for creative solutions, so folks can do the

## MEETING NOTES

(continued)

things they want to do responsibly. A Forest Plan is like a county zoning plan; there are things you can/cannot do in different areas of the forest. We need to update Forest Plans every 15 years. The last one was put in place in 1990, and a lot has changed since then: new science and changed conditions. A NF is a complex piece of property; everybody won't be happy with every part of it. We hope you'll look at it and say, "I like this part but not that part, but I understand why they need to have it." We'll talk about Access and Wilderness tonight and then follow up later about Restoration and Grazing. We hope to keep folks engaged and informed along the way.

### **Introductions around the circle, and what will we accomplish if this is a successful meeting?**

- On the Walla Walla Community Council, study natural resource issues. Let's talk, be civil, and consider everyone's perspectives.
- From Walla Walla; outdoor recreation interest; want to understand where plans are, and hope all of us will have the opportunity to register our interests.
- Live in Walla Walla; have a cabin in the Blues; here to listen/learn
- Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision Team Leader, from Baker City; hope we can create a plan that folks can live with for next 15 years.
- Mountain biker; would like to learn what's really going on; would like to continue to have access to the forests.
- I'm looking for good ideas to ponder and take home.
- Hope everyone's opinions are heard.
- Backcountry horsemen, OR and WA. Blue Mountain Alliance; multiple interests. Forest Plans are very grueling. I'm a veteran of the last Forest Plan. Need to have the support of the users to achieve success.
- Want a Forest Plan that provides opportunities for youth.
- From Walla Walla; snowmobiling, hunting, camping, firewood
- Hope everyone feels they were listened to and heard
- Slow down the closures I see on the forests. Every day in the woods it seems there is a new closure. Slow down, and give us all better access for huckleberry picking, mushroom picking, 4-wheeling, etc.
- National Forests are for the people; want to make sure it stays that way.
- I have a cabin near Tollgate and want to see how this affects me.
- From Spokane; would like to protect habitat for game and fish
- From Walla Walla; snowmobile association
- Would like to narrow the gap in communication between the FS and community
- Snowmobile association since 1975; used to hike; when knees failed, got a 4-wheeler and snowmobiles. Wonder why are we here again? Would like to understand where we are.
- Problems are best solved outdoors
- Representing Blue Mountains Audubon Society; let's keep in mind the health/wellbeing of the forest.
- I hunt, fish, and snowmobile. I want to see what's going on.
- I see roads closing; I want to see them open back up. There is plenty of room for everyone to enjoy the forests.
- Would like to find common ground.
- Represent Hells Canyon Preservation Council; avid recreationalist in the Blue Mountains, both motorized and non-motorized: huckleberry picking, fishing, hunting, and camping. I would like a plan

## MEETING NOTES

(continued)

- that offers diverse opportunities and also addresses the impacts of motorized use on wildlife such as elk; also road maintenance and the effects of erosion on fish. Looking for good dialogue.
- Walla Walla County Commissioner: Many citizens are interested in what's happening on the forests they care about. I'm here to learn. As a citizen, I want to make sure people have access; want everyone to leave knowing their voices have been heard. As an elected official, I also want to see compromise, so everyone feels like they were part of the solution.
  - Eastern WA Dirt Riders Association; interested in motorized access.
  - From Walla Walla; one of oldest permittees on the Malheur NF. I want to keep multiple uses on the forests.
  - I'd like to be heard and hear what others have to say.
  - Here representing the WA Department of Fish & Wildlife; would like to ensure fish and wildlife have the quality habitat they require, and balance that with adequate access.
  - President of Blue Mountains Audubon Society and member of the Walla Walla Community Council. I have worked on every FS Ranger District and traveled all over the Blues. I want to hear what other people want. I suspect no person has the same want as everyone else, and I hope we can find the right balance.
  - NW Trail Riders Association; service the Winom-Frazier OHV Complex on the southern Umatilla. A successful meeting would be to understand what these meetings are all about.
  - Here to listen and learn something new.
  - I don't understand the reason for different plans in different areas, and I'd like to learn more.
  - Moved here with family to be in the Blues. Want to see if we can find a successful resolution for the Forest Plan.
  - Here to hear some of the ideas others have. I would like to see existing roads remain open; take the barricades down and maintain roads for fire access. I'm also a backpacker. Happy to help maintain roads/trails as well. FS spending for public relations would be better spent on trails. We are the tax payers, and we should not be removed from our forests.
  - President of the Blue Mountain Alliance. Here to find out where we are with the plan, and what happened to our comments? Let's get this resolved.
  - Want to share opinions on access to the forest.
  - From Milton-Freewater; here to listen.

