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## Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision enters home stretch

By George Plaven  
EO Media Group

Logging trucks growl over the Blue Mountains in northeast Oregon, hauling freshly cut timber to one of Boise Cascade's three manufacturing facilities scattered around the region, including a plywood mill in the rural town of Elgin.

About 250 people work full-time at the Elgin complex, making plywood panels for building construction.

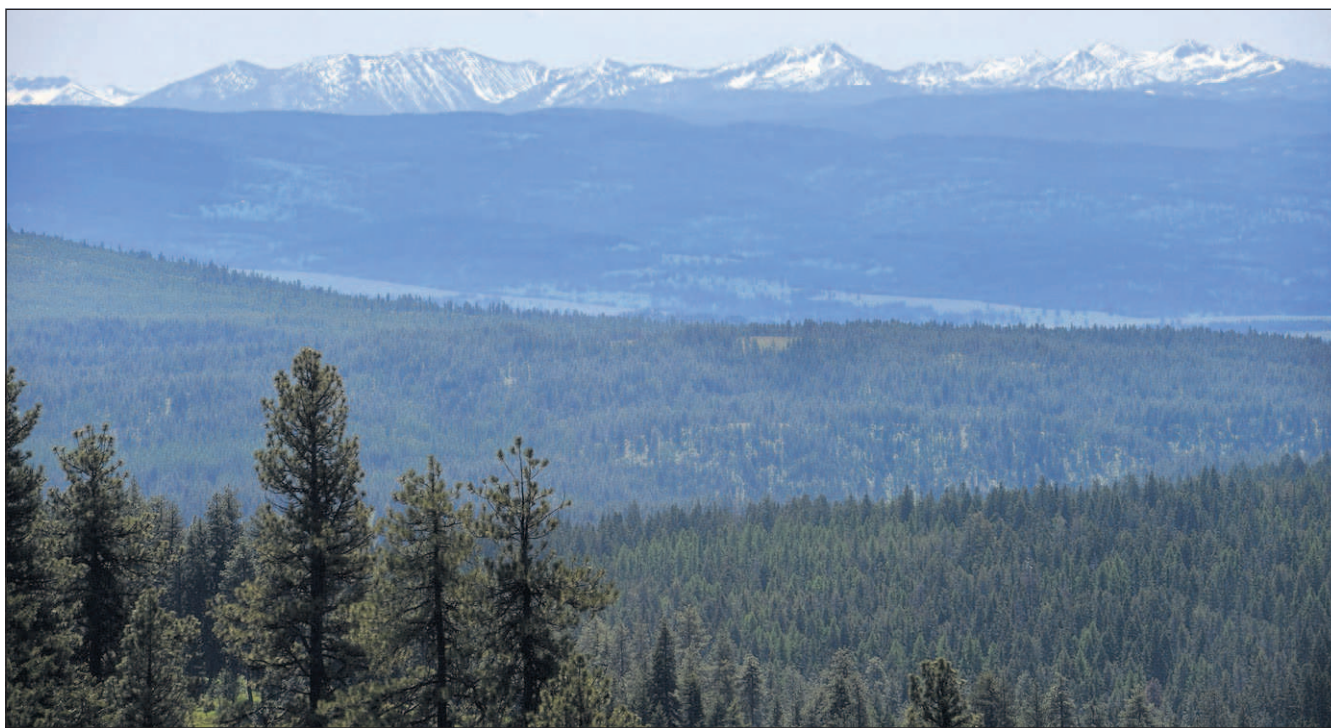
Elsewhere on site, a stud mill sits empty after Boise Cascade announced an indefinite curtailment, ceasing operations in mid-July.

Mill closures are nothing new in Eastern Oregon. Since 1990, the industry has lost 18 mills and more than 1,200 jobs locally, said Lindsay Warness, forest policy analyst for Boise Cascade. On a percentage basis, that's equivalent to 106,000 jobs in the Portland metro area.

To keep the remaining mills open, Boise Cascade buys roughly 33 percent of its timber from as far as Mount Hood and southwest Idaho, trucking in logs from 250 miles away. A smaller percentage comes from the three national forests within the Blue Mountains — the Umatilla, Wallowa-Whitman and Malheur — where Warness said the company has seen a "significant decline" in avail-



Lindsay Warness



EO Media Group

A new plan for the three national forests in northeastern Oregon could ultimately increase logging and grazing.

able timber supply.

That could change soon, as the U.S. Forest Service has proposed doubling the timber harvest in its latest recommendations for the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision, encompassing 5.5 million acres of public lands — an area about the size of New Jersey.

After 15 years, the Forest Service released its final draft of the management plans and environmental study for all three forests in June, focusing on a wide range of environmental, social and economic factors.

The public now has until Aug. 28 to file objections, kicking off another 90-day resolution period. Only groups and individuals who have previously established

legal standing can file objections. Once that is complete, the Northwest regional forester in Portland will sign off on a record of decision.

Jim Pena, