EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
UNDERSTANDING BAKER AND UNION COUNTIES ECONOMIC WORKSHOPS

Bureau of Land Management
Baker Resource Area, Vale District
Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision Team
Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests

June 28 and 29, 2006

Overview: The Bureau of Land Management Baker Resource Area, Vale District and the Forest Service Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision Team (both offices located in Baker City) worked with the Sonoran Institute (Tucson, Arizona) to conduct two one-day economic workshops. The workshops occurred June 28 in Baker City (Baker County) and June 29 in La Grande (Union County), Oregon. This report summarizes the participants, workshop structure, major themes, and evaluations of the workshops.

Participants: Forty-five people participated in the Baker City workshop including agency personnel and Sonoran Institute staff (11 people). Attendees represented various agencies, local governments, elected officials, and organizations. They expressed interests in timber, grazing, recreation, mining, conservation, economic and business development, hunting, and fishing.

Forty-three people attended the La Grande workshop including agency personnel and Sonoran Institute staff (8 people). Approximately one-half of the participants identified themselves during introductions as being associated with the timber industry, either as employees of Boise Cascade, Wallowa Forest Products, Associated Oregon Loggers, or members of Oregon Women in Timber. Other interests represented included recreation, conservation, economic and business development, local government and elected officials, hunting, fishing, and ranching.

Workshop structure: Elaine Kohrman, Social Scientist/Economist for the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision Team, outlined the workshop objectives and how the information will be used:

Objectives for the workshop:
- Discuss and learn about relationships between public lands and the economy
- Build from local knowledge
- Identify strategies that address public lands and community goals
- Identify measures of success

How this information will be used:
- Forest Service: Inform and refine the revised Forest Plan -
  - Vision
  - Strategies
  - Monitoring
  - Analysis of effects
- BLM: Provide preliminary input to their planning process
- Provide social and economic information to other planning efforts

Baker City: In the Baker City workshop, the Sonoran Institute staff reviewed the agenda and everyone introduced themselves and their expectations for the day. The staff presented information on trends that are changing the economies in western states and the group discussed which key trends were relevant or not to the local economy. The staff then introduced the Economic Profile System (EPS) using the Baker County profile. The group spent the rest of the

day discussing conditions and trends for specific topics in the county, social and economic aspects of a vision for the county related to public lands, strategies for achieving the vision, and measures for determining whether the vision was successfully reached in the future. This was facilitated with small groups discussion several questions and recording their answers, and then reporting back to the full group. Further comments were added from the entire group at each point in the process.

La Grande: In the La Grande workshop the following day, minor changes to the format were made based on feedback from the Baker City workshop: participants were organized into a smaller number of groups and assigned to topics, rather than choosing their own groups. This allowed participants to examine issues that were outside their normal range of consideration and generated more diverse discussions.

Major themes: In both workshops, the discussions generated a wide range of ideas for the Forest Service and the BLM to consider in revising their plans. The groups offered considerable insight into community values, visions, concerns, and preferences. Some of the major themes common for both locations were:

- Values for healthy environments, healthy economies, communities, and healthy families
- Strong desires to maintain or improve many aspects of the current situation (i.e. rural character, slower population growth, active timber industry).
- A vision for a high quality of life linked to the history of the area, the rural setting, local knowledge, and access to the forest for a variety of uses that create more and higher paying "family wage" jobs and opportunities.
- A desire for the Forest Service to maintain a "healthy forest," although perceptions of what this means varied between more or less logging and wilderness designation, or differences about the level of access for recreation uses.
- Concerns about reducing fire risks and increasing management accountability
- Preferences for local economies based on timber, ranching, agriculture, and recreation

Evaluations: At the end of both workshops, the group discussed improvements and individuals also filled out evaluation sheets.

Baker City: Based on the 19 evaluations from the Baker City workshop, some participants said the small group discussions were the most valuable part of the day (6); followed by the presentation on changes in the west (4); the EPS data (3); and the contact and dialogue with agency personnel (2). Four participants thought the exercise on community values was the least useful; whereas some cited the presentation on changes in the west (3); and the EPS data (2).

In response to, "What was the most important thing you learned during the workshop?" the most frequent answer was the degree of common ground participants found with each other. Eleven participants said that they expected to use the EPS tool; four said they would not, and the remainder said "maybe" or did not answer the question. The largest number of participants said a workshop report or notes would be the most useful form of follow up. Many others said they needed to see the ideas from the workshop actually integrated into the forest plan.

Participants gave a range of suggestions on ways to improve the workshop and additional comments: three mentioned that the facilitators should more carefully record participants' responses on flip charts, while six specifically praised the facilitation. Two suggested organizing the groups for more diverse discussions, and two cited needing fewer break-out groups.

La Grande: Thirty-two evaluations were turned in for the La Grande workshop. The highest number of participants cited the small group discussions as the most useful component of the workshop, followed by the EPS data and group discussions in general. Six evaluations said that being assigned to groups where they didn't have specific expertise on the topic was the least useful. Some participants said that all portions of the workshop were useful (6), others did not

answer the question (4), and three participants thought the comments by fellow participants were least useful.

In response to, “What was the most important thing you learned during the workshop?” there was more agreement within the community than people expected, although a fair number said there was a broader divergence of viewpoints than expected. Eleven participants indicated that they planned to use the EPS tool, eleven didn’t intend to use it, and the remainder said maybe, didn’t answer the question, or gave another answer. Five people said a workshop report or notes would be the most useful follow-up, several others mentioned seeing the Forest Service actually use the outcome of the workshop in its planning process, and the remainder gave a range of answers.

A broad spectrum of suggestions on ways to improve the workshops was given, but no clear trends stood out. Some noted that the mix of participants was limited, included “outsiders,” favored some interests over others; and thanked the Sonoran Institute for a job well done.

Workshop Materials:

The PowerPoint presentation on the “Changing Economy of the West,” and the EPS profile software to generate the county-specific profiles are available to download at www.sonoran.org.

Workshop notes are available at http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/uma/blue_mtn_planrevision/.

Workshop evaluations are on file with the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision Team, P.O. Box 907, Baker City, Oregon, 97814.

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