



United States
Department of
Agriculture



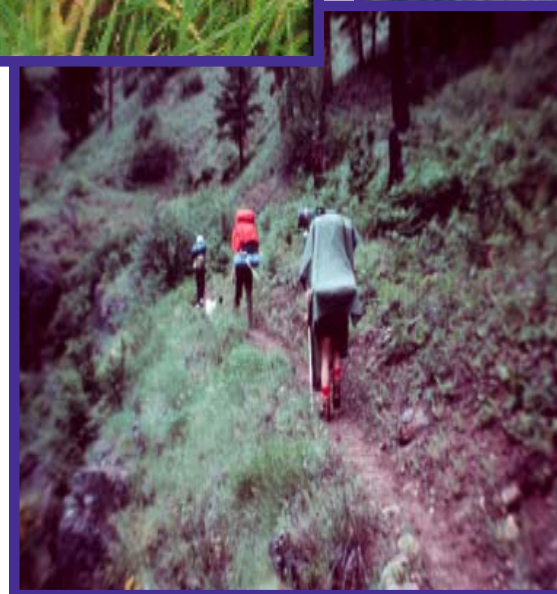
Forest Service



Malheur, Umatilla,
& Wallowa-Whitman
National Forests

Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision

DRAFT Executive Summary Need for Change



November 2005

Reasons for Revision

The *Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Resource Planning Act* of 1974 requires that the Land and Resource Management Plans (Forest Plans) be revised "when the Secretary finds conditions in a unit have significantly changed, but at least every 15 years." In the 15 years since the three Blue Mountain's Forest Plans were signed, much has changed.

Forest resource conditions have changed due to management activities, epidemic insect events, large wildfires, and changing public uses and use levels.

Since 1990, several scientific studies and assessments have addressed land management issues applicable to the Blue Mountains. Some of these looked at a broad geographic scale and set the context for the Blue Mountains as part of a larger ecoregion. In addition, analytical models used to guide management activities and the data used in the models have changed and improved.



Forest Service hydrologists look for hydric features in soils along Swamp Creek (Spring, 2004)

