

USFS Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision Meeting | April 9, 2014 | Clarkston, WA

Notetaker: Seth Baker, EnviroIssues

Approximate Attendance: 25

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

Q: The map is broad. I see there's 5 million acres total and 90,000 acres of proposed wilderness. Can you enlarge the mapped yellow area in the Clarkston vicinity so we can see the local area?

R: This map shows the Umatilla National Forest only- there are 40,000 acres here. 40,000 out of 90,000 acres proposed in Alternative E are on the Umatilla National Forest. There's a display in the back that goes into more detail. In Washington, we're looking at the orange piece, south of the Tucannon River adjacent to existing wilderness. That's the only one in Washington. There are two in Oregon on the Umatilla National Forest- one near Hell Hole and the other one is near John Day. I suggest when we break that you meet with Dennis to show you exactly where the boundaries would be in greater detail.

Q: Why is more wilderness proposed and who is proposing it?

R: We have to go through this evaluation process as part of the forest planning rule. When you look at alternatives, there are people who would like to see more wilderness and people who would like to see none. We have alternatives with a range of wilderness proposed between no more and a lot more. The preferred alternative is a balance in between. We're looking for feedback on these alternatives.

Q: To follow up regarding wilderness, why do we need any more wilderness? Maybe you should take back some wilderness we already have. We have a significant amount of wilderness around us and the problem is it locks the ground up and significantly limits what can be done with it. No motorized use, no timber harvest, no grazing. There's a long list of "no" use in wilderness. It's not managed very well. It's left to grow as a jungle so it can burn off and be a land of no value. I would wonder why we don't go the other direction and reduce wilderness.

R: The Forest Service can't create or reduce wilderness, only Congress can. We follow the Forest Rule and make proposals. As far as taking wilderness away, you have to talk to Congressional members.

Q: Could you recommend reducing the amount of wilderness?

R: It's not part of the planning rule. I'm not sure. We can recommend not increasing wilderness, but we don't have the flexibility that I'm aware of to propose taking wilderness away.

C: I think you stated there were not going to be roads or trails that would be reduced. In the Wallowa-Whitman Forest it states reductions in motorized use.

R: This is a draft plan. Even if we sign the plan, we would have to go through a planning process to remove any roads or trails or over-snow use. That would be a separate planning process.

C: Under the suitable uses and activities, the energy development concerns me. I'm not pro-wilderness but I don't want to see a bunch of windmills. They might seem quiet but they're not quiet. Also, environmentalists say they kill birds. I think you're going to have a battle from those of us who don't want to see them and the environmentalists who don't like them due to wildlife impacts.

R: We made the assumption that there is going to be interest in energy development on national forest land. We tried to look at areas where it might be a suitable use, and where it would not be suitable. That's feedback you can provide. Maybe you don't want any windmills. Give us your comments. This is really new and different for us.

C: Of all the forms of energy production I would say wind is the least efficient and it takes horrendous roads to get the turbines in there and build them. I'd like to see more trails but not freeways through the mountains.

Q: What is the perceived status of bull trout right now? Maybe that's a federal program to protect them, but is there any thought that they are harming other wild trout populations?

R: The bull trout are federally listed and we work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the tribes to do our best to bring them back so that they can be removed from the list. As far as effects to other species, I would encourage you to speak to the state agencies or USFWS.

Q: I'm pro management. Some of these alternatives like wilderness or endangered species limit management areas. Burned into our minds is the School Fire. You see it regularly, it's there. The landscape resulting from that fire does not meet your desired conditions. Fuel management is very important to the economy. How do you deal with FOIAs or lawsuits? It seems like every time you try to do management you get sued. How do you deal with that? Those lawsuits are costly but surely not as costly as the fires.

