

Ready, Set, Revision!

Forest Plan Revision News for the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests

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2008 Planning Rule vacated and remanded

How this may impact the revision process and the content of the revised forest plan

The Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision team was assembled in late 2003 and began the revision process in 2004. The revision effort was initially expected to last four years. Due to changes in the planning regulations in effect over the years, the project is in year six.

The revision team has worked collaboratively throughout the process, holding three rounds of public meetings in 10 communities and hosting three field trips. The team has worked with county commissioners, American Indian tribes, interest groups, and individuals. Due to litigation of the 2005 Planning Rule, the team was not able to collaborate in 2007, but resumed public discussions in 2008 after the release of

the 2008 Planning Rule.

In June 2009, the 2008 Planning Rule was vacated and remanded by the District Court for the Northern District of California. The 2000 Planning Rule, as amended, is now in effect, which allows the Forest Service to use the provisions of the 1982 Planning Rule to revise forest plans.

The team will initiate consultation as required by the Endangered Species Act and will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) as part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. The team will continue to consider your concerns and issues related to forest planning in the Blue Mountains as the NEPA process progresses.

New Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision team leader selected: Katie Countryman

Dave Schmitt, who became the Blues Mountains Forest Plan Revision team leader in October 2002, took a well-earned retirement in October 2008. The new team leader is Katie Countryman, a long time Wallowa-Whitman National Forest (WWNF) employee.

Katie began her Forest Service career with seasonal employment on national forests in Colorado in the 1970s. She first came to northeastern Oregon to work as a seasonal employee for the WWNF in 1979. Katie became a Forest Service career employee in 1986 as a computer specialist

on the WWNF. She has also worked as the forest inventory coordinator, forest analyst, forest environmental coordinator, and forest planner.

Katie graduated from Colorado State University with a B.S. in forest biology in 1979 and from Eastern Oregon University with a B.S. in computer science in 1988.

Katie and her husband, Bruce, have lived in Baker City for 20 years. They have two daughters; both are attending college.

NEPA process to begin: a message from Katie Countryman

The Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision team is about to begin the first step in the NEPA process: the scoping phase.

Scoping is where the proposal (called the proposed action) is presented to the public and interested parties. Your comments on the proposed action will help us determine the issues related to it. These issues

will be used to help the team build alternatives and to determine the scope of the analysis that will be documented in the draft EIS.

In building the proposed action, we have considered all of the comments received during the collaborative workshops and ask you to continue your involvement through the scoping phase and throughout the NEPA

process.

A schedule of public scoping meetings will be available soon. We encourage you to attend one of these meetings.

More information about the forest plan and the NEPA process is available throughout this newsletter.

Please don't hesitate to contact the team if you have questions.



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What exactly is a forest plan and what does it do?

A forest plan is a document that guides land management decisions (project level planning) for a period of about 15 years. It is strategic in nature and does not approve projects.

Similar to elements of a county zoning plan, which require approval prior to beginning a project, parts of the forest plan describe desired conditions, suitable uses, and design criteria for project planning. On lands guided by county zoning plans, unless outright allowed by the plan, projects proposed by individuals or companies cannot be initiated without demonstrating compliance and obtaining the proper permits. Example: a home builder wants to build on land zoned for

residential use. The builder must submit a building plan to the building and planning departments. It will be reviewed for compliance with the land use plan, building codes, property setbacks, height restrictions, etc., after which construction can begin.

Comparably, projects proposed for National Forest System lands must be analyzed for compliance with laws and regulations along with adherence to forest plan direction, with all analyses documented by following the NEPA process. Once the analysis and public review are complete, the responsible official decides whether or not to implement the proposal either as is or with modifications to it.

Forest Plan Revision Team news and notes

Personnel changes, planning record moved

In addition to Katie Countryman assuming the team leader position, there have been several other staffing changes within the team.

Heidi Bigler Cole is the team's new social scientist and is responsible for social science collaboration and analyses. Heidi's education and background include a B.A. in speech communication, an M.S.c. in environmental science, and a Ph.D. in natural resources. She has 20 years experience with the Forest Service in public affairs, technology transfer, and social science research and application and is a certified professional facilitator.

Debbie Wilkins joined the team to work on recreation analyses, including summer and winter motorized and non-motorized uses; roadless area and wilderness area analyses; wild, scenic, and recreational rivers analyses; access on roads and trails; special uses; cultural and historic interests; and facilities. Debbie's education and background include a B.S. in forest resources, a B.S. in outdoor recreation management, and 22 years experience with the Forest Service working in recreation management.

Earl "Duke" Klein is the team's new wildlife biologist and is responsible for

analyzing the effects of management actions on plants and animals. Duke is also responsible for coordinating and consulting with other state and federal agencies that have responsibilities for these resources. His education and background include a B.S. in wildlife science and more than 30 years of public and private experience in research and management of natural resources. This includes 20 years with the Forest Service as a planner and wildlife biologist. Duke is a certified wildlife biologist.

