BLM PUBLIC HEARING HELD BEFORE

HEARING OFFICER, GINA RAMOS

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Boise, Idaho

Reported By:

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PROCEEDINGS

MR. AMME: I want to welcome everybody here. This is the number six public meeting/hearing we have been having for the National Veggie EIS that was released November 11th -- November 20th. Excuse me. My name is Brian Amme. I am the project manager for this project. I work for the Nevada state office of the BLM. I am their planning environmental coordinator that was recruited by the Washington office to help out with this project.

I have got a few introductions to make to you. Gina Ramos is here from the Washington office. She is our senior weed specialist for Washington. And we have Stuart Paulus from ENSR International who is our third-party contractor helping us put this EIS together. And Linda Mazzu from the BLM Office of Fire and Aviation right here in Boise is with us here tonight.

Some of you folks I know and a lot of you I don't. We actually have some public tonight, and this is great. This is what we like for these meetings.

I don't really have a lot of introductory remarks to say, other than Stuart will give a brief presentation and Gina will be serving as the hearing's

officer tonight. If anybody wants to make any comments, we have a court reporter to record any comments that are made. So with that, I'll just let Stuart kick it off and go through his presentation, and we'll get into the hearing portion of this session.

MR. PAULUS: Thank you, Brian. And I want to thank you for coming to tonight's public hearing on the Bureau of Land Management's Vegetation Treatment's EIS, Pragmatic EIS, and also Environmental Report, or Programmatic ER.

The purpose of the public meeting tonight is to help the public, you, understand the BLM's proposal to treat vegetation on up to six million acres annually in the western U.S., including Alaska.

We also are going to try to explain the role of the environmental impact statement as well as the environmental report. This is little different from some proposals you see done by the BLM where there is generally just an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement prepared. For this project, we also did an environmental report, which actually serves as sort of a supplemental document to the EIS.

And finally probably the main purpose of the meeting is to solicit comments from the public on

issues of concern that you feel were maybe not addressed properly in the EIS, or perhaps you identified incorrect information that we need to correct, or perhaps you thought of an alternative treatment proposal or an alternative proposal for vegetation treatments that's better than the ones that the BLM identified in the EIS that you would like to submit. Again, those are some of the things we are looking for from you the public.

The BLM was founded in 1946 with the goal to serve current and future publics and to restore and maintain the health of the land. The agency administers nearly 262 million acres of surface lands and about 700 million acres of subsurface mineral lands. It is quite a bit of acreage. And nearly all the surface acres are found in the western U.S., including Alaska, as shown in this map. As you can see, there is a big chunk obviously right where we sort of are today, central portion of the western U.S., lots of acreage in Nevada and Utah, Wyoming, and Idaho. And although it is hard to tell from this map, there is actually quite a few acres in Alaska. Alaska is maybe a little smaller than it should be in proportion of the rest western U.S., but in Alaska there are about 81 million acres of BLM land. So nearly a third of the

acreage is in Alaska.

So what is the BLM proposing to do and why? Well, the overall goal is to treat -- or the reason for the proposal is to treat vegetation on up to 6 million acres annually in the western U.S., including Alaska, using five primary treatment methods. The treatment methods are prescribed fire, use of herbicides, and manual, mechanical, and biological control methods.

You might have ask where did the BLM come up with the 6 million acres, especially when we consider that today the BLM treats about 2 million acres annually, and in now considering bumping that up to 6 million acres? Well, back in 2002 when this kind of project actually began -- and it actually began in late 2001, but it really got rolling in 2002. We went out to all the different field offices and asked them what projects do you perceive in the next zero to three years, and three to ten years; where are these projects going to occur; what types of treatments do you plan to use; what types vegetation do you plan to treat; what types of equipment or method -- specific methodology do you plan to use?

And the different field offices then sent that information back to us, and we used that to actually come up with the breakdown of how many acres would be

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1 treated using each method, and also about how many
2 acres would be required to meet their treatment goals.
3 And that is how we came up with the 6 million acres.
4 Of that 6 million acres, about 3.5 million
5 acres are primarily treated for hazardous fuel
6 reduction and weed control, basically land ecosystem
7 health restoration. About 1.5 million acres are
8 basically for fire rehab or fire reclamation, to
9 restore damage lands that have been impacted by fires
10 in the past. And the remaining 1 million acres is
11 being treated by an assortment of BLM programs
12 including treatments to benefit fish and wildlife
13 habitat, water quality, cultural resource areas, areas
14 with high visual significance, thing like that. So,
15 again, about 1 million acres covers all the different
16 BLM programs.
17 But keep in mind, treatments to benefit fire
18 damage areas or for hazardous field reduction or
19 whatnot obviously benefits lots of other things,
20 including wildlife, water, et cetera.
21 The reason the BLM is proposing to treat 6
22 million acres, several reasons. One, the big goal is
23 to reduce hazardous fuels to reduce the risk of
24 wildfires. As you well know living in this area part
25 of the country, there have been quite a few large and

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1 very severe wildfires in the past decade or so, and it
2 is believed that a lot of this is the result of fire
3 exclusion policies and practices over the last
4 decade -- or actually, about the last century or so.
5 It has resulted in the build up of hazardous fuels in
6 forest and rangelands. Thus a lot of the treatments
7 are to help reduce the amount of hazardous fuels that
8 can lead to future wildfires.
9 The second major goal is to remove and control
10 weeds. It is estimated that weed populations have
11 increased about fourfold in the last 15 years, so even
12 with current treatment levels weeds continue to spread.
13 So let's hope by increasing the number of acres treated
14 and using more effective treatment methods, perhaps the
15 controlled weeds might -- or certainly we might have a
16 better control over weed populations.
17 Another major goal is obviously to restore and
18 rehabilitate lands that have been damaged by wildfires
19 in the past several decades, again, lots of lands being
20 burned in Idaho, Oregon, some in Washington, Montana,
21 Wyoming, et cetera -- Utah, Nevada. Lots of acres have
22 been burned. These areas if they are not restored and
23 rehabilitated may attribute to the increase in weed
24 populations and whatnot, so try and restore those
25 lands.

