

## **Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides on BLM Lands in Oregon Draft Environmental Impact Statement October 2009**

### ***Draft EIS and Proposed Action***

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) currently uses herbicides selectively and conservatively in combination with other treatment methods, such as mechanical or manual removal of vegetation and biological control, to control and manage the spread of noxious weeds.

The BLM has prepared a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that analyzes a proposal to make additional herbicides available to BLM Districts in Oregon for:

- control of noxious and other invasive weeds;
- control of native vegetation encroaching on rights-of-way, administrative sites, and recreation sites;
- control of native vegetation when needed to control pests in state-identified pest quarantine areas, and;
- implementing wildlife habitat improvement projects to benefit BLM sensitive and Federally-listed wildlife species.

Under the Proposed Action (Alternative Number 4) in the Draft EIS, the BLM anticipates annually treating approximately 28,100 acres of invasive plants using non-herbicide methods (mechanical, manual and biocontrol) and 30,300 acres of invasive plants using herbicides.

The BLM also anticipates treating 15,100 acres of native plants using herbicides in such areas as rights-of-way, recreation sites and administrative sites and to meet habitat objectives for listed wildlife species.

The BLM currently treats approximately 2,500 acres of noxious weeds using mechanical methods, 2,000 acres using manual removal, 1,500 acres using biocontrol methods, and 12,000 acres using herbicides.

### ***Need for the Proposed Action***

As a result of 1984 and 1987 U.S. District Court orders, the BLM in Oregon only utilizes four of the 18 herbicides currently utilized by the rest of the Bureau in other western states and only uses those herbicides in the treatment of noxious weeds.

Although the BLM has an aggressive noxious weed control program that includes prevention measures as well as manual, mechanical and herbicide treatments, noxious weeds are spreading on BLM lands in Oregon at an estimated 12 percent per year, or 144,000 acres per year.

The use of the additional herbicides would allow for more effective treatment of noxious and invasive vegetation. Currently there are 12 listed noxious weed species (such as medusahead rye) that cannot be effectively treated using existing manual, mechanical or herbicide treatment methods nor are there effective controls for the



invasive species such as cheatgrass which, like medusahead, is an annual grass. These weeds are overtaking native sagebrush ecosystems, infesting habitat of Federally-listed plant and animal species, and increasing the risk of wildfire.

The herbicides being analyzed in the Draft EIS are being considered for use because of their effectiveness and because they can be used in smaller doses, are more target-specific, and are less likely to adversely affect people and other non-target organisms such as fish and wildlife than the four herbicides currently available to the BLM in Oregon.

While it isn't possible under any alternative in this EIS to eliminate noxious and invasive weeds, the proposed action is expected to slow the noxious weed spread rate from its current 12 percent per year to 6 percent per year.

### ***Proposed Action - Additional Details***

In addition to treating approximately 30,300 acres of invasive plants using herbicides, the Proposed Action would also make herbicides available for the treatment of native vegetation in rights-of-way, administrative sites, and recreation sites. The use of herbicides in combination or as a replacement of current manual and mechanical treatment methods is estimated to save the BLM approximately \$1 million per year. This type of treatment would occur on approximately 15,100 acres per year.

The proposed action also proposes to use herbicides to treat native vegetation in those instances where it will benefit BLM sensitive and Federally-listed wildlife species. These types of projects would total approximately 5,000 acres per year. An example would be the use of herbicides to improve habitat conditions for Sage-grouse by treating juniper trees that are encroaching on sagebrush habitat in eastern Oregon.

Vegetation types and the occurrence of invasive species differ across the state. Therefore, the proposed action would make 12 herbicides available to Districts west of the Cascades and 16 herbicides available to Districts east of the Cascades (See [Table 3-1](#) for a description of the herbicides).

The Proposed Action would prohibit aerial application of herbicides west of the Cascades.

The BLM manages approximately 26 percent of the lands in Oregon and the proposed use of herbicides on 30,300 acres is very small in comparison to statewide herbicide use. In an effort to put BLM's proposed herbicide use in context, following is a table that displays use of the 18 herbicides analyzed in the Draft EIS and the use of those herbicides across Oregon in 2008 (See [Table 4-1](#) below). The Oregon-wide use figures are from the State of Oregon Department of Agriculture's annual Oregon Pesticide Use Reporting System and do not include household use.

### ***Definitions***

**Invasive plants** (or weeds) are non-native aggressive plants with the potential to cause significant damage to native ecosystems and/ or cause significant economic losses.

**Noxious weeds** are a subset of invasive plants that are county, state, or Federally-listed as injurious to public health, agriculture, recreation, wildlife, or any public or private property.



**Vegetation** includes noxious weeds, invasive weeds, and introduced and native plants.

**Native vegetation** includes native and desirable non-native plants.

**Biological control** – The use of non-native agents including invertebrate parasites and predators (usually insects, mites, and nematodes), and plant pathogens to reduce populations of invasive plants.

**Please See Tables 3-1 and 4-1 on the Following Pages**

