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BLM Approves Path Forward to Increase Timber Harvest and Environmental Protections in Western Oregon Forests

Portland, Ore. –The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) today approved an historic path forward for local communities in Western Oregon with Resource Management Plans (RMPs) that will increase job growth, tourism and recreation while also creating predictability for timber harvest, and offering strong protections for the northern spotted owl, listed fish species, and water resources.

“With this Resource Management Plan, the BLM has achieved an extraordinary balance that will create predictability and sustainability in Western Oregon,” BLM Deputy Director Steve Ellis said. “We are creating timber harvest opportunities for local communities, increasing tourism and recreation and protecting threatened and endangered species. We look forward to continue working with Oregonians on plan implementation.”

Throughout the course of the planning process, the BLM held 41 public meetings, workshops, and forums in Western Oregon. The agency received more than 7,000 comments, 4,500 of which were sent in during the formal comment period in 2015. The BLM also worked closely with other federal and state agencies and Oregon counties to develop strategies to protect fish, water, and threatened and endangered species.

The BLM estimates that with full implementation of the RMPs it will be able to provide 278 million board feet (mmbf) per year in total timber harvest. The BLM will create harvest timber opportunities using the principles of ecological forestry, which incorporates principles of natural forest development. In the reserves, the BLM would allow timber harvest to help meet management objectives such as increasing fire resiliency, developing habitat for northern spotted owl and other species, and protecting listed fish species and water resources. Also in the reserves, the BLM would protect stands of older, structurally complex forests. These stands include nearly 100 percent of all older forests, which protect high quality habitat for spotted owl.

In response to public input, the plan will also increase recreation and tourism opportunities in Western Oregon by designating 20 percent of the planning areas as Recreation Management Areas (RMAs), which are areas on the landscape that will be developed to create recreation opportunities, reduce user conflicts, and protect natural and recreational resources. There are approximately 491,000 acres of RMAs in the planning area. The BLM focused on providing close-to-home recreation access based on 30 and 60 minute travel distances from the 12 most populated communities in the planning area.

“The Forest Service commends the Bureau of Land Management on the impressive effort put for on their Resource Management Plans for Western Oregon, including their clear commitment to public engagement

throughout the process,” said Jim Peña, Regional Forester for the Pacific Northwest Region of the Forest Service. “We thank the BLM for their close partnership and coordination during this management planning effort.”

The BLM estimates the RMPs will increase annual harvest value from \$23 million to \$51 million, the value of recreation will increase from \$223 million to \$271 million, and the contributions to jobs will increase from 7,900 to 8,500.

The BLM signed two decisions: a Northwestern and Coastal Oregon Record of Decision (ROD)/RMP and a Southwestern Oregon ROD/RMP. The Northwestern and Coastal Oregon ROD will include the Salem, Eugene, Coos Bay, and northern half of the Roseburg Districts, and the Southwestern Oregon ROD will include Medford and southern half of the Roseburg Districts, and the Klamath Falls Resource Area in the Lakeview District. The RODs each contain a rationale for the decision, provide an allowable sale quantity declaration, describe how the BLM will transition to the new plan, and outline direction for mitigation, plan monitoring, and evaluation. The completion of the RODs is a culmination of a four year effort by the BLM to use new science, policies, and technology to protect natural resources and support local communities.

The BLM released the Proposed RMPs for a 30-day protest period beginning April 15, 2016, and received 46 protests. Descriptions of how each was addressed can be found in the Director’s Protest Resolution Report available at http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/planning/planning_overview/protest_resolution/protestreports.html.

Copies of this document are available at the Coos Bay, Eugene, Medford, Roseburg, and Salem Districts and the Lakeview District’s Klamath Falls Field Office. The document is also available to view or download online at <http://www.blm.gov/or/plans/rmpswesternoregon/>.

All elements of the Resource Management Plan will be effective immediately. The implementation timeline for projects will be decided at the District or Field Office level. All District-level projects, including timber sales, development of recreation opportunities, and restoration projects, will need to go through site-specific planning.

The RODs and RMPs for the six Western Oregon BLM districts were last approved in 1995. In 2011, the BLM conducted plan evaluations of the 1995 RMPs, and concluded that a plan revision was needed to address necessary changes to timber and wildlife programs, and minor changes to most other programs as a result of new scientific information.

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The BLM manages more than 245 million acres of public land, the most of any Federal agency. This land, known as the National System of Public Lands, is primarily located in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The BLM also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM’s mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America’s public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. In Fiscal Year 2015, the BLM generated \$4.1 billion in receipts from activities occurring on public lands.