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1 And finally the overall goal is to improve
2 ecosystem health, which will benefit water quality,
3 visual characteristics of the land, and also fish and
4 wildlife habitat, among other things.
5 Quick overview of the five primary treatment
6 methods. The first one is fairly obvious. This is
7 mechanical, use of heavy equipment such as bush hogs,
8 large mowers, tractors, graders, chaining perhaps. A
9 number of sort of types of treatments involve large
10 types of equipment.
11 Prescribed fires -- and, again, these are in
12 the order of their importance to the BLM in terms of
13 treatment acres, so mechanical is the most common
14 method to be used. Prescribed fires is the second most
15 common method to be used. Again, using fire --
16 man-induced fire to remove vegetation or control
17 vegetation, especially for hazardous fuel reduction;
18 and in some cases, using natural fires, especially in
19 some states like Alaska where it is a little hard to
20 get people out to set fires, so they use natural fires,
21 lightening caused fires, in areas where they have kind
22 of set up the burn plan already, and let sort of mother
23 nature do a lot of the work for them and keep an eye on
24 the fire to make sure it is kind of achieving agency
25 goals.

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1 The third most common method to be used is the
2 use of chemicals or herbicides. Here we are spraying.
3 One picture shows the BLM spraying using a helicopter
4 and another one using an ATV to apply herbicides.
5 The fourth most common method will be the use
6 of biological control techniques. Biological control
7 can be the use of domestic livestock to contain
8 vegetation, such as in this case, goats are out here
9 controlling vegetation along this stream bank. We can
10 also use sheep and other domestic livestock, and it
11 also can be the use of insects or pathogens that will
12 feed upon vegetation and weaken or kill the vegetation.
13 It is also an effective control method, and it is used
14 extensively, especially in Montana. They are kind of
15 leading the charge in the bio-control method, as does
16 California. They do a lot of biological control.
17 And finally the least common method is manual
18 control through the person using a chainsaw. Again,
19 use of hand tools, and that is used in areas where, you
20 know, you are doing spot treatments or smaller
21 treatments that would be difficult to do with large
22 aerial spray program, let's say, or large heavy
23 equipment where you need a little more precise control
24 than with some of the other methods.
25 In addition to evaluating the overall proposal

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1 to treat 6 million acres, there were some other things
2 that we tried to achieve in this EIS that was of
3 importance BLM. Probably one of the other major things
4 we were looking at was to evaluate the risk to humans,
5 plants, and animals from using new herbicides to
6 control vegetation. One of things that BLM had
7 requested from the field offices and what not was to
8 use some new herbicides that the field offices felt
9 would be effective in controlling certain weed species
10 or certain types of invasive vegetation.
11 The four new herbicides that we looked at that
12 the BLM wanted to consider for use were diflufenzopyr,
13 diquat, fluridone, and imazapic. Diquat and fluridone
14 are primarily aquatic herbicides used in water
15 situations where you have water. And diflufenzopyr and
16 imazapic are used in terrestrial or upland situations.
17 In the process of doing these assessments, and
18 basically we were looking at what are the risks of
19 using these chemicals on people and plants and animals,
20 and in particular threatened, endangered species, which
21 was the interest of some of the other federal agencies,
22 we did extensive risk assessments that took really the
23 bulk of the time in the last several years working on
24 these risk assessments. And in the process of working
25 on these risk assessments, we coordinated extensively

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1 with the Environmental Protection Agency, and the U.S.
2 Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Oceanic and
3 Atmospheric Administration National Marine Fisheries
4 Service, or NOAA Fisheries Service, to look at how to
5 best evaluate the risk to plants and animals and humans
6 from use of these herbicides as well as some of the
7 herbicides that BLM is currently using.
8 And the goal of the BLM and these agencies was
9 in particular to develop a protocol that we could all
10 use in the future and going forward to evaluate maybe
11 new chemicals that may come on the market in the
12 future. And part of this arose by looking at some of
13 the methodology that the BLM had used, oh, about 10 or
14 15 years ago, when they did some similar EISs and
15 finding that some of that methodology was either
16 outdated, or didn't adequately cover some species of
17 concern, especially Salmonids and some of the other
18 fish species. And so we were trying to come up with a
19 protocol or a method that really looked at the risk of
20 those species as well as humans and some of the other
21 plants and animals.
22 So we developed a protocol that is included in
23 the appendix of the EIS, and you are certainly welcome
24 to look at that. And the goal of developing the
25 protocol is then to hopefully be able to use it in the

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1 future to evaluate chemicals that may come on the
2 market that the BLM would like to consider for use in
3 conjunction with the appropriate National Environment
4 Policy Act or NEPA Process to insure that not only are
5 the risks assessed, but the public has input into the
6 whole process and to make sure that these types of
7 evaluations are done properly. So, again, evaluate the
8 risk of new and existing chemicals and to develop a
9 protocol and hopefully be able to use that protocol in
10 the future.
11 The reason we did a programmatic EIS -- well,
12 the overall reason is federal agencies are required
13 under NEPA to prepare an environmental impact statement
14 if there is a reasonable potential for significant
15 environmental impacts from their proposed action. When
16 you think of the use of herbicides, that generally
17 raises the likelihood that there are significant
18 environmental impacts, or certainly that potential.
19 And in fact through the scoping process,
20 through the risk process, and also through the process
21 of looking at the earlier EISs that were done by the
22 BLM in the late 80s and 90s, we decided that really the
23 use of herbicides was the primary issue of concern that
24 needed to be evaluated in the EIS. So that is the path
25 we took to focus the EIS on the use of herbicides.

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1 Thus the programmatic EIS analyzes the effects of the
2 use of herbicides on natural and social resources, and
3 it, again, looks at the potential use of herbicides
4 throughout the west, including Alaska.
5 As part of the EIS process in looking at and
6 analyzing the potential effects of using herbicides, we
7 considered five different alternatives that were
8 developed, many of these really by the public during
9 the scoping process. What were some of the different
10 ideas that the public came up with during scoping in
11 terms of ways or ways not to use herbicides? And these
12 are the five alternative that were evaluated in the
13 EIS.
14 The first ones required in all EISs and that
15 is basically the No Action Alternative or essentially
16 continuing what the BLM is doing now. Right now the
17 BLM treats about 2 million acres annually. Of those 2
18 million acres, about 300 thousand acres involve the use
19 of herbicides. The BLM has approval under earlier EISs
20 to treat vegetation in 14 states using herbicides, and
21 they are currently allowed to use 20 herbicides. Back
22 in the earlier EISs, they looked at 20 herbicides and
23 20 were approved for use. So right now we have 14
24 states, 300 hundred thousand acres, and 20 herbicides.
25 The next one is Alternative B, and that is

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1 basically the BLM's preferred alternative or their
2 current proposal, and it is a little bit different than
3 A. First of all, as we discussed, we are increasing
4 the number of acres; 6 million overall. Of those 6
5 million acres, about 930 thousand acres involve the use
6 of herbicides. So we have about a threefold increase
7 in total number of acres and about a threefold increase
8 in acres using herbicides.
9 In addition, we have added three new states to
10 the mix that were kind of forgotten, for whatever
11 reasons in the earlier EISs, or maybe nobody cared back
12 then. The three states that we also looked at in this
13 EIS were Texas, Nebraska, and Alaska. Now, the BLM
14 doesn't have a lot of acres in Texas and Nebraska,
15 which is maybe why nobody cared that much about them in
16 the '80s and early '90s, but obviously Alaska does.
17 Alaska has about 81 million acres. At this time Alaska
18 doesn't plan to use herbicides, but they would like the
19 opportunity in the future should the need arise. So we
20 did look at the use of herbicides in Alaska.
21 In addition, Alternative B, D, and E are a
22 little different from A in that the BLM would only use
23 14 of their currently available herbicides, plus the
24 four new herbicides that we evaluated as part of B, D,
25 and E -- and we'll discuss D and E in a little bit.

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1 The reason they decided to go that route and
2 in effect basically not using six herbicides that are
3 currently available to them is that the six herbicides
4 that we are not looking at have rarely or never been
5 used in about the last seven, eight, nine years. So
6 the BLM did not feel that they were going to use them
7 going forward, and the consensus was also that unless
8 we really have a good handle of the risks of these
9 herbicides that are little used, it probably didn't
10 make a lot of sense to continue using them until we
11 better understood the risks.
12 So, in fact, as part of Alternative B, and D
13 and E, we not only looked at the risks from the four
14 herbicides that the BLM would like to use, but also
15 between the BLM and also some risk assessments that the
16 Forest Service has done in the last few years, looked
17 at the risks to the other 14 herbicides to get a sense
18 of, well, are those also safe? Even though the BLM is
19 currently authorized to use them, are they in fact safe
20 given what we know now compared to what we knew in the
21 late '80s and '90s. So that is also part of B that BLM
22 using new herbicides, more acres, a few more states,
23 and also getting a better understanding of some of
24 their existing herbicides as well as the one they
25 proposed.

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1 A number of members of the public, as shown in
2 Alternative C, didn't want the BLM to use herbicides at
3 all. So we looked at an alternative were herbicides
4 would not be used and just the other four treatment
5 methods were used.
6 Other folks in the public were concerned about
7 herbicide drift. Especially when you apply herbicides
8 by helicopters of aircraft, it tends for the herbicide
9 to drift from the target area into a non-target area.
10 So we looked at an alternative that basically looked at
11 what are the issues or the benefits and the downsides
12 of not spraying herbicides.
13 And finally, we have Alternative E, which is
14 an alternative that was developed based on a proposal
15 given to us by a coalition and environmental groups.
16 And this proposal has a number of components in which
17 herbicides are only one portion of it, and that
18 proposal is an appendix in the EIS, towards the back of
19 the EIS. It is actually about 35 pages in length, so I
20 would suggest if you are interested in it, you read it
21 because I'm only going to hit a few of the highlights
22 tonight, but it's a rather extensive proposal.
23 And among other things as it kind of relates
24 to herbicides, one thing that they suggested is that
25 the BLM not use acetolactate synthase-inhibiting

