near future. Upon approval of the policy and implementation guide, the Forest Plan will be reviewed and amended if necessary. This will be completed as soon as it is possible to do so. I believe this policy will be an important factor in helping to achieve a mutual goal of the Tribes and the Forest Service to provide strategies for habitat management and anadromous fish production consistent with fish restoration goals of the Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Program. I will make it a point that the CRITFC be contacted early in the scoping phase of analysis for any projects located in anadromous fish drainages on the Forest.

Alternative I permitted scheduled timber harvest inside the riparian area for Class I and II nonanadromous streams, but not anadromous streams I have modified this alternative to exclude from scheduled harvest, a strip of land 100 feet on each side of **all** Class I and II streams. I have several reasons for taking this approach:

1. These areas are critical in the protection of water quality and fish habitat. Management activities, such as timber harvest, present much greater risk to water quality and fish habitat if they occur close to these important streams.

2. Some streams on the Forest have been damaged by past activities, including timber harvest, road construction, mining, and livestock grazing.

3. Trees within riparian areas provide shade and streambank stability while they are alive. When they die, they provide habitat for snag-dependent species and later, those which fall into or across the stream, provide channel stability and improved fish habitat Quality of these habitats will be greatest if these areas are excluded from scheduled harvest

This does not mean that no harvest can occur in riparian areas. As with all lands outside the suitable base, harvest is allowed "when necessary to accomplish multiple use objectives other than timber" (FOREST PLAN, FOREST-WIDE STANDARD #103 and MANAGEMENT AREAS 3a and 3b #25). This means that in riparian areas non-scheduled harvest is allowed if doing so will accomplish specific riparian resource objectives.

In making this decision I have considered the economic consequences of removing these areas from scheduled harvest Analysis indicates that removing these lands (approximately 5,000 acres) from the suitable base results in a drop in the annual ASQ of approximately 0.2 MMCF (1 MMBF). I believe that this trade-off is worth the benefits received from the added stream protection. This change is reflected in the Forest Plan standards but not in the outputs such as those identified in the schedule of management activities or the land allocation adjustment to unsuitable timber lands.

ISSUE AREA : Big-game Habitat

- What level of big-game habitat should be provided to meet the needs for desirable big-game herds?

Elk populations prior to 1970 were relatively stable but low During the past decade populations have steadily increased to a current summer population of about 6,600 elk; about one-third of these elk winter on the Forest Mule deer population have fluctuated during the past 40 years and are currently on a downward trend in 2 of the 7 game management units which include the Forest. Management of winter range for elk will provide for the wintering needs of mule deer as well since mule deer winter range on the Forest is minimal and overlaps with elk winter range. Mule deer winter ranges occur principally on private lands below the Forest.

Management of big-game herd levels is the responsibility of the State of Oregon, Department of Fish and Wildlife while the Forest Service manages the habitat occurring on the Forest. Ultimately the cooperation of both agencies will assure quality habitat that supports viable populations The State management objective for elk populations in that portion of game management units which occur on the Malheur National Forest is 2,800 elk wintering on the Forest.

Ranchers on private land adjacent to the Forest are concerned about the movement of deer and elk off the Forest to private land. Presently, some herds move off the National Forest to winter on private land adjacent to the Forest. The amount and distribution of cover, snow depth, weather, disturbance (human activities) and animal preference for forage all influence big game use of public or private lands The increased potential of the Forest to carry larger populations will also increase the potential for more big game to winter on private land. Forage improvements on the winter range may increase the carrying capacity and retain more deer and elk on National Forest lands, depending on the other factors listed above

The wildlife issue of most concern to the public deals with big game habitat for elk hunting opportunities. Most of the dispersed recreation use occurs on the Forest during the deer and elk hunting seasons. Most local, and many regional and statewide residents and hunter's groups, are concerned about forest management activities and their effect on elk numbers and hunting opportunities. Most hunters are not only concerned about quality habitat (Forest Service responsibility) but are also concerned about the length of the hunting season, population numbers, opportunities for success, and whether hunting will be on a limited entry basis that would reduce their hunting freedom (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife responsibility)

Big-game habitat management and timber management are interrelated. Habitat quality for big-game populations is determined by cover quality, size and spacing, and by forage and road density (disturbance) factors. Timber management activities can influence the balance and distribution of cover and forage. Elk population numbers have increased, probably responding to available forage and controlled hunts.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODF&W) population objectives for the elk and deer herds, hunter success rates, and the need to limit hunting opportunities in certain units are related to the anticipated effects of Forest management on big-game habitat. For example, in addition to total population objectives, ODF&W has objectives for bull-to-cow and buck-to-doe ratios for each herd at the end of the hunting season. To ensure that the appropriate number of males are harvested, the Forest Service must limit access (by closing roads) and/or ODF&W must limit the number of hunters The Forest activity that most affects the management actions of ODF&W to meet its population objectives is the control of access for hunters using motorized vehicles

It is my decision to manage big-game habitat so as to maintain deer and elk populations at approximately the State's population management objective levels The application of big-game cover standards and the elk habitat effectiveness model (Thomas et al. 1988), will be used to balance cover quality, cover spacing, forage, and security (open road densities) to achieve habitat effectiveness objectives on big-game summer and winter range areas Effective vegetation manipulation and road management techniques will contribute to a slight increase through time of the Forest-wide habitat effectiveness for big game

Our analysis shows that Alternative C-modified would be the best alternative for wildlife. (See Chapter IV of the FEIS). However, I do not believe the gains in wildlife habitat and increased old growth allocations justify the reduction in timber harvest that would result. Similarly, I do not believe the gains in timber production from Alternative B-modified is worth the potential risk to big game habitat or hunting recreation experiences on a Forest such as the Malheur -- a Forest valued by many for its

wildlife and hunting values. I believe Alternative I is a reasonable compromise with some slight modifications.

It is my decision to select Alternative I with several modifications to big-game habitat. The next several pages describe my four changes to Alternative I in the following order:

1. Increase in HEI objectives in both summer and winter range
2. Reduction of winter range satisfactory and total cover standards on selected watersheds.
3 Reduction of summer range satisfactory cover standards in Malheur & Silvies watersheds
4. Reduction of summer range cover acreage for HEI calculations in Malheur & Silvies watersheds

1 Increase in HEI objectives in both summer and winter range

Habitat Effectiveness Index (HEI) measures Rocky Mountain elk habitat. It is the relative value of habitat conditions based on the potential of the habitat type to provide cover, the quality of existing cover, and the miles of road open to vehicular traffic The use of HEI, and in particular the integration of this technique with silvicultural techniques, is still being tested and evaluated Further testing and evaluation will occur during plan implementation and monitoring

In Alternative I the minimum HEI standard is 4 in summer range and 5 in winter range. On the Umatilla National Forest, which is adjacent to the north, the minimum HEI standard is 6 in summer range and .7 in winter range. The State of Oregon has raised a concern about this discrepancy I am also concerned with the consistency between forests, therefore I have modified Alternative I to increase HEI objectives to .5 in summer range and 6 in winter range This means that the minimum standards are to remain the same as in the Alternative I but that the goals to strive towards in site-specific project implementation will be slightly higher, as shown in the table below. As projects are planned the opportunity to achieve higher objectives will be considered where site-specific vegetative characteristics and health provide that opportunity

Elk Habitat Effectiveness Index (HEI)		
	Minimum Standard	Desired Objective
Winter Range	.5	6
Summer Range	.4	5

In those instances where both timber and HEI objectives can't be achieved in summer range, as determined through monitoring, the plan direction will be amended. Until that can be done, the timber objective will be met in a manner as consistent as possible with the HEI objective. Project analysis will consider site-specific conditions and the need to maintain quality big-game habitat and projected timber yields

