

**USFS Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision Meeting | April 4, 2014 | Kennewick, WA**

*Notetaker: Melissa Thom, EnviroIssues*

*Approximate Attendance: 50*

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

**C: I've used the Umatilla for hunting and fishing for 50 years and now own property on the Tucannon River. I feel strongly that there has been an error in designating wind development as a suitable use for the forest. The wind industry condemns the land so no one can use it, and the red lights are a blight on the landscape. There's nowhere in that area where you get a scenic view without the wind towers. Wind development should not be included as an action for the national forest.**

**C: You're working in two states and the off road rules are noticeably different. The Washington State House Bill 1632 addresses ATVs on public roads, which are inside the forest, and I don't see that addressed here. I will leave that legislation with you.**

*R: We will take a look at that, thank you. Dennis would be the one to get back to you.*

**Q: What is being done for consultation of sacred places and uses for all of the native tribes surrounding these three forests?**

*R: We have worked with and provided information to all surrounding tribes asking for input on the plan. The US government has a treaty with the tribes and they have rights. It's our responsibility to maintain those rights. We talk in the plan about opportunities for gathering native foods and other tribal uses. We have been working closely with the tribes by briefing them and making sure we're meeting their desires.*

**Q: Does the plan address growth management and other management concerns on the forests? Is there a plan for that?**

*R: You can have a copy of the plan tonight and give us your thoughts on how we manage those issues.*

**Q: I heard there is new language in the draft plan that would remove recreational pack goats from the forest, specifically in or adjacent to big horn sheep habitat. Is that correct?**

*R: Yes. You're right, there is a standard and guideline where we do not allow pack goats within a certain distance from areas currently occupied by big horn sheep. There is a lot of country you can still use, but there are some minor areas that we are trying to keep a separation.*

**C: I'm from the North American Pack Goat Association. Closure of these areas to pack goats is unjustified. There is no scientific data or studies that are conclusive on pack goats being a threat to bighorn Sheep. There is a lack of evidence that disease transmission occurs between pack goats and sheep. Closing areas to pack goats without further study would be reckless and a violation of NEPA. The most recent studies conducted on the possibility of disease transmission were in 2003 and were Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision**

**funded by a foundation for bighorn sheep, which has pushed their personal agenda to remove pack goats. This raises questions to the bias of the studies. I want an unbiased group of scientists to examine this issue before such a closure could be considered. Pack goats are an extremely low impact animal that are enjoyed by all kinds of user groups, including old and young as a means of transportation to carry their gear. I want USFS to meet and discuss alternatives with the public and Pack Goat Association to come up with alternatives to keep the goats and sheep from coming into contact with each other. We are bighorn sheep advocates, we need to protect them, but we can live in harmony and do it together without removing pack goats.**

**C: I own property in Tollgate and was not notified about this process or these meetings, and neither were my neighbors and others.**

**Q: What designates a road and a trail? Is there clear verbiage about that in the plan?**

*R: I'm not sure if there are official definitions in a glossary, but we do have Forest Service handbook guidance that would give us those definitions. I don't have those with me, but I can get you those definitions because there is a distinction.*

**Q: Can you clarify how we can compare the alternatives?**

*R: When you go through the DEIS, there is an area that shows the objectives by alternatives, grazing and timber outputs by alternatives, etc. You should be able to see how each item compares to determine what you like or don't like about the alternatives. Sabrina can walk you through the document after the presentation.*

**C: In terms of social well being and economics, motorized recreation is addressed very little. It's an important point and should be addressed more. Snowmobiles and four-wheelers are big up there. Economically, we buy gas and hot dogs and beer in those areas and there's an economic impact. We want to see it addressed as a major point.**

*R: Thank you. Our team will take a look at that.*

**C: I'm concerned that there are studies conducted by well educated people, but access and usability is restricted because of special issues that have been litigated, not based on the expert studies on how the forests should be used. Areas are being closed because of lawsuits on specific vegetation or species without true scientific backing. This negates the studies you've included in the plan that identify how you would like to manage. This is all done behind closed doors and it really concerns me.**

**C: Specific road closures are problematic for getting from one open area to another, like the road between Cow Camp Bridge and the Panjab Bridge that is closed but the areas on either side are open. What's the point of closing that small, one-mile road? It eliminates the possibility of movement in there. Can dirty little tricks like these be addressed in the forest plan?**

*R: The Forest Plan doesn't get into site-specific analysis. That would be travel management planning on each of the districts. Many of you know where those weird little spots are. We've*

*been talking to folks about options and opportunities. Sometimes those closures are there for safety issues or other reasons. There are issues we are aware of and people need to continue to work with the district rangers to adjust or change something like that. In the plan, desired conditions for roads and trails are identified; if the language we use in the plan doesn't work for you, let us know how we can make that desired condition possible while still allowing road use.*

