
BIGHORN SHEEP: SUPPLEMENTAL ANALYSIS TO THE FOREST PLAN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT—INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM VIDEOCONFERENCE

Forest Supervisor Offices—Baker, OR; Boise, ID; McCall, ID; Orofino, ID; Pendleton, OR

June 25, 2008

ATTENDEES

- Emily Anderson, Office of the Governor of Idaho
- Christine Bradbury, Clearwater/Nez Perce National Forests Tribal Liaison
- Joanne Bonn, Nez Perce National Forest Wildlife Biologist
- Vic Coggins, Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife
- Ana Egnew, Payette National Forest Wildlife Biologist
- Craig Ely, Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife
- Keith Lawrence, Nez Perce Tribe
- Curt Mack, Nez Perce Tribe
- Dustin Miller, Office of U.S. Senator Larry Craig (observed early morning session only)
- Susan Miller, Payette National Forest Ecologist
- Chans O'Brien, Payette National Forest GIS Analyst
- Suzanne Rainville, Payette National Forest Supervisor
- Carl Scheeler, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- Tim Schommer, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest
- Pattie Soucek, Payette National Forest Planner/Interdisciplinary Team Leader
- Paul Wik, Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife

PROCESS SUPPORT

- Susan Hayman, Facilitator, North Country Resources, Inc.
- Nikole Pearson, Documentation, Peak Science Communications

MEETING OBJECTIVES

1. To brief the IDT on the key features of the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) and Forest Plan amendment before these documents are released for public review and comment.
2. To share the outcomes of the briefings to the Regional and Washington offices.
3. To identify immediate and longer term next steps, and coordinate calendars.

ACTION ITEMS

What	Who	When
Develop a travel proposal for field trip planned for the week of July 21	Soucek, Schommer	June 26
Develop a travel proposal for float trip planned for the week of August 3	Soucek, Schommer, Mack	July 3

OPENING

Welcome

Susan Hayman introduced herself, asked participants to introduce themselves, and reviewed videoconferencing procedures with the team.

Pattie Soucek welcomed participants and reviewed what the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) would be presenting to the team today. Soucek asked participants to hold all questions until the end of the presentation. The USFS is not seeking edits or changes to the text, but welcomes questions or comments. Suzanne Rainville acknowledged the volume of work completed by Soucek and her team since the interdisciplinary team (IDT) last met. Rainville noted that the Regional and Washington offices have reviewed the document and provided feedback, and Congressional members have been briefed. Rainville reminded participants that this is a draft document, and the bulk of the work will be completed between the draft and the final.

Hayman reviewed the agenda (Appendix 1), including the meeting objectives. Hayman emphasized that this is not an opportunity to edit the document, but an opportunity for the IDT to see what the USFS is releasing to the public.

IDT BRIEFING ON THE DRAFT SEIS AND FOREST PLAN AMENDMENT

The USFS delivered a PowerPoint presentation that highlighted information presented at the previous briefings. To date, the USFS has briefed the following: USFS Regional Office (RO), USFS Regional Forester, USFS Washington DC Office (WO), and Idaho Congressional staffers. The following agencies and organizations will be briefed prior to releasing the document to the public: U.S. Department of Agriculture; Washington DC Congressional members; states of Idaho (Governor's office and Idaho Department of Fish and Game and Idaho Department of Agriculture), Washington, and Oregon; affected tribes; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and potentially affected livestock grazing permittees. Rainville agreed to speak with IDT members from the individual states to decide how they wanted to conduct their briefings and who would be included (BIN item).

Soucek explained that she began each briefing with a review of the pertinent background information, including the appeal, the appeal direction, the purpose and need of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS), and guidance direction received from the WO. Next, Soucek identified the following baseline information: habitat model and map, risk assessment, scientific data, geographic population range (GPR), and qualitative relative risk ratings. Chans O'Brien displayed the bighorn sheep source habitat model, which is also now being used by the state of Idaho in its bighorn sheep management planning process. During each briefing, the USFS noted that 92% of the 50,000+ telemetry points fall within this habitat model. O'Brien also displayed the risk assessment map. Soucek used the next several slides to explain how the home ranges were used to develop the GPR and how the GPR for the Hells Canyon population differed from the Salmon River population.

Three issues from the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) were addressed in the SEIS: wildlife habitat and species, rangeland resources, and tribal rights and interests. Each alternative differs by the percentage of current allotments that remains open and the percentage of risk that remains on the landscape.

Alternative 7, which left all of the Payette National Forest as suitable for domestic sheep grazing, was selected in the Forest Plan and became the baseline alternative. Alternatives 3, 4, and 6 all removed the same piece of Hells Canyon Management Area #1 from domestic sheep grazing. Alternative 7G was moved forward as the agency preferred alternative.

Susan Miller reviewed how the relative risk ratings were used to rate the alternatives, and Rainville reviewed the legal challenges. Rainville emphasized the importance of avoiding further delay, which could result in additional litigation.

