



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Blues Intergovernmental Council provides recommendations for Forest Plan Revision in the Blue Mountains**

**LA GRANDE, Ore. (July 14, 2022)** – Following two years of collective work, the Blues Intergovernmental Council (BIC) has provided recommendations to the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) on desired conditions for key forest management issues in the Blue Mountains. With these recommendations, the BIC supports the agency's intent to reinitiate the Forest Plan Revision process for the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests. As the BIC continues to engage regularly with the Forest Service throughout the Forest Plan Revision process, the BIC also intends to initiate a broad public engagement effort to provide another avenue for the public to ensure the agency hears community input, concerns and ideas that can inform the content of the Forest Plans.

The BIC members, which consist of government leaders from impacted counties, states, federal and Tribal entities, have been working together for two years to develop desired conditions for Forest Service consideration on several key and previously polarizing issues that were within the withdrawn Blue Mountains Forest Plans. These key issues included riparian livestock grazing, fisheries, hydrology, forest health, and access. The BIC also commissioned and oversaw the completion of a socioeconomic analysis to offer data that considers impacts of forest management decisions to local communities.

The BIC-endorsed desired conditions (with a minority report included for the access issue) provide key foundations that will be crucial components of an improved Forest Plan Revision process by reflecting local values, incorporating input, and providing robust opportunities for meaningful engagement.

The BIC's endorsed desired condition products (combined with the connections that each member has with various community perspectives) also offer a timely opportunity to develop updated Forest Plans for these National Forests that provide for the sustainable needs of the landscape and

the needs of current and future generations. The BIC encourages the Forest Service to move forward with the plan revision process now and develop sustainable Forest Plans that reflect local values and provide tangible benefits to the communities surrounding the Blue Mountains.

The Forest Service previously attempted to complete Forest Plan Revision for the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests with a planning effort that spanned 15 years. The previous Forest Plan Revision process was highly contentious, with numerous community members and leaders feeling frustrated, misunderstood, and ignored. The objection process yielded more than 350 objections to the Forest Plans, which ultimately resulted in the revised Land Management Plans, Final Environmental Impact Statement and draft Records of Decision being withdrawn on March 14, 2019.

Following the withdrawal of the Blue Mountains Forest Plans, leadership from the Pacific Northwest Regional Office and the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests met with the Eastern Oregon Counties Association in April 2019, to coordinate, better understand concerns, and identify opportunities to approach forest planning and management in a new way. The participants recognized the need to explore unique approaches and work together at a larger scale, which included other government entities within and surrounding the Blue Mountains geographic area.

The various government entities officially formed the BIC in November 2019, to serve as an overarching entity and develop joint recommendations on the most contentious issues identified in the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision process. The diverse membership of the BIC ensures numerous perspectives and interests are represented in these discussions.

As an intergovernmental forum, the BIC is available to the public as a bridge between the Forest Service and communities surrounding the Blue Mountains. By serving in this capacity the BIC aims to help build trust, provide clarity about the planning process and plan components, complement Forest Service public outreach efforts, and bring continual feedback to the Forest Service regarding ways to improve the process or products.

While the BIC is available as a resource, the public will also have numerous opportunities to provide feedback directly to the Forest Service during the Forest Plan Revision process through various public engagements and specified formal comment periods. Information regarding these opportunities will be shared by the Forest Service once plan revision is initiated.

The BIC generally meets on the last Tuesday of every month and the meetings are open to the public. Additional information about the BIC is available at: <https://bit.ly/3O2vUID>.

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