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1 herbicides. These are herbicides that are active, and
2 if they -- especially if they drift from the non-target
3 area have the potential to adversely impact non-target
4 plants; and there has been some recent incidents where
5 sometimes these have drifted from a target area into a
6 non-target area, so they were concerned about them.
7 The focus of their proposal was also on
8 passive restoration. As you can see, this proposal by
9 the BLM is pretty active. There is passive
10 restoration, but there is also a lot of active
11 restoration using treatment methods to restore and
12 rehabilitate lands and to control vegetation and reduce
13 risk of fire. Their focus was more on passive
14 restoration; let nature takes it's course and do some
15 other things and maybe let nature take a greater role
16 in resolving some of these issues versus taking a more
17 active role.
18 They also suggested that we try to discourage
19 or eliminate spraying areas where amphibians might
20 incur in certain -- obviously near wetlands and whatnot
21 where you might find amphibians, and also to be
22 extremely careful and work, maybe perhaps more closely
23 with tribal groups and Alaska natives to insure that
24 their resources aren't impacted by herbicides and the
25 other treatment methods. Again, I suggest you look in

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1 the EIS because the full text is there.
2 Well, some of you might be saying, hasn't the
3 BLM been treating vegetation for many years, so really
4 what is new? As I mentioned, the BLM went through the
5 same process in the late '80s and early '90s when they
6 prepared some EISs to do sort of the same kinds of
7 things we are doing now, but there are some major
8 differences.
9 First of all, there were actually four EISs
10 done in the late '80s and early '90s, and they had kind
11 of a more regional focus, at least for three of the
12 four. The one on the top right was the 13 state EIS
13 and it in fact covered 13 states, so it covered a good
14 chunk of the west.
15 The Northwest EIS covered five states, and
16 then there was one act specifically done for western
17 Oregon, and finally one was done for California, so
18 back then they did four EISs. But in the process of
19 doing those EISs, obviously they didn't cover Texas,
20 the they didn't cover Nebraska, and they didn't cover
21 Alaska.
22 They also, under those EISs, really only
23 accounted for about a half million acres. So when they
24 totaled up all the acres that I guess probably the
25 field offices provided recommendations for, they came

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1 up with about a half million acres. Since then through
2 policy and other legislative processes and what not,
3 the BLM has received authorization to treat an
4 additional 1.5 million acres, which brings us up to
5 that 2 million acres I talked about. But as far as the
6 EISs are concerned, we are only about a half of a
7 million acres.
8 Again, I mentioned three states weren't
9 covered. They obviously did not talk about the new
10 herbicides that we're evaluating in this EIS. They did
11 not develop a protocol to evaluate new herbicides in
12 the future, and as I mentioned earlier, they really
13 didn't do a very rigorous review of the risk to plants
14 and animals, and specifically threatened, endangered
15 species, and ever more specifically, Salmonids.
16 So this EIS is really focused on that and
17 there has been a lot of effort with the Fish and
18 Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries to look at those
19 risks. And in support of that part of the EIS, we
20 actually prepared a Biological Assessment, which is
21 about a 500-page document. You can see it out front.
22 And as I will show you in a little bit if you get the
23 CDs that have the EIS and ER, the Biological Assessment
24 is included on those CDs. And that Biological
25 Assessment evaluates actually evaluates a risk not only

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1 for the use of herbicides, but the other treatment
2 methods to threatened, endangered species that might be
3 found on Bureau of Land Management lands, and there are
4 about 350 species.
5 As I mentioned, we also did a programmatic
6 environmental report. And you might say, why did you
7 do that? Well, basically the environmental report was
8 done to address or evaluate the issues associated with
9 the other treatment methods, so manual, mechanical,
10 biological control methods, and prescribed fires.
11 Through scoping, through the early EISs and whatnot,
12 the BLM decided that they weren't really making any
13 decisions as it relates to the use of those treatment
14 methods, thus it is not necessary to do an EIS for
15 those methods; however, we still felt that we needed to
16 evaluate the issues associated with those treatments
17 methods for two primary reasons.
18 One, for the cumulative effects analysis that
19 was done as part of the EIS. And the cumulative
20 effects looks at the affects of activities that the BLM
21 has done in the past, the present, and the future. And
22 because of one of our alternatives actually considers
23 no herbicide use, there is really no way we can
24 evaluate cumulative effects from no herbicide use if we
25 don't look at the other treatment methods.

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1 So to properly evaluate how herbicide use fits
2 in with the other treatment methods, we had to do an
3 analysis of basically all the treatment methods. Even
4 though we are not making any specific decisions
5 relating to those four treatment methods, we had to
6 look at them to judge their effects in the context of
7 also using or not using herbicides. And as I mentioned
8 also, the other treatment methods in that analysis was
9 especially important to the Fish and Wildlife Service
10 and NOAA Fisheries. They not only wanted to know what
11 the risks are to Salmonids and other threatened,
12 endangered species that may be found on BLM lands or
13 may use BLM lands for part or all of their life
14 history, but they also need to know well how do you
15 other treatment methods fit into the context of impacts
16 to these species.
17 What they're especially considered about is in
18 many cases the BLM may just say, burn and area and then
19 treat it with herbicides or use other treatments
20 methods. There may actually be two or three treatment
21 methods used on the same piece of ground. So they
22 wanted to know how all these different methods fit
23 together, and how these species of concern might be
24 affected by these actions.
25 This chart sort of gives you an overview of

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1 the importance of the different treatment methods in
2 terms of percentage of acres treated, sort of under the
3 current situation, and under the preferred alternative,
4 or what they would propose to do in the future. And,
5 again, these are best guesstimates based on what the
6 field offices have provided to the BLM.
7 And I am also going to discuss what types of
8 numbers we have got for Idaho, and it sounds like we
9 have got a number of folks here from eastern Oregon, so
10 I'll discuss those as well.
11 As you can see, the two most common methods
12 are the use of prescribed fire and mechanical
13 treatments, with the mechanical treatments, in fact,
14 increasing in importance and becoming the most
15 important method under the preferred alternative.
16 Mechanical treatments are especially important in
17 hazardous fuel control and also weed control,
18 especially in areas where it is difficult to spray or
19 use fire.
20 A lot of these treatments are geared towards
21 treatments in was we call the WUI, or the Wildland
22 Urban Interface, and these are areas where there is BLM
23 land in close proximity to public lands. And there is
24 a lot of concern, obviously, from fires, as we have
25 seen in recent years, harming people or their property.

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1 Obviously, you read all the time in California or some
2 of these other states where wildfires have destroyed a
3 considerable amount of property, and in many cases,
4 killed people. So a lot of the treatments are geared
5 towards that WUI Wildland Urban Interface at least to
6 initially reduce that risk. So mechanical treatments
7 are obviously a benefit, especially there where it is
8 close to where people live, and it is difficult to
9 spray or burn or use other treatments.
10 The herbicide use actually holds fairly
11 constant over current, versus what we project in the
12 future, about 16 percent of the treatments will be
13 using herbicides. Biological control and manual
14 treatments decline under the preferred alternative.
15 However, keep in mind, the current alternative includes
16 2 million acres. The preferred alternative is for 6
17 million acres. So, actually, in terms of total acres,
18 it will increase under all treatment methods, but
19 percentage wise, herbicides stay steady; fire,
20 mechanical, increase; and biological control and manual
21 methods decrease.
22 If we look at Idaho to see how they kind of
23 fit in with this, the most common treatment in Idaho is
24 the use of mechanical treatments, and right now about
25 half of the treatments are done mechanically. That will

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1 drop to about 42 percent under the preferred
2 alternative based on their projection. So mechanical
3 treatments will actually be a little higher than what
4 we are seeing for the western U.S. Prescribed fire,
5 under current and future projections, is around 20
6 percent; so that's, oh, 10 to 15 percent less than what
7 the western U.S. is looking at. And the use of
8 herbicides is holding fairly study at about 25 percent
9 in Idaho. So the use of herbicides is up about 10
10 percent from what we are seeing in the rest of the
11 western U.S. Biological controls, around 6 percent in
12 the future, and manual about 4 percent; so somewhat
13 similar to what we are seeing in the western U.S.
14 If we look at eastern Oregon, we get a little
15 different situation. Where Idaho's prescribed fire was
16 running about 20 percent, eastern Oregon is projecting
17 about 40 percent. That's what they currently do, and
18 that is about what they project in the future. Their
19 fire use is higher than what we are seeing for the West
20 as a whole, and certainly double that of Idaho.
21 Mechanical treatments, again, pretty constant from what
22 they're doing now to what they project in the future,
23 around 33 to 35 percent, and so that's somewhat similar
24 to what we are see for the rest of West. Manual
25 treatments, interestingly, are pretty darn high in

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1 eastern Oregon, around 15 to 20 percent -- manual
2 treatments -- so they are much higher. And the use of
3 herbicides in eastern Oregon, currently about 6 percent
4 of treatments with herbicides. We run about 8 percent
5 under the preferred alternative. So 6 to 8 percent,
6 pretty study, and obviously that's about half of what
7 the rest of the West is projecting.
8 So where do we go from here? Scoping, which
9 is the process by which we ask the public what types of
10 things we should address, and the draft EIS was done
11 way back in January through March of 2002. As I
12 mentioned, we haven't been goofing off for the last,
13 almost four years, although maybe sometimes it kind of
14 seems like it to some folks. But a lot of that time
15 was spent doing the risk assessments. We had
16 conference calls weekly with the EPA, Environmental
17 Projection Agency and the Fish and Wildlife Service and
18 NOAA Fisheries for good year almost, and then a lot of
19 back and forth as we developed the protocol and then
20 the different work products and shared them with those
21 agencies to make sure we were all on the same page so
22 that they were comfortable with it. Also the document
23 was reviewed by all the different state and field
24 offices from the BLM, and we had a technical team that
25 reviewed the document, so that took quite a long time

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1 to get the input from -- many, many, many, many people
2 in the BLM looked at the documents and all had
3 comments.
4 If you're interested in some of these
5 supporting documents that were prepared for the EIS --
6 there was also air modeling reports that looked at the
7 affects of prescribed fire and how that would effect
8 air quality in the western U.S. There were reports
9 done for air quality. There were reports done in
10 support of the culture resource issues, and then of
11 course the risk assessments for all the chemicals -- or
12 at least ten of the different chemicals that I think
13 the BLM actually evaluated, and the remainder being
14 evaluated by the Forest Service and those are on their
15 web site. If you would like to look at those risk
16 assessments -- the reason we didn't publish them was
17 because each one probably runs between 250 to 400 pages
18 for the entire documents for one chemical. If you go
19 on the CDs, you can find them there. That is pretty
20 the easiest way to take a look at those documents
21 because they are rather extensive. All the other
22 supporting reports are also on the CDs, as is the
23 biological assessment that runs 500 plus pages. It is
24 also on the CD.
25 The draft EIS, as Brian mentioned, was

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1 available on November 10th to the public. We are
2 currently on our six of ten comment meetings -- public
3 hearing meetings. Tomorrow night is Billings, then
4 Cheyenne, and then on the 13th, we have Las Vegas and
5 Washington DC on the same day. We are going to split
6 up, so don't worry, we have got them covered.
7 The final EIS -- well, then the comment period
8 actually ends January 9th, so if you have comments on
9 these documents, get them in by January 9th. The final
10 EIS is projected to be available in late spring 2006.
11 So between January 9th and then, we'll be taking all
12 your comments, looking at them, seeing how we can
13 improve the document based on your input, and then
14 preparing the final EIS.
15 The public will then be allowed to review the
16 final EIS. They will have at least a 30-day review
17 period for that. And then it is hoped that sometime in
18 the summer -- right now we're projecting July, but we
19 also projected this project would be done in 2003 or
20 2004, so we take all these projections with a grain of
21 salt. But we are hoping that the document is done, the
22 record decision on one or more -- one of the
23 alternatives, or a combination of alternative
24 components will be out around July of 2006.
25 So what can you do to help? Well, the first

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1 thing that is probably most important is that if you
2 like -- if you are interested and would like to comment
3 or find out more about what the BLM is proposing, read
4 the documents. Having trouble sleeping? This is a
5 good document to read. If you don't have much going on
6 during the holidays, this will fill up much of your
7 time. No, actually, there probably -- hopefully there
8 is some interesting things in here. It's just the rest
9 of us have been working on this forever, so sometimes
10 we kind of glaze over it.
11 Anyhow, review the documents. There are
12 several ways to do it. There are CDs out front. Keep
13 in mind there is a two-CD set. So I noticed last night
14 for some reason people -- even though you were trying
15 to tell them that, were only grabbing one, or somehow
16 it looked like on the table that one or two people only
17 grabbed one. There is actually two CDs; one has the
18 EIS on it; the other one has -- and actually it has the
19 environmental report, I believe -- and the other one
20 has all the supplemental reports, the appendices,
21 biological assessments on this one, and all the risk
22 assessments and whatnot. So make sure you get both
23 CDs.
24 And I would recommend this over all other
25 methods, except for maybe a hard copy. All this

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1 information that is shown up there is also on the web
2 site. For the web site, you go to www.blm.gov to get
3 there. It is pretty straightforward. The first link
4 on the web site will take you to the Veg EIS, so it is
5 nice to be number one on their site. And the site is
6 pretty well laid out, but for those of you like me that
7 have dial up connections at home, it can take a while.
8 So since you're here tonight, grab a CD. It will save
9 you a lot of time and grief.
10 The other way, if you really want a hardcopy,
11 Brian has extra hardcopies at his office. He would be
12 happy to send them out. And especially as we get
13 closer to January 9th, he will be very anxious to send
14 them out otherwise we're taking up floor space, so ask
15 him for a copy. We actually sent out hardcopies of all
16 the people that requested them. We originally had a
17 large mailing list way back in the beginning. We
18 picked up new names as we went through this process.
19 We asked all those people that would like a hardcopy,
20 and those folks that responded and said they wanted
21 one. So if you for some reason didn't get one and
22 thought you should have, ask Brian, and he will get you
23 a hardcopy. The other thing you can do is go to the
24 BLM field or state offices, and they should have copies
25 there also to look at, if you want to. You can't take

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1 them, but you can certainly look at them.
2 Once you have gone through them and get a
3 sense of what we're talking about and you have comments
4 on the document, there are several ways to do that.
5 One way is to pick up a comment response form that was
6 on the front desk there. This has several things here
7 you can do. One, you can provide your comment and send
8 it back to Brian. If you would like to get copy of the
9 final EIS, fill this out, send it back to Brian or
10 leave it with us tonight. If you would like to be on
11 the mailing list to find out more about the process as
12 we go towards the end, fill it out and give it back to
13 us. And there actually is information on the bottom as
14 to where to mail it or send it if you want to do that
15 route; otherwise, I will show you the other ways you
16 can get information back to us in the next slide.
17 What we want to know, as I mentioned before,
18 what are the issues that we should have covered? What
19 mistakes did we make? What things did we overlook?
20 What things did we maybe not cover adequately enough?
21 And if you have any alternative ideas as to how to
22 treat vegetation that we should have considered, we
23 would like to know those as well.
24 So where can you send your comments? There
25 are many different ways to do this. Obviously, you can

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1 mail them to Brian. In case you don't feel like
2 writing this down or don't want to write it down, we
3 actually have a handout here, and also on this comment
4 form. You should have gotten at least one or both of
5 these when you came here. All this information is
6 towards the back of this little fact sheet here, and it
7 is also on the bottom of this sheet. You can mail the
8 information back to Brian. He is in Reno, Nevada, and
9 he would be happy to get it, via mail; or you can fax
10 it to Brian. That is a fax number there.
11 And finally, if you want to -- I know a lot of
12 people like to put together their comments on their
13 word processor and then just e-mail it off to somebody.
14 We have an e-mail address you can also send it to, and
15 that is, actually, how I think we have been getting
16 most of our comments so far is via e-mail. It is
17 probably the easiest way for most people. That is
18 fairly simple, vegeis@nv.blm.gov. So that is pretty
19 straight forward, and if you could send your comments
20 by January 9th because that is the cutoff date.
21 We certainly appreciate your comments. While
22 I have been on this trip, I am actually reviewing an
23 EIS for a project that I had worked on in the past and
24 am no longer working on, and I have found some flaws in
25 their EIS. So I will be sending my comments to them on

