

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
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To: District Managers: Lakeview, Burns, Prineville, Spokane and Vale

From: Deputy State Director, Resource Planning, Use and Protection

Subject: Rollout of the Interior Columbia Basin Strategy

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the *Interior Columbia Basin Strategy* (Strategy) was signed by the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Fish and Wildlife Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries, and the Environmental Protection Agency on January 24, 2003.

The MOU brings the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project to conclusion with the agreement that the federal agencies will adhere to a Strategy that provides for relatively consistent application of basin-wide science. The Strategy refers directly to science findings of the Science Assessment, and provides principles and guidance for their application in Land Use Planning and implementation activities. To facilitate implementation of the Strategy, the Executive group has established an interagency deputy-level guidance team. BLM's representatives are the Deputy State Directors for Resources in each State Office.

The Strategy, MOU, News Release, and a Talking Points/Q&A paper are attached. Please familiarize yourselves with this information. If you have any questions about these documents, please contact Jerry Magee, Environmental Protection Specialist, in the State Office Branch of Social Sciences at 503-808-6086. The above listed documents, with an Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Plan (ICBEMP) Summary/Q&A paper in place of the Talking Points, will also be posted on the ICBEMP website at <http://www.icbemp.gov> for public access purposes. We encourage Districts to place a link to this website in your Planning/Environmental Analysis web pages.

Key public and interest groups were briefed between January 27 and February 14, 2003. The official public release date for this Strategy is the date of the attached News Release. All media calls will be handled by Andy Brunelle of the Forest Service in Idaho: he can be reached at 208-334-1770. Media-related questions can also be directed to Brenda Lincoln, Public Affairs Specialist, in the State Office Public Affairs, at 503-808-6033.

My special thanks to all who have been involved in this effort over the years.

Districts with Unions are reminded to notify their unions of this Information Bulletin and satisfy any bargaining obligations before implementation. Your servicing Human Resources Office or Labor Relations Specialist can provide you assistance in this matter.

Signed by
Harold J. Belisle
(Acting)

Authenticated by
Mary O'Leary
Management Assistant

4 Attachment(s)

- 1 - [The Interior Columbia Basin Strategy](#) (11pp)
- 2 - [Interagency Memorandum of Understanding](#) (5pp)
- 3 - [News Release](#) (2pp)
- 4 - [Completion of ICBEMP](#): Talking Points/Questions & Answers (4pp)

Distribution

WO210 (Room 1075LS) – 1

Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project

Press Release

For Immediate Release - February 19, 2003

News Contacts: Andy Brunelle, Boise, 208-334-1770
Brenda Lincoln, Portland, 503-808-6033
Rex Holloway, Portland, 503-808-2241

Federal Land Agencies Adopt Science Strategy for Interior Columbia River Basin

(Boise, ID; Portland, OR) -- The Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) today announced the completion of the nine-year old Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project. With the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding the federal agencies – Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, NOAA Fisheries, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Environmental Protection Agency and the Forest Service’s Forest and Range Experiment Stations – will cooperatively implement the “*The Interior Columbia Basin Strategy*” to guide the efforts to update land use plans for National Forests and BLM lands in the four-state region.

“It is the interest of all parties to this MOU to utilize the findings of the Project’s Science Team, new information and best available science as it emerges during the life of the Strategy,” said Intermountain Regional Forester Jack Troyer. “The science developed during the Project will guide our work to update land use plans, as well as on the ground management. Our goal is to manage public lands in the Interior Columbia Basin to meet community needs for goods and services in an ecologically sustainable way.”

The agencies released a Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and proposed decision for the management of federal lands in eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho and western Montana on December 15, 2000. Instead of a formal, basin-wide decision from the Project however, the regional decision makers elected to adopt a strategy of incorporating the science into ongoing land use planning efforts.

Completion of the Project received support from regional leaders. Idaho Governor Dirk Kempthorne said, “I am pleased to see the completion of this project in a manner that will allow the science to be used in decisions made at the local level, by those most affected by land-use decisions on our federal lands. In our July 2000 four-governor agreement on salmon recovery we noted the interior Columbia River Basin needs a balanced strategy that can provide for stable and predictable multiple-use management on federal lands for fish and wildlife and other purposes while permitting needed flexibility,

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particularly on private lands. The existence of such a strategy is long overdue.”

