

**Transcript of April 12, 2016 Conference Call  
Update on Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision**

**Moderator: Peter Fargo, Public Affairs Officer, Blue Mountains Forest Plan**

**Participants: Sabrina Stadler, Team Leader, Blue Mountains Forest Plan  
Tom Montoya, Forest Supervisor, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest  
Chuck Oliver, Deputy Forest Supervisor, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest**

Sabrina Stadler: Hello, this is Sabrina Stadler, Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision Team Leader. Just wanted those that have joined us to know that we are here and we're going to give a few minutes just in case people's clocks are off by a bit and we'll start the conference call. So please hang in there and we'll get back to you soon. Thank you.

[Beginning of Audio Recording]: Hi, this is Sabrina, back again, and we have got Peter here and he's going to get us started. So Peter Fargo is our Public Affairs Officer for the team and I'm the Forest Plan Revision Team Leader, Sabrina Stadler.

Peter Fargo: Hi, everybody and welcome to our public update on the Blue Mountains Forest Plan. We have recently issued a newsletter, an April newsletter with some updates and I wanted to have a chance to review that with everyone and provide some clarification to explain our rationale, et cetera.

So thanks for taking the time to be on the call. I want to let you know who's in the room here. We have Tom Montoya, the Forest Supervisor for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest as well as Chuck Oliver, the Deputy Forest Supervisor on the Wallowa-Whitman.

And Sabrina Stadler who you heard from before, our team Leader for the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision. And I'm Peter Fargo, the Public Affairs Officer for the team.

I just want to spend a little time going through the agenda for our call and review our April newsletter is number one on the agenda, and number two on

the agenda is to go through questions and answers that folks have submitted to our e-mail address, and we may even have some questions coming in as the call proceeds. So thank you very much for your thoughtful questions, we hope we can answer as many as possible.

A few words on logistics. We may have up to 250 people on this phone line and if you've ever done a conference call before, dog barking, coffee makers running in the background with 250 people could really add up, so we decided to have this be a radio broadcast.

It's going to be one-way audio and that folks on the other side of the line are muted but we still want this to be an interactive session. So we have asked for your questions in advance and we'll also respond to questions if possible. If we can't get through all of them, we'll look to answer them in our next round of conference calls.

So if you would like to send additional questions in during the call, the e-mail address is [bluemtnplanrevision@fs.fed.us](mailto:bluemtnplanrevision@fs.fed.us), and that's b-l-u-e-m-t-n-p-l-a-n-r-e-v-i-s-i-o-n@f-s - as in Forest Service - dot fed, as in federal, dot U.S. And Carol Underhill our Public Affairs Specialist will be queuing questions up for us.

Now lastly I just want to set some expectations. It's always nice to have a bit of a disclaimer. We won't be able answer every question, and I just want to put the out there so folks aren't too disappointed. We are here to provide clarification and to explain the rationale for the updates that we provided in the newsletter to the best of our ability.

But I just want to let people know that we don't have any new decisions at this point but we will be coming out with more information as we move towards the summer and we provide new newsletters, and we at this stage additional conference calls at that point to provide updates on those

newsletters. So this is a first step in providing the information as we continue revising the Forest Plans.

So if your questions pertain to a future newsletter or conference call on the topic of access and management areas, or on grazing, or on pace and scale of restoration, or on other topics that we intend to address in future newsletters then we may need to bin those or bookmark them for a future conference call but we'll do the best that we can here to make sure people get their questions answered.

If you hear an answer that isn't completely satisfactory, it may just be because we don't know the answer yet. So don't want folks to think that we're holding any information back, we're just a work in progress and as I said we haven't had any new decisions made since we released the newsletter in April.

So with that I want to turn it over to Sabrina to talk about the newsletter and kick off why is it that we do Forest Plans, and then we'll move through the elements of the newsletter. You can have that up on your computer screen or if you've had it mailed and you have it in hand, then feel free to walk through it with us.

Hope not to disappoint anybody, if you've read the newsletter in detail already, this will be a bit of a review but we wanted to make sure that those who haven't had a chance to go through the newsletter with a fine tooth comb have a good hearing of it. So Sabrina?

Sabrina Stadler: Hi. So one of the main reasons that we are engaging in this process is that we have - sorry, we're trying to work on getting another phone running and there's some background noise going on.

So in the 1976 National Forest Management Act it requires that every 15 years forests are to revise their Forest Plan, and so basically we kicked off

this effort in 2003 and initiated a notice of intent in the Federal Register in 2004, and folks are wondering why it's taking so long.

And in part that answer is because we've had several new planning rules that have come and gone in the process of getting this plan out. And so it appears that we're somewhat stable at this point with the 2012 planning rule, and so we sometimes get questions about why aren't we referring to that.

But the reason is that we got, we've gotten so far along with this particular effort that we have felt that it would be best to just continue on this path and going through all the different revisions to different planning rules has made it somewhat resilient to this and we've tried to embody those as we've come along.

So we feel like this really does represent the best thinking of the time and that we can live with this for 15 years if we can just get this through. So our efforts will be to try to wrap this up if we can and part of that is just trying to keep you all informed of where we're going and how we've used some of the input that we've been given from you, from not only the public meetings but the comments.

And this is a slightly different approach than typical planning efforts may do that we've been involved with specifically on project-level planning but, and we hope that this will be helpful to the folks involved and help people understand where we're going to take these plans into the future.

And that kind of brings us to the point of, you know, these are public lands, they're lands that we are trying to meet the needs of many people and you know, how nature matters to the people varies across the Blues and across the nation and yet we need to be responsive to as many people as we can in the process of creating these plans.

So the understanding that these are shared resources and that we are going to need to work together to find a way to accommodate most of those needs. It's been a challenge and it takes time to do it, and bringing folks along with us in the process has been one of our goals in the last few years.

Peter Fargo: Thanks Sabrina. So I'm going to pass it over to Tom in a second to talk about the open letter for from the Blue Mountains Forest Supervisors, and just for a second I wanted to take you back on what Sabrina said about why we do Forest Plans.

She talked about the big picture reason, she talked about the legal reason that we do it under the National Forest Management Act of 1976. And an additional reason is really, this is what we're about in the Forest Service. Since 1905 we have had the charge from our First Chief Gifford Pinchot to always find "the greatest good of the greatest number in the long run", and the entire phrase there is, "where conflicting interests must be reconciled, the question will always be answered from the standpoint of the greatest good of the greatest number in the long run."

And I just wanted to highlight that to acknowledge that sometimes there are conflicting interests and sometimes we do have to work through those and actually that's been something that as a Forest Service we've done since the beginning. And so we're honored to continue doing that under this Forest Plan. So Tom is going to talk a little bit about the open letter from the Blue Mountains Forest Supervisors.

Tom Montoya: Good evening, friends of the Blue Mountains. I'm here tonight to share an update on the revision of the Blue Mountains Forest Plans which will guide the management of approximately five million acres of the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests.

To begin we want to acknowledge those that have been involved in this planning revision process. We've been encouraged by how many of you

value your public lands and we thank you for helping to shape how we manage these national forests on behalf of the American people.

Over the past year as part of the public engagement effort, we have visited with over 700 individuals and had 24 public workshop sessions, with our communities across eastern Oregon, eastern Washington and western Idaho.