The reason I feel that it is acceptable for the two forests to be slightly different is because the situation on the Malheur is somewhat different than on the Umatilla. The habitat capability for elk changes as one moves from the Blue Mountains in the north to the Great Basin high desert in the southern reaches

of the Malheur The slightly lower HEI values on the Malheur in both summer and winter range reflect this change in habitat

Another reason for slightly lower HEI standards on the Malheur is to allow for vegetative treatment so that epidemic levels of insect and disease can be curtailed. This will maintain both forest health and achieve as high a level of HEI as may be compatible While vegetative treatments are occurring, the habitat effectiveness will be reduced from desired levels in some areas. Road closures and other actions such a forage seeding will be used to mitigate these effects Treatment activities needed to deal with current insect and disease problems make it possible to achieve future desired HEI levels. In many cases, not treating vegetative health conditions now will result in a significant loss of cover in the near future.

The difference in HEI levels between the Malheur and Umatilla and the application of that model to different habitat conditions will allow the Forests to test the objectives on the ground and evaluate these different applications

2. Reduction of satisfactory and total cover standards for winter range on selected watersheds.

During the last year the Forest has collected new data which indicated that implementation of satisfactory cover standards in winter ranges may be extremely difficult, to impossible, to achieve in some drainages. The Forest Plan yield tables were calculated on 1980 data and ground conditions have changed since that time. Insects and disease have increased to epidemic levels. Although modeling projections were updated to 1990 conditions, new data suggests that much of what was considered cover in the modeling process does not meet the definition of cover on the ground. This is in part due to the impacts from epidemic insects and disease infestations and in part due to the natural ecological potential of the land. In some areas nonforested lands such as scablands naturally limit the ability of the land to become big-game cover

Given the conditions listed in the above paragraph, the impacts on the timber supply would be too great in that the timber outputs (ASQ) would be difficult to obtain with the standards identified in Alternative I. Therefore I have directed the Forest Supervisor to reduce satisfactory cover standards in winter range (Management Area 4a) in 4 out of 7 major watersheds, and total cover in 3 out of the 7 major watersheds (see table below for changes) These changes will not effect ASQ These new standards have been incorporated into the Plan.

Changes between Alternative I and Selected Alternative in Management Area 4a (Winter Range)

Winter Range	Satisfactory Cover		Total Cover	
Watershed	Alternative I	Selected Alternative	Alternative I	Selected Alternative
Fox/Cottonwood	10	10	25	25
M.F. John Day	10	10	25	25
S.F. John Day	10	8	25	20
N F Malheur	10	8	25	20
Upper John Day	10	10	25	25
Malheur	10	5	25	20
Silvies	10	8	25	25

3. Reduction of satisfactory cover standards for summer range in Malheur and Silvies watersheds

Management Area 1 (General Forest) has a variety of objectives The primary objective is timber production, but big-game habitat (summer range) is an important objective also Through silvicultural prescriptions and the suitable lands on which they apply, a certain contribution to the Forest-wide ASQ is anticipated Like winter range, it is anticipated that achievement of both the ASQ and cover standards will be difficult. The State of Oregon is very concerned about being able to achieve the ASQ output on the southern half of the forest and so am I. Therefore I have asked the Forest Supervisor to plan for an additional 2 MMBF per year in the Malheur and Silvies drainages by lowering satisfactory cover standards to 5% and 8%, respectively (see table below) Total cover will remain the same at 20%. Because mule deer need less cover as compared to elk, my decision will result in giving stronger emphasis on the southern summer range to mule deer in combination with elk.

