



for the greatest good



**BLUE MOUNTAINS**  
**FOREST PLAN REVISION - 2015**  
Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman  
National Forests

# Meeting Notes

## **Public Meeting on Pace and Scale of Restoration and the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision**

Hosted by Union County, High Desert Partnership, and the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest  
La Grande, Oregon | Nov. 12, 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, the 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): Mark Davidson, Dave Price, Irene Gilbert, Cleve Kimball, Danae Yurgel, JoAnn Marlette, Gary Marlette, Frank Mason, Bark Wales, Jon Paustian, Bill Grigsby, Dawn Edvalson, Doug Stratton, Kirsten Johnson, Kelly Ducote, Jeff Blackwood, Jack Southworth (facilitator)

**US Forest Service (USFS) participants:** Tom Montoya, Genevieve Masters, David Hatfield, Sabrina Stadler, Gunnar Carnwath, Alissa Tanner, Darcy Weseman, Peter Fargo (notetaker)

**Organizations represented:** Union County, Eastern Oregon University, La Grande Observer, Oregon Trail Trader, Avella Orchard, Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, Blue Mountain Alliance, High Desert Partnership, and USFS

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### **Introductory Remarks**

*Facilitator, Jack Southworth of High Desert Partnership:* Thank you for being here; the purpose of tonight’s meeting is to discuss the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision, and specifically the portions that pertain to the “pace and scale” of forest restoration. Please note the guidelines for respectful dialogue on your agendas; let’s be respectful; please focus on the issues, not the person.

*Mark Davidson, Union County Commissioner:* Thank you for coming out and caring about the Forest Plan Revision process and its effect on our community. This is important and affects our economy, our jobs, and we want to see it supports our way of life.

*Tom Montoya, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Supervisor:*

- Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to participate in this process. We are here to talk about the Forest Plan Revision and the pace and scale of restoration, including dialogue about timber volumes around the Blue Mountains. We had a good technical workshop earlier today, and some of you were there.

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- I want to talk a bit about where we've been, what we've heard, and where we're going. A Forest Plan defines ecological, social, and economic goals; it guides our future planning and management; we are required to prepare a new plan on a 15-year rotation, but for a number of reasons we are still under the 1990 Forest Plan. We are following the 1982 Planning Rule, although the objection process will be under the 2012 Rule.
- Timeline: We have been at this for about 12 years; stops/starts due to litigation and new rules; we released a draft in 2014, got a lot of comments, and decided to pause and re-engage with our communities to make sure we understand the concerns.
- Change can be challenging; we need to make changes to the Forest Plan based on the latest science and information.
- We have heard a lot about timber harvest outputs; Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ) is what is available for regularly-scheduled timber harvest; additional volume can be produced on lands that are "Unsuitable" as long as it's ecologically sustainable. There is no regulatory limit, but there is an ecological limit. We are looking to move toward future Desired Conditions (DCs).
- The wood products industry is an important part of our ability to make changes to the land. It is vital to keep that industry going, so we can maintain a healthy forest.
- The best of intentions have been changed due to influences beyond our control. We had timber volumes in the 1990 Plans that were interrupted by listed fish species (PACFISH/INFISH), East Side Screens (>21" trees), the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, etc.
- There are budget constraints; we can only do as much as we can with the budgets we have.
- Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we have heard that people really care about their National Forests and want to support the responsible stewardship of these resources. You are doing that by being here tonight, so thanks again. I look forward to our discussion.

**Questions from the Facilitator:** Who are you, where are you from, and what is your relationship to the National Forests? Also, what is your concern, and what is your solution?

- I like to fish and hike.
- I recreate here; it's my home.
- My concern is we're focusing on timber projects, but these are ecological systems; let's look at wildlife habitat; "restoration" can be co-opted by industry. There is a lot of anxiety about wildfires, and projects could be pushed through without understanding the consequences.
- From Medford; here for a class.
- From Hermiston; doing some research; want to see how meetings are going.
- Representing the Observer in La Grande.
- Concerned about soils, water, wildlife, and the voices we're not hearing from. Would like to see a Forest Plan that protects our water quality above all; preserve soil; protect old trees as living history; woodpeckers and other wildlife need the old growth.
- Interested in this whole Forest Plan process; I am concerned about the direction of forest management today; want to turn it around; solution is to back up, listen, and find a solution; there is room for improvement to obtain the support of the people that you need; now you have to do it.
- Traditional uses are important to me; also realize that federal land is an important refuge for wildlife; they have standards that are often stronger than the States. Regarding pace and scale of restoration, I believe the Forest Service has the resources, but plans are not well-thought out in terms of where they can get the

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best bang for the buck—e.g., clearing areas around town, preventing wildfires. Identify those areas using a public process. One suggestion is to prioritize maintenance and post signs about it; otherwise people are on their own out there. The public problems with road closures are mainly because they are surprised and not getting enough information about road plans in advance. Some roads should be closed; others should not.

