

# Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision—2014

## Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests



# Frequently Asked Questions

## Access

### How do the Revised Plans address public access?

The plan components that provide guidance and strategic direction with regards to access and transportation are the desired conditions, objectives, guidelines, management areas, and suitable uses.

**Roads and Trails Desired Condition and Guidelines:** The Proposed Revised Forest Plan includes desired conditions with associated guidelines for roads and trails.

**Watershed Objectives:** There are objectives identified for road and trail related work to reduce sediment delivery from roads and trails to aquatic and riparian areas (hydrologic connectivity).

**Management Area Desired Conditions:** Additionally, there are desired conditions for management areas where motorized use is described in terms of motorized (MA3B) and nonmotorized (MA3B) backcountry use.

**Management Area Suitable Uses:** Suitable uses are identified in terms of motorized access in winter and summer, as well as the suitability of adding roads and trails within the various management areas.

### Do the Revised Plans close any roads? Why does the Forest Service close roads?

The Forest Plan is a visionary document that provides strategic guidance and direction. The Proposed Revised Forest Plan will provide the guidance and direction to inform road and trail decisions on a project-level basis (travel management planning). However, in order to close roads, additional public involvement and environmental analysis is required and will be accomplished through travel management planning. The Forest Service closes roads and trails for a variety of reasons, such as seasonal closures, natural resource protection, hazardous conditions, or the road has become impassable.

### What is the status of each of the Forests with regards to Travel Management?

With the exception of Wilderness, the 1990 Forest Plans for the Malheur and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests provide limited management direction to distinguish motorized vehicle use allocations from nonmotorized use allocations. The 1990 Forest Plan for the Umatilla National Forest included detailed management direction related to motorized vehicle use. Subsequent to the Umatilla 1990 land management decision, each District on the Umatilla National Forest made Access and Travel Management Decisions leading to the production of a forestwide motor vehicle use map (MVUM) designating motorized vehicle routes, trails, and areas in compliance with 36 CFR 212.51, Subpart B and 36 CFR 216.13 of the Travel Management Rule. The Malheur and Wallowa-Whitman National Forest do not have a MVUM with designated routes. They are both in the process of completing Travel Management.

### Since Travel Management is a separate process, how will travel management make use of the Proposed Revised Forest Plan?

The Forest Plans have identified management areas where motorized access is identified either as suitable or unsuitable. During the travel management process, each Forest will evaluate the road system in relation to these management areas. The Umatilla has a final MVUM. The Malheur and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests will use the allocation of the management areas in the Forest Plans in their public engagement discussions as they move forward with travel management planning to develop their final MVUMs.



for the greatest good

Efforts were made with the preferred alternative (Alternative E) to examine existing uses and to allocate the management areas in a consistent manner with existing uses. For example, motorized backcountry areas (MA3B) were delineated based on the current road and trail use in the areas and the low road

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS *continued*

density; therefore, these areas will be suitable for motorized vehicle use. In the case of nonmotorized management areas (MA3A), boundaries were drawn specifically to not include roads and areas that are currently being accessed by motorized vehicles. In these areas, roads and trails would not be identified for motorized vehicle use; however decisions regarding the designation of use of those trails would occur through travel management planning.

### Do the Revised Plans change winter motorized access?

The 1990 Forest Plans identified over-snow motorized vehicle use as suitable in all areas outside of designated Wilderness. Under the Proposed Revised Forest Plans, winter motorized use will continue in Recommended Wilderness Areas (MA 1B), Backcountry Motorized (MA 3B), General Forest (MA 4A), Riparian Management Areas (MA 4B), and Developed Sites and Administrative Areas (MA 5). Use within Wildlife Corridors (MA 3C) is restricted to designated routes identified on a Forest's Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM). Over-snow motorized vehicle use is prohibited in designated Wilderness (MA 1A).

### Access related to Backcountry Nonmotorized (MA3A) and Backcountry Motorized (MA3B) and Wildlife Corridor (MA3C)

Use or Activity	Management Areas		
	MA 3A	MA 3B	MA 3C
Motor vehicle use (summer) <sup>1</sup>	U	S	S
Motor vehicle use (winter)	U	S	S
Road construction	U	U	S <sup>1</sup>
Trail construction (for motor vehicle use)	U	S	S

S = Designates use or activity as generally suitable

U = Designates use or activity as generally unsuitable.

<sup>1</sup> Indicates generally suitable applies only to use or activity on designated roads and trails and within designated areas.

### What is a designated route or area?

A designated route or area is a National Forest System road or trail that is designated for motor vehicle use pursuant to §212.51 on a motor vehicle use map (MVUM). The MVUM is a result of Travel Management Planning under Subpart B of the Travel Management Rule. The Forest Plan does not designate routes or areas.

### What are backcountry management areas and how do they relate to motorized vehicle use?

#### Are Backcountry Management Areas "de facto" Wilderness?

Backcountry areas are categorized into Backcountry Nonmotorized (MA 3A), Backcountry Motorized (MA3B) and Wildlife Corridors (MA 3C). These management areas would be managed in a primitive to semi-primitive condition, but for multiple uses. Unlike designated Wilderness, motorized use is considered a suitable use in Backcountry Motorized (MA 3B) as portions of these backcountry areas have roads. Motorized use is considered an unsuitable use in Backcountry Nonmotorized (MA3A). Most Backcountry Nonmotorized (MA3A) areas were delineated around existing roads or trails, and these areas typically overlap with Inventoried Roadless Areas, or areas with few or no existing roads. Motorized use is suitable in Wildlife Corridors (MA 3C), in both summer and winter.

