



THE LEADING EDGE

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*Newsletter of the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project-
Evaluating and Implementing Ecosystem Management within the Interior Columbia Basin*

Public Comment Influences Management of 63 Million Acres

More than 83 thousand public comments significantly influenced the development of a proposed management strategy for Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Forest Service-administered lands in four western states according to Martha Hahn, Idaho State Director for the BLM and Chairman of the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project's executive steering committee.

"The Forest Service and BLM have been working together to explore ways that are more effective at ensuring the long-term sustainability of public land resources for present and future generations," Hahn said. "We have responded to the public's concerns and comments in the Supplemental Draft EIS."

The Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Supplemental Draft EIS), which outlines three management alternatives for 63 million acres of public land in eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho and western Montana, is currently available for public review and comment. The Supplemental Draft EIS

Public Meetings on the Supplemental Draft EIS

The Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project has scheduled a number of public meetings on the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement. A total of 13 public meetings will be held in late April and early May across the Project area. Public meetings will run from 7:00 - 9:00 P.M. local time.

April 18

Salmon, Idaho - Salmon Community Center, 200 Main Street

Walla Walla, Washington

- Best Western Walla Walla Suites, 7 East Oak Street

April 19

Missoula, Montana - Boone and Crockett Building, Old Milwaukee Depot, 250 Station Drive

April 20

Kalispell, Montana - The Outlaw Inn, 1701 US Hwy 93 South

April 24

John Day, Oregon - Forest Supervisor's Office, 431 Patterson Bridge Road

Libby, Montana - Libby City Hall, 952 East Spruce Street

Public Meetings continued on page two

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Public Comment

Continued from page 1

supplements the *Eastside and Upper Columbia River Basin Draft EISs* released in June, 1997. These Draft EISs explored seven alternatives for management of the public lands of the Interior Columbia Basin.

“Of the three alternatives presented, Alternative S2 was identified as the preferred alternative because it provides the best strategy for protecting and restoring fish and wildlife habitats, improving the health of forests and rangelands, and providing a more predictable level of goods and services from public lands,” said Hahn.

Partners in the development of this strategy include the National Marine Fisheries Service, Environmental Protection Agency, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

After considering public comments received on the Supplemental Draft EIS, a Final EIS and Record of Decision will amend 62 land use plans for the 32 National Forests and BLM administrative units within the project area. The Final EIS will also replace interim Forest Service and BLM strategies for anadromous and inland fish and old forests. The 90-day public comment period on the Supplemental Draft EIS ends July 6, 2000.

During the comment period, public meetings will be held throughout the Project area. See the accompanying article for meeting dates and locations.

Written comments on the Supplemental Draft EIS will be accepted by mail at Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project, P.O. Box 420, Boise, Idaho 83701-0420 or electronically at www.icbemp.gov. For additional information, a Supplemental Draft EIS Information Packet is posted at www.icbemp.gov.

Available Documents

The *Interior Columbia Basin Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Supplemental Draft EIS)* was recently mailed to everyone on the Project’s mailing list. There were two separate mailings, one was the full Supplemental Draft EIS while the other was a summary of the Supplemental Draft EIS and a summary of the response to public comments on the *Eastside and Upper Columbia River Basin Draft EISs*.

Most people received the 30-page summary of the Supplemental Draft EIS and the 136 page summary of the response to public comments on the

Draft EISs. The rest of those on the mailing list received the full ICBEMP Supplemental Draft EIS. This mailing consisted of the 30-page summary of the Supplemental Draft EIS and the two-volume Supplemental Draft EIS, which runs over 1,200 pages.

If you are interested in receiving the full *Supplemental Draft EIS* you may contact the ICBEMP and request one. Requests can be taken via mail at ICBEMP, 304 N. 8th Street, Room 250, Boise, ID 83702, via fax at 208-334-1769, or by phone at (208) 334-1770 x120.



