



for the greatest good



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 Plan Revision

Hosted by High Desert Partnership and the Umatilla National Forest

Heppner, OR / Morrow County Fairgrounds

July 23, 2015

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

Attendees (as listed on the sign-in sheet): Brian Thompson, Thomas Wolff, Mike Gorman, Corey Sweeney, Cam Sweeney, Don Stroeber, Jeff Cutsforth, Karen Wolff, Ed Yeoman, Bill Ewing, Jay Coil, Frank Mason, James Cason, Steve Cherry, Brian Jennings, Terri and Dave Denton, Roger Ables, Greg, Roger Ford, David Sykes, and Jack Southworth

US Forest Service (FS) attendees: Ann Niesen, Lori Seitz, Joani Bosworth, David Hatfield, Dennis Dougherty, Peter Fargo (notetaker)

Organizations represented (as listed on the sign-in sheet): Columbia Basin Electric Cooperative, Morrow County, Fun Runner ATV Club, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Northwest Trail Riders Association, Heppner Gazette, US Forest Service

Facilitator Introduction – Jack Southworth, High Desert Partnership

- We are here to discuss the access and wilderness portions of the draft Blue Mountains Forest Plans. FS planning staff are here to listen to you, as are FS officials from Heppner and Pendleton.
- The FS wants to do more listening than talking, so they can get your advice on how to make this a better Forest Plan.
- Let's begin by going around the circle for a round of introductions.

Introductions around the circle: Who are you, where are you from, and if this is a good meeting what will we accomplish?

- From Heppner, seeking open access for these mountains
- From Heppner, want a better understanding, so I can share with others who couldn't be here
- From Heppner, want to know what's up with this whole deal
- Want to understand the process, enjoy remote areas and want to keep them in good shape
- Parks manager for Morrow County; want to see connectivity between our parks; more access in/out; think we can work together

MEETING NOTES

(continued)

- Local farmer and forest user
- Local rancher with a FS grazing allotment for 50-60 years
- Recreation planner on BMFP revision team; success is open dialogue; I look forward to hearing some good ideas.
- Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife; focused on hunter access and big game management
- Staff Officer on the Umatilla NF; supervise scientists; acting as Forest Supervisor today; here to listen to you; a successful meeting would include respectful dialogue and good feedback on the Forest Plan.
- From Bend; representing Backcountry Hunters and Anglers; want to preserve what we have in the woods; in this meeting I hope to see collaboration; balance of multiple uses of the forest
- Heppner Gazette, and I'm here to report on the meeting
- Forest user; was here for the last round of meetings
- Forest user; trying to keep up with the plan and changes
- From Stanfield, OR and here with NW Trail Riders Association. Our club started when the John Day Wilderness closed our trails. I'm interested in seeing motorized access stay.
- From Pendleton, OR - Public Affairs Officer with the Umatilla National Forest; here to listen for the FS; look forward to hearing diverse perspectives and what people want to see. I'm also a forest user and enjoy access via ATV, motorcycle, and hiking boots.
- From La Grande, OR - have been away for a few decades; I'm now back home and concerned about our forests and access; looking for ways to help.
- Representing the Fun Runners ATV club of Hermiston; trying to get more information
- Forest user; here with questions on access and why the FS didn't get back to us after we submitted comments last year
- Avid forest user; I see that the FS is well-represented; I would like to find out why we are doing this and what we can do to prevent doing this again.
- Representing the Columbia Basin Electric Cooperative
- Representing Morrow County Commissioners
- Resident and Morrow County tax assessor/collector

Opening remarks from David Hatfield, Staff Officer, Umatilla National Forest

- Why are we here? Over a year ago, we sent out a draft Environmental Impact Statement. Many folks didn't like it; or didn't like the way it read; or felt we didn't do a good enough job listening.
- We are here seeking solutions and zones of agreement on how to produce a better plan. We want a plan that more people can support – or at least you can say that you can live with it.
- A Forest Plan is important because it guides future management of the forest; it is akin to a county land zoning plan. Our zones include grazing, campgrounds, motorized, and non-motorized areas.
- This is a strategic document; what that means is the plan does not make any site-specific decisions.
- Basically, we realize we messed up, and we think we can do better. Last time we held public meetings about the plan, we talked a lot and explained in detail what was in the plan. This time we're here to listen.
- Access and Wilderness were some of the most important areas that people were concerned about. Other topics included: Pace & Scale of Restoration, and Grazing.
- How will we use the information we gather here tonight? We are taking notes; the team will look them over and see how we can weave this information into the forest planning process, and see if we can

MEETING NOTES

(continued)

come up with a better plan. Some information we will feed to the District Ranger to address on a local level.