Many activities that are not allowed in designated Wilderness areas would be allowed in backcountry management areas (MAs 3A, 3B, and 3C). Uses suitable within the backcountry management areas (but excluded from Wilderness) include structural wildlife habitat improvements; recreation facility improvements such as trail shelters, sanitary facilities and primitive campsites; and under certain conditions, special uses such as electronic sites. In addition, the use of mechanical and motorized equipment would be suitable in the maintenance and administration of lands in backcountry allocations.



### **Will access to private inholdings within the Forests be eliminated through the Revised Forest Planning process?**

Private land access is protected by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. Any road closure would require separate site-specific environmental analysis with associated public involvement (NEPA). Since the Forest Plan is a programmatic document, no site-specific actions or decisions are included within the plan revision process.

### **What is the 2001 roadless rule? Why are there “inventoried roadless areas” with roads that are currently open to motorized vehicle use?**

The inventoried roadless process started in the 1970s; roadless areas were designated by the Clinton administration through a decision in 2001, known as the 2001 Forest Service Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR). It also went through a public process. That decision was then litigated and went through the court system. But ultimately the decision still required us to carry forward the inventoried roadless areas identified in that environmental analysis. In some cases, there are existing roads and trails within the inventoried roadless areas. These roads will continue to remain accessible to motorized vehicles where that use is consistent with the Proposed Revised Forest Plan, and any decisions to close specific roads or trails would require separate site-specific environmental analysis with associated public involvement (NEPA).

### **How do Inventoried Roadless Areas relate to Forest Plan direction?**

Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs), as established in the 2001 Forest Service Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR), are allocated to varying management areas, with the majority being allocated to three primary management areas: Recommended Wilderness Area (1A), Backcountry Nonmotorized (MA 3A), and Backcountry Motorized (MA 3B). The desired conditions, suitable uses, standards, and guidelines for these management area designations align with the regulations outlined in the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Prohibitions within IRAs include road construction and reconstruction; and the cutting, sale, or removal of timber (subject to limited exceptions).

### **What does backcountry limited motor vehicle use mean?**

The current draft Proposed Revised Land Management Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement both include the word “limited” when describing Backcountry Motorized (MA3B). Editorial efforts were made to eliminate the use of the word “limited,” but not all instances where the word was used were corrected. The use of the word “limited” was considered to be unnecessary, as motorized use is either considered suitable or not suitable for any given management area. More importantly, the desired conditions for backcountry management areas are to maintain the primitive or semi-primitive ecological conditions within these areas.

## **Recommended Wilderness**

### **Why are there designated Wilderness areas in the Blue Mountains and why does the Proposed Revised Forest Plan recommend additional Wilderness areas?**

The Wilderness Act (1964) initially protected 54 Wilderness areas (9.1 million acres) across the nation and established a process for adding new lands to the National Wilderness Preservation System; this Act designated the Eagle Cap and Strawberry Mountain Wilderness areas in the Blue Mountains.

The Omnibus Oregon Wilderness Act of 1984 designated additional Wilderness areas across the state of Oregon; as a result, the 1990s Forest Plans were not required to review potential Wilderness areas.

The Forest Plans must comply with the National Forest Management Act of 1976 which requires that

“roadless areas...shall be evaluated and considered for recommendation as potential Wilderness areas during the Forest Planning process...”

and that management direction be provided for these areas; however, the Omnibus Oregon Wilderness Act having just been passed stated that new recommendations could wait for the next planning cycle.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS *continued*

The 1982 planning rule requires the Forest to inventory and evaluate potential Wilderness areas. Potential Wilderness areas identified during this process are further analyzed against an established set of evaluation criteria. In this planning cycle, we are required to use the process for identifying potential Wilderness areas outlined in FSH 1909.12, Chapter 70, which has two phases: inventory and evaluation. The Wilderness evaluation process is a requirement for the Revised Forest Plan process. A range of alternatives was developed for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) that included varying amounts of recommended Wilderness area. The different alternatives provide differing amounts of recommended Wilderness area and the Regional Forester will select the alternative.

**Are new Wilderness areas (MA1A) or additions to current Wilderness areas (MA1B) being proposed?**

The preferred alternative (Alternative E) includes administrative recommendations for additional Wilderness. There are 30,400 acres of administrative recommended Wilderness on the Malheur National Forest; 40,100 acres on the Umatilla National Forest; and 20,300 on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. Alternatives presented within the Blue Mountain National Forests Proposed Revised Land Management Plan vary the amount and location of Recommended Wilderness (MA1B) on each Forest and the acreage total for each alternative is displayed in the table below.

**Recommended Wilderness area (MA 1B) acreage for each alternative for each National Forest**

National Forest	Alt. A	Alt. B	Alt. C	Alt. D	Alts. E and F
Malheur	0	1,160	83,810	0	30,400
Umatilla	0	1,440	248,676	0	40,100
Wallowa-Whitman	0	10,770	172,840	0	20,300

**What activities are suitable in Recommended Wilderness?**

The Proposed Revised Forest Plan includes a desired condition that provides for uses that are conducive to maintaining the inherent Wilderness character of these Recommended Wilderness. Uses or activities identified in the suitable use matrix of the Proposed Revised Forest Plan are displayed below:

Management Area (MA)	Use or Activity								
	Timber Production	Timber Harvest	Grazing (cattle and sheep)	Motor vehicle use (summer)	Motor vehicle use (winter)	Road Construction	Trail Construction (for motor vehicle use)	Mechanical fuel treatment	Energy Development
Wilderness (MA 1A)	U	U	S	U	U	U	U	U	U
Recommended Wilderness (MA 1B)	U	U	S	U	S	U	U	U	U

**Is over-snow-vehicle (OSV) a suitable use in Recommended Wilderness?**

Over-snow-vehicles are determined suitable within Recommended Wilderness Area (MA1B), as presented in the “general suitability matrix for management areas” (pg. 97).



