

Draft Record of Decision

for the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests Revised Land Management Plans

Baker, Crook, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa, and Wheeler Counties, Oregon;
Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, and Walla Walla Counties, Washington

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Introduction

This draft record of decision documents my decision and rationale for approving the revised land management plans for the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests, and the final environmental impact statement (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/BlueMtnsPlanRevision>).

The revised land management plans will provide guidance for future project and activity decisionmaking for the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests. The revised land management plans replace the previous land and resource management plans, which were approved in 1990 (1990 plans). Upon completion of the objection resolution process, this draft record of decision will be separated into one final record of decision for each of the three revised land management plans. While the three final records of decision will be similar to each other, the final record of decision for each revised land management plan will reflect the uniqueness of each National Forest.

Forest and Community Setting

The Malheur (and a portion of the Ochoco National Forest administered by the Malheur), Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests, collectively referred to as the national forests in the Blue Mountains, are located in eastern Oregon, southeastern Washington, and western Idaho. These three National Forests include approximately 5.5 million acres with the majority (5.1 million acres) in Oregon, about 310,000 acres in Washington, and the remaining 160,000 acres in western Idaho (see Figure 2 of the revised land management plans). Approximate acreage for each of the three National Forests are as follows:

- Malheur National Forest: 1,709,000
- Umatilla National Forest: 1,404,000
- Wallowa-Whitman National Forest: 2,436,000

The Malheur National Forest includes a 240,000-acre portion of the Ochoco National Forest administered by the Malheur National Forest. The Umatilla National Forest straddles the Oregon-Washington border and is the northern-most national forest in the analysis area. The Wallowa-Whitman National Forest includes the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area. The revised land management plan, in combination with the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area Comprehensive Management Plan (2003), constitute an integrated resource management plan for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. The revised land management plan retains in its entirety the Comprehensive Management Plan, which guides management of the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area (Appendix D of the revised Wallowa-Whitman Land Management Plan).

The highly diverse natural resources of the national forests in the Blue Mountains serve many important functions and play a central role in contributing to local economies through timber harvest, cattle and sheep grazing, mineral prospecting, and recreation, while also providing unique habitats for plant and wildlife species. The watersheds, rivers, and streams of the national forests in the Blue Mountains provide many ecological, economic, and social benefits. They support diverse communities of aquatic and terrestrial species, and surrounding communities rely on water from the three National Forests for drinking water, recreation, agriculture, industry, hydropower generation, and other uses.

The complex geological history of the Blue Mountains, including floods, volcanic eruptions, glaciation, landslides, and erosion, has shaped the landscape into a unique combination of landforms and vegetative patterns. The Blue Mountains contain deep river canyons layered with gently sloping upland benches that are vertically cut by steep, V-shaped drainages. The area is known for extreme variations in elevations that range from less than 2,000 feet at the bottom of Hells Canyon, the deepest gorge in North America, to nearly 10,000 feet at the top of the Wallowa Mountains in Oregon and the Seven Devils Mountains in Idaho. Rocky outcrops and high peaks, ranging up to 9,000 feet, protrude along the backbone of the Strawberry, Aldrich, Elkhorn, Wallowa, and Wenaha Mountain ranges.

This combination of geology and topography produces a distinctive, mosaic pattern of dense, heavily forested slopes interspersed with open, rugged herblands and grasslands. Deep volcanic ash soils contribute to productive forest stands and herblands/grasslands that provide forage and browse. For over a century, these productive lands have generated forest products, contributing to the local and regional supply of forest products in response to national demands.

Ranching represents a large portion of the economic base in the Blue Mountains area and is a valued contributor to local culture. Permitted livestock grazing on the National Forests is a part of many ranch operations; some permittees use the National Forests to supplement private land forage, whereas others rely on the National Forests for a large percentage of forage. Ranchers are permitted to graze cattle or sheep on specified allotments within the three National Forests during late spring, summer, and early fall. Fees collected from grazing contribute toward county receipts and are reinvested into range improvements.

The Blue Mountains encompass one of the most extensively mineralized areas in Oregon. The area has been an important producer of gold, silver, and copper, and has been a source of lesser amounts of lead, zinc, platinum, chromium, and other metals. It is also a potential source for geothermal energy.

The three National Forests are within the areas aboriginally occupied by several American Indian Tribes, each maintaining strong ties to the lands within the analysis area that plays a significant role in tribal life. Numerous archaeological and historical resources existing within the three National Forests are important to Tribes. Other areas and activities of importance to Tribes include gathering herbs and plants from traditional locations, traditional hunting and fishing sites, and other areas used for traditional uses. Habitat for fish and wildlife is also important to Tribes. Tribal members also continue to practice religious activities within the three National Forests, finding spiritual renewal in sacred areas. Tribal activities depend on maintenance of healthy forests and herblands/grasslands across the Blue Mountains.

The Blue Mountains provide areas with an undeveloped character and backcountry setting. With seven designated wilderness areas, one national recreation area, and 13 wild and scenic rivers, the three National Forests offer a variety of diverse experiences. Several of the roads that provide access to the three National Forests are part of national, regional, and state scenic byways. Along the Hells Canyon, Blue Mountains, Elkhorn, and Journey through Time Scenic Byways, visitors and residents may enjoy scenic panoramas of pastoral valleys, mountain vistas, and rolling uplands interspersed with steep river canyons. An abundance and variety of wildlife species may be seen, including bald eagles in the winter and bighorn sheep in the summer and fall. Remarkable scenery and solitude are available in many areas, including the Vinegar Hill-Indian Rock Scenic Area located along the border of the Malheur and Umatilla National Forests.

Recreational opportunities in the Blue Mountains attract visitors from across the nation as well as from regional population centers and local communities. Popular recreation activities include fishing and boating on the numerous rivers in the area, hiking, biking, sightseeing, horseback riding, hunting, off-highway vehicle use, recreational prospecting, gathering forest products, driving for pleasure, and wildlife viewing. Winter sports enthusiasts can find snowmobiling and downhill and cross-country skiing opportunities on the three National Forests. These recreation opportunities are important to local economies, and the value of open space, personal independence, rural lifestyle, and minimal crowding provide incentives and offerings for local residents who choose to live in the many close-knit rural communities in and around the Blue Mountains.

Land Management Planning

The Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests are important to local governments because local citizens rely on the many benefits provided by these public lands. Most counties in the Blue Mountains “socio-economic impact zones” have lower median household incomes than state averages, and natural resources supply a substantial portion of the local economic base. To address local interests, the Forest Service met with local government officials throughout the planning process, and also addressed formal comments from local governments that were submitted in 2014. In addition to consulting with States and Tribes, the Forest Service worked with counties in and around the analysis area.

Eleven counties have maintained "cooperating agency" status in the planning process, and cooperating agency meetings have provided a valuable forum for information exchange and discussion between county and Forest Service officials. Further, the Forest Service reviewed the relevant planning and land use policies of government entities, consistent with 36 CFR 219.7(c) of the 1982 Planning Rule, and the results of this review are displayed in the final environmental impact statement (Volume 3, Ch. 4). For more information about Forest Service engagement with local governments, please see the section below on “Engagement with State and Local Governments, Tribes, other Federal Agencies, and the Public.”

The Revised Land Management Plans

The revised land management plans and final environmental impact statement were developed according to the National Forest Management Act (1976) and its implementing regulations (36 CFR¹ part 219; National Environmental Policy Act (1969); the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (40 CFR 1500–1508); and the Forest Service National Environmental Policy Act regulations (36 CFR 220). According to transition language of the 2012 Planning Rule,² the responsible official may elect to use the provisions of the prior planning regulations (1982 Planning Rule, dated September 30, 1982, and as amended) to prepare land management plan amendments and revisions. I have elected to follow the provisions of the planning regulations in effect prior to May 9, 2012, referred to collectively in this document as the 1982 Planning Rule, as this land management plan revision process was initiated before 2012. Also, most of the supporting analysis in the draft

¹ Code of Federal Regulations

² 36 CFR 219.17(b)(3)

Environmental Impact Statement was completed prior to 2012, further supporting the decision to use the 1982 Rule.³

References in this draft record of decision refer to the 1982 Planning Rule unless indicated differently in the citation. However, in consideration of transition time requirements identified in the 2012 Planning Rule, the revised land management plans include a monitoring plan per 36 CFR 219.12 of the 2012 Planning Rule; and I have elected to use the pre-decisional administrative review process per 36 CFR 219.50, Subpart B, of the 2012 Planning Rule, to give individuals or entities an opportunity for an independent Forest Service review and resolution of issues before the approval of each of the revised land management plans. Where the 1982 Planning Rule does not provide clearly stated definitions, we used the definitions established by the 2012 Planning Rule for added clarity, for example: plan components, including desired conditions, standards, and guidelines.

With this decision, the selected alternative will become the revised land management plans for the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests. These land management plans replace the 1990s land management plans as amended. Compared to the 1990 land management plans (No Action Alternative), the revised land management plans focus on restoration of landscapes, including fire dependent landscapes; allocate management areas suitable for motorized access; recommend wilderness; apply landscape ecology concepts; integrate watershed restoration approaches; identify key and priority watersheds; and identify focal species for monitoring instead of management indicator species.

Nature of the Land Management Plan Decision

The nature of a land management plan decision is outlined in the National Forest Management Act. Similar to local government land-use zoning, the direction in land management plans is used to guide future management decisions and set consistent expectations for the types of activities permissible on a national forest. A land management plan provides overall guidance for the management of National Forest System lands and is based on law, science, and input from State and Federal agencies, local governments, Tribes, and the public. A land management plan establishes goals, desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, management areas, and land suitability to assure coordination of multiple uses (such as outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, wildlife and fish, and wilderness) and a sustained yield of products and services.

The land management plan decision is strategic in nature, does not commit to the selection of any specific project, and does not dictate day-to-day administrative activities needed to carry on the Forest Service's internal operations such as personnel matters, law enforcement, or organizational changes. The land management plan programmatic management direction will be implemented through the design, execution, and monitoring of future, site-specific activities such as harvesting timber, conducting a prescribed burn, or relocating a trail. Future activities must be consistent with the strategic direction provided in the revised land management plans and will be subject to separate environmental analysis as required under the National Environmental Policy Act.

Need for Change

The existing land management plans for the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests are almost 30 years old and have been amended a combined 172 times. Economic, social,

³ Forest Service Manual (FSM) 1920.3, 9(b)

and ecological conditions have changed since these land management plans were approved in 1990. The Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests are revising their 1990 land management plans to:

- Meet the requirements of the National Forest Management Act;
- Address changed conditions and provide consistent management direction (as appropriate) across the three National Forests;
- Incorporate changes in law, regulation, and policy; and
- Use best available scientific information.

In particular, the Blue Mountains Land Management Plan Revision interdisciplinary team addressed the following areas in the revised land management plans to:

1. More adequately protect and restore terrestrial plant and animal species and their habitats.
2. More adequately protect and restore watersheds and aquatic habitats.
3. Address management of fuels and fire risk.
4. Address the effects of climate change.
5. Recognize the interdependency of social and economic components with national forest management.

Each of these items is described in detail in the final environmental impact statement, Volume 1, Purpose and Need section. The following sections explain these subjects, along with the significant issues identified by the revision team (see the final environmental impact statement, Volume 1, Issue Statements), that contribute to the need to change the existing land management plans

The Decision

I have reviewed the alternatives; considered the objectives and concerns of county, State and local governments, Tribes, other Federal agencies, and public comments; national direction and policy; and internal management concerns. After considering the effects to the economic, social, and ecological environment as described in Chapter 3 of the final environmental impact statement, I have selected the primary management direction identified in Alternative E-Modified. My decision approves the desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, management area allocations, suitability determinations, and monitoring and evaluation direction as described in the revised land management plans and under Alternative E-Modified in Chapter 2 of the final environmental impact statement.

Fully implementing Alternative E-Modified (the revised land management plans) will provide the following benefits compared to the existing 1990 land management plans:⁴

⁴ The outputs indicated are projections of potential benefits under fully implemented revised land management plans. Actual outputs will depend on future site-specific analysis, decisionmaking, and implementation, as well as the funding levels and capacity of the Forest Service and its partners.

- Increase potential employment by up to 1,173 jobs in the forest products, livestock, and recreation sectors – from 1,647 jobs under the existing land management plans to an estimated 2,820 jobs under the revised land management plans;
- Increase the planned timber sale quantity, and replace the Eastside Screens 21-inch diameter limit with a guideline that allows harvest of large trees under certain scenarios;
 - ◆ Increase timber sale program quantity by 104 million board feet (MMBF) – from 101 MMBF harvested (recent average) under the existing land management plans to 205 MMBF under the revised land management plans.
 - ◆ Thin up to 33 percent of overstocked dry-upland forest types during the planning period to improve forest health and reduce risk for severe wildfire, while also allowing treatments of other forest types.
- Provide a diversity of motorized and nonmotorized recreation opportunities including desired conditions for road maintenance and for minimizing road-related effects on aquatic and terrestrial systems.
- Maintain current levels of recreation, contributing up to \$4,564,000 annually in income from recreation related jobs;
- Recommend to Congress 70,500 acres for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System;
- Determine 10 rivers as eligible and 3 rivers as suitable for wild and scenic river designation; provide new proposals to establish 6 research natural areas; and add 4 botanical areas to the existing network.
- Continue livestock grazing outputs consistent with the existing land management plans; approximately 242,800 animal unit months (AUMs). The three National Forests analyzed the potential for up to 51,600 additional AUMs associated with vacant allotments (vacant as of 2013), including in the analysis the suitable acres for grazing and historic AUMs on those vacant allotments.
 - ◆ The authorization of additional AUMs on vacant allotments will require separate, allotment-level environmental analyses, decisions to reauthorize grazing, and implementation, including infrastructure construction prior to permit issuance.
 - ◆ Land management plan grazing guidance will support ongoing grazing activities while providing adequate protection of sensitive aquatic species, riparian habitat, and water quality.
- Integrate the Pacific Northwest Region Aquatic and Riparian Conservation Strategy (ARCS), adapted to Blue Mountain conditions, modernizing direction established under the Interim Strategies for Managing Anadromous Fish-Producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho, and Portions of California (PACFISH) and the Inland Native Fish Strategy - Interim Strategies for Managing Fish-Producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho, Western Montana and Portions of Nevada (INFISH), while supporting other uses, including timber harvest, grazing, recreation, and watershed restoration activities;
- Ensure viable native fish and wildlife populations and incorporate current science and interagency direction for recovery of threatened and endangered species.

