

MNF

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The proposed vegetation work is dominated by commercial and pre-commercial thinning to restore stand resilience.

The proposed activities include:

- Commercial harvest of some 24 million board feet of timber over 8,600 acres.
- Pre-commercial thinning, including biomass and post and pole removal as feasible, over 5,500 acres.
- Prescribed burning on eight blocks to create a mosaic vegetation pattern, conducted in an area of 24,800 acres.
- Aspen restoration over 25 acres.
- Riparian enhancement thinning on 22 reaches and sites.
- An interpretive site, featuring information about the area's mining history, southeast of Galena.
- Road changes: building 1 mile of new road, decommissioning 9.5 miles of road, opening 7.5 miles of road that's currently closed, and closing 2.9 miles of road that's open now.

Halemeier said the agency had as many as 14 alternatives to consider at the outset, but has narrowed the field to two: "no action" and a recommended alternative that he described as logical and science-based.

Acknowledging there will be differing opinions, he noted the process so far has included meetings with the Blue Mountains Forest Partners collaborative group and public outreach including an open house at the airport.

Forest Supervisor Steve Beverlin said the agency also presented a packet of information to Sheriff Glenn Palmer and invited him to a meeting with the interdisciplinary team for the project.

Public comments last week focused on road closures.

Asked if the agency would reconsider any of the road decisions, Halemeier noted that a lot of time already was spent walking the roads and discussing them, but he would be willing to look at specific roads again.

The Deep Creek road, proposed for decommissioning, drew concern from Billie Jo George. She said people in the Galena area want that road open because it has access to cell phone service for emergencies.

Jim Sproul, chair of the county's public access advisory board, questioned whether certain roads were closed by an existing order with specific environmental reviews.

Halemeier said that's being reviewed, but Beverlin cautioned that the same people needed to get the project going are the ones who must do such reviews.

The Big Mosquito discussion followed a similar presentation at the Court's Feb. 11 meeting on the Wolf Project, proposed for the south end of the forest. Road advocates have asked for an extension of the March 6 deadline to comment on that project, noting the Forest Service outreach focused on Harney County.

Details on the projects are available on the Malheur National Forest website.

Oregonians could see a \$349M tax 'kicker'

By Peter Wong
Capital Bureau

SALEM – Oregon taxpayers could see up to \$349 million credited against their 2015 taxes next year under an economic and revenue forecast released last Thursday.

But despite the amount of the projected "kicker," state economists say future economic growth they forecast may cushion most of its effects on the next two-year state budget.

"These are the salad days for Oregon's economy," state economist Mark McMullen told lawmakers on the House and Senate

revenue committees.

The net effect could be a reduction of just \$21 million, once a higher ending balance from the current 2013-15 budget and projected increases in income taxes for the 2015-17 cycle are taken into account.

The budget framework proposed by the Legislature's chief budget writers is at \$18.5 billion in spending from the tax-supported general fund and lottery proceeds. Those are the most flexible sources available to lawmakers.

Under a law that dates back to 1979, taxpayers receive excess amounts – known as the "kicker" – when actual collec-

tions exceed projections by 2 percent or more for the budget period.

The most recent kicker was in 2007, when the state rebated \$1.1 billion to individual taxpayers. Another \$340 million scheduled to go back to businesses went into the creation of a general reserve fund.

There are two more forecasts scheduled before a kicker is finally determined for 2013-15 – the May 14 forecast, on which lawmakers will base final decisions on the next two-year budget, and a Sept. 1 forecast that will be released in late August.

McMullen said there still

could be a 50 percent chance that a kicker will occur, given that the projection is just \$59 million above the threshold to trigger a kicker.

If there is one, taxpayers will no longer get checks as a result of a 2011 change. Lawmakers reverted to the refund method used before 1995, and credits against the following year's taxes will save an estimated \$1 million on printing and mailing checks.

The Senate Finance & Revenue Committee has begun hearings on a proposal to retain some excess personal income taxes for a state reserve. Sen. Mark Hass, D-Beaverton, the

committee chairman, says voters would have to be involved at some point, because voters approved a ballot measure in 2000 to put the kicker into the Oregon Constitution.

"It's hard for legislators to explain how the current system works," he said.

The economists also project excess corporate income tax collections, but under a 2012 ballot measure, that money will go into the state school fund and will not be rebated.