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS *continued*

### **Who will make the decision to recommend additional Wilderness?**

The decision to recommend Wilderness is made by the Regional Forester at the time a decision on the Proposed Revised Forest Plan is made; however, only Congress can designate Wilderness.

### **Can the Forest Service change Wilderness designations?**

The Forest Service does not have the authority to either designate or change Wilderness designations. That authority is reserved by Congress.

### **Are there additional public comment opportunities and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) processes to provide input on Recommended Wilderness?**

Wilderness recommendations in the Proposed Revised Forest Plan are prepared through the current NEPA process, and there are no subsequent NEPA processes. However, the designation process conducted by Congress often includes years of congressional committee hearings where the public, government officials, and members of Congress provide additional input into the decision making process and may result in a Wilderness Study area as an interim step prior to designation.

### **What is the Forest Service's definition of Wilderness? It seems that not all Wilderness areas are necessarily pristine. Some Wilderness areas contain old logging roads, stumps, etc.?**

The Forest Service definition of Wilderness is based on the statutory language found in The Wilderness Act (Public Law 88-577). Section 3(c) of the Act states that a Wilderness area “generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable.” While designated Wilderness areas strive to encompass “primeval character” and “natural conditions,” some areas may contain remnants of past land use activities, a legacy from previous decades that in some cases contribute to the scientific or historical value of the area.

### **Are wildland fire management activities allowed within Recommended Wilderness?**

Wildland fires within Recommended Wilderness can be suppressed using standard suppression tactics. Minimum Impact Suppression Tactics (MIST) are often applied to reduce suppression impacts to these primitive backcountry settings and their related Wilderness values. Wildland fire can also be managed for resource benefit within Recommended Wilderness, and planned ignitions (prescribed fire) can also be applied, where both activities use the same MIST principles to reduce overall management related impacts to Wilderness values and characteristics.

### **Will all Recommended Wilderness presented in the Proposed Revised Forest Plan be new Wilderness?**

**Malheur National Forest:** For the Malheur National Forest, Recommended Wilderness totals 30,444 acres: over two-thirds of that area (23,145 acres) represents a recommended “new” Wilderness area, and the remaining acreage represents recommended additions to existing designated Wilderness.

**Umatilla National Forest:** For the Umatilla National Forest, Recommended Wilderness Area totals 41,000 acres: approximately one-half of that area (21,980 acres) represents a recommended “new” Wilderness area, and the remaining acreages represents recommended additions to existing designated Wilderness.

**Wallowa-Whitman National Forest:** For the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, Recommended Wilderness Area totals 20,300 acres: all of these acres represent recommended additions to existing designated Wilderness.

In many cases, recommended additions to existing Wilderness serves to improve existing Wilderness boundary management, in addition to meeting the necessary Wilderness evaluation criteria.

### **What is the percentage of Wilderness (MA 1A) and Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) compared to General Forest (MA 4)?**

**Malheur National Forest:** The 1.7 million acre Malheur National Forest contains approximately 82,500 acres of designated Wilderness. Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) comprise approximately 181,500 acres. The combined total of 264,000 acres represents 16% of the Malheur National Forest.



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS *continued*

**Umatilla National Forest:** The 1.4 million acre Umatilla National Forest contains approximately 304,000 acres of designated Wilderness. Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) comprise approximately 282,200 acres. The combined total of 586,200 acres represents 42% of the Umatilla National Forest.

**Wallowa-Whitman National Forest:** The 1.7 million acre Wallowa-Whitman National Forest contains approximately 759,500 acres of designated Wilderness (excluding Wilderness acres within the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area). Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) comprise approximately 253,000 acres. The combined total of 1,012,500 acres represents 60% of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

It should be noted that while Inventoried Roadless Areas include certain management use and activity prohibitions under the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, suitable uses within IRAs are not as restrictive when compared to designated Wilderness. Suitable uses within IRAs include motorized and mechanical uses, commercial uses, and may contain structures or installations.

### Aquatic Species and Habitats

#### **Must projects help move aquatic and riparian habitats towards desired conditions for these habitats?**

Yes, projects that may affect aquatic and riparian habitats would be designed to help move these habitats towards desired conditions, through coordination and consideration of other land use needs.

#### **Can priority watersheds for active restoration of watershed function, and riparian and aquatic habitat improvement change if there is a need to switch priorities?**

A key watershed is one that has some semblance of good condition with presence of productive fish populations. Priority watersheds for active restoration are selected from among the watersheds chosen as Key Watersheds. Key watersheds will not change, but watersheds targeted for active restoration may be reprioritized and others selected, at any time if the need exists.

#### **Will the Preferred Alternative contribute to maintaining or restoring viability for aquatic Threatened or Endangered populations of the focal aquatic species selected to represent species diversity in the planning area?**

Yes, all of the alternatives incorporate the Region 6 Aquatic Riparian Conservation Strategy intended to contribute to maintaining or restoring populations of the selected focal species, threatened and endangered species, and will contribute to maintaining species diversity in the planning area.

### Economic and Social Well-being

#### **How does the Forest Service analyze the economic contribution to the communities?**

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Volume 1, Chapter 3 has a detailed Economic and Social Well-being analysis. The analysis gives projections with regards to the economic contribution each alternative will give to the various Forests.