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1 their EIS, and I expect my comments to be treated
2 seriously, and you can be well assured that whatever
3 comments you send us, we will treat very seriously.
4 That is something I feel very strongly about that if
5 somebody went to all the trouble of sending us, that we
6 darn well better listen to it.
7 That's all I have to say. Gina will now
8 conduct the public hearing.
9 MS. RAMOS: Good evening. My name is Gina Ramos,
10 and I am tonight's hearing officer. This hearing will
11 come to order.
12 As Stuart mentioned earlier, this is an
13 opportunity to provide public comments on the draft
14 Environmental Impact Statement and Environmental
15 Report. We asked anyone that was interested in
16 providing comments to sign up. Even if you did not
17 sign up to provide comments, you still will be given
18 the opportunity to provide comments. All of the
19 comments that we receive tonight, either written or
20 orally, will be compiled and analyzed and considered as
21 we prepare the final Environmental Impact Statement and
22 Environmental Report.
23 We will ask each person that has signed up --
24 and so far there is only one -- but anyone that wishes
25 to provide a comment to either come forward or to stand

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1 up where you're sitting. Please state your name, the
2 organization you represent, if any, and provide your
3 comment. If you also have a written comment, we would
4 like you to submit it to our court reporter as part of
5 the formal hearing.
6 We will initially give everyone five minutes.
7 And when you have one minute remaining, Stuart will
8 just lift up that 1-minute mark, and we will ask you
9 summarize your comments. If time is remaining, we will
10 provide you some additional time.
11 Unlike the open house, we will not be
12 entertaining any questions. Again, this is a formal
13 hearing, and this is an opportunity to provide
14 comments; however, when the hearing is adjourned, we
15 will remain and answer any question that you may have.
16 So I would like to call the first person.
17 Katie Fite, you can come forward and provide your
18 comments, or stand up where you are, but please speak
19 as clearly as possible so our court reporter can record
20 your comments.
21 MS. FITE: Okay. Well, I'll just stand here, I 1
22 guess. My name is Katie Fite, K-a-t-i-e F-i-t-e with
23 Western Watersheds Project.
24 Several years ago, two or three years ago sort 2
25 of near the beginning of the spring, scoping, a

2 (cont.)

1 coalition of groups, American Lands, Alliance, Western
2 Watersheds Project, Committee for the High Desert,
3 Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides,
4 working with Mary O'Brien submitted a citizen's
5 alternative based primarily on passive restoration that
6 was referred to by the presenter. I am very very
7 disappointed to see that that alternative was passed
8 over. I really don't understand the reasons why,
9 having discussed a little bit with Brian in the earlier
10 part of this session.

3

11 What I see here is BLM is proposing, in the
12 report, massive, massive new disturbance -- expanding
13 disturbance from mechanical methods, fire, and other
14 methods on public lands. While at the same time, not
15 undertaking actions that are needed to address the
16 causes of weeds and the causes of any heightened fire
17 risk.

4

18 One of the primary causes, of course, of weeds
19 across public lands is livestock grazing and trampling
20 activity that disturbs, alters, and destroys native
21 vegetation, livestock infectors of weeds, seed
22 transport in their fur, the mud of their hooves, and in
23 their feces. Livestock also contribute greatly to
24 hazardous fuel problems across public lands, including
25 increasing density, small size dog hair thickets of

1 trees, and by destroying macrobiotic crescent opening
2 the soils up for weed invasive -- cheatgrass and other
3 flammable weed invasions, among other things.

5

4 So when I look -- and I have not read these
5 documents in their entirety yet, but in listening to
6 their presentation, what I see here is a bonanza for
7 the chemicals companies. BLM is proposing to greatly
8 expand its weed treatment on public lands, at the same
9 time it is increasing its disturbance. Part of what is
10 going on here -- I'm sure the only way BLM would be
11 able to pay for treating all these expanded acres is
12 using federal fire funds.

6

13 As part of the treatments that are going to be
14 conducted under the Healthy Forests Initiative, fire
15 funds will be used to buy these herbicides that are
16 going to be sprayed on public lands, while at the same
17 time, we aren't addressing the catalyst sheep grazing
18 damage. We aren't addressing the unnecessary roading
19 on public lands. We aren't addressing the run-a-muck
20 now, oil and gas exploration, including in Brian's home
21 state of Nevada, where there are now suddenly all these
22 proposals for ramped oil and gas exploration across
23 very fragile sagebrush landscapes in sage grouse
24 habitats, pigmy rabbit habitats, etc.
25 So what we have here is an agency proposing

1 massive new disturbance -- and going back to Nevada
2 again -- having just reviewed the ELRMP, what does the
3 ELRMP propose to do, but treat millions of acres of
4 pinyon juniper, woody vegetation. They aren't focusing
5 on the cheatgrass and getting rid of the cheatgrass, or
6 the extensive crested wheatgrass seedings, which are
7 basically biological deserts out there. No, they are
8 planning radically disturbing, through the use of fire,
9 through the use of mechanical methods, valuable pinyon
10 juniper forests.

7

11 And what is behind this all? In my mind,
12 working on public lands livestock grazing for many
13 years, is that if we kill woody vegetation on public
14 lands, we will temporarily -- or at least some people
15 believe -- increase forage for livestock. It doesn't
16 matter how much cheatgrass and other kinds of weeds
17 resolve from that -- but anyway, that's where I see
18 this process going.

