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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treated using each method, and also about how many acres would be required to meet their treatment goals. And that is how we came up with the 6 million acres.

Of that 6 million acres, about 3.5 million acres are primarily treated for hazardous fuel reduction and weed control, basically land ecosystem health restoration. About 1.5 million acres are basically for fire rehab or fire reclamation, to restore damage lands that have been impacted by fires in the past. And the remaining 1 million acres is being treated by an assortment of BLM programs including treatments to benefit fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, cultural resource areas, areas with high visual significance, thing like that. So, again, about 1 million acres covers all the different BLM programs.

But keep in mind, treatments to benefit fire damage areas or for hazardous field reduction or whatnot obviously benefits lots of other things, including wildlife, water, et cetera.

The reason the BLM is proposing to treat 6 million acres, several reasons. One, the big goal is to reduce hazardous fuels to reduce the risk of wildfires. As you well know living in this area part of the country, there have been quite a few large and

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very severe wildfires in the past decade or so, and it is believed that a lot of this is the result of fire exclusion policies and practices over the last decade -- or actually, about the last century or so. It has resulted in the build up of hazardous fuels in forest and rangelands. Thus a lot of the treatments are to help reduce the amount of hazardous fuels that can lead to future wildfires.

The second major goal is to remove and control weeds. It is estimated that weed populations have increased about fourfold in the last 15 years, so even with current treatment levels weeds continue to spread. So let's hope by increasing the number of acres treated and using more effective treatment methods, perhaps the controlled weeds might -- or certainly we might have a better control over weed populations.

Another major goal is obviously to restore and rehabilitate lands that have been damaged by wildfires in the past several decades, again, lots of lands being burned in Idaho, Oregon, some in Washington, Montana, Wyoming, et cetera -- Utah, Nevada. Lots of acres have been burned. These areas if they are not restored and rehabilitated may attribute to the increase in weed populations and whatnot, so try and restore those lands.

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And finally the overall goal is to improve ecosystem health, which will benefit water quality, visual characteristics of the land, and also fish and wildlife habitat, among other things.

Quick overview of the five primary treatment methods. The first one is fairly obvious. This is mechanical, use of heavy equipment such as bush hogs, large mowers, tractors, graders, chaining perhaps. A number of sort of types of treatments involve large types of equipment.

Prescribed fires -- and, again, these are in the order of their importance to the BLM in terms of treatment acres, so mechanical is the most common method to be used. Prescribed fires is the second most common method to be used. Again, using fire -- man-induced fire to remove vegetation or control vegetation, especially for hazardous fuel reduction; and in some cases, using natural fires, especially in some states like Alaska where it is a little hard to get people out to set fires, so they use natural fires, lightening caused fires, in areas where they have kind of set up the burn plan already, and let sort of mother nature do a lot of the work for them and keep an eye on the fire to make sure it is kind of achieving agency goals.

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The third most common method to be used is the use of chemicals or herbicides. Here we are spraying. One picture shows the BLM spraying using a helicopter and another one using an ATV to apply herbicides.

The fourth most common method will be the use of biological control techniques. Biological control can be the use of domestic livestock to contain vegetation, such as in this case, goats are out here controlling vegetation along this stream bank. We can also use sheep and other domestic livestock, and it also can be the use of insects or pathogens that will feed upon vegetation and weaken or kill the vegetation. It is also an effective control method, and it is used extensively, especially in Montana. They are kind of leading the charge in the bio-control method, as does California. They do a lot of biological control.

And finally the least common method is manual control through the person using a chainsaw. Again, use of hand tools, and that is used in areas where, you know, you are doing spot treatments or smaller treatments that would be difficult to do with large aerial spray program, let's say, or large heavy equipment where you need a little more precise control than with some of the other methods.

In addition to evaluating the overall proposal

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to treat 6 million acres, there were some other things that we tried to achieve in this EIS that was of importance BLM. Probably one of the other major things we were looking at was to evaluate the risk to humans, plants, and animals from using new herbicides to control vegetation. One of things that BLM had requested from the field offices and what not was to use some new herbicides that the field offices felt would be effective in controlling certain weed species or certain types of invasive vegetation.

The four new herbicides that we looked at that the BLM wanted to consider for use were diflufenzopyr, diquat, fluridone, and imazapic. Diquat and fluridone are primarily aquatic herbicides used in water situations where you have water. And diflufenzopyr and imazapic are used in terrestrial or upland situations.