### **Introduction to Forest Planning – Dennis Dougherty, FS Recreation Specialist, Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision Team**

- National Forest Management Act – Forest Plan helps us manage and balance multiple uses.
- In 1960s, the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act and Wilderness Act directed the Forest Service to balance six uses: recreation, wildlife, and wilderness in addition to timber, water, and range
- Forest Plan includes Plan Components are the bones of the Plan: Goals, Desired Conditions (aspirational), Objectives, Standards (are constraints), Guidelines, Management Areas (similar to zoning), Suitable Uses (tiered to Management Areas to define appropriate uses in those areas)
- Travel Management is a separate process; different than the Forest Plan. Executive Order from 1972, updated in 2005. Analyzes roads and designates areas, roads, and trails for a safe, manageable, and affordable system. The result is a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM).

## MEETING NOTES

(continued)

- Although they are different processes, the Forest Plans and Travel Management are interrelated. There are three key areas in the Forest Plan that speak to motorized travel: Desired Conditions, Management Areas, Suitable Uses

### Response from Sabrina Stadler, FS Team Leader, Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision Team

- I hope everyone can leave today with a clearer understanding between Travel Management and Forest Plan Revision. Today's focus is on the Forest Plans rather than the Travel Management Plan.
- Regarding the response to public comments on the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS):
  - o You might be wondering why do we do an EIS? It's how we analyze different alternatives for the Forest Plans.
  - o We received over 1300 comments last year. It took our service provider a long time to "code" these comments – to categorize them with other similar comments. We just received the coded comments and can now begin to address them. Our response to comments will be in the final EIS.
- Our new public affairs officer will keep you in the loop.

### Panelist remarks (conversation starters):

- I'm passionate about the Blue Mountains, and things are changing drastically. There are fewer day hikers, backpackers, and horseback riders. We own the Blues as citizens, and we need to take care of them. I'm concerned about habitat, noise, and what people understand about the Blues. We don't offer enough education about how the Blue Mountains work, and what the Blues do for us. Deer and elk are important, but there are many other species. Many birds migrate and breed here with all the bugs there are to eat. We need people in the Blue Mountains, so they will care about it and attend meetings like this. I'm focused on the long-term stability of Blues. With access comes great responsibility -- not to cause erosion or destroy water quality. For example, the City of Walla Walla depends on Mill Creek for its water supply, but there is a big mud hole at the headwaters caused by irresponsible motorized users. What should we do about people who ruin the forest for everyone else? We need to remember that we can wipe out the forest quickly if we're not careful.
- I read the Forest Plan. To me, it said "Let's close the forest, and let's get more wilderness." I've been up there in the mountains since 1969, when there were huge areas we could cover. Now there's hardly anywhere you can go without getting a ticket. The only place my wife can ride [her OHV] is on our 5 acres. A lot of people in the Blue Mountains don't like Mr. Thompson at all [law enforcement officer]. It's going to get nasty if we don't change something. I live 35 feet from the NF, and I have a lot of wildlife in my backyard. Firewood access permits are very regulated – you can't do this, you can't do that. Ease up, and let us have some room. I want to ride on my side-by-side and get them licensed, but they're not allowed to be out there.
- Backcountry hunters/anglers want to protect habitat. For example, access to the forest is important, but it can also bring weeds; invasive weeds mean the game moves on. Also, the Columbia River Basin is the biggest habitat in the region and affects the forest, and vice-versa. A treaty will be renegotiated

## MEETING NOTES

(continued)

with Canada and Indian Nations to make sure there is enough water coming down from the north for power and irrigation. We are also trying to help salmon, so they can keep running past the dams. Salmon and other species need enough cool water, or they die. As for the forests, we need different areas for different uses, so we can avoid conflicts. The Forest Supervisor can only do so much. He only has so many dollars and has to ask permission from Portland for a lot of things. We need to help.

