



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*

Area Affected by EIS to be Reduced

The Executive Steering Committee (ESC) has decided that management direction developed for the Supplemental Draft EIS, the Final EIS, and the Project Record of Decision will not apply to Forest Service- and BLM-administered lands located in Utah, Nevada and Wyoming.

The direction will also not apply to those portions of eastern Oregon and eastern Washington already covered by direction in the Northwest Forest Plan, nor to Forest Service-administered lands within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. This decision reduces the area affected by the decision from 72 million acres to approximately 64 million acres. (See "Before and After" illustration on page 3.)

Background

The Eastside Draft EIS project area was originally defined in 1994 to include all Forest Service- and BLM-administered lands east of the Cascade Mountain crest in Oregon and Washington. The UCRB Draft EIS addressed lands in the Upper Columbia River Basin in Idaho, Montana, Utah, Nevada, and Wyoming.

Within the Eastside EIS project area, the land along the eastern slopes of the Cascades also fell within the

Continued on page 3

Three Alternatives for Supplemental Draft EIS Presented for Science Review

The Supplemental Draft EIS (SDEIS) will address only the most significant and geographically broad issues within the interior Columbia River Basin, with a focus on four basic and interrelated components: landscape dynamics (patterns of succession and disturbance); terrestrial species habitat; aquatic systems and habitat; and human needs, products, and services.

The Project EIS Team has prepared three alternatives for review by the Science Advisory Group — a no-action alternative (S1), and two action alternatives (S2 and S3). Each presents a single broad-scale ecosystem management strategy that integrates, or links these four components in an attempt to resolve basin-wide issues. It is possible that there will be more -- or different -- alternatives when the SDEIS is released for public comment in September 1999.

No-Action Alternative S1

Alternative S1 (no-action) is an updated version of Alternative 2 in the Draft EISs. It incorporates into a single long-term strategy the management direction currently included in existing land use plans, interim strategies (INFISH, PACFISH, and Eastside Screens), US Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service Biological Opinions, and Healthy Rangelands standards and guidelines. This long-

term direction would apply to all Forest Service- and BLM-administered lands within the project area.

Action Alternatives S2 and S3

Action alternatives S2 and S3 are intended to protect important fish and wildlife habitats, to improve certain areas in need of restoration, and to maintain ecosystem functions and processes on a basin-wide scale. The following emphases are **common to both alternatives**:

- Focus on restoring and maintaining ecosystems and providing for the social and economic needs of people.
- Designate and protect specific geographic areas containing important fish populations and terrestrial source habitat. Protect key riparian areas.
- Promote the economic participation of the local workforce in management activities by focusing on nearby rural communities or geographic areas that are economically specialized in industries tied to goods and services from Forest Service- and BLM-administered lands.
- Prioritize and make restoration activities more effective and efficient.

Continued on page 2

Each alternative in the SDEIS will present a broad-scale strategy for resolving basin-wide issues.

Three Alternatives for Supplemental Draft EIS Alternatives Presented for Science Review *Continued from page 1*

Key Differences: S2 and S3

Risk management. Alternatives S2 and S3 are essentially two different strategies for managing risk.

The dictionary defines risk as “the possibility of suffering harm or loss; to expose to a chance of loss or damage.” In a science-based project such as ICBEMP, the scientists lay out the risks — the possibility of harm or loss — associated with various management actions or strategies. The land managers use this scientific information to determine acceptable levels of risk.

The refined approach as presented in the SDEIS will consider the risks or trade-offs of conducting management activities versus conducting no management activities. It will look at risk in the short term (10 years or less) versus long term (over 10 years). It will consider risk at the local level (fine-scale) against the backdrop of basin-wide processes and conditions (broad-scale). The end result will be action alternatives — integrated ecosystem management strategies — that place different emphases on minimizing risk.

A key difference between Alternatives S2 and S3 has to do with trade-offs between short- and long-term risk. Alternative S2 emphasizes minimizing short-term risk to habitats needed by species which are listed or have the potential to be listed under the Endangered Species Act. This strategy, while protecting and maintaining important aquatic and terrestrial habitat in the short term, may result in a long-term vulnerability to landscape disturbances such as catastrophic fire and insect and disease outbreaks.

Alternative S3 emphasizes minimizing long-term risks to healthy forests and rangelands from either management activities or from landscape disturbance events. This alternative accepts more risk in the short term than does Alternative S2, within the requirements of the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, and Clean Air Act. Fewer acres are conservatively managed as core aquatic habitat and Riparian Conservation Areas than in Alternative S2.

Analysis. In an attempt to minimize short-term risk, Alternative S2 places more of an emphasis on conducting analyses, such as Subbasin Review and Ecosystem Analysis at the Watershed Scale (EAWS), prior to conducting management activities. Alternative S3 places less emphasis on analysis and more on initiating actions on the ground that address long-term risks faster.

Social-economic-tribal concerns. Both action alternatives would include methods to enable local and tribal communities to benefit from jobs generated by land management activities on Forest Service- and BLM-administered lands. Alternative S3, however, has a stronger emphasis on conducting management activities which would benefit isolated and economically specialized communities than does Alternative S2.

Restoration activities. Both S2 and S3 include a broad-scale integrated restoration strategy that prioritizes certain subbasins for restoration to benefit aquatic and terrestrial species, forest health, rangeland health, and/or watershed health, as well as for economic, tribal, and other needs of society.

