

Colville Plan Revision  
Meeting To Discuss Potential Wilderness Areas  
March 31, 2016

Subject: Request to discuss history of potential wilderness areas

Participants:

Scott Nielsen, Public Lands Advisory Council & Stevens County Cattlemen's Association Vice-President (but stated he was not necessarily representing those groups); Gary Nielsen, TriCounty Motorized Recreation Association President; and George Wishon, grazing allotment permittee

Amy Dillon, Forest Plan Revision Team Lead; Deb Kelly, Forest Plan Revision Public Affairs Officer; Eric McQuay, Forest Plan Revision Recreation Lead and West Zone Recreation Program Manager; and Marcy Rumelhart (notes)

Meeting start time: 11:30 am, Colville National Forest Supervisor's Office, Colville, WA.

This meeting was requested by Scott and Gary for purpose of obtaining clarification and understanding of potential wilderness area (PWA) designation process and potential effects to motorized routes. However, the majority of the discussion was about PWAs.

Scott asked about the acreage differences in PWAs shown on maps on the web page. He questioned the acreage was accurate if the boundaries were not accurate.

Amy – not sure if that is just an editing error or just difference in acres between alternatives.

Eric – there are changes due to geographic information system (GIS) methodology and how the digital mapping counts edges, curves and lines. It sometimes creates slivers, or very small pieces when the lines are matching up. It comes down to pixels.

The PWAs do change slightly between alternatives but thought that the acres were mostly consistent. Most differences are fairly minor. There were some areas on the maps that were removed to make them more contiguous (e.g., cherry stems). Rodney made some decisions to clean up some of those areas. Changes could be large based on the alternative. Keep in mind the PWA boundaries are not set until the final decision is made. Until that time they are draft boundaries. Prior to the documents being finalized and a decision made on the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revised Forest Plan, the areas will be verified on the ground. Any areas not carried forward as recommended wilderness in the final document will not be ground verified and will remain as either backcountry or backcountry nonmotorized. The PWA boundaries will remain as part of the original inventory.

#### **Background on how PWAs were created**

Eric provided some background information and history of where the PWAs came from. An excerpt from a Forest Plan Revision briefing paper on Inventoried Roadless Areas, Potential Wilderness Areas, and possible Wilderness Recommendations reads -

“The term “inventoried roadless area” first came about in the 1970s during the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE I and RARE II) efforts by the Forest Service. The Forest Service was directed to evaluate areas for potential wilderness recommendation to carry out the 1964 Wilderness Act. Inventoried roadless areas identified by these efforts came to be known as “Appendix C Inventoried

Roadless Areas” as they are listed in Appendix C of the final environmental impact statement for forest plans. Another key event was the 2001 Roadless Rule, which established national direction for all inventoried roadless areas identified in the 2001 Roadless Rule maps. For the Colville National Forest this is identical to the Appendix C Inventoried Roadless Area maps. Subsequent litigation on the 2001 Roadless Rule has occurred and remains active to this date. Recently, the name used in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH 1909.12, Chapter 70) to refer to Inventoried Roadless Areas has changed to “Potential Wilderness Areas,” more closely reflecting their role.”

Eric – when the 1988 forest plan came along, it included Appendix C (RARE I and RARE II). Between RARE I and RARE II the Forest lost acres and Appendix C ultimately became Management Area 11. Then with the 2001 Roadless Rule, the boundaries were set and included direction for no system roads or commercial timber harvest. The acres changed again.

Between 2006 and 2008 a series of public collaboration meetings were held at the Chewelah Peak Learning Center for the purpose of reviewing inventoried roadless area boundaries. This was the beginning of the PWA evaluation process. For the forest plan revision evaluations the PWAs had to meet two criterion: must be greater than 5,000 acres and contain no open Forest Service system roads. Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs, 2001 Roadless Rule vintage) that did not meet the criteria did not come forward as PWAs and are being proposed as backcountry in the draft forest plan. The PWA layer (GIS) was a result of those meetings. The PWA terminology is in the recreation specialist report for the draft forest plan, but not in any other documents because the terminology has changed again. PWAs are now termed “lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System”.

The Forest Service is required to review areas for wilderness characteristics during any plan revision. The forest supervisor is the recommending official and will consider all the options before making a recommendation to the regional forester, who is the decision maker. Once a decision is made for the final forest plan, it would require congressional designation to change it from recommended wilderness to designated wilderness.

#### **General discussion and question/answer**

Scott asked for clarification on the Lost Creek PWA and why it was not dropped from consideration as recommended wilderness in the draft plan because it had logging units in it that made it not eligible for consideration.

Eric – Lost Creek met the two criterion of greater than 5,000 acres and no open system roads. During the public meeting process (2006-2008) it was determined that the area was surrounded by and contained motorized trails and was not supported by the collaborative as being recommended as wilderness. For recommended wilderness, an inventory is done first, then evaluations, then analysis where the responsible official reviews everything and makes the decision to carry an area forward as recommended wilderness or not. Lost Creek, through the analysis process, was ultimately removed from recommended wilderness consideration.

There was discussion of decommissioning roads and how that factors into PWA eligibility.

Amy – the Forest Service wasn’t considering closing roads in 1988. That is a more recent thing, since the 2008 wilderness meetings occurred.

Eric – before he came to the Forest, some roads were decommissioned that made the areas eligible for PWA consideration. That is the case for Twin Sisters specifically and probably Owl Mountain, Jackknife, and South Huckleberry based on the motorized trail numbers in these PWAs.

