TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

National Vegetation Treatment Programmatic EIS and ER for the Western U.S. and Alaska

Pursuant to Notice, a public hearing on the National Vegetation Treatment EIS and Environmental Report, was held at the office of the Bureau of Land Management, Billings, Montana, on the 7th day of December, 2005, beginning at 7:00 p.m.

PRESENTER:

STUART LINDSEY PAULUS, Ph.D.
Program Manager, Environmental Services
ENSR International
9521 Willows Road NE
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Also present:

Gina Ramos, BLM
Brain Amme, BLM
Linda Mazzu, BLM
Ken Fisher, ENSR

PUBLIC COMMENT PAGE
Hank McNeel 40

P R O C E E D I N G S

7:00 p.m.

MR. AMME: We welcome you to our seventh public hearing on the National Vegetation Treatment EIS and Environmental Report.

My name is Brian Amme. I'm the Project Manager for this project, along with my co-team lead Gina Ramos, Senior Lead Specialist from the Washington office, and Stuart Paulus from ENSR International, our contractor to help us do the toxicological risk assessments on the herbicides and write the EIS.

Our assistant from ENSR, Ken Fisher, is also here with us tonight.

We've been traveling all over. We've been traveling a city a day. Boise last night, and Grand Junction the night before.

We're in Billings tonight, Cheyenne tomorrow, and then we're going to finish up in Washington, D.C. and Las Vegas, Nevada next Tuesday, so it's been quite a hectic schedule for us.

But anyway, tonight Stuart will give a brief presentation on the purpose of this EIS

and Environmental Report, to kind of refresh our memories on what it is. And I'll just let him dive into that right now, and we'll get on with this.

MR. PAULUS: I want to thank you for coming to tonight's public hearing on the BLM's Vegetation Treatments Programmatic EIS and Environmental Report for the Western U.S. and Alaska.

The purpose of the hearing tonight is to help you understand the BLM's proposal to treat up to 6 million acres annually in the western U.S., including Alaska. We also hope to better explain the role of the EIS and the Environmental Report.

This proposal and supporting documents is a little different than some of the other ones the BLM has done, in that not only are we preparing an EIS, but we're also preparing an Environmental Report, and we'll discuss later on why we did that.

And finally, perhaps the most important reason for the meeting tonight, is to solicit public comments on issues and concerns that you felt should have been addressed in the EIS,

maybe errors or omissions that we made in the document that you'd like to see clarified or fixed.

Also, if you have alternative proposals for treating vegetation that you thought the BLM should have considered or think we should consider for the final, we'd also like to know that as well.

The BLM was founded in 1946 with the goal of serving current and future publics and restoring and maintaining the health of the land. The agency administers nearly 262 million acres of surface lands, and about 700 million acres of subsurface mineral lands.

Nearly all the surface acreage is in Alaska and the western U.S. It's shown on this map, as you can see, the bulk of the acres for kind of the core central portion in the western U.S., but obviously a good chunk of land up here in Montana, Nevada, Wyoming, Idaho.

And although it's hard to tell from the scale of this map, Alaska actually has about 81 million acres of BLM land, so about a third of the acres are in Alaska, even though it's kind of hard to tell from this map. So Alaska is a

very important state to consider in terms of vegetation treatments.

So what is the BLM proposing to do and why? Well, the first thing, and probably the most overarching goal, is to treat vegetation on up to 6 million acres annually in the western U.S. and Alaska, using five primary treatment methods.

The five primary methods are manual methods, mechanical methods, biological control methods, the use of prescribed fire, and the use of herbicides.

The way we came up with these 6 million acres is way back when this project began, which was actually in late 2001, after scoping meetings in 2002, we went out to all the different field offices for the BLM and asked each field office to give us a list of projects that they had proposed in the next zero to three years, and project what they foresaw out from about three to ten years into the future.

We asked them for an estimate of acres to be treated, types of vegetation to be treated, methods to be used, location where the treatments would occur, and a number of other

variables that we asked for information on.

This came back to Brian and Gina, the project managers, and using that information, we came up with an estimate of about 6 million acres would have to be treated annually to meet the goals that the BLM was proposing.

