ISSUE AREA : Forest Health

The Forest has and is currently experiencing large-scale insect infestations of forested areas. The attacks have created large stands of dead and dying trees These large-scale pest epidemics have major impacts on wildlife habitats, recreation opportunities, timber growth and yield, visual resources, fire hazards, and other resources. A number of groups, agencies, and individuals are concerned about the damage and commensurate losses. My goal is to provide for a healthy and productive range and forest ecosystem

My decision has the potential to reduce insects and diseases and possible losses from these pests, thus providing for forest health Approximately 40% of the total forested area will be in an older forest condition Seventy percent of the regeneration acres will be managed using even-aged management, resulting in high control effectiveness The risk of losses from insects and diseases is at a relatively *moderate level because of acres receiving stocking level control.*

Under this Forest Plan, integrated pest management approaches are used in a cost-effective manner to prevent and control forest pests The principle approach in preventing the spread is through vegetation management activities. When prevention fails, early detection and aggressive control action may assist in alleviating large pest outbreaks. The appropriate control method for forest pests will continue to be determined through site-specific environmental analyses For additional information on forest health reference the FEIS, IX, INDEX, "INSECTS & DISEASE"

ISSUE AREA : Old Growth

As described in the FEIS, there are several reasons why responsible management should include retaining old growth forest areas At issue, of course, is how much land to retain and what constitutes old growth. For the definition of old growth used in Malheur National Forest planning refer to the FOREST PLAN, CHAPTER VI, GLOSSARY

Meeting management requirements for wildlife on the Malheur National Forest means retaining 38,090 *acres of old growth forest outside of wilderness, research natural areas, semiprimitive areas, and wild* and scenic rivers I believe there are several reasons why somewhat more than that amount should be retained

1. *The management requirement is based on current knowledge and estimates of what is* necessary to retain viable populations of wildlife that rely on old growth conditions.

2. In order to achieve adequate distribution of old growth stands, it was necessary to select several that only marginally meet the definition of old growth or will need to grow into old growth It can be argued that some of the stands we have designated don't meet the accepted definition at present, although they have the potential to grow into old growth in the future

3. Recent wildfires as well as insect and disease epidemics over the past decade illustrate how easily old growth stands can be lost

For these reasons, we have prescribed that an additional 9,600 acres, or a total of 47,690 acres, be managed as dedicated old growth in Management Area 13. This is approximately the same amount as was shown in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement after adjustments are made for changes into different land allocations such as roadless and wild and scenic river areas.

There are those who have suggested that the allocation of old growth acres should be higher. The dedicated old growth represents only a portion of the old-growth habitat existing on the forest. Additional old growth will remain protected in wilderness, semiprimitive areas and other management allocations that are distributed across the forest.

Connectivity corridors provide travelways between old growth areas. Although important for all wildlife, it is crucial for small game so that populations do not become genetically secluded. My selected alternative provides for connectivity corridors through land allocations in riparian areas, visual corridors, wild and scenic rivers and more.

The State of Oregon is concerned about the amount of ponderosa pine old growth in dedicated old growth (Management Area 13) and so am I They have requested that we reassess that amount of old growth which is captured in designated areas. I feel this is a reasonable request and have asked the Forest Supervisor to inventory designated old growth within one year to ensure that at least 5,000 to 7,000 acres are in ponderosa pine climax or in mixed conifer with a majority of ponderosa pine. If the inventory shows dedicated old growth does not capture at least this acreage, steps will be taken to rectify this situation

Preliminary information from the new timber inventory, currently underway, will provide an opportunity to re-evaluate the old growth situation within two years. At that time, I will consider whether or not changes in old growth forest management measures are necessary. For additional information on old growth reference the FEIS, IX, INDEX, "OLD GROWTH".

ISSUE AREA : Visuals

Visuals are an integral part of the Malheur National Forest. Many publics come to enjoy a recreational setting away from an urban life and the scenery is part of their total outdoor experience. There was a great deal of public comment about the visual character of the Forest in response to the DEIS. In general, respondents felt that maintaining the visual integrity of the Forest was important Several publics, including the State of Oregon, suggested that we use uneven-aged management to retain large diameter trees in critical viewshed.

Our analysis showed that uneven-aged management can be used to retain large diameter trees in specific areas This was one of the reasons that Alternative I allocated 30% of the suitable timber lands to uneven-aged management. In addition Alternative I established tighter standards to retain the visual character of the Forest

The State of Oregon commented on two specific visual areas, Logan Valley and along the North Fork of the Malheur trail. In Logan Valley they requested to change the foreground from retention to partial retention, the latter being less restrictive on timber harvesting, thus gaining a possible 1 MMBF to the ASQ. I seriously considered their request and fully realize the importance additional ASQ is to the timber industry but felt that the impacts to the Logan Valley visual corridor did not warrant an additional 1 MMBF.

My rationale for retaining the Logan Valley foreground at retention is fairly straight forward The area is under consideration for a Scenic Byway and as such is definitely a visually sensitive area I am not certain that it is possible to schedule additional ASQ in this area without dramatically altering the landscape, but I do agree that if the uses are compatible we should schedule more harvest. Therefore I have directed the Forest Supervisor to proceed with a corridor plan in this viewshed (with foreground at retention). After completion of a corridor plan I will revisit the opportunity for additional volume by