

Local

WWNF road analysis ongoing as comment period ends



Brian Addison / The Baker County Press

The Wallowa-Whitman National Forest headquarters in Baker City with the Elkhorn Mountain range in the background.

Continued from Page 1

The public identification of existing roads will be added to the USFS “existing conditions maps.” The existing condition maps “are a compilation of information collected from the public, the counties, and tribes over the past eight years, plus the Forest Service’s own road inventory maps,” stated Bogardus.

The existing condition maps are then used by the USFS for development of Subpart A of the 2005 Travel Management Rule.

Region 6 Forester Jim Peña has directed Wallowa-Whitman National Forest officials to complete the Subpart A analysis by the end of 2015.

Once the Subpart A analysis has been completed, the USFS may then move onto Subpart B of the 2005 Travel Management Rule.

“Subpart B provides for a system of National Forest System roads, National Forest System trails, and areas on National Forest System lands that are designated for motor vehicle use,” said Bogardus.

After road designations are made, the USFS then publishes a Motorized Use Map.

While the work on Subparts A and B have been progressing, so too has the USFS revision of the Blue Mountain Forest Management Plan. The Blue Mountain Forest Management Plan revision has been underway for several years and once completed will replace the forest plan in place since 1990. The Blue Mountain Forest Management Plan guides all activity on the federally managed lands within three national forests, the Wallowa-Whitman, Umatilla, and Malheur.

Subparts A and B are not, per se, incorporated into the forest management plans. “Site-specific travel management decisions are not typically made in

land management plans,” Bogardus explained.

“Travel management decisions are made at the project level and must be consistent with the applicable land management plan. Forest Plans must be consistent with applicable laws and regulations, including the 2005 Travel Management Rule,” Bogardus continued.

“Upon completion of the (Blue Mountain) Forest Plan Revision, which is anticipated to occur in 2016 or 2017, the Forest (Service) will resume the development of Subpart B of the 2005 Travel Management Rule,” said Bogardus.

Snowmobiles are not exempt from USFS travel planning and are covered in Subpart C of the 2005 Travel Management Rule. “Per court order, Subpart C requires that roads, trails and areas where over-snow vehicle use can occur be specifically designated by local Forest Service managers,” stated Bogardus. “No timeline has been established for completion.”

USFS officials attempted in 2009 to implement a Travel Management Plan in the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest that would have invoked a blanket closure of all 9,400-miles of roads after which certain roads would be designated as open. Forest road policy was to change from the long-standing “open unless designated closed” policy to a “closed unless designated open” policy.

That first attempt at the Travel Management Plan in the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest met with strong opposition from the public including a petition against the plan signed by approximately 6,000 residents of northeastern Oregon. The forest supervisor at that time, Monica Swalbach, rescinded that Travel Management Plan.

As the public input period reached the March 31 deadline, development of

Subpart A and the accuracy of the USFS maps have recently come under fire from local residents and access organizations.

In an official comment submitted to the USFS, open-forest access advocate John George of Bates, Oregon writes: “After careful consideration no I do not believe the maps are correct, as the roads that are currently designated closed on your existing conditions maps may or may not have been properly closed to motorized use and those inconsistencies are not documented on the maps provided. The current open road system does not leave enough roads open to meet the resource management needs and other forest management objectives to which I and others are accustomed in Eastern Oregon. I also believe that the Sub-Part A report development has been severally (sic) flawed and does not allow the local communities and citizens an opportunity to participate in the development of the report in a substantive manner.”

George continues, “Your office currently states there are 2.5 miles of open road densities per square mile on the Forest and according to your desired conditions in the DEIS (Draft Environmental Impact Statement) your goal is for 1.5 miles of open road densities per square mile. I believe the 2.5 miles of road per sq. mile of forest to be exaggerated, and misleading. The standard of 1.5 miles of road per square mile of land, does not leave enough roads open to properly manage the Forest and does not allow adequate access to the Forest, it also fails to recognize current public right of way law, as well as the General Mining Act of 1872 that grants free and open exploration of minerals.”

When asked for a response to George’s concerns regarding Subpart A

of the 2005 Travel Management Rule, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest officials answered simply, “No comment.”

Baker County Commissioners hope to hold a public discussion soon about the USFS current road maps and Subpart A and have invited Tom Montoya, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest supervisor to attend a commissioner’s meeting in the near future.

Commissioners Tim Kerns and Mark Bennett have sent letters to Montoya emphasizing a desire to develop a working relationship between the USFS and the Baker County Natural Resources Advisory Committee.