Alternative 7G was identified as the preferred alternative because it satisfied the need for separation between domestic and wild species and reduced the risk by managing to prevent contact. Rainville feels that both the available data and current science support this selection, which she believes errs on the side of caution.

Soucek displayed the Forest Plan direction developed by the USFS after consulting with the IDT, RO, and WO and several clarifying maps, including a map of the one-mile, sheep-free zone. Participants made the following comments and asked for the following clarifications:

- Language stating “3 or more bighorn sheep” should be changed to “3 or more verified bighorn sheep sightings.”
- These standards are meant to reduce the 20% of risk remaining on the landscape.
- The GPR will be recalibrated every five years, even if no additional bighorn sheep are sighted, and the GPR can get larger or smaller.
- The current language says that the GPR will be recalculated if three or more bighorn sheep are sighted between the 90% to 100% contour lines. This standard should be rewritten to say outside of the 90% contour line, which would include sightings outside of the GPR.
- The same dataset will be used when recalculating the GPR. The USFS will be adding to the original dataset, not taking away, thus the expert opinion used to develop the GPR for the Salmon River population will not be discarded.
- If domestic sheep cannot be kept out of the GPR, they will not be allowed to graze on the allotment.

Rainville added that the WO wants to know what support they receive from the Governors’ offices and the tribes. Also, the Congressional staffers would like the potentially affected livestock grazing permittees to be informed before the document is released to the public. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is also working on the bighorn sheep issue, but the BLM is waiting to see what the Payette National Forest does before making any decisions.

Forest Plan Direction

Soucek displayed the Forest Plan language in its entirety and explained the rationale for developing each objective, standard, and guideline. The IDT provided the following comments and questions:

- WIOB16 needs to be revised to include sightings outside of the GPR.
- Clifford et al. 2007 was specifically cited because of an IDT request.
- The monitoring chapter of the Forest Plan provides more monitoring details; however, the Forest Plan will not specifically state who will do the monitoring or how the monitoring will be done.
- The RO added goats to the Forest Plan language.
- A standard about noxious weed suppression to avoid degrading low-elevation sheep ranges was not included because the existing Forest Plan language addresses this.
- “Reasonable assurance” is not defined by the USFS. However, the standards are part of the goal for reasonable assurance.
- Soucek agreed to let IDT members view the document in her office. Hayman clarified that members of the IDT could view the document for clarification, but would be doing so individually and not on behalf of the IDT.
- The one-mile, domestic sheep-free zone would be implemented as soon as 3 or more sightings of bighorn sheep occur outside of the 90% contour line. This sheep-free zone would remain until the USFS recalculates the GPR, which only takes a couple days. Once the GPR is modified, the sheep-free zone would be removed.
- Domestic sheep grazing could occur further than one mile from the GPR, but must be at least one mile away.
- Changing the language from “3 or more bighorn sheep” to “3 or more bighorn sheep sightings” would also address the issue of seeing the same sheep on three different occasions.
- One mile was chosen for the sheep-free zone after consulting with Tim Schommer and Clint McCarthy.
- A participant suggested adding “verifiable” before any language that discusses bighorn sheep sightings, and another participant requested making the verification simple since sightings shouldn’t be dismissed just because someone doesn’t have the proper qualifications. Forest Service personnel noted that current practices require the person reviewing the sighting to have the proper qualifications.

- All sightings are used for modifying the GPR, even sightings on private land. However, the USFS cannot control grazing on private land.
- A goal should be added stating that separation should be maintained throughout the Payette National Forest, not just the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area (HCNRA) or inside the GPR.
- Because the alternative deems all land within the GPR as unsuitable for domestic sheep grazing, the Forest Plan does not need to repeat that language.
- Domestic sheep grazing would not be allowed in the Rapid River leg of the HCNRA.
- Anyone still scheduled for briefing can request a presentation that includes review of all proposed Forest Plan language, not just the standards displayed in the current PowerPoint presentation.
- Adaptive management includes the removal of permitted domestic sheep grazing and modifying the GPR. Neither the SEIS nor the Forest Plan discuss bighorn sheep removal since the USFS can only control the domestic sheep grazing permits and cannot direct state wildlife agencies to remove bighorn sheep. Transferring authority to remove a bighorn sheep to the permittees has to come from the states. However, even if a bighorn sheep is removed by a permittee, that would still count as a sighting and could trigger modifications of the GPR.
- The adaptive management process and the tools for maintaining separation rely heavily on sightings and recalculations of the GPR. However, all possible measures to prevent contact, including the use of guard dogs, will be included in the domestic sheep allotment annual operating instructions.
- The current standards contain all existing emergency protocol language, which includes rerunning the GPR if three or more sightings occur.
- The intent of the Forest Plan is not to outline the details, but to provide standards and guidelines that must be met.

Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

Soucek briefly reviewed the contents of the Draft SEIS. The executive summary frames the background and the contents of the SEIS. Chapter 1 discusses the issues, the findings of the reviewing officer, and the decisions within the document, including the agency preferred alternative. Chapter 2 includes a short discussion of the alternatives that were considered but dropped from detailed study and a thorough discussion of the alternatives that were carried through for detailed study, including how the alternatives were developed. Chapter 3 contains the effects to bighorn sheep by alternative, the economic analysis (grazing and hunting/recreation), effects on tribes and effects to rangeland resources. The tribal section has been reviewed by the USFS tribal liaisons and will be reviewed by the tribes as part of the informal consultation process.

NEXT STEPS/CALENDAR

The briefings and consultations will be completed by mid-July, and the document will be released for public comment by August 1 to start the 90-day comment period. The USFS will then collect the comments, including additional requests from the RO and WO. The next step will be an analysis of the comments, which should be finished by January. The goal will be to have a final decision by this time next year. Currently, the public involvement plan does not extend beyond the release of the draft document. Rainville noted that the USFS may conduct open briefings after the document is released. The next IDT meeting will occur in January 2009 under the current schedule, though Rainville asked the IDT members to be flexible to meet in the fall for field reviews if the need arises.

The USFS has planned a field visit from July 21 to July 25 to explore specific areas of concern. Soucek and Schommer will develop a field trip proposal and distribute it to the team for comment and a list of attendees.

The USFS will conduct a second field visit from August 3 to August 12 to float the Middle Fork and Main Salmon River. Several IDT members have already committed to this trip and additional members should let Soucek know if they are interested in participating. Soucek was advised to review the river miles before deciding on the length of the trip. Soucek, Schommer, and Curt Mack will develop a trip proposal and distribute it to the IDT by the end of next week.

During the field trip discussion, Soucek clarified that the USFS is going to modify the GPR between the draft and final documents; however, the GPR is currently locked for changes as of November 2007. The GPR will be rerun between the draft and final using all available sightings. Rainville again reminded participants that this is a draft and a decision has not yet been made because the public still needs to weigh in on the issue.

Craig Ely noted that the USFS could brief the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission and the Governor's natural resources representative on July 18. Soucek will attend this briefing.

Rainville reviewed possible briefing dates with several of the IDT members: July 2 for the State of Idaho, July 10 for the Nez Perce Tribe, and July 1 for the Shoshone–Piute. Paul Wik and Rainville will talk later to confirm a date. The permittees will be briefed just prior to release of the draft. After the draft is released, the USFS would like to meet with those who filed the appeals, the Woolgrowers Association, state officials, the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep (FNAWS), and anyone else the IDT thinks is critical. Additional field work may be necessary in the fall but should not delay release of the final document. Additional cooperators may be added between releasing the draft and writing the final SEIS, but no decision has yet been made on whether those additional cooperators will be members of the IDT.

In order to meet the current timeframes, the tribes must have their revisions to Soucek by June 30, and Soucek must have the document to Nikole Pearson for final editing by July 7.

BIN ITEMS

1. State agencies and Governors should be briefed simultaneously.
2. Clarify language about the 3 plus sightings outside of the GPR
3. Take another look for outside the GPR for WIOB16.
4. Sightings will be verified.
5. RAST12 needs to be linked to a trigger.
6. Need to add a general statement about no grazing in the GPR.
7. WIOB13 should refer to entire forest and not just the HCNRA.
8. Need a formal, interagency monitoring plan. Although the monitoring chapter does capture some of the team's concerns, Egnew requested a meeting to discuss monitoring details.

WRAP-UP

The meeting adjourned at 12:33 P.M.

HANDOUTS

1. Agenda, 1 p.

APPENDIX 1—AGENDA

Bighorn Sheep: Supplemental Analysis to the Forest Plan Environmental Impact Statement

Interdisciplinary Team Videoconference

June 25, 2008 – 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. (Mountain)

Forest Supervisor Offices in Orofino ♦ McCall ♦ Boise ♦ Baker ♦ Pendleton

Meeting Objectives:

- 1) To brief the IDT on the key features of the DSEIS and forest plan amendment before these documents are released for public review and comment
- 2) To share the outcomes of the briefings to the Regional and Washington Offices
- 3) To identify immediate and longer term next steps, and coordinate calendars

Agenda

Time	Topic	Process / Product
9:00 a.m.	Opening <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome and opening remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Suzanne Rainville, Payette Forest Supervisor – Pattie Soucek, Payette Forest Planner • Meeting overview, group agreements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Susan Hayman, Facilitator 	Information
9:10 a.m. (15-minute break at 10:30 a.m.)	IDT Briefing on the DSEIS and Forest Plan Amendment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key features (what’s changed, what’s not) • Outcomes of Regional Office and Washington Office briefings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PowerPoint presentation • Clarifying Q&A
12:00 p.m.	Next Steps, Calendar	Information
1:00 p.m.	Adjourn	