

BLM impressed by Community Alternative effort

BY JOHN GERRITSMAS

A project in the Applegate that is currently in the planning phase is Nedsbar. This project is designed to harvest timber, improve the transportation system (roads) for forest management, reduce fuels that support unwanted fire effects, and thin forest stands to promote growth, health and vigor. The project design features include protections for the northern spotted owl, other wildlife habitats, sensitive plants, clean water, and soil productivity. The project is on Oregon and California (O&C) lands in the Little Applegate watershed and is to contribute to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Medford District's annual timber harvest for fiscal year 2015.

Having worked with residents in 2011-12 on the Bald Lick timber sale (also referred to by residents as the White Hat project), the BLM met with leaders of the Applegate Neighborhood Network to request working together again in a meaningful way prior to notifying the general public of the project. While BLM was developing alternatives for the project, a community effort was under way to provide a Community/Citizens' Alternative. That effort resulted in a highly detailed alternative that is being analyzed by BLM resource specialists along with BLM-developed alternatives in the project's environmental assessment. The Community Alternative provides for no harvest activity in Senator Wyden's proposed primitive backcountry areas, provides for a 20-inch diameter limit in timber harvest units, and does not construct roads.

Some of you may have heard that the alternative proposed by BLM at the public meeting in Jacksonville in June 2014 is no longer being considered. It was

an important starting point to identify all of the potential units in which a timber harvest might occur. After substantial field work since then, the BLM created two other alternatives that better meet the intent of the recovery plan and habitat management for the northern spotted owl. One of the BLM alternatives constructs new roads while the other does not. Both alternatives include yarding logs with a helicopter.

Those who have worked to develop the alternative should be proud of their effort! I am not aware of any such previous proposal to a timber sale that has been produced by members of the community in such a detailed manner. Of particular interest to the BLM are the social points of view of this project that include the spiritual, visual, philosophical, and local economic approaches to forest management. These factors will also influence the final project design and are best identified by area residents. In addition, BLM and community interests are now working to agree on the metrics that will be used to evaluate all the alternatives in the most unbiased manner possible.

We also intend to have a session for residents so both the BLM and the community alternative designers can jointly help explain the ecological, economical and social underpinnings of each alternative and the analysis and results in the environmental assessment.

In addition, a community team has indicated that they would like to monitor the tree marking as it occurs. BLM will commit to having a review of the mark prior to the sale being sold. BLM will also work with the community team to monitor implementation of the project.

All of these actions will better inform final decisions for the project and implementation of treatments that are consistent with the project's environmental assessment and design.

While the process of collaborating on the Nedsbar project is not yet finished and its efficacy not yet determined, this is certainly an example of the kind of an "idiosyncratic" approach envisioned for the Applegate Adaptive Management Area (AMA), of which the project area is a part. The Northwest

Forest Plan used the term "idiosyncratic" to describe a homegrown and unique out-of-the-box way of approaching a task. The Applegate AMA has a rich history of these kinds of attempts to try new ways at managing BLM public lands. We hope to be successful—again!

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