Basically, the goals that the BLM was trying, or the objective that the BLM was hoping to achieve from these treatments, was one, to reduce the hazardous fuel loads to reduce the list of wildfires.

As you well know, in this state, from the Yellowstone fires all the way up here to the current, there have been a lot of very large and severe fires in the last decade or two. Obviously there's been fires throughout history, but they seem to be more intense and more severe in the last decade or two.

So the BLM is trying to conduct vegetation treatments to reduce these risks, especially to people and property that are found in close proximity to public lands.

Another major goal is to reduce and control weeds. It's estimated the weed populations have grown about fourfold in the

last 15 years or so. So there's a hope that through this process and increasing the number of acres treated, that we can get a better handle on the weed populations.

A third major objective was to restore and rehabilitate lands that have been damaged, especially those damaged by fires. Obviously we've had a lot of fires and very severe fires in the last few decades.

There's a lot of damaged land out there, and a lot of this land is susceptible to weed infestations. So it's hoped that by treating these lands and controlling weed infestations and revegitating these lands, that we can get them back into a healthy condition much faster than just hoping that they'll do it on their own.

And finally, the overarching goal is to improve ecosystem health, which obviously would benefit a number of different resources including water quality and fish and wildlife habitat, but it also improves visual resources, cultural resources, especially vegetation used by Native Americans and Alaska Natives, and a lot of other natural and social resources.

One other thing I wanted to mention, that of those 6 million acres, about 3.5 million acres are primarily dedicated towards hazardous fuel reductions and weed control.

About 1.5 million acres is primarily dedicated towards fire rehab or rehabilitation of damaged lands, and about 1 million acres is spread among a number of BLM programs, including fish and wildlife habitat, watershed improvement, water quality improvement. Again, a whole number of different programs.

But keep in mind that if you rehab acreage or you reduce hazardous fuels, you will also benefit a lot of the other things such as wildlife, water quality and other resources.

A quick overview of the different methods. This is an example of the mechanical method. Again, the mechanical method generally involves the use of large equipment such as bush hogs, mowers, sometimes Caterpillar tractors, other types of large equipment, to remove or control vegetation.

And I'm also listing these in order of importance, so in terms of number of acres treated, the mechanical method is the most

common method used.

The second most common method used is the use of prescribed fire, using man-induced or man-ignited fire to control vegetation, especially to reduce hazardous fuels.

But in many situations, especially in Alaska, using natural fire to reduce or control vegetation or reduce hazardous fuels in areas where the BLM has identified sort of a fire management objective or plan, and then allowing natural fires to sort of achieve their objectives.

The third most common method is the use of herbicides. There's a couple different methods, using helicopters in the upper left, and ATV vehicles on the lower right.

The fourth most common method is the use of biological control methods. That can include using domestic livestock to contain vegetation such as these goats are trying to do here along this creek, or it may also involve using insects or pathogens that feed upon vegetation and either weaken or kill the vegetation and help to slow its growth and spread.

And finally, the least common method, but one that's also very important, is the use of manual labor, small hand tools, basically obviously here using a chainsaw, but hose and axes. Again, more use of hand tools to control vegetation.

Manual and mechanical treatments are especially important in an area which we call the wildland urban interface or the WUI, and that's basically the area that's in close proximity to areas where people and their property are.

Those are areas where maybe it's difficult to conduct herbicide treatment or set fires in a prescribed burning program for fear of perhaps causing damage to people or their property, or perhaps causing air quality impacts from the smoke to people, and impacting people with respiratory problems. So those are good areas for using mechanical treatment or manual treatments where you need a little more selective control.

In addition to evaluating what would result in treating 6 million acres, there were a couple of other things we tried to achieve in

the Environmental Report and the EIS.

In the EIS in particular, one of the things we also wanted to look at were the risks to humans and plants and animals from using several new herbicides, specifically Diflufenzapyr, Diquat, Fluridone, and Imazapic. Diquat and Fluridone are used in aquatic situations, while Diflufenzapyr and Imazapic are primarily used in terrestrial or upland situations.

So again, there were four new herbicides that the BLM wanted to use in the future, and thus they needed to look at what would be the risks of using these herbicides to people, and that also would include Native Americans and Alaska Natives, and also to plants and animals, and in particular, threatened and endangered species was of special concern.