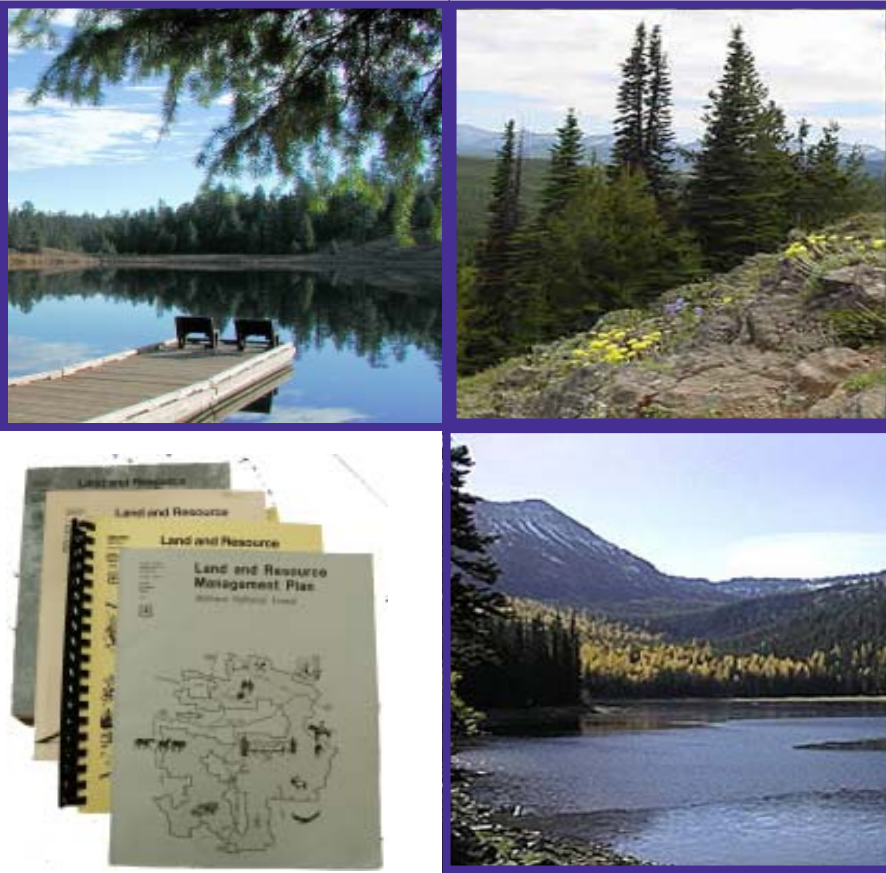


Elaine Kohrman, the Revision Team's Social Scientist/Economist, shares the sense of place maps with county commissioners (August, 2005)

Changes within society include population growth, type and volume of recreation activities, land uses, and urban development as well as people's attitudes, values, and beliefs regarding public lands. An example of a changing social value is an increasing awareness of the link between stewardship activities and improved social and economic conditions of communities in the Blue Mountains. Natural resource management activities are increasingly planned and implemented with greater collaborative involvement and decision-making; reflecting people's expectation about how to be involved in forest planning processes.

Forest Service policy and resource management direction have evolved with new legislation, new science, and a changing society. In the past there have been numerous court decisions that interpret and specify how laws, regulations, and policies are to be implemented. Also, additional species have been listed under the *Endangered Species Act*, and a few have been removed from the list. The current forest plans have been amended several times to reflect changed conditions, new science, or changes in law, regulation, and policy. However, the actual text of the forest plans has not been edited to integrate these changes into plan direction. This has caused misunderstandings, especially if the reader is unaware of the amendments and/or does not have access to the amendment language.

Aspects in Need of Change



Clockwise starting at top left: Bull Prairie Reservoir, Umatilla NF; Rocky Point and Elkhorn Range, Wallowa-Whitman NF; Strawberry Lake, Malheur NF

In light of the above, the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision Team examined the forest plans for the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests, and they reviewed the current conditions on the three forests. Below are major aspects of the forest plans that the three Forest Supervisors believe should be changed through the forest plan revision process.

Need for Change

- 🌲 **Direction is inconsistent at times between the three forests**
- 🌲 **Forest plans do not fully address sustainability**
- 🌲 **Direction related to aquatic habitats does not reflect current science**
- 🌲 **Direction for vegetation conditions does not address management of fuels or fire risk**
- 🌲 **Direction related to wildlife does not address an adequate diversity of habitats**
- 🌲 **Direction for off-highway vehicle use is not adequate**

NEED: Plan Direction is Inconsistent at Times Between the Three National Forests

The three national forests of the Blue Mountains have common issues, resources, users, and interested publics; however, each forest plan is different in its approach to management and the description of management areas. These differences can result in different interpretations by the public and managers resulting at times in inconsistent management of resources and uses across forest boundaries. Having similar direction in the three forest plans should provide better service to users of the three national forests and lead to more consistent management across the Blue Mountains.

HOW THE FORESTS WILL RESPOND: The Blue Mountains national forests have established one team to revise all three forest plans in one effort. The revised forest plans will establish consistent management direction (desired conditions, management categories, objectives, and guidelines). The Team is using a collaborative process involving state and federal agencies, American Indian tribes, the public, interest groups, and employees across the Blue Mountains.

Strategies will be developed for managing resources to provide social, ecological, and economic sustainability and applied across the three forests.

For example, across the three forests lands generally suited for uses such as timber production, fire, livestock grazing, and motorized recreation will be determined using the same set of criteria.

Additionally, the inventory of areas with wilderness potential and wild and scenic rivers will be reviewed and updated in a single effort. River eligibility and wilderness recommendation will consider the needs of the province rather than individual forests.