My decision is fully supported by the environmental analysis documented in the final environmental impact statement, as required by law and regulation. This decision applies only to National Forest System lands on the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests and the portion of the Ochoco National Forest administered by the Malheur National Forest. It does not apply to any other Federal, State, or private lands, although I considered the effects of these lands on the three National Forests and the effects of my decision on lands surrounding the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests.

This decision will help create healthier forest conditions that are more resilient to wildfires, insects and diseases, and strengthen our stewardship of National Forest System lands to serve as a good neighbor to adjacent landowners. My decision will supply clean water for downstream communities and users while providing improved habitat for fish and wildlife. Finally, this decision fosters productive and sustainable use of National Forest System lands, creates “working forests” that support rural prosperity and economic development, continues livestock grazing to support surrounding agricultural communities, and provides access for wide-ranging recreational opportunities to enhance public enjoyment and health benefits from the National Forests.

Rationale for Decision

The selected alternative (Alternative E-Modified) provides the most balanced approach to management of the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests, and provides for a variety of uses identified as important by stakeholders and the public. My decision is based on a careful and reasoned comparison of the environmental consequences of, and responses to, issues and concerns for each alternative.

The selected alternative provides opportunities for active management and timber production. The general forest management area (MA 4A) provides the suitable base for timber production, while other management areas allow for timber harvest when conducting actions to achieve broader restoration goals. Activities in these management areas will move vegetation towards desired conditions for improved resiliency within the historical range of variability. My decision also provides areas with passive management and nonmotorized access, such as recommended wilderness and backcountry nonmotorized management areas.

In contrast with the Departure Alternative (Alternative E-Modified Departure), in which the highest levels of timber harvest occur within the first decade, the selected alternative supports an economically and ecologically sustainable, even flow of timber from the three National Forests. Although the Departure Alternative would allow more rapid thinning than the selected alternative of the dry-upland forest areas that face higher risks from fires, insects, and diseases, the expected natural resource and socio-economic impacts of a front-loaded harvest schedule are problematic. Forest Service socio-economic analysis suggests that fully implementing the Departure Alternative would likely result in a "boom and bust" cycle affecting communities surrounding the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests. Modeling for the Departure Alternative indicates that harvest levels at or above 300 million board feet (for the three National Forests combined), could be reduced to half that level after 20 years. Such a rapid decline in timber harvest has a well-documented potential to decrease incomes, increase poverty, increase foreclosure and bankruptcy rates, increase crime rates, decrease populations and school enrollments, and decrease tax revenues. For these reasons, I decided not to select the Departure Alternative. All other things being equal, the selected alternative will still plan to aggressively, yet sustainably, thin the dry-upland forest areas (as well as other forest types) that are most in need of treatment to bring them closer to the historical range of variability.

The selected alternative is responsive to the diverse needs, issues, concerns, and opportunities expressed by State and local governments, Tribes, and other Federal agencies, organizations, and the public. The revised land management plans emphasize moving toward desired conditions and contributing to economic, social, and ecological sustainability, and promote sound land stewardship in partnership with local communities to conserve rural character and promote rural prosperity. I have made my decision with due consideration of the input from diverse citizens and stakeholders, several of whom shared their interests and preferences during one or more of 120 formal opportunities provided for public input. The following sections describe how my decision (1) is responsive to the need for change identified throughout the planning process, (2) maximizes net public benefit, and (3) addresses the key concerns and comments expressed during the land management plan revision process (see the section below, titled "Engagement with State and Local Governments, Tribes, other Federal Agencies, and the Public" as well as the "Response to Public Comments" section in the final environmental impact statement, Volume 4, Appendix C.)

Net Public Benefit

The National Forest Management Act implementing regulations (1982 Planning Rule 219.1) state that land management plans must "...provide for multiple-use and sustained yield of goods and services from the National Forest System in a way that maximizes long-term net public benefits in an environmentally sound manner."

I have considered the many competing public desires and uses of the three National Forests, the economic needs of the counties surrounding each National Forest, and the need for improved ecological diversity and integrity. I seek to make a decision that balances the need for resource conservation with one that contributes to the economic well-being of these communities.

I selected Alternative E-Modified because, in my judgment, it maximizes the net benefit to the public by:

- Increasing contributions to meet economic and social needs of people, cultures, and communities while emphasizing a diversity of high-quality motorized and nonmotorized outdoor recreation opportunities, as well as improvements in priority watershed conditions that support healthy and recovering fish populations on the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests.
- Emphasizing restoration of vegetation and watersheds to improve resiliency to wildfires and other disturbances while supporting timber harvest, grazing, mining, recreation, and a variety of other uses.
- Aiding in conserving and recovering federally listed species and other species with viability concerns by incorporating updated science and recovery plans, while providing sustainable and predictable levels of products and services, such as timber and forage.

Revision Topics

Early in the land management plan revision process, a set of topics was developed to assess the 1990 land management plans. The list of topics was reviewed and validated at each step in the land management plan revision process. Revision topics represent a systematic framework for discussing the revised land management plans. In addition, the revised land management plans carry forward other management direction not identified as needing change or that needed only minor changes to achieve the multiple-use balance sought in this decision. The following revision topics were used to develop alternatives.

Providing Access to the Three National Forests – Issue 1

With a large federal land base in eastern Oregon and southeastern Washington, I recognize that local economies are dependent on access and use of the three National Forests. I heard from county commissioners and members of the public that any net loss in roads would not be acceptable. Therefore, the revised land management plans include a desired condition for a safe and sustainable access system that allows access for the public. The revised land management plans do not designate, open, or close specific roads, or change current designations for motor vehicle use on existing roads on the three National Forests. The revised land management plans do contain sideboards for how roads will be managed. The Umatilla National Forest will continue to modify its motor vehicle use map annually to reflect decisions that are made regarding the transportation system and its uses. The Malheur and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests will complete Travel Management Planning under the 2005 Travel Management Rule, 36 CFR 212, after the revised land management plans have been finalized. All of the three National Forests will use guidance in the revised land management plans when making subsequent travel management decisions.

I heard from many people who access the three National Forests for gathering forest products, hunting, mountain biking, hiking, camping and winter recreation, just to name a few of the many types of access-related activities people enjoy. I also considered the nonmotorized types of activities that people told me they valued. Nonmotorized areas are desired for hunting and fishing, summer and winter recreation, secluded wildlife habitat, and biological reserves. Management areas and corresponding suitability ratings that support these nonmotorized activities and values include Designated and Recommended Wilderness and Wilderness Study areas, Wild River Segments, Research Natural Areas, Nationally Designated Trails, Municipal Watersheds, and Backcountry (nonmotorized) areas. These management areas will provide a full spectrum of opportunities for nonmotorized uses.

The revised land management plans do not exempt the three National Forests from the need to develop and maintain motor vehicle use maps as required by the 2005 Travel Management Rule.⁵ The guidance in the revised land management plans, and the provisions of the Travel Management Rule, will govern subsequent motor vehicle use map decisions. Given the need to contribute to local communities and economies, I believe these subsequent decisions are vital to providing safe, well-maintained and efficient travel networks for resource management, recreation, and the subsistence activities that are so important locally and nationally.

Contributing to Social and Economic Sustainability – Issue 2

National forest management activities and the associated production of goods and services affect businesses within a number of sectors. Throughout the planning process, I heard from stakeholders and the public that the revised land management plans should support local communities by allowing for growth in potential economic outputs associated with the three National Forests, including forest products, recreation, and livestock grazing. I believe a productive working relationship between the three National Forests and local governments is vital for successfully implementing the revised land management plans, as is supporting the local economic base within the ecological framework of the revised land management plans. The Forest Service developed the selected alternative in response to public comment and local government requests to achieve multiple-use goals on the three National Forests.

⁵ 36 CFR part 212

The revised land management plans, if fully implemented, would support the following benefits: up to 2,820 jobs and up to \$113,667,000 in annual labor income in the forest products, recreation, and livestock grazing sectors. These estimated economic outputs are only projections of potential benefits under fully implemented revised land management plans. Actual outputs will depend on separate site-specific analysis, decisionmaking, and implementation, as well as the funding levels and capacity of the Forest Service and its partners. Estimated economic outputs represent a potential increase of more than 1,000 jobs in these sectors compared to jobs contributed under the 1990 land management plans, while more than doubling the potential labor income derived from these jobs. These figures can be broken down further by business sector. This decision has the potential to support up to 1,593 timber-related jobs, an increase of 985 jobs compared to the level of jobs supported by the 1990 land management plans. The revised land management plans support up to \$91,204,000 in annual timber harvest-related labor income, an increase of more than \$56,000,000 as compared to the 1990 land management plans. In contrast, the revised land management plans would maintain an estimated 144 recreation related jobs with an estimated labor income of \$3,755,000 annually.

Similar to the recreation sector, economic outputs associated with livestock grazing under the revised land management plans are expected to continue at levels that are generally consistent with current outputs under the 1990 land management plans. However, in response to comments, the Forest Service analyzed the potential for additional animal unit months (AUMs) that could be supported by vacant allotments.⁶ Based on the additional AUMs that could be accommodated if vacant allotments were stocked, the final environmental impact statement identified the potential for up to 1,083 grazing-related jobs, an increase of 188 jobs above the 895 jobs currently supported by the 1990 land management plans. The analysis also identified the potential for up to \$18,708,000 in annual grazing-related labor income, a 21 percent increase over the current estimated labor income under the 1990 land management plans.

The selected alternative will continue to support our productive working relationships with local governments and contribute to social and economic sustainability in rural communities as each National Forest implements projects under these land management plans to accomplish multiple-use goals and the mission of the Forest Service.

Livestock Grazing – Issue 3

Some individuals and stakeholders advocated for increases in grazing outputs, and others advocated for reductions. Some argued for the elimination of grazing on the three National Forests. The revised land management plans simply designate management areas as suitable or not suitable for grazing, consistent with the 1982 Planning Rule. All other grazing decisions will continue to be made for individual allotments in separate environmental analyses.

Livestock grazing is a valuable local industry. The revised land management plans support sustainable livestock grazing while moving toward ecological, social, and economic desired conditions (see revised land management plans, Part 1, 3.3.2 Livestock Grazing, Desired Conditions). All management areas in the revised land management plans are suitable for livestock grazing, with the exception of research natural areas, administrative areas, municipal

⁶ The revised land management plans do not authorize grazing on vacant allotments, which would require several additional steps, such as separate allotment-level environmental analysis and decision-making to reauthorize grazing, and subsequent implementation requirements, such as improvements to infrastructure, prior to permit issuance.

watersheds, and botanical areas. The revised land management plans do not make allotment-level decisions, such as the number of animals that may graze a particular allotment, nor do the revised land management plans authorize grazing on vacant allotments, as discussed above.

Many commenters, including county commissioners, were concerned about how aquatic and riparian plan direction would affect livestock grazing. The riparian vegetation use guideline included in the draft land management plan received considerable attention, as it provided indicators for streambank alteration, utilization of woody vegetation, and forage stubble height. Grazing interests expressed concern that the stubble height requirement was not implementable and that specific numbers were not appropriate for the revised land management plans. As described above, I have worked with regional stakeholders, including cooperating counties, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and subsequently modified the riparian vegetation use guideline for the revised land management plans. The guideline (now termed GM-3G) clarifies that only those grazing use indicators and numeric values appropriate to a given site and necessary for maintaining or moving towards desired conditions should be used. The updated guideline emphasizes that inference and professional judgment to interpret and apply the best available scientific information should be made at the site level.

Use of the Watershed Condition Framework in the evaluation of existing conditions was a point of confusion and concern for the cooperating county agencies, National Marine Fisheries Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Watershed Condition Framework is now not specifically identified in the riparian vegetation use guideline as a means to establish existing watershed condition. However, the Watershed Condition Framework provides helpful information that can and will be used as part of the evaluation, along with other specific, local information, to establish existing conditions for a specific site.

Guideline GM-3G is intended to provide consistent, objective grazing management across the three National Forests, based on best available science, to maintain or improve riparian vegetation and stream conditions, thereby improving the viability of the Regional Forester's sensitive aquatic species, contributing to the recovery of threatened and endangered species, and facilitating the attainment of State water quality standards over the long-term. I believe these are positive changes to the revised land management plans, which will improve and protect riparian and aquatic habitats, as well as promote consistent grazing management across the three National Forests.

Restoring and Sustaining Landscapes – Issue 4

The selected alternative identifies approximately 36 percent of the three National Forests as suitable for scheduled timber production within the General Forest management area, and allows active restoration in all management areas except Wilderness, Recommended Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas. I believe the lands within the General Forest management area represent areas where timber production is feasible, based on other resource requirements and compatibility with management area desired conditions. Outside the General Forest management area, an additional 27 percent of the lands will be suitable for timber harvest to maintain or move the forest toward desired conditions, making timber harvest a restoration tool on more than 63 percent of the three National Forests.

Where desired conditions are being met, the revised land management plans will maintain forest structural stages and tree species composition and densities within the historical range of variability; where desired conditions are not being met, the revised land management plans will

facilitate restoration actions to move forest vegetation toward the desired conditions using a variety of tools. Natural ecological disturbance processes, such as wildland fire, may be used to move the three National Forests toward desired conditions, depending on expected disturbance effects and resource objectives. Desired conditions for forest structure will provide for increased ecological resilience to disturbances such as fire, insects and diseases.