Although we've heard differences of opinion about how to best manage this spectacular landscape and ecosystems of the Blue Mountains, most agree that these national forests should continue to be managed for the many uses and benefits that they provide folks now and into the future.

We've found the input shared here in the public reengagement process to be very helpful and we are using the input in a variety of ways. For example, public listening sessions have brought additional context to our 2014 formal comment process.

It's also given us a better understanding of how different alternatives may affect the many publics that we have in the Blue Mountains and across the United States. In response we are currently crafting, two new alternatives which we will analyze in detail in our environmental impact statement. I'll talk a little bit about those two alternatives at this time.

The first alternative that I want to talk about will emphasize the restoration that has been brought forward by the formal and informal comments. Also the reengagement input and the revised recommendation by our Forest Service resource specialist.

The second alternative is built upon the first. This alternative would considerably increase what we call the pace and scale of forest restoration during the planning period. We heard that a lot during our engagement of a need to address that restoration over the life of the plan which is about 15 years.

This of course would move a larger portion of the forest landscape toward desired conditions. Projects such as thinning forests, logging, reducing fire severity and decreasing risk that are posed by those dense forest in terms of impact. That was heard clearly from our public.

We will provide public updates with new information as we develop these alternatives and continue with the analysis of the alternative within the EIS. While we seek to be responsive to all of our diverse publics, any alternative we consider must be analyzed for compliance with federal laws, regulations and policies governing the national forests.

Also keep in mind that the Forest Plan revision is still a work in progress and the deciding officer, who in this case is the Regional Forester, has not made any final decision.

What are the next steps you may ask? The final product of this Forest Plan revision process will include three separate Forest Plans, so there'll be a plan for each of the forests including the Malheur, Umatilla and the Wallowa-Whitman National Forests.

Before these Forest Plans can be finalized, however, we will consult with federal agencies on things like the Endangered Species Act. We also continue our government-to-government consultation with appropriate Indian Tribes, and of course work with state and county governments.

We'll also continue to address questions and concerns from all of you who continue to be interested in the Blue Mountains Forest Plans. When the final EIS for the three forests and the three draft Record of Decisions are ready, these documents will be available for your review, the public, for 60 days, at which time we'll have an objection period.

Individuals and entities that submit a substantive, formal comments during the opportunities for public comment may file an objection. If they do -- and that of course is if you do not feel that your issues were satisfactorily addressed.

Once those objections are received, we will go through a process to address those objections and the Regional Forester will sign each of the Records of Decisions.

In closing tonight, we would like to express our appreciation for your involvement in the stewardship of the National Forests. We are committed to using this information you have provided to shape the revised Forest Plans.

Over the coming months we will strive to keep the lines of communication open through sharing of information by e-mail, phone, web and in other ways that we are trying to reach out to you. So we want to thank you for being with us tonight and we're going to continue on with the program. Thank you.

Peter Fargo: Thank you, Tom. This is Peter once again and passing the baton over to Sabrina to walk us through where we have been in this process just to catch everyone up who hasn't been involved recently, and then to review the timeline that we're moving through and the next steps in this NEPA process.

Sabrina Stadler: Great. Thanks, Peter. So as I mentioned earlier, 2003 was the kick off but by 2010 we actually got a Proposed Action out on the street. And from that we developed a range of alternatives, we've developed six different alternatives and submitted a draft EIS for review and comment, for the public to review in 2014.

And we provided an extended comment period on that going up to 150 days, and in that process we received over a 1000 letters. And so what we basically came to realize is that not only was there kind of an overall sentiment of dissatisfaction but there was also this need that we felt to help people to have

an opportunity to talk to us and not to go completely dark between the draft and the final.

And really try to spend some time understanding the personal needs and what these people were saying specifically. And it's really led to a rich conversation and one of the really great opportunities we had was to bring together over 40 different stakeholders representing a diverse perspective to help us design the meetings.

And what resonated is the three main topics were to talk about the grazing, the access issues and wilderness, and the pace and scale of restoration across the Blues.

And the format we've used to get there it was kind of interesting because we just saw the common theme emerge from each of the subgroups that broke up to talk about this and so we kind of felt like we were on the right track if we could just go back and revisit some of those things with the communities.

So that led us to meet in a lot of different eastern Oregon communities, to try to work more closely with the constituents in, on the land base and really help to, you know, bring a voice to those letters that we received and to people who hadn't even been participating and hopefully gained some more interest in public lands management.

And our role there was really largely to listen, and that group of stakeholders really felt that we have, typically we go out and we do these formal presentations and we give a very small amount of time for a dialogue. And that we needed to flip it this on its head and really let people in the community talk to us and talk to us about their concerns first hand.

And so our efforts were really not to try to answer or be responsive to any of those issues but to really listen to what they were saying, and be sincere in

that listening effort and to take good notes. And to try to bring that back to the interdisciplinary team and talk about this more carefully.

And we did do some answering of questions as they came around but we really tried not to get into that mode of trying to correct people or trying to really explain things, and just really allow for that creative, kind of mode of thinking that people had.

And so that led us to reaching over 700 individuals which was really fantastic, and even to this day as I'm hearing people talk even at the OPB broadcasting that just happened, you know, I recognize those voices and I recognize the people.

And I think that's really created a greater depth for us in terms of our understanding of the specific people and what their interests are and it's been a very valuable experience. And I think also it's creating better relationships so that when we go to implement the plan, we'll be more in dialogue, more working together, the understanding of how the community fits into that.

So that brings us to kind of where we're going at this point. So we've got, we went through that yearlong of reengagement, and now we're taking that information that we heard and we're trying to synthesize it, work within our organization, within the agency to talk amongst ourselves about what to do about what we've heard, not only those listening sessions but also specifically the comments that we received.

And working on trying to find solutions to some of those really hot issues, and then that we're also trying to re-circle the wagons with some of the people that we have cooperating relationships with like the state. And we are working on working with our local governments, the counties, talking to some of the natural resource advisory committees.

Also there is a RAC, the John Day-Snake River RAC, we worked with the tribes, there's four different tribes that we're currently working with. But going back and getting those, the two states, talking to them about where we might be taking some of these concerns and just kind of sound boarding with folks to just really see if like we're landing in a place that everyone can see us being able to implement for the next 15 years.

Then we're basically taking that and starting to craft the final EIS to go with the - and oh, we've identified the need to at least analyze for sure one new alternative, but then we thought, you know, a good idea would be to analyze another one which is this departure alternative.

And basically frame it around the new alternative so that, we could see what the effects are for that and we're going to talk more so I won't go into too much detail right now. So that being said we're working on that and also consultation with the services, the regulatory, the National Marine Fisheries Service and Fish and Wildlife Service, talking to them about the approach that we'd like to take.

So the analysis we hope to have completed by the end of the summer and have, we'll have three draft Forest Plans and records of decisions that then can go through what's called the objection period, and that's a 60-day period, where people will have the opportunity, who provided substantive comments previously, to object us on their, on the merits of those comments.

Or if we bring in new material that people haven't seen before, they could also object on that. So, in order to provide that length of time to receive those, we have 60-day period and then there'll be a resolution period.