Alternative S3 promotes a higher level of restoration activities such as thinning, watershed improvement, or prescribed fire in the short-term for the long-term benefit of restored landscape processes. More subbasins are categorized as high-priority for restoration than in Alternative S2; the result is that more areas near isolated and economically specialized communities receive the highest priority for restoration activities.

Important aquatic habitats. The action alternatives identify and delineate subwatersheds containing important fish populations in which little short-term risk from management actions is accepted. Because Alternative S2 emphasizes minimizing short-term risk, it designates more subwatersheds in this category than does Alternative S3.

Science Advisory Group Evaluation

The Science Advisory Group (SAG) has been working since April on an analysis of the environmental effects of implementing Alternatives S1, S2 and S3. The scientists plan to deliver an evaluation package to the Project EIS Team in June.

SAG is also developing summaries of the information that will be peer reviewed and made available at a later date in publications.

The EIS Team will use the SAG evaluation as the scientific and analytical basis for writing Chapter 4 of the SDEIS (Environmental Consequences).

What About the Draft EIS Alternatives?

The Project's Executive Steering Committee decided to combine the Eastside and UCRB EISs into one EIS for the entire project area. This decision emphasizes that one broad-scale strategy is being developed for the interior Columbia River Basin.

Seven alternatives were developed and analyzed in the Eastside and UCRB Draft EISs. These will not be reprinted in the SDEIS, but any and all of them are still available for the Executive Steering Committee to select in the Record of Decision. If any of the original alternatives are brought forward for the final EIS, then a detailed comparison with the SDEIS alternatives will be made.

Area Affected by EIS to be Reduced *Continued from page 1*

planning area of the Northwest Forest Plan. In 1998, the ESC formalized an earlier decision that this overlapping area would not be amended by the ICBEMP ROD.

In 1995 it was decided to exclude the Forest Service-administered lands within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem from the UCRB Draft EIS. This action affected the Targhee, Bridger-Teton, and portions of the Caribou national forests.

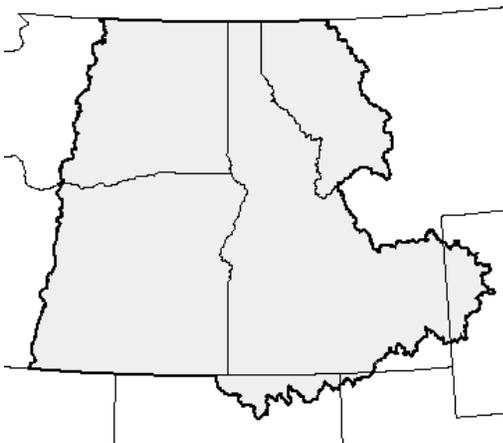
A Refined Approach

Since October 1998, when the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior defined a new and more narrow direction for the Project, the ESC and the Project Management Team have

worked to develop a refined approach that focuses on broad-scale, basin-wide issues. ESC members agree that major issues in those portions of the States being excluded from the Project decision will be resolved through other decision processes more efficiently.

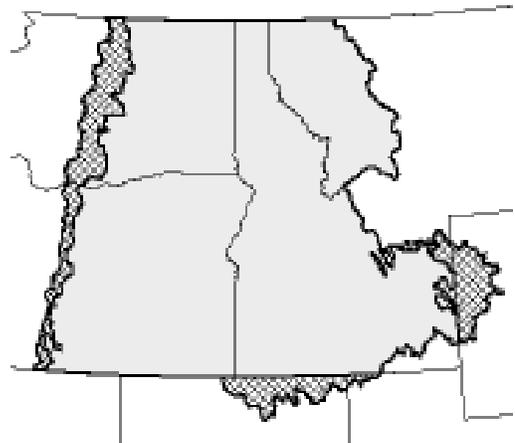
While management direction in the ICBEMP Record of Decision will not apply to lands in the NW Forest Plan overlap area and the portions of the basin in Utah, Nevada, and Wyoming, the Science Advisory Group will analyze cumulative effects of the entire basin, which includes these areas.

Before



The ICBEMP project area originally encompassed Forest Service- and BLM-administered lands in seven States.

After



Changes to the project area as shown above affect about 4.6 million acres in the NWFP overlap area, 2.8 million acres in Nevada and Utah, and 3.8 million acres in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and Wyoming.

Bob Williams Retires

Bob Williams, Regional Forester for the Pacific Northwest Region of the Forest Service, has decided to retire from the Forest Service. Bob has served on the ICBEMP Executive Steering Committee since 1996. His last day on the job was June 3.

In his three years as Regional Forester, Bob also served as co-chair of the Regional Interagency Executive Committee, which directs the implementation of the Northwest Forest Plan.

The new Regional Forester, when named, will fill the vacancy left by Williams on the ICBEMP Executive Steering Committee.

Terrestrial Report Correction

In our last newsletter, we informed you about the availability of the terrestrial report entitled *Source Habitats for Terrestrial Vertebrates of Focus in the Interior Columbia Basin: Broad-scale Trends and Management Implications*. What we **didn't** tell you is that **you can purchase a copy of a Draft version of this report** by contacting Icon Printing in Walla Walla, Washington at (509)525-3831.

The draft report is approximately 1,100 pages, and is broken down into three volumes which can be purchased separately. To purchase the entire report ask for Wisdom, Volumes 1, 2 & 3; the cost is approximately \$70.

The report is expected to be published and available free of charge from the Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station this summer.

Log on to our website at www.icbemp.gov/science/ for an updated list of other available ICBEMP science reports.



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