



## Washington, DC Update

*Congress returns to consider spending, forest policy.* Congress recently returned from its traditional August recess, and faces a long list of to-do items, including agreeing on a plan to fund the federal government beyond September 30, the end of the fiscal year.

House Republicans continue to advance Appropriations bills that are unlikely to garner bipartisan support in the Senate, which is needed to secure the 60 votes necessary to move legislation in that chamber. The Senate is advancing bipartisan Appropriations bills that are likely non-starters for House Republicans. This major disconnect makes a Continuing Resolution much more likely.

However, Democrats are demanding commitments that Republicans won't support subsequent rescission requests or President Trump's proposed "pocket rescissions," which the Government Accountability Office [believes](#) are illegal. This debate is part of a broader fight over expanded Presidential authority and Congress' unique power of the purse under the Constitution.

Congress will also have to take up the annual Defense Reauthorization Bill, which has been a vehicle for non-defense legislation in the past. Energy and Natural Resources Committee leaders are also expected to continue negotiating potential permitting reform legislation, with Republicans supporting streamlined environmental reviews and Democrats looking for reforms to improve the transmission grid and renewable energy project development.

The Senate Agriculture Committee could schedule action on the Senate version of the Fix our Forests Act, which has become the most likely vehicle for various forestry proposals. The House Natural Resources Committee is also expected to focus on legislation to empower Tribes to take a more meaningful role in the management of federal forests.

*Trump appointees await confirmation.* Finally, there are over 100 Trump Administration nominees that are awaiting confirmation in the Senate as Democrats have used their limited power under current Senate rules to delay votes. Senate Majority Leader John Thune is considering a Senate rule change to speed up these votes. Micheal Boren, Trump's nominee to serve as USDA Undersecretary for Natural Resources and the Environment, which oversees the Forest Service, is strongly opposed by Senate Democrats and has seen his confirmation delayed for months. Neil Jacobs, Trump's nominee to oversee the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is also stalled in the Senate. /Heath Heikkila

# The AFRC Podcast



## **Episode 48** **Fuel Treatments: Smart Investments, Healthy Forests**



The AFRC Podcast is a monthly discussion examining key issues and news relating to forestry, forest products and public lands management.

On Episode 48, we're joined by Frederik Strabo, an environmental and natural resource economist at UC Davis whose research focuses on how fuel treatments can reduce the economic costs of wildfires. His work shines new light on the benefits of proactive forest management, from lowering suppression costs to protecting communities and ecosystems. We'll talk about his findings, their implications for the Northwest Forest Plan, and how economics can inform smarter wildfire policy.

Click here to listen to Episode 48. Our podcast is also available on Spotify and Apple Podcasts

## **Executive Orders Spur Growth of Landscape-Scale Forest Management**

Following President Trump's signing of two Executive Orders on March 1, aimed at expanding U.S. timber production and strengthening the domestic lumber industry, several National Forests have initiated large, landscape-scale projects to accelerate treatment of forested acres.

The Colville National Forest is preparing its third A-to-Z style contract, which the purchaser completes the NEPA process and oversees implementation. The first two projects, Mill Creek and Chewelah, each treated more than 50,000 acres. The new Powers Lake Area project is expected to be of similar scale, continuing to bolster the Colville timber program, which now sells roughly 130 million board feet annually.

In Montana, the State and the Forest Service recently signed a Shared Stewardship Agreement to formalize a framework for addressing high-risk forests. The 200,000-acre landscape spans portions of the Flathead and Kootenai National Forests. Under this agreement, Montana DNRC will take on implementation of authorized restoration goals with a 20-year mutual commitment to planning and execution using the Good Neighbor Authority.

Meanwhile, the Bitterroot National Forest is pursuing a 10-year Integrated Resource Stewardship Contract for projects within the Bitterroot Front Landscape Planning Area and possibly other areas across the forest. Approximately 13,000 acres are planned for treatment over the next decade, with potential expansion to adjacent areas. Four project areas may be offered at contract award for immediate

implementation, with additional areas to be added annually as funding allows. The effort includes at least 90,000 CCF, approximately 45 million board feet, of commercial timber.

