WESTERN OREGON PLAN REVISIONS

PLAN REVISIONS NEWS

WESTERN OREGON

NEWSLETTER ISSUE NO.8 DECEMBER 2007

BLM

Salem, Eugene, Roseburg, Coos Bay, Medford, and Klamath Falls Offices

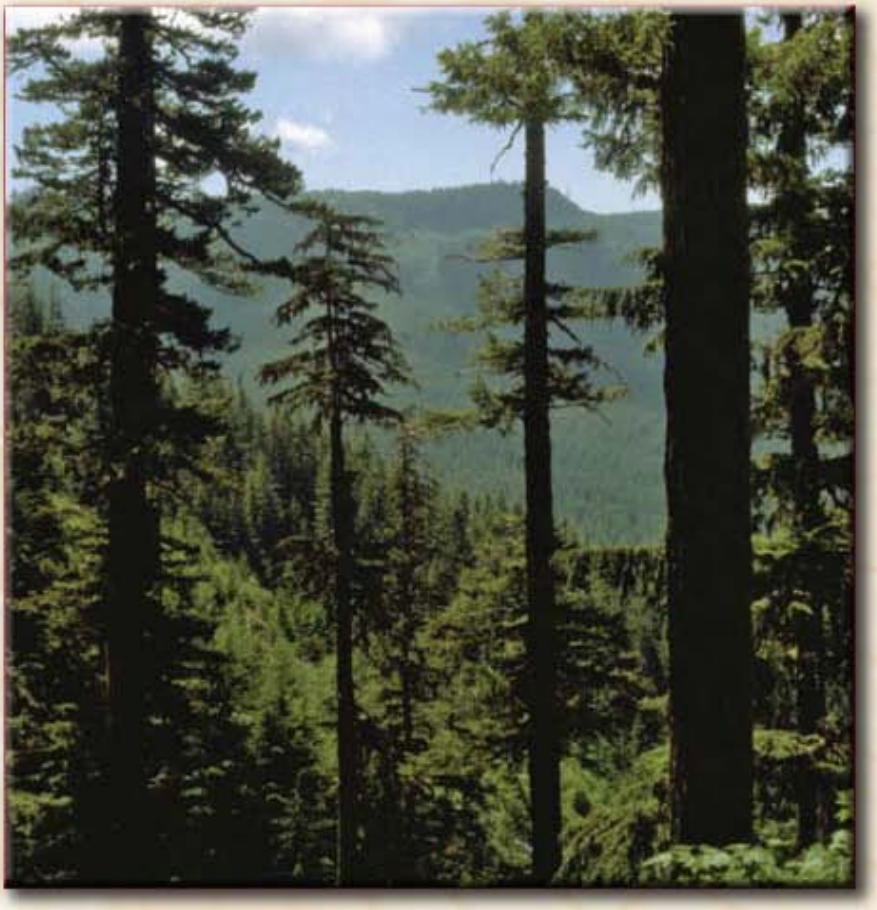
Comment Period Extended to January 2008

In August 2007 the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) analyzing four alternatives for the future management of 2.5 million acres of public lands.

The BLM originally offered three months for the public to review the DEIS. Now, because of the complex nature of the document, the public comment period has been extended to five months. Comments are now due by January 11, 2008.

With this extra time, we hope you'll take the time to thoroughly review the document and let us know how our analysis can be improved.

We appreciate every effort taken to review the analysis and offer comments. Comments are being collected through the Web Forum we have established: http://www.daylightdecisions.com. We think the Web Forum offers a new and innovative way to review the document and provide meaningful comments. See pages 6-7 in this newsletter for details.



Comments are Coming In...

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) has been available for public review since August 2007. Public meetings, open houses, and workshops have been conducted throughout western Oregon. Hundreds of documents have been distributed and a comprehensive website has been available containing the document, background information, and an interactive mapping tool for public use.

Comments are being received daily, through the Internet and through postal mail. As we review the comments that we've already received, we are seeing confusion regarding the purpose of the effort, what the analysis shows, and what the process entails. Through this newsletter, we'll attempt to clear up some of these issues.