Panelists remarks:

- Oregon is a special place. I grew up in the Pacific Northwest, in Washington; moved to Oregon and fell in love, and I have explored every corner of the state.
 - Backcountry Hunters and Anglers was formed to preserve the backcountry experience; we advocate for a balanced management plan; multiple uses
 - Everyone has the right to be out there to use the resources, but nobody has the right to abuse the resources; we advocate the “leave no trace” ethic. A small percentage of people do abuse the forests; they leave trash, etc.
 - Like many hunters, we do use ATVs. But we do it legally. When the road comes to an end, we use the original ATVs: our legs. Our members don’t like when other ATVs interrupt their hunt while they are out there.
 - As you may already know, big game has been moving into private lands. Elk would rather have “dessert” on private lands than “leftovers” up in the mountains.
 - We want to retain as many roads as we can, but if there are road redundancies, we should ask if we need all of those roads. I believe we need better habitat. More big game are moving to private lands, in part because our logging is a mess. Due to a lack of logging, sunlight is not hitting the floor of the forest and grass is not growing.
 - We come with a spirit of collaboration; there need to be more frequent meetings – an ongoing mechanism to work together. Collaboration means that none of us get everything we want, but we all get something. We have opportunities to do what we love, but we use our public lands in respectful ways.
 - A lot of FS budgets go to fighting wildfires. Senator Wyden saw this during his recent tour of Oregon’s public lands. He is determined to find a different pot of money to address the budget crisis. Call Wyden and Merkley’s offices to encourage them.
 - Regarding the increased demand for getting away into the woods, I support it -- as long as access is responsible, reasonable, and people stay on designated trails. We can use the land, but we cannot abuse it.
-
- Our job is to manage big game for the state. Getting hunters around the forest is imperative to what we do.
 - But it’s a juggling act. How much access is appropriate based on myriad factors in managing big game. Disturbance, from all kinds of access, affects where big game go. Elk are a disturbance-based animal; they move away from disturbance in general. A lot of great research has come out of the Starkey Research Center; a lot of our data has come out of that. We try to manage the level of disturbance that happens on the NFs, because if the elk leave for private lands, where there is less disturbance, those animals are not available for hunting, viewing, etc.
 - Social acceptance is a challenge. Our Heppner unit is 38% public land. If the elk leave the forests for private lands too much, that becomes unacceptable for private landowners. It’s a circular balancing act; we want the access to the animals, but that drives them away, and then we need to deal with access impacts.

MEETING NOTES

(continued)

- We understand there is a desire for all kinds of access – for all kinds of needs/interests. Redundant roads are an issue. Hunting has definitely changed the landscape and where elk are on the landscape.
-

- Access is a big thing. Our feeling is we need more connectivity. We don't need roads side-by-side, but we need access in and out.
- A lot of people will go use the roads/trails, and there is some abuse. It's up to us to police our own.
- Older and younger people need access to get into these places.
- We need roads to hunt and play. It takes a lot of planning to make everybody happy; that is tough to do. But we cannot close all of our access.

Facilitator: The FS wants to hear solutions that work for everybody. What are solutions/characteristics that you would like to see in the access portion of the Forest Plan that would work for everybody in this room?

- A lot of our problem is financial; we don't have the timber sales we used to. The FS is in trouble. Come hunting season, I don't see deer/elk. We need to collaborate and work the problems out from there. Every time I'm up there, I'm aggravated about what I see our money spent on. That's a problem for DC too.
- Don't want to see any more reduction in access to the woods. Half the places I went when I was a kid I can't access unless I hike 5-10 miles; then I can't bring my gear. I don't hunt anymore; it has been 2 years, because it's too crowded out there.
- Population is one of the problems; there are just too many people up there. We closed a lot of roads in the Travel Management process – spur roads, etc. There are still plenty of roads up there. If you want to get out there and walk, you can get where you want to go. It used to be you only saw people up there during hunting season; now it is overrun. East side and west side visitors. I don't want to see any more roads closed; many were closed that shouldn't have been.
- I manage grounds in the Heppner area; adjacent to NF; adjacent to private land. If you want more game, you need to graze the forest, keep the wildfire out, and keep predators out. I have more deer on my ranch than are on the NF. The OHV park has 30-40K OHVs out there a year. If you want to make money, log the forests, and use that money to manage the forests. Every time you all get together, the forest rules are always more restrictive. Don't be more restrictive; manage the lands better.
- I think we already have enough closed areas. Some have been closed due to the terrain. If somebody wants to experience roadless hunting, there are plenty of areas. We are choking down on access.
- Access isn't just for hunting; there are grazing/fencing/private interests within the forest; the FS needs to take that into account. A road was proposed to close; then a fire came through and the road stopped it from burning further.
- I appreciate the comments so far, and I concur.
- Speaking as a private individual; I used to allocate funds to different agencies in Oregon. For example, I helped fund a study by Dr. Wisdom, who found that wildlife/elk will habituate to ATVs but mountain bikes scare the heck out of them. While we don't want to disturb them while they are calving, and we need to let them thrive, they will habituate to ATVs. I also worry about fire access. Grazing has worked at the OHV park.