On the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest, a Request for Information has been issued for the End of the World Planning Area, with objectives focused on reducing insect and disease risk, mitigating wildfire hazards, and improving vegetation and water quality. A long-term 10-year G-to-Z Integrated Resource Stewardship Contract is being considered, covering about 17,000 gross acres, with net treated acres expected to be lower following unit layout. Over the life of the contract, more than 50 million board feet of commercial timber could be offered. A public meeting to discuss the project is scheduled for September 10 in Grangeville, Idaho, followed by a site visit.

With Congressional authorization to extend stewardship contracts to 20 years, additional forests are exploring opportunities to identify suitable landscapes and solicit bidders. These projects will require partnerships with states through the Good Neighbor Authority or with individual purchasers. AFRC views these initiatives as essential for increasing the number of acres treated while keeping the region's milling infrastructure viable. */Tom Partin*

## **USDA Takes Next Steps to Rescind the 2021 Roadless Rule**

On August 27, USDA Secretary Rollins [announced](#) the next steps in a rulemaking process to rescind the 2021 Roadless Rule. The Roadless Rule has been a roadblock to science-based active management on millions of acres of Federal forests for more than a quarter-Century. Rescinding the Roadless Rule would allow local experts to make place-based decisions to steward and manage our forests.

The Secretary's decision was published in the [Federal Register](#) on August 29. Public comments are due September 19. AFRC will submit supportive comments on behalf of our members, highlighting the following points:

### **It's about wildfire prevention and public safety.**

- Nearly half of all roadless acres are located in areas rated as high or very high wildfire risk.
- Since the Roadless Rule was enacted, more than 8 million acres of roadless forests have burned – highlighting the consequences of limiting access and management.
- Roads are essential for safe and effective wildfire response. Without access, firefighters can't reach ignition points, build containment lines, or safely evacuate visitors and residents.
- Rescinding the rule allows land managers to reduce fuels and restore healthier, more fire-resilient forests.

### **It's about promoting proactive, science-based forest management.**

- The Roadless Rule effectively barred active forest management across nearly 60 million acres, or almost one-third of the National Forest System. This approach simply hasn't worked.
- Many of these forests are now overstocked with dead or dying trees, creating ideal conditions for insects, disease, and ultimately more high-severity wildfires.
- Rescinding the rule will give our public lands managers more opportunities to use science based tools – like thinning, prescribed burning, and selective harvesting – to improve forest health and reduce ecological stress.

### **It's about maintaining safe access and critical infrastructure on public lands.**

- Road access is necessary not only for management but also for maintaining recreation infrastructure, water systems, and search-and-rescue operations.

- The rule even prevented temporary road construction in areas where roads were critical for stewardship and public safety.
- Rescinding the rule doesn't mandate roadbuilding. It simply allows roads to be considered where they're needed.

**It's about restoring local flexibility and accountability.**

- A one-size-fits-all mandate doesn't work across 60 million acres of diverse landscapes.
- Rescinding the rule gives local land managers and stakeholders flexibility to tailor solutions based on forest conditions, fire risk, and ecological needs.
- Forest Service decisions will still be transparent, collaborative, and accountable to the public through established environmental laws and processes.

**Rescinding the Roadless Rule will not result in "Unrestrained Logging."**

- Claims that rescinding the Roadless Rule will lead to "unrestrained logging" are false and misleading. All activities on National Forest lands – including those in former roadless areas – must still comply with strict environmental laws, including the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, and individual forest management plans.
- Forest projects must undergo site-specific environmental review, public input, and scientific analysis before proceeding. Rescission simply removes a blanket, top-down blanket prohibition on considering access – it does not eliminate the rigorous oversight that governs timber harvests on federal land.
- Federal forests remain among the most heavily regulated lands in the world, and sustainable forest management, not unrestrained logging, remains the standard.

**Rescinding the Roadless Rule will not lead to more human-caused wildfires.**

- Not all roads are open to the public. The Forest Service routinely restricts access to certain roads using gates, locks, and barriers – especially in areas with sensitive wildlife or fire concerns. Rescinding the Roadless Rule does not mean unlimited public access.
- Roads can be managed to reduce ignition risks. Agencies can control access to prevent human-caused ignitions while maintaining roads for emergency response, fuels treatment, and maintenance.
- Poor access is a top obstacle to fire suppression. In nearly every major wildfire over the past 15-20 years, the Forest Service has identified lack of road access as a key barrier to effective response.
- Road infrastructure supports rapid suppression. Having roads in place – especially ones that are closed but can be quickly reopened – allows firefighting crews to access ignition points faster and prevent small fires from becoming large, destructive events.
- Current policy is leading to road loss, not expansion. The Forest Service is losing more than 1,000 miles of road access every year due to policy restrictions or lack of maintenance funding – further limiting its ability to manage forests and respond to fire.
- Building new roads mid-crisis is inefficient and dangerous. When fires start in remote areas, it often takes days for the Forest Service to build temporary roads just to get equipment on-site. Maintaining access in advance saves valuable time and resources.

Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities also offers an easy-to-use online form that allows you to send official comments directly to the Forest Service. You can [take action here](#). Please share it with others who support better forest management. /Travis Joseph



## **AFRC Submits Comments on USDA Reorganization Plan**

On August 26, AFRC submitted formal [comments](#) to Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins regarding the U.S. Department of Agriculture's proposed reorganization of the Forest Service.

AFRC expressed support for the Administration's stated goal of bringing USDA "closer to its customers" and realigning the agency to improve its ability to achieve its mission. As the largest manager of forests in the West, the Forest Service has a critical role to play in expanding active management, reducing severe wildfire risks, and ensuring a sustainable supply of domestically produced wood products. AFRC emphasized that any restructuring must strengthen these functions, rather than weaken them.

AFRC noted that regional offices provide important value to contractors, purchasers, and partners by ensuring consistency in contract materials and administration across multiple National Forests. With many AFRC members operating in more than one National Forest at a time, inconsistent contract clauses or administrative practices could create confusion and inefficiencies. Regional offices also serve as vital access points where contractors and stakeholders can resolve issues and maintain predictability in their business relationships with the agency.

In addition, AFRC highlighted the importance of regional offices in managing stewardship and Good Neighbor Authority agreements. These agreements, often developed and signed at the regional level, are essential tools for meeting the timber output expansion goals outlined in President Trump's Executive Order promoting domestic timber and lumber production. AFRC's comments urged USDA to maintain clear processes and points of contact for these agreements as it moves forward with the reorganization.

The comments also stressed the need to retain subject matter expertise that currently resides at the regional level. Regional staff often provide specialized guidance on matters that extend across multiple National Forests, such as compliance with the Endangered Species Act, forest plan amendments, and project defense against litigation. AFRC warned that losing this expertise could reduce efficiency and consistency, as well as undermine the agency's ability to defend projects in court.

Finally, AFRC underscored that the reorganization should clarify lines of authority and decision-making at the local and state levels. Local leaders must remain visible and accessible in their communities and be empowered to make timely, final decisions. Ensuring continuity of expertise and strong local leadership will be essential if the Forest Service is to meet the goals of active management and expanded timber supply.

Finally, AFRC reiterated its commitment to working with the USDA and the Forest Service throughout the reorganization process. Our comments stressed that the ultimate measure of success will be whether the agency emerges better equipped to expand active forest management, reduce wildfire risks, and provide a reliable supply of American-made wood products. AFRC and its members stand ready to partner with USDA to achieve these objectives. */Nick Smith*

## **Upthegrove Announces Proposal to Set aside 77,000 Acres**

On August 26, Washington Commissioner of Public Lands Dave Upthegrove held a press conference outside a Seattle suburb where he signed a [Commissioner's Order](#) that directs the set aside of an additional 77,000 acres of manageable state trust lands from sustainable forest management in favor of potential alternative revenue generation opportunities like ecosystem service markets. DNR has developed a [website](#) on the proposal entitled, "Fast Forward – A New Direction for Our Forests" that includes fact sheets and a mapping tool for "Structurally Complex Forests."