Public Meetings *Continued from page 1*

April 25
Lakeview, Oregon - BLM/FS
Interagency Office,
1300 South G Street

Coeur D’Alene, Idaho -
Coeur D’Alene Inn,
W 414 & Appleway

April 26
Boise, Idaho - Idaho Historical
Museum, 610 N Julia Davis Drive

May 1
Okanogan, Washington - Agriplex,
175 Rodeo Trail Road

May 2
Colville, Washington - Colville
Community College,
985 South Elm Street

May 3
Bend, Oregon - Shilo Inn, North
Highway 97 and OB Riley Road

May 4
Pocatello, Idaho - Cavanaugh’s
1555 Pocatello Creek Road

For more information, check our web site at www.icbemp.gov, or contact the Project’s offices at (208) 334-1770 or (509) 522-4030, or check with a local BLM or National Forest office.

Summary of Effects of Alternatives

Chapter 4 of the SDEIS presents the results or effects of implementing the management direction proposed in Chapter 3. These effects have been analyzed by the Project's Science Advisory Group to verify consistency with the scientific assessment. The following paragraphs depict what the conditions might be on Forest Service- and BLM administered lands across the basin. Alternatives were assumed to be implemented at existing budget levels or with modest increases.

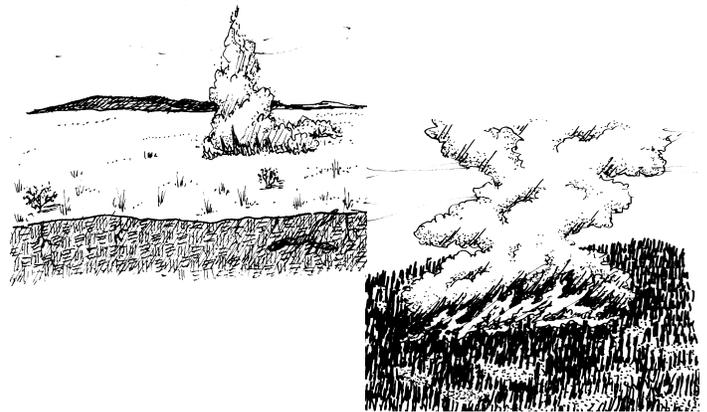
Forests - All alternatives are expected to increase the extent of old forests. Alternatives S2 and S3 restore old forests better than S1 by matching the right tree species to the place on the landscape where they grow. The strategy results in vigorous forests able to withstand disturbances like fire. Of the two alternatives, S2 will be more effective than S3. Differences between the alternatives result from the increased amount of thinning, prescribed fire, stewardship harvest, and management direction that protects and increases the extent of old forest.

Uncharacteristic insect and disease effects are expected to remain near current levels over the long term. Vegetation treatments (e.g., thinning, prescribed burning) that create growing space between trees help control uncharacteristic insect and disease effects.

Rangelands - The rate of expansion of noxious weeds and other exotic or undesirable plants would be slowed in Alternatives S2 and S3 due to the application of an integrated weed management strategy. However, for all alternatives, the extent of noxious weeds and other exotic undesirable plants would continue to increase. The projected continued spread is due to the already wide distribution noxious weeds combined with the lack of weed control and prevention techniques that are proven to be effective at the landscape scale.

In Alternatives S2 and S3 the mountain big sagebrush, fescue-bunchgrass, and wheatgrass bunchgrass vegetation types, which have declined substantially in geographic extent from pre-settlement to current, would increase in extent where reintroduction of fire achieves reduction in woody species encroachment and increasing density.

Uncharacteristic Wildfire - In Alternative S2, there would be a long-term reduction of 15% in the size and severity of uncharacteristic wildfires due to forest restoration efforts. The improvements from S2 and S3 come from fuel reduction treatments (thinning and prescribed burning) and adjusting disturbances (fire, insects, harvest and disease) better suited to the landscape, climate, and vegetation.



