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Western Oregon Plan Revisions
P. O. Box 2965
Portland, OR 97208

Re: Western Oregon Plan Revisions

Dear BLM,

The following are my comments on the Summary of the Draft EIS for the "WOPR". Unfortunately, I do not have the time to read the Draft itself; since these revisions cover such an extensive acreage, I assume that professional scientists will read the entire document and lend their expertise to comments on the alternatives.

I support the No Action alternative, which requires O & C BLM lands to be managed under the Northwest Forest Plan and current Resource Management Plans (including relevant Watershed Analysis documents). I followed in detail the creation of the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) and felt that it represented a balanced approach to sustainable timber harvest, better protecting watersheds as aquatic fisheries habitat and domestic water suppliers, and allowing for the recovery of "special status" species. I have also followed, and commented on in detail, proposed revisions in the Plan, specifically the Survey and Manage and Aquatic Conservation Strategies components. Some of the more thoughtful revisions have been incorporated into the Plan, whereas attempts to undermine the Plan by "revision" have been challenged in the federal courts.

Since the Plan was enacted, I have submitted detailed comments on both Forest Service and BLM "proposed actions", generally timber projects but sometimes restoring or building recreation sites, grazing or mining proposals. Most of my comments have been on Environmental Assessments, thus allowing me to see how the NWFP "works" on the local level. My conclusion is that the Plan has worked well, requiring BLM planners to consider the impacts of timber extraction on riparian areas, all types of water bodies, fragile plant communities, other "special status" species, soils, topography, and the forest structure itself. Considerations apply not only to the size, species, and location

of trees removed, but also appropriate logging methods for particular situations. Overall, the Forest Plan has resulted in more carefully designed timber sales which take into account the unintended consequences of logging. The NWFP should therefore remain the overarching management document (with all of its legal requirements) for all Western Oregon BLM lands, O & C as well as "public domain".

The following are my comments on the Summary, page by page.

1. Preface, August 2007 Newsletter. While BLM lands may be managed under the requirements of either the O & C Act or FLPMA, both of these were superseded by the NWFP, which applies to Western BLM lands since they are within the range of the Northern Spotted Owl. The O & C Act of 1937 did not anticipate species or watershed degradation due to logging quantity and quality, and thus should not be the guiding policy statement at this time.

District Plans do not need to be revised. They presently address local issues and make significant contributions (including timber) to local communities.

The quote from the O & C Act of 1937 indicates that the Act and the NWFP are actually quite similar in management direction, considered in the context of modern times. The 1937 Act calls for protecting watersheds, regulating stream flow, and providing recreational facilities, as well as a permanent source of timber supply. The relevant importance of each of these elements will change over time and vary with location. For example, protecting watersheds may become more important than timber extraction if these are "key watersheds", harbouring important fisheries resources or serving as a source of domestic water supplies.

Timber harvest receipts should not have to be used to fund basic services. Standing forests provide valuable fish and wildlife habitat, and serve as well to sequester carbon. Thus, it is appropriate that Congress re-authorize the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act for 2008, rather than increasing logging as proposed in the Draft EIS.

The Preface states that BLM has gained knowledge from research and 10 years of implementing their current management plans. If anything, that research should indicate that plans should be more conservative, since Northern Spotted Owl populations continue to decline and global warming places an added stress on overall species survival.

2. Introduction

(a) Key Points. Existing management plans do not direct any particular timber harvest levels. New recovery plans and re-designations of critical habitat can be incorporated into existing plans. The principles of sustained yield in the O & C Act must be interpreted in light of the Endangered Species Act, which the NWFP already does.

(b) Text. The O & C Act does not provide the "primary direction" for administering O & C lands; the NWFP does. See my comments above, as the text merely repeats the key points.

3. Purpose. As stated previously, the text of the NWFP and O & C Act show a remarkable similarity of purpose; the NWFP simply applies to current conditions and priorities (i.e., species protection and watershed health). The text quotes a court case which states that Congress mandated timber production as the "dominant use" of O & C lands. However, this decision in 1990 predates the NWFP, which was judicially reviewed. Is it still valid today? Also, doesn't FLPMA also supersede the O & C Act, since it applied specifically to BLM lands?

The only real need for this EIS is to satisfy the settlement **agreement for the long-standing** litigation referenced in footnote 2. I remind the agency that this process does not require selection of a particular alternative.

