

Completion of ICBEMP: Summary and Questions & Answers

Background

- The Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Project (ICBEMP) was initiated in July 1993, when President Clinton directed the US Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to “develop a scientifically sound and ecosystem-based strategy for management of eastside forests.”
- In addition to the land management agencies the US Fish and Wildlife Service, NOAA-Fisheries and Environmental Protection Agency are working on ICBEMP.
- The ICBEMP geographic area includes over 140 million acres in the interior Columbia River Basin, the Upper Klamath, and parts of the Great Basin. Any proposals developed by ICBEMP only apply to the public lands administered by the BLM and USFS within this area (approximately 64 million acres).
- The Pacific Northwest and Rocky Mountain Research Stations of the USFS have produced numerous research publications about the ICBEMP area. Since 1996 these publications have been used for project and planning efforts.
- Two draft environmental impact statements addressing management of these public lands were released in May of 1997 for public comment. Over 83,000 comments were received during the comment period.
- A combined Supplemental Draft EIS was released in May of 2000 that responded to the public comments, new scientific information, agency review and direction from Congress and the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior. The comment period on the SDEIS ended July 6, 2000. Five hundred comments were received during the review period.

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- A final EIS and Proposed Decision were released on December 15, 2000 initiating a public protest process that closed on January 16, 2001. Seventy-four protests on the final EIS and Proposed Decision were received and they have been reviewed and analyzed. Key messages in the protests range from a broad scale analysis should not make decisions for local level plans and one size fits all direction is inappropriate, to feelings that the direction was not specific enough. There were also comments that the final EIS and Proposed Decision did not consider and integrate the USFS Roadless Area Conservation Rule and the National Fire Plan.
- Based on these concerns the Agencies evaluated various options on how to proceed. The science base and knowledge gained from the ICBEMP effort will be utilized during USFS and BLM unit planning efforts. This will result in decisions based on both broad-scale and specific local information and expertise and provide greater opportunities to work with states, tribes, local communities and publics.

- The Agencies have decided to it is in the best interests to conclude this Project by issuing an implementation strategy that will provide guidance for incorporating the science data and resource information into land use plans for the National Forests and BLM lands and for project-level planning.
 - The strategy identifies key elements to be addressed, and the local land use planning efforts will identify where, when and how those elements should be addressed.
 - The strategy does not replace PACFISH/INFISH and the Eastside Screens direction, therefore the interim strategies continue for applicable activities until local administrative unit land use plans are amended or revised.
 - By design, the strategy is compatible with the work now going on among the agencies and the numerous interests (e.g., National Fire Plan projects, implementation of fish and wildlife habitat restoration work).

Questions and Answers

1. Question: Why wasn't a single, basin wide Record of Decision issued?

Answer: A Record of Decision (ROD) is one of the ways ICBEMP could be brought to conclusion. Several options were evaluated to complete ICBEMP and enable field levels to apply its valuable science considering local information and using local input. A consolidated ROD is not necessary to achieve the goal of ensuring use of the information by field offices.

2. Question: What options were evaluated?

Answer: Four general options were considered:

- A ROD based on the existing FEIS;
- Rely on the science information without any additional direction;
- Completing a combination of a ROD for an abbreviated alternative plus an *Implementation Strategy*.
- An *Implementation Strategy* without a consolidated ROD. This would then be implemented during Forest Service and BLM plan revisions and amendments. This is the preferred option.

3. Question: Why are agencies recommending an *Implementation Strategy*?

Answer: The *Implementation Strategy* option has been selected because ICBEMP has been overtaken by many other efforts that address Basin issues, e.g., the "All H" Strategy, National Fire Plan, etc. ICBEMP needs closure by a strategy that considers and coordinates with these other efforts. This *Implementation Strategy* provides for that and also:

- Provides a consistent application of Basin-wide Science.
- Provides Basin level direction for local planning and project implementation to address Basin level issues.
- Allows local administrative units flexibility to identify where, when, and how principles and guidance are addressed.

