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Bureau of Land Management Planning Team  
Western Oregon Plan Revisions  
P. O. Box 2965  
Portland, Oregon 97208

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen of the Planning Team,

Thank you for the chance to comment and for your responses to my concerns. I am most concerned about the future of the northern spotted owl and the marbled murrelet. The No Action alternative (Northwest Forest Plan) best meets their needs under the four alternatives – however, I suggest a new alternative that makes all currently designated spotted owl critical habitat Late-successional forest Management Areas. The Preferred Alternative reduces the amount of suitable habitat within critical habitat units to close to 50% over 100 years; a reduction of the amount meets the idea of adverse modification. I am also concerned about special status species, especially the northern goshawk. Finally, I have a concern about Environmental Justice and special forest products since low income people and minorities are the primary harvesters of special forest products.

Sincerely,

*Alison Dunlap Center*  
Alison Dunlap Center

Comments from:  
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Comments on the DEIS for the Western Oregon Plan Revisions

Northern Spotted Owl

Working Towards Recovery

The major reason for the northern spotted owl being listed as a threatened species was population declines due to the loss of habitat. The No Action alternative (the Northwest Forest Plan), was an attempt to reach recovery goals by providing suitable habitat in large blocks for up to 20 pairs of owls, providing dispersal habitat and protecting existing owl activity centers. Under the Endangered Species Act, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is to work to promote the conservation purposes of the act, in this case to promote the recovery of the spotted owl; however, the population of northern spotted owls continues to decline. In order to work toward recovery, BLM should prevent any further loss of habitat and work toward providing more habitat - the No Action alternative, alternative 1 and the subalternative that allows no timber harvesting of forest over 80 years old maintain the amount of existing suitable habitat in the first several decades and then increases the amount of suitable habitat. However, the Preferred alternative (alternative 2) and alternative 3 both decrease the amount of suitable habitat (for up to 50 years) before the amount of habitat increases. Given the continuing decline of the spotted owl, the loss of suitable habitat for 50 years does not lead toward recovery. One of the reasons for this decline of suitable habitat and the limited amount of structurally complex forest stands under the Preferred Alternative is the lack of retention trees in regeneration harvest units. A regeneration harvest unit with retention trees can become structurally complex (suitable habitat) within 50 years; harvest units without retention trees can take 100 years or more to become structurally complex. Spotted owls also require dispersal habitat; only the No Action and alternative 1 maintain dispersal habitat. The spotted owl population should also be supported by protecting existing spotted owl activity centers; the effect of destroying current activity centers, especially those with reproducing owl pairs, will lead to further population declines. The DEIS did not adequately address what the loss of owl activity centers will do to the spotted owl population.

Critical Habitat

Critical habitat is defined in the Endangered Species Act as: "(I) the specific areas within the geographic area occupied by a species...on which are found those physical and biological features (I) essential to the conservation of the species, and (II) that may require special management considerations or protection;" (Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended) (DEIS page 1042). Together with the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS), the BLM is to ensure that their actions do not cause the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat (DEIS, page 11). Both the FWS and the BLM have been reluctant to define what adverse modification of spotted owl critical habitat would be making thus making an assessment difficult. However, using the above definition that critical habitat contains physical and biological features essential to the conservation of the species and BLM's own words, "ensure that their actions do not cause the destruction...of designated critical habitat," we can conclude that the destruction of those essential features through a series of regeneration harvests would adversely modify critical habitat. The No Action alternative (NW Forest Plan) does the best job of conserving critical habitat but even it does not totally align with designated critical habitat. The Preferred Alternative would only

ever have little more than 50% suitable habitat over 100 years within critical habitat units. If critical habitat is indeed habitat that is essential to the conservation of the spotted owl, then destroying it and reducing the amount to 50% is indeed adverse modification under any logical definition. In addition, the Preferred Alternative does not retain the portions of critical habitat units with the best suitable habitat. For example in the southeastern portion of the Eugene District, the portions of the critical habitat unit (those located in the Sharps Creek and Mosby Creek watersheds) with older, more continuous forest stands are not delineated as LSMA while the poorer habitat, younger and more fragmented stands (located in the Coast Fork Willamette watershed) are designated as LSMA.

#### General Corrections

Spotted owls and critical habitat are not listed in the index. Move the discussion of critical habitat into chapter 4 (it is currently difficult to find) and actually do an analysis of the effects of the alternatives on the functionality of critical habitat.

#### Suggested New Alternative

I suggest that the BLM analyze an alternative that delineates the LSR/LSMAs to align with Critical Habitat Units and maintains existing spotted owl activity centers. No regeneration harvests nor harvest of stands over 80 years old would occur in the Critical Habitat Units. Provide for dispersal habitat in the timber management areas through retention trees (10-15 trees per acre), riparian areas and by maintaining a certain amount of dispersal habitat within townships. Harvest 40 - 79 year old stands by thinning to promote structurally complex stands as well as to provide timber.

#### Marbled Murrelets

##### Working Towards Recovery

One of the major reasons for the marbled murrelet being listed as a threatened species was population declines due to the loss of nesting habitat. The No Action alternative (the Northwest Forest Plan), was an attempt to reach recovery goals by providing suitable habitat in late-successional reserves within 50 miles of the coast and by protecting murrelet sites. Under the Endangered Species Act, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is to work to promote the conservation purposes of the act, in this case to promote the recovery of the marbled murrelet; however, the population of marbled murrelets is not yet secure. In order to work toward recovery, BLM should prevent any further loss of habitat and work toward providing more habitat - the No Action alternative, alternative 1 and the subalternative that allows no timber harvesting of forest over 80 years old increases the amount of nesting habitat. However, the Preferred alternative (alternative 2) and alternative 3 both decrease the amount of nesting habitat, decrease the patch size of older forest stands and increase the edge density. Marbled murrelet nests are prone to predation by corvids (ravens, crows and jays) and the smaller the patch size and greater the edge density, the greater the chance of nest predation. One of the reasons for this decline of nesting habitat and the limited amount of structurally complex forest stands under the Preferred Alternative is the lack of retention trees in regeneration harvest units. A regeneration harvest unit with retention trees can become structurally complex (suitable habitat) within 50 years; harvest units without retention trees can take 100 years or more to become structurally complex. Marbled

murrelets require large trees with large branches to nest on which would require closer to 200 years of tree growth. Stands with no retention trees would need at least 200 years to develop into murrelet nesting habitat. The murrelet population should also be supported by protecting existing marbled murrelet sites and those found in the future.