The Northwest Forest Plan

The 1994 Northwest Forest Plan, upon which our current plans are based, has a dual purpose — to maintain the late successional and old growth ecosystem within the home range of the northern spotted owl, and to provide a predictable and sustainable supply of timber (Pages 3 & 8, DEIS). This second purpose is especially important to the BLM because we are directed by the O&C Lands Act of 1937 to produce a sustainable flow of timber (Page 9, DEIS).

As has been pointed out before, management under our current plans has met the first purpose, but we have not met the second — sustainable timber production. In fact, since the inception of the Northwest Forest Plan, timber harvest has been at less than 50 percent of the predicted harvest level.

The Northwest Forest Plan was written as a balanced plan. However there seems to be a misperception that the Plan provided protection to all existing old-growth stands. That's not the case. The Northwest Forest Plan allocated about two-thirds of the area to late-successional or riparian reserves where late-successional habitat is the goal. These areas include most of the existing "old-growth" stands and many young stands as well. Under the Northwest Forest Plan some older stands of trees fall within other areas designated for intensive timber production. Logging in these areas has been controversial even though the Northwest Forest Plan designated them for intensive management. Much of the litigation about the Northwest Forest Plan has been about timber sales in these areas.

The Goals of the BLM's Plan Revisions

The goals of the BLM's planning effort are not vastly different from the goals of the Northwest Forest Plan. The BLM will not go back to the timber production of the 1960s, 1970s, or 1980s. Even under the most aggressive timber alternative analyzed in our current draft plan (Alternative 2), only 47 percent of the land is within the area managed for timber (Page 89, DEIS). If Alternative 2 were selected, that would be a 40 percent decrease in harvest levels from the 1960s, 1970s, or 1980s. More importantly and often left out of this discussion, is the fact that these BLM-managed forests are capable of growing 1.2 billion board feet per year. Under the draft plan, the Alternative 2 harvest levels would be 727 million board feet per year or less, depending on the final alternative selected (Page 559, DEIS).

The goal of the plan revision process is to find a way for the BLM to manage the lands for permanent forest production in conformity with the principles of sustained yield, consistent with the O&C Lands Act of 1937. In addition, the BLM's revised plans must also comply with all other applicable laws including the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act (Pages 3-4, DEIS).

Economic Impacts

What does this mean for local economies? The O&C Lands Act of 1937 requires us to manage these western Oregon lands for permanent forest production while providing economic benefit to local communities. During the 1980s, payments to counties ranged from $61 million to $110 million. Under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000, payments to counties were as high as $117 million. The DEIS demonstrates that timber receipts under our preferred alternative (Alternative 2) would get us close to the equivalent of the BLM's portion of the payments made to counties under this act (Page 539, DEIS). Unlike the payments from Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000, this alternative would also provide new jobs in the timber industry that will ripple through western Oregon's economy, and get us a long way toward being a significant contributor to important local county-funded services such as libraries, public health, and law enforcement (Pages 540-548, DEIS).

Would the selection of the preferred alternative, as it is defined in the DEIS, generate timber receipts for the western Oregon counties to replace the recent funding under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000? It depends. The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 provided funds based on both BLM and Forest Service-administered lands. BLMs revised plans only project increased revenues from BLM lands. Counties with a higher percentage of BLM-administered lands may come closer to recent receipts under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 than counties with higher percentages of Forest Service-administered lands.

Protecting Existing Older Forests

Under Alternatives 1 & 2, the majority of the existing older forests (more than 200 years old) will be protected (Alternative 1 – 75%, and Alternative 2 – 57% - Page 509, DEIS). Under all alternatives, some younger forests will be allowed to develop into forests with characteristics of older forests (Pages 517-525, DEIS). Ultimately, this would allow us to meet our legal mandate to protect and enhance habitat for endangered species like the northern spotted owl, and craft a plan that meets the timber production requirements of the O&C Lands Act.

Off-Highway Vehicle Emphasis Areas

Each of the new alternatives analyzed will provide more management of off-highway vehicles (OHV). Where most of the BLM-managed lands are now "open" to OHV use, under the revised plans, the vast majority of these areas will require that OHV use be limited to "…designated roads and trails" (page 139, DEIS).