Tim Gliddon is the newest member of the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision team. Coming from the private sector, this is Tim's initial experience working in federal civil service. Tim is the planning assistant and will support the team in a variety of manners, including his primary duty of records management. His education and background include a B.A. in education/natural science and seven years U.S. Air Force service specializing in personnel management.

Please also note that the project record for plan revision will now be maintained at the supervisor's office of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest in Baker City, Ore.



These trees are part of an old growth aspen stand in an area that is proposed for designation as a research natural area. This is one of many designations that will help guide project-level decisionmaking.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1970 provides for an open and public process for making informed federal land management decisions. NEPA requires federal agencies to consider the environmental effects of proposals, including the impacts to social and economic resources, as well as the impacts to natural resources. An environmental impact statement is a NEPA document that discloses the purpose and need for the decision to be made, the proposed action and alternatives, and the analysis of the effects of the proposed action and alternatives.

When Does NEPA Apply?

NEPA requires agency decisionmakers to make informed decisions. Therefore, the NEPA process must be completed before an agency makes a final decision on a proposed

action. NEPA analyses should include a consideration of how NEPA's policy goals will be incorporated into the decision to the extent consistent with other considerations of national policy. NEPA does not require the decisionmaker to select the environmentally preferable alternative or prohibit adverse environmental effects. Decisionmakers in federal agencies often have other concerns and policy considerations to take into account in the decisionmaking process, such as social, economic, technical, or national security interests. But NEPA does require that decisionmakers be informed of the environmental consequences of their decisions.¹

¹ CEQ, "A Citizen's Guide to the NEPA, *Having Your Voice Heard*," available at www.nepa.gov

NEPA analysis: the process and timeline

1. Forest Service identifies a need for action and develops a proposal (the proposed action)
2. Scoping begins: proposed action released, public meetings held, and comments accepted - **early 2010***
3. Revision team considers scoping comments and identifies issues - **summer 2010**
4. Alternatives to the proposal are developed from identified issues - **summer/fall 2010**
5. Effects to social, economic, and natural resources are analyzed - **fall 2010**
6. Draft EIS released for public comment: public meetings held and comments accepted - **early 2011***
7. Comments analyzed and responses and final EIS released - **fall 2011**
8. Objection period begins - **fall 2011***
9. Final decision signed - **early 2012**
10. Implementation begins

* Denotes a public participation phase.

The NEPA scoping phase

Scoping will:

- Identify people or organizations who are interested in the proposed action
- Identify the significant issues to be analyzed in the EIS
- Identify and eliminate from detailed review those issues that will not be significant or those that have been adequately covered in prior environmental review
- Determine the roles and responsibilities of lead and cooperating agencies
- Identify any related EAs or EISs
- Identify gaps in data and informational needs
- Identify other environmental review and consultation requirements so they can be integrated with the EIS
- Indicate the relationship between the development of the environmental analysis and the agency's tentative decisionmaking schedule¹

¹ CEQ NEPA Regulations, 40 C.F.R. § 1501.7, available at www.nepa.gov

More information is available online

The Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision Web site: www.fs.fed.us/r6/uma/blue_mtn_planrevision/

Forest Service NEPA Web site: www.fs.fed.us/emc/nepa/

Forest Service Web site, The Definitive Source of Technical Guidance for Forest Planning: www.fs.fed.us/TIPS/

The Federal government's NEPA information clearinghouse: www.NEPA.gov that includes A Citizen's Guide to the NEPA, which can be accessed directly: www.nepa.gov/nepa/Citizens_Guide_Dec07.pdf

The Council on Environmental Quality: www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ceq/

Questions and answers about the forest plan revision process

Question: How does the change in planning regulations impact the work done by the plan revision team?

Answer: The plan revision process has been designed to be planning rule neutral and withstand changes so that all of the work accomplished will continue to be relevant to the process.

Question: Will the national forests still offer timber for sale and harvest?

Answer: Yes, timber sales will be offered within areas determined to be suitable for timber harvest and timber production after project level decisions are made.

Question: Will grazing be allowed on the national forests?

Answer: Yes, existing livestock grazing will continue subject to the terms and conditions of existing permits. As grazing permits expire, site-specific project NEPA decisions will be made to re-authorize grazing as appropriate. As stated on page 2 of this newsletter, the forest plan is a programmatic document and does not make site-specific, project level decisions or authorize permits such as a grazing permit. The forest plan will contain desired conditions and standards and/or guidelines that grazing operations must follow.

Question: Will firewood collection continue on the national forests?

Answer: Firewood collection will be allowed and will be guided by the terms stated on the firewood collection permit.

Question: Will operation of OHVs and ATVs be permitted?

Answer: Yes, OHVs will be permitted on designated roads and trails and within areas specifically designated open by a site-specific, project level designation decision. The forest plan will contain desired conditions and standards and/or guidelines that must be followed when designating roads and trails for off-highway vehicle use.

Question: How will the new forest plans differ from the 1990 forest plans?

Answer:

- The new forest plans will be strategic in nature.
- Climate change will be addressed.
- Designation of management areas will be simplified.
- New science will be incorporated.
- Management activities will be focused on restoration.
- The forest plans of the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests will be very similar.

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