



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*

Initial Public Content Analysis

Public involvement has been an important part of the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project since its beginning in 1994. Our intent to maintain an open dialogue with the public, neighboring agencies, county officials and tribal leaders has been emphasized throughout the process.

Because of this effort we have received over 60,000 comments at our Boise and Walla Walla offices since the comment period began in June 1997. Comments have come from throughout the United States and 17 foreign countries to date.

Due to the tremendous amount of information coming in, the project staff felt the need to conduct a preliminary content analysis at the mid-point of the comment period to provide early information to the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Team and decision makers about the public's responses to the Draft EISs. As of October 15, 1997, approximately 31,000 letters had been processed, and analyzed for content.

Comments fell into several categories including soils, air quality, disturbance processes and mechanisms, fire, insect and disease, forestland and rangeland health management, noxious weeds, air quality, riparian health, wilderness and roadless areas, fish, wildlife, economics, roads, and recreation.

Fire, especially restoring fire as a natural disturbance process, and the role of insect and disease were clearly identified as a concern. Managing to achieve forest health, rangeland health and aquatic and riparian health were issues that the public also wanted addressed in the EIS. Protection of old-growth forest stands, appropriate use of livestock grazing on public lands, and spread of noxious weeds are other concerns brought up frequently.

Respondents believe the protection and restoration of riparian and aquatic systems are long overdue. Many respondents advocated providing wildlife with long-term, self-sustaining existence thru habitat restoration and minimizing habitat loss.

A large volume of comments were received relating to economic concerns. Concerns were raised about the accuracy and validity of the

broad-scale analysis when applied to a local area. Initial analysis shows a split in opinion over commodity versus non-commodity economic values, that is some value old-growth forests for wood products while others value them for their intrinsic value.



"I have heard a wide spectrum of ideas and concerns at the many public meetings I have attended and the myriad of comment letters I have read. Our challenge now is to incorporate the public comments into the Final Environmental Impact Statement."

CATHY HUMPHREY
Deputy EIS Team Leader,
Interior Columbia Basin
Ecosystem Management Project

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Initial Content Analysis

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Listed below is just a sampling of the many types of comments that have been received to date:

"How do people fit into a healthy ecosystem. What kind of ecosystems are we going to manage?" Libby, MT

"Your selection of Alternative 4 fails completely to meet the needs of our future. You ignore scientific findings in your selection of #4. The increase in timber harvest and grazing over current production are incompatible with restoration and will cause continued damage to the general ecology of the area." Roseburg, OR

"The people living on the land, particularly the livestock operators who have been for a century or more, are your best bet to revitalize the cycles of the Upper Columbia River Basin. They are the only ones that can keep these cycles and watersheds healthy." Lund, NV

"More human intrusion means rapid spread of noxious weeds in native habitat. Your DEIS fails to adequately address and mitigate the noxious weed threat. A major adverse effect co-existent with any proposals for any forest management in native habitats." Hungry Horse, MT

"...There is no question that resource dependent communities have experienced downturns ranging from job reductions due to mill closures, to loss of economic support system for entire communities. The ICBEMP project has not caused those things to happen. It has, on the other hand, pointed out existing and probable economic realities in those regions including inevitable changes associated with changing public values and land uses. While the measure of community resilience can be discussed and debated without consistent conclusion, the current downward economic trends will continue without appropriate strategies to mitigate them. In highlighting those issues, the ICBEMP project has brought into national focus the depth and seriousness of the problem. This can only work to serve the recovery and sustainability interests of the areas... The project presents an opportunity here where one may not currently exist." Missoula, MT

"I like the idea of selective cutting and I want to see adoption of composite materials (I know they exist) in the construction industry." Bothell, WA

"I favor prescribed fires to reduce fuel loads, eradicate young firs and favor ponderosa pine. That's what the interior Columbia Basin produces best!" Cheney, WA

"Native Americans need their views listened to, considered, and implemented. They are citizens, too, and they were here before we were. Native Americans have much valuable knowledge on land management and land stewardship." Kaysville, UT

We hope to utilize all of this public input to draft the best possible Final EIS. But, the ultimate measure of success will be many years from now when the people who live in the Basin can continue to enjoy a high quality of life, sustained by the Basin's rich natural resources and wild beauty. Many of the people who live in the Columbia River Basin make their living off of its rich natural resources and therefore have a direct dependence on the ecological health of the Basin. It is with everyone's involvement and support that federal, state and private scientists and land managers will be able to restore ecological health to the Basin so their children and their grandchildren will continue to be captured and enraptured by this "romantic wildness."