Upthegrove's announcement came over seven months after the Commissioner ordered a six-month "pause" of two dozen pending DNR timber sales on his first day in office. Those sales included mature, structurally complex forests that Upthegrove made a campaign promise to protect as so-called "Legacy Forests."

However, earlier in the day Commissioner Upthegrove convened an agency-wide staff meeting where he announced that most of the nearly two-dozen timber sales that were paused would soon be released and come to the Board of Natural Resources for approval. These sales are part of approximately 29,000 acres of mature forest Upthegrove is green lighting for harvest over the next 4-5 years to prop up DNR's timber sale program.

As reported in the [August 2025 Newsletter](#), Upthegrove's pause drove the DNR timber sale program to some of the lowest levels seen in decades, raising serious concerns about the financial impact to trust land beneficiaries and DNR management funds that rely on timber revenues. Mills and contractors that rely on DNR timber sales are also feeling the impact.

AFRC issued a [press release](#) on the day of the announcement and three days later placed an [op-ed](#) in the Seattle Times raising serious concerns with the proposal. With about half of the DNR state trust lands already set aside from harvest (~600,000 acres), removing another 77,000 acres of mature forests would have a drastic impact on timber volumes and revenues.

Anti-forestry groups are not pleased with the proposal and are pressuring Upthegrove to modify draft maps to include different areas. Upthegrove recently signaled that DNR is reviewing the maps and considering changes.

AFRC opposes arbitrary set asides of additional DNR state trust lands. There are also serious questions about the authority of the Commissioner of Public Lands to unilaterally order such a policy change when state law vests the Board of Natural Resources with setting policy for DNR state trust lands. Board decisions, such as the decadal Sustainable Harvest Calculation, are made through an open and transparent process that includes analysis and public comment. It is unclear if Upthegrove plans to bring the proposal to the Board of Resources.

In the meantime the debate will likely shift to the Legislature where Upthegrove is expected to request legislation authorizing DNR to enter into ecosystem service markets. /Heath Heikkila

## **AFRC Defends the Forest Service's Restoration Categorical Exclusion in Federal Court**

On August 11, United States District Court Judge James P. Jones heard oral argument in *Clinch Coal. et al. v. United States Forest Service, et al.* (No. 2:21-cv-0003-JPJ-PMS) in the Western District of Virginia. This case involves a challenge to the U.S. Forest Service's promulgation of three categorical exclusions (CEs). Plaintiffs, who comprise various groups focused on conservation in the Southern Appalachian region, filed a facial challenge (i.e., the regulation is always unlawful) to three CEs: CE-3 (special use activities that involve less than 20 acres of National Forest lands), CE-24 (road construction and realignment of up to 2 miles), and CE-25 (activities that have the primary purpose of forest restoration that are less than 2,800 acres). These three CEs were promulgated in November 2020, which was part of a three-year process by the agency to update and streamline environmental analysis, decision-making

procedures, and make the examination of environmental effects less costly. See [November 2020 Newsletter](#).

Plaintiffs alleged the CEs and the agency's rulemaking process violate the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) because the Forest Service failed to demonstrate that the CEs will *not* have significant environmental effects. AFRC is participating as a Defendant-Intervenor on behalf of AFRC, American Loggers Council, and the Federal Forest Resource Coalition who supported the Forest Service's promulgation of the CEs. See [June 2021 Newsletter](#). These CEs provide economic benefits by streamlining commercial timber contracts on National Forests and simplifying the NEPA process. The parties had a two-and-a-half-hour argument before Judge Jones on Plaintiffs' Motion for Summary Judgment.