The selected alternative does not prohibit the harvest of trees greater than 21 inches in diameter, as mandated by the Eastside Screens amendment to the 1990 land management plans. Instead, the revised land management plans incorporate a forestwide guideline (OF-1G) for old forest and large tree management that specifies the circumstances where old⁷ trees, large⁸ trees and legacy⁹ trees may be harvested. These circumstances include: to move stands towards their desired conditions for species composition or density when removal of small trees alone cannot meet goals; to control or limit insects and diseases; to reduce fuels within the wildland-urban interface; to provide important instream structure; or for safety reasons. Old forests will not be tied to particular parcels of land or a single management area. The revised land management plans will maintain or foster the development of old forest within the historical range of variation in various management areas throughout the three National Forests. I believe this guideline will protect old, large and legacy trees and foster the development of late structure forest stages across the landscape, while allowing adequate management flexibility to achieve desired conditions.

The allowable sale quantity¹⁰ for the revised land management plans is 80 million board feet (MMBF) for the Malheur, 53 MMBF for the Umatilla, and 64 MMBF for the Wallowa-Whitman per year. The timber sale program quantity¹¹ for the revised land management plans will be 84 MMBF for the Malheur, 56 MMBF for the Umatilla, and 65 MMBF for the Wallowa-Whitman per year. Actual volume offered in a given year may vary due to budget or regulatory conditions. Both the allowable sale quantity and timber sale program quantity for the revised land management plans represent substantial increases from recent averages under the existing land management plans.

Recommending Wilderness – Issue 5

Public opinion regarding wilderness recommendation varies widely. The three National Forests received many comments about recommended wilderness throughout the planning process. Many people favor recommending additional areas for wilderness while many others do not agree with any new wilderness recommendations. The cooperating agency county commissioners do not

⁷ For the purpose of this guideline, the definition for the terms are as follows: “Old” trees are live trees with distinct features indicating ages of generally 150 years or older. (See revised land management plans, Part 3, Goal 1, 1.14 forestwide standards and guidelines for old forest).

⁸ “Large” trees are live grand fir over 30-inches diameter at breast height or live trees of any other species over 21 inches diameter at breast height.

⁹ “Legacy” trees are old trees that have been spared during past harvest or have survived stand-replacing natural disturbances and are thus significantly older than the average trees in the general area. This distinguishes them from other ‘residual’ trees, which may also have been spared from harvest but are not always significantly older than the average trees in the area.

¹⁰ The allowable sale quantity is the upper limit of the amount of timber volume potentially available for harvest from land suitable for timber production.

¹¹ The timber sale program quantity is the actual planned objective level of harvest volume, assuming full implementation, including firewood, expected to be sold annually from harvests for any purpose (except salvage harvest or sanitation harvest) on all lands in the Plan Area, not just lands suitable for timber production.

support additional recommended wilderness in the revised land management plans. However, I believe that a balanced approach to managing the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests includes managing some areas for their already existing semi-primitive and primitive character. These areas are important to some members of the public for the opportunities they provide for a recreational experience with a sense of solitude and self-reliance. These areas also provide unfragmented blocks of wildlife habitat with relatively little human disturbance.

My decision results in recommending an additional 70,500 acres to Congress as wilderness allocations (approximately 1.4 percent of the three National Forests, and about 20,000 acres less than what was proposed in the draft environmental impact statement and its accompanying draft land management plan). Recommended areas include additions to the established Strawberry Mountains (2,990 acres, Malheur National Forest), North Fork John Day (1,170 acres, Umatilla National Forest), North Fork Umatilla (280 acres, Umatilla National Forest), and Wenaha-Tucannon (8,650 acres, Umatilla National Forest) Wildernesses. I also administratively recommend the McClellan Mountain (23,580 acres, Malheur National Forest), Hellhole (21,780 acres, Umatilla National Forest), and Twin Mountain (12,020 acres, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest) areas to recommended wilderness allocation (see final environmental impact statement Appendix E).

My decision allows existing mountain biking and chainsaw use for maintenance of existing trails to continue in recommended wilderness areas until these areas are designated as wilderness by Congress. The revised land management plans contain direction for the monitoring of mechanized use in recommended wilderness areas, as well as direction to address this use if they cause any increase in user-created trails. Other ongoing activities, including grazing and mineral exploration, will continue to be suitable uses in these recommended wilderness areas.

Additionally, approximately 62,350 acres (88 percent) of these recommended wilderness areas are located within inventoried roadless areas as identified under the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Currently, these areas are managed consistent with the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule, which prohibits road construction, road reconstruction, and timber harvesting in inventoried roadless areas on National Forest System lands, except where specific circumstances exist (36 CFR 294, Subpart B). Managing these areas as recommended wilderness under the revised land management plans does not represent a change to the way they are currently managed.

Despite the revised land management plans' consistency with most county land use plans, and the three National Forests' ongoing work with the community and collaborative groups, issues persist regarding economic effects related to expected timber outputs and recommendations for wilderness designation. The social and economic section in final environmental impact statement (Volume 1, Chapter 3) discusses these issues. I acknowledge the counties still dispute whether my decision will strike the correct balance between ecological protection and local economic need; however, I believe this decision is appropriate and meets my legal and regulatory responsibilities during the land management plan revision process for evaluating and recommending areas that fully exhibit wilderness characteristics.

To further ensure I met these requirements, I directed the interdisciplinary team to again look for areas that met the criteria of recommended wilderness areas prior to the release of the final environmental impact statement. Public comment and ground verification pointed to limited areas adjacent to the McClellan Mountain (435 acres) and Strawberry Mountain (1,830 acres)

Wilderness areas on the Malheur National Forest, and adjacent to the North Fork Umatilla (45 acres) Wilderness on the Umatilla National Forest, and adjacent to the Twin Mountain (2,490 acres) Wilderness on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest that met the criteria for recommended wilderness. As a result, those areas were added to the recommended wilderness in the selected alternative. Additionally, limited areas of Hellhole (200 acres) and North Fork John Day Wilderness area additions (71 acres), and Upper Tucannon (230 acres) Recommended Wilderness areas on the Umatilla National Forest were determined to not meet the recommended wilderness criteria. Those areas have been removed from the selected alternative. Finally, the Greenhorn Mountain Recommended Wilderness area on the Malheur National Forest (6,139 acres) and Umatilla National Forest (7,733 acres) and Huckleberry recommended wilderness area on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest (10,770 acres) were also removed from the selected alternative. This decision was based on multiple considerations including existing summer and winter motorized use, existing mining activity, boundary manageability, adequate range of existing management direction, and lack of sufficient wilderness characteristics to be suitable for wilderness designation. Overall, this review resulted in a reduction of about 20,343 acres (-3,874 acres on the Malheur National Forest, -8,189 acres on the Umatilla National Forest, and -8,280 acres on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest) of recommended wilderness in the selected alternative than what was published in the preferred alternative of the draft environmental impact statement and draft land management plan.

My recommendation, paired with the already designated wilderness areas on the Malheur National Forest (82,600 acres), Umatilla National Forest (304,200 acres) and Wallowa-Whitman (372,900 acres)¹² National Forest, would result in a combined total of about 17 percent of the three National Forests to be managed as wilderness if Congress should act to formally designate these recommended wilderness areas. I believe that this approach for recommended and designated wilderness provides balance with managing for other desired conditions across the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests. These areas provide valuable habitat for wildlife species that benefit from unfragmented environments. Managing these areas as recommended wilderness does not mean that fire suppression would not occur if conditions and incident objectives determined that fire suppression would be the appropriate course of action.

Actively Restoring Ecological Resilience – Issue 6

Resilience is defined as the ability of an ecosystem and its component parts to absorb, or recover from the effects of disturbances through preservation, restoration, or improvement of its essential structures and functions and redundancy of ecological patterns across the landscape. Resilient landscapes have a greater capacity to survive natural disturbances and large-scale threats to sustainability, especially under changing and uncertain future environmental conditions, such as those driven by climate change and increasing human uses. Concern about the amount, type, and extent of management activities that would be aimed at restoring ecological resilience in the proposed action was expressed during the scoping comment period. Based on perceptions of the current vegetation condition and its resilience, some people believe management approach under the proposed action would be too aggressive while others expressed a desire for a more aggressive approach. The level of public concern is heightened because the management actions taken to restore ecological resilience influences the ecosystem services the three National Forests provide in the Blue Mountains.

¹² This number does not include designated wilderness in the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area

The final environmental impact statement assessed ecological resilience using six indicators: four that measure the level of projected management activity and two that predict the outcomes of management activity.

Four indicators for projected management activity are:

1. acres of annual forested vegetation restoration actions;
2. miles of road treatments in priority watersheds;
3. miles of improved riparian areas; and
4. forage use intensity in priority watersheds

Two indicators for outcomes of management activity are:

1. the number of watersheds in improved condition; and
2. improvement in the dry upland forest potential vegetation group departure index value at year 50.

Tables 131, 132 and 133 in the final environmental impact statement (Volume 1) display a summary of the key indicators used in the analysis of ecological resilience.

Past fire management policies, combined with historical timber harvesting practices, have had substantial effects on existing forest structures and contributed to more highly departed forest landscapes. Compared to the other forest potential vegetation groups, existing conditions within the dry upland forest potential vegetation group tend to exhibit the greatest amount of departure from the historical range of variation. Within the dry upland forest landscape, all three National Forests are currently characterized by a vast disparity between the mid-aged understory reinitiation stages and the single-storied stages of old forest. The understory reinitiation stages are grossly overrepresented in terms of historical range of variability, while at the same time, single-storied old forests are now very uncommon. Across the three National Forests, the extent of the dry upland forest existing today in the old forest single-story structural stage ranges only from 1 to 4 percent versus a natural historical condition that is estimated to have been between 40 to 65 percent. This pattern is a complete reversal of the structure stage distribution that would be expected to develop under a natural disturbance and stand development regime.

The analysis in the final environmental impact statement (Volume 1) revealed a positive correlation between the degree of active vegetation restoration treatments and improvements in the ecological resilience indicators. The selected alternative, along with Alternatives D, E and E-Modified Departure, all make substantial and roughly equal progress moving forest vegetation composition, structures, and density closer to the historical range of variation. The selected alternative will thin a large amount of what is now dense, mid-aged stages, prioritized to dry upland forest, and convert it to more stable, low-density, mid-aged stages, less prone to atypical severe wildland fire behavior. By reducing the proportion of overstocked dry upland forest, the selected alternative results in one of the lowest departure index scores for the dry upland forest at year 50.

The ecological resilience issue is complex, involving physical and biological factors as well as human actions. Risks to resilience arise from many sources, both natural and human caused. Reducing risks in one component of the ecosystem may increase risks in others. No one alternative best addresses the issue of ecological resilience. Reliance on natural processes may be the fastest way to achieve desired conditions for some ecosystem components, while others

components may require active restoration. However, the selected alternative more than adequately addresses the issue of ecological resilience while also addressing several other issues including old forest, livestock grazing, restoring and sustaining landscapes as it contributes to social and economic sustainability.

Engagement with State and Local Governments, Tribes, other Federal Agencies, and the Public

The revised land management plans reflect the valuable input provided by State and local governments, Tribes, other Federal agencies, and the public. Since 2004, the Forest Service has organized over 120 formal opportunities for input, plus many other informal opportunities for information exchange. The timeline below summarizes the key phases of public and stakeholder engagement during the planning process.

- **2004-2010:** During proposed action development, held pre-scoping public meetings, workshops, and field trips to inform the proposed action. The Forest Service, public, and stakeholders also adapted to changes in forest planning rules in 2005, 2008, and then later in 2012.
- **2010:** For the scoping comment period, published a notice of intent in the Federal Register on March 29, 2010, requesting written comment on the proposed action. The Forest Service organized a series of public meetings during and following the comment period. Responses included 110 unique comment letters and 4,025 organized form letters.
- **2011-2013:** During alternative development, met with States, counties, Tribes, advisory committees, collaborative groups, industry representatives, and interest groups, and the public to develop Alternatives for the draft environmental impact statement.
- **2014:** Published a notice of availability in the Federal Register on March 14, 2014, requesting formal written comment on the draft environmental impact statement and draft land management plan. During the comment period, the Forest Service hosted 14 public meetings and a webinar to provide information, answer questions, and listen to public input. The Forest Service extended the comment period from 90 to 150 days and received over 1,000 letters containing over 4,000 comments. Following the release of the draft environmental impact statement in 2014, some commenters recommended that the planning process should start over from the beginning, because those commenters did not agree with elements of the draft environmental impact statement or draft land management plan (Alternative E). The Forest Service determined, however, that substantive comments could be addressed within the existing range of alternatives or with modifications to Alternative E. This decision reflects the agency's commitment to an iterative process to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act.
- **2015-2016:** Worked with local stakeholders to identify key topics from the comment period that were in need of further community discussion: pace and scale of restoration, livestock grazing, access, and wilderness. From June 2015 through February 2016, the Forest Service hosted or attended 24 public listening sessions in communities near the three National Forests. Each session was professionally facilitated to ensure that every participant had time to speak, listen to others, and propose solutions. Individual citizens, local government leaders, and a variety of interest groups actively participated in these listening sessions. Their input brought additional context to the 2014 formal comments and enhanced the Forest Service's understanding of how different alternatives may affect diverse public interests.