In the process of doing these assessments, and basically we were looking at what are the risks of using these chemicals on people and plants and animals, and in particular threatened, endangered species, which was the interest of some of the other federal agencies, we did extensive risk assessments that took really the bulk of the time in the last several years working on these risk assessments. And in the process of working on these risk assessments, we coordinated extensively

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with the Environmental Protection Agency, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration National Marine Fisheries Service, or NOAA Fisheries Service, to look at how to best evaluate the risk to plants and animals and humans from use of these herbicides as well as some of the herbicides that BLM is currently using.

And the goal of the BLM and these agencies was in particular to develop a protocol that we could all use in the future and going forward to evaluate maybe new chemicals that may come on the market in the future. And part of this arose by looking at some of the methodology that the BLM had used, oh, about 10 or 15 years ago, when they did some similar EISs and finding that some of that methodology was either outdated, or didn't adequately cover some species of concern, especially Salmonids and some of the other fish species. And so we were trying to come up with a protocol or a method that really looked at the risk of those species as well as humans and some of the other plants and animals.

So we developed a protocol that is included in the appendix of the EIS, and you are certainly welcome to look at that. And the goal of developing the protocol is then to hopefully be able to use it in the

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future to evaluate chemicals that may come on the market that the BLM would like to consider for use in conjunction with the appropriate National Environment Policy Act or NEPA Process to insure that not only are the risks assessed, but the public has input into the whole process and to make sure that these types of evaluations are done properly. So, again, evaluate the risk of new and existing chemicals and to develop a protocol and hopefully be able to use that protocol in the future.

The reason we did a programmatic EIS -- well, the overall reason is federal agencies are required under NEPA to prepare an environmental impact statement if there is a reasonable potential for significant environmental impacts from their proposed action. When you think of the use of herbicides, that generally raises the likelihood that there are significant environmental impacts, or certainly that potential.

And in fact through the scoping process, through the risk process, and also through the process of looking at the earlier EISs that were done by the BLM in the late 80s and 90s, we decided that really the use of herbicides was the primary issue of concern that needed to be evaluated in the EIS. So that is the path we took to focus the EIS on the use of herbicides.

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Thus the programmatic EIS analyzes the effects of the use of herbicides on natural and social resources, and it, again, looks at the potential use of herbicides throughout the west, including Alaska.

As part of the EIS process in looking at and analyzing the potential effects of using herbicides, we considered five different alternatives that were developed, many of these really by the public during the scoping process. What were some of the different ideas that the public came up with during scoping in terms of ways or ways not to use herbicides? And these are the five alternative that were evaluated in the EIS.

The first ones required in all EISs and that is basically the No Action Alternative or essentially continuing what the BLM is doing now. Right now the BLM treats about 2 million acres annually. Of those 2 million acres, about 300 thousand acres involve the use of herbicides. The BLM has approval under earlier EISs to treat vegetation in 14 states using herbicides, and they are currently allowed to use 20 herbicides. Back in the earlier EISs, they looked at 20 herbicides and 20 were approved for use. So right now we have 14 states, 300 hundred thousand acres, and 20 herbicides.

The next one is Alternative B, and that is

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basically the BLM's preferred alternative or their current proposal, and it is a little bit different than A. First of all, as we discussed, we are increasing the number of acres; 6 million overall. Of those 6 million acres, about 930 thousand acres involve the use of herbicides. So we have about a threefold increase in total number of acres and about a threefold increase in acres using herbicides.

In addition, we have added three new states to the mix that were kind of forgotten, for whatever reasons in the earlier EISs, or maybe nobody cared back then. The three states that we also looked at in this EIS were Texas, Nebraska, and Alaska. Now, the BLM doesn't have a lot of acres in Texas and Nebraska, which is maybe why nobody cared that much about them in the '80s and early '90s, but obviously Alaska does. Alaska has about 81 million acres. At this time Alaska doesn't plan to use herbicides, but they would like the opportunity in the future should the need arise. So we did look at the use of herbicides in Alaska.

In addition, Alternative B, D, and E are a little different from A in that the BLM would only use 14 of their currently available herbicides, plus the four new herbicides that we evaluated as part of B, D, and E -- and we'll discuss D and E in a little bit.

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The reason they decided to go that route and in effect basically not using six herbicides that are currently available to them is that the six herbicides that we are not looking at have rarely or never been used in about the last seven, eight, nine years. So the BLM did not feel that they were going to use them going forward, and the consensus was also that unless we really have a good handle of the risks of these herbicides that are little used, it probably didn't make a lot of sense to continue using them until we better understood the risks.