As part of this process, we coordinated extensively and actually worked very closely with the Environmental Protection Agency, and also the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fishery Service, or what I will now call NOAA Fisheries.

These three agencies had obviously a very intense interest in the use of herbicides. EPA, not only from the perspective of risk to plants and animals, but I think maybe their interest was more the human risk, where the Fish & Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries were perhaps more concerned with the risk to plants and animals, and in particular, threatened and endangered species, especially for NOAA Fisheries, they were especially concerned about risks to salmonids in the Pacific Northwest and California.

So they worked with us. For about a year or so, we actually worked very closely with those agencies to develop a protocol, not only to evaluate the four new herbicides, but to develop a protocol that we could use in the future to evaluate new herbicides that the BLM might like to use sometime in the future.

So not only did we look at the risk from the new herbicides, but the next goal was to develop a protocol, which we did, in conjunction with working with the EPA, Fish & Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries.

Again, that process of just developing

the protocol took probably a good year, at least. Then it took another year or two just to do the risk assessments.

In addition to doing the risk assessments for the four new herbicides, we also went a step further. Risk assessments were done for a lot of the herbicides, or basically all the herbicides that the BLM is currently using, back in the late Eighties and Nineties.

But in developing the protocol, it became pretty obvious right from the get-go, that there were some issues associated with maybe the way they did some of the methods back then or maybe some of the methods that have become more refined since the late Eighties and early Nineties to today, as it relates to fish and wildlife.

So we ended up actually going back and looking at some of the other chemicals that the BLM currently uses and looking at the risk to fish and wildlife.

And for some other chemicals, looking at some risk assessments that the Forest Service has recently done the last five years or so, and taking their information, applying it to

situations that might be more relevant to the BLM treatments and looking at the risk to fish and wildlife from some of these other chemicals using risk assessments that the Forest Service used.

So again, now we've got another agency that we work closely with. We've got EPA, Fish & Wildlife Service, NOAA Fisheries, and also the Forest Service.

At the end of the day, we had developed a protocol among all these agencies. And again, the hope is to use this protocol in the future to try kind of streamline the process of evaluating future herbicides so it doesn't take four or five years like this process did.

Keep in mind that this would also have had to involve the NEPA process or the National Environmental Policy Act process, to ensure that the public had adequate input into the whole decision-making process for the use of herbicides in the future. So not only would we use the protocol, but we'd also use the needed procedures to make sure that there was adequate input by the public.

Federal agencies, under law, basically

under NEPA, are required to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement if a proposed action has the potential to cause significant environmental impacts.

For most people, when you think of the use of herbicides, you think of the bad horror stores in the past of what herbicides have done to people, plants or animals, so that immediately brings to mind that there could be a significant environmental impact from using herbicides, especially the new herbicides since they haven't been looked at.

Thus, the use of herbicides became really the primary issue or the primary issue of controversy that was identified and evaluated in the EIS. And in fact, it was also the primary issue of concern that was identified in earlier EIS's done by the BLM to evaluate vegetation treatments back in the Eighties and Nineties. We'll look at some of those EIS's a little later.

So again, we focus basically on herbicides in the EIS. Thus, the Programmatic EIS specifically analyzed the effects of the use of herbicides on the natural and social

resources on public lands administered by the BLM.

As part of the EIS process, we developed several alternatives, and basically these were developed by the public through scoping. These were different ways the public felt we could evaluate herbicides or different alternative uses of herbicides that they thought we should consider in this document.

The first one, as required in the EIS, is basically looking at the way things are today if you continue to do them into the future, or the no action alternative.

Under the no action alternative, the BLM would be able to treat vegetation in 14 states, which is what they do now using herbicides. They would be able to use 20 different herbicides. Right now they have 20 herbicides that are currently available to them.

However, of those 20 herbicides, there are actually six of them that they rarely or haven't used in the last six or seven years, including Atrazine and Fosamine. So again, really they only have been using about 14 herbicides to any great extent in the last five,

six, seven years.