“It is my goal that we craft a good working relationship where we can utilize both the Cooperating Agency and Coordination processes,” Kerns writes. “The federal forest is an important and integral part of Baker County, and I wish to maintain a strong and positive working relationship as we move forward through the Forest Plan Revision process, completion of the required Travel Management plan, and ultimately more timber being removed from our forest to lessen the impact of inferno-like fires.”

Kerns’ letter was signed by he and Commissioner Bennett.

Bennett penned his own letter to Montoya and, similar to Kerns, outlined several areas of focus. “Forest health, community stability, forest access/travel management, proposed wilderness/road less areas, mineral extraction, timber harvest, grazing, and recreation,” are topics highlighted within both Kerns’ and Bennett’s letters.

“We must collectively work to maintain the customs, culture and economic stability of Baker County, while balancing the mandates of the United States Forest Service,” Bennett concluded in his letter to Montoya.

Translator District offers opt-out form

The Blue Mountain Translator District’s fiscal year is coming to a close May 31st. Customers who misplaced their June 2014 billing and opt out form can contact the district, which will provide replacement forms.

Members have until April 15th of 2015 to return their forms for the current fiscal year.

Annual billings will be mailed June 1st for the new fiscal year.

Invasive plants EIS comments now sought

BAKER CITY, Ore. – Public comments on the Invasive Plants Treatment Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) are being sought through May 4, 2015. The Draft SEIS project documents can be found at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=41451>.

In 2010, a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Invasive Plants Treatment Project was published and a Record of Decision (ROD) was signed, authorizing a variety of invasive plant treatments to contain, control or eradicate existing and new invasive plants on the forest. The full Invasive Species FEIS can be found at <http://www.fs.usda.gov> by following the WWNF links.

A large number of new and existing invasive plant populations on the national forest required analysis to implement new or more effective and cost-efficient treatment actions, including the updated list of herbicides, as analyzed in the Region 6 Invasive Plant FEIS. Current inventories indicate that invasive plant infestations are broadly distributed and occupy approximately 22,842 acres on the national forest.

Six months after the ROD was signed, a complaint was filed against the agency in the U.S. District Court of Oregon, alleging that the 2010 decision violated the NEPA, the National Forest Management Act and the Clean Water Act.

Subsequent appeals and court rulings resulted in this Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) to re-analyze and disclose the potential cumulative effects of treating invasive plants across the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest for the next 15 years; and outlining compliance with PACFISH and INFISH, which guide management of riparian habitats to protect native fish.

The Draft SEIS includes only portions of the 2010 FEIS that were modified or replaced. Portions of the 2010 FEIS that remain unchanged are not included in the Supplement.

Guidelines for the submission of written, verbal or electronic comments can be found in the legal notice or the project documents, which can be accessed at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=41451>.

To receive a copy of the electronic documents on CD, or a hardcopy of the documents, contact Gene Yates, Forest Botanist, at 541-523-1290 or gyates@fs.fed.us

Cattlemen urge attendance at Bend meeting

On April 24th, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) will be holding a meeting in Bend, OR. The focus of the meeting will be directed toward wolf delisting.

Due to the topic of the discussion, the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association (OCA) is urging a strong show of members.

As information regarding the meeting time and place are to be determined, members of the public can continue to check online for updates here: <http://www.dfw.state.or.us/agency/commission/minutes>

The OCA says it recommends members to encourage County Commissioners, Sheriffs, and Chamber of Commerce reps, from as many counties as possible to attend and voice their opinions.

OSU honor roll

Several students from Baker County made Oregon State University’s Winter Term 2015 Honor Roll. They are as follows:

Baker City

Straight-A Average: Ryan K. Cashen, Sophomore, Pre-Chemical Engineering; Samantha Searles, Sophomore, Psychology.

3.5 or Better: Laura E. Borgen, Senior, Applied Visual Arts; Trenton K. Howard, Senior, Psychology; Chelsea K. McVay, Senior, BioHealth Sciences; Jessilyn K. Sayers, Sophomore, Pre-Communication; Connor L. Yates, Junior, Pre-Computer Science.

Halfway

3.5 or Better: Tanner H. Seal, Junior, BioHealth Sciences.

Small business workshop ahead

Blue Mountain Community College’s Business Development group is presenting a free workshop to introduce participants to who the Federal Public Land Agencies are, offer advice and tools for growing their business by

selling to the government, and give the opportunity to network with representatives from different State and Federal agencies.

Presentation Overview: Who the Agencies are and what they do, Policy that Dictates work be set aside

for small businesses, Why you as a contractor are important to the Agencies for Completion of Requirements, Sources of assistance to Small Businesses Acquisition process, Networking opportunities, Are you equipped to do

business with the Federal Government, and Marketing to Agencies.

Contact Sue LaCroix slacroix@gcap.org 541-786-7344 for questions and more information on this workshop.