Your Continued Involvement Is Critical

Over the past four years project staff have conducted the largest public involvement effort in the history of land management planning efforts. Increased efforts to provide the public opportunities to interact with the staff and provide comments has occurred over the past six months since the formal public comment period began on the two Draft Environmental Impact Statements.

With ten weeks left in the public comment period for the Upper Columbia River Basin and Eastside Draft Environmental Impact Statements (EISs), over 60,000 comments have been received to date. If you have not sent in your comments yet, please take some time to write down your thoughts and send them to us.

We encourage you to make your comments as specific as possible. Here are some examples of the types of comments that will be most helpful to us:

- * Provide new information pertaining to proposed action or alternative.
- * Identify a new issue or expand on an existing issue.
- * Identify different ways to meet the need (could include a new alternative).
- * Point out specific places in the analysis which you feel may not be accurate or identify different sources of credible research.

As these comments are received, an objective method called "content analysis" will be used to compile, categorize, and organize the public input by identifying specific areas of concerns from respondents. The process captures substantive comments in the respondent's own words, keeping opinions and supportive reasons together, without interpretation or judgement. All substantive comments will be organized into similar categories, synthesized, and then summarized into reports.

The content analysis reports and EIS Team responses will be given to the Projects' Executive Steering Committee. The three Forest Service Regional Foresters' and three BLM State Directors will then use this information to decide what changes need to be made while preparing a Final EIS.

Terrain Map Available

The Terrain Base Map that was developed for the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project has been professionally printed and is now available to the public at a cost of only \$2.00 each, plus an additional cost of \$1.00 for each shipping tube. The size of the map is 40" x 30".

The popular map which shows the boundary of the 144 million acre project area, elevation, rivers, major roads, counties and communities, over a shaded relief backdrop (elevation), has been in demand from folks throughout the United States.

People wishing to purchase the map may do so by calling the Bureau of Land Management Office, in Portland, OR at (503) 952-6001. An order form and payment information is also available through the ICBEMP internet homepage at:
<http://www.icbemp.gov/spatial/html/terform.html>

Summary of Public Meetings

Since the Draft Environmental Impact Statement was released in June 1997 the project staff has traveled throughout the project area conducting public meetings. Public meetings have been held in Missoula, Thompson Falls, Libby and Eureka, Montana; Lewiston, Moscow, Boise, Challis, and Salmon, Idaho; Elko, Nevada; Bend, John Day, Burns, Baker and Portland, Oregon. Project team members also traveled to Spokane, Colville, Naches, Cle Elum, and Walla Walla, Washington to listen to the public concerns. More meetings are being scheduled as requested.

In each location a substantial amount of time has been devoted to answering questions and addressing concerns. The list of questions and concerns throughout the project area appears to be somewhat consistent:

- The public is concerned about their private land and ask what effect these decision documents will have on them.

- They are concerned about being able to make decisions locally.

- Social and economic issues such as roadless areas, logging and timber harvest, grazing and management are foremost on the minds of attendees.

Many members of the public would like to be able to better see and understand how the scientific data was used to come up with the preferred alternative.

While verbal comments are not formally recorded at these meetings, team members have noted the verbal concerns, and have encouraged people to submit them in writing to ensure we get their comment accurately.

The public's feedback is important to team members so we can determine what changes may be needed to develop the Final EIS.

The 1998 Interior Appropriations Bill

President Clinton signed the 1998 Interior Appropriations Bill on November 14, 1997. This annual appropriations bill provides funding for all Department of Interior agencies and Forest Service programs within the Department of Agriculture. This year the bill included direction specific to the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project.

Section 323 of the bill states that prior to the completion of any decisions resulting from the Project's Final Environmental Impact Statement that a report be submitted to the Congressional Committees on Appropriations of the Senate and House of Representatives with information on the decisions to be made, the costs of implementation, and the impacts on production of goods and services in the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

The legislation also directs the publication of additional economic and social conditions at the subbasin (approximately 800,000-1,000,000 acres) level and the impact of the Draft EIS alternatives on communities. This information would be made available to allow some time for public comments prior to close of comment period on the Draft EIS.

In signing the legislation President Clinton expressed concerns that the new requirements could cause further delay in adoption of a final strategy, with the delay hurting communities and families dependent on the natural resources for their livelihood. Project staff and agency legal staff are reviewing the language of the appropriations bill to determine the effect and changes needed prior to issuing the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Project Timeline Adjusted

The Executive Steering Committee (ESC) for the Interior Columbia Basin Project has asked the project staff to adjust the project timeline. A timeline revision will be completed by mid-December. The ESC is now looking at the release of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in late 1998 or early 1999 followed by the Records of Decision.