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**Review of draft Desired Condition for Goal 2.7, Roads and Trails Access, and Table 25: General suitability matrix for management areas.** Each meeting attendee received a two-page excerpt of the Draft Proposed Revised Land Management Plan, pages 60 and 97. The facilitator provided 5 minutes for everyone to review the information, and then went around the room asking for feedback and edits to improve the Desired Condition for Roads and Trails Access.

- MA 3C – define it; put it in English.
- Maintenance is currently done by people using the roads; we need more maintenance from the FS, because road maintenance just isn't being done; need to ensure fire access.
- I agree; roads aren't being maintained. FS needs to actually maintain the roads to save money over the long run. Instead Officer Thompson, the watershed monitor, is busy taking license numbers and giving tickets.
- The Desired Condition should be purely based on the resource needs; should not reference budget funding; this process should not be budget driven. Be careful not to include too many examples of what can go wrong with roads, etc. Don't want to bias the plan and include undue reasons for closing roads.
- Why is winter elk habitat mentioned? [Response: More miles of road in a square mile can affect wildlife, especially at certain times of the year.] Need to acknowledge that people doing motorized access are the ones maintaining the roads – bringing chainsaws and cutting logs out. We need more volunteers giving back to the mountains, and that should be included in the text.
- To be fair, some roads are getting cleaned up. I see trail crews once every other summer, but it's not enough. I carry a chainsaw and handsaw. We do more work than I've ever seen the FS do. I say, "Leave the mountains alone; we will take care of them."
- What part of the plan is this Desired Condition from? I remember there were A,B,C,D,E,F options before. [This is from the "Preferred Alternative", Alternative E, now the Proposed Revised Land Management Plan.] We've given up a lot of closed roads. Some were proper; some unnecessary. Maybe the roads we already have closed are enough. FS staff don't seem to be getting the work done.
- MA 3C and MA 3B. We have no idea what these are. [See second page, Table 25, on the back.] Ok, but I want to see a map to understand these areas. What are administrative areas? Minimize conflicts between different types of users – ok. What about allowing people to take appropriate risks? "Use the forest at your own risk." What is a Motor Vehicle Use Map? Instead of "hydrologic connectivity", use simple language like "erosion". I think snowmobiles should be allowed to go beyond routes that are open to summer vehicle travel, because they are up on the snow. Regarding budget: FS needs to thin top management and put more boots on the ground. People

## MEETING NOTES

(continued)

need to get out and work the woods. No offense to Peter, but we don't need a PR department. [Peter agreed that working in the woods would be more fun.] Also, it's impossible to have roads and not have erosion. We used to have a lot more roads and miles; instead of getting rid of them, let's maintain the ones we have.