Activities - When compared to current activity levels.
Continued on page four

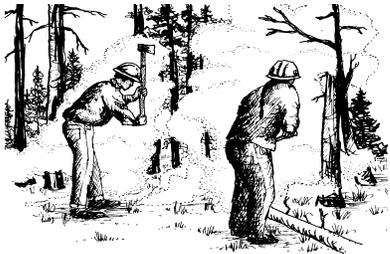
Summary of Activities/Outputs of Alternatives

The SDEIS does not set targets or levels of production. In order to estimate effects, the combination of management direction and investment in resource management activities was presumed to result in projected levels of activity.

Output / Activity	Alternative S1	Alternative S2	Alternative S3
Animal Unit Months (AUMs)	3,111,000	2,798,000	2,765,000
Timber Harvest Volume (mmbf)	810	990	980
Forest/Woodland Restoration (acres)	142,000	199,000	192,000
Rangeland Restoration (acres)	3,074,000	3,339,000	3,183,000
Prescribed Fire/Fuels Management	181,000	1,456,000	1,110,000

Summary of Effects of Alternatives (continued)

Alternative S2 will have increases of up to 40% in reforestation and precommercial thinning in forests and woodlands. A 9% increase will occur in activities on rangelands such as weed control and seedings. There will be a seven fold (700%) increase in the total amount of acres treated with prescribed fire/fuels management on forests and rangelands.



In Alternative S3 there will also be increased levels of activities, but not as much as Alternative S2, a 35% increase in treated forest/woodland acres, a 4% increase in treated rangeland acres, and a five fold (500%) increase in the amount of acres treated with prescribed fire/fuels management.

Outputs - Timber harvest volume is predicted to increase up to 21% in Alternative S2. While harvest levels would increase under Alternatives S2 and S3, the size and quality of the logs produced would likely decrease because of the stand restoration objectives guiding the thinning and harvest activities. Harvest level increases would come primarily from commercial thinning and other harvest activities designed to promote ecosystem and forest stand restoration.

Objectives and standards for watershed and rangeland protection and restoration could indirectly reduce animal unit months (AUMs). Other social, cultural and economic factors also continue to directly reduce AUMs over the long term.

Socio-economics - It is estimated that there are approximately 95,000 jobs associated with livestock grazing, timber harvest, and recreation (1% in livestock grazing, 9% in timber harvest, 81% in recreation, and the remaining 8% in forestry-related services). Direct employment generated from Forest Service- and BLM-administered lands would increase in Alternatives S2 and S3 by up to 4,000 and 3,000 jobs, respectively. The increases represent a 4% gain in Alternative S2, and a 3% gain in Alternative S3 with respect to the total 95,000 jobs.

In the first decade of implementation, livestock grazing on Forest Service- and BLM administered lands and the

number of related jobs would decline an estimated 112 to 125 jobs (10-11 %) under S2 and S3. Forest restoration activities and related jobs are expected to increase under Alternative S2 by up to 1,300 jobs (21 %). The large increase in prescribed fire activity in Alternative S2 would increase employment by about 2,600 jobs, and S3 would increase employment by about 1,900 jobs.

Tribal - Alternative S2 provides more consistent and effective consultation direction for dealing with Tribes, which should lead to improvements in government-to-government consultation. There will be more opportunities for tribal involvement in both planning and decision-making processes than currently exist. The higher rate of restoration is predicted to be more responsive to the social and ecological needs of tribes.

Wildlife - In general, there is not a great degree of difference in effects on wildlife species between the three alternatives at the basin scale. However, there are local differences. Habitat for species dependent on old-forests would generally increase with Alternatives S2 and S3, providing for greater increases than Alternative S1. Habitat for species that use multiple vegetative types would generally be stable. Habitat for species that are dependent on shrubland or grassland types is generally predicted to decrease from current levels. The level of predicted decrease is generally less with Alternatives S2 and S3 than with Alternative S1. Broad-scale endangered or threatened species (such as grizzly bear and gray wolf) would trend toward recovery (removal from the endangered species list) within recovery areas. Alternatives S2 and S3 should have greater positive effects than would Alternative S1.