Right now, the BLM treats about 2 million acres annually. Of those 2 million acres, about 300,000 acres are treated using herbicides. So 14 states, 20 potential herbicides for use, and about 300,000 acres under alternative A. That's what they're doing today.

Then we move on to alternative B, which is the BLM's preferred alternative, and the one that the EIS primarily focuses on. Under this alternative, the BLM would be able to expand herbicide use.

First of all, we mentioned earlier that the BLM will treat up to 6 million acres. Of those 6 million acres, about 930,000 acres would be treated using herbicides. So a threefold increase in total acres, about a threefold increase in acres treated using herbicides.

The BLM would also be able to treat vegetation in 17 states versus 14 under alternative A. We'd pick up three new states, Texas, Nebraska and Alaska's 81 million acres. The reason we are picking those states up is they were not evaluated earlier in the late

Eighties or early Nineties. Not sure why, but they weren't. Texas, Nebraska don't have a lot of acres, but obviously Alaska does.

At this time, Alaska doesn't propose to do any herbicide treatments in that state but they would like the option to do them in the future. They are slowly but surely starting to see more and more weeds up there so it may be something they will use in the future.

The other thing is that under alternatives B, D and E, the BLM would only be able to use 14 herbicides. Basically, we decided not to worry about the six that I mentioned earlier that really aren't being used much at all.

If there ever is a need to use them in the future, the BLM would have to do a risk assessment to kind of update information and see what the risks are of using those herbicides.

Some of those herbicides have risks that were identified in the late Eighties and early Nineties in those EIS's, and really before they would use them much more, they probably should update the information to see if those risks are worth taking or have they become

greater than maybe they were back in the Eighties and Nineties.

So right now, we've basically put those six chemicals to the side. We're going to focus on the 14 that the BLM is currently using and then add in the four new herbicides that we evaluate in the EIS. And now that brings us up to 14 plus 4, or 18 potential herbicides.

Under alternative C, a lot of the folks in the public asked that we not use herbicides at all, so we looked at an alternative that does not involve the use of herbicides. It just basically looks at what are the impacts from not using herbicides and replacing those treatments with prescribed fire and the manual and mechanical and biological control methods.

The fourth alternative is not conducting treatments or herbicide treatments from the air, so not using helicopters and aircraft and airplanes.

The concern there is for some folks that when you spray from the air, some of the herbicide has the potential to drift from the target area to a nontarget area, or off public lands onto private lands, let's say, so if you

don't spray from the air, that risk becomes much less.

And finally, the last alternative is alternative E. This alternative was developed by a coalition of environmental groups, and it has a number of different components, one of which is they recommended that we not use acetolactate synthase inhibiting herbicides.

These are herbicides that have been shown that when they drift or get off the target area and go to a nontarget area, they have the potential to cause harm to nontarget vegetation, including agricultural crops if they drift onto those.

So they suggested that we avoid using these types of herbicides, specifically Chlorsulfuron, Imazethapyr, Metsulfuron-Methyl and Sulfometuron-Methyl.

If the four new herbicides are accepted, one of the four new ones is Imazapic, so there are potentially five herbicides that would not be available out of the 18 that we've looked at under alternative B under this alternative.

There are other components of the

alternative, it's an appendix. The entire document that the coalition gave us is in the appendix of Volume II of the EIS. It's about 21 pages in length.

Some other components include they would like the BLM to stress more passive restoration. Instead of actively going out there and treating vegetation using our five methods, basically let mother nature do a lot of the restoration, perhaps removing livestock or other causes that maybe lead to weed populations or degraded lands.

They would not like the BLM to spray, use herbicides or spray in areas where amphibians may be found. They would like to see maybe a 500-foot buffer between treatment areas and areas with threatened and endangered species.

There are also other components that include the other treatment methods. Right here we're just focusing basically on the herbicide issues. So again, if you're interested, it's one of the appendices towards the back of Volume II of the EIS.

Well, some of you, especially those of

you with the BLM, are probably asking well, the BLM treats vegetation, I believe they prepared, and I mentioned they prepared EIS's back in the Eighties and Nineties, so why are we doing this all over again. Well, there are several reasons why we are preparing another Programmatic EIS.