AFRC General Counsel Sara Ghafouri argued on behalf of Defendant-Intervenors and used her time to provide the Court with context of the importance of these CEs to maintain healthy and resilient forests, provide a reliable supply of timber, and promote the health of rural economies. Her argument focused on the merits of the case, demonstrating how the Forest Service provided substantial evidence that these CEs normally will not have significant effects, consistent with NEPA, by relying on (1) expert input from professional staff and experts, (2) past Forest Service projects developed under Environmental Assessments, and (3) benchmarking CEs adopted by other agencies that involve similar actions.

Overall, Judge Jones's focus was on whether the Court had jurisdiction to hear Plaintiffs' claims and whether the Forest Service's consideration of experts and analysis of past projects in various regions across the country provided substantial evidence to justify the promulgation of the challenged CEs.

*/Taylor Harwood*

## **Ninth Circuit Upholds the BLM's Big Weekly Project**

On August 27, the Ninth Circuit issued a 63-page opinion upholding the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Big Weekly Elk Forest Project (Big Weekly Project). Ninth Circuit Judge Milan D. Smith Jr. authored the unanimous decision.

The Coos Bay District first scoped the Big Weekly Elk Project in 2019 with a stated purpose and need to: 1) promote northern spotted owl nesting, roosting, foraging (NRF) habitat within the late-successional reserve (LSR) land use allocation (LUA), 2) promote the development of stable wood in riparian reserve (RR) LUA, and 3) conduct timber harvest to contribute to the District's allowable sale quantity volume in the harvest land base (HLB) LUA. The District published the Final EA in 2021, which proposed two action alternatives to meet these ends. Alternative 2 analyzed 2,116 acres of commercial thinning in LSR and RR LUAs and a mix of commercial thinning and regeneration harvest across 520 acres of HLB LUA. Alternative 3 analyzed 2,141 acres of commercial thinning in LSR and RR LUA and a mix of commercial thinning and regeneration harvest across 727 acres of HLB LUA. Alternatives 2 and 3 were estimated to produce 46.2 million board feet (mmbf) and 59.5 mmbf of commercial timber volume, respectively. The District has published six decisions from the Big Weekly Project, each selecting Alternative 3 as the preferred alternative. To date, the Coos Bay District has awarded 25 mmbf in timber sales from the Big Weekly Elk Project, and another 32.7 mmbf is expected from the Project's remaining sales.

Plaintiffs Cascadia Wildland and Oregon Wild brought two claims, alleging that: 1) the Big Weekly Project violated the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and the BLM's 2016 Resource Management Plan's (RMP) provisions regarding marbled murrelet habitat; and 2) the Big Weekly Project violated NEPA by failing to take a "hard look" at the environmental impacts.

About 65 percent of the Big Weekly Project overlaps with lands designated as LSRs, which has special management direction for marbled murrelets, a species listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Relevant here, the RMP provides that, in LSRs, certain activities “needed to protect of the overall health of the [occupied marbled murrelet] stands or adjacent stands” are permitted “as long as the occupied stands continues to support marbled murrelet nesting.” Additionally, “felling and removal of trees for habitat restoration” and “the construction or maintenance of linear or nonlinear rights-of-way, spur roads, yarding corridors, or other facilities, as long as the occupied stand continues to support marbled murrelet nesting.” The Big Weekly Project did not propose LSR thinning in stands with suitable murrelet habitat or in stands delineated as occupied habitat but proposed thinning adjacent to those stands to develop, in the long-term, areas of murrelet nesting habitat.

In upholding the Project, Judge Smith Jr. wrote: “Emerging from the thicket of overlapping statutes, regulations, and administrative actions, we are satisfied that BLM did not act arbitrarily or capriciously.” With respect to the FLPMA claim, Plaintiffs argued that because the Project proposes to harvest stands adjacent to suitable murrelet habitat, those activities constitute modifying nesting habitat which would trigger the requirements of the Murrelet Management Direction to survey for murrelets. In Plaintiffs’ view, the Project violates the RMP by failing to do so. In interpreting the direction in the RMP, the Ninth Circuit found the term “modifying nesting habitat” to be ambiguous and *deferred* to the BLM’s interpretation that it refers to direction alteration of nesting habitat—i.e., habitat alerting activities occurring within a polygon that the BLM identifies a marbled murrelet habitat: “[T]he tools in our interpretive toolkit led us to conclude that ‘modifying nesting habitat’ could be read narrowly or broadly. It follows for many of those same reasons that BLM’s narrow reading is reasonable.”