- USFS: My biggest concern is the Forest Plan may tie the hands of specialists who are on the ground. Let's measure twice, cut once.
- Concerned with machines cutting limbs off the trees and leaving them on the ground as fuel for fire.
- My concern is our County's economic viability, jobs, and industry; also concerned about the effect of the Forest Plan on our ability to control wildfire, which can endanger our property, and the smoke can affect our most vulnerable populations. We should be treating at least 5% of the forest per year to deal with overstocked stands. Look at different management areas and make changes to ensure they can be actively managed. Take into account climate change, change in precipitation, and stocking levels that can be supported on the ground.
- USFS: I'm not sure everyone is going to love this plan when we're done.
- Our friends have a big patch of forest land; they manage it independently; they burned, but it didn't get into the trees, because they carefully manage the fuels.
- When we moved into Baker County in the 60s, we had beautiful forests and managed them well. The forests we have now I don't recognize. I'm thinking it's because all the environmentalists are suing, and when they win, we the public pay their bill.
- The spotted owl did a great job destroying the timber industry. What have we learned now? Somebody made it up; it was a bald-faced lie. People are concerned about elk leaving the forest. Go look at the ATV park on the Umatilla; they can't get rid of them. When I was here in the 60s, there were over 10 mills. When there were fires, the salvage timber was gone. Now what we get compared to what burned is not much. (USFS: About 10 million board feet on the Wallowa-Whitman.) There is an awful lot of good-looking timber that needs to be harvested. Solution: Better management; more efficient NEPA; most of it is boilerplate; we need faster response time to salvage.
- USFS: My concern is to achieve a Forest Plan that provides an optimal balance while providing long-term sustainability. Thank you for helping us find it.
- USFS: I'm the one who decides which trees get cut; I have to balance wildlife, fire, recreation, and minerals. Prescriptions are getting more and more complicated; I have less and less time to collect the appropriate information to make these more complicated prescriptions. Areas are getting bigger and bigger, yet we have less money to contract out the work. The more pace & scale of restoration, the more difficult it could be to provide good service. A solution: More boots on the ground and more specialists to get more data; projects are not too complex if I actually have the data. Then logging and monitoring.
- USFS: On the Blue Mountains Restoration Team; lived here in La Grande for many years; there is a lot of science out there, and we need to use it; we need to move faster.

### Second round of input

- Infrastructure is very important. The forest has to be managed, or you are going to see larger and larger fires. The infrastructure is moving toward the edge; if we don't move it away from the edge, we're going to lose it. There are some things that can be done: Look at the criteria that went into areas that are Suitable, Unsuitable, and Unsuitable (but available). Also Old Growth: For a lot of people it is a sensitive, even

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religious, term. Old growth is needed, but how much? Is there some old growth credit that can be applied to the remaining forest acres? If that can be done, it could be very helpful. The 21" Rule is purely arbitrary; it was negotiated; old growth was defined as anywhere from 20-30". The 21" Rule goes away, but the old growth characteristic is applied. How you apply that makes a big difference.

- Thank you for bringing up the importance of water. Part of me resists that a lot of money is going toward these meetings, but I understand that public support is important. The Travel Mgmt. Plan created a lot of barriers for this Plan; another was the 300'-buffer from Designated Roads; there is a lot of anger about elderly and disabled people who worry about losing access. Asking for more money is not going to happen; there is no point in even going there. I have a mining claim on an 80-acre island on FS land. It might be advisable to think about selling those kinds of areas with designated funds going toward restoration.
- Wilderness areas tend to be similar: cold/moist forest. We don't have wilderness representing the dry forests, which seem to have less protection.
- Thank you; I look forward to the conclusion of this process
- USFS: Thank you for expressing your perspectives. Soils, water, and wildlife are also important, and we cannot ignore those either.
- I feel it's a privilege to be here, and it's my duty to be here since I care about Eastern Oregon.
- I learned a lot, including about the 21" Rule. However, I'm concerned about restoration projects; need to make sure not to leave dead trees out, since they are a fire hazard too.
- USFS: We have interested, engaged, and educated communities. I have heard a diversity of interests tonight, and I appreciate that.
- We all care about our forests; we are all concerned; it is a question of how we get there.
- I learned that not all meetings need to be as challenging as the one here last week; this is refreshing.
- Really appreciate the respectful dialogue.
- Good to hear a diversity of input; I also recognize that solutions aren't easy when we have a diversity of opinion.
- You have the same desires as I do in terms of restoration.
- People are willing to roll up their sleeves and work together with us; we will continue to engage with our communities and try to get at that middle ground.
- USFS: Look forward to seeing this plan concluded; also want to ensure we take what we learned from all of these engagements and try to incorporate it the best we can.
- USFS: We're probably not going to make everyone happy, but I hope at least you feel that you've been heard.