First of all, the EIS's done in the late Eighties and early Nineties were more regionally focused, except for perhaps the one on the upper right there, which was the 13-state EIS, in fact, covered 13 of the 14 states.

The other three were more regionally focused, one on the Pacific Northwest, one on western Oregon, and one specific to California. So they pretty much focused on issues in those states.

Again, the 13 states cover 13 of our 17 states, so there's quite a bit of overlap there in terms of areas covered, but the other ones are much more specific.

As I mentioned earlier, under those EIS's, in fact, under the EIS specifically, the BLM was only allowed to treat about 500,000 acres annually. As I mentioned, however, we're up to about 2 million acres annually, and that's

the result of a number of policies of BLM and other Congressional actions that have allowed the BLM to increase the number of acres treated up to about 2 million acres.

Most of those acres are related to reducing hazardous fuel and fire-related or haz fuel weed treatments that have allowed the BLM to increase those acres up to about 2 million. But again, we're at the cap there where we can't go much higher than that.

The EIS's obviously, as we discussed earlier, did not cover Alaska, Nebraska or Texas. They do not include the herbicides that we are looking at, and those EIS's do not develop a protocol. They did obviously describe the methods that they used to evaluate the risk to the herbicides that they looked at.

But as I mentioned earlier, some of the methodology has changed quite a bit since the late Eighties, early Nineties, especially as it relates to fish and wildlife, and in particular, salmonids and some of the fish group.

So our protocol helps bring that science kind of up to date and it's something that the BLM can then carry forward to use in

the future.

As I mentioned way back in the beginning, we also prepare a Programmatic Environmental Report. As I mentioned, the EIS focuses on herbicides. That was the primary issue identified during scoping.

We also wanted to look at the impacts of the other treatment methods, manual, biological, prescribed fire and mechanical. And there were several reasons we needed to do that.

Although we were not making any decisions specific to those treatment methods as we are with herbicides, we still need to evaluate the issues and risks of using those different methods to plants and animals, humans and other social resources.

A couple reasons why we had to do that. One was to help us do our cumulative impact assessment as part of the EIS. A cumulative impact assessment is required to kind of look at what are the impacts of past, present and future actions with not only what the BLM is doing, but other types of actions that may occur that may sort of combine with BLM actions to perhaps cause a significant impact or other types of

impacts that may be greater than what would occur just under the BLM action.

Obviously we have one alternative that says we won't use herbicides, so for us to properly evaluate the risks of the other treatment methods for that alternative, we had to have some document that allowed us to look at those risks and those issues associated with those treatment methods.

So that's what we did in the ER, we looked at the issues associated with the other treatment methods, and specifically, I think one that really stands out are what the issues associated with using prescribed fires, especially as it relates to air quality.

You folks around here have probably had a lot of smoky air here in the past decade or so. I know I've traveled through here and could barely see the road at times it was so smoky.

So there's obviously a lot of concern about air quality issues associated with wildfires, but when you have a prescribed fire there's also smoke produced there, so what are the impacts to air quality from prescribed fires.

In addition, when we worked with the EPA and Fish & Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries, NOAA Fisheries and Fish & Wildlife Service were concerned not only what are the effects of herbicides on threatened and endangered species, but also, you know, they're looking at, okay, the BLM may treat an area with herbicides, but they may also treat that same ground with mechanical treatments or perhaps burn it.

They may use multiple treatments on a piece of ground. They may use different types of treatments, let's say along a watershed, and all these things can interact to impact threatened and endangered species, and especially salmonids, which is probably a lot of where their focus was, especially for NOAA Fisheries.

So they wanted to know not only what were the effects of using herbicides on threatened and endangered species, but how do the other treatment methods play into the mix.

How, if you did use less herbicides and burn more, what would that maybe do to threatened and endangered species, how might

that affect salmonids and other fish. So they were pretty adamant, I would say, about making sure that we looked at all the different treatment methods.

If you look over there, we printed a small number of hard copies of the biological, what we call biological assessment, which is the document that was given to those agencies to help them evaluate this proposal in terms of the risks for all the different treatment methods.

If you have the CD or if you want to get one before you leave tonight, the biological assessment is also on the CD, so that's another good place to find it.