And that resolution period will involve the Chief of the Forest Service because this is the Regional Forester's decision to decide on these three Forest Plans. And so we'll bump it up to the Chief, the Chief will then decide who has standing in the objection process.

And then there will be meetings with the objectors and try to come to some resolution and we hope that we can move forward to getting a decision by spring of 2017, and that would be again, three Records of Decision and three Forest Plans.

Peter Fargo: Thanks, Sabrina. So that is the timeline that we have moved through and where we're headed over the next several months, and some questions that have come up around the re-engagement process have revolved around how we're going to use the input that we've been hearing in those meetings.

And I think this newsletter that you have in front of you, hopefully, and that we're reading here is a testament to the fact that we really have been listening and taking your input to heart, and we've been doing that in a few ways.

One is we've been evaluating what we heard in the engagement meetings at face value and thinking about how people's recommendations could lead to changes in the environmental impact statement, alternatives and in the draft Forest Plans.

We've also been looking at the two sources of information that we received recently which includes the informal public input from the reengagement listening sessions and also the formal public comments that we received in 2014.

And as we compare those, we're looking for new ideas and solutions and, most importantly, the reengagement input is helping us to add context to those formal public comments to better understand, evaluate and address those comments.

And last but not least we had a lot of public meetings that were right in the back yard of Forest Supervisor offices, and also in the backyard of the Forest Districts, and we had a lot District employee's participation.

And we just want to put out there that those District employees and Supervisors Office employees were listening carefully and thinking about how they can continue to build the relationship that they've built in those meetings and continue to carry that information forward on the forest level and at the project level.

And so what we've heard in those meetings is not just relevant to the Forest Plan revision process but we're taking it to heart in other ways. So thank you all for taking the time to be a part of that process. It really made a difference.

At this point we want to move towards the question and answer part of the program, and we've received a large number of questions via e-mail over the last week. So thank you all for taking the time and thought to do that. I think we're going to start with an answer, a question for Sabrina about the two new alternatives.

And my role will be to read the questions and be the voice of the questioner and in some cases, folks, I just want to beg your pardon, I'm going to be paraphrasing questions because some of the questions, the e-mails that we received were lengthy but we made an effort to parse out what the questions are and add some context to it, and so I hope that I'm doing justice to your questions.

So first, with the two new alternatives to be analyzed in the final environmental impact statement, how many total alternatives will that make and has the agency's preferred alternative changed? Sabrina?

Sabrina Stadler: Hi. Yes, so we had six alternatives originally that we analyzed. One was the no action, and then there was a proposed, modified proposed action which

was Alt B, and then we had a range of other alternatives to choose from, C to F.

And then there was, there were also alternatives that we eliminated from detailed study that weren't either considered not feasible or consistent with our national policy or, and direction that governs the National Forest management.

And from there we will be building the selected alternatives which would be what we'll frame the Forest Plans around, and so our efforts right now are really trying to pull together these, you know, being responsive to the comments that we've received, the reengagement, that input that we received.

And, you know, working closely with the staff as we for the three forests and the Regional Office as we present ideas and ways of thinking about things differently than we've done before and get everyone to agree that this is the correct approach to take.

And some of this is going fairly smoothly and other things take more time and are more what David Hatfield, our Plan, one our Planning Hatfield people over there at the Umatilla, he says it's a "wicked issue".

And those wicked issues are really the heart of what makes this all have to really work to try to find those find those places of balance in the forest between what other people, one person may want and what another group might want. So that's kind of in a nutshell.

Peter Fargo: Thank you. I'm glad you brought up the wicked issues because it's part of the opportunity and the challenge for us continuing our communication with the public and with our partners as we revise the Forest Plans, the draft Forest Plans.

Typically the process in the NEPA world, the National Environmental Policy Act, would go in that we would put out a draft for comment, what, like we did in 2014. And then receive those public comments, and carefully document them, respond, develop responses to them and revise the drafts. And then come back out with the final and the response to comments, and we're doing that but in this case we're doing it in a very interactive way. And so we do want to ask for some patience and forgiveness in advance as we work our way through the process together.

So another question here for Tom. In the open letter which Tom just read, the forest supervisors mentioned that the first new alternative will emphasize "restoration" in quotes. What does restoration look like and how do these new restoration alternatives relate to thinning projects, et cetera?

Tom Montoya: What a great question to receive. Ecosystem restoration, I would say, includes the entire landscape. So when we look at restoration, we're looking at not only the vegetation that's out there but the watershed, the health of that ecosystem in terms of clean water, clean habitat or great habitats for things that people enjoy whether they be elk habitat or other species of concern.

So when I say ecosystem restoration, I'm really looking at that bigger picture and that's how the Forest Service as a whole is looking at restoration currently. I would say we've come a long way in our history since 1905.

In the early days of the Forest Service we kind of focused on what I would call the quantity outputs. And probably didn't fully understand what the impacts and the implications of doing that were in terms of tradeoffs to other things, such as clean water and other things like habitat.

Again, we've learned a lot over the years in how forest systems work, and we have been trying to do a better job of taking care of forests as a whole in terms of ecosystem restoration. The forest can take better care of everyone if we do that.

I'm going to give an example. That example is since the mid-1990s, we've been operating under what we term the Eastside Screens and many of you have probably have heard us talk about the Eastside screens. One of those Screens led to the prohibition on harvesting what we call large trees, and those are trees that are greater than 21 inches in diameter. That, at that time was supposed to be a temporary change.

And actually this prohibition was supposed to be addressed under the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management project which occurred in the 90s. That project didn't come to a final decision and so we are left with the Eastside Screens moving forward into current times.

As we've learned more about forest ecosystems and restoration, we've found that there are cases where removing certain species of trees even those large trees greater than 21 inches is actually an ecological benefit.

For instance an example of that would be there's many grand firs that are encroached into what we call dry upper zones where normally we would have ponderosa pine be the historical species that we would have thriving on the landscape, it would have open what we call park like conditions but they're more resistance to natural fires.

Grand firs are often not resistant to fires. They actually - they adapt under fire conditions like the ponderosa pine so we, they're one of those species we call a non-resistant species.

By removing some of those grand firs we can help restore that fire adaptive ecosystem and move us towards what we call our desired conditions in the Forest Plan, and that's really where we're trying to focus is trying to move our landscape to a better condition in terms of desired conditions.

Peter Fargo: Thanks, Tom. I hope that gives folks some imagery thinking about what restoration looks like, and I have a long list of questions that we've received here and thinking how we might revolve around this topic for a bit. And one of the questions is about our Desired Conditions which Tom was just talking about and how, you know, sometimes we may be able to work towards those Desired Conditions in non-intuitive ways.

So one question asks, where do our Desired Conditions for the forest ecosystem come from? And is a Desired Condition that we have a real natural forest or more of a tree-farm-like condition out there? So a good question and I think I'm going to turn it over to Sabrina first and maybe she'll popcorn to someone else to finish it off.

Sabrina Stadler: Okay. Yes, so one of the things that folks might not remember or realize is that early on in this planning process the Forests really worked closely with the community to develop these Desired Conditions, and they had over 60 public workshops to help inform the way that they were going to be framed.

And so this approach is really been one of not only an emphasis on the ecological resilience but also an understanding how important the social and economic wellbeing of our communities are to helping create the ecological landscape that we need and want.