- Responds to state and local government concerns.
- Has field level manager support.
- Offers least expensive closure to ICBEMP.
- Can be accomplished by existing organization structure.

4. Question: What is in the *Implementation Strategy* document?

Answer: The *Implementation Strategy* document is developed around the key science findings and basin-wide issues developed by the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). Some of the key findings include:

- ♦ Landscape Dynamics
- ♦ Terrestrial Species Habitat
- ♦ Aquatic & Riparian Habitat
- ♦ Social-Economics
- ♦ Tribal Governments
- ♦ Coordination with other management efforts
- ♦ Adaptive Management

5. Question: What about NEPA, FLPMA, and NFMA direction relative to this *Implementation Strategy* document?

Answer: The *Implementation Strategy* document is NOT a decision document requiring NEPA compliance. It simply provides basin-wide principles and guidance, associated with the Science Assessment, which will be addressed in local administrative unit and project planning activities. It leaves it up to local administrative unit plans to identify where, when, and how the principles and guidance are addressed consistent with NFMA/FLPMA. These local planning documents are fully subject to NEPA processes. Project level activities will *also* be fully compliant with NEPA.

6. Question: How does the *Implementation Strategy* relate to the Science Assessment and the FEIS?

Answer: The *Implementation Strategy* refers directly to science findings of the Science Assessment, and provides principles and guidance for their application in administrative unit planning and implementation activities. There is no specific alternative selected for application from the FEIS. The ICBEMP FEIS contains information and management principles that may be considered and applied as local planning efforts are developed, and the local offices are free to consider this information.

7. Question: How does ICBEMP and the *Implementation Strategy* relate to the other National and Basin level management strategies?

Answer: Other National and Basin level management strategies have evolved during the 8-year life of the Project, e.g., the National Fire Plan, the federal agencies' "All H" Strategy and the Northwest Power Planning Council's *Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Program*. Many of the forest health issues that caused the initiation of ICBEMP are being addressed, to a degree, in these other efforts. The ICBEMP *Implementation Strategy* will acknowledge these other efforts

and provide principles and guidance directing the science to be incorporated into local planning and decision-making activities in a compatible manner with the direction of these other efforts.

8. Question: PACFISH, INFISH and the Eastside Screens were supposed to be temporary management strategies and the ICBEMP *direction* was supposed to replace them, what will happen with these strategies?

Answer: Since the *Implementation Strategy* does not provide a specific replacement for PACFISH/INFISH and the Eastside Screens direction, the interim strategies will continue for applicable activities until local administrative unit land use plans are amended or revised to identify different long-term strategies. Replacement depends upon local conditions and whether local conditions, experience and science will support the application of different standards. For example, the Boise, Payette and Sawtooth National Forests will replace the PACFISH and INFISH interim strategies when their respective forest plans are revised in 2003. We expect that replacement may take until 2010 across the whole Basin.

9. Question: What about the 74 Protests that were filed with the FEIS and Proposal, how are they being handled?

Answer: The Protests have been analyzed and summarized within a “Content Analysis” process. Several points made in the Protests have been considered in the development of the *Implementation Strategy*, particularly those expressed by Idaho’s Governor and several County Governments regarding retention of options for local managers. The issuance of the *Implementation Strategy* would include a letter to Protest filers, which would explain what the “Strategy” is and how their concerns were considered in its design.

10. Question: How will you assure the consistent application of the *Implementation Strategy*? Will there be a monitoring plan to do this?

Answer: The *Implementation Strategy* will be provided to all units and State and Regional offices will review plan developments for broad-scale consistency appropriate to the variability of landscapes and conditions across the Basin. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been signed by all of the Agencies to provide for consistent application and review.

11. Question: So what’s the bottom line?

Answer: The *Implementation Strategy* is the product of ICBEMP in lieu of a basin-wide decision. Instead the science base and knowledge gained from the ICBEMP effort would be utilized during USFS and BLM unit planning efforts.