4. Alternatives. For purposes of comparison, the text must describe the "no-action" alternative.

(a) Alternative 1. How are the LSRs "similar" to those in the NWFP? Are they of the same size, location, and level of protection from "treatments"? Reducing Riparian Reserve width by half on fish-bearing/intermittent streams is a poor idea. The entire width is needed to protect riparian species such as amphibians, and creates the microclimate for adjoining aquatic areas. The NWFP allows thinning in the outer Riparian Reserves if it will further ACSs. This seems to be a better compromise between Riparian Reserve protection and timber production. Amphibian species continue to decline, and are particularly susceptible to the effects of global warming. Thus, recent "research" points to protecting riparian areas more, not less.

Obviously, no green tree retention in Timber Management Areas is a bad idea since it destroys habitat connectivity with the LSRs. No salvaging is a good idea.

(b) Alternative 2. Post-disturbance salvage logging is a bad idea because it disturbs fragile soils and otherwise impedes natural recovery processes. It also is not economically

viable. Again, the "Riparian management areas" are of insufficient widths, even narrower than Alternative 1. See my comments for that alternative. The purpose of the reserves is not just to produce trees which will eventually provide CWD for streams, which seems to be the basis for the standards here. See my above comments on green tree retention.

(c) Alternative 3. As a summary, I cannot even make sense of this alternative, nor find any legal standard for assessing whether or not a particular timber harvest complies with the RMPs. I thought the rotation "age" was that which a forest stand reached before it was clearcut. At any rate, this alternative provides for no LSRs and the Riparian Management Areas are of too narrow a width, so it is unacceptable to me.

(d) Figure 1. The text does not explain some of the categories in the graphs, such as "National Land Conservation System". (This category does not exist under the "No Action" alternative--why?). What is the Coquille Tribal Forest Land category, and why does it not exist under the No Action alternative? What is the "Adaptive Management Area" under the "No Action" alternative in terms of allowed activities? What happens to this category under the action alternatives? Again, Alternative 3 does not have legally enforceable standards and guidelines.

Allowing 14% of these lands to be in Riparian Reserves, as opposed to 6-9% under the action alternatives, does not appear to be over-protective of watersheds, fish, and riparian species.

(e) Table 1. Again, I do not understand Alternative 3. What is the size of an assessment area? If half of the trees are at least 90 years old, can BLM cut down all of the trees? This strikes me as highly irresponsible and not in line with the principles of sustained yield.

The table makes no distinction between thinning and logging. There is no mention of Special Status Species, special habitats, or protecting deciduous (hardwood)/unusual conifer trees. The action alternatives are totally deficient with respect to the Northern Spotted Owl, especially Alternative 3. What happened to the concept of distribution as a criterium for assessing Species population health?

In which LUAs do the green tree and snag retention categories apply? I think the snag figures for the "No Action" alternative are incorrect. Snag habitat should meet the 40 percent of maximum population densities requirements for five woodpecker species (Salem District RMP, p. 21). Under Down Wood, what does "QMD" stand for? Again, species distribution will not be well served

if only "noncommercial" down wood is kept outside of the late-successional reserves. This wood will be too small to last long or provide habitat/structure for many species or streams.

See my previous comments on salvaging. It can only be justified where necessary to reduce hazards in the WUI. See also my previous comments on Riparian Reserve width. Table 1 should state what 2 SPT and 1 SPT widths are, so a comparison can be made with Alternatives 2 and 3. The No Action alternative is the only one that adequately protects Riparian zones, with a 344' buffer on fish-bearing streams and 172' on non-fish bearing streams, with thinning allowed only if ACSs are thereby advanced. These buffers were decided upon based on extensive scientific testimony. Aquatic and riparian species are no better off than they were in 1994, and some have declined even further. Any narrowing of buffers must be substantiated by scientific evidence that aquatic and riparian species will not thereby suffer.

For the action alternatives (especially 1), will thinning be allowed within the Riparian Reserves?