#### **Why isn't the economic goal the highest priority for the Forest Service?**

The Forest Service is a multiple use management agency. As stewards of the land, we must balance land use while maintaining ecological diversity and resiliency. In caring for long-term ecological sustainability, social uses, goods, and services follow by balancing economic and social outputs with the needs to sustain ecologically diverse and resilient landscapes.



### **What in the Proposed Revised Forest Plan effort will diversify the economies in Eastern Oregon?**

There are objectives in the Proposed Revised Forest Plan tied to goods and services in the form of jobs and other outputs such as timber, recreation, grazing, and restoration. There is an emphasis on accelerating the pace and scale of restoration in the preferred alternative that would subsequently contribute to the economic stability of the local communities. The increased pace and scale will be a win ecologically by improving landscape resilience, as well as economically by contributing to the ecological stability of our local communities and maintaining the infrastructure. The preferred alternative focuses on providing a range of goods and services resulting from a combination of increased timber harvest and forested restoration; maintaining grazing outputs at current levels; collaboration and partnerships emphasizing improved recreation opportunities and landscape restoration. Restoration projects go beyond forested vegetation and include stream, road and rangeland improvements. As technology evolves there are new product markets that the Forest would also support, such as improved biomass utilization. While the Revised Forest Plan focuses on restoration; recreation and other social and economic goods and services flow from having a healthy and resilient ecosystem.

### **Does the current plan revision consider the management objectives of the State Fish and Game departments?**

Yes. Under the social well-being goal, one of the desired conditions under 2.4 Hunting and Fishing is to support Oregon and Washington Departments of Fish and Wildlife management objectives (Pg. 58).

### **How did budgets factor into the alternative development?**

Budgets are discussed in Appendix A of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). Budgets were determined based on the level of objectives in each alternative. In Alternatives A, B, and C, the amount of money to reach the objectives would be consistent with today's budgets. These three alternatives varied in the emphasis areas for where funds were spent. For example, in Alternative B, more money was allocated to the vegetation treatment program than in Alternative C. There are assumptions in the document about what we would need financially to accomplish the desired conditions. We get annual appropriations from Congress and we are able to work with state and grant funding, volunteer work, and partnership opportunities, as well, so there are a number of ways to achieve the desired conditions.

## **Forested Vegetation**

### **What is Historic Range of Variability and why is it important?**

The historical range of variability (HRV) has become a common reference condition for assessing landscapes because it provides a context for understanding the conditions under which plants and animals evolved. The HRV concept is used to characterize fluctuations in ecosystem conditions and processes over a period of time as the result of disturbance processes. When disturbance processes occur with characteristic frequency and intensity, ecosystems respond by exhibiting predictable behavior and complexity. Ecosystems within the Blue Mountains evolved with disturbances, including wildfire, insects, disease, landslides, human uses, changing weather patterns, and other factors. The HRV was designed to characterize the range of vegetation composition, structure, and density produced by these disturbance agents. The type and frequency of pre-settlement disturbances can serve as a management template for maintaining sites within their historical range of plant composition and vegetation structures – if landscapes can be maintained within their HRV, then they stand a good chance of maintaining their biological diversity and ecological integrity through time. It is typically assumed that pre-settlement conditions represent optimum habitats for native plants and animals, and that the best way to recover an endangered or threatened species is to restore its habitat to some semblance of pre-settlement conditions. Since a key premise of HRV is that native species have evolved with, and are adapted to, the historical



disturbance regimes of an area, ecosystem components occurring within their historical range are believed to represent sustainable ecological conditions.

### **How would old forest be managed under the preferred alternative?**

The preferred alternative would not include a specific land management area allocation for old forest but would manage old forest where it exists on the landscape. Many older forest stands that do not yet meet the definition of old forest would become old forest over time. Some old forest stands would be affected by disturbances and would no longer meet the definition of old forest or provide old forest habitat requirements. The management direction under the preferred alternative would contain flexibility which would allow forest stands to be managed for their structural stage, regardless of whether they are allocated to an old forest management area. Old forest would not be considered suitable for timber production. However, harvesting could occur in old forest stands to meet the desired conditions. Within the dry forest, where most of the harvest treatments would occur, treatments would convert multi-storied stands to single story stands by removing smaller diameter trees and retaining old trees. The amount of single story old forest would increase while the amount of multi-storied old forest would decrease.

### **How would individual old trees be managed under the preferred alternative?**

The Revised Forest Plan emphasizes retaining the largest trees on the landscape. There is recognition that old trees are critical habitat component and socially important as well. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement analyzed three different approaches to retaining old trees. The preferred alternative (Alternative E) would retain live trees with certain old tree characteristics, as opposed to having a strict 21"dbh limit (Alternative A and C), as in the current Forest Plans, as amended, or 21"dbh with some exceptions (Alternative B), or using an age-based criterion (Alternative F). Using physical tree characteristics (bark appearance, branches, knots, and tree crown) to infer old age is an efficient approach to managing individual old trees while being less expensive and time-consuming, particularly in comparison to an alternative that utilized a more strict age guideline. For most tree species, certain tree characteristics can be used as a fairly reliable indicator of older age (generally greater than 150 years old, but varies by species and site). Using old tree characteristics would enable Forest managers to achieve other desired conditions (such as species composition) because it would allow the removal of larger diameter, mid-aged trees of more shade tolerant/fire intolerant species, such as grand fir. There are instances where large trees may be harvested that are not within the Historic Range of Variability. By having the old tree characteristic guideline the Forest Service can manage for old growth trees wherever they occur on the landscape to help provide for viability of small mammals and other old tree dependent species. The Forests have all amended their Forest Plans under the current strict 21"dbh limit multiple times.