This graph kind of gives you an overview of the importance of the different treatment methods in terms of percentage of acres treated under the current situation and then under the preferred alternative, and then it also gives you the numbers from Montana because they're a little different.

As you can see, the red and blue, red is mechanical, blue is prescribed fire. Under the preferred alternative, both increase a little bit in terms of percentage of acres

treated under the preferred alternative.

The use of herbicides stays fairly constant between what the BLM is treating now and what they would do in the future in terms of percentages. Well, the percentage of acres treated using manual and biological control would go down a little bit.

Keep in mind again, on the left we're looking at 2 million acres, on the right 6 million acres, so even for biological control and manual treatments, the number of acres, actual number of acres treated will increase, again because we're treating threefold for acres.

If we look at Montana, right now Montana treats about 25% of its acreage using prescribed fire. This will actually drop to about 14%, is what they project in the future, so they're no where near what the rest of the west is doing in terms of projecting the amount of prescribed fire use.

Mechanical and manual are probably about 6 or 7% total, a very small number of acres.

Herbicides, right now about 13% of

acres are treated using herbicides, so somewhat similar to what occurs in the rest of the west. In the future that's going to bump up to about 20%. For the west as a whole it's about 16%, so Montana is pretty much in line with that number.

The one that's substantially different than the west is the use of biological control agents, and the gentleman here, Hank McNeel, is probably one of the reasons that's the case.

Right now it's estimated that about 56% of the acres treated in Montana are treated using biological control agents. The only other state that has a number anywhere near as high is California.

Under the preferred alternative, that's basically going to hold about 58%, so it's not going to change a whole lot, but 58% in Montana versus, I'm going to say it looks like about 7% for the west as a whole. So again, Montana is spearheading that effort to use a lot of biological control treatments.

So where do we go from here? Key dates, we had the scoping meetings way back in January to March, 2002. And as I mentioned, we weren't goofing off, well, I didn't say that we

weren't goofing off, but we weren't goofing off during all those years in between.

About a year or so was spent putting together the protocol for the risk assessments and deciding how we were going to attack this problem. And then another year or two actually preparing the risk assessments.

If you're interested in them, they are not printed in a hard copy because there would be lots of hard copies. If you look on your CD, there are a lot of supporting documents, and that's basically what was done during that two or three-year period.

We did several air quality modeling reports in support of the ER, Environmental Report, to look at the effects of prescribed burning. But there's also the other treatment method in term of their emissions, dust and other types of emissions.

All of the risk assessments, or at least risk assessments for ten different chemicals that the BLM actually looked at, are on those CDs. Each of those risk assessments runs probably 300 pages or so when you add in all the different pages, the different

appendices and whatnot. So there's ten of those.

The other risk assessments were done by the Forest Service for chemicals the BLM is using. And if you look in the EIS or your CD, it will actually give you a link to the Forest Service risk assessment. You can go to their website and they have all theirs on the website. That's a good place to look at them.

There's also some reports that were done to look at the effects to cultural resources, and in particular, Native American resources, since obviously Native Americans are important users of vegetation. And their biological assessment, as I mentioned, is also on those CDs.

So a lot of the reports are on the CDs, and that's what took up the last several years, in addition to preparing the draft EIS, which has gotten us to where we are today.

The draft EIS came out on November 10th to the public. We are currently having our meetings, as Brian mentioned we are on meeting number seven. We go to Cheyenne tomorrow night, and then we do Las Vegas and Washington, D.C.

next Tuesday, and that will be the end of the public meetings.

We are accepting comments on the draft EIS through January 9th, so you have a little over a month still to send in your comments. That gives you plenty of time to read the documents over the holidays.

The final EIS is projected to be available in late spring 2006. That will then go out to public review for 30 days at least. That should occur again in early summer 2006.

Then it's anticipated that the Record of Decision, which is basically where the BLM will make a decision on which alternative or alternative components it will use to treat vegetation, they will make that decision sometime this summer, and right now they're hoping to have it done by July.

So what can you do to help? As I mentioned, the purpose of the meeting tonight is to discuss your issues with the document.