So, in fact, as part of Alternative B, and D and E, we not only looked at the risks from the four herbicides that the BLM would like to use, but also between the BLM and also some risk assessments that the Forest Service has done in the last few years, looked at the risks to the other 14 herbicides to get a sense of, well, are those also safe? Even though the BLM is currently authorized to use them, are they in fact safe given what we know now compared to what we knew in the late '80s and '90s. So that is also part of B that BLM using new herbicides, more acres, a few more states, and also getting a better understanding of some of their existing herbicides as well as the one they proposed.

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A number of members of the public, as shown in Alternative C, didn't want the BLM to use herbicides at all. So we looked at an alternative were herbicides would not be used and just the other four treatment methods were used.

Other folks in the public were concerned about herbicide drift. Especially when you apply herbicides by helicopters of aircraft, it tends for the herbicide to drift from the target area into a non-target area. So we looked at an alternative that basically looked at what are the issues or the benefits and the downsides of not spraying herbicides.

And finally, we have Alternative E, which is an alternative that was developed based on a proposal given to us by a coalition and environmental groups. And this proposal has a number of components in which herbicides are only one portion of it, and that proposal is an appendix in the EIS, towards the back of the EIS. It is actually about 35 pages in length, so I would suggest if you are interested in it, you read it because I'm only going to hit a few of the highlights tonight, but it's a rather extensive proposal.

And among other things as it kind of relates to herbicides, one thing that they suggested is that the BLM not use acetolactate synthase-inhibiting

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herbicides. These are herbicides that are active, and if they -- especially if they drift from the non-target area have the potential to adversely impact non-target plants; and there has been some recent incidents where sometimes these have drifted from a target area into a non-target area, so they were concerned about them.

The focus of their proposal was also on passive restoration. As you can see, this proposal by the BLM is pretty active. There is passive restoration, but there is also a lot of active restoration using treatment methods to restore and rehabilitate lands and to control vegetation and reduce risk of fire. Their focus was more on passive restoration; let nature takes it's course and do some other things and maybe let nature take a greater role in resolving some of these issues versus taking a more active role.

They also suggested that we try to discourage or eliminate spraying areas where amphibians might incur in certain -- obviously near wetlands and whatnot where you might find amphibians, and also to be extremely careful and work, maybe perhaps more closely with tribal groups and Alaska natives to insure that their resources aren't impacted by herbicides and the other treatment methods. Again, I suggest you look in

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the EIS because the full text is there.

Well, some of you might be saying, hasn't the BLM been treating vegetation for many years, so really what is new? As I mentioned, the BLM went through the same process in the late '80s and early '90s when they prepared some EISs to do sort of the same kinds of things we are doing now, but there are some major differences.

First of all, there were actually four EISs done in the late '80s and early '90s, and they had kind of a more regional focus, at least for three of the four. The one on the top right was the 13 state EIS and it in fact covered 13 states, so it covered a good chunk of the west.

The Northwest EIS covered five states, and then there was one act specifically done for western Oregon, and finally one was done for California, so back then they did four EISs. But in the process of doing those EISs, obviously they didn't cover Texas, the they didn't cover Nebraska, and they didn't cover Alaska.

They also, under those EISs, really only accounted for about a half million acres. So when they totaled up all the acres that I guess probably the field offices provided recommendations for, they came

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up with about a half million acres. Since then through policy and other legislative processes and what not, the BLM has received authorization to treat an additional 1.5 million acres, which brings us up to that 2 million acres I talked about. But as far as the EISs are concerned, we are only about a half of a million acres.

Again, I mentioned three states weren't covered. They obviously did not talk about the new herbicides that we're evaluating in this EIS. They did not develop a protocol to evaluate new herbicides in the future, and as I mentioned earlier, they really didn't do a very rigorous review of the risk to plants and animals, and specifically threatened, endangered species, and ever more specifically, Salmonids.

So this EIS is really focused on that and there has been a lot of effort with the Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries to look at those risks. And in support of that part of the EIS, we actually prepared a Biological Assessment, which is about a 500-page document. You can see it out front. And as I will show you in a little bit if you get the CDs that have the EIS and ER, the Biological Assessment is included on those CDs. And that Biological Assessment evaluates actually evaluates a risk not only

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for the use of herbicides, but the other treatment methods to threatened, endangered species that might be found on Bureau of Land Management lands, and there are about 350 species.

As I mentioned, we also did a programmatic environmental report. And you might say, why did you do that? Well, basically the environmental report was done to address or evaluate the issues associated with the other treatment methods, so manual, mechanical, biological control methods, and prescribed fires. Through scoping, through the early EISs and whatnot, the BLM decided that they weren't really making any decisions as it relates to the use of those treatment methods, thus it is not necessary to do an EIS for those methods; however, we still felt that we needed to evaluate the issues associated with those treatments methods for two primary reasons.

One, for the cumulative effects analysis that was done as part of the EIS. And the cumulative effects looks at the affects of activities that the BLM has done in the past, the present, and the future. And because of one of our alternatives actually considers no herbicide use, there is really no way we can evaluate cumulative effects from no herbicide use if we don't look at the other treatment methods.

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So to properly evaluate how herbicide use fits in with the other treatment methods, we had to do an analysis of basically all the treatment methods. Even though we are not making any specific decisions relating to those four treatment methods, we had to look at them to judge their effects in the context of also using or not using herbicides. And as I mentioned also, the other treatment methods in that analysis was especially important to the Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries. They not only wanted to know what the risks are to Salmonids and other threatened, endangered species that may be found on BLM lands or may use BLM lands for part or all of their life history, but they also need to know well how do you other treatment methods fit into the context of impacts to these species.

What they're especially considered about is in many cases the BLM may just say, burn and area and then treat it with herbicides or use other treatments methods. There may actually be two or three treatment methods used on the same piece of ground. So they wanted to know how all these different methods fit together, and how these species of concern might be affected by these actions.

This chart sort of gives you an overview of

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the importance of the different treatment methods in terms of percentage of acres treated, sort of under the current situation, and under the preferred alternative, or what they would propose to do in the future. And, again, these are best guesstimates based on what the field offices have provided to the BLM.

And I am also going to discuss what types of numbers we have got for Idaho, and it sounds like we have got a number of folks here from eastern Oregon, so I'll discuss those as well.

As you can see, the two most common methods are the use of prescribed fire and mechanical treatments, with the mechanical treatments, in fact, increasing in importance and becoming the most important method under the preferred alternative. Mechanical treatments are especially important in hazardous fuel control and also weed control, especially in areas where it is difficult to spray or use fire.

A lot of these treatments are geared towards treatments in was we call the WUI, or the Wildland Urban Interface, and these are areas where there is BLM land in close proximity to public lands. And there is a lot of concern, obviously, from fires, as we have seen in recent years, harming people or their property.

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Obviously, you read all the time in California or some of these other states where wildfires have destroyed a considerable amount of property, and in many cases, killed people. So a lot of the treatments are geared towards that WUI Wildland Urban Interface at least to initially reduce that risk. So mechanical treatments are obviously a benefit, especially there where it is close to where people live, and it is difficult to spray or burn or use other treatments.

The herbicide use actually holds fairly constant over current, versus what we project in the future, about 16 percent of the treatments will be using herbicides. Biological control and manual treatments decline under the preferred alternative. However, keep in mind, the current alternative includes 2 million acres. The preferred alternative is for 6 million acres. So, actually, in terms of total acres, it will increase under all treatment methods, but percentage wise, herbicides stay steady; fire, mechanical, increase; and biological control and manual methods decrease.

If we look at Idaho to see how they kind of fit in with this, the most common treatment in Idaho is the use of mechanical treatments, and right now about half of the treatments are done mechanically. That will

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drop to about 42 percent under the preferred alternative based on their projection. So mechanical treatments will actually be a little higher than what we are seeing for the western U.S. Prescribed fire, under current and future projections, is around 20 percent; so that's, oh, 10 to 15 percent less than what the western U.S. is looking at. And the use of herbicides is holding fairly study at about 25 percent in Idaho. So the use of herbicides is up about 10 percent from what we are seeing in the rest of the western U.S. Biological controls, around 6 percent in the future, and manual about 4 percent; so somewhat similar to what we are seeing in the western U.S.

If we look at eastern Oregon, we get a little different situation. Where Idaho's prescribed fire was running about 20 percent, eastern Oregon is projecting about 40 percent. That's what they currently do, and that is about what they project in the future. Their fire use is higher than what we are seeing for the West as a whole, and certainly double that of Idaho. Mechanical treatments, again, pretty constant from what they're doing now to what they project in the future, around 33 to 35 percent, and so that's somewhat similar to what we are see for the rest of West. Manual treatments, interestingly, are pretty darn high in

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eastern Oregon, around 15 to 20 percent -- manual treatments -- so they are much higher. And the use of herbicides in eastern Oregon, currently about 6 percent of treatments with herbicides. We run about 8 percent under the preferred alternative. So 6 to 8 percent, pretty study, and obviously that's about half of what the rest of the West is projecting.

So where do we go from here? Scoping, which is the process by which we ask the public what types of things we should address, and the draft EIS was done way back in January through March of 2002. As I mentioned, we haven't been goofing off for the last, almost four years, although maybe sometimes it kind of seems like it to some folks. But a lot of that time was spent doing the risk assessments. We had conference calls weekly with the EPA, Environmental Projection Agency and the Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries for good year almost, and then a lot of back and forth as we developed the protocol and then the different work products and shared them with those agencies to make sure we were all on the same page so that they were comfortable with it. Also the document was reviewed by all the different state and field offices from the BLM, and we had a technical team that reviewed the document, so that took quite a long time

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to get the input from -- many, many, many, many people in the BLM looked at the documents and all had comments.

If you're interested in some of these supporting documents that were prepared for the EIS -- there was also air modeling reports that looked at the affects of prescribed fire and how that would effect air quality in the western U.S. There were reports done for air quality. There were reports done in support of the culture resource issues, and then of course the risk assessments for all the chemicals -- or at least ten of the different chemicals that I think the BLM actually evaluated, and the remainder being evaluated by the Forest Service and those are on their web site. If you would like to look at those risk assessments -- the reason we didn't publish them was because each one probably runs between 250 to 400 pages for the entire documents for one chemical. If you go on the CDs, you can find them there. That is pretty the easiest way to take a look at those documents because they are rather extensive. All the other supporting reports are also on the CDs, as is the biological assessment that runs 500 plus pages. It is also on the CD.

The draft EIS, as Brian mentioned, was

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available on November 10th to the public. We are currently on our six of ten comment meetings -- public hearing meetings. Tomorrow night is Billings, then Cheyenne, and then on the 13th, we have Las Vegas and Washington DC on the same day. We are going to split up, so don't worry, we have got them covered.

The final EIS -- well, then the comment period actually ends January 9th, so if you have comments on these documents, get them in by January 9th. The final EIS is projected to be available in late spring 2006. So between January 9th and then, we'll be taking all your comments, looking at them, seeing how we can improve the document based on your input, and then preparing the final EIS.

The public will then be allowed to review the final EIS. They will have at least a 30-day review period for that. And then it is hoped that sometime in the summer -- right now we're projecting July, but we also projected this project would be done in 2003 or 2004, so we take all these projections with a grain of salt. But we are hoping that the document is done, the record decision on one or more -- one of the alternatives, or a combination of alternative components will be out around July of 2006.

So what can you do to help? Well, the first

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thing that is probably most important is that if you like -- if you are interested and would like to comment or find out more about what the BLM is proposing, read the documents. Having trouble sleeping? This is a good document to read. If you don't have much going on during the holidays, this will fill up much of your time. No, actually, there probably -- hopefully there is some interesting things in here. It's just the rest of us have been working on this forever, so sometimes we kind of glaze over it.

Anyhow, review the documents. There are several ways to do it. There are CDs out front. Keep in mind there is a two-CD set. So I noticed last night for some reason people -- even though you were trying to tell them that, were only grabbing one, or somehow it looked like on the table that one or two people only grabbed one. There is actually two CDs; one has the EIS on it; the other one has -- and actually it has the environmental report, I believe -- and the other one has all the supplemental reports, the appendices, biological assessments on this one, and all the risk assessments and whatnot. So make sure you get both CDs.

And I would recommend this over all other methods, except for maybe a hard copy. All this

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information that is shown up there is also on the web site. For the web site, you go to www.blm.gov to get there. It is pretty straightforward. The first link on the web site will take you to the Veg EIS, so it is nice to be number one on their site. And the site is pretty well laid out, but for those of you like me that have dial up connections at home, it can take a while. So since you're here tonight, grab a CD. It will save you a lot of time and grief.

The other way, if you really want a hardcopy, Brian has extra hardcopies at his office. He would be happy to send them out. And especially as we get closer to January 9th, he will be very anxious to send them out otherwise we're taking up floor space, so ask him for a copy. We actually sent out hardcopies of all the people that requested them. We originally had a large mailing list way back in the beginning. We picked up new names as we went through this process. We asked all those people that would like a hardcopy, and those folks that responded and said they wanted one. So if you for some reason didn't get one and thought you should have, ask Brian, and he will get you a hardcopy. The other thing you can do is go to the BLM field or state offices, and they should have copies there also to look at, if you want to. You can't take

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As part of the treatments that are going to be conducted under the Healthy Forests Initiative, fire funds will be used to buy these herbicides that are going to be sprayed on public lands, while at the same time, we aren't addressing the catalyst sheep grazing damage. We aren't addressing the unnecessary roading on public lands. We aren't addressing the run-a-muck now, oil and gas exploration, including in Brian's home state of Nevada, where there are now suddenly all these proposals for ramped oil and gas exploration across very fragile sagebrush landscapes in sage grouse habitats, pigmy rabbit habitats, etc.

So what we have here is an agency proposing

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

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

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

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

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

So I would just urge BLM to prepare a Supplemental Draft EIS that embraces a broader range of alternatives, including passive restoration techniques. And we -- the same coalition of groups that worked in developing an alternative before, would be happy to work with you in amending what we presented, or providing additional information, if necessary.

MS. RAMOS: Thank you, Katie.

Would anyone else like to provide any comments tonight?

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Would you please state your name, the organization you represent, if any, and provide your comments. And as I said earlier, when we have one minute remaining, Stuart will hold up that one-minute warning card.

Again, if you all have -- Katie, if you have a written comment, if you would turn that in also.

MS. RICHARDS: My name is Brenda Richards, and I am the federal lands chairman for the Idaho Cattle Association, and also the public land chairman for Idaho for the National Public Lands counsel.

I would like thank the BLM for taking the time -- I know it has been a long process -- in putting forward this EIS, and looking at the alternatives as extensively as they have. I have had the opportunity to participate on several of the tours in the Oregon and Idaho area pertaining to the vegetation treatments, whether they are manual, fire, chemical, or the no alternative -- or no treatment alternative.

I would like to say that we need to remember that these are public lands. They are multiple use, and they do sustain a large amount of multiple use.

In treating weeds -- and as we referred to earlier, the woody vegetation such as juniper -- it does help all the multiple uses. It helps the

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wildlife. It does help to provide a more diverse ecosystem out there. And a lot of these things also contribute to damage to the watershed. The juniper encroachment does take tremendous amount of water out of the watershed and does not allow for a lot of vegetation to come back in. There has extensive studies done on many of these treatments, and these studies were looked at by the BLM.

I would also like to state that livestock grazing has always been used as a fuel reduction -- when it is used properly. And that is another multiple use, and it is something that was looked at in the EIS and needs to be given the credit due.

Again, with these vegetation treatments, it is not only a benefit to the public lands, but it is a benefit to the wildlife aspect and to the whole watershed when you look at the large ecosystem picture.

Thank you.

THE COURT: Thank you very much.

Would anyone else like to provide a comment tonight? Okay.

As stated earlier, this is the six of ten formal hearings that the BLM will be conducting. We will conclude on December 13th with a hearing in Las Vegas, Nevada, and one in Washington DC. If you know

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of anyone that was unable to attend tonight and is interested in providing some comments, please encourage them and take some extra CDs, or they can stop by the BLM field offices and the BLM state office and pick up a copy of the CD, or they can go onto the web site.

We thank you all for your comments tonight, and we thank you for coming in and listening to the presentation.

This will conclude tonight's hearing, and this hearing is now adjourned. Thank you and have a safe trip home tonight.

(The hearing concluded at 7:47 p.m.)

REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

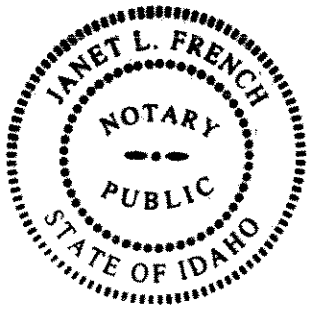
STATE OF IDAHO)
) ss.
COUNTY OF ADA)

I, JANET FRENCH, Certified Shorthand Reporter and Notary Public in and for the State of Idaho, do hereby certify:

That said hearing was taken down by me in shorthand at the time and place therein named and thereafter reduced to typewriting under my direction, and that the foregoing transcript contains a full, true and verbatim record of said hearing.

I further certify that I have no interest in the event of this action.

WITNESS my hand and seal this 15th day of December, 2005.



Janet French

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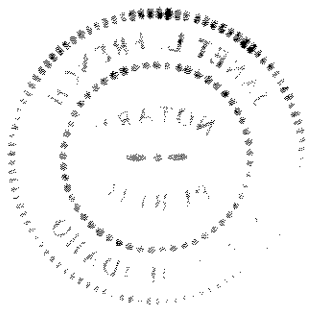
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