- **2016-2018:** Continued tribal consultation meetings. Continued engagement with states, counties, and other federal agencies. The Forest Service also continued to communicate with the public about the ongoing land management plan revision process through newsletters, mail, email, website updates, and public conference calls. In response to public and stakeholder input, the Forest Service developed two modified alternatives (Alternative E-Modified and E-Modified-Departure) and analyzed them in detail in the final environmental impact statement. The modified alternatives were informed by formal public comments, listening session input, and revised recommendations by resource specialists. The Forest Service also updated the analysis of other alternatives in the final environmental impact statement based on comments to the draft revised land management plan and environmental impact statement. Modifications made to the land management plan and environmental impact statement, including the two modified alternatives, are based on substantive formal comments. The Forest Service did not consider these modifications to be substantial changes or new issues, circumstances, or information relevant to environmental concerns.¹³ Therefore, we determined that a supplement to the environmental impact statement and subsequent comment period would not be necessary. Overall, the Forest Service analyzed eight alternatives in detail.
- **2018:** Published the revised land management plans, draft record of decision, and final environmental impact statement for the objection and resolution process.

Additional details regarding Forest Service engagement with State and local governments, Tribes, other Federal agencies, and the public can be found in Volume 3, Chapter 4 of the final environmental impact statement. Formal comment letters from government entities, submitted in response to the 2014 draft environmental impact statement, are also included in Volume 3, Chapter 4 of the final environmental impact statement. Additionally, Forest Service responses to 2014 formal comments (categorized as concern statements) are available in Volume 4, Appendix C of the final environmental impact statement. Below is a summary of interests expressed by State and local governments, Tribes, Federal agencies, and the public.

States

The Plan Areas for the revised land management plans include parts of Oregon and Washington. State agencies that submitted comments on the revised land management plans include the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Department of Forestry, and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. The interdisciplinary team carefully considered the 2014 comments submitted by the States in response to the draft environmental impact statement.

State agency comments requested better acknowledgement of current (and potential future) collaboration to improve forest health and habitat across boundaries. The Forest Service welcomes the opportunity to work more closely with State agencies on a variety of common priorities, and the interdisciplinary team improved language in the revised land management plans to reflect the ongoing collaborative work between the three National Forests and States. Specifically, the Forest Service added language to the revised land management plans regarding the value of working with local collaborative groups and the value of an all-lands approach.

State agencies also recommended more measurable plan direction, including desired conditions, standards, and guidelines, with more quantitative targets that would facilitate an assessment of achievement over time. In response, the Interdisciplinary Team enhanced plan direction to make it

¹³ 40 CFR 1502.9 (c)

more measurable and specific in many resource areas, including vegetation management, riparian management, and wildlife habitat. The interdisciplinary team also updated the definitions of desired conditions, standards, guidelines, and other plan components based on the 2012 Planning Rule. In response to the States, the interdisciplinary team conveyed that different plan components can work together to provide direction for forest management, and project-level analysis and decision-making will bring further specificity and measurability that may not be appropriate at the programmatic level of the land management plans.

Both the Oregon and Washington Departments of Fish and Wildlife recommended strong links between the land management plans and future travel management decisions to help reduce the impacts of roads on wildlife and water quality. The Forest Service clarified that travel management under subpart B of the Travel Management Rule (designation of summer motorized routes), will be done on the Wallowa-Whitman and Malheur National Forests after the revised land management plans are complete (the Umatilla National Forest has already completed the requirements under subpart B of the Travel Management Rule). Therefore, the Wallowa-Whitman and Malheur land management plans do not include references to designated routes to avoid the pre-decisional use of that term.

The Departments of Fish and Wildlife identified a variety of measures to improve habitat for big game, with focus on Rocky Mountain elk and bighorn sheep. The State and Forest Service joint effort to discuss ways to strengthen land management plan direction for elk and bighorn sheep demonstrates the value of partnership needed between agencies. Using a collaborative process that also involved tribal biologists (described above), the Forest Service developed more measurable guidelines and a standard to improve elk security. The intent of these elk-related plan components is to help improve the distribution of Rocky Mountain elk across all seasonal ranges on the three National Forests.

The Forest Service, after coordination with State and tribal specialists, also strengthened standards in the revised land management plans to protect bighorn sheep. I acknowledge that State and tribal partners sought a more aggressive position regarding the recreational use of domesticated pack goats than is found in my decision. In response, the interdisciplinary team clarified that the Forest Service does not currently authorize or permit the use of pack goats on the three National Forests, nor does the Forest Service currently restrict this use. Restricting pack goat use would require separate, site-specific analysis and decisionmaking. However, the effective separation approach (described above in the "Tribes" section) still applies to the use of pack goats. The revised land management plans clearly state: "The use of pack goats shall not be authorized in occupied bighorn sheep habitat or where effective separation from bighorn sheep cannot be reasonably maintained" (BHSM-2S).

Further, the States encouraged the Forest Service to work with partners to develop a multi-organizational monitoring and evaluation strategy, which would ideally include funding commitments. The Forest Service updated the monitoring sections in the land management plans to be consistent with the 2012 Planning Rule. Per planning policy, however, additional monitoring or funding commitments are not appropriate in the land management plans. Nevertheless, I acknowledge the value of coordinated monitoring efforts outside of the land management plan process and intend to pursue a coordinated approach with State agencies and other partners to conduct monitoring.

Local Governments: Counties

County elected officials (commissioners and judges) have consistently represented local government interests to the Forest Service during the planning process. Key county concerns are summarized below, and additional details are available in the Responses to Comments section in Volume 4, Appendix C of the final environmental impact statement.

The Forest Service provided opportunities for county involvement throughout the planning process. For example, county officials participated in scoping and in the alternative-development process; they submitted formal comments on the draft environmental impact statement and draft land management plan in 2014; and they actively participated in public listening sessions during 2015-16. The Forest Service continued to meet with county officials during 2016-18 with over 20 separate meetings. Eleven counties in the three National Forests have current memoranda of understanding confirming their cooperating agency status in the planning process. Both before and after the release of the draft environmental impact statement, cooperating agency meetings provided a valuable forum for information exchange and discussion between county and Forest Service officials. Further, the Forest Service reviewed the relevant planning and land use policies of other government entities, including those of counties, consistent with 36 CFR 219.7(c) of the 1982 Planning Rule. The results of this review are displayed in the final environmental impact statement (Volume 3, Ch. 4).

All of the counties within, or adjacent to, the three National Forests include rural communities and active user groups that value the many forest products and recreational opportunities provided by the three National Forests. Therefore, county officials advocated for plan direction that supports rural prosperity and lifestyles. Topics of primary concern for county officials have included increasing timber harvest and sales, continuing livestock grazing, maintaining motorized access, and minimizing special management area allocations that may impact the existing uses of local citizens.

Consistent with county interests, the revised land management plans (if fully implemented) would allow for a significant increase in timber harvest and sales. The timber sale program quantity would more than double, from a recent average of 101 million board feet under the existing land management plans to 205 million board feet under the revised land management plans. Further, to improve forest health and reduce the risk of severe wildfire, the revised land management plans would allow the thinning of up to 33 percent of the overstocked dry-upland forest types during the planning period, while also allowing treatments of other forest types.

Livestock grazing would continue under the revised land management plans at a level consistent with the existing land management plans—approximately 242,800 animal unit months (AUMs). Grazing guidance would support ongoing grazing activities while providing adequate protection of sensitive aquatic species, riparian habitat, and water quality. In response to comments, the interdisciplinary team analyzed the potential for up to 51,600 additional AUMs associated with vacant grazing allotments (vacant as of 2013), including in the analysis the suitable acres for grazing and historic AUMs associated with those vacant allotments. However, the authorization of additional AUMs on vacant allotments would require separate, allotment-level environmental analyses, decisions to reauthorize grazing, and implementation, including infrastructure construction prior to permit issuance.

The revised land management plans are generally consistent with existing motorized access. Any future modifications of approved uses will be subject to separate, site-specific analysis and decision-making processes. For example, 3,809,485 acres across the three National Forests are

suitable for summer motorized use under the revised land management plans, an estimated increase of 4 percent compared with the existing land management plans. Acres suitable for winter motorized use total 3,826,885 acres across the three National Forests under the revised land management plans, an estimated 4 percent decrease compared with the existing land management plans. In comparison, 1,022,275 acres across the three National Forests are suitable for only nonmotorized use.

The revised land management plans include 70,500 acres of recommended wilderness across the three National Forests, which contrasts with the request of some counties for no additional recommended wilderness. The interdisciplinary team analyzed recommended wilderness areas in accordance with the Wilderness Act and direction associated with the 1982 Planning Rule. Recommendations are generally consistent with existing uses and reflect a balanced consideration of a range of public comments.

Overall, the revised land management plans reflect county input regarding the need to support rural prosperity and lifestyles. Fully implemented, the revised land management plans (in comparison to the 1990 land management plans) would annually support up to 1,173 new jobs and up to \$59.5 million in additional annual income, for a total of up to 2,820 jobs and \$113.6 million in annual income in the forest products, livestock, and recreation sectors associated with the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests.

Tribes

Within the three National Forests in the Blue Mountains, a significant portion of lands ceded by Tribes in various treaties was designated as part of the National Forest System by the Organic Administration Act of June 4, 1897. Lands were ceded through the treaties of 1855 by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, the Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho, and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Indian Nation of the Yakama Reservation. The Klamath Tribes, via the Treaty with the Klamath Nation of 1870, ceded lands extending into the Malheur National Forest. These treaties are known for their specific language recognizing certain reserved rights of the Tribes in aboriginal use areas. Other federally recognized Tribes with interests in the three National Forests include the Burns Paiute Tribe, the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of the Duck Valley Reservation, the Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone Tribes, the Fort Bidwell Indian Community of Paiute Indians, and the Chief Joseph Band of the Nez Perce, which is now part of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation.

Two federally recognized Tribes have consistently engaged in the Blue Mountains land management plan revision process and also submitted formal comments on the 2014 draft land management plan:

- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (Umatilla, Cayuse, and Walla Walla Tribes), based in Pendleton, Oregon. The Confederated Tribes' reservation shares a boundary with the Umatilla National Forest.
- Nez Perce Tribe, based in Lapwai, Idaho. The Nez Perce Tribe's reservation is near the northern boundary of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

These Tribes have treaty-reserved rights within the three National Forests, and Forest Service staff and leadership regularly consult with the Tribes on each National Forest's program of work and on specific projects. The Tribes' cultural resource departments work with the three National Forests to protect significant sites and artifacts, and to ensure that tribal members can continue to

exercise treaty-reserved rights by accessing ceremonial, medicinal, and subsistence resources. The Tribes' natural resource departments are also engaged with Forest Service staff, seeking to restore the habitats, populations, and distributions of native fish and wildlife.

The Forest Service has engaged in staff-to-staff and government-to-government consultation with the Tribes on the revised land management plans. Planning staff worked closely with tribal staff to include or edit specific language in the revised land management plans and final environmental impact statement to address tribal concerns.

Key concerns of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation that have been addressed in the revised land management plans or final environmental impact statement include: treaty rights, cultural resources, culturally significant foods, cultural resources that are not place-based, historical areas, traditional cultural properties, Religious Freedom Restoration Act, American Indian Religious Freedom Act, bighorn sheep, and elk.

Key concerns of the Nez Perce Tribe that have been addressed in the revised land management plans include: treaty rights, treaty-reserved resources (for example, fish, game, roots, and berries), economic contributions of the Tribe, consultation, cultural resources, traditional cultural properties, historic properties (like trails), sacred sites, species viability, fisheries, aquatic habitat and riparian areas, range and plants, timber, bighorn sheep, and elk.

Both Tribes expressed similar concerns regarding bighorn sheep and elk. Bighorn sheep are an important tribal resource and a federal trust responsibility on the three National Forests. The Tribes and the Forest Service share a common concern about disease transmission to bighorn sheep from domestic sheep or goats. The Forest Service carefully considered the Tribes' 2014 formal comments and engaged with tribal staff to strengthen the plan components for bighorn sheep in the revised land management plans. Forest Service specialists engaged with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Nez Perce Tribe, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. Although the revised land management plans include many changes requested by the Tribes, some differences in approach remain. For example, the Confederated Tribes requested that the land management plans "Classify all currently unoccupied bighorn sheep habitat (including source habitat) as unsuitable for domestic sheep and goat grazing and trailing," while the Nez Perce Tribe similarly recommended that "...all areas modeled as potential but currently unoccupied bighorn sheep habitat on the three National Forests be classified as unsuited for domestic sheep grazing." The revised land management plans do not meet these requests as written. Instead, under the revised land management plans, a standard has been created (BHSM-2S) "domestic sheep or goat use would not be authorized where *effective separation* from bighorn sheep cannot be reasonably maintained." The effective separation standard would allow bighorn sheep populations to expand and move into new areas over time, which is the intent of the Tribes' suggested language. The revised land management plans focus on effective separation because this approach is based on best available science and national direction.

Both Tribes submitted comments that elk are being pushed out of traditional ranges on the National Forests, resulting in economic and social impacts, including elk not being available to tribal members exercising their treaty-reserved hunting rights. In response, the Tribes, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Forest Service worked together to define *elk security* based on the best available science. The Forest Service subsequently identified priority areas on the National Forests to reach 30 percent or greater elk security at the subwatershed scale.

Other Federal Agencies

A number of Federal agencies have interests within, or adjacent to, the three National Forests. These agencies include, but are not limited to, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The interdisciplinary team carefully considered and addressed the formal comments submitted by other Federal agencies in response to the draft environmental impact statement. The Forest Service also worked with Federal officials during the development of the revised land management plans. For example, under the Endangered Species Act, the Forest Service is required to engage in a formal consultation process with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service. Moreover, the Forest Service reviewed the relevant planning and land-use policies of other Federal agencies to ensure consistency and compliance in the revised land management plans.

Most comments received by the Forest Service came from the EPA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Marine Fisheries Service. Their comments are summarized below.

The EPA's main concerns were directed to land management plan components for watersheds and riparian management areas. The EPA expressed a concern for the lack of quantitative riparian management objectives for water temperature, large wood, bank stability, bank angle, width-depth ratio, and pool frequency. The EPA further recommended that the final environmental impact statement and land management plans include additional specificity about the types of harvest treatments that would be pursued in riparian zones. The EPA also recommended the revised land management plan incorporate the grazing utilization rates and residual stubble heights for riparian areas as for Alternative F, because the EPA believes these rates would result in higher rates of animal rotation.