And so in terms of the bigger picture of how we have structured that, one of our big goals in terms of ecological resilience has been to really focus on the forest structure and the density and the species composition to really demonstrate of the range of variability that once existed on the landscape and not just have a uniform one-size-fits-all sort of way of approaching our landscape treatments.

The efforts now are to really look at the fact that we had a large distribution of different stand structures, densities, the vegetation conditions represented a

lot of different species and that we're not just focused, on a monocrop of pine say for example, like a forested tree farm, might.

So it is now understood that the forest ecosystem really needs to have a balance that is adapting in order to have a resiliency to disturbance as well as to create a good wildlife habitat and ecosystem processes that if we don't have all those key components, any one of those things could be the one that wildlife niche needs in order to survive.

So we can't just rely specifically on only doing fuels reduction treatment. We also need to be thinking about other ways to manifest that whole range of diversity in our landscape treatments.

And we also have - know that we have a fairly large amount of Wilderness in these forests which has been really helpful in terms of keeping that ecological sort of safe place for wildlife in terms of that we won't be doing any treatment in there and that will remain a place for, sanctuary so to speak.

We also have the need to, as we restore and maintain to also be thinking about how a key piece of our need is to have the tools available for the restoration treatments that we do. And that is largely making sure that we have those, the infrastructure in place that that would require in terms of mills and keeping enough of the heavy equipment that is involved with the timber operators. If we don't have that then we basically kind of cut off our ability to actually do the treatments that we so badly need.

And lastly, I would say that in terms of the future and providing that level of ecological resilience, we're also very cognitive of the fact that we need to have clean water, and we need range land, and we're providing opportunities for recreation and forest products.

So it's not just a one-size-fits-all or only going for timber, we really need to be considering all of the specific needs that people are going to need and other people rely on as well as what the fish and wildlife need.

Peter Fargo: Thanks, Sabrina. This is Peter once again. Just to recap the question was about where do our Desired Conditions come from in these Forest Plans, and Sabrina talked about the fact that they come from you in those 60-plus public workshops that we held to inform those goals and Desired Conditions.

And they also come from a scientific process in which we emphasize the historic range of variability as an indicator for us of healthy management framework. And we also carry that forward to the present and to the future.

It's not just about what happened in the way back machine, say 2000 years ago or even 500 years ago, but we want to make sure it's something that's relevant today and that's part of our process as well. So as we're talking about Desired Conditions, I thought this might be an opportunity to pivot towards some other plan components that include Standards and Guidelines and how Desired Conditions, Standards and Guidelines interact.

You know, one, actually multiple questions that we have received were what is the difference between a Standard and a Guideline? And is a Standard better than a Guideline? How do we deal with them?

Sabrina Stadler: Right, yes, that's a common issue. So, and maybe that would be good to just clarify in general. So Desired Conditions are really kind of creating a vision on the landscape for how we'd like to see that particular resource managed.

And it's really a proactive kind of visionary, strategic way of looking at that particular resource or the ecological or economic condition or social condition that we're trying to ensure that in this, that in the plan period we have, but also knowing that not only will it be sometimes necessary for several plan periods to have it.

That it, in order to meet those Desired Conditions, it's not just going to be today but it could take us, you know, up to 150 years to grow back some of the old forest for example that we desire across the landscape.

So that Desired Condition, what we've done to ensure that we make, have for the threshold that we would not drop below is to develop Standards or Guidelines. And the standards are basically requirements that as we do project-level work, we would be required to meet that Standard, and it's usually a constraint on the work that we're doing.

For example if we're working in a riparian management area and we have the need to bring in heavy equipment to do some treatment in there, we would have to meet the Desired Condition for that particular land base, the riparian management area, in order to justify that work.

So it's not that you can just carte blanche go in and do the work but also we've got Standards that prevent us from going in to areas that we might, that are considered more sensitive or that have impacts to Threatened or Endangered species or a fish particularly. In cases of bighorn sheep we also are trying to prevent the spread of disease in those populations.

So we've created things where we have to do them, and then the Guidelines are very similar to a Standard and what we need to do is represent how we're going to meet the intent of that Guideline if we don't follow the Guidelines to the letter.

And so that would have to be disclosed in the environmental documentation as we proceed to do a project. If we have a Guideline and we can't, we don't intend to do it in any specific way that we may be able to meet the intent of that without actually doing it that specific way that it's written in the Guideline.

And that, some folks have felt that that doesn't provide enough regulatory and that they really want to know that when the Forest Service is saying they're going to do it this way, they're going to do it this way.

And so we're taking another hard look at our Standards and Guidelines and asking ourselves in the cases where we really feel like we really wouldn't do it any other way, would it be best to just make this a standard and we're having those kinds of conversations to just daylight that to ourselves and really take that one more look and verify if we want to make that a Standard versus a Guideline.

And sometimes it's a fine line because if there seems in the way it's written that there's a flexibility with how you would approach it, it feels like gosh, that does seem like it should be a Guideline because that, nothing in here is actually telling us we can't go below 30% or a hard number, we're not getting a hard number. But on the other hand is that feeling from the public that it's not giving them enough to go on and that they don't feel like we're definitely going to do it.

So we're making that, we're trying to navigate those waters to find that sweet spot of whether we're saying yes, we're going to go with that and say that's going to be a standard. Or no, we're, we think that's there's going to be enough of an ability to meet the intent that we can still work with it being a Guideline. So that's kind of the quick and dirty of the desired conditions, Standards and Guidelines.

Peter Fargo: Thanks for explaining. Does anyone else want to jump in on that conversation? Great, well, that seems pretty clear. I think for most people out there who are looking at Forest Plans for the first time that sounds relatively straight forward.

And for others who may have been involved in past Forest Planning efforts maybe even the 1990 Forest Plans that we currently have, in the Blue

Mountains, the slightly different emphasis now, or we might say a different emphasis on desired conditions as the target for us, and Standards and Guidelines help us to move towards those desired conditions.

Sabrina Stadler: Yes, it's really going to be how we'll frame a project as we go into a new area, we'll look to the Desired Conditions, how far off we, are we departed from the Desired Condition, what projects could we develop that will help us move towards a Desired Condition?

So those are best going to be the lens that we'll be looking at and they, and we absolutely have to make the case that we're moving forward with the Desired Conditions, you know, moving it towards that or that we're being neutral to it, so it's still as important as a Standard or a Guideline.

Peter Fargo: Thank you. Well, I'm going to step back to a previous topic that we were just on before we moved into Desired Conditions and Standards and Guidelines and that is back to the restoration concept. And one of the topics that comes up under that umbrella is burning and disruption.

So one question we received is, "is the burn history going to be disruptive or disrupted in the drive to thin the forest mechanically? Or will management follow what nature has adapted to?" And I wanted to put that out to anyone here in the room who would like to address it.

Tom Montoya: Thank you. Maybe - this is Tom. I can probably address that, Peter, in terms of fire and fire histories on a landscape and how thinning relates to that. So I'll just start out by saying many of our ecosystems in the Blue Mountains, as I mentioned before, adapted under a fire regime of some sort.

Fire happens frequently on the landscape in the Blue Mountains and I actually recently heard a scientist from, I believe he was from Oregon State, say that for the Wallowa-Whitman alone on an annual basis we had

somewhere between 50,000 to 70,000 acres of fire burning naturally every year.