### **How would fire (planned and unplanned ignitions) be used as a tool under the preferred alternative?**

The level of prescribed burning (planned ignitions) outside of harvest units would continue at the current rate of approximately 30,000 acres per year within the three National Forests. Within harvest units, prescribed burning and/or fuel treatments using ground-based equipment would increase to approximately 32,450 acres. The majority of the fuels treatments within the harvest units would be accomplished using fire. In addition, unplanned ignitions (wildfires) may also be managed to achieve desired conditions for forested vegetation. The use of unplanned ignitions as a tool to meet resource objectives could occur on all acres, as long as those fires are moving the landscape towards, or helping maintain, the desired conditions for the area.

### **How much timber volume would be unharvestable due to the Recommended Wilderness designation?**

Recommended Wilderness falls within current inventoried roadless areas (IRAs). Some timber exists in these areas, but commercially harvesting them is difficult because they are steep with little access. The Chief of the Forest Service authorizes timber harvest timber in IRAs, and there is a very small chance that it would be approved.



**The Proposed Revised Forest Plan emphasize dry forest restoration management. There is a lot of moist forest that is in need of restoration and could provide a lot of material for the local community. Why does the Proposed Revised Forest Plan emphasize dry forests?**

There is nothing in the Proposed Revised Forest Plan that prevents us from working in moist forest areas if it moves us toward the desired condition. The Proposed Revised Forest Plan objectives are for resilient landscapes for both dry and moist forests. There is broader agreement on how to return dry forest to the historic range of variability than moist forests. When managing the landscape we look at the historic range of variability. Part of that depends on analysis and how it relates to conditions on the landscape.

**Why can't the public cut firewood from down dead pine trees?**

Down and dead wood is important for wildlife habitat. The bigger logs and the pine last a long time on the landscape. That's why those size and species limits were established, to meet the requirements for the snags and down trees across the landscape. Down wood is important to small mammals by providing both cover and forage opportunities. A separate analysis was conducted to authorize firewood cutting on National Forest System lands for both private and commercial purposes. The Proposed Revised Forest Plan does not speak to firewood cutting.

**Does the plan address the beetle population and how to control for it?**

Yes, insect and disease risk hazard are analyzed as part of the DEIS in Volume two, the Forested Vegetation, Timber Resources, and Wildland Fire section. There are also desired conditions and objectives for managing insects and disease.

**How does the Proposed Revised Forest Plan address salvage of burned large wood/timber?**

While the decision to salvage would be a separate decision, the Proposed Revised Forest Plan provides strategic guidance and direction with regards to the appropriate management areas where timber harvest is suitable, including desired conditions, standards, and guideline language. Timber salvage would be suitable in management areas where timber production and harvest are considered suitable (See pg. 97). Additionally, all salvage projects would follow the standards and guidelines for Post-Fire Habitat under Species Diversity. The standards and guidelines pertain to source habitat retention within burned areas, the size of harvest areas, and leaving snags and snag patches across the burned landscape.

## Vegetation

**Does the Proposed Revised Forest Plan deal with noxious weeds?**

There are desired conditions, standards, guidelines, and objectives for invasive species. The desired conditions, standards, and guidelines are listed in Appendix A under the no action alternative. The Forests have been going through project-level invasive species analysis.

## Livestock Grazing & Grazing Vegetation

**How many acres will be available for grazing?**

Appendix G has the acreages broken down by Allotment name and Alternative. Appendix G starts on page 427 in Volume 3 of the DEIS. The total acres suitable for livestock grazing on the Malheur National Forest are 1,197,000 for cattle and 101,000 for sheep. The total acres suitable for livestock grazing on the Umatilla National Forest are 284,000 for cattle and 42,000 for sheep. The total acres suitable for livestock grazing on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest are 408,000 for cattle and 25,000 for sheep.

**How are Sage grouse addressed with regard to grazing management in the Proposed Revised Forest Plan?**

There is a relatively small amount of sage-grouse habitat on the Blue Mountains Forests. Sagebrush steppe habitat was estimated to occur on approximately six percent of the landscape within the Malheur National Forest; however,



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS *continued*

not all of this is considered sage-grouse habitat. Habitat mapping completed by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) indicates that only 41,600 acres is considered greater sage-grouse habitat, and of this, 30,000 has been mapped as core habitat, and the remainder as low density habitat. Sagebrush steppe habitat was estimated to occur on less than one percent of the landscape for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, but according to ODFW a little more than 3,000 acres within the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest would be considered sage-grouse habitat, most of which is mapped as core habitat. The greater sage-grouse is not expected to occur within the Umatilla National Forest.

The Preferred Alternative retains the Alternative B (Proposed Action) modified management direction with the following addition: In greater sage-grouse habitat, fence construction within one mile of known leks (protected activity centers) and seasonal high use areas should not be authorized or allowed. Fence construction on the crest of low hills should not be authorized or allowed unless the fence is marked with anti-strike markers.

Grazing utilization within occupied greater sage-grouse habitats should not exceed 40 percent at any time during the grazing season and will be determined specifically for each greater sage-grouse habitat, i.e., grazing utilization measured as an average of the entire pasture or grazing unit will not be used to determine compliance with this guideline.

During greater sage-grouse breeding season, livestock turnout and trailing should avoid high concentrations on known greater sage-grouse leks (protected activity centers).