**Q: Why propose more wilderness when there is already so much? In Central Oregon we had problems in one area where they designated wilderness on a former military base and it made it so hunters were not able to go out there with their carts. Some bicyclists were upset, too.**

*R: We have to go through a wilderness analysis as part of the planning process. Some people want to see more wilderness while some want to see less. The Umatilla Forest is 1.4 million acres or so. Alternative C would add half a million acres across all three forests, and demonstrates what that would look like for those who wanted more wilderness. Alternative D shows no additional wilderness for those who didn't want any new wilderness. So we analyzed a range. Alternative E looks towards the middle of that range with 90,000 acres total recommended on the three forests. And we want your feedback on that. Current recreational uses can continue in these areas until they're designated, if they are designated at all. But we probably couldn't do a timber sale in recommended areas while awaiting a decision on designation.*

**Q: What is the percentage of wilderness and non-road acreage compared to general forest?**

*R: On the Umatilla there are 304,000 acres of wilderness out of 1.4 million acres. Recommended wilderness on Umatilla is for an additional 40,000 acres. I don't have the specific number of acres of Inventoried Roadless Areas. In general, wilderness on the Umatilla is a quarter of the landscape and inventoried roadless areas are another quarter. The other half is for other uses.*

**Q: So half of the forest area is inaccessible to anyone that wants to use it?**

*R: Wilderness is available for hiking and horse riding, etc. In the Preferred Alternative, inventoried roadless areas are split into non-motorized and motorized backcountry management areas. On Umatilla, the backcountry non-motorized use is 70,000 acres and motorized use is 160,000 acres. Some non-motorized areas still have motorized trails, and other management areas don't have any trails at this point in time. There won't be a huge shift from what you would see today. But Alternative C would look really different because that was built on different assumptions.*

**Q: Why would you need to designate something like Hell Hole as wilderness if no one uses it anyway? Why go to the trouble?**

*R: People do use it because there is good fishing in the bottom if you don't mind hiking. Wilderness is managed differently than anything else. If we recommend that as wilderness, it really doesn't affect a lot of users because most people just drive by. Again, we're looking for feedback. If that doesn't make sense to you, we will take that into consideration.*

**Q: I see in the process that you will get written submissions. Will we be able to see them on the website so we can see the dialogue between participants?**

*R: The summaries from these meetings will be provided online so you can see what people in other locations have said. All comments submitted will be responded to in the Final EIS and you can see them then.*

**C: I want to see people's statements before you publish them in the Final EIS.**

*R: We can look to see if that's something we can do.*

**Q: I'm concerned about where my cabin is. I've had a [recreational residence] permit since 1968 and the annual fees have gone up significantly. We used to have a good relationship with the Forest Service, but recently your representation out there says one thing and then does another. The regulations for our area are different than the ski area across the street – why is that?**

*R: The Forest Plan will not change permits. Your cabin area will still be under your existing permit. The second issue about participation from the Forest Service, we can talk more about that so I can help resolve that issue.*

**Q: The Tollgate Snowmobile Club sent a letter to Sabrina and we want to know if this letter will be included when you do a response to comments.**

*R: We re-type hard copy letters we receive into our electronic system and they go through comment analysis. They are coded so we make sure we capture everything consistently. Comment analysis uses word search, so electronic letters are preferable. But we will incorporate any form of comment we get whether verbal, hand-written, or electronic.*

**Q: There's information that said there had been 41,000 letters received in 2010 and 4,000 of those were form letters. Was that all from one organization? It looks strange that most of the comments were possibly coming from one entity.**

*R: Those were from a variety of different entities, not just one. Form letters are still tracked for comment analysis.*

**Q: The design criteria in part three of the plan says, that the standards and guidelines shall apply to all projects and decisions made after the plan is approved, but neither standards nor guidelines themselves are decisions?**

*R: The point is that if we say we have a standard, that doesn't mean we won't have to do site-specific planning on the local level. We will use those guides to frame the project design, but the actual decisions and implementation will be after project specific NEPA.*

**Q: What is a *Silene spaldingii*?**

*R: It's a plant. It's a listed threatened species under the Endangered Species Act.*

**Q: There is a standard in the plan that livestock grazing isn't allowed where that plant exists. Why is grazing a hazard for it?**

*R: Trampling is the issue, and it's listed because there are very few of those plants. With that standard, we want to manage the timing of grazing -- it's not a desirable plant for cows. Spalding's Catchfly is the common name. We work with local permittees on that issue and they have been able to work around it; they are able to identify it.*

**C: Are you able to move problem species like that plant around based on soil type because we've had issues with plants like that. Have you done a study for transplanting those?**

*R: There have been some studies on the plant and it's in a grassland, open hillside habitat, not in forested landscapes. We work well with our permittees on this issue; they are able to both graze and avoid the plant. They know what to look for and time the livestock grazing accordingly.*

**Q: Can you provide your study to that gentleman [who earlier asked about this plant]?**

*R: We will if he asks for it.*