The BLM's plan revisions recognize that OHV use in the Medford District is a significant issue. To address that, Alternative 2 would designate 13 areas as "Off-Highway Vehicle Emphasis Areas" (page 143, DEIS). If approved, these designations would require the BLM to focus management attention on these areas. Designation as an "Off-Highway Vehicle Emphasis Area" does not mean that this area would necessarily be managed to promote or attract future OHV use. It does mean BLM will provide more attention to the areas to enforce rules, protect important resources, and develop the areas to meet the needs of neighbors and users. None of the potential OHV Emphasis Areas are being proposed as "open" play areas on public lands. If the areas are not designated they will not be closed to OHVs, but use will be limited to designated roads and trails.

Working with Others

Throughout this process, we've met often with Federal agencies, scientists, tribal representatives, the state of Oregon and representatives from the western Oregon counties in the preparation of this draft plan.

More than 130 meetings were held with a variety of groups, organizations and public officials, and since the draft was released in August 2007, we have held an additional 70 meetings with the public, watershed councils, organized groups and interested parties.

We remain committed to interagency involvement in this plan revision effort. There are issues that must be resolved with Federal regulatory agencies. We will continue to work with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on water quality issues, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and their northern spotted

owl and marbled murrelet recovery efforts, and the NOAA Fisheries - National Marine Fisheries Service on listed or potentially-listed fish species.

Our goal continues to be crafting BLM land management plans that meet our statutory requirement to produce a sustainable flow of timber, but also meet our legal responsibilities to provide habitat needs of species listed under the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, and other applicable laws.

consistent with the federal laws that are applicable to our responsibilities. We must make decisions based on the best available data and science through processes prescribed under the National Environmental Policy Act. That act requires us to fully disclose the impacts of our decisions before a final decision has been made.

We have taken many steps to ensure that this complex process is as open and available to the public as possible. We still have paper or CD copies of the draft document available to those who ask for one. The DEIS can also be reviewed on the website and at many libraries in western Oregon.

Your Input is Important!

We are now accepting public comments on management options, but no final decision has been made. We especially welcome substantive comments that we can use to improve the analysis of environmental effects as displayed in the draft environmental impact statement.

We are looking for you to tell us how to improve this draft plan. It is important to note that this process is not a vote to determine who's in favor or opposed to this planning effort. The BLM must make decisions

If you would like to talk to someone, or want an electronic or paper copy of the DEIS, call your local BLM office or our plan revision team at 503-808-6629 or send us mail at: BLM's Western Oregon Plan Revisions, P.O. Box 2965, Portland, OR 97208. Questions or requests for documents or information can also be submitted through the website:
http://www.blm.gov/or/plans/wopr

Website

A website has been developed for the plan revision project. The multi-faceted tools on this site offer many opportunities to gain information and provide comments. Here are some helpful hints on how to find what you're looking for. Please visit the Web Forum at **http://www.daylightdecisions.com**

Getting Started

Click here for a guided tour.

Getting Over the First Hurdle

As you navigate the site to the commenting tools, you may trip on the security hurdle that the BLM had to place on the website to assure the safe handling of comments. If you have to change some security settings on your machine, have no fear, this will not interfere with other programs and will only make your machine more secure. It's not hard, just follow the instructions. It only takes a few minutes. If you have problems call 503-808-6629. It's worth it!

Browse Through the DEIS

Want to browse through the draft document? The Web Forum serves up the Draft EIS in html format with an interactive Table of Contents so you can explore the areas that interest you and leave comments as you go.

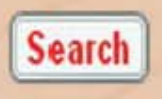
What's Proposed in Your Neighborhood?

If you want to see how the different alternatives might affect your neighborhood or favorite trail, use the Interactive Map. One of the easiest things you can do is use the "search" button with locally-recognized place names. Then use the "hand" tool and the "zoom" tools to focus in on the area that matters to you. Once you're looking at your important area, select an overlay such as "Land Ownership" or "Forest Age" or "Alternative 2" to see how proposed plans may affect the area.