Now, as we've learned as we've gone through the west so far, most people have not read the document, it's only been out for a few weeks. So the first thing you would probably

want to do is review the documents.

Again, you have another month or so to read them and formulate your comments. There are several ways to review the documents. All the materials that have been prepared are on CDs over there.

Keep in mind it's a two CD set, so make sure you grab a pair of CDs. One is basically the EIS, and I think maybe the Environmental Report is on there, and then the other one are a lot of the supporting documents and whatnot, so make sure you get both EIS's. They both have different titles on the label so you'll be able to tell which one is which. That's one way to look at it.

Another way is to go on the website. You go to www.blm.gov, click on that, it will take you to the BLM home page. Right there at the top of the home page, or the first bullet or whatever you want to call it, is the Vegetation Treatments EIS Project. Click on that and it will take you to another page that explains what we've done, how to use the website to find the materials you want. All the documents are listed there.

It's pretty nice layout that they did. Click on that, if you go to the EIS, for example, within the EIS you can click on it. It might say map 1-1, click on that it will take you right to the map so you don't have to jump around to find things. Just make clicks and it takes you where you want to go. So it should work out pretty well. So that's another option.

If you would like a paper copy, we printed a limited number of paper copies and we mailed them to those people that asked for them, but we have boxes and boxes still sitting around.

So Brian, especially as we get closer to January 9th, is going to want to be moving paper copies out of his office. So if you would like to get a copy, ask him for one. I'll give you that information in just a minute.

And finally, you can also go to the BLM field offices or the state office and they should have hard copies there and CDs. Again, we'll leave a bunch of CDs with the office tonight, so that's another good place to look at them.

If you're debating between the CD and

the website, I would suggest taking the CD just because some of these files are fairly large. We tried to make them as small as we could so they would download for people like me that have dial-up you know, the last three people that still do. You can download them in a reasonable amount of time, but obviously the CD is a lot quicker.

Once you've had a chance to look at the documents, we would appreciate it if you would provide your comments on issues you feel need to be addressed in the EIS or the Environmental Report.

Errors and omissions, you know there are errors in there, I hate to admit it, but there are. So hopefully you'll catch the ones that we've missed or didn't find already. That's important.

If there are any alternative methods or treatment options that you think should have been addressed in there, let us know that also. Again, it's an opportunity for you to let us know where the weaknesses are in the documents so that we can make sure that the final document is a much stronger document.

And also, let us know if you want to be placed on the mailing list. There are several ways to do this. At the front desk, you've got a form, and this one gives you several options. It gives you an opportunity to put yourself on the mailing list if you'd like to get the final EIS or be kept abreast of what's going on with this project as it kind of winds down.

It also gives you the opportunity to write your comments out on this form and either give it to us tonight or mail it to Brian or fax it to Brian.

Then also, if you want to receive the EIS, there's that form. And again, if you know what you want to say tonight, go ahead and fill that out or take one with you and just mail it back to Brian or fax it to him.

So where can you send your comments? As I mentioned, that form, that's one option, and that tells you where to mail or fax it to. Again, this is Brian's address. He's in Reno, and Brian's the project manager, co-project manager with Gina, but he has the duty of taking all these comments and making sense out of them, so send them to Brian.

Another option is to fax your comments to Brian, and again, you don't have to use this form. If you want to use a word processor, type it up, mail it to Brian or fax it to Brian, that's fine, or perhaps most of you, as has been the case so far, like to work on your word processor, attach it to an e-mail and send it off as an e-mail. And this is the e-mail address vegeis@nv.blm.gov. Go ahead and write your comments, attach it to your e-mail, send it off, boom, you're done.

As I mentioned earlier, comments need to be received by January 9th to be assured that they will be included in the EIS, the final EIS, so please try and do that.

This is a good time with the holidays coming up, probably don't have much going on in the next several weeks, so pull out the EIS, you know, especially after you have that Christmas dinner, you've got all those sweets in you, you're having a tough time falling asleep, pull the document out, and boom, you'll be asleep in no time.

If you get started now, you'll get lots of good sleep between now and January 9th, and

hopefully you'll finish the document in the meantime.

So that's all I have. Now I'll turn it over to Gina, who will conduct the public hearing, and I thank you for your attention.