5. Affected Environment/Environmental Consequences.

(a) Ecology. "Small" conifer forests is the wrong term. What is the age range for these forests? (Young, mature, structurally complex). Terms should not be defined by referencing another document, even in a summary. What follows is not a true comparison of the alternatives, and it is not specific enough to be legally defensible. What are "average historic conditions?" How can BLM anticipate forest conditions "across all ownerships" and why is this included? The first bulleted item is beside the point, since timber is harvested even under the No-Action alternative. The second item requires some explanation and substantiation, and does not compare the alternatives. It is also a deceptive statement. What is the time frame for the third bulleted item? The fourth bulleted item ("almost twice as fast") requires scientific support. For the last item, fragmentation of what? This section of the DEIS is legally insufficient, even for a summary.

(b) Socioeconomics

(1) Figure 2. As the graph shows, the Secure Rural Schools payments are set at the peak level of timber receipts, which occurred in 1988-89. This level of timber harvest was unsustainable and not typical, as is indicated by timber harvest before and after these years. Therefore, any reasonable expectation of timber receipts should not be based on the federal subsidy, or peak years, but rather an average of pre-NWFP harvesting. The NWFP is blamed for lower timber receipts, but the

graph plainly shows that county timber receipts from 1985-87 were no greater than those for years after the NWFP was applied to these lands. Obviously, continued federal subsidies are the best alternative, justified by the nationally significant resources provided by these forests in a relatively non-logged condition.

(2) Local Economic Impact. Again, the analysis here shows that holding on to federal funding is better than logging (except for Alternative 2, which is not sustainable and therefore a violation of the O & C Act anyway). How can the No Action alternative, which preserves the status quo, possibly result in a net decrease of 3,770 jobs and 125.5 million of earnings? Does Table 2 assume that Secure Schools funding will be lost under all of the alternatives? What do the "Total" numbers of jobs and earnings refer to--timber related jobs, or also jobs impacted by the loss of timber receipts?

(3) Present Net Value. What assumptions does this calculation make with respect to the value of timber and disturbances such as fire which may occur within that 50 years? What are the costs due to? How can first decade revenues and costs be projected over the next 50 years when they are not constant over that time period? I therefore do not understand how present net value (over 50 years) can be derived from first decade net revenues. I also do not understand how a negative (loss) can be transformed into a positive (Alternative 3) The analysis also does not factor in external costs to other resources due to heavy logging and narrowing the width of Riparian Reserves.

(c) Timber.

(1) Figure 3. What does the "harvest land base" correspond to in Figure 1 for each of the alternatives? The percentages do not seem to match up. For the No Action alternative, commercial thinning is allowed in the Riparian Reserves, and I think outright logging in the Adaptive Management Areas. Please explain which land use allocations are considered part of the harvest land base.

(2) Figure 4. Over what time period was the annual allowable sale quantity calculated? Does it include timber from all types of harvesting?

(3) Figure 5. The title of this graph is confusing; it appears to apply to the land base size, but is actually about timber production from commercial thinning in "nonharvest" areas (a contradiction in terms). What is the point of this graph? If commercial thinning can occur in both harvest and non-harvest land allocations, why show only the volume in nonharvest allocations? Isn't the point to show total timber production?

(4) Timber Harvest Acres. A range is not asked for, but rather a real comparison of alternatives. Do the annual "timber harvest acres" include all types of harvesting, or just regeneration harvesting? If commercial thinning, which is a type of harvesting, can occur in "nonharvest" land allocations, then what constitutes the "harvest land base"?

The general idea in the Timber section of an EIS or EA is to compare actual timber production for each alternative, and then translate that into revenue (not all timber has the same value). This entire section is very confusing and does not provide the information to make those comparisons.

(d) Special Forest Products. Mushrooms, as a special forest product, are not abundant relative to demand. Will they continue to flourish in heavily logged areas? (They are sometimes worth more than the timber).

(e) Botany. What is meant by the term "nonfederally listed"? If these species are "special status", they are federally listed. Are they on state lists, but not federal? What is good "potential" habitat? These species are somewhat predictable in suitable habitat, which is why such sites must be surveyed before they can be disturbed.

Patch size is an area description; density is number of individuals or populations in a given area. "Patch size per population" does not make sense. This paragraph does not properly describe the factors which determine the risks of population loss.

What is the difference between (a) loss of populations; (b) local extirpation; and (c) local extinction? Aren't they all the same thing? How many conifer-related species are known from 20 or fewer sites on BLM lands? How many of them occur predominantly on O & C lands?

In the last paragraph, federally listed species of what? Where do the five species occur? Are they LSR or Riparian Reserve dependent? How will the action alternatives contribute to the recovery of these species? (i.e., beyond maintaining currently known sites).