Of course we suppress fires because they have an impact on private land and other values at risk. So there's reasons that we have suppressed that fire, but because we've suppressed that, our forests have become dense and the fire history has been disrupted.

So thinning its self isn't meant, I would say, to necessarily disrupt that natural fire regime or burn history. It's meant to just do the opposite. It's meant to try to restore that natural forest structure and ecosystem in terms of species composition so that we can bring fires back and begin to have a more natural or characteristic approach to the way fire acts on the landscape.

When we compare the conditions of the forest today, like I said, and what happens in the past in terms of what we call our historic range of variability, and again that's based on desired conditions that we want, we find some big disconnects out there.

Particularly when we look at our dry, pine ecosystem, and as I mentioned before, you start getting species like grand fir that are growing where they didn't naturally grow before and those things, like I said, are not adaptive to the fire regime that are natural on the landscape. They burn hotter and we get those crown-type fires.

This type of forest though historically developed with and adapted to the fire, and if you look at the pine stands that we have where we've been treating those pine stands with thinning and using prescribed fire, there are more open stands. And those open stands are lot more resistant to fire when we do have it.

And fire in that historic forest typically occurs, you know, every several years or longer but usually that fire, what's important to understand, would normally

happen in a low intensity surface-type ground fire as opposed to a running headwall crown-fire type of situation with, like we've seen recently.

So right now because of the way we've managed these dry forests for, like I said the last 100-plus years or more, most of it is in a very different, a very unnatural, unhealthy condition I would say. It's very unusual to have a naturally dense forest like we have now.

And that's why we need to try to do some work to try to get them back to a more resistant ecosystem that can allow fire to play its role when needed but also give us a chance to capture those fires when we do need to suppress them when they are looking to threaten private land and other inholdings that we have on the landscape.

So we need to give that upper hand to our firefighters who have a very difficult job, and we can't currently do that in a lot of cases and we usually have to back off to an area where it's more safe to attack those fires. And I think by doing the work that we need to do there on the landscape, we can get there in terms of a better ecosystem that's healthier and that's adapted to that fire regime that we want to have out there.

Again, just want to reiterate that we will be doing work under this plan, that's our intent is to restore the landscape to Desired Conditions. As Sabrina just mentioned, those Desired Conditions really drive how we look at the landscape across all three national forests that we're analyzing under the NEPA analysis.

Peter Fargo: Thank you, Tom. A couple follow-up questions there since you mentioned public lands and private land inholdings, and you also talked about thinning, here are a couple questions that relate to those topics.

"We may have well-thinned public lands but there will be patches of private land, some of them within or adjacent to the public lands, that continue to

need work. Is there any way that private land owners could be helped to thin their woodlands?"

Sabrina Stadler: Yes. So I brainstormed with Peter a little on this and my first thought was that I know that there are efforts by the National Forest System to work with our partners in collaboration, but the biggest thing that you might need to do is reach out to the state. Our ODF, Oregon Department of Forestry, I just can't imagine there can't be programs that you could work with them to help thin your forests to make them more fire resilient.

The other thing that comes to mind is the Natural Resource Conservation Service. And I know I, in my past life, when I did field production projects that that, they were working on helping to bring grant funding to the communities.

So that's another possibility, and some places have fire counsels, Fire safe counsels and I'm not sure, where this particular individual lives but that might be another thing worth exploring. So there are, you know, mechanisms out there for people to work with, I don't know if you're familiar with any others, Tom?

Tom Montoya: I am familiar with a couple of others. So in the Blue Mountains we have the unique partnership with all our fire agencies that we deal with, under what we call the Cohesive Wildfire Strategy and under that strategy it allows us to work across boundaries in what we call an all-hands, all-lands approach.

And a good example of that is a recent project that we're doing that's actually in the objection process right now. It's called the East Face Project in which we're doing work on the National Forest but we didn't stop at the boundary because that's not the way ecosystems work, that's not the way fires work.

We're working across those boundaries with our partners. That's, those are the same ones Sabrina just mentioned. So Oregon Department of Forestry has been getting money through the Governor's program to increase the

pace and scale of restoration on the East Side and also through what we call the Joint Chiefs proposals which includes the Chief of the Forest Service and the Chief of the Natural Resource Conservation Service in a joint Chiefs approach to allow work to happen on private lands as well. We've also included the BLM in this effort as well as work on the state lands involved with the Elkhorn Wildlife Refuge there.

So it's a great example of how we do work across all lands and just not stop at a boundary because it just doesn't make sense and I think you're going to see more of that kind of effort with all the agencies wanting to do that. We've had a lot of, I would say emphasis to do that, and a lot of ability to do that through grants and other things like the joint Chiefs proposal. So wanted to just mention those things.

Chuck Oliver: So it's great to hear all the different things that are available out there and with a couple more. One in particular is the County Extension Agent. They aren't in a position to actually help do the work on the private land.

But from an education standpoint they help land owners better understand the interactions of their private land within that ecosystem and how that would affect potentially their future depending on what happens on the forest and the work that they're doing.

Another one, and it's not in all counties, but the RC and D, or Resource Conservation and Development Districts. They are very keyed in to the education for private landowners. They have an opportunity to compete for federal and state grant dollars. So they do put on several different programs and also offer grants in kind type work to help private landowners pursue thinning on their private property. So neither of those are large scale, but they're very effective programs.

Sabrina Stadler: Yes.

Peter Fargo: It sounds like those might be some good local points of contact. Sabrina mentioned the Oregon Department of Forestry or if you're in another state, that state's department of forestry.

And then Tom mentioned some of those strategic efforts that are pulling resources together to make this possible, and then Chuck went back down to the ground talking about the County Extension Agent. Would that be for example, here in Baker County we have an OSU Agricultural Extension Service.

Chuck Oliver: That's exactly it.

Peter Fargo: Okay.

Chuck Oliver: And every county has one through the university.

Peter Fargo: Okay, great. So it sounds like a couple directions for people to go. Here's another question that is on a similar topic. "Whatever alternative is chosen, it seems like several of them call for prescribed burns. Why would you burn our forest when they can provide very badly needed jobs to timber workers and make better use of our natural resources by utilizing the material on the ground instead of polluting the air by burning it up?"

And so those are going back to a couple topics that Tom addressed previously but focused a little more on those economic opportunities and on the air pollution challenges related to fires.

Sabrina Stadler: Yes, so I can take a first stab and maybe Tom can add to it. So one of the things that we really feel have, we've come to realize is that thinning alone will not reduce the fuels on the ground and that there's not just the fuel ladder but also if you have heavy, dense fuels on the ground, the chances are at least during a high-severity fire that you'll burn the cambium of the trees.

And so what we've learned over time is that we can't just go in and remove the trees and remove the ladder but we also have to treat the fuels on the ground if we're going to create fire resilience in the land.

And so the beauty of doing prescribed fire though is that we can control the conditions that we do that in rather than waiting for a lightening event to happen during the heat of the summer when we have very high, dry, low-moisture conditions, and so, you know, the fires grow much larger than we would like to see them grow.