The project timeline is being adjusted for several reasons:

1. The public comment period was extended an additional four months (comment period ends on February 6, 1998).
2. The volume of public comments has been greater than anticipated.
3. The 1998 Interior Appropriations Bill contains language that directs additional work that must be completed before decisions are made.

Implementation is still anticipated to begin in 1999 but later in the year than originally anticipated. Project staff are currently notifying internal agency personnel, partners, and the public of the change in the timeline.

What We Are Hearing

The release of the science reports and the two draft EISs has urged various interest groups to react and comment. Many of these interest groups have also taken the opportunity to tell their own members about the Project. Over the last several months, project staff have been monitoring what different interests are saying about the Project. The nature of comments and reactions to the documents present stark differences of opinion on several critical issues the Draft EISs are addressing. A couple of examples of differing opinions are:

THE DIRECTION IN THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE IS TOO RESTRICTIVE vs. NOT RESTRICTIVE ENOUGH -

Restrictive - Many people feel there are too many standards which require additional analysis before action, such as, across the board road reduction requirements that do not address the forest health issue or standards in riparian buffers within the aquatic strategy that they feel are too extreme.

Not Restrictive - Others feel that there is no specific standard that applies to staying out of the roadless areas, or prohibits harvest of large, old-growth trees.

The Project's Approach - There is a mix of standards (required actions or prohibitions) which are different for each alternative. Some standards address on-the-ground management, and are necessary to meet Federal environmental laws in areas such as sustaining populations of fish and wildlife species (species viability). Other standards require that additional analyses occur before on-the-ground activities. These analyses serve to "ground truth" and fortify the scientific information, increasing the accuracy of broad scale cumulative effects analysis and helping set priorities. With information resulting from these analyses, local managers can adjust standards to fit local conditions.

The project was initiated to respond to broad scale issues, such as catastrophic wildfires, noxious weed invasion, and species viability which transcend jurisdictional boundaries. The Draft EISs also provide consistent guidance from a larger, interagency context.

The scale of this Project is different from the site specific management with which people are most familiar. This plan provides broad scale direction, while allowing managers on-the-ground flexibility. Therefore, local managers, who have built relationships with public land users and other interested citizens, will continue to make local decisions. This plan will result in higher levels of collaboration between agencies, governments, and the public over Federal land management issues.

THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE WILL SIGNIFICANTLY DECREASE TIMBER HARVEST vs. WILL SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASE TIMBER HARVEST -

Harvest Decreased - Many people feel that implementation of the preferred alternative will have serious impacts upon resource-based businesses and rural communities and economies by further restricting timber harvest.

Harvest Increased - Others feel the preferred alternative will double the amount of industrial logging in our National Forests and on forest lands administered by the BLM.

The Project's Approach - The preferred alternative does show an increase in timber harvest volume over the **current** situation (**the last three years**). Timber harvest volume would be **lower than** the 10-year average between **1985-1994**. Harvested tree species and size will differ and more small diameter trees and different tree species would be harvested.

The Draft EISs will make changes in the timber harvest program. There will be more acres harvested but with a different style of harvest treatment. The average volume (number of board feet) harvested per acre and the average size of the trees harvested will be reduced. There will be an increase in the amount of thinning to provide space for the larger and healthier trees in the forest so that they can regain their vigor, and better withstand inevitable natural disturbances such as wildfire, wind, insects, and disease.

The use of prescribed fire will increase. Although it carries a risk, prescribed fire can do some things that timber harvest cannot (such as provide nutrients and carbon recycling), and in some cases prescribed fire will be used after thinning trees.

It is clear there are widely divergent views on many natural resource management issues. As Federal land managers we need to consider all views in developing our land use management strategies. The Draft EISs represent the best attempt to balance these competing views. We believe that there are reasoned choices within this wide range of opinion. Our goal is to identify that range within which decisions can be made using public comments to guide us in the decisions.

Project Update Meetings Scheduled

The following monthly meetings are scheduled to update and inform interested participants on the progress and status of the project. These meetings also provide the public an opportunity to give us feedback and interact one-on-one. These meetings continue to serve the project staff by providing us with excellent ideas, suggestions, and comments.

December 16, 1997
7:00 p.m.

BLM Idaho State Office
1387 Vinnell Way
Boise, ID

January 20, 1998
7:00 p.m.

Project Office
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Walla Walla, WA



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A periodic newsletter produced by the

**INTERIOR COLUMBIA BASIN
ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT PROJECT**

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