(f) Invasive Species. The first phrase makes no sense; if the species is already abundant there is no "risk" of introduction" because the species is already there. Why is the proximity to riparian areas a factor? The main factors which increase the spread of invasive species are roadbuilding and timber harvesting, because individuals and equipment track the spores/seeds in. Increased light and soil disturbance, by itself, could just as easily prompt the growth of native species which outcompete the invasives.

(g) Wildlife. Even in the Summary, the first two paragraphs need to be more specific, and the analysis better. The buffers are too narrow, and logging too extensive, for me to be assured that the habitat needs of special status amphibians, mollusks, and cavity-nesting birds will be met under all four alternatives. Alternative 3 has no LSRs, and Alternatives 2 and 3 have only 25' no-harvest widths on fish-bearing streams. Why the distinction between perennial and intermittent streams (as to outcome) when both categories have only 0-25' no-harvest widths?

The second paragraph states the obvious, but what about species with low mobility? With specific habitat requirements?

(1) Marbled Murrelet. Does it really matter that habitat will increase in 100 years if the species does not persist in certain areas due to short-term habitat loss? By the way, 50 years is hardly "short-term". What is the status of this species now? How will each alternative affect its present nesting habitat, so critical to its survival, decade by decade? Can the species persist if a substantial percentage of its habitat (especially nesting) is lost in the short term?

What does "patch" and "core" refer to? How can an "edge", which has length or perhaps area, have "density"? What is the significance of these parameters to species persistence?

(2) Northern Spotted Owl. As with the Marbled Murrelet, the possible effects of the action alternatives cannot be evaluated without first knowing the status of these species at present. Is it enough to maintain or increase "suitable habitat", if critical nesting habitat is destroyed? "Suitable habitat" means suitable for what? Again, the amount of suitable habitat in 100 years is irrelevant if the species does not last that long. Considering that this species continues to decline, the only acceptable alternative is the one that increases suitable habitat in the short term (No Action).

Table 4 needs to be labeled better. What are "habitat capable acres"--the size of the LSRs? What are "% of Habitat Capable Acres"? How can percentages provide a meaningful comparison when the starting acreages are different? Since Alternative 3 cannot be included in this comparison for lack of LSRs, there must be a third analysis which compares all NSO suitable habitat for all of the alternatives. Table 5 is misleading because it compares "connectivity" habitat for No Action, Alternative 1, and Alternative 2, with all suitable habitat for Alternative 3. It's like comparing apples with oranges.

What is "dispersal" habitat? Anything outside the LSRs? Habitat of a lesser quality than "suitable"? What makes dispersal habitat of greater or less "quality"? What's the difference between decreasing, and not increasing? (if it will stay at the same level, say so.)

(h) Fish. Large, woody debris is a factor affecting the abundance and survival of salmonids, but not determinative. The alternatives seem to be fashioned entirely around providing CWD to streams, rather than also considering the importance of stream substrate, water quality features, and the presence of appropriate vegetation and prey. Microclimate is extremely important and was a reason FEMAT recommended wider stream buffers. What is "higher land ownership"? To say that the differences between alternatives is less than 3% does not compare them. What is "fish productivity"?

The statement about fine sediment delivery is conclusory. Fish habitat can be severely degraded locally even if the total increase is less than 1%. The same can be said for increases in peak flows at the fifth-field watershed level. Even if increases are not apparent at that level, they may be such at smaller scales that fish habitat is degraded. The sentence about stream temperatures is conclusory, and needs to be justified in light of the very narrow Riparian Reserve no-harvest widths called for in the action alternatives. Why would stream temperatures increase along the Coquille Forest land use allocations only under Alternatives 2 and 3?

(i) Water. To state that "Subwatersheds are more sensitive to extremes in environmental conditions than alternative variations of harvest levels" is to miss the point. The concern is for when extremes in environmental conditions are augmented by heavy logging, road densities, etc., and a "tipping point" is reached. The statement about regeneration harvesting is conclusory, and also ignores other factors which may contribute to peak flows.

With respect to stream temperatures, it's not good enough to "limit the increase of stream temperature within the range of natural variability"; it is also important what the stream temperatures are seasonally, diurnally, etc. Whether or not stream shade is "effective" depends on the width of the stream, as well as microclimate conditions. The statement here is also conclusory and demands a better explanation since the Riparian Reserve no-harvest buffers vary greatly among the alternatives.