R: I agree. The School Fire is not a desired condition. That's why we would like to increase the amount of vegetation treatment for exactly what you said. It's good for the landscape, environment and people. We don't want to have 50-100 thousand acre fires. That doesn't meet the needs of many of us and our species. Lawsuits are outside the realm of forest planning but it is part of business these days. We go through the analysis and appeal and objection processes. If folks aren't happy, they litigate us and we go through a court process. It's costly and takes time but I think many of us would want the opportunity to litigate if it were something we were interested in. People are really passionate about their national forests and to me that's a positive thing.

C: I'm old school and I believe in multiple uses for all of the forests. I would go on record supporting the comments requesting no more wilderness. Let's manage what we have more intensively.

R: Commenting is really important. Whether it's big or small, commenting gets you into the system and helps you continue down the process later with objections, appeals or litigation. I encourage you to comment even if you think it's minor. When you review the plan I know some of you are going to give us a lot of comments.

Q: I would like to address this question to the representative from U.S. Representative Cathy McMorris' office. The response that I get from him may alter further questions and comments. I know Cathy is a fan of farming but I don't know her stance on wilderness or logging. Could you bring us up to date on that? Congress is our next step.

R: [Mike Poulson - Cathy McMorris-Rodgers' Office] Cathy is a big fan of managed forests. If you look in the Spokesman-Review she had an opinion editorial last Sunday that would give you an idea of her opinion. About one-third of the forest is diseased. Unless we cut more wood than we have in the last 10 years, it will be half diseased soon. She's not a fan of wilderness. I say that because we're involved with a number of collaborative groups that we are making progress with and wilderness is a reality that we're not able to get away from.

C: One of the hats I've worn is a wildland forest firefighter. After 27 years of fighting fires I don't know why we can't have more grazing and manage those flashy fuels and lighter fuels that are causing these big fires. I think the biggest help would be increasing grazing rather than keeping it the same.

R: Alternative D slightly increases grazing so you might want to look at the proposed revised land management plan.

C: First, thank you for coming and choosing Clarkston to have a meeting. It's nice to be able to meet you and get information directly from you. We're hoping the comments we make are being considered and we can have influence on your decision. We hope we're not just airing our complaints. I was born and raised here. I've lived here all my life and have recreated in the Blue Mountains and Umatilla National Forest all my life. I know my way around all this area as well as the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. I own timberland that borders national forest system land out of Cloverland. I pay attention and recreate up there. I have two or three areas of concern. First, access, I think it's important that you pay close attention to providing access for multiple uses including snowmobilers, berry pickers, fire wood-cutters, four-wheelers and mushroom hunters. Each of these people think what they're doing is important. We hope you folks strongly promote and make more access. I want to see more trails, not less. Don't close roads down. Build more roads to provide access for the people. All the time we hear about the Forest Service considering decommissioning roads due to silt. Take a hard look at that. I personally don't know of one road that causes a silt problem for streams in our area. There may be a silt problem in other areas. It costs us a lot of money to get those roads built to have access so you can manage ground and provide access for loggers. Let's keep roads and keep them open for all different people. Second, we all enjoy seeing the beauty and the diverse timber and grazing and all of the natural resources we have in national forests. We don't want to see it burn up like the School Fire. We're really hoping you folks can concentrate on forest stewardship programs. Another commenter made a good comment about lighter fuels and debris. I don't think any

of you would just scatter garden seed and walk away from it. That wouldn't be responsible management. Our forests should be logged the same way you would weed your garden. A good rancher doesn't put more cattle on the grazing ground than what his grass can support. We need to manage our national forests the same way. It's good for community and economics. Thin the trees, take out lighter fuels and create opportunity for local contractors. I hope you put strong interest on that. Provide logging contracts as well so timber can re-grow and be re-harvested. Third, I hope you consider less wilderness, not more wilderness. There's a lot of "no" to wilderness. Manage our resources for multiple uses. It will be a big economic boost for communities around national forests. We hope you guys can use common sense to guide you and not be influenced by far away environmental groups with an agenda. I know those people have a lot of money and a lot of time. We local folks are behind you to provide good management and access.

C: I agree 100% with the last comment.