### **Where did the riparian utilization standards come from?**

The new utilizations Guidelines were proposed in response to the need for accelerated restoration for aquatic habitat and species. The Guidelines are meant to balance the Preferred Alternative with aquatic and riparian resource concerns.

### **Why does the Proposed Revised Forest Plan reduce the riparian allowable forage utilization for livestock within riparian management areas? What will happen if my allotment has a higher utilization level authorized in riparian management areas than the Revised Forest Plan does?**

Alternative E, the preferred alternative, proposes to increase the pace and scale of restoration. Decreasing the amount of utilization in riparian management areas would help to move them toward the desired condition. Once the Revised Forest Plan is in place, the term grazing permits for each allotment will be modified to replace the 1990 Forest Plan language with the Revised Forest Plan language. However, site-specific environmental analysis and consultation on threatened and endangered species will need to be completed on all of the allotments as each allotment management plan is revised, which will determine the appropriate level of utilization for your specific allotment.

### **What is a *Silene spaldingii*? There is a standard in the Proposed Revised Forest Plan that livestock grazing isn't allowed where that plant exists. Why is grazing a hazard for it?**

*Silene spaldingii* is a listed threatened plant species under the Endangered Species Act. Spalding's Catchfly is the common name. The reason for the standard is that trampling from livestock grazing affects its growth. It is listed because there are very few plants. With that standard, we want to manage the timing of grazing; it's not a desirable plant for cow forage. We work with local permittees to help them identify the plant and they have been able to work around it.

## **Minerals**

### **Does the Proposed Revised Forest Plan address mining and mineral exploration?**

The Mining Act of 1872 gave all citizens of the United States the right to locate mining claims on public lands and gave them the right to explore and recover the minerals on those claims. The Surface Management Regulations under 43 CFR 3809 regulate the surface disturbance associated with exploration and mining. The purpose of the



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS *continued*

surface management regulations is to “Prevent unnecessary or undue degradation of public lands by operations authorized by the mining laws. Anyone intending to develop mineral resources on the public lands must prevent unnecessary or undue degradation of the land and reclaim disturbed areas.”

The Proposed Revised Forest Plans provide standards and guidelines to prevent unnecessary or undue degradation of the Blue Mountains Forests and to be consistent with other State and Federal Regulations. An example of a guideline is: “Where possible, the operating plans for existing activities should be adjusted to minimize adverse effects to aquatic and riparian dependent resources in the riparian management areas.” The language in the plan does not preclude exploration or mining on valid claims, but it may require adjustments to Plans of Operations or Notices to comply with the regulations.

### Energy

#### **In suitable uses and activities, can you explain more about energy development and the potential for wind towers?**

The National Forests are required by the Energy Policy Act of 2005 to address development potential for renewable energy resources, including wind energy. Wind energy, if it occurs on the National Forests, would be regulated as a special use following directives contained in Forest Service Handbook FSH 2709.11, Chapter 70. The Proposed Revised Forest Plan has identified General Forest (MA4A) as potentially *suitable* for wind energy development. Based on data available from the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, the total area with potential for wind energy development on NFS lands in the Blue Mountains totals slightly less than 390,000 acres. The Hells Canyon Recreation Area is not included in the analysis. Identifying these areas does not mean that they are proposed for development, or that development is likely to occur, subsequent NEPA would be required to authorize any wind energy development projects on National Forest System lands.

### Rocky Mountain Elk

#### **Are there specific management areas established for elk (e.g., winter range)?**

The action alternatives do not draw a hard line around elk ranges as found in the current Forest Plans. It was felt that elk use of the landscape is based on habitat attributes found in an area and these attributes can change due to fires, active management, predator presence, snow depth, and disturbances. Winter range mapping was done in 1990 for the current Forest Plans. An extensive mapping effort of winter range was conducted in 1997 by Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and in 2009 Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife finalized a new mapping effort. Comparing these three efforts illustrates the problems associated with hard lines, as each effort increased the amount of winter range for each Forest, and in general there is less than 50% overlap between the efforts.

#### **Was the new forage/habitat selection model used in the development of the Proposed Revised Forest Plan?**

No. The model for the Blue Mountains was still being developed at the time plan alternatives were being crafted. During the time that the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) analysis was being finalized, the Blue Mountains model was being beta tested with the final testing not completed until after the DEIS analysis had been completed. The model predicts where elk choose to be in terms of a probability of selection and when one or more of the four variables change, the probability of elk selecting a given unit of habitat also changes. It will have utility in planning projects based on the current plan.

#### **Are elk a Management Indicator Species (MIS)?**

Yes, but only for the Wallowa-Whitman and Umatilla National Forests. They were chosen as indicators of how well these two Forests implement the Forest Plan’s direction for providing security for wildlife.



### **How does the Proposed Revised Forest Plan address elk populations?**

Management of wildlife populations is a state responsibility and both Oregon and Washington have elk management plans. Because of their social and cultural importance, the plan establishes desired conditions and guidelines for elk habitat management which are to be implemented in strategic areas in coordination with the state wildlife agencies. Elk use a broad array of habitats throughout the year and by providing for ecosystem health it is felt that, in general, this will provide the appropriate quantity and quality of habitat to sustain a healthy elk population.