Changes between Alternative I and Selected Alternative in Management Area 1 (General Forest) Summer Range

Summer Range	Satisfactory Cover		Total Cover	
Watershed	Alternative I	Selected Alternative	Alternative I	Selected Alternative
Fox/Cottonwood	12	12	20	20
M F. John Day	12	12	20	20
S.F. John Day	12	12	20	20
N F. Malheur	12	12	20	20
Upper John Day	12	12	20	20
Malheur	12	5	20	20
Silvies	12	8	20	20

4. Reduction of cover acreage for HEI calculations in in Malheur and Silvies watersheds.

Alternative I provided for satisfactory and marginal cover in blocks of at least 30 acres on summer range. Consistent with my decision above to give stronger emphasis to deer on the southern portion of the forest I have decided to modify Alternative I to allow for satisfactory cover in blocks of 10 acres on both the Malheur and Silvies watersheds. All other watersheds will provide for cover in blocks of 30 acres in size but this may not be possible to do this due to site condition or potential in all areas. Where cover in 10-30 acre blocks is known to provide adequate habitat, site-specific analysis will recognize the value of these smaller cover areas and include these acres in HEI calculations.

Prior to making the four changes discussed above, I had created the Blue Mountain Elk Initiative, which is discussed in more detail below.

In February of this year I introduced "The Elk Initiative for the Managed Forests of the Blue Mountain of Oregon and Washington" which is also referred to as "The Blue Mountain Elk Initiative". The primary goal of the proposal is to work in partnership with the Oregon and Washington State Wildlife Agencies, communities, private landowners, and interested groups and individuals for the benefit of elk management in the Blue Mountains

To determine the effectiveness of elk habitat management prescriptions, standards, and guidelines during plan implementation, the three Blue Mountain Forests (Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman) will develop and implement a coordinated monitoring program Elk habitat condition, including road density, cover quality (satisfactory and marginal), cover size and spacing, forage quality and quantity, and any other appropriate factors, will be evaluated on a project basis and monitored on a watershed basis The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and Washington Department of Wildlife will be invited to cooperate in the development and execution of the monitoring and evaluation program This program will be initiated within one year of Plan implementation for the three Blue Mountain Forests. The results will be evaluated yearly. Appropriate adjustments to the three Forest Plans will be initiated within three to five years if warranted.

The Forest will work with the States and other entities thru the Blue Mountain Elk Management Initiative, to address questions of public and private land interaction with elk habitat management, and other potential strategies for minimizing impacts on elk habitat during plan implementation, project design and execution,and monitoring

During the next ten years, we anticipate that studies at the Starkey Experimental Forest and Range will yield new insights into the relationships between management of forest land and elk The decisions we are making in this plan are, for the most part, reversible New information that becomes available as part of the Starkey studies can be incorporated into the next land management plans, or by amendment to this plan if considered necessary

ISSUE AREA : Roadless Areas

- Should some or all of the Forest's roadless areas remain roadless, or be opened to roaded development? Should Pine Creek study area be recommended to Congress for wilderness classification?

The Forest currently has 18 separate roadless areas comprising 180,948 acres. Some people enjoy the recreation experience available in areas which have many characteristics of wilderness but fewer restrictions Such areas can be characterized as providing semiprimitive nonmotorized or motorized recreation opportunities Maintaining the undeveloped character will mean excluding such areas from regulated timber harvest and road construction In areas providing for motorized use, off-road vehicle use may continue; mineral exploration and extraction could continue in both types of area

Areas maintained in an undeveloped state will also be eligible for future wilderness consideration. National and Regional environmental groups such as the Wilderness Society, Native Plant Society, and Oregon Natural Resources Council are opposed to development of these areas stating that in many cases there is no need for development and they should remain undeveloped rather than foreclose on future wilderness possibilities. One of these areas, Pine Creek, was analyzed in this planning process for potential inclusion in the National Wilderness System because it was designated for further planning review by the RARE II Final Environmental Impact Statement. These same groups as well as local environmental groups, some hunters, and some local residents favor roadless management of these areas because they believe it protects sensitive plant species, wildlife habitat, water quality and other amenity values, better than management geared toward consumptive uses

Others such as the mining and timber industry associations and businesses, many local residents, and local governments state that the management of these areas has been in limbo long enough They want to develop access and the resources in these areas to end the uncertainty about their availability. They state that the resources in these areas need to be managed so that they can contribute to local industrial and economic needs They believe that wildlife habitat can be improved and the vegetation will be in a more vigorous condition if the resources are managed for consumptive uses (primarily wood fiber production)