MS. RAMOS: Good evening. My name is Gina Ramos, and I will be tonight's hearing officer, and I would like to call this hearing to order.

As stated earlier, the purpose of the hearing is to give the public an opportunity to provide comments on BLM's Environmental Impact Statement and Environmental Report.

All of the comments that we receive, either orally or written, will be compiled, analyzed, and considered as BLM prepares the final Environmental Impact Statement, and then final Environmental Report.

As people came in this evening, we asked them to sign up if they wanted to provide comments, but if you still want to provide comments and didn't sign up, you will still have that opportunity.

What we will do is we will ask those folks that are interested in providing comments

to come up to the microphone, state your name the organization you represent, if any, and provide your comments. If you have a copy of written comments, we'll also ask you to provide them as part of the hearing record.

We will initially start with about five minutes, and after you have reached one minute, we will hold up a sign saying that you have one minute left, and we'll ask you to summarize your comments. It doesn't look like we're going to have too many people tonight, so we'll probably be a little flexible about that.

Now, unlike the open house, we will not be entertaining any questions, but we will be around after the hearing has adjourned to answer any questions that you may have.

So, at this time I'd like to call Hank McNeel up to the microphone and have Hank provide his comments.

MR. McNEEL: This is Hank McNeel, weed scientist for over 40 years, in private industry right now, retired.

I would like to make a few comments like on the terminology on noxious weeds. I think the terminology that you used was for

federal and state agency designated. One thing I think needs to be addressed is counties can also designate a noxious weed within their county. I would like to see that added.

I need to clarify on the use of pesticides on BLM lands. I see in the EIS it says restricted use pesticides, individuals must be certified. On the policy within the BLM, it is any pesticide used on BLM lands will be certified, the individuals will be certified. I'd like for that to be clarified.

One of the other things I would like to see is a greater emphasis on your integrated weed management, how the culmination of the integrated weed management practices would strengthen, and I think it would help you a great deal when it goes to the final for the people to accept it.

One thing that did concern me was the lack of time and public awareness some people had to review this document for this hearing tonight, because I do know that some of the county weed districts contacted me today, which I felt they should have contacted the BLM as to why they hadn't heard about it until the last

two or three days.

One other thing is I think would help you is -- and I haven't read this in detail, is what happens if the BLM doesn't use a herbicide or a combination of the integrated weed management. What happens to our native species or our threatened and endangered species.

Many people do not understand that these are useful tools also to save our native species and our threatened and endangered species. Sometimes the risk of the weed or the nonwanted plant is greater on eradicating a threatened and endangered species than the use of herbicides.

I would like to go on record to state that I strongly support the use of alternative B, the preferred alternative. The only thing I wish is that this would have been out five years ago.

The other thing is I really like the way you people addressed how to develop the risk assessment and possibly approve new herbicides that have been proven to be safe out in the environment. That is one thing that has long been needed.

The last thing I would like to say is I would like to compliment the contractors and the BLM for their efforts in this EIS. I think you've done an extremely well job. Just keep it up, get it approved so the people on the ground can use it.

Thank you.

MS. RAMOS: Thank you, Hank.

Would anyone else in the audience like to come up and provide some comments tonight?

(No response.)

All right, if there aren't any other people that would like to comment, we will go ahead and conclude this hearing.

Before we adjourn, though, I highly encourage anyone that is attending tonight, if you know of anyone that was unable to attend and is interested in the EIS and the Environmental Report, to take any of the CDs and the frequently asked questions, and distribute them out to any coordinator of weed management areas or any other partners that the BLM has.

Thank you all for your time for coming in tonight. And this hearing is now adjourned.

(Whereupon, the hearing was concluded

at 7:45 p.m.)

REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

TITLE: Public Hearing on Vegetation Treatments Programmatic EIS and ER for the Western U.S. And Alaska

HEARING DATE: December 7, 2005

LOCATION: BLM Offices, Billings, Montana

I hereby certify that the proceedings herein are contained fully and accurately on the tapes and notes reported by me at the hearing in the above case before the Bureau of Land Management, and that this is a true and correct transcript of the same.

DATE: January 4, 2006

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