## **Terrestrial Wildlife**

### **Were Management Indicator Species (MIS) used in the viability analysis?**

Although two of the MIS species are also focal species and therefore were used in the viability analysis, that is not the purpose of selecting MIS. MIS are intended as a tool to: 1) establish explicit Forest Plan objectives for wildlife and fish habitat, 2) analyze the degree to which Forest Plan alternatives meet those objectives, and 3) monitor the effect of Forest Plan implementation. Section 219.19 of the Forest Service Planning Rule establishes the requirements for wildlife viability and for management of threatened and endangered species under Forest Plans. The use of MIS may contribute to meeting those requirements, but it is clear that MIS are also intended to serve a broader role in management for diversity. For example, MIS may include species that are hunted, fished or trapped. These clearly are not species for which the primary concern is viability. Rather, the objective for these species is to provide habitat that will help meet established population objectives. MIS may also include “invertebrate species” which are not covered through the viability requirement because that provision applies only to vertebrates. Therefore, use of invertebrates as MIS would clearly address broader concerns for diversity than are addressed through the viability requirement.

### **How will you address species that fall outside of the “focal” species concept?**

Focal species are intended to serve as an indicator of ecosystem sustainability. The viability of the focal species is assumed representative of the group of species with similar ecological requirements and this group is assumed to respond in a similar manner to environmental change. There are some species, especially rare plants, that the “coarser” context of ecosystem diversity may not satisfy their specific needs. In such cases a finer scale analysis at the plan level if appropriate, was done (see the following questions). However, with some species the scale must be smaller (i.e. land snails) and therefore a detailed analysis is expected at the project-level where necessary (directed by standards and guidelines).

### **Does the Proposed Revised Forest Plan address the gray wolf?**

No. The gray wolf is covered by the 2005 Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan and it is the state departments of wildlife that are responsible for population management. The Proposed Revised Forest Plan sets the objectives for management of habitat, so it may indirectly influence wolf populations through improved prey habitat.

### **How does the current situation with the sage grouse affect Forest Planning?**

The three Forests have very little habitat for this species so there is little impact to the planning effort. The Umatilla National Forest does not have any habitat identified as occurring on the Forest, but the Malheur and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests do have some identified. The Preferred Alternative (Alternative E) incorporates some standards/guidelines similar to the BLM proposal as side boards for planning purposes. However, the desired condition of no net loss of sagebrush habitats under all alternatives should provide ample protection on those few acres found on the three National Forests.

### **What are wildlife corridor areas and how are they managed?**

The Proposed Revised Forest Plan identifies a wildlife corridor connecting isolated pieces of the North Fork John Day Wilderness together. When managing in these corridors careful consideration for the effects of harvest or road related work will occur in an effort to limit interference with wildlife movement.



## Watershed

### How will riparian and aquatic habitats be managed?

Most existing management direction will be carried forward. This includes the use of riparian management areas (formerly RHCAs, or riparian habitat conservation areas in PACFISH and INFISH) and the identification of priority and key watersheds that are crucial habitats for threatened, endangered or sensitive fish and other aquatic or riparian-dependent species. Forests identify priorities for active restoration from the set of key watersheds in order to make the best use of restoration funding; these are identified as priority watersheds in the Proposed Revised Forest Plan.

### What kinds of watershed restoration actions are proposed and how will watershed conditions be improved?

The Proposed Revised Forest Plan does not describe specific actions that will take place, but describes objectives for improvement in watershed, soil, riparian, and aquatic habitat conditions. Watershed restoration objectives are described in Tables A-48, A-49, and A-50 in Appendix A. Forest vegetation conditions are expected to improve in all alternatives and this contributes to improved watershed conditions. The analysis in the DEIS suggests that decreasing sediment delivery and the hydrologic effects of roads will improve overall watershed conditions.

### What's the value of clean water in the Proposed Revised Forest Plan?

There are desired conditions for managing water quality. Managing watersheds is a high priority. Protecting and managing lands will ensure our mission of clean and high quality water.

## Climate Change

### How is climate change considered in the Proposed Revised Forest Plan?

The topic of climate change is considered throughout the Proposed Revised Forest Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). Many of the desired conditions in the Plan factor climate change and ecological resilience into them. The DEIS has an entire section devoted to climate change additionally, cumulative effects associated with climate change are described for many of the effects analysis sections.

## NEPA and Commenting

### What is a substantive comment and does it give people standing in the objection period?

Substantive comments address the specifics of the plan. Substantive comments affect the range of alternatives because they specifically address the main plan components. For example, commenting on specific timber sales are outside the scope of the Forest Plan, but commenting that a guideline should really be a standard and explaining your rationale is within the scope of the Forest Plan and is substantive. Submitting a comment that says "I think Alternative E is not a good alternative" is not a substantive comment; however if your comment states "I don't like the plan component or the analysis because" and provide the reason why it's not appropriate, and "here's what I would do," that's a substantive comment. Non-substantive comments do not help the process and the development of the Revised Forest Plan and those commenters do not have standing; therefore they can't object during the objection period. The objection process gives standing to people who make substantive comments.

### Should I make my comments specific to each Forest or can I address all three? Can I comment on what I like about the different alternatives?

Comments can be submitted for each individual Forest, or because there is similar proposed direction for all three forests, a commenter may submit for all Forests; just be specific about which Forest you are talking about when you submit specific comments. In telling us what you do and do not like about the alternatives, be as specific as you can about your rationale and propose a solution.



### **What's the process after the DEIS comment period, for incorporating our comments into the document, and for the Record of Decision?**

The initial phase will include a content analysis where we will group similar comments and concerns. A report is generated from the analysis that identifies the concerns from all the comment and the Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) will then work on responding to the concerns/comments. The IDT will also start working with the Forest leadership teams to discuss the nuances and decide whether comments are addressed through development of a new alternative or modification of the preferred alternative. The Forest Supervisors will then work with the Regional Forester and Regional Staff to determine which alternative should be selected that incorporates the comments, and then revise the Forest Plan and develop a Record of Decision for each Forest.