The "Roads" discussion does not compare the alternatives. There is a difference between building 8 and 37 miles, and "within a distance that could deliver sediment to streams" is too vague to mean anything. The statement "Most new roads would be located outside of a stream influence zone where possible" is also too vague, with too much "wiggle" room, to mean anything.

New roads will not have the effect of decreasing fine sediment delivery (last sentence, LXI). If the existing road system is dense and poorly maintained, it is cold comfort to know that the new roads will contribute only 0.3% more sediment. What are "best management practices"? They cannot be assumed to maintain or improve water quality if the roads are built in what are presently Riparian Reserves.

(j) Fire and Fuels. How many acres of O & C lands are north and south of Grants Pass, respectively? If the primary source of high-severity fire is in new and young even-aged stands, how will the action alternatives reduce this threat since they call for more regeneration harvesting over a larger land base? I thought the No Action alternative in an EIS constitutes the baseline, against which the action alternatives are assessed. How, then, can the No Action alternative result in the "largest decrease" north of Grants Pass, and the "most decrease" in the Medford District? In the Klamath Falls area, how can the No Action/Alternative 3 alternatives "decrease fire severity and hazards at approximately the current levels"?

Why do forests without green tree structural legacies have a lower fire resiliency?

This section needs to discuss WUI work to reduce fire hazards, or indicate why it is not relevant to O & C lands.

(k) Recreation. Logging and roadbuilding are generally perceived as interfering with recreational experiences, and the typical EA or EIS describes project design features to minimize friction between these activities. There is simply no support for the proposition that the action alternatives "improve the quality of visitor experiences."

Table 6 (ORV areas) lumps all of the action alternatives together, but the text states that Alternative 2 (only) will designate 10 new emphasis areas in the Medford District. I also do not understand the categories in this table; they do not explain how the action alternatives change ORV areas. Of course, ORV areas need to be designated and limited, but this could have been done under all of the alternatives, and should be the subject of a separate EA or EIS.

(l) Wilderness. It is amazing to me that out of 146 public wilderness proposals, only 9 were found to contain wilderness characteristics and five "acceptable" under the action alternatives. Did only 9 areas "qualify", or is it a matter of leaving most of these lands in timber production for political or economic reasons? Out of the 2.2-2.6 million acres subject to this plan revision, setting aside even 16,485 acres as Wilderness (the No Action alternative) is pitiful, and not responsive to increasing public demand for recreational experiences that only this land allocation can provide.

(m) Visual Resources. What does it mean to "maintain" Class IV lands? The discussion here explains the categories somewhat, but otherwise states the obvious rather than giving a true comparison. What about the No Action alternative?

(n) National Landscape Conservation System. What are these lands and why do they not exist under the No Action alternative?

(o) Soils. This section is totally inadequate. There needs to be a discussion of roads, logging on steep slopes, salvage logging, and regeneration harvesting, as all can have a negative impact on soil productivity. What "practices" will be the same or be improved?

(p) Grazing. As with Recreation, this would seem to be a separate topic for another EA or EIS. Again, why are these not incorporated into the No Action alternative? (proposed changes). As a matter of best land use, grazing authorizations should be reduced even more and forage production should not be increased (is this for wildlife, horses, or domestic animals?)

(q) Wild Horses. No Comment.

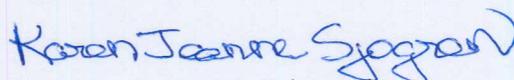
(r) ACECs and RNAs. This discussion simply makes no sense, and I can only hope that rewriting it will help. Why were none of the proposed 38 ACECs even included in the No Action alternative? There is no land use class that adequately protects the unique values of these areas. Why were they reduced under the action alternatives? How does this impact sensitive plant communities and species? How can the occurrence of these special values be reduced (Table 9) under current law?

(s) Cultural Resources. The alternatives are not compared here. Damaging up to 2% of historic sites each decade is not insignificant.

(t) Energy and Minerals. No Comment.

This concludes my comments on the DEIS Summary. Even as a summary, it needs to be more complete, contain better analyses, and contain much better writing. I have tried to be constructive in my criticisms. The No Action alternative is the only acceptable alternative, i.e., maintaining management under the Northwest Forest Plan as well as the 1937 O & C Act.

Sincerely,



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