MEETING NOTES

(continued)

- When you get to a certain age, you can't go down these canyons any more. I don't want the FS to open land, just so somebody can get down there on an ATV. Some areas are best for fit young people; it is not worth it for some of us older people to go down there and get elk, etc.
- I have never seen roads re-opened. Why not? Elk run for miles when they see a four-wheeler coming during hunting season. On the other hand, elk are all over the OHV areas. Private landowners own their land and want to get around and see it; I feel the same about the National Forests; I own them too, and I want to see them.
- The FS went wrong the first time with this 200-page pamphlet; it is too much for me. It's too big an area to digest. This needs to be on the local level, so I can give my input and reasoning. The FS may have reasons to close roads; I can give as many reasons. We're trying to combat big government, but the local FS officials are helpful; they know the local roads/areas.
 - Response by FS Recreation Specialist: Nobody likes when one-size-fits-all regulations come down from DC. The Forest Plan is necessarily broad to cover a lot of issues that are similar across the Blues, but it doesn't make site-specific decisions. That's handled locally by the District Rangers.
- I want to see open access. Closing roads affects fire suppression; that means spending more money on firefighting. You'll run out of resources to fight fires from the air. About the plan, 85% of comments were negative; the 1200 page document covered three NFs, and a lot of information was 10-15 years old – is that the best you have? We don't accept it. That's why we're here. Follow through if you make a claim; don't put something out there and hope it will go away. What about the public? Don't tell us about your problems. The OHV park has 8,200 acres and wolves, elk, etc. Quit pushing people into a funnel. I like space and privacy. I'm older, and I'm not going to be pushed off my roads. On the Umatilla, you have to have a map. I have watched my roads closed for many years. I lived in the mountains; my dad was a logger on the Wallowa-Whitman NF. Debris is not habitat; it's a fire hazard. A tree feller dropped a tree on himself; he died because they couldn't get help to him.
- Clean the forest up; we have the OHV park doing good management. The wolves are here; we have seen them.
- The FS is doing a bad job. Manage the resource. You are not maintaining the roads; closing them won't save you money. Instead of closing them, and limiting access, start taking care of the roads. Madison Butte: I hunt there, and it is in bad shape. You are not doing your jobs; do your job; manage it; take care of it. The reason there is no money to take care of roads is because we're not taking care of them. The forest is a renewable resource: cut it, plant it, cut it again. We're not doing that. Closing roads? You guys need to pick on something else.
- I came in with a chip on my shoulder; I have seen no response to my comments in over a year. What I have seen is a lot of mismanagement. Many areas out there are too thick and major fire hazards. The roads we have are poorly marked.
- I've lived here all my life; I am upset about the mismanagement. When you close a road, reach out to people and understand what problems it's going to cause for them. I pay taxes, and I have the right to take my ATV where I want to go.
- Private ranches and the OHV park have a lot in common; they are clean and grazed; that is why the elk are there. Access: I don't understand why trees are so thick. If we maintained the roads, we wouldn't have the problems that we do. We close the roads when they are too close to streams and disturb elk. But how do I get a road opened again? Is there a procedure in the Forest Plan that says, "To open a road, you need to do X, Y, Z." We need that in the Plan, so we understand how to work on it.