### **What's the difference between an objection process and an appeal process? How does each affect the litigation process?**

Many projects and activities, and most land management plan amendments and revisions, are subject to a pre-decisional administrative review process, commonly referred to as an objection process. Direction for the project-level objection process can be found at 36 CFR 218, and for the planning objection process it can be found at 36 CFR 219, subpart B. Under both the project-level and planning objection process, individuals and entities may file objections after an environmental analysis document is completed and before a decision document is signed. The objection processes build on early participation and collaboration efforts, with the intention of resolving concerns before a decision is made.

The plan objection process is different from the optional plan appeal process in that the objection process allows the deciding officer to resolve concerns before the decision is made rather than after the decision is made.

Similar to Forest Service appeal processes, responses to objections are provided by the next higher level line officer above the Forest Service official proposing to sign the project or land management plan decision.

### **What happens if we don't make comments during the DEIS comment period?**

In order for an objection to be considered during the objection process, the objector must have earned standing in the process. In order to earn standing the objector must have made a substantive comment during the official opportunities to comment. Comments allow you to object. If there are substantive changes between the Draft and Final, you may also object based on that new information (36 CFR 219). Generally, the objection should pertain to the comments made during other formal comment periods in order to have standing.

### **What is being done for consultation on sacred places and uses for all of the native tribes surrounding these three Forests?**

We have worked with and provided information to all surrounding tribes asking for input on the Proposed Revised Forest Plan. The US government has a treaty with the tribes and the tribes 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 incorporating their feedback. We meet with the tribes quarterly on Forest projects as well as the Forest Plan. Occasionally the specialists from the tribes meet with the Forest Plan Revision team to discuss specific plan issues.

### **Can you clarify how we can compare the alternatives?**

The DEIS has three locations where there is a comparison of alternatives, the Executive Summary, Chapter 2, and Appendix A. The Executive Summary provides a high-level overview of the alternatives and a comparison of alternatives in terms of projected outputs. Chapter 2 provides a more detailed description of the alternatives and how the issues raised during scoping were addressed. Appendix A provides the details of how each alternative ranges in terms of management areas, desired conditions, standards, guidelines, objectives, and monitoring (the plan components).



**Part three of the Proposed Revised Forest Plan states that the standards and guidelines shall apply to all projects and decisions made after the Revised Forest Plan is approved, what does this mean?**

All standards and guidelines will apply to site-specific planning environmental analysis. We will use those standards and guidelines to frame the project design, but the actual decisions and implementation will be after a project-specific environmental analysis process is completed, which includes public involvement.

**How much weight do you give to comments from people not from this area?**

The Blue Mountain Forests are National Forests, therefore they are a resource that is utilized and enjoyed by everyone in the country. Comments are the same no matter where you come from. The commenting process in NEPA is not a vote. Comments made by the public within the communities surrounding these three National Forests tend to be more specific and provide more detail, making them more substantive and useful in revising the Proposed Revised Forest Plan and DEIS.

**How many amendments have been made since the 1990 Forest Plans and are those being considered for this plan?**

There have been more than 100 amendments in total since 1990 on all three Forests. The no action alternative in the DEIS, Alternative A, is the current Forest Plan, as amended, as it is currently operating. The amendments factored into our need for change that prompted going into the Proposed Revised Forest Plan process.

**Why are these three National Forests being analyzed together in one Draft Environmental Impact Statement?**

While a separate Record of Decision and Forest Plan will be developed for each National Forest in the Blue Mountains, the environmental analysis is consolidated into one Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) because of the geographic similarity across the Blue Mountains and the adjacency of the Forests to one another. The Forest Service felt it would be most efficient if the analysis covered all three forests, and the portion of the Ochoco managed by the Malheur at one time for a couple of reasons. This document structure allows the public and deciding officer the ability to understand the larger context of how the effects of the Revised Forest Plans will prevail across the Blue Mountains and their communities. It also puts the effects in one document, making it is easier to evaluate them all together, as opposed to reading and evaluating three separate Environmental Impact Statements.

**General Questions**

**Who is representing individuals with disabilities in the Proposed Revised Forest Plan? Do you consider people with disabilities when developing management direction?**

The Forest's take seriously our ability to provide recreational opportunities regardless of abilities. We work with local groups to provide better access. The Forest Service is responsible for complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act and looking out for the interests of the American people, while putting together these Forest Plans and managing our lands. The Forest Plan provides a range of options across the landscape, so now is the time for Forest users to comment.

**How will you notify the public on site-specific decision processes based on these Forest Plans?**

There are various ways the public is notified of activities going on on each of the Forests. The primary way that the Forest notifies the public of the proposed actions is through the schedule of proposed actions (SOPA), available on each of the Forest web sites. The SOPA is distributed quarterly, and includes all the site-specific projects scheduled to occur, with the specific contact person. In certain instances there may be legal notices in the paper announcing the scoping or comment periods. Occasionally, there are public meetings.



**Why wasn't the County Commissioners alternative (Alternative D) selected as the preferred alternative?**

Alternative D was based on recommendations by the County Commissioners but it wasn't selected as the preferred because the Regional Forester wanted a balance between all the issues. For example, Alternative D didn't recommend any Wilderness. We received public comment asking us to recommend at least some Wilderness. Alternative E is the best balance, in the Regional Forester's opinion, but no decisions have been made.

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