Alternatives S2 and S3 should have better effects than Alternative S1 for wildlife because there is specific direction to: restore habitats that have declined substantially in geographic extent from the historical to current time period, maintain and recruit snags; repattern vegetation consistent with the landscape; implement the Healthy Rangelands strategies throughout the project area; reduce exotic plant invasion through Integrated Weed Management, and reduce negative effects of roads.

Alternative S2 should have better effects because it focuses a greater concentration of restoration activities in areas with opportunities to improve species habitats and applies more beneficial riparian direction than does Alternative S3.

Summary of Effects of Alternatives (continued)

Fish - The largest increase in aquatic habitat capacity (quality and quantity) would come from Alternative S2, followed by Alternative S1 and then Alternative S3. Alternative S2 maintains or improves riparian ecological processes, while Alternative S1 would likely maintain them. Alternative S3 is less certain in maintaining or improving riparian conditions.

Alternative S2 is expected to result in the most improvements for water quality and habitat for the six key salmon and trout species studied (steelhead, stream-type chinook, bull trout, westslope cutthroat, Yellowstone cutthroat, and redband). Alternative S3 is expected to result in the least improvement when compared to Alternatives S2 and S1.

The differences result from Alternative S2 having wider Riparian Conservation Areas around streams, and more subwatersheds protected for important fish populations. These subwatersheds have stronger protection than provided by Alternative S1.

Landscap Heath - The forests and rangelands within the Interior Columbia River Basin are characterized by increasingly larger and more severe wildfire, increased invasion of noxious weeds, more insect and disease problems, and changes in vegetation that provide habitat for wildlife species. The movement away from historical conditions is proceeding with a great momentum.

Where restoration activities are concentrated (in high restoration priority subbasins), local results are positive. However, even in the high restoration priority subbasins there is a considerable time lag involved in moving vegetation closer to desired conditions. Because it took time to reach this condition, remedies will not be easy, inexpensive, or quickly achieved.

Roads - Decreases in adverse road effects with short- and long-term benefits to hydrologic function and watershed process would be highest for Alternative S2, second for Alternative S3 and third Alternative S1.

The intent of the road direction is to insure there is a road system that provides safe, efficient access but minimizes road-related adverse effects on resources such as water quality, fish and wildlife. Some roads may be closed or obliterated and ecological values restored, other roads that are needed will be improved to address safety and minimize adverse environmental effects. New road construction will be reduced from past levels. New road building should rarely occur in watersheds that are currently unroaded or have very few roads.

For all alternatives, the Forest Service's proposed Road Management Policy and associated analysis requirements are expected to decrease the amount of disturbance resulting from roads.

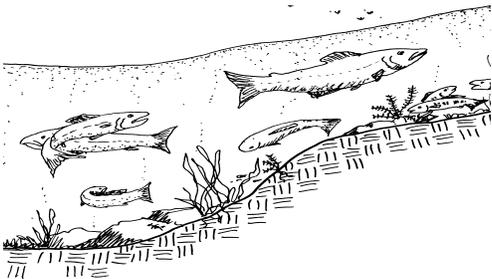


Replacing Interim Strategies

Three separate interim management strategies apply to much of the Project area. These "interim strategies" were adopted with the intent that a long-term land management strategy would be developed. Forest Service and BLM land managers have recognized that some issues must be addressed at a larger scale, and the ICBEMP provides a "big picture" strategy to address many large scale issues beyond those addressed in the interim strategies. Some of these big picture issues have been the subject of appeals and lawsuits over federal land management decisions.

These interim strategies include:

- **PACFISH** - This strategy was implemented to stop habitat degradation and begin the restoration of aquatic and riparian ecosystems for anadromous (ocean-going) fish.



- **Eastside Screens** - Screens were designed to maintain habitat options for species considered to be associated with eastside old growth forests. The intent of the screens was to retain key habitat features and management options until a larger-scale analysis and Environmental Impact Statement is completed to provide new direction.