In response to EPA's concerns, the revised land management plans express desired conditions for watersheds and riparian management areas in qualitative terms, rather than specifying quantitative benchmarks, because parameters for watershed, riparian and water quality will vary, for example, by landform and stream channel type. The revised land management plans include ten standards and guidelines that direct the conduct of silvicultural practices and timber harvest within riparian management areas. Standard TM-1S is the overarching guiding standard: "Silvicultural treatments shall occur in riparian management areas only as necessary to maintain, enhance or restore desired conditions for aquatic and riparian resources" and that these activities shall "avoid or minimize adverse effects to aquatic and riparian resources." The revised land management plans include guideline GM-3G, which establishes stubble heights and grazing utilization rates that are generally the same as with Alternative F. Stubble heights and utilization rates would vary according to whether or not desired conditions have been attained. Guideline GM-3G prescribes more conservative stubble heights and utilization rates where desired conditions have not been attained to foster attainment of desired conditions.

The EPA also recommended that guideline OF-1, related to old tree management, should better define the approach to be used to identify older forest. The EPA recommended that the site-specific approach for identifying old growth should take into account geographic context, tree size, tree age, tree species, spatial distribution, relative abundance, the historical range of variability, forest health, and the potential of an area to grow large trees.

The Forest Service modified guideline OF-1G in the revised land management plan to incorporate several of EPA's concerns. The revised land management plans do not include a firm age-limit, but do include a guideline that requires retention and recruitment of old trees, large trees, and

legacy trees, with specific exceptions to accommodate progress toward related desired conditions for forest vegetation. Components in the revised land management plans are designed to allow management flexibility to address desired conditions for forest vegetation structure class, density and species composition, as well as desired conditions for old forest. Specific methods to identify old trees would be developed at the project level during implementation and would take into account factors such as species-specific characteristics, geographic context, and the potential of a site to grow large trees.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service were mainly concerned with direction for watershed health, riparian area management, and, in particular, how grazing management would be carried out in riparian management areas. The Rationale for the Decision section above on page 7 addresses these issues. Grazing management in riparian areas was also a topic of interest among other commenters. For additional details, please refer to the Responses to Comments in Volume 4, Appendix C (Grazing: Utilization) of the final environmental impact statement. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also recommended that several guidelines for the management of federally and candidate listed plant species be crafted to function as standards rather than guidelines. The Forest Service made the recommended changes to several guidelines to function as standards for federally listed and candidate plant species.

The Public

Local residents rely on many of the benefits provided by the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests. The benefits, such as livestock grazing, timber harvest, motorized access, recreation, tourism, and subsistence activities (hunting, fishing, woodcutting, and gathering of mushrooms, berries, and plants) are important to economic and social life in and around the three National Forests. Formal public comments from individual citizens and non-governmental organizations reflected a wide range of perspectives and positions on a diverse set of issues, including: access, aquatics, climate change, cultural resources, energy, forest management, grazing, lands and special uses, management areas, mining, planning process, plants, public involvement, recreation and scenery, social and economic issues, soil, water quality, watersheds, wilderness areas, backcountry areas, wild and scenic rivers, wildfire, and wildlife. As part of an iterative National Environmental Policy Act process, the interdisciplinary team developed and analyzed a range of alternatives to address these diverse public concerns, and I believe that Alternative E-Modified responds best to the full range of public concerns.

Under the revised land management plans, citizens will continue to enjoy current uses of these three National Forests. In support of rural prosperity, many areas on the three National Forests will continue to serve as “working forests” and have the potential to deliver more jobs and income in forest products, livestock, and recreation. The three National Forests will remain open for multiple uses, including motorized uses, and access will remain free of charge in the vast majority of areas. The revised land management plans will not directly close any roads; such site-specific decisions will be handled separately from the revision of the land management plans, either on a project-by-project basis or as part of a larger travel management process. Overall, the revised land management plans support healthier forests that are more resilient to wildfires, insects, and diseases.

Fully implementing the land management plans will allow the Forest Service to be a better neighbor to adjacent landowners, provide better habitat for wildlife and fish, benefiting the many hunters and fishermen who rely on these resources, and supply cleaner water for downstream communities and farmers.

Alternatives

To provide important context for the decision being made, this section describes how I considered the alternatives, their benefits, and their tradeoffs. The Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests analyzed eight alternatives in detail: no action, the modified proposed action, and six alternatives developed in response to issues raised by local governments and the public. These alternatives are described in detail in Chapter 2 of the final environmental impact statement.

Development of alternatives was driven by the need for change, as described above, and were developed through extensive engagement with State and local governments, Tribes, other Federal agencies, and the public. These alternatives include different options to address identified issues and to respond to the purpose and need. While all the alternatives provide a range of multiple uses and goods and services, each responds to issues in different ways. One example is how management areas, with their different emphases, were distributed across the landscape to address one or more of the land management plan revision topics.

All plan revision alternatives represent, to varying degrees, the principles of multiple-use and ecological and economic sustainability. The alternatives provide basic protection of forest resources and comply fully with applicable laws, regulations, and policies. In addition, all plan revision alternatives would:

- Meet the purpose and need for change or address one or more significant issues;
- Provide sustained multiple uses, products, and services in an environmentally acceptable manner (including leasable and locatable minerals, timber, livestock forage, and recreation opportunities);
- Retain existing designated areas (wilderness areas, wild and scenic rivers, scenic byways, and national historic trails);
- Retain all existing permitted activities and facilities;
- Protect heritage resources;
- Recognize the unique status of American Indian tribes and their rights retained by trust and executive order with the United States, including consultation requirements;
- Conserve soil and water resources and not allow significant or permanent impairment of the productivity of the land;
- Provide protections for riparian areas;
- Contribute to the recovery and viability of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife and plant species; and
- Maintain air quality that meets or exceeds applicable Federal, State, and/or local standards or regulations.

In addition, the following plan components are included in all plan revision alternatives: Goals, desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, management areas, designated areas, suitability, and a monitoring program. These plan components are defined in Part 1 of the revised land management plans and described in detail in Parts 2 and 3 of the revised land management plans.

Alternatives Considered in Detail

In addition to the no action alternative and the proposed action, the Forest Service developed six plan revision alternatives, which respond to the needs for change and issues identified by the public. Complete descriptions and comparisons of the alternatives are provided in “Developing the Alternatives” in Volume 1, Chapter 2 of the final environmental impact statement; and Appendix A, Volume 4 of the final environmental impact statement provides the details of plan components for each alternative. Appendix A in each land management plan contains the 2018 Blue Mountains Aquatic and Riparian Conservation Strategy (ARCS). This document was developed from the 2008 Pacific Northwest Region ARCS, as modified from public comments received on the February 2014 draft environmental impact statement. The strategies in the 2018 Blue Mountains ARCS apply only to Alternative E-Modified and Alternative E-Modified Departure. Alternatives B through F would still follow the guidance of the original 2008 Pacific Northwest Region ARCS. Compared to the 2008 Region ARCS, the 2018 Blue Mountains ARCS adds some new standards and guidelines, and changes some existing guidelines to standards and vice versa.

Alternative A: No Action Alternative

Alternative A (no action) would continue management direction under the 1990 land management plans as amended. The portion of the Ochoco National Forest administered by the Malheur National Forest’s Emigrant Creek Ranger District would continue to be administered using the 1989 land management plan for the Ochoco National Forest. These land management plans emphasized the production of wood products using even-aged management and assumed that ecological conditions were healthy and that disturbances, such as wildland fire or insect and disease outbreaks, would not substantially affect planned actions, desired outcomes or outputs.

The existing land management plans provide a mix of natural resource-based goods and services, such as timber and wood products, livestock forage, big game, and minerals in an environmentally sound manner. This alternative reflects the current level of goods and services provided by each administrative unit and the most likely amount of goods and services expected to be provided in the future if current management direction continues (see 36 CFR 219.12(f)(7) 1982). At the same time, Alternative A provides for other uses and values, such as scenery, recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, and clean air and water. The PACFISH, INFISH, and Eastside Screen amendments to the land management plans (intended to provide interim direction until land management plans were revised) would continue.

Alternative B: The Modified Proposed Action

Substantial public input contributed to the development of the proposed action. Based on a series of public meetings and coordination between 2003 and 2010 with various interest groups including county, State, and local governments, tribal governments, and other Federal agencies, several needs for revising the 1990s land management plans were identified. The proposed action, developed to address those needs for change, was distributed for public review as part of public scoping in March 2010. Based on public responses received at that time, modifications were incorporated into the proposed action.

Alternative B emphasizes restoring landscape functions and processes to create resilient landscapes that are adaptable to the effects of disturbances and to address climate change. Alternative B includes desired conditions that would emphasize an integrated strategy for managing National Forest System lands. Management allocations would become more consistent

between the three National Forests. Alternative B would emphasize a combination of active management and natural processes to restore landscapes on the three National Forests.

Alternative C

Alternative C varies from Alternative B by emphasizing the role of natural processes in forest restoration (also referred to as passive restoration). When compared to the other alternatives, less timber would be harvested, more areas would be allocated for nonmotorized recreation, and more areas would be allocated to recommended wilderness areas. Similar to Alternative A, old forest would be mapped and allocated to a management area. The harvest of large trees (21 inches diameter or larger) would be prohibited. Managed wildland fire for resource benefit to achieve the desired condition would be highest in this alternative. Wildlife corridor management areas would be identified. This alternative would make substantial reductions to the permitted number of domestic livestock. The default width of riparian management areas would be greater than what is proposed for the other alternatives.

Alternative D

Alternative D, developed in coordination with the cooperating counties, would increase active management of forest and range vegetation to maximize the outputs of goods and services, while meeting minimum requirements to conserve other resources such as soils and water quality. Alternative D projects the highest volumes for timber harvest and would emphasize active management using mechanical treatments to restore the forested landscape. Alternative D responds to requests to increase public motor vehicle access. No areas would be allocated to preliminary administratively recommended wilderness areas or to backcountry (nonmotorized). This alternative does not include a standard or guideline prohibiting the harvest of trees 21 inches diameter or larger, but relies exclusively on desired conditions. Alternative D generally retains the same standards and guidelines under that apply to MA 4B – Riparian Management Areas as Alternatives B, E, and F, using the 2008 Pacific Northwest Region Aquatic and Riparian Conservation Strategy. However, under Alternative D, these standards and guidelines apply to much smaller areas. For example, the buffer width for fish-bearing streams under Alternative D is 100 feet, versus 300 feet under the other alternatives.

Alternative E

Alternative E was used to develop the 2014 draft land management plan that accompanied the draft environmental impact statement. Alternative E would use vegetation management and aquatic and wildlife habitat treatments to increase the scale of restoration activities, while emphasizing the potential benefits to water quality and watershed condition. Alternative E responds to public concerns and questions regarding the environmental effects of accelerating efforts to improve ecological resilience. While similar in many regards to Alternative B, Alternative E would increase objectives for both the number and extent of restoration projects that would be undertaken on the three national forests in the Blue Mountains. Objectives for riparian and aquatic habitat improvement activities and road maintenance proposals to improve aquatic conditions within key and priority watersheds would be substantially greater than proposed in Alternative B. Similarly, area (acres) allocated to Management Area 1B (preliminary administratively recommended wilderness areas) would be more than proposed in Alternative B.

Alternative E-Modified (Selected Alternative)

Alternative E-Modified was developed in response to substantive comments received from the public, State and county governments, Tribes, and other Federal agencies, and the public on the

draft environmental impact statement and draft land management plan. Alternative E-Modified is the alternative that the revised land management plans are built upon.

Alternative E-Modified would maintain an overall level of projected timber volume sold, slightly more than under Alternative E (205 versus 203 million board feet). To protect old trees, this alternative includes a revised old tree guideline that would emphasize retaining trees having certain old tree characteristics, with certain specific exceptions (see the final environmental impact statement, Appendix A, Alternatives in Detail).

Alternative E-Modified would emphasize active restoration, especially in dry forest types, through vegetation management, and it incorporates the 2018 Blue Mountains Aquatic and Riparian Conservation Strategy (ARCS). This strategy promotes improvements to aquatic and terrestrial wildlife habitats while increasing management flexibility.

Objectives for riparian and aquatic habitat improvement activities and road maintenance investments in aquatic restoration within key and priority watersheds are similar to Alternative E but are substantially higher than objectives proposed in Alternative B.

Alternative E-Modified would allocate approximately 70,500 acres to MA 1B (preliminary administratively recommended wilderness areas), which is about 20,000 fewer acres than would be allocated under Alternative E, but 57,000 acres more than for Alternative B.

Alternative E-Modified analysis includes suitable acres of rangeland for livestock grazing and the animal unit months (AUMs) associated with active allotments, plus the suitable acres of rangeland and potential AUMs associated with vacant allotments as of 2013 (AUMs based on historic values for these vacant allotments).

Alternative E-Modified Departure

Plan components for Alternative E-Modified Departure are identical to plan components for Alternative E-Modified except for objectives in E-Modified Departure that increase the pace and scale of vegetation restoration over the next 20 years. The National Forest Management Act limits the allowable sale quantity to a volume of timber that can be harvested annually “in perpetuity,” which is known under the 1982 planning regulations as a “nondeclining even-flow.” The intent of nondeclining even-flow is to prevent higher than sustainable harvest levels in one decade from resulting in lower harvest levels in future decades, which is especially important for communities where a consistent supply of wood products from national forests contributes to and helps maintain the stability of the local economy.