- Personally, I like the roads that are "closed" with gates, because it's nice to hike them and pick huckleberries, etc. One edit: Add a period after "efficiently managed". The FS isn't getting more money, as far as we can see. They should keep the most important roads open; less important ones should be closed if we cannot afford to maintain them.
- The language is not clear to the lay reader in the bottom section. Clarify "motorized" vs. "mechanized" access. I don't want to have to drive a long way to get to a trail to go hiking with my family. Non-motorized trails should be more easily reachable for more people. Consider building trailheads closer to population centers, and work with community groups to help with maintenance.
- From the perspective of the Community Council, balancing the environmental, economic, cultural values in Blue Mountains is a challenge. Our demographics are changing in this region, and it's important that we share these resources. Many people are interested in non-motorized activity and wildlife habitats. On a personal level, I've been going up to Blue Mountains since 1957. I studied the maps, and I'm blown away by number of roads on the forests – they look like someone dumped a bowl of spaghetti on the map. There are issues with environment / wildlife and motor vehicles. Backing off on roads is probably a good thing.
- I want my kids to appreciate woods like I did when I was a kid; we enjoyed motorized vehicles in Idaho. But it's also hard to manage more people in the woods. I support a balanced approach to managing the woods. Volunteering is great, but I don't think we can rely on the public to do everything the FS can do – and vice versa. It's a team effort.
- Everyone wants to see the maps. Come back with some big maps on a projector. Focus on the things we CAN do. Put more signs up on the roads to warn people about what's up there and what uses are allowed.
- Funding is one resource. Also consider others – such as volunteers. They are not always dependable, but if you do volunteer on the forest, make sure to report your time and organization to the FS. It's essential to help the FS get more money to care for the places you care about. Yes, the maps that FS puts out stink; they need to be more navigable. Let's acknowledge that *different kinds of roads have different impacts*. It's not just about road density, but where the road is and the density of use. (Think of a highway v. forest road.) Volunteers are often happy to help if it means getting something open.
- The text in this Desired Condition is a bit repetitive and unclear. The final section really needs a total rewrite. If you don't use plain English, you disconnect yourselves from citizens. Please provide a simple map instead of codes and acronyms. We're not stupid; we just want it clear and easy to understand.
- We need to have closures during elk calving season and critical escape cover.
- I agree the text can be clearer and simpler. Having a cop out there is not valuable; having a person there handing out tickets is counter-productive. In terms of projects, instead of getting out there and doing the job, you're collecting data to report up. Don't forget about us – the users.

## MEETING NOTES

(continued)

- If you're concerned about costs and roads, redistrict so the FS doesn't have to travel so far to service different areas.
- Elk are everywhere, including private lands. That section referring to elk needs to be removed.
- Remove the section about having snowmobiles only on summer motor roads.
- The last section on Motor Vehicle Route Density should be re-written; it is not clear. Nothing gets people more excited than land issues – whether it's private land or public land. On private land, people want to do what they feel is reasonable on their own land without any government restriction, but they are often quick to point out the problems other people create for them (e.g., the beekeeper next door). Public land is challenging in a different way. When we finish the plan, if nobody is completely happy, then we've probably been successful.
- FS rep: The Desired Condition speaks to the diversity of ways people use the forest. This is one Component of many Forest Plan Components that work together to achieve the Desired Condition. For example: Management areas need to reflect the Desired Conditions.
- Most communities in the Blues don't have trails right out their back doors. Hiking trails should not only be in deep canyons and high rocky areas. Document says road should address mobility requirements and future uses; we need to anticipate new technologies and uses in different management areas. If the desired condition is to reduce road density, that needs to be reflected in the Standards and Objectives. Communication needs to be simplified, so people can understand how the Forest Plan affects forest management on the ground.
- We are sharing the forest, and we have such different needs. My need is for solitude. I want clarity on where I can go and not see/hear motorized vehicles. I don't need to take away any more motorized areas, but please don't add any more motorized areas. We need to have policing of wet meadows, where some motorists are tearing them up. Can the motorized community police each other? More horse access would be great. Many roads that were built for logging can be let go.
- It's hard *not* to find something to agree with in here. There are many more people who now live here in Walla Walla. (That's why we have stoplights.) We need to yield to each other. My worst fear now is not having water, because water is really important for us.
- I'm concerned about the language on over-snow travel. Until the travel management plan for winter recreation has been developed [Subpart C], is this not premature? Also, I suggest that you mention the "adopt-a-trail program". That's a beauty for volunteers. A business or club can say, I'm going to take care of Trail 47. That's my job, and if I don't do it, then FS may need to close the trail/road.
- WA State Snowmobile Association is the only organized group that works with the FS in all districts across the state. We maintain the trails that we ride on. We don't get down into the dirt. However, the younger generation needs to be educated to respect the forest. I see ruts in the ground from 4x4 trucks and beer cans everywhere.
- The road density numbers are based on good science from the FS research station based in La Grande. We should include references to share where those numbers came from.
- Elk and deer live in my yard. They take the path of least resistance, including trails and roads. If you want to scare an elk, walk up to them. The X-miles per square mile of road density doesn't make sense, because the animals hear the engines and know what to expect. Regarding funding: The FS has a lot of vehicles with only one person in each. That's not efficient. Also, the FS doesn't make money when they log, so why are they logging? We need to get together and try to make

## MEETING NOTES

(continued)

this thing work. When this is done, it's true that a lot of us are going to be upset. We won't all be happy, and that's ok.