Trish Callaghan, the Revision Team's Recreation Specialist, points out areas with wilderness potential to Community Collaborative Workshop participants (John Day, OR, April, 2005)

NEED: The Current Forest Plans Do Not Fully Address Sustainability

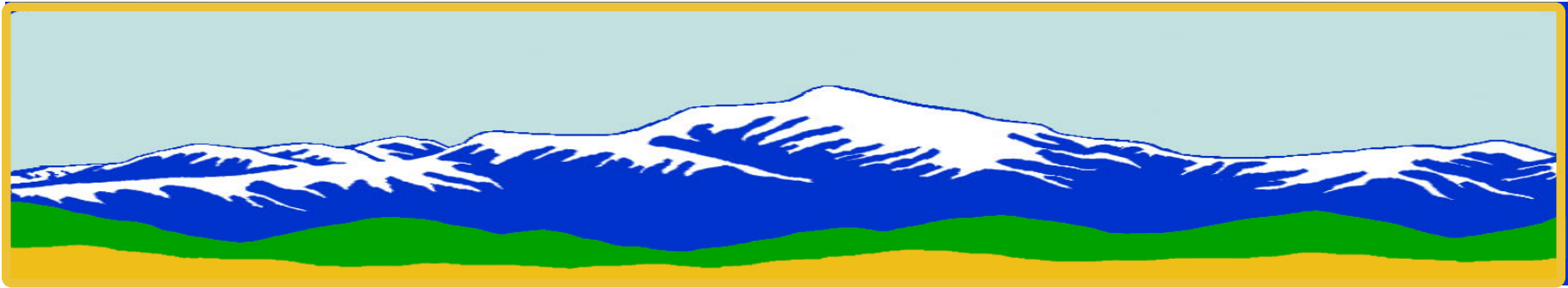
The mission of the Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands in a manner that meets the needs of present and future generations. Currently, the three forest plans address resource issues along individual resource areas such as timber, range, minerals, wildlife, and soils. Monitoring of forest plan activities has revealed some conflicts and inconsistencies between management direction for various resources. This makes reaching forest plan goals and objectives more difficult. In addition, social and economic aspects are not fully integrated with physical and biological aspects.

While ecological integrity is fundamental to sustainability, comments from the Community Collaborative Workshops indicate that social and economic aspects of sustainability are as important as ecological aspects. The revised forest plans should provide a more integrated approach to management. Management direction that integrates social, ecological, and economic aspects would sustain the productivity of the land and its renewable resources to best meet the needs of the American people.

**Blue Mountains
Forest Plan Revision
Sustainability Framework**

-  **Social Well-being**
-  **Ecological Integrity**
-  **Economic Well-being**

HOW THE FORESTS WILL RESPOND: Management direction in the revised forest plans will address the three fundamental aspects of sustainability: social well-being, ecological integrity, and economic well-being. Each of these aspects will have criteria and indicators that describe conditions that are desirable to achieve sustainability (see page 4). Desired conditions, management categories, and objectives and guidelines will be developed considering the interaction between social, ecological, and economic aspects and will reflect the local culture and economy. Conflicts between various resource values will be addressed by considering the relationship and linkages between the indicators. Monitoring will focus on measuring progress toward achieving the desired conditions.



Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision Sustainability Framework

1 - Social Well-Being

1.1 - Collaborative Stewardship

- 1.1.1 Participating and Engaging
- 1.1.2 Decision-making
- 1.1.3 Learning and Adapting

1.2 - Capacity and Efficacy

- 1.2.1 Community Resiliency
- 1.2.2 Accountability and Flexibility
- 1.2.3 Land Ownership
- 1.2.4 Trust Responsibilities

1.3 - Social Equity

- 1.3.1 Justice and Rights
- 1.3.2 Public Health and Safety

1.4 - Social and Cultural Values

- 1.4.1 Hunting, Fishing, and Gathering
- 1.4.2 Scenery
- 1.4.3 Interpretation & Conservation Education
- 1.4.4 Heritage Resources
- 1.4.5 Specially Designated Areas
- 1.4.6 Access and Use
- 1.4.7 Recreation
- 1.4.8 Attitudes, Beliefs, Values