The 1982 planning regulations¹⁴ allow for the evaluation of alternatives that “depart” from the nondeclining even-flow requirement if doing so will better attain the overall objectives of multiple-use management when any of the following conditions are indicated:

- high mortality losses from any cause can be significantly reduced or prevented; or
- forest size or age-class distributions can be improved, thereby facilitating future sustained-yield management; or

¹⁴ 36 CFR 219.16 (a)(3)

- implementation of the base sale schedule¹⁵ would cause a substantial adverse impact upon a community in the economic area of the forest; or
- overall multiple-use objectives would otherwise be better attained.

Under Alternative E-Modified Departure, the Total Sale Program Quantity would increase by 59 percent as compared to Alternative E-Modified. Within 20 years, Alternative E-Modified Departure would thin a larger proportion (approximately 70 percent) of the dense, overstocked, dry, upland forest in lands suitable for timber production compared to Alternative E (approximately 30 percent). With most of the thinning of dry upland forest completed in the first 20 years, harvest levels for Alternative E-Modified Departure would be expected to decrease substantially in future decades, compared to Alternative E-Modified, as the National Forests transition to a lower overall sustainable, “maintenance” level of harvest.

Alternative F

The management emphasis for Alternative F is the same as stated for Alternative E: to use vegetation management and aquatic and wildlife habitat treatments to increase the scale of restoration activities, while emphasizing the potential benefits to water quality and watershed condition. However, management objectives for active restoration, while greater than proposals made for Alternative B, would be less than the proposals for Alternative E. Both riparian and aquatic habitat improvement activities and road maintenance proposals for aquatic restoration within key and priority watersheds are significantly greater than the Alternative B proposals. The budget assumptions for vegetation treatments would be the same as proposed for Alternative B. Alternative F proposes the same desired conditions and management areas as Alternative E.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated From Detailed Study

Federal agencies are required by the National Environmental Policy Act to rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives and to briefly discuss the reasons for eliminating any alternatives that were not developed in detail.¹⁶ Public comments received in response to the proposed action provided suggestions for alternative methods for achieving the purpose and need. Some of these alternatives may have been outside the scope of this revision effort or duplicative of the alternatives considered in detail. Eleven additional alternatives or variations of alternatives were considered, but dismissed from detailed study for reasons summarized in Volume 1, Chapter 2 of the final environmental impact statement and in the Response to Public Comments section (final environmental impact statement, Appendix E).

Environmentally Preferable Alternative

The Council on Environmental Quality regulations require agencies to specify the alternative or alternatives considered to be environmentally preferable.¹⁷ The Forest Service handbook (FSH 1909.15) defines environmentally preferable as: “An alternative that best meets the goals of section 101 of NEPA [the National Environmental Policy Act]. ... Ordinarily this is the

¹⁵ Base sale schedule: A timber sale schedule formulated on the basis that the quantity of timber planned for sale and harvest for any future decade is equal to or greater than the planned sale and harvest for the preceding decade, and this planned sale and harvest for any decade is not greater than the long-term sustained yield capacity.

¹⁶ 40 CFR 1502.14

¹⁷ 40 CFR 1505.2(b)

alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment and best protects, preserves, and enhances historical, cultural, and natural resources.”

I find, based upon the laws and regulations guiding National Forest System management, that Alternative E-Modified is the environmentally preferable alternative. Although Alternative C would allow the fewest mechanical ground-disturbing activities and lowest acres allowing motorized use, it does not address the six goals of the National Environmental Policy Act (outlined below) as well as Alternative E-Modified does. I base my finding on the following comparison showing how the alternatives address the goals of section 101 of the National Environmental Policy Act:

1. Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustees of the environment for succeeding generations

Alternative E-Modified emphasizes moving forest conditions toward desired future conditions while contributing to ecological, social, and economic sustainability. Alternative E-Modified provides movement towards vegetation desired conditions while providing sustainable levels of timber production. The timber harvest levels under Alternative E-Modified provide the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests sustainable share of products and public uses, while having a higher probability of improving and restoring vegetation for future generations than other alternatives considered in detail (see final environmental impact statement, Chapter 3, Ecological Resilience.)

2. Assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings

Alternative E-Modified achieves maintenance of safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing national forests better than the other alternatives because it provides the best mix of resource utilization, active and passive management, and motorized and nonmotorized recreation uses along with the safeguards provided by standards and guidelines for maintaining water quality, scenery, and wildlife habitat. Alternative E-Modified also provides greater timber harvest levels compared to the no action alternative and maintains access to important recreational areas better than Alternative C.

3. Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences

The beneficial uses that are most varied between alternatives include timber production, aquatic management and a reasonable balance between motorized and nonmotorized recreation opportunities. Alternative E-Modified achieves a higher level of beneficial uses than the other alternatives. While Alternative E provides almost the same level of wood fiber production as Alternative E-Modified, it provides less flexibility and fewer provisions for aquatic restoration and maintenance. Alternative E-Modified provides for greater assurance of maintenance of large trees across the landscape over time and provides balanced movement of vegetation species, densities, and structure toward desired conditions. This improves the health of our forests and watersheds, enhances wildlife habitat, and creates resistant and resilient forests to the effects of disturbances including insects, diseases, and wildfire and to address climate change. Alternative E-Modified includes the 2018 Blues Mountains Aquatic and Riparian Conservation Strategy (Appendix A of the land management plans), which provides greater benefit to aquatic and riparian resources than other alternatives. Additionally, Alternative E-Modified provides a reasonable balance between motorized and nonmotorized

recreation opportunities and provides continued access to private lands and access for administrative use and special use authorizations.

4. Preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment, which supports diversity and variety of individual choice

Part of preserving our historic and cultural national heritage is recognizing that humans are a natural aspect of our national heritage. Humans have utilized the physical and biological resources within the Blue Mountains region for thousands of years. Recognizing this fact, I find that the best way to preserve this heritage, and the environment that supports diversity and variety of choice, is to manage for national forests that provide a balance between the physical and biological resource use and the appropriate protection of cultural and historic resources. Based upon collaborative public efforts, tribal consultation, and the effects of each alternative displayed in the final environmental impact statement, I find that Alternative E-Modified meets this goal better than the other alternatives. Alternative E-Modified improves on the no action alternative by adopting a landscape scale approach, including the 2018 Blue Mountains Aquatic and Riparian Conservation Strategy, and an adaptive monitoring strategy. It provides the best balance of uses between Alternative C's emphasis on wilderness values and protection of backcountry areas and Alternative D's emphasis on achieving desired conditions through mechanical means.

5. Achieve a balance between population and resource use, which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities

The public demands a variety of products and uses that can be provided by the three National Forests. National Forest System lands and resources contribute to local economies and the quality of life in the region. The final environmental impact statement's analysis of alternatives compares the various values the public uses to determine their quality of life, varying from economic resource extraction values (timber harvest and minerals) to less tangibly defined resources such as recreation, wilderness values, and backcountry protection. I find that Alternative E-Modified best achieves the balance sought in this goal by increasing estimated timber volumes and jobs, maintaining livestock grazing, providing a balance of motorized and nonmotorized recreation opportunities, and designating 1.4 percent of the three National Forests as recommended wilderness.

6. Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources

I find Alternative E-Modified enhances the quality of renewable resources and provides sustainable use of renewable resources. The standards and guidelines and the management area allocation under Alternative E-Modified provides for levels of resource use that are greater than current levels under the no action alternative, while providing protection measures and maintaining areas as backcountry or recommended wilderness. While other alternatives provide a higher level of resource use, they do not provide plan components that maintain and enhance wildlife habitat to the same degree or do not allow for sustained yield as does Alternative E-Modified. Alternative C emphasizes more passive management and greater amount of backcountry and recommended wilderness, but it does so at the expense of resource utilization and does not achieve as much vegetation restoration as Alternative E-Modified.

Range of Alternatives

After considering the analysis of all the alternatives, and the alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed study, I believe a range of reasonable alternatives was carefully evaluated based on the need for change and compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

Two modified alternatives were added to the alternatives considered in detail, as a result of public comments on the draft environmental impact statement and draft land management plan. These modified alternatives refined the preferred alternative in the draft environmental impact statement (Alternative E), altering wilderness recommendations, increasing the pace and scale of restoration, focusing restoration on dry forests that are most departed from desired conditions, and balancing riparian and aquatic species conservation needs, especially for federally listed species, through the 2018 Blue Mountains Aquatic and Riparian Conservation Strategy. All plan revision alternatives are realistic, implementable, and responsive to the revision topics.

Using Best Available Science

The development of the final environmental impact statement and the land management plans was based on consideration of the best available science throughout the planning process. The interdisciplinary team comprehensively reviewed available scientific research and other information relevant to the resource areas addressed. Scientific conclusions were drawn from well-supported data sources and data availability was disclosed. Scientific sources were cited, responsible opposing views were discussed, incomplete and unavailable information was acknowledged, and scientific uncertainty and risk was addressed in relevant portions of the final environmental impact statement or project record. In addition, specific modeling and analysis methods were documented as appropriate.

For the three National Forests, scientific studies in this analysis included science supporting the Interior Columbia Basin Management Project (Quigley et al. 1996, 1997), a project initiated in 1993 to “develop a scientifically sound ecosystem-based strategy for management of eastside forests.” A final environmental impact statement and proposed decision for the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project were published in December 2000. In January 2003, the Regional Executives for the Forest Service, Forest Service Research, BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the EPA signed a Memorandum of Understanding completing the project. The agencies signing the memorandum agreed to cooperatively implement the Interior Columbia Basin Strategy, to use the scientific findings of the Strategy’s science, and to integrate new information and best available science as they are developed.

The Strategy was updated in 2014, incorporating the science data and resource information developed by the Interior Columbia Basin Management Project, as well as more recent science, into land use plans (Forest Service land management plans and BLM resource management plans) and project implementation. The Strategy identifies key principles that are relevant to future planning efforts including an update of ecological principles. The Blue Mountains revised land management plans have been designed to be responsive to the guidance and expectations identified in the Strategy. For more information on the Strategy, including expectations for incorporating guidance from the Strategy in land management plan revisions, refer to the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project website at:

https://icbemp.gov/html/ICBEMP_Frameworkmemorandum-and-strategy_2014.pdf

In addition, the specialists on the interdisciplinary team have used and referenced appropriate scientific information, models, and data to develop the analyses and conclusions in the final environmental impact statement. This science has been continually updated throughout the land management plan revision and environmental analysis process. The final environmental impact statement explains how scientific information has been compiled and used. Each resource section analyzed in Chapter 3, Environmental Consequences, discloses the methods used and cites the scientific sources relied on to disclose the effects of the alternatives.

Findings Related to Laws and Regulations

The Forest Service manages the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests in conformance with many laws and regulations. I have reviewed the statutes specific to individual resources as described in Chapter 3 of the final environmental impact statement, and I find this decision represents the best possible approach to both harmonizing and reconciling the current statutory duties of the Forest Service. The revised land management plans are strategic and programmatic in nature, providing guidance and direction to future site-specific projects and activities. Following are summaries of how the revised land management plans address compliance with some of the more prominent applicable laws and regulations.

National Forest Management Act

The National Forest Management Act requires the development, maintenance, amendment, and revision of land management plans for each unit of the National Forest System. These land management plans help create a dynamic management system so that an interdisciplinary approach to achieve integrated consideration of physical, biological, economic, and other sciences will be applied to all future actions on the unit.¹⁸ The Forest Service is to ensure coordination of the multiple uses and sustained yield of products and services of the National Forest System.¹⁹

The National Forest Management Act requires the Secretary of Agriculture to promulgate regulations for developing and maintaining land management plans. On April 9, 2012, the Department of Agriculture issued a final planning rule for National Forest System land management planning (2012 Planning Rule).²⁰ According to transition language of the 2012 Planning Rule at 36 CFR 219.17(b)(3), the responsible official may choose to use the provisions of the prior 1982 Planning Rule (dated September 30, 1982, and as amended²¹) to prepare land management plan amendments and revisions. The Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests chose to use the provisions of the 1982 Planning Rule for revising the land management plans.

The following sections discuss consistency of the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman revised land management plans with required elements of the 1982 Planning Rule.

Establishment of Forestwide Multiple-Use Goals and Objectives, Desired Conditions, and Quantities of Goods and Services (36 CFR 219.11(b))

Consistent with the 1982 Planning Rule, forestwide goals, desired conditions, and objectives are defined in Part 1 of the revised land management plans, and established in parts 1, 2 and 3 of the

¹⁸ 16 U.S.C. 1604(b), (f), (g), and (o)

¹⁹ 16 U.S.C. 1604(e)(1)

²⁰ 77 FR 68 [21162-21276]

²¹ The 1982 provisions can be found online at <http://www.fs.fed.us/emc/nfma/includes/nfmareg.html>.

revised land management plans. The “quantities of goods and services” are established in the objectives located in part 2 of the revised land management plans.

Establishment of Management Area (MA) Direction (Multiple-use Prescriptions) with Associated Standards and Guidelines (36 CFR 219.11(c))

Standards and guidelines are defined in part 1 of the revised land management plans and established for forestwide resources in part 3 of the revised land management plans. The forestwide standards and guidelines were carefully crafted and strike a balance between providing assurances that management direction is followed, while allowing managers flexibility in the case of site-specific circumstances.

The revised land management plans allocate 18 management areas across the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests (exclusive of the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area) that each have specific management direction (see management area allocations and the emphasis of each management area described in part 2 of the land management plans, under the Management Area section.) The management area prescriptions include specific standards and guidelines, which are listed by management area in part 2 of the revised land management plans. Additionally, unless otherwise stated in the revised land management plans, forestwide standards and guidelines also apply to all management areas.

Land within the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests may be assigned to more than one management area. For example, several research natural areas and wild and scenic rivers overlap into congressionally designated wilderness areas. In such cases, the most restrictive plan direction applies to the area of overlap.

The standards and guidelines included in the land management plans provide sufficient requirements and management direction for management areas and forestwide resources, provide for resource protection, and reflect the intent of the revised land management plans. Standards and guidelines were developed in an interdisciplinary manner, and provide for maintenance or achievement of the revised land management plan objectives and desired conditions.