### Critical Habitat

Critical habitat is defined in the Endangered Species Act as: "(I) the specific areas within the geographic area occupied by a species...on which are found those physical and biological features (I) essential to the conservation of the species, and (II) that may require special management considerations or protection;" (Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended) (DEIS page 1042). Together with the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS), the BLM is to ensure that their actions do not cause the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat (DEIS, page 11). Both the FWS and the BLM have been reluctant to define what adverse modification of critical habitat would be making thus making an assessment difficult. However, using the above definition that critical habitat contains physical and biological features essential to the conservation of the species and BLM's own words, "ensure that their actions do not cause the destruction...of designated critical habitat," we can conclude that the destruction of those essential features through a series of regeneration harvests would adversely modify critical habitat. The No Action alternative (NW Forest Plan) does the best job of conserving critical habitat by aligning with designated critical habitat. The Preferred Alternative would only partially align with critical habitat units and the amount of nesting habitat within them would decrease. If critical habitat is indeed habitat that is essential to the conservation of the marbled murrelet, then destroying it through regeneration harvests and reducing the amount of nesting habitat is adverse modification.

### General Corrections

The analysis of marbled murrelet critical habitat is not listed in the index and is hard to find. Move the discussion of critical habitat into chapter 4 and actually do an analysis of the effects of the alternatives on the functionality of critical habitat.

### Late-successional Forests and Special Status Species

Old growth and mature forests that are structurally complex support a myriad of species in western Oregon. Special status species that depend on these forests include northern goshawks, Oregon slender salamanders, red tree voles, and Johnson's hairstreak butterfly. The amount of structurally complex forest and patch size increases under the No Action alternative and alternative 1; the amount decreases for 50 years and the patch size decreases over time under alternatives 2 and 3. How will the BLM avoid the need to list structurally complex forest dependent species under the Preferred Alternative? The northern goshawk, in particular, has been proposed for listing before and goshawk management plans have been suggested to the western BLM districts. However, the assumption was made that goshawks would use the same habitat as spotted owls and that the late-successional reserves under the Northwest Forest Plan would provide the necessary nesting habitat (structurally complex forest with large patch sizes). Because of this, goshawk nest sites on BLM lands have been treated in an inconsistent fashion with some nesting sites protected and others not and not all resource areas surveyed for northern

goshawks. The DEIS states that BLM would use management to avoid the need to list special status species; it does not state what that management would be. The Preferred Alternative (alternative 2) and alternative 3 would both limit the amount of structurally complex forest (to around 30% by 2106) and decrease the patch size of forest stands. Both of these results will limit the amount of northern goshawk nesting habitat. How will the BLM provide adequate northern goshawk habitat to prevent the need to list the goshawk?

#### Special Forest Products, Environmental Justice and Socioeconomics

The sections on Special Forest Products, Environmental Justice and Socioeconomics were not adequately analyzed. The Socioeconomic section is inconsistent in its treatment of timber products and special forest products. A model is used to assess the value of timber including timber sale receipts, wood products, mill employment and effects to local communities. The value of special forest products are assessed only by the amount of receipts for permits (\$300,000) and is considered a minor industry. However, according to the Oregon Public Broadcasting web site's article "The Oregon Story - Harvesting the Wild" ([www.opb.org/oregonstory/harvest](http://www.opb.org/oregonstory/harvest)), the region's special forest product industry was valued at \$190 million in 1992. The wild mushroom export business out of Oregon exceeds \$6 million annually. Clearly, the comparison between timber products and special forest products needs to be compatible and special forest products should not be dismissed as a minor industry. Environmental Justice looks at the effects of the alternatives on minority and low income people. Special forest product harvesters are mostly low income rural people and minority groups including Asians (from Laos, Viet Nam, Thailand and Cambodia), Hispanics, and Native Americans. Many of these groups derive most of their income from special forest products by picking spring mushrooms, harvesting bear grass and huckleberries in the summer, and picking fall mushrooms. A diligent mushroom picker can make \$10,000 annually which can be the difference between falling into poverty or not for rural low income people. Both low income people in western Oregon rural communities and minorities will be affected by the alternative chosen. Timber harvest can decimate some mushroom species for decades while promoting the growth of other species. If the most valuable special forest products are the ones decimated by timber harvests, the choice of alternative can have a significant effect on people's incomes. BLM can analyze the effects of the DEIS alternatives on special forest products using estimated amounts of forest products harvested and their financial value (there are plenty of Oregon State University studies that look at mushrooms and other forest products and at the effects of harvesting timber on these forest products). BLM should also analyze how the alternatives effect the livelihoods of low income and minorities who rely on special forest products for their livelihoods under the Environmental Justice section.

#### Stream Buffer Recommendation

All streams, including all intermittent streams, need to be buffered. Stating that 10 - 15 trees per acre will be left means that 10 will be left in most cases (not the 12 assumed in the analysis). During high precipitation events, a lot of sediment-carrying water will be flowing down these intermittent streams, they need to be buffered with the 25 foot buffer.