So this is a preemptive move to really do some fuels reduction, do some under burning and try to mitigate some of the effects of what might happen during the summers when we get those lightening busts. You know, we're not going to be able to treat everywhere to stop a fire that's in the ground.

You know, that, those particular instances are going to be hard to stop and even with some fuels reduction, like some of these areas that we just recently had large fires in, they'd had some very good fuel reduction projects go through there, but it's still even with that and the under burning, they weren't able to stop those large fires from continuing to grow.

And that's kind of the sort of thing we've been facing is we've gotten hotter, dryer summers and lower moisture content in our fuels later in the summer is that the fires then once they get going they get to be quite large in size.

And by doing what we can at least for the other fires that come along and not necessarily all those 98 percentile days where it's that extreme weather condition with a super dry forest, at least we're hopeful that we'll be able to stave off from having at least as much mortality when we have fires come through the area.

Tom Montoya: Yes, and I'll just add to that, you know, fire is important on the landscape but it's not the only way that we try to remove the fuels that are out there. So we

look for opportunities to utilize that biomass. Currently there's not a lot of industry I would say surrounding the Blue Mountains to utilize that biomass.

But again, we're working with our partners, that being Oregon Department of Forestry and other folks, who really are interested in trying to utilize that biomass.

Actually we're, we've gotten some grants in the past few years - actually we haven't, some private citizens have gotten that money, to kind of boost up that biomass industry surrounding the Blue Mountains, and I think that's a positive thing.

I think the more we can get at that biomass industry, the more we can try to remove that stuff and make it economical to remove. Right now it's not very economical to remove that smaller stuff. You know, it can't be utilized by the timber industry in terms of making lumber and those kind of things, so biomass products, such as what we call things like biochar where they coat seeds with essentially charcoal, or use smaller products for such things as posts and poles and hot poles and all those smaller diameter products, I think is a positive things. We're trying to boost that around the Blue Mountains so that we can utilize more of that as opposed to burning it up.

Sabrina Stadler: Another thought I had too is about the air quality concerns and I think, you know, partly we are at least when we're doing the prescribed fires, we're aware of the air quality. We have smoke management plans, we're working with the counties to ensure that when we do the burn that we're not burning too much area at once so that's it's not going to impact the citizens as much.

And so by doing that in measured outputs of prescribed fire we are hoping that that won't have as much impact on the citizens that would due to large fires that we see in the summer, and that's kind of one of the reasons we've been working closely with the surrounding forests and the other land management agencies so that when we're all burning, we're not, you know,

creating too much smoke. So I think the air quality is a concern and we understand that and we do our best to address that to our ability by doing some of this prescribed fire.

If we didn't do any then we'd basically be left to the wind, the fire, the big fires happening, being the only way that the fires are getting, I mean the forest is getting any fire.

Peter Fargo: That's a really good point. I remember looking at my air quality index last summer in August...

Sabrina Stadler: Oh, right.

Peter Fargo: And seeing it dark brown for a number of days and people probably smell that smoke in the air during the prescribed burning season and then have bad memories but it's kind of pay me now or pay me later and while we have some control over the conditions, it's nice to be able to take care some of those fuels.

So Tom mentioned some of the other that ways that we do take care of the fuels and we try to, and a question that has come up is, again, an economic question. How do we pay for all of the mechanical fuels treatment that we would like to do and in the alternatives that we are suggesting will be added, we have additional restoration as our goal. And I think some people are wondering how do we pay for that or can we pay for that?

Tom Montoya: Well, you know, currently we pay for that through appropriations that we get through Congress, of course. That mainly comes in the format of either dollars through management of our forest timber outputs or we also get allocations for treatment of fuels.

Now what's been really maybe I would say refreshing the path probably three years now is this addition of money from the State of Oregon. That for this

year alone we, I think we're getting \$5.2 million to work on, the state is putting that much up I should say to work on restoration of National Forest mainly on the east side of Oregon.

And so they're happy to step up and help with some of that as well which hasn't been there before and we can leverage some of those dollars to do a lot of good work on the ground.

The other one's we've mentioned before is just how the federal dollars to federal, other federal agencies such as NRCS and others that have the ability to help us in kind of the, again, all-hands, all-lands approach.

So that's how we pay for it currently. You know, there's always innovative ways of approaching those things and who knows what we'll see down the road but, you know, currently the primary funding of that comes out of our appropriations from Congress.

Chuck Oliver: So Tom mentioned how we do pay for it, I just wanted to throw out that it is a struggle for us and we do have concerns into the future. We currently have many projects that we have completed, gone through the NEPA process and they're ready for us to move forward and begin implementation but we don't have the funds to do it.

The sad part is that every year that we don't accomplish these projects, we are adding more projects to it and the forest continues to grow. So there's a large back log for us to deal with the fuels load in that we're facing out there.

So we do have to be creative. Tom has mentioned several ways that we've been able to secure dollars to help us make this happen but we have a long ways to go and we're going to have to be even more creative as we move into the future.

Peter Fargo: Thanks Chuck. That brings up another question that some have asked and was asked before in the middle of someone else's question. Why is that we can't cut our way out of the problem with thinning or timber harvest that pays for itself? Is that something that we can explain on the phone today?

Chuck Oliver: Not that we can explain it fully on the phone but there's so many pieces, so many different ecosystems within the larger forest that we deal with. Tom had mentioned the economic piece of it, we can't get the work done unless Congress provides the dollars for us to do it.

We're able to get some grant dollars from other probably government sources or there's a value to it intrinsically that somebody can take out and it pays for them to do the work, they could be able to get something else besides that stick off the forest, so much of what we're dealing with right now is not, the term that we're using for that is the biomass. There's a lot of biomass, a tremendous amount of biomass in the forest which is available fuel for burning for wildfire but there's not a lot of interest both because of how difficult it is to harvest that and the limited value that's associated with it, so until we can figure out some way to add value to that non-merchantable timber out there, we're going to continue to struggle. We do have programs in place such as stewardship programs that allow us to essentially trade goods for services where we could harvest larger trees out there that do have a value, and trade the value of those trees for additional work to get rid some of those smaller trees or the biomass that we're dealing with out there but it's limited and until there is some sources with revenue associated with it it's not going to happen so.

Sabrina Stadler: Yes, even just to haul that biomass to a biomass production plant is cost prohibitive just because it's, you know, fuel costs so much money, although they have dropped, fuel prices.

Peter Fargo: Tom, did you want to add anything there or go onto the resiliency?

Tom Montoya: No, I think, I think we should talk a little bit about resiliency if that, we still have some time, Peter?

Peter Fargo: You bet. It's about 6:40 so the program goes until 7 o'clock and we absolutely have time. So these discussions have been around restoration and fire and fuels and mechanical treatments, and the Blue Mountains Forest Resiliency project addresses many of those topics.

And may cause some confusion even if in name alone because it's a big landscape wide project that has the word Blue Mountains in it and the topic of discussion on this call today is Blue Mountains Forest Plan. So Tom, if you would explain how they relate and explain how they differ that would be helpful.

Tom Montoya: You bet, Peter. So we do have two projects that are ongoing and they both have Blue Mountains in them so I can understand why our public at times can get confused, and those two projects of course are the Blue Mountains Forest Plans and the other one is the Blue Mountains Forest Resiliency project.

