



USDA Forest Service
Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests

How do I make comments that get used?

What is a forest plan?

Forest plans are broad and strategic, setting the management direction for the national forest. They are similar to county zoning plans. Forest plans describe the desired conditions, suitable uses, and design criteria land managers use in project planning. Forest plans do not approve any projects; projects must go through a separate analysis and decision process and must be in compliance with the direction in the forest plan.

What is the proposed action?

The proposed action is a proposed revised forest plan. It is not an analysis document. The analysis of the proposed action will be in the environmental impact statement (see next paragraph). The proposed revised forest plan is a result of the collaboration efforts made over the last several years and serves as a starting point for the formal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

What are the next steps in the process?

The release of the proposed action starts the NEPA process. The proposed action and the alternatives developed as a result of your comments will be analyzed in an environmental impact statement (EIS). The draft EIS is expected to be released in the spring of 2011. At that time you will have another opportunity to comment, this time on the draft EIS including all of the alternatives and analysis. Your comments at that time will be used to complete the final EIS, which will be available in the spring of 2012. The final revised forest plans are expected to be implemented in 2012.

Why comment?

Your comments are important in the development of alternatives to the proposed action. Comments are used to develop significant issues. Alternatives to the proposed action are built using these issues. Issues reflect omissions in the proposed action or place more emphasis on one outcome over another.

All comments are read and considered, but only substantive comments that are within the scope of forest plans are useful in designing alternatives to the proposed action. So how do you make a substantive comment about forest plans? Tell us what you like about the proposed action and why, what we left out that you would like to see in the revised forest plans, or what you think should be changed and why.

Useful scoping comments:

- Are within the scope of forest plans. Useful comments provide suggestions for changes to desired conditions (what the forest should look like and provide in the future), management areas (the emphasis put on specific locations of the forest), suitable uses (what uses and activities are suitable for specific areas), objectives (projections of some of the measurable program outcomes expected over the

life of the plan), and standards and guidelines (the restrictions put on activities conducted on the forest).

- Take into account current laws, regulations, and policies
- Are supported by scientific evidence

Examples of comments that are not within the scope of forest plans include: suggestions for improvements to specific campgrounds, thinning for fuels reduction in specific areas, or opening specific closed roads. Those are project level decisions that are made following a separate analysis and decision process.

What should I focus my comments on?

Focus on those parts of the revised forest plan proposed action that are plan components as identified on page 5 of the proposed action.

- **Goals and Desired Conditions** – The land and resources of the national forests are managed to achieve or maintain goals and desired conditions to allow the national forests to contribute to a range of outcomes now and into the future. The background and existing condition descriptions that precede the desired condition statements are there for context only and are not plan components. These descriptions will be further expanded in the environmental impact statement to be developed. Comments directed towards the background or existing condition statements are only helpful if they result in changes to the desired conditions. Tell us what you like or don't like about the desired conditions and why. Did we leave anything out?
- **Management Areas** – Management Areas provide consistent direction for similar portions of the national forest landscape. They include special areas and congressional designated areas such as wilderness. Do you like the current mix of management areas and their locations, or would you like to see something different? Would you like to see more wilderness? Where? Are there other special areas you would like to see proposed? Would you like to see more general forest and less undeveloped area? What areas that are undeveloped in the proposed action would you like to see changed to general forest? Are there other management area changes you would like to see? Why?
- **Suitable Uses & Activities** – Table 31 on page 81 of the proposed action lists suitable uses by management area. This is not an exhaustive list of uses that may take place in a management area, but highlights some uses of interest to land managers. Are there any uses that have been omitted that you would like to see added? Where should they be suitable? Are there uses listed that you would like to see the general suitability changed for a specific management area? Why?
- **Objectives** – Objectives are projections of program activities and outcomes that are expected to take place during the life of the revised plan. These are not commitments, but are estimates of measurable planned results expected to lead to maintaining or achieving desired conditions. Objectives take into account ecological needs, community capacity and expected budget levels. They are not guarantees, and they are not an exhaustive list of all of the activities the Forest Service expects to conduct in the life of the plan. Are there objectives you expected to see that are not there? Are the measures within the range you expected to see? Why or why not? What would you like to see different and why?

- **Monitoring and Evaluation** – Forest plan monitoring and evaluation are used to determine if the forest plan direction is being implemented and whether or not the application of standards and guidelines is meeting forest plan goals and objectives. The monitoring items in the proposed action are only those required by the planning rule. What other monitoring items would you like to see in the revised plan? Why?
- **Standards and Guidelines** – These are limitations on activities or uses for reasons of environmental protection, public safety, risk reduction, or to achieve desired conditions, goals or objectives. Are there standards and guidelines missing? What are they and what purpose would they serve? Are there some there that you would like to see changed or removed? Why?

Comments are most helpful if received by May 28, 2010. Written comments should be addressed to the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision Team, P.O. Box 907, Baker City, OR, 97814. Comments can be dropped off at the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Headquarters at 1550 Dewey Ave, Baker City OR, 97814. Comments can also be sent via email to: blue_mtn_planrevision@fs.fed.us.