2 - Ecological Integrity

2.1 - Ecological Function

- 2.1.1 Disturbance Processes
- 2.1.2 Watershed Function
- 2.1.3 Productive Capacity
- 2.1.4 Population Sustainability
- 2.1.5 Invasive Species

2.2 - Ecological Structure and Composition

- 2.2.1 Plant Community Diversity
- 2.2.2 Air Quality
- 2.2.3 Soil Productivity
- 2.2.4 Water Quality
- 2.2.5 Landscape Patterns
- 2.2.6 Special Habitats

3 - Economic Well-Being

3.1 - Capital and Wealth

- 3.1.1 Natural Capital
- 3.1.2 Built Capital (Facilities & Infrastructure)
- 3.1.3 Human Capital

3.2 - Goods, Services, and Other Values

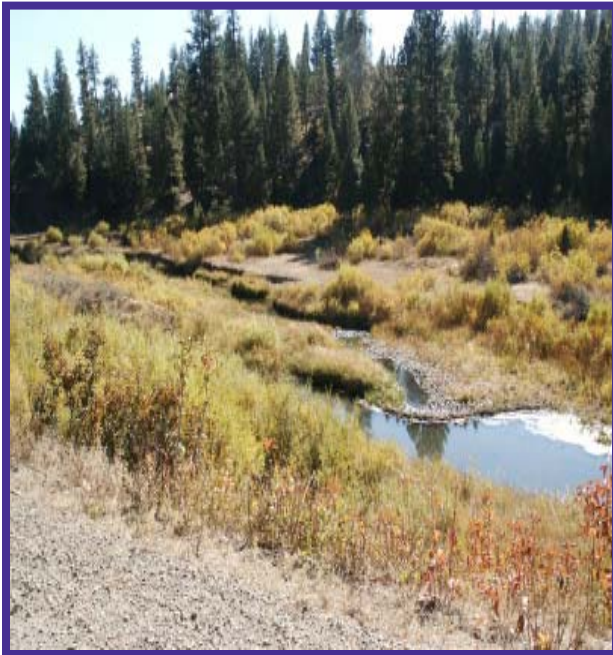
- 3.2.1 Goods and Services
- 3.2.2 Other Values

3.3 - Trade and Distributional Equity

- 3.3.1 Trade Balance
- 3.3.2 Employment and Income
- 3.3.3 Distribution



NEED: Direction Related to Aquatic Habitats Does Not Reflect Current Science



The *Interior Columbia Basin Strategy* (USDA/USDI, 2003) emphasizes restoring the processes responsible for creating and maintaining aquatic and riparian habitats and restoring naturally functioning riparian ecosystems. It also outlines specific components to be included in revised forest plans.

Amendments to the current forest plans provide interim direction (i.e., PACFISH, INFISH, and the Eastside Screens) for managing threatened or endangered fish species. However, current forest plan language was never changed to integrate this interim direction or resolve conflicts between the existing forest plan language and interim direction language. In addition, new science is available that should be considered in developing forest plan direction. The forest plans need to be updated to reflect current science and applicable law, regulation, and policy.

How the Forests will Respond: The Revision Team will review current science related to aquatic species as well as appropriate elements identified in the *Interior Columbia Basin Strategy* and develop desired conditions, management categories, objectives, and guidelines and identify priority watersheds consistent with law, regulation, and policy. The revised forest plans will incorporate regional direction for aquatic habitat conservation.