- **INFISH** - This strategy calls for long-term management direction to protect habitat and populations of resident native fishes outside anadromous fish habitat.

The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the National



Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) reviewed these strategies and issued Biological Opinions on the land use plans amended by PACFISH, INFISH and Eastside Screens. The Biological Opinions concluded the continued existence of threatened and endangered species would not be jeopardized by these strategies, provided that additional terms and conditions prescribed by FWS and NMFS, and included in the Biological Opinions, were implemented.

The interim strategies and their respective Biological Opinions are represented in the "no action" Alternative S1 in the *Supplemental Draft EIS* along with the management direction of the existing 62 land management plans in the basin.

In the case *Prairie Woods Products et. al. vs. Glickman et. al.* Judge Hogan's decision discussed the need to replace the Eastside Screens and PACFISH. In his ruling, Hogan stated, "There is no evidence in the record that the Forest Service abused its discretion or acted in an arbitrary or capricious manner by taking into account the fact that the interim screens and PACFISH were slated for replacement by the long-term Interior Columbia River Basin strategies or by failing to consider the impacts of such long-term strategies."

In the case *Friends of the Wild Swan et. al. vs. U.S. Forest Service et. al.* Judge Jones upheld INFISH as an interim strategy, while a permanent long-term strategy emerges from the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project.

Judge Jones also underscored the intent that ICBEMP will be the long-term aquatic strategy when he stated, ". . . [T]he Forest Service has, for the moment fulfilled its legal obligation to ensure the viability of the bull trout . . . I emphasize again that PACFISH and INFISH are temporary measures and that this court expects the Forest Service to replace them with a permanent strategy; PACFISH and INFISH will not satisfy the Forest Service's legal obligation forever."

Project Prepares Report to Congress

The Project has written a report in response to Congressional direction in the appropriations legislation of 1998 and 2000 affecting the Department of Interior and Related Agencies. Provisions in those spending bills required a report on the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project.

The 50-page report describes the nature of the decisions to be made for an ICBEMP strategy. It provides a general sense of the types of land and resource management policy and planning decisions to be made when 62 land use plans are updated by the Record of Decision (ROD). Since the Project provides broad-scale direction to guide federal land management in the project area, there are no local "on the ground" decisions to be included in the project's ROD.

No new formal decision-making structures will result from the Project's ROD. The standard Forest Service and BLM organization structure, field managers' decision-making structure, and methodologies for allocating and establishing priorities will continue to be used. The ROD most likely will include standardized and consistent resource analysis processes to help local managers make ecosystem-based decisions that take into account the risks to resources at various scales.

Costs and time estimates for decisions are displayed in the Supplemental Draft EIS and summarized in this report.

Estimates of costs and analysis were made to guide the analysis of effects.

Production of goods and services is estimated for each Resource Advisory Council (RAC) and Provincial Advisory Committee (PAC) unit in the Project area. This same information is in the *Interior Columbia Basin Supplemental Draft EIS*. In general, model projections indicate the following:

- *Timber harvests are projected to increase* at both the basin level and by RAC/PAC area as a consequence of implementation of restoration under Alternatives S2 and S3.
- *Domestic livestock use of forage could decline.*
- *Forest and woodland restoration activity would increase substantially in the first decade*, by up to as much as 40 percent in some cases.
- *Rangeland restoration activity could increase modestly*, by approximately nine percent.

Funding to implement the decisions in the project's ROD will come through the standard process of obtaining appropriations.



Letters

The Project received two letters in response to our request in the previous issue of The Leading Edge. We plan to print those letters in the next issue.

HOW TO COMMENT

We will be accepting comments on the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement until July 6, 2000, a 90-day comment period.

Mail comments to SDEIS, BOX 420 Boise, ID 83701-0420.

We also will accept comments via our website at www.icbemp.gov. At the web site you will have the option of filling out the comment form, or via email. The email address is sdeis@icbemp.gov.

To be most useful, comments sent as an attachment to an email should be in WordPerfect or Microsoft Word. Please include information on name and address of person commenting.

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