So I'm going to talk a little bit about they're related and how they differ maybe a little bit. So the Blue Mountain Forest Resiliency project is a large landscape restoration proposal at this point. I want to emphasis it's at its infancy, it's at a proposal standpoint. We just went through a series of public meetings and ended that scoping about a week ago, actually.

Got a lot of information from our public on this latest proposal, and what that project, the Forest Resiliency project really is a restoration of healthy conditions on the landscape. It grew out of an effort that our Regional Forester put forth after he started looking at some data and some maps of eastern Oregon and eastern Washington and saw that the health of the forests were in dire straits.

Somebody termed it as we can do a lot of work out there under our current pace but we're going to get lapped. And in fact we may have already been lapped in this race against time. So he said we need increase the pace and scale if we're going to kind of get ahead of this.

So that's how the Resiliency Project kind of came about. It's an effort through what we call the East Side Restoration Strategy and we have been working with a team of experts called Blue Mountain Forest Resiliency ID team to work on those large scale restoration projects.

That project covers three forests, the Ochoco, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman, and on the Wallowa-Whitman I'll talk specifically about that a little bit, it covers about 280,000 acres or proposed treatment.

It primarily focusing on, again, dry-pine ecosystems to reduce that fuel load but also have a strategic fuel break component that will look at where we can do fuels treatment along road to catch fires or actually in the long term maybe allow us to use prescribed fire in some ways in a more strategic approach.

So that's how that project came about and that's kind of what it's all about is the restoration of those dry-pine ecosystems and fire path strategic locations. Even though both of these are named the Blue Mountains and have that in it, they do differ in that one is a large-scale project of course, and one is guidance of our Forest Plans across the Blue Mountains.

They do however both address kind of the ecological, social and economic goals of the forest and try to approach it in a resiliency focus in terms of restoring the ecosystem by reducing such things as over-stocked timber stands we have out there.

There's often a question about timing that we get with these two projects because they are on kind of the same timeline, and so how the two plans,

that being our new Forest Plan relates to the resiliency project is often a question that we get.

So currently the Resiliency Project is under the 1990 Forest Plan but it will maybe, hopefully, be completed under a decision for the Forest Plans, the new Forest Plans in the Blue Mountains here. So we've been making sure that we've been communicating with the Forest Plan team in terms of understanding such things as Desired Conditions and Management Areas.

And what we've found is in developing the project, the Management Areas closely overlap for both the old plan and where we're going with the new plan primarily because we're focused on general forest areas with the resiliency project and not doing a lot of work in those other areas that are in the new Forest Plan such as riparian areas and Roadless Areas and those kind of things.

We are also making sure that we are working through a NEPA process to do this at a rapid pace so the Resiliency Project is going to do it a little bit differently than most folks are probably familiar with, with NEPA. We're going to try some new things in terms of trying to accelerate the NEPA and find efficiencies.

So if you do have questions about it I would say get ahold of anyone of the Forest and let us know what those questions are and we'll do our best to try to answer them, because we know doing NEPA differently can confuse folks.

So just wanted to mention that, Peter, and again, hopefully folks can separate the two in terms of one's a project-level project and one is more an umbrella Forest Plan effort, but they both have the name Blue Mountains in them.

Peter Fargo: Thanks a lot, Tom. That's helpful to clarify on two projects on what looks like a parallel track. So I think we'd be remiss in this conference call if we didn't clarify why we have two new alternatives.

And I thought we'd take a few minutes to explain what the difference is between the first alternative that we announced in the Open Letter emphasizing restoration informed by a formal public comment reengagement input and revised recommendations by Forest Service Resource Specialist.

And the second alternative which builds upon the first and considerably increases the pace of forest restoration during the planning period, and basically I wanted to turn it over to all three of you to help us understand how do they compare these two alternatives and what is the element of non-declining flow that we can help people understand?

Sabrina Stadler: Yes, so basically, you know, we heard from a lot of people that, one, we weren't paying enough attention to the social needs of the communities or the economic needs of the communities, and then we also heard that, you know, from people who were feeling like we were not doing enough to create the regulatory certainty or a way to really know whether we were preserving the ecological integrity.

And so we've been going back through and finding those areas where we found that people had the most consternation and talking about them internally and really trying to craft a new alternative that we think addresses a lot of the concerns that we heard, that we think are really going to help us be successful in the next plan period.

And from that the, we did hear loud and clearly that there's a large concern that we're being lapped by nature in terms of, I think, we mentioned it earlier that we can't get enough treatment done in - while we've done some work, meanwhile other areas are growing and we just can't, which we're not catching up enough to create a resilient landscape.

And so we valued that and thought, you know, that does seem like a reasonable alternative and looked closer at our planning regulations, and

there is a way that we could approach it as long as we are basically addressing the Desired Conditions.

And looking at it from an economic standpoint is one reason but then also the ecological standpoint, and we've really, we understand the economic involvement also knowing that it's going to be costly to implement a large-scale restoration project - I mean a program like the one that would be in what we're calling a Departure Alternative it's a consideration.

So it's helping us to understand more what the implications would be on the landscape to analyze it in detail and also to better understand if we were to accelerate our restoration what other things we might end up trading off for that.

And one of the things that is a concern is that what we have to make sure we're doing on our suitable land base for timber production is to make sure that in this plan period we do not exceed the long term sustained yield.

And that means basically we're trying to make sure that future generations will have, a forested landscape that is resilient and moving towards the Desired Conditions just as we are trying to do. And so that long-term sustained yield, there's a threshold that if we're within this plan period we cannot go over on this, that land base that's called the suitable land base.

If we go over that, then we have to do what's called the departure analysis, and so we can accelerate to a certain degree but then, which will happen if we subsequently have a decline. And so, you know, I think I mentioned this earlier that there's some serious concerns that we don't want to lose the infrastructure through that decline.

So if we can, if we keep a steady output the hope is that we'll maintain at least the level of infrastructure that we had or increase it slightly. If we go up

and then, and ramp way up and then ramp down again, there's that potential that we can't keep the infrastructure going for the long term.

And that we know if we're going to keep a resilient landscape in the long term that we really need to have those tools at our, you know, to be able to have a restoration economy, really. So that's one of the reasons why we're looking more closely at that, and so that, there'll be those two separate alternatives that we'll look at in more detail and really try to understand the tradeoffs involved.

Peter Fargo: Thank you.

Tom Montoya: I'll just to add a little bit there in terms of making sure folks understand where we get some of the guidance for doing the departure analysis that we're looking at, that Departure Alternative. Those come out of the National Forest Management Act.

You know, Congress sets those regulations and asks a long time ago when that was passed that we make sure that we do that in a conscious way in terms of making sure we have justification for that in terms of a highly-departed ecosystem or departed from what we're calling a Desired Conditions.

And so for the Blue Mountains of course we think we're there and we can do that but we're guided again by regulations, and that's what kind of Sabrina was talking about of bringing in the factor of you can depart for a while, but then you got to come back into something that's sustainable in the long run and that's really discretion from Congress that gives us how we do that approach. So I just wanted to give some context in how we go about that.

Peter Fargo: And when we talk about departure and flows, what we're talking about is timber volume or timber related...

Tom Montoya: Correct.

Peter Fargo: Biomass.