Gary asked about the public process that happened in 2001.

Deb explained that much of the background information is on the public webpage for the combined Okanogan-Wenatchee and Colville plan revisions. She stated that original working maps, summaries and meeting notes from the wilderness workshops would be on the original project website. Not all comments were captured in the meeting notes, so no individual comments. The notes reflect more broad input or summary of discussion. What came out of the meetings was the working map.

Scott asked if there was an agreement from the wilderness workshops that moved forward.

Deb stated the groups never came to direct consensus. The Chewelah Peak meetings were the starting point and we did get to some areas of agreement, but not a consensus. Lost Creek received a level of agreement.

Eric – the boundaries won't change from the original inventory, but because of the level of agreement from the wilderness workshops, some PWAs were not carried forward as recommended wilderness. No consensus, but some level of agreement to not carry forward. The Proposed Action that was sent to the public in 2011 included what was brought forward by Rick Brazell. He made a decision on what to include in the Proposed Action, based on what he heard at those meetings. The two areas that had some agreement but no consensus were Lost Creek (not to include as recommended wilderness) and Salmo-Priest Adjacent (to include as recommended wilderness). The inventory to determine PWA boundaries was not a public process. This was done by the Forest Plan Team at that time. The inventory was just the starting point for discussion in the wilderness workshops. Ground verification will take place this summer, after the comment period.

Deb – through the whole planning process and at public meetings the Forest Service has been inviting comments on this, and is still taking comments now.

Scott – the main issue for him is that the PWA boundaries, in some cases, have increased. They are larger than the underlying inventoried roadless area boundaries, and include some areas that have been logged.

Eric stated it will be very helpful to the Forest Service if his comments are very specific and detailed about this. When he visits these areas in the field, he will make note of what he finds such as evidence of past logging, but ultimately it is the forest supervisor who makes a recommendation to the deciding official. We will make boundary adjustments based on ground verification.

George pointed out areas on the map west of the Abercrombie Hooknose proposed recommended wilderness area that he knows include roads and evidence of past logging.

Scott requested, if available, any information the Forest has on the Hartbauer timber sale logged in the 1980s.

George – there is a Hartbauer Creek in the area. Also another timber sale in that area off of the road going to the Abercrombie trailhead. Think it was called the HiLo Silver timber sale.

Scott – the public wilderness meetings produced maps with PWA boundaries, and later he saw maps where some of the PWAs were removed. Why?

Eric – Early on the Forest Plan team may have removed the PWAs that were not being considered for recommended wilderness from the maps...I don't know for sure. However, the inventory does not change and therefore all of the PWAs that met the minimum criteria of 5,000 acres and no open system roads would need to be taken through the evaluation and analysis process before a decision could be made on whether or not to recommend an area for wilderness designation. There have been many

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discussions about whether areas should become PWAs, and he recognizes the frustrations. Just be aware that boundaries may change prior to the final plan being signed.

Scott questioned whether an area that is removed from the suitable timber base for recommended wilderness, is really suitable for recommended wilderness if the boundaries are wrong and it reduces the size of a PWA that barely meets the 5,000 acre minimum acreage standard (e.g., Quartzite area). Is the Forest Service taking land that could be productive and making it recommended wilderness?

Eric – the Quartzite area on the map was identified as a PWA and is just barely a couple hundred acres over the minimum 5,000 acre requirement. If the boundaries are wrong and the area drops below 5,000 acres, then this area could be mis-categorized as backcountry which could take land out of the suitable timber base.

Scott – if the Forest Service is eliminating roads now and then going through another plan revision process in the future, are you developing more wilderness with a minimum road strategy?

Eric – that might be a comment you can submit. It is possible that areas where roads once existed adjacent to PWAs or designated wilderness could be reviewed under future forest plan revision efforts as eligible to be considered for addition to designated wilderness, if the roads and corresponding vegetation treatments are no longer “substantially recognizable”.

Amy – roads are considered for removal during project level analysis, not at forest plan level.

Scott asked if the GIS layers are available and compatible for GPS use.

Amy – GIS layers are available to the public in several formats on the plan revision website. Also, Stevens County has them.

The group greatly appreciated Eric’s excellent presentation. Meeting ended about 1:30.

Additional information requested at the meeting:

- Deb will send links to older information on the original Oka-Wen and Colville website, including reading room with public comments, meeting notes, etc. to Gary and Scott.
- Marcy will look into the Three Rivers Ranger District records for old timber sale information (Hartbauer, HiLo Silver).
- GIS layers are available to the public on the Forest Plan Revision website:  
<http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/colville/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fseprd491838>

Gary and Scott provided their email addresses for future contact:

[rsnielsen@plixtel.com](mailto:rsnielsen@plixtel.com)

[grielsen@ultraplix.com](mailto:grielsen@ultraplix.com)

Acronyms:

PWA – potential wilderness area

GIS – geographic information system

IRA – inventoried roadless area

FSH – Forest Service Handbook

RARE – roadless area review and evaluation

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\*Follow-up April 13, 2016

- *Website links to older information on the original Oka-Wen and Colville website, including reading room with public comments, meeting notes, etc. were emailed to Gary and Scott on April 1, 2016;*
- *Forest employees researched old timber sales and were able to locate some information on the HiLo timber sale. A draft map and spreadsheet were emailed to Gary and Scott on April 13, 2016.*
- *Forest employees were not able to locate any electronic or paper information on the Hartbauer timber sale.*