Recommendations to Congress for Additions to the Wilderness Preservation System (36 CFR 219.17(a))

The land management plans recommend addition of 1.4 percent of the three National Forests as wilderness (see Rational for Decision, Recommending Wilderness section on page 12 above for a more detailed discussion). Components of the revised land management plans direct that current uses in these areas, including mountain biking and chainsaw use on existing trails, may continue so long as the wilderness characteristics and potential for each area recommended remains intact until congressional action is taken or the area is released from consideration through a future plan amendment or revision.

This recommendation is a preliminary administrative recommendation that will receive further review and possible modification by the Chief of the Forest Service, Secretary of Agriculture, and the President of the United States. Congress has reserved the authority to make final decisions on wilderness designation. Until such time Congress chooses to act to designate these areas, these areas will be managed under the revised land management plans.

Determine Suitability and Potential Capability of Lands for Resource Production (Timber and Grazing) (CFR 219.14 and 219.20)

A timber suitability analysis following the requirements of the National Forest Management Act was completed as a part of the planning process (final environmental impact statement, Volume 2, pages 167-168, 172-173). This process begins with a series of subtractions of land from the total forest land base using the four categories listed in the regulation at 36 CFR 219.14(a) to identify lands not available for timber production, resulting in areas tentatively suitable for timber production. Areas tentatively suitable for timber production may further be removed from lands suitable for timber production during the development of alternatives. These areas include riparian management areas, old forest, inventoried roadless areas, and other backcountry areas.

Similarly, suitability determinations and analysis for livestock grazing was completed as part of the planning process (final environmental impact statement, Volume 1, pages 152-153, 179-184). Capability is the initial step in determining suitability and is determined by identifying all the lands within the analysis area that are National Forest System lands or other lands administered by the Forest Service, and subtracting areas with soil types not meeting criteria to sustain forage or grazing, areas covered by water, and areas with overstory tree canopy cover or unpalatable shrub cover greater than 60 percent. The remaining area is identified as capable rangeland.

Rangeland suitability is further refined from the capable rangeland. Once the capable rangeland is determined, acres that do not have a proposed management area prescription that would allow for grazing are subtracted. Administrative sites, recreation areas, and other areas of specific use are also subtracted, as are areas specifically closed to grazing by past actions or incompatibility of use between resources. The remaining area is identified as suitable rangeland to be used in the land management planning process.

Suitability determinations and potential capabilities of lands for resource production for both timber production and livestock grazing are integrated into the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests. Therefore, the revised land management plans are fully compliant with the National Forest Management Act.

National Forest Management Act Diversity and Viability Requirements

The National Forest Management Act also requires that land management plans “provide for diversity of plant and animal communities based on the suitability and capability of the specific land area in order to meet overall multiple-use objectives, and within the multiple-use objectives of a land management plan adopted pursuant to this section, provide, where appropriate, to the degree practicable, for steps to be taken to preserve the diversity of tree species similar to that existing in the region controlled by the plan.”²² The 1982 Planning Rule requires that “Forest planning shall provide for diversity of plant and animal communities and tree species consistent with the over-all multiple-use objectives of the planning area” (36 CFR 219.26). In addition, land management plans shall provide direction to manage fish and wildlife habitat to maintain viable populations of existing native and desired non-native vertebrate species in the Plan Area (36 CFR 219.19).

The interdisciplinary team identified the species that occur on the three National Forests, determined which of those species have special concerns, narrowed down which species could be affected by forest management, screened the risks to species through a coarse filter (ecosystem

²² 16 U.S.C. 1604 6 (g)(3)(B)

diversity), and developed additional plan components where necessary through a fine filter approach (species diversity).

The overall goal for ecological sustainability is to sustain native ecological systems and support diversity of native plant and animal species. The focus in the sustainability analysis was on species that are of regional or local concern as indicated by documented threats to populations or habitats. Native vertebrates and invertebrates known to occur on land administered by the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests also were considered. In addition to viability, the revised land management plans establish surrogate species that represent the habitats and risk factors that relate to a broader group of species. There are 30 surrogate terrestrial and aquatic species listed for the revised land management plans. The final environmental impact statement (Chapter 3) documents how the revised land management plans provide for diversity and viability of these surrogate species.

The revised land management plans ensure viable native fish and wildlife populations as well as restoration of forest health on a broad scale including the diversity of vegetation structure and composition across the three National Forests. Rather than evaluating the viability of each individual species within the Plan Area, a representative, or surrogate, species was selected to represent a group of species. Surrogate species serve as an indicator of the welfare of other species using the same habitat and with similar habitat requirements. The surrogate species approach is a credible and scientifically rigorous method to assess ecosystem conditions that contribute to the viability of wildlife species. The viability analysis in the final environmental impact statement demonstrates that the selected alternative, E-Modified, shows little risk of impact on viability for any of the species due to strong protections provided by plan components.

The planning process and the final environmental impact statement indicate the revised land management plans and their preparation meet National Forest Management Act viability and diversity requirements. Therefore, the revised land management plans are fully compliant with the act.

Establishment of Monitoring and Evaluation Requirements that Provide a Basis for Periodic Determination and Evaluation of the Effects of Management Practices (2012 Planning Rule)

The monitoring plans, described in part 4 of the revised land management plans, are consistent with the 2012 Planning Rule at 36 CFR 219.11(d) and 219.12(k). Each monitoring question links to one or more goals, desired conditions, or objectives. However, the monitoring programs strive to be realistic in terms of budget and capacity and do not include a monitoring question for every plan component. The monitoring requirements established in part 4 of the land management plans will provide the information necessary to evaluate implementation of the revised land management plans and will facilitate adaptive management in response to monitoring results and other new information.

Research Station Director Concurrence

Consistent with the Forest Service Manual (FSM) 1921.04.b.4 and 4063.04.b.1.b, revised land management plan components for experimental forests and research natural areas were reviewed by the Station Director, Pacific Northwest Research Station. The Station Director, by March 22, 2018 letter, has approved the revised land management plans' management direction for experimental forests and research natural areas.

Archaeological Resources Protection Act

The purpose of the Archeological Resources Protection Act is to provide protection for archaeological resources found on public lands and Indian lands of the United States. The legislation provides civil and criminal penalties for those who remove or damage archaeological resources in violation of the prohibitions contained in the act. The act prohibits the removal of archaeological resources on public lands or Indian lands without first obtaining a permit from the affected Federal land manager or Indian Tribe, and requires Federal agencies to develop plans to survey lands under their management to determine the nature and extent of archaeological and cultural resources.

The revised land management plans are strategic and programmatic in nature, providing guidance and direction to future site-specific projects and activities. Compliance with section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and 36 CFR 800 regulations also meets the intent of this act by requiring assessments and surveys to identify the presence of historic properties within the area of potential effect for site-specific activities and to assess their effects on these resources. In addition, the three National Forests will continue to consult with Tribes during site-specific management activities that may impact cultural sites and cultural use. The revised land management plans include desired conditions, standards, guidelines, and management focus provisions to consider the effects of project and management activities to American Indian rights, interests, and cultural resources. Therefore, the revised land management plans are fully compliant with this act.

Clean Air Act

According to the Clean Air Act of 1990, the Forest Service has the responsibility to protect the air, land, and water resources from the impacts of air pollutants produced within national forest boundaries and to work with states to protect those same resources from degradation associated with the impacts of air pollution emitted outside of national forests.

The revised land management plans do not create, authorize, or execute any activities with the potential to alter air quality, although it does provide for the consideration of certain types of activities such as prescribed burning. Forestwide desired conditions and guidelines include direction for meeting air quality standards established by Federal and State agencies during prescribed burns. Therefore, the revised land management plans are fully compliant with this act.

Clean Water Act

The intent of the Clean Water Act is to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation's waters. The revised land management plans do not create, authorize, or execute any ground-disturbing activity, although they do provide for the consideration of certain types of activities. The revised land management plans contain direction to ensure all site-specific projects meet or exceed State water quality standards by implementing best management practices prepared under guidance of the Clean Water Act. Implementation of the revised land management plans is expected to contribute to protecting or restoring the physical, chemical, and biological integrity of surface and ground water within the national forests in the Blue Mountains in accordance with the Clean Water Act. Therefore, the revised land management plans are fully compliant with this act.

Endangered Species Act

The purpose of the Endangered Species Act is to provide a means whereby the ecosystems upon which endangered species and threatened species depend may be conserved and to provide for the conservation of such endangered species and threatened species. Section 7(a)(1) of the act requires Federal agencies to carry out programs for the conservation of endangered species and threatened species. In addition, the Endangered Species Act requires Federal agencies to insure that any agency action does not jeopardize the continued existence of the endangered species and threatened species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of the species' designated critical habitat (Endangered Species Act, section 7(a)(2)). The act also requires the Forest Service to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service on projects that may affect federally listed species and for the three agencies to base the consultation on the use of the best scientific and commercially available data.²³

In accordance with section 7(c) of the Endangered Species Act, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service identified the listed and proposed threatened or endangered species and their critical habitats that may be present on the three National Forests. A biological assessment was prepared by the three National Forests to assess the effects of the revised land management plans on the identified terrestrial, aquatic, and plant species and their critical habitats, as well as the effects of the land management plans on candidate species.

The terrestrial portion of the biological assessment found implementation of the revised land management plans *may affect, and is likely to adversely affect* the endangered gray wolf, the threatened Spalding's catchfly, the proposed wolverine, and the candidate species, whitebark pine. No designated critical habitat occurs for these terrestrial species. The biological assessment outlines the specific reasons why implementation of the revised land management plans may have short-term adverse effects to these species but result in overall net conservation and recovery benefits.

The aquatic portion of the biological assessment found implementation of the revised land management plans *may affect, and is likely to adversely affect* bull trout, Middle Columbia River steelhead, Upper Snake River Basin steelhead, and Snake River spring/summer and fall Chinook salmon, and *may affect, and is likely to adversely affect* designated critical habitat for these fish species. The revised land management plans may have short-term adverse effects to these species and their critical habitat, but result in overall net conservation and recovery benefits. The land management plans provide a suite of protective desired conditions, standards, and guidelines aimed at avoiding or minimizing these adverse effects. Two forestwide standards (WM-1S and RMA-1S) apply to all management activities and require that aquatic and riparian baselines that are within desired conditions be maintained. Where baselines are not within desired conditions, projects must restore or not retard attainment of desired conditions, to the degree that the project contributes to it. Short-term adverse project effects may occur when the project supports or does not diminish long-term recovery of watershed function, desired conditions, and federally listed species—unless the three National Forests have limited authorities to deny the project (for example, under the Greater Mining Act of 1872). In these situations, project effects shall be minimized to the greatest extent possible. The National Marine Fisheries Service concluded in their April 20, 2018, biological opinion that these two standards are instrumental in ensuring that the aggregate of any adverse effects from future site-specific activities will be small and will be

²³ 16 U.S.C. 1536(a)(2)

offset by beneficial actions, such that environmental baselines in watersheds containing listed anadromous fish continue to be maintained or improved.

Furthermore, the land management plans and Appendix A: the 2018 Blue Mountains Aquatic and Riparian Conservation Strategy (ARCS), include a comprehensive strategy for conserving aquatic resources, particularly because of the Strategy's restoration objectives and focus on priority watersheds. As restored watersheds accumulate over time through implementation of focused aquatic restoration activities, larger blocks of high-quality, well-connected aquatic and riparian habitat will be created, increasing the amount of refugia. In the Interior Columbia Basin Strategy, the Forest Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the EPA identified seven fundamental elements that the revised land management plans should include to promote and achieve conservation of aquatic and riparian resources (BLM et al. 2014). The revised land management plans and 2018 Blue Mountains ARCS include all seven elements. Each element, as described in the land management plans and ARCS, is likely to avoid or keep small the aggregate adverse effects resulting from future site-specific projects or benefit listed fish species and their habitat and will be offset to at least some degree by beneficial actions. Based on the land management plans' protective suite of standards and guidelines, and on the ARCS's focus on stream and riparian habitat restoration in priority watersheds, the National Marine Fisheries Service expects the land management plans will maintain or improve the viability of the populations of listed anadromous species in the plan areas.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a biological opinion and concurrence opinion for the revised land management plans on May 29, 2018. The biological opinion determined that the actions as proposed in the revised land management plans *are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence* of gray wolf, Spalding's catchfly, wolverine, whitebark pine, or bull trout, and *are not likely to destroy or adversely modify* bull trout critical habitat. Furthermore, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the Forest Service finding that the actions proposed under the revised land management plan may affect, but are not likely to adversely affect the gray wolf.

The National Marine Fisheries Service issued a biological opinion for the revised land management plans on April 20, 2018. The biological opinion determined that the revised actions as proposed in the land management plans are *not likely to jeopardize the continued existence* of Middle Columbia River steelhead, Snake River Basin steelhead, and Snake River spring/summer and fall Chinook salmon, and are *not likely to destroy or adversely modify* designated critical habitat for these species. Because of the programmatic nature of land management plan planning, neither the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service nor National Marine Fisheries Service issued an incidental take statement, as incidental take is to be assigned, as necessary, when planning future, site-specific projects. Therefore, the revised land management plans are fully compliant with the requirements of the Endangered Species Act.

Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act

The procedures of the 1982 Planning Rule²⁴ require that at least one alternative be developed that responds to and incorporates the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act Program's tentative resource objectives for each National Forest as displayed in regional guides. However, in 2001, the Pacific Northwest Region's Regional Guide was retracted. Therefore, for purposes of ensuring consistency with the act, we designed all plan revision alternatives to

²⁴ 36 CFR 219.12(f)(6)

support the broad resource objectives of the Forest Service's Strategic Plan for 2015–2020. The Strategic Plan was developed in lieu of a Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act Program, and in accordance with the Government Performance Results Act and the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. Therefore, the revised land management plans are fully compliant with this act.

Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act

Consistent with the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act of 1960²⁵, the Forest Service manages the National Forest System to sustain the multiple use of its renewable resources in perpetuity while maintaining the long-term health and productivity of the land. Resources are managed through a combination of approaches and concepts for the benefit of human communities and natural resources. As demonstrated in the final environmental impact statement and as required by the act, the revised land management plans guide sustainable, integrated resource management of the resources on the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests in the context of the broader landscape, giving due consideration to the relative values of the various resources in particular areas. Therefore, the revised land management plans are fully compliant with this act.

National Environmental Policy Act

The National Environmental Policy Act requires public involvement and consideration of potential environmental effects of new projects and programs. The environmental analysis and public involvement processes for the revision of the land management plans comply with the major elements of the requirements set forth by the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act.²⁶ These include (1) considering a broad range of reasonable alternatives, (2) disclosing cumulative effects, (3) using high quality and accurate scientific information, (4) consideration of long-term and short-term effects, and (5) disclosure of unavoidable adverse effects.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) submitted written comments, dated August 15, 2014, summarizing their review of the draft environmental impact statement and draft land management plan. The Forest Service addressed EPA's recommendations in the Response to Comments section of the final environmental impact statement. Additionally, the Forest Service provided EPA a draft response letter and hosted a conference call between EPA and Forest Service staff to discuss how the final environmental impact statement and revised land management plans will address EPA's recommendations.

The Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests considered a broad range of alternatives in the final environmental impact statement and have compiled a comprehensive record of the effects relevant to the alternatives considering best available scientific information. The revised land management plans adopt all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm. These means include provisions for providing the ecological conditions needed to support biological diversity and standards and guidelines to mitigate adverse environmental effects that may result from implementing various management practices. The revised land management plans include monitoring requirements and an adaptive management approach to assure needed adjustments are made over time.

²⁵ 16 U.S.C. 528–531

²⁶ 40 CFR 1500-1508

The revised land management plans do not represent an irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources. The revised land management plans are a programmatic-level planning effort and do not directly authorize any ground-disturbing activities or projects. Future ground-disturbing activities and projects will be made consistent with the revised land management plans and will be subject to additional site-specific public involvement, environmental analysis, and pre-decisional review processes. Therefore, the revised land management plans are fully compliant with the National Environmental Policy Act and Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations.

National Historic Preservation Act

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires each Federal agency to take into account the effects of its actions on historic properties, prior to approving expenditure of Federal funds on an undertaking or prior to issuing any license. Furthermore, an agency must afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (an independent Federal agency created by the act) an opportunity to comment on any of the agency's undertaking that could affect historic properties. National forests must work closely with the appropriate scientific community and American Indian Tribes concerning cultural resources. In addition, the laws and policies that govern cultural resource protection on Federal lands are coordinated with the State Historic Preservation Officers of Washington and Oregon, who serve in an advisory capacity.

The revised land management plans are a programmatic level planning effort and do not directly authorize any ground disturbing activities or projects. Future site-specific projects undertaken in response to direction in the revised land management plans will fully comply with laws and regulations that ensure protection of heritage resources. The revised land management plans include forestwide desired conditions, standards, and guidelines for cultural resources to fully integrate heritage resource management with other management activities. Therefore, the revised land management plans are fully compliant with the National Historic Preservation Act.

Roadless Area Conservation Rule

Management direction for inventoried roadless areas is compliant with the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule.²⁷ The 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule includes a prohibition on road construction and reconstruction in inventoried roadless areas, and prohibitions on timber cutting, sale, or removal except in certain circumstances. The revised land management plans are a programmatic level planning effort and do not directly authorize any road construction, reconstruction, or timber removal. Inventoried roadless areas overlap multiple management areas with the majority overlapping three management areas: 1A – Recommended Wilderness Area, 3A – Backcountry (nonmotorized use), and 3B – Backcountry (motor vehicle use). Lesser amounts of overlap occur in special areas that contain scenic, historical, geological, botanical, zoological, paleontological, and other special characteristics. The desired conditions, standards, and guidelines for these management area designations require consistency with the regulations outlined in the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Therefore, the revised land management plans are fully compliant with this rule.

Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act establishes a National Wild and Scenic Rivers System with three classes of river systems: wild, scenic, and recreational. The purpose of the act is to protect select

²⁷ 36 CFR 294 Subpart B, published at 66 Fed Reg. 3244-3273

rivers “...for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations” and to “preserve select river’s free-flowing condition, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values.”

Evaluation of the eligibility of rivers and streams for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System was conducted during the preparation of the revised land management plans as required by the act and Forest Service Manual policy (FSM 1924.03). In addition, management area direction in the revised land management plans provide protection for the outstandingly remarkable values identified for those rivers identified as eligible or suitable as well as for designated rivers. Therefore, the revised land management plans are compliant with this act.

Wilderness Act

The Wilderness Act of 1964 established a National Wilderness Preservation System to be administered in such a manner as to leave these areas unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness. It provides the statutory definition of wilderness, how areas are added to the wilderness system, and management requirements for congressionally designated areas.

Evaluation of existing wilderness and areas recommended for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System was included in the environmental analysis for the revised land management plans. The revised land management plans provide direction for designated wilderness through goals, desired conditions, standards, guidelines, and suitability that preserve the wilderness character of each designated wilderness area. Specific direction for the management and protection of wilderness characteristics in recommended wilderness is included in the revised land management plans and complies with the planning regulations (36 CFR 219) and agency policy (Forest Service Handbook 1900). Therefore, the revised land management plans are compliant with this act.

Pre-decisional Administrative Review Process (Objection Process)

This decision is subject to objection pursuant to the 2012 Planning Rule at 36 CFR Part 219. Objections must be filed by way of regular mail, fax, e-mail, hand-delivery, or express delivery with the Objection Reviewing Officer, USDA Forest Service.

- Electronic objections must be submitted to the Objection Reviewing Officer via e-mail to objections-chief@fs.fed.us, with a subject line stating: “Objection regarding the Revised Blue Mountains Forest Plans.” Electronic submissions must be submitted in a format (Word, PDF, or Rich Text) that is readable and searchable with optical character recognition software.
- Faxed objections must be sent and addressed to “Objection Reviewing Officer” and must include a subject line stating: “Objection regarding the Revised Blue Mountains Forest Plans.” The fax coversheet should specify the number of pages being submitted. The fax number is (202) 649-1172.
- Hardcopy objections may be submitted by regular mail to the following address: USDA Forest Service, Attn: Objection Reviewing Officer, 1400 Independence Ave. SW, EMC-LEAP, Mailstop 1104, Washington, DC 20250. Hardcopy submissions must include a subject line on page one stating: “Objection regarding the Revised Blue Mountains Forest Plans.”
- Hardcopy objections also may be submitted by carrier or hand deliveries to the following address: USDA Forest Service, Attn: Objection Reviewing Officer, 210 14th Street, SW,

EMC-LEAP, Mailstop 1104, Washington, DC 20250. Office hours are Monday through Friday, 8:00am to 5:00pm, excluding Federal holidays. Carrier deliveries may call 202-791-8488 during regular business days and hours, above, to coordinate delivery of objections. Hardcopy submissions must include a subject line on page one stating: "Objection regarding the Revised Blue Mountains Forest Plans."

- Individuals who need to use telecommunication devices for the deaf (TDD) to transmit objections may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 between 8:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m., Eastern Standard Time, Monday through Friday.

Objections, including attachments, must be filed within 60 days following the day after publication of the notice of the opportunity to object in *The Oregonian*, the newspaper of record. The objection period begins the first day after the publication date of the notice. Objections or attachments received after the 60-day objection period will not be considered. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection. Those wishing to object to these land management plan revisions should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Individuals and entities who have submitted substantive formal comments related to land management plan revision during the opportunities for public comment (as provided in subpart A of 36 CFR part 219) during the planning process for that decision may file an objection. Objections must be based on previously submitted substantive formal comments attributed to the objector unless the objection concerns an issue that arose after the opportunities for formal comment. Objections received in response to the notice, including names and addresses of those who object, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection.

Prior to the issuance of the reviewing officer's written response, either the reviewing officer or the objector may request to meet to discuss issues raised in the objection and their potential resolution. Interested persons who wish to participate in meetings to discuss issues raised by objectors must have previously submitted substantive formal comments related to the objection issues. Interested persons must file a request to participate as an interested person within 10 days after a legal notice of objections received has been published. Requests must be sent to the same email or address identified for filing objections, above, and the interested person must identify the specific issues they have interest in discussing. During the objection meeting, interested persons will be able to participate in discussions related to issues on the agenda that they have listed in their request to be an interested person.

Implementation of the Revised Land Management Plans

The revised land management plans provide a framework and text to guide resource management options. They are strategic, programmatic documents and do not make project-level decisions or irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources. Those kinds of commitments would be made after more detailed, site-specific analysis, and further public comment as part of the site-specific environmental analysis process.

After the reviewing officer has responded in writing to all objections, the revised land management plans for the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests will

become effective 30 days after the date of the publication of notice of approval (per the 2012 Planning Rule, 36 CFR 219.17(a)).

Project and Activity Consistency with the Revised Land Management Plans

To ensure better consistency of projects, activities, and resource plans with the 2012 Planning Rule, I am adopting the consistency provisions as described at 36 CFR 219.15 of the 2012 Planning Rule. The following explains how new and ongoing projects and activities, and existing resource plans, will be made, as appropriate, consistent with the revised land management plans, per guidance in the 2012 Planning Rule.

Application to Projects or Activities Authorized after the Land Management Plan Decision

Direction in revised land management plans will apply to all projects that have decisions made on or after the implementation date of the final records of decision. All projects and activities authorized by the Forest Service after approval of the revised land management plans, subject to valid existing rights, must be consistent with the revised land management plans. All subsequent project or activity approval documents will describe how the project or activity is consistent with the land management plans using the criteria identified in the revised land management plans (see Consistency with Plan Components, pages 7-8 in the land management plans).

Application to Projects or Activities Authorized before the Land Management Plan Decision

All ongoing national forest projects and activities shall be revised to be consistent with the revised land management plans as soon as practicable, subject to valid existing rights²⁸ as follows:

- Contracts, authorizations of occupancy and use, or other instruments subject to annual operating instructions or operating plans will be made consistent with all applicable revised land management plan direction through the annual operating instructions or annual operating plans during the operating season after the final records of decision for the revised land management plans are signed. Exceptions to this requirement include where the revised land management plan states a timeline for consistency that is different than described in this paragraph. For the process of determining a grazing allotment's monitoring indicators and allowable use levels associated with guideline GM-3G, these determinations will be completed within 5 years for allotments with federally listed fish and 7 years for all other allotments.
- Contracts, authorizations of occupancy and use, or other instruments not subject to annual operating instructions that will expire within 5 years of the implementation date of the final record of decision for a revised land management plan where federally listed species or habitat may be affected will be made consistent with revised land management plan direction within 1 year of the implementation date of the record of decision for the revised land management plan. Where federally listed species or habitat is not affected, these activities will be made consistent upon renewal of the contract or authorization.

²⁸ 16 U.S.C. 1604(i)

- Contracts, authorizations of occupancy and use, or other instruments that will expire more than 5 years after the implementation date of the final record of decision will be made consistent with revised land management plan direction within 5 years of the implementation date where federally listed species or habitat may be affected. Where federally listed species are not affected, these activities will be made consistent with revised land management plan direction within 7 years of the implementation date.

Application to Existing Resource Plans

Resource plans previously developed by the Forest Service that apply to resources or land areas within the analysis area will be reviewed for consistency with the revised land management plan's components and, as soon as practicable, will be updated, as needed, to make such resource plans consistent with the revised land management plan components,²⁹ with one exception: the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area Comprehensive Management Plan is being incorporated into the revised Wallowa-Whitman Land Management Plan unmodified.

Maintaining the Land Management Plans, Adapting to New Information, Amendments, and Administrative Changes

The land management plans may be amended at any time based on a preliminary identification of the need to change them. In addition, certain minor changes to the land management plans may be made administratively. The preliminary identification of the need to change the land management plans may be based on a new assessment, land management plan monitoring, or other documentation of new information, changed conditions, or changed circumstances. The amendment and administrative change processes that will be followed for any future amendment or administrative change of these land management plans are described in the 2012 Planning Rule at 36 CFR 219.13(b) and (c).

Adaptive Management

The revised land management plans are an integral part of an adaptive management cycle that will guide future management decisions and actions on the three National Forests. The revised land management plans provide for the sustainability of the resources of the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests, while directing the coordination and management of multiple uses of National Forest System land such as recreation, timber, mining, wildlife, fish, watershed, and wilderness. Recognizing that conditions on the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests do not remain static, that new information is constantly emerging, and that scientific uncertainty is associated with some conclusions regarding resource effects, the revised land management plans embrace a monitoring and adaptive management approach. The adaptive management process under the revised land management plans will include:

- Defining and measuring progress toward accomplishing land management plan objectives;
- Monitoring management outcomes and changing circumstances at the land management plan level and broader scale (per requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule at 36 CFR 219.12); and

²⁹ Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 section 21.41

- Revising management strategies accordingly.

The revised land management plans identify measureable objectives that will be monitored via the three National Forests' land management plan-level monitoring programs. Additionally, broader-scale monitoring actions will contribute additional knowledge to this adaptive management cycle. This adaptive management cycle will enable the three National Forests to identify and respond to changing conditions, changing public desires, and new information, such as that obtained through research and scientific findings.

Contacts

For more information regarding a specific national forest or general information regarding the land management plan revisions, please contact the respective National Forest Supervisor, below.

- Thomas Montoya, Wallowa-Whitman Forest Supervisor 541-523-6391
- Steven K. Beverlin, Malheur Forest Supervisor 541-575-3000
- Eric Watrud, Umatilla Forest Supervisor 541-278-3716

Approval

Regional Forester
Pacific Northwest Region

Date