Tom Montoya: Yes.

Peter Fargo: Off the landscape.

Tom Montoya: Yes. It's timber volume.

Sabrina Stadler: Yes, even biomass is considered as part of that volume, even though it's hard to.

Peter Fargo: Great, well, we're at 6:53 by my clock and we don't need to keep everyone until seven but we do have some other questions so let's see if we can address a couple others that are bigger picture in nature because we've gone into some of the weeds or the trees.

But it's good, we need to make sure to offer clarification if possible. One of the questions that has come up that is very big picture in nature is about climate change. "How does the Forest Service supposed to address on climate change and the effects it is having and will continue to have on our public land, presumably through these forest lands, how do we propose to address it?"

Sabrina Stadler: Right. Yes, so, climate change has really kind of come about in terms of national direction quite strongly in the last few years, and one of the things that we've been really doing I think that's innovative for the Blues is to create a vulnerability assessment that will allow us to better understand the sensitive habitat of areas that we expect in the - during the climate change as it's happening, to become more impacted.

So for example, where we might see more droughty soils, higher stream temperatures, areas where we think that vegetation might be more at risk of certain vegetation types.

And so our team is looking at this vulnerability assessment that has been recently done by the Pacific Northwest Research Station in collaboration with the forest and trying to better bring that into our planning effort in terms of not only our planning components, but also our Impact Analysis.

But one of the places that I really can foresee it being a benefit is that we can start to overlay those areas together where we have - we're going to see some coincidence issues where we're going, where we'll see not only do we have soils that look to be vulnerable and vegetation, but also the streams.

And those we'll be areas that I think in this plan period, knowing that climate change happens over a long period, that at least in the 15 years we can start being proactive in some of those areas and looking at forests, and what can we do to really help create some resilience in them and target some of those areas right now, early on at least in terms of creating resilience for the watershed conditions, culverts, creating areas that we think that are prior-resilient as well as any other specific trends.

Resource areas that we can address especially on the watershed levels. So, that's one of the things that our team is really working on. Understanding the overlay of how those interactions might exist on the landscape and where we might have some of our most vulnerable watersheds and that includes an area that we can direct the forest to help them look closer at those.

And then we've also been, all along I think - the team knowingly has been thinking about climate change. We have actually got a whole section in the EIS that's devoted to climate change and it's best available science that we had at the time and now we've got this vulnerability system that really gets us a long way towards capturing all that information.

So that will be embodied in that section, and we have been designing the Desired Conditions with that in mind knowing that, if we have ranges, for example, of values, that's probably a better approach because we are going to be seeing a spectrum of how we might be managing the forest in terms of, you know, there's going to be places where we have the future range of availability will not be the same as the historic range. Just as climates change we might start to see certain vegetation types change.

So, we really feel like that thoughtful approach has been embodied in our efforts to our design the desired conditions at the onset, and then now with this vulnerability stuff that we'd will be able to hone in on some of those sensitive plant communities or places where we might see some more of need to address this specific needs on the ground.

Peter Fargo: Thank you. Well, now that we've talked about global climate change and how it might affect our region, I want to know what's in it for me, and I just want to ask on behalf of those who have called in and who have submitted comments to us in 2014 during the formal public comment period.

"When will comments be addressed or responded to formally? And will there be additional opportunities to comment on the new alternatives?"

Sabrina Stadler: Right. Yes. So, as we prepare the final Environmental Impact Statement, one of the requirements is that we craft a response time. And so our team is capturing those concern areas that people wrote in about and writing formal responses to them, and those will be embodied in the final environmental impact statements.

In terms of new opportunities to comment, we at this point we're basically trying just to, you know window in where we're going to folks and let them know the approach that we're taking, but we're really not opening up any a new formal comment period at this time.

And we're preferring to move forward, finalize these documents and the opportunity to object will be another opportunity essentially to comment. So, if there's an issue that we did not address to people's satisfaction, they can submit an objection letter and we will consider that at that time.

Peter Fargo:

Great. Thanks for clarifying that. And, like I said, we will still move this conversation forward together in newsletters. We'll go - we'll be continuing to share new information coming out of our revision process. And an upcoming newsletter that we hope will come out later in May, perhaps June, will address forest access and also management areas, and some of the revisions around those topics.

Some newsletters that will be following will be addressing livestock raising, and then after that, pace and scale and restoration, and we'll be able to provide even more detail than we have on the call today.

So, our hope is that we will have newsletters sharing at least the staff recommendations that have been made to the forest supervisors and to the regional forester for revision to these Forest Plans, and then we'll look forward to having additional conference calls to clarify and hopefully explain the rationale behind some of those changes.

Beyond that, we do have opportunities for you to have your voice heard, and one of those opportunities is what we're calling "Voices of the Forest", and this is a little bit of a commercial from my shop.

We understand that we have a lot of public meetings and that was one way that people could share what's on their mind, and a lot of people in those public meetings shared personal stories and values about their experience of the Blue Mountains, and that's something that we wanted to tap into to really get a sense of that personal side of things.

“What do the Blue Mountains mean to you? Why are they important to you? Why do you care about the Blue Mountains?” And in 60 seconds or less, could you take a video and send it to our email address - which you'll see from many of the emails that you've received [bluemtnforestplan@fs.fed.us](mailto:bluemtnforestplan@fs.fed.us). Let me confirm that, I always get it wrong. It's [bluemtnplanrevision@fs.fed.us](mailto:bluemtnplanrevision@fs.fed.us).

So please send us your videos, be as creative as you like. And try to keep it personal and positive in terms of why is it that you care? Why is it that the Blue Mountains are important to you? And that will help us to continue adding context to the input that we've received on the Forest Plan revision. And with that, we are at 7:01 and I just want to let folks in the room say one more thing as we close out.

Sabrina Stadler: Yes, I was a little bit, but I think it went pretty well. We got a lot of good questions, and I just want to encourage you to keep sending questions and we know we weren't able to talk to all of the questions that we received and we'll do our best as we approach these next topic areas to continue to answer those questions, and it may be off topic a little too just to try to hit the questions that we received.

Thank you very much for participating and we look forward to seeing what the response is to this. And, again, I don't know, I think Peter did mention this but we will have this audio on our Website, so people will be able to listen to it at their leisure and maybe share it with their friends.

Tom Montoya: So, this is Tom, I also want to say thanks for folks just being sincere and involved with the Forest Planning effort. And we hope that this was a positive outcome in terms of trying to answer your questions. I realize we didn't really get to everyone's questions as Peter mentioned, but we will have more of these to try to address more of the questions as we go through this to a final EIS. So, thanks again.

Chuck Oliver: Yes, thanks for the questions. In reading through many of these, there's some great questions, very thoughtful questions. I'm glad that people are taking this serious and taking the time to, you know, to interact with us on this process. It's important for us to get these questions. That's what's going to help us to create the best product in the end. So thanks for that.

Peter Fargo: Well, thanks again everybody, this is Peter signing off. Early on in the call, in the introduction I mentioned Gifford Pinchot Greatest Good of the greatest number for the longest time and, just wanted to mention that without your participation in this process we wouldn't be able to find the Greatest Good.

It's something that we find together and it's something that we'll continue to re-find and re-find together. So, thanks for, again, taking the time.

END