Interactive Tools

Zoom In to the Map

Zoom Out of the Map

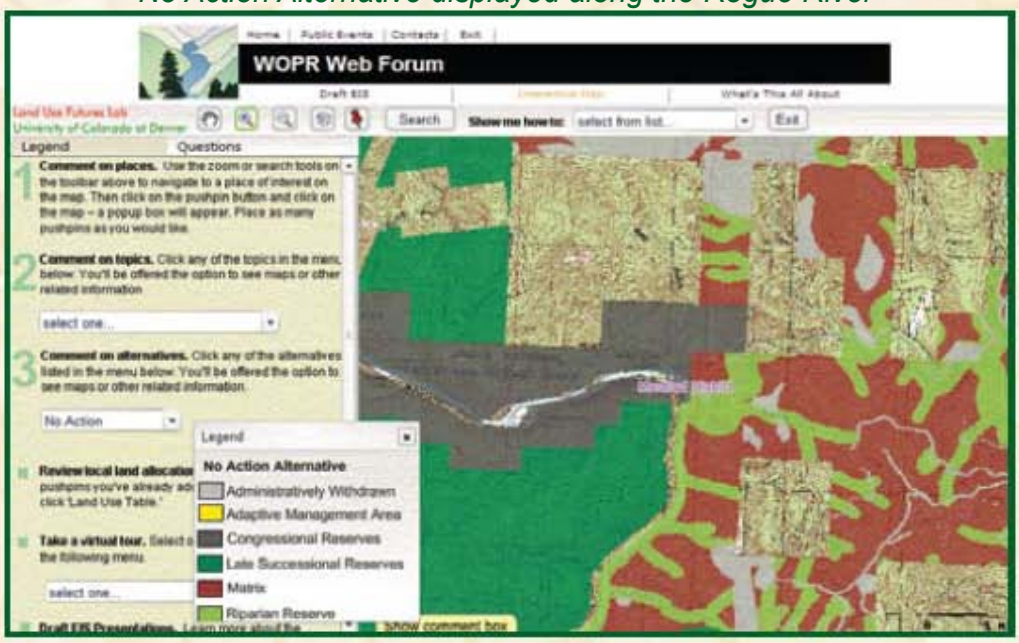


Search for a Place

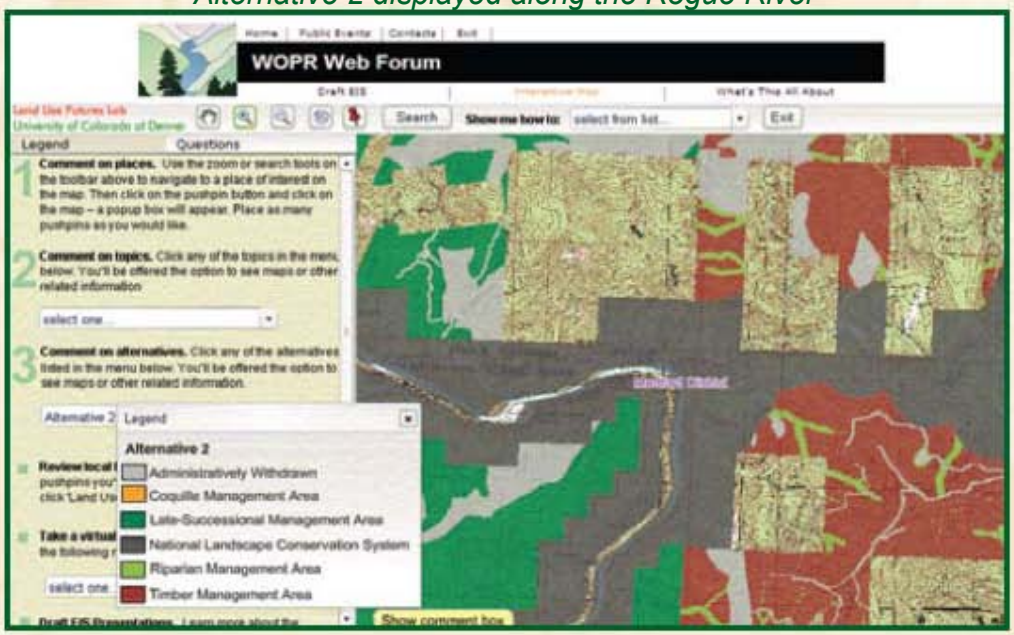
Push-Pin allows you to make comments tied to the location on the map. Once you establish an important site on a map, you can scroll the mouse over it and ask to see a table that compares the alternatives within that unique watershed.

You can use the Interactive Map to compare alternatives on the areas that are important to you and even view the ages of the stands of trees!

No Action Alternative displayed along the Rogue River



Alternative 2 displayed along the Rogue River



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Time is running out!

Comments on the Western Oregon Plan Revision Draft Environmantal Impact Statement must be recieved or postmarked by: **January 11, 2008.**

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