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Subject: Guidance for Implementing Eastside Screens

To: Forest Supervisors of the Colville, Deschutes, Malheur, Ochoco, Umatilla, Wallowa-Whitman, Wenatchee-Okanogan, and Winema-Fremont National Forests

In August 1993 the Regional Forester issued a letter providing direction to eastside National Forests on retaining old-growth attributes at the local scale and moving toward the historic range of variability (HRV) across the landscape. These became known as the "eastside screens." A subsequent decision notice in May 1994 amended all eastside Forest plans to include these standards.

During the nine years the screens have been in effect (five years since the 1997 clarifications), new science findings have emerged. The accompanying enclosure outlines some of these findings and their implications for the screens. These findings reinforce the importance of retaining and recruiting large, old trees in the eastside landscape, particularly (but not only) in Forests historically dominated by single-story LOS.

Practical experience in trying to meet these objectives, however, has sometimes presented challenges. A recent survey of eastside Forest Silviculturists revealed that the interpretation of screens direction, including 21-inch diameter limitations, no harvest in stands below HRV (Scenario A), and prescriptive connectivity corridors, is limiting their ability to meet the screens objectives of providing LOS stands—particularly drier LOS single-story ponderosa pine or western larch stands.

I therefore encourage you to consider site-specific Forest plan amendments where this will better meet LOS objectives by moving the landscape towards HRV, and providing LOS for the habitat needs of associated wildlife species. The enclosure provides examples of when this may be appropriate. The objective of increasing the number of large trees and LOS stands on the landscape remains. Economic considerations are important but are not considered adequate justification alone for conducting harvest activities in LOS stands.

I encourage you to coordinate with the Regional screens team and Regional planning staff as site-specific Forest Plan amendments are developed. This letter replaces those of October 2, and December 23, 1997.

Mike Ash(for)
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Regional Forester

Enclosure

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ENCLOSURE

Recent Science Findings and Practical Experience:
Implications for the Eastside Screens

During the nine years the screens have been in effect (five years since the 1997 clarifications), new science findings have emerged. Work on the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project has indicated late-seral, single-layer forests are currently below HRV in dry forests and are likely to become below HRV in moist forests (Wisdom et al. 2000, Hemstrom et al. 2001). This has substantial species management implications.

For example, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (2002) documented birds of conservation concern. Those for eastern Oregon and Washington include a number of species associated with LOS. Work with the DecAID advisory tool (Mellen et al. 2003) indicates 70 percent of populations of the following bird species (some cited as concerns in U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2002) use snags as follows:

Pygmy nuthatch: 18-34 inches or larger
White-headed woodpecker: 18-36 inches or larger
Pileated woodpecker (an MIS): 20-35 inches or larger
Flammulated owl: 6-53 inches or larger

The fisher is a Regional Forester's Sensitive Species found in moist eastside forests. The Fish and Wildlife Service has recently been petitioned to list the fisher under the Endangered Species Act. Data from DecAID indicate that 70 percent of fishers use snags between 27 and 47 inches DBH. Radio telemetry studies indicate that snag densities in telemetry locations of fishers are significantly greater than those of random sites.

These findings reinforce the importance of retaining and recruiting large, old trees in the eastside landscape, particularly (but not only) in Forests historically dominated by single-story LOS. It is critical that silvicultural prescriptions provide for large snags in adequate numbers (as indicated by DecAID and other tools) through time to provide habitat for these species.

Practical experience in trying to meet the objectives of the screens, however, has sometimes presented challenges. A recent survey of eastside Forest Silviculturist revealed that the interpretation of screens direction, including 21-inch diameter limitations, no harvest in stands below HRV (Scenario A), and in some cases forest connectivity corridors, is limiting their ability to meet the Screens objectives of providing LOS stands—particularly drier LOS single-story ponderosa pine or western larch stands.

Previous interpretations that site-specific Forest Plan amendments were not allowed except in rare cases (Regional Forester's letters on the screens, October 2 and December 23, 1993), coupled with a nine-year body of practical experience, suggest a need for more flexibility in the implementation of screens direction. Some flexibility in implementing 21" diameter limitations, harvest under Scenario A, and connectivity corridors, is appropriate.

Examples of where amendments may be appropriate include, but are not limited to:

- Moving multiple-layered ponderosa pine stands towards LOS of a single layer where the pine are competing with grand fir or other shade-tolerant species historically held in check by wildfire.
- Maintaining shade-intolerant desirable trees <21 in dbh where their recruitment into the > 21 inch class is reasonably foreseeable in the near future, and when giving preference to them better meets LOS objectives.
- Harvesting > 21 inch dbh mistletoe-infected trees when doing so best meets long-term LOS objectives and does not eliminate currently important wildlife habitat.
- Fuel reduction when in Scenario A to protect older trees (e.g., removal of smaller "ladder" fuels).
- Overstory removal of shade tolerant species to protect rare or declining understory elements, such as aspen or rare herbaceous plants.

References Cited

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