As applied to the Project, the Ninth Circuit concluded that in LSRs no thinning will occur within any existing nesting habitat and thinning will only take place in adjacent stands—therefore there is no obligation for the BLM to survey and buffer under the Murrelet Management Direction.

With respect to the NEPA claims, Plaintiffs argued that the BLM failed to take a “hard look” at the impacts on murrelets. In response to Plaintiffs’ NEPA claims, the Ninth Circuit heavily relied on the Supreme Court’s recent opinion in *Seven County Infrastructure Coalition v. Eagle County, Colorado*, 145 S. Ct. 1497 (May 29, 2025), which emphasized the importance of affording deference to the agency. Plaintiffs argued that the BLM had mischaracterized the environmental impacts on the harm caused by thinning adjacent to murrelet nests, i.e., edge effects. The Ninth Circuit held that the BLM took the requisite “hard look” at the impacts to murrelets and appropriately relied on tiering to the RMP’s EIS: “In essence, the Plaintiffs challenge BLM’s conclusions about the severity and existence of deleterious edge effects. This is a technical, scientific issue where deference to agency technical expertise is at its apogee. That dooms the Plaintiffs’ claim.”

The Ninth Circuit ruling is a huge victory for the BLM, as it will serve as important precedent to other pending challenges to BLM projects. /Sara Ghafouri and Corey Bingaman

## **Fish and Wildlife Service Determines Fisher Not Warranted for Listing Under ESA**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has determined that listing the Northern California-Southern Oregon distinct population segment (NCSO DPS) of fisher under the Endangered Species Act is not warranted. The determination was made following the completion of a Species Status Assessment (SSA) Report that considered current and potential future risks to the DPS. The report concluded that, although existential risks such as climate change and wildfire may have impacts across the range of the DPS, those



risks coupled with the species' resiliency to habitat modification do not amount to a likelihood of extinction in the foreseeable future. Specifically, the report noted that "Fishers in the NCSO DPS demonstrate a moderate ability to adapt to changing conditions such as shifts in forest composition and prey availability, ability to persist in fire-prone landscapes, and tolerance of landscape changes from silviculture."



The NCSO DPS covers much of northwest California and portions of southwest Oregon and includes both native and reintroduced populations. In 2020, FWS also determined it was not warranted for listing while concurrently listing the Southern Sierra Nevada (SSN) DPS as threatened. In response, a coalition of environmental groups filed a complaint challenging the 2020 rule.

In 2023, FWS entered into a settlement agreement and agreed to prepare a new 12-month finding as to whether the listing of the NCSO DPS of fisher is warranted. FWS also published a request for information to inform the SSA Report that would inform the listing determination. A copy of joint comments submitted by AFRC and Calforests can be found [here](#). The SSN DPS maintained its listing

as threatened.

In conjunction with this month's listing determination, FWS highlighted the existing habitat protection measures in current management plans that govern federally managed forest land across the DPS. Also noted were voluntary conservation measures taken by the timber industry and tribal governments to contribute to the protection and recovery of fishers. More information can be found [here](#). /Andy Geissler

## Clackamas Stewardship Partners Tour Mt. Hood National Forest

Various stakeholders involved in the Clackamas Stewardship Partners (CSP) joined Mt. Hood National Forest staff to tour past and future vegetation management projects on the Clackamas River Ranger District. The tour focused on the District's next planning area, called Anvil, located between Ripplebrook and Timothy Lake. The objectives of the Anvil project are to improve forest health and resiliency, restore historical stand structure and composition, reduce hazardous fuels, and provide sustainable forest products.