Former Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber stated, “I’m pleased that the strategy for federal lands in the interior Columbia River Basin is being finalized. Restoring the health of the eastside forests was a priority of mine throughout my administration. We learned a lot about how to do this with good science and collaborative processes through numerous restoration projects over the last years. This strategy and the science from the Project will be valuable in the updating of the Forest Plans and furthering our efforts to restore forest ecosystem health.”

The Project, initiated in January 1994, addressed the landscape health issues facing the Columbia River Basin such as

the threat of wildfire, noxious weeds, and the protection and restoration of habitat for fish and wildlife species. The Project also addressed the socio-economic effects of federal land management decisions.

Copies of the Memorandum of Understanding and *The Interior Columbia Basin Strategy* are available on the website, www.icbemp.gov.

ICBEMP *Implementation Strategy* Talking Points and Questions & Answers

Talking Points

Background

- The Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Project (ICBEMP) was initiated in July 1993, when President Clinton directed the US Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to “develop a scientifically sound and ecosystem-based strategy for management of eastside forests.”
- In addition to the land management agencies the US Fish and Wildlife Service, NOAA-Fisheries and Environmental Protection Agency are working on ICBEMP.
- The ICBEMP geographic area includes over 140 million acres in the interior Columbia River Basin, the Upper Klamath, and parts of the Great Basin. Any proposals developed by ICBEMP only apply to the public lands administered by the BLM and USFS within this area (approximately 64 million acres).
- The Pacific Northwest and Rocky Mountain Research Stations of the USFS have produced numerous research publications about the ICBEMP area. Since 1996 these publications have been used for project and planning efforts.
- Two draft environmental impact statements addressing management of these public lands were released in May of 1997 for public comment. Over 83,000 comments were received during the comment period.
- A combined Supplemental Draft EIS was released in May of 2000 that responded to the public comments, new scientific information, agency review and direction from Congress and the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior. The comment period on the SDEIS ended July 6, 2000. Five hundred comments were received during the review period.

Completion of ICBEMP

- A final EIS and Proposed Decision were released on December 15, 2000 initiating a public protest process that closed on January 16, 2001. Seventy-four protests on the final EIS and Proposed Decision were received and they have been reviewed and analyzed. Key messages in the protests range from a broad scale analysis should not make decisions for local level plans and one size fits all direction is inappropriate, to feelings that the direction was not specific enough. There were also comments that the final EIS and Proposed Decision did not consider and integrate the USFS Roadless Area Conservation Rule and the National Fire Plan.
- Based on these concerns the Agencies evaluated various options on how to proceed. The science base and knowledge gained from the ICBEMP effort will be utilized during USFS and BLM unit planning efforts. This will result in decisions based on both broad-scale and specific local information and expertise and provide greater opportunities to work with states, tribes, local communities and publics.

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- The Agencies have decided to it is in the best interests to conclude this Project by issuing an implementation strategy that will provide guidance for incorporating the science data and resource information into land use plans for the National Forests and BLM lands and for project-level planning.
 - The strategy identifies key elements to be addressed, and the local land use planning efforts will identify where, when and how those elements should be addressed.
 - The strategy does not replace PACFISH/INFISH and the Eastside Screens direction, therefore the interim strategies continue for applicable activities until local administrative unit land use plans are amended or revised.
 - By design, the strategy is compatible with the work now going on among the agencies and the numerous interests (e.g., National Fire Plan projects, implementation of fish and wildlife habitat restoration work).

Questions and Answers

1. Question: Why wasn't a single, basin wide Record of Decision issued?

Answer: A Record of Decision (ROD) is one of the ways ICBEMP could be brought to conclusion. Several options were evaluated to complete ICBEMP and enable field levels to apply its valuable science considering local information and using local input. A consolidated ROD is not necessary to achieve the goal of ensuring use of the information by field offices.

2. Question: What options were evaluated?

Answer: Four general options were considered:

- A ROD based on the existing FEIS;
- Rely on the science information without any additional direction;
- Completing a combination of a ROD for an abbreviated alternative plus an *Implementation Strategy*.
- An *Implementation Strategy* without a consolidated ROD. This would then be implemented during Forest Service and BLM plan revisions and amendments. This is the preferred option.