- People in the FS need to work alongside the community—not just be seen writing tickets, but working with community to get work done that the community cares about.
- Careful not to close down too many roads, or you may increase traffic/impacts on the open roads. Then you'll have a reason to close them down too.
- Don't allow energy development in certain Developed Sites (e.g., Lake Jubilee). [FS response: Just because a use is listed as "suitable" does not mean it will happen in that management area. Energy development would be very, very unlikely in a developed campsite area like Lake Jubilee. We can make that more clear by adding a distinction to Management Area (MA) 5, for example, 5A/B/C/D.]

### Recap of what was shared around the circle, by Sabrina Stadler, FS Team Leader, Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision

- To answer the questions, the wildlife corridor language came from Alternative E.
- I agree that we need to make the text more readable, less repetitive, etc.
- We need to add language to work with volunteers and user groups.
- The reference to "administrative use" is not clear.
- I heard that we should maintain roads for fire access.
- We need to minimize user group conflict.
- Include education for future generations.
- Roads/trails/areas should be properly signed.
- We need appropriate maps.
- What does "mechanized" mean? (e.g., bikes, wheelchairs)
- People are looking for trails in diverse settings and opportunities to access trails closer to population centers.
- One consideration I've had is to add language noting the desire to integrate road/trails with the local community's needs.
- I heard a lot of different points of view on elk (seasonal closures v. elk don't mind)
  - o Seasonal closures for winter range ("green dot system in Oregon")
- Terms like "hydrological connectivity" are too scientific and should be more straightforward.
- I heard "keep roads open and maintain them well".
- I heard that we need to work with communities to meet their needs.

### Final feedback around the circle: How did you feel about the meeting? Did you feel you were heard?

- I appreciate that "access" means different things for different people. Having people state positively what they are hoping for could be a more helpful way to find common ground.
- We need to keep the dialogue around what different people want.
- I appreciate community input and civility. Good comments and hope to see you at the next meeting and what will be presented.
- I came with a different expectation -- trying to get consensus amongst a group. I'm feeling positive now, but I know what comes back in the end will be different. I hope everyone can get what they need, even if not what they want.



## MEETING NOTES

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- Glad everybody has something they can do in the mountains. Hope the plan doesn't come out only limiting traffic. Don't close roads.
- Leave roads the way they are. Don't close any more.
- Open up the roads. Let us travel and don't harass us for everything we do.
- As long as we're still talking, we can make progress and get things done.
- There is very little trust in the FS; we need to get this plan done.
- Don't close any more roads down. Don't close down just because you don't have money to maintain them. Find another way.
- Tonight was a deeper meeting, and I appreciate that people took the time/attention to go into detail. I'm sorry not to see a representative of the Tribes here; that was a missed opportunity. Please proactively reach out to them next time. The Hispanic community also needs to be included; they are important members of this community.
- It was hard to know what this meeting was for.
- Please make progress. Take these comments, and give us a report out. The next meetings should be informed by what we discussed/learned/distilled here.
- Thank you for your courage and confidence.
- I'm concerned that access is going away, but I'm encouraged by everyone's attitude.
- Closing note from Kevin Martin, Forest Supervisor: Thank you all for sharing. We're not good about simple/clear language. We need to do better. Folks are interested in working together, and we need to build that into our decision space. People are interested in sharing – help us find ways to make that happen. That will take energy and perseverance. We will get a plan. I'm not sure everyone will be happy with every aspect of it, and we may not get everything we want, but I hope people will know we did our best to meet their needs.