Units proposed for treatment to attain these objectives are limited to previously harvested areas comprised of young, dense, uniform conifer stands. Forest Service staff indicated that treatments in these stands would adhere to the typical sideboards that have become almost standard for Forest Service projects over the past 30 years: thinning from below while maintaining low quality northern spotted owl habitat. Although the Forest Service acknowledged recent Executive Orders that call for expanded timber production from federal forest land, they also noted that current restrictions in the Northwest Forest Plan severely limit their options in planning areas like Anvil.

In addition to the field trip stops in planned Anvil units, the CSP and the Forest Service also visited a previously harvested unit from the Buck Stew timber sale. Unlike the Anvil project, Buck Stew included a single unit where regeneration harvest was analyzed and implemented.



The treatment resembles a shelterwood where, unlike a clearcut, individual and clumps of trees from the original stand are retained to provide a seed source and to diversify the structure of the new stand. Three years following harvest, the stand includes a variety of early seral shrub species in addition to scattered conifer seedlings. Forest Service staff noted that they encountered an elk herd during previous visits to the stand, which was a welcome sign as one of the objectives of this Buck Stew unit was to improve elk summer range habitat.

*/Andy Geissler*

## **Forest Service Seeks Input on Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision**

On August 5, the Forest Service published in the Federal Register the Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS for the long-awaited forest plan revision for the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests, collectively known as the Blue Mountains Forests. Although the plans are combined, due to common conditions over much of the Blue Mountains, each supervisor will sign the plan separately. The Draft Land Management Plan (LMP) and associated documents can be found [here](#). Comments on the Draft Land LMP are due October 5.

This marks the second occasion in the past decade where the Forest Service attempted to revise the 1990 LMP for the Blue Mountains Forests. A revised LMP was issued in 2018 following nearly 15 years of contentious public planning in which numerous community members and leaders felt frustrated, misunderstood and ignored. The administrative objection process yielded more than 350 objections to the revised LMP. Many of the objections indicated that the public felt that the input they provided had not been incorporated nor had the unique social and economic needs of the affected communities been addressed. As a result, on March 14, 2019, the Forest Service deputy chief instructed the Regional Forester to withdraw the revised LMP, Final Environmental Impact Statement, and draft Record of Decision. As a result of this withdrawal, the Blues Intergovernmental Council (BIC) was formed whose members included eastern Oregon County government officials, tribal representation and other key interested parties.

One component of the Draft LMP that will garner a high level of scrutiny is how it addresses the Eastside Screens, specifically the “21-inch rule.” Since its inception, the 21-inch rule has proven to be a major impediment to attaining desired forest conditions in eastern Oregon, due primarily to its arbitrary nature and lack of flexibility for specific tree species and forest conditions. Unfortunately, the Draft LMP does not propose to remove this diameter limit, but instead proposes its modification that includes new diameter limits in addition to an age limit.

Conversely, the Draft LMP proposes a departure from the Eastside Screens that would permit “silvicultural thinning” in riparian areas. The single largest riparian issue in eastern Oregon has been the inability to restore the shrub and hardwood component due to the Eastside Screen prohibitions. This

provision would bring the Blue Mountains Forests in line with most other National Forests where active forest management, including timber harvest, is routinely implemented in riparian areas to meet aquatic objectives.

Other notable aspects of the Draft LMP include the designation of approximately 56% of the land base as suitable for timber production. From this land base, the Draft LMP proposes an annual projected sale quantity for sawtimber of 55 mmbf, 54 mmbf, and 62 mmbf on the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa Whitman respectively. Thirty thousand acres of hazardous fuels mitigation acres are anticipated annually on the Malheur, with 20,000 acres anticipated annually on both the Umatilla and Wallowa Whitman. It is hopeful that the timber output and hazardous fuels reduction targets will help address the hundreds of thousands of un-thinned plantation acres across the Blue Mountains. The method used to reduce stocking levels in these stands is critical for maintaining the future timber program. */Irene Jerome*