MEETING NOTES

(continued)

- I feel that, if the FS decommissions a road, it will never be opened again.
- FS people are good and work hard, but the umbrella they have to work under is so strict that they can't do their jobs. What we see in the Morrow County OHV park works, so maybe we need to focus on smaller areas for planning purposes.
- If there was a proposal to open 10 roads on the National Forest, nobody but the FS would be here. The FS is afraid to get sued. We need to let you guys who are trained and hired to do your jobs; go out and do it. The real solution is to go to Senator Wyden, Senator Merkley, etc. The real solution is to get help from DC to stop this senseless BS.

Summary from Dennis Dougherty – FS Recreation Specialist, Forest Plan Revision Team

- Let's keep in mind that if different sides don't completely like the plan, it may actually be a good plan. We all can't get everything we want, but we can all get something.
- I heard...
 - A lot of different perspectives; also a lot of commonalities
 - Multiple uses; balance
 - Local economics and reliance of communities on forest products
 - Funding; there is not much we can do about that; it is a Congressional game
 - Cooperation, collaboration, communication
 - I heard opposition to road closures; let's keep what we have open
 - Address impacts on adjacent lands; private lands
 - Habitat: We manage the wildlife "hotel". We don't manage the game population (that's ODF&W); maybe we're doing a bad job managing the hotel though.
 - Social, economic, ecological
- Comment period: There were a lot of comments, and they were complex. We had a team read them, organize them, and group the comments. We just got them back from that team, grouped together with like comments. We will respond to them in the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS); unfortunately there is a big time gap between comments and response.
- We need to improve the components of the plan that we know need improving, and we also hope to hear new recommendations from you and others to bring other opportunities for improvement to our attention.
- I heard folks talk about getting involved with legislators. There is a current bill in the US House of Representatives that would reduce NEPA requirements for thinning/insects. Litigants would also be required to post bond to sue; they may even have to foot our legal bills.

Summary from David Hatfield – Staff Officer, Umatilla National Forest

- I'm encouraged that you all came out to help us manage your National Forest.
- People are passionate – including about what they did when they were kids, and now wanting to pass on traditions to kids and grandkids.
- If you are interested in local decisions, please work with your local Ranger District; that is why they are here.
- The FS works closely with Oregon and Washington states.
- We need to balance multiple uses.

MEETING NOTES

(continued)

- I heard many say they don't want us to close any more roads, and certainly not without checking with you all. Lori and Ann are available to you; they can help if they know about your concerns. We can continue to work together in groups like this.

Facilitator: How did you feel about this meeting, and did it address what you hoped it would?

- Without better trust, it's hard to make progress. People in the paper are upset that their comments have not received a response. People want an individual response from the FS; they will not understand the federal process for releasing/responding to comments. Are there any alternatives that call for specific road closures? [FS: The Forest Plan does not propose to close any roads. They set the areas and tone for future management decisions.] Local people cannot deal with the large volumes you dropped on us last year.
- I want to thank people for playing nice in the sandbox.
- Recap: Several citizens asked how we can re-open decommissioned roads. How? [Ann, District Ranger: We have the tools to change road status as part of Travel Management.]
- Why are we here wasting our time? I think we know the answer. Land management is not new; been around since man has. We have not managed properly in the past. We can look at private lands as an example. Thank you to local FS staff for the good things they have accomplished and good things they will do in the future.
- I think there's been more communication this year, and that's been really important. It's safety; it is courtesy. If we can keep it up, I'd appreciate it.
- I agree; local FS is trying hard to do a good job but kind of handcuffed by frivolous litigation. Until we can get more control in the hands of local decision-makers, we will continue to struggle to meet local needs.
- It won't take us long to hear from people opposed to closing more roads.
- We can do a lot more to make it better.
- We are pretty lucky here in that we have a Travel Management Plan that we pounded out in the past. There is a pretty good mix of access on our forest; roaded areas and unroaded areas.
- I will look for a plan that is transparent and a process that is transparent; thank you for your time.
- Any good plan must have a local base of support. Local folks are close to the land and care about it. We will throw our support behind local plans. Timber management needs to be revised completely. Good timber is like good farming/ranching and can be done in a sustainable manner. Once we get over the continuous cycle of lawsuits, we'll be able to focus on the actual work. The plan is never going to be perfect, but we can achieve a balance. The Umatilla NF is one of the grandest places in Oregon. You folks are blessed to have it; love it and pass it down to your children.
- Have you had any meeting where there was unanimous support for more road closures? If there are more closures, would it be safe to say these meetings are just jacking our jaws?
 - Response by FS Recreation Specialist: No, that would not be our assumption. Unanimous support is rare in forest management, so we are listening to different perspectives.