8

19 And I go back to the alternative that focused
20 on passive restoration, closing unnecessary roads and
21 rehabbing them so that they don't present bringing
22 conduits into wild land areas so that vehicles don't
23 drive across them setting fires with catalytic
24 converters. And doing things like reducing the
25 livestock impact on the landscape. All those methods

9

1 need to considered, along with this massive spray
2 campaign that the BLM is embarking on.

10

3 And I guess I just wonder, how much will this
4 cost? Is there anywhere in these documents where we
5 have a real and honest assessment of the cost, not only
6 of the chemicals but also of this massive array of
7 treatments? I do know that, for example, in Urban
8 Interface Projects that we have been involved in Nevada
9 in the Nevada in the Mt. Wilson area, BLM was proposing
10 to spend 10 to 12 million dollars, at least, over three
11 to four years to treat 50-square miles of public land.
12 Of course, they weren't anywhere near any urban areas,
13 a lot of them, but it was just a way to spend fire
14 money and increase livestock forage. And that was
15 eventually settled through litigation.

11

16 So I would just urge BLM to prepare a
17 Supplemental Draft EIS that embraces a broader range of
18 alternatives, including passive restoration techniques.
19 And we -- the same coalition of groups that worked in
20 developing an alternative before, would be happy to
21 work with you in amending what we presented, or
22 providing additional information, if necessary.
23 MS. RAMOS: Thank you, Katie.
24 Would anyone else like to provide any comments
25 tonight?

1 Would you please state your name, the
2 organization you represent, if any, and provide your
3 comments. And as I said earlier, when we have one
4 minute remaining, Stuart will hold up that one-minute
5 warning card.
6 Again, if you all have -- Katie, if you have a
7 written comment, if you would turn that in also.
12 8 MS. RICHARDS: My name is Brenda Richards, and I am
9 the federal lands chairman for the Idaho Cattle
10 Association, and also the public land chairman for
11 Idaho for the National Public Lands counsel.
13 12 I would like thank the BLM for taking the
13 time -- I know it has been a long process -- in putting
14 forward this EIS, and looking at the alternatives as
15 extensively as they have. I have had the opportunity
16 to participate on several of the tours in the Oregon
17 and Idaho area pertaining to the vegetation treatments,
18 whether they are manual, fire, chemical, or the no
19 alternative -- or no treatment alternative.
14 20 I would like to say that we need to remember
21 that these are public lands. They are multiple use,
22 and they do sustain a large amount of multiple use.
23 In treating weeds -- and as we referred to
15 24 earlier, the woody vegetation such as juniper -- it
25 does help all the multiple uses. It helps the

1 wildlife. It does help to provide a more diverse
2 ecosystem out there. And a lot of these things also
3 contribute to damage to the watershed. The juniper
4 encroachment does take tremendous amount of water out
5 of the watershed and does not allow for a lot of
6 vegetation to come back in. There has extensive
7 studies done on many of these treatments, and these
8 studies were looked at by the BLM.
16 9 I would also like to state that livestock
10 grazing has always been used as a fuel reduction --
11 when it is used properly. And that is another multiple
12 use, and it is something that was looked at in the EIS
13 and needs to be given the credit due.
17 14 Again, with these vegetation treatments, it is
15 not only a benefit to the public lands, but it is a
16 benefit to the wildlife aspect and to the whole
17 watershed when you look at the large ecosystem picture.
18 Thank you.
19 THE COURT: Thank you very much.
20 Would anyone else like to provide a comment
21 tonight? Okay.
22 As stated earlier, this is the six of ten
23 formal hearings that the BLM will be conducting. We
24 will conclude on December 13th with a hearing in Las
25 Vegas, Nevada, and one in Washington DC. If you know

1 of anyone that was unable to attend tonight and is
2 interested in providing some comments, please encourage
3 them and take some extra CDs, or they can stop by the
4 BLM field offices and the BLM state office and pick up
5 a copy of the CD, or they can go onto the web site.
6 We thank you all for your comments tonight,
7 and we thank you for coming in and listening to the
8 presentation.
9 This will conclude tonight's hearing, and this
10 hearing is now adjourned. Thank you and have a safe
11 trip home tonight.
12 (The hearing concluded at 7:47 p.m.)
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25

1 REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

2 STATE OF IDAHO)
) ss.
3 COUNTY OF ADA)

4

5

6 I, JANET FRENCH, Certified Shorthand Reporter and
7 Notary Public in and for the State of Idaho, do hereby
8 certify:
9 That said hearing was taken down by me in shorthand
10 at the time and place therein named and thereafter
11 reduced to typewriting under my direction, and that the
12 foregoing transcript contains a full, true and verbatim
13 record of said hearing.
14 I further certify that I have no interest in the
15 event of this action.
16 WITNESS my hand and seal this 15th day of December,
17 2005.
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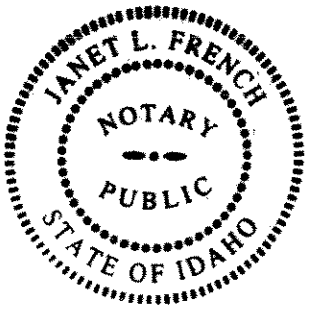

Janet French
JANET FRENCH,
CSR and Notary Public
in and for the State of
Idaho.

25 My Commission Expires: 10-28-10

NOTARY PUBLIC
STATE OF IDAHO