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Mild winter ushers in early prescribed burns

Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY – Malheur National Forest officials say the mild winter may allow an early prescribed burn season this year.

Fire managers are evaluating conditions, with burning planned in several units.

The Blue Mountain Ranger District is continuing its hazardous fuels reduction program with pile burning and

spring landscape prescribed burns in various areas. The pile burning may take place over the next few months on these units: County Road 18, Canyon Creek, Damon and Crawford.

Landscape burning this

spring may include these units: Dairy on the Emigrant Creek Ranger District; Knox and Pine Creek, Prairie City Ranger District; and Crawford Creek, Balance, Damon, Starr and Canyon Creek, all on the Blue

Mountain district. The burning is done based on specific weather and vegetative conditions. The intent is to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires and restore forest health.

LAND

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John Day rancher Ken Holliday notes Grant County likely signed on for the Zone 1 category because officials recognized the need to protect the rich timberlands within the county's boundaries, a much more significant asset than in other nearby counties.

However, Grant was the only county to adopt the zone, he said. A few years later the state dropped the Zone 1 approach, but the special zone remained in place for a large swath of Grant County.

Zone 1 has covered as much as 499,000 acres in the county, that figure recorded in

1982. However, classification changes since then moved substantial acreage into the higher-revenue grazing bracket, reducing Zone 1 to the current 236,000 acres.

The zone was established by a 1944 memorandum of agreement (MOA) between the state and the county that also set the assessment at no more than 5 cents per acre. The agreement was considered renewed each year unless canceled by either party in advance.

Holliday said the county should consider that MOA still in effect.

Webb said the rate set by the MOA – 5 cents per acre – has been increased over the years at the request of ODF and with the consent of past

county courts. He conceded that happened during his own tenure with the Court, noting he wasn't aware at the time that the MOA limited the rate to a nickel.

However, the money isn't the only issue for the local ranchers, who say the agency's historic emphasis on fire suppression has fostered conditions that ensure large wildfires. They say ODF should take a different approach, as the federal agencies are doing, and embrace prescribing burning and other proactive means to prevent fires.

Webb and John Day rancher Allan Mullin pointed to air tanker drops during the 2013 fire season that didn't stop the spread of blazes on their land but were costly. They also

say some Zone 1 lands may be enhanced by fire, which burns out unwanted juniper and brush.

Webb said the Legislature allocated some \$3 million to ODF to spend with the Forest Service on reducing fire risk to the federal forests, an amount that would double if the governor's proposed budget for 2015-17 is approved.

The landowners question the push to raise their assessments when ODF has that amount of money available.

They asked the Court to stand firm on any Zone 1 in-

crease, but also to have a say in how that money could be used to manage the lands for fire resilience.

The Court is in a position "to motivate" ODF to take a different approach, Webb said.

The state agency, he added, shouldn't just assume it deserves an increase because it spent the money the prior year.

Holliday agreed, saying "When they build their budget each year, they don't go for what they need, they go for what they want."

PLAN

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criticism from a range of stakeholders – for a range of reasons.

Given the volume of concerns, the Forest Service has been meeting with county officials in the region in recent months to try to chart a course to move the plan revision forward.

In Grant and Harney counties, critics worry a broad three-forest plan will roll back advances under way through collaboration on the Malheur National Forest. The Malheur's 10-year stewardship contract is underway, helping to boost the timber harvest to 65 million board feet last year, with another increase planned for this year.

"We need, in my opinion, our own plan," Britton said.

His proposal calls for the collaboratives to come up with new language primarily concerning vegetation management issues, as well as "an appropriate percentage of grazing and access issues."

The rest of the Court gave Britton the go-ahead to forward the proposal to the Forest Partners at their next meeting.

The Forest Partners, meanwhile, have already been discussing whether and how to get involved with the forest plan revision.

In their Feb. 19 meeting,

the group didn't address the specifics of Britton's proposal, but did discuss the Forest Service's willingness to do additional analysis and create a new alternative for the revision. Some members cautioned that they should stick to what they know best, namely

vegetation management, while others saw a golden opportunity to provide solid proposals for the plan revision.

The Partners made no decision on a role in the process, but decided to form a subcommittee to consider the possibilities and look at next steps.

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- Senior Centers in John Day and Prairie City
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