Poorly functioning riparian habitat (top left) (September, 2004)

Properly functioning riparian area (bottom left) (September, 2005)

Aquatic Conservation Strategy Elements that Revised Forest Plans will Incorporate:

-  **Riparian Management Areas**
-  **Key Watersheds**
-  **Watershed Analyses**
-  **Watershed Restoration**
-  **Monitoring**

NEED: *Direction for Vegetation Conditions Does Not Address Management of Fuels and Fire Risk*

Currently forested areas on the three national forests are dominated by dense, multi-layered conifer stands with tree species not well-suited for the area. This puts forest stands at high risk for uncharacteristic damage from wildland fire, insects, and disease. Current forest plan standards and guidelines do not adequately address the multiple factors that have created the existing uncharacteristic conditions nor do they adequately address the varied nature of the landscape. They also do not address the need for management strategies that consider the unique qualities of various landscapes. The revised forest plans need to establish a more integrated strategy that recognizes multiple risk factors and addresses variability in conditions and site potentials. The revised forest plans also need to address management of fire risk.

HOW THE FORESTS WILL RESPOND: The revised forest plans will include integrated management direction for vegetation composition and structure that recognizes the role of disturbance processes specific to each biophysical setting and fire regime. They will also incorporate recent updates to wildland fire policy and legislation such as the *Healthy Forest Restoration Act* and the *Healthy Forests Initiative*. Strategies for post-disturbance activities will also be included.



Dense lodgepole pine regeneration following wildfire (above) (Sumpter Valley, September 2004)



Dense overstocked forest stand (left)

Recently treated forest stand (right)

(Deer Creek, September, 2004)



NEED: Direction Related to Wildlife Does Not Address an Adequate Diversity of Habitats

One objective in the *Strategic Plan for the Forest Service* is to “provide ecological conditions to sustain viable populations of native and desired nonnative species and to achieve objectives for management indicator and focal species.” The current forest plans use management indicator species to determine population sustainability for vertebrate species. While they are extremely important species, they do not represent an adequate cross-section of terrestrial and aquatic habitats found within the Blue Mountains. In addition, the *Interior Columbia Basin Strategy* identifies key elements to be addressed in planning efforts, such as source habitats, that are not addressed in the current forest plans. The revised forest plans need to reflect current science and applicable law, regulation, and policy and to focus attention on habitat conditions rather than on population numbers.

HOW THE FORESTS WILL RESPOND: The Revision Team will review current science in a collaborative process to identify focal species that represent the full range of habitat types located across the Blue Mountains. The sustainability of focal species populations would be modeled to depict relationships among ecological and risk factors that influence species viability. Based on the modeling, the Revision Team will develop desired conditions, management categories, objectives, and guidelines to provide habitat that contributes to sustainable populations.