3. Question: Why are agencies recommending an *Implementation Strategy*?

Answer: The *Implementation Strategy* option has been selected because ICBEMP has been overtaken by many other efforts that address Basin issues, e.g., the "All H" Strategy, National Fire Plan, etc. ICBEMP needs closure by a strategy that considers and coordinates with these other efforts. This *Implementation Strategy* provides for that and also:

- Provides a consistent application of Basin-wide Science.
- Provides Basin level direction for local planning and project implementation to address Basin level issues.

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- Allows local administrative units flexibility to identify where, when, and how principles and guidance are addressed.
- Responds to state and local government concerns.
- Has field level manager support.
- Offers least expensive closure to ICBEMP.
- Can be accomplished by existing organization structure.

4. Question: What is in the *Implementation Strategy* document?

Answer: The *Implementation Strategy* document is developed around the key science findings and basin-wide issues developed by the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). Some of the key findings include:

- ♦ Landscape Dynamics
- ♦ Terrestrial Species Habitat
- ♦ Aquatic & Riparian Habitat
- ♦ Social-Economics
- ♦ Tribal Governments
- ♦ Coordination with other management efforts
- ♦ Adaptive Management

5. Question: What about NEPA, FLPMA, and NFMA direction relative to this *Implementation Strategy* document?

Answer: The *Implementation Strategy* document is NOT a decision document requiring NEPA compliance. It simply provides basin-wide principles and guidance, associated with the Science Assessment, which will be addressed in local administrative unit and project planning activities. It leaves it up to local administrative unit plans to identify where, when, and how the principles and guidance are addressed consistent with NFMA/FLPMA. These local planning documents are fully subject to NEPA processes. Project level activities will *also* be fully compliant with NEPA.

6. Question: How does the *Implementation Strategy* relate to the Science Assessment and the FEIS?

Answer: The *Implementation Strategy* refers directly to science findings of the Science Assessment, and provides principles and guidance for their application in administrative unit planning and implementation activities. There is no specific

alternative selected for application from the FEIS. The ICBEMP FEIS contains information and management principles that may be considered and applied as local planning efforts are developed, and the local offices are free to consider this information.

7. Question: How does ICBEMP and the *Implementation Strategy* relate to the other National and Basin level management strategies?

Answer: Other National and Basin level management strategies have evolved during the 8-year life of the Project, e.g., the National Fire Plan, the federal agencies' "All H" Strategy and the Northwest Power Planning Council's *Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Program*. Many of the forest health issues that caused the initiation of ICBEMP are being addressed, to a

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degree, in these other efforts. The ICBEMP *Implementation Strategy* will acknowledge these other efforts and provide principles and guidance directing the science to be incorporated into local planning and decision-making activities in a compatible manner with the direction of these other efforts.

8. Question: PACFISH, INFISH and the Eastside Screens were supposed to be temporary management strategies and the ICBEMP *direction* was supposed to replace them, what will happen with these strategies?

Answer: Since the *Implementation Strategy* does not provide a specific replacement for PACFISH/INFISH and the Eastside Screens *direction*, the interim strategies will continue for applicable activities until local administrative unit land use plans are amended or revised to identify different long-term strategies. Replacement depends upon local conditions and whether local conditions, experience and science will support the application of different standards. For example, the Boise, Payette and Sawtooth National Forests will replace the PACFISH and INFISH interim strategies when their respective forest plans are revised in 2003. We expect that replacement may take until 2010 across the whole Basin.

9. Question: What about the 74 Protests that were filed with the FEIS and Proposal, how are they being handled?

Answer: The Protests have been analyzed and summarized within a "Content Analysis" process. Several points made in the Protests have been considered in the development of the *Implementation Strategy*, particularly those expressed by Idaho's Governor and several County Governments regarding retention of options for local managers. The issuance of the *Implementation Strategy* would include a letter to Protest filers, which would explain what the "Strategy" is and how their concerns were considered in its design.

10. Question: How will you assure the consistent application of the *Implementation Strategy*? Will there be a monitoring plan to do this?

Answer: The *Implementation Strategy* will be provided to all units and State and Regional offices will review plan developments for broad-scale consistency appropriate to the variability of landscapes and conditions across the Basin. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been signed by all of the Agencies to provide for consistent application and review.

11. Question: So what's the bottom line?

Answer: The *Implementation Strategy* is the product of ICBEMP in lieu of a basin-wide decision. Instead the science base and knowledge gained from the ICBEMP effort would be utilized during USFS and BLM unit planning efforts.

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