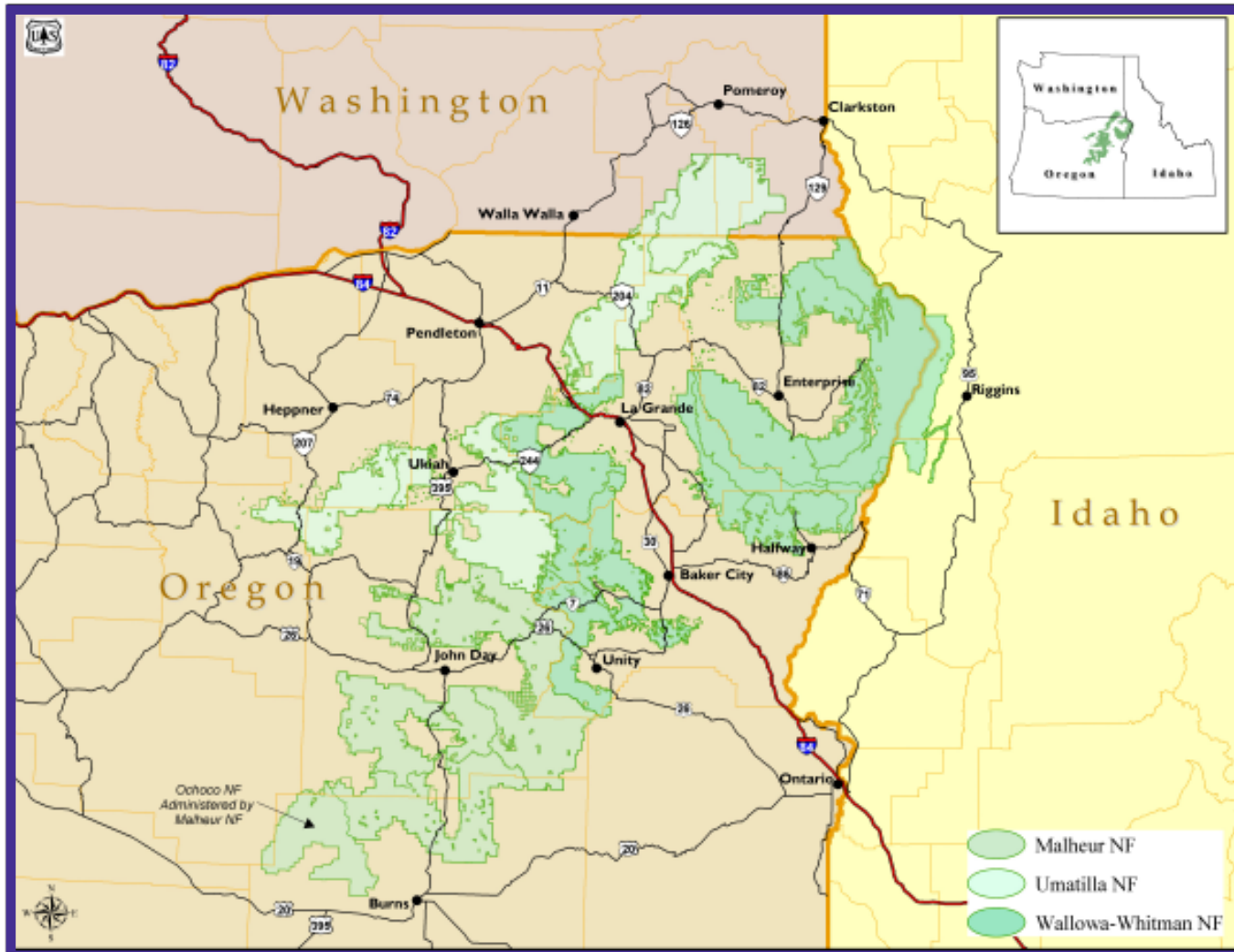


Motorcycle and all-terrain vehicle riders use trail system on Whitman Unit near Unity, OR (October, 2003)


NEED: Direction for Off-Highway Vehicle Use is Not Adequate

The current forest plans did not foresee the growth and popularity of off-highway vehicles or the extensive use now occurring across the Blue Mountains national forests. While providing outdoor recreation opportunities meets one of the goals of the Forest Service, unmanaged off-road motorized use is widespread and is causing localized resource damage. Motorized access was the single most urgent topic for the participants in the Community Collaborative Workshops. Unmanaged off-highway motorized use is recognized by the Chief of the Forest Service as a major threat to the mission of providing healthy and productive forests.

HOW THE FORESTS WILL RESPOND: The revised forest plans will identify areas generally suitable for motorized use providing strategic broad-scale direction for project-level decisions. The revision will respond to the *National OHV Rule*, review the *Tri-Forest All-Terrain Vehicle Strategy* recently developed by the three forests, coordinate suitability with adjacent Bureau of Land Management units, and consider natural resource impacts, desirable levels of use, safety considerations, social concerns, law enforcement concerns, tribal treaty rights, and neighboring landowners’ concerns. Based on these assessments, desired conditions, management categories, objectives, and guidelines will be developed to address motorized use.



-  **5.3 million acres on three national forests**
-  **3 states**
-  **18 counties**
-  **160+ communities**

- The National Forests of the Blue Mountains:**
-  **Malheur**
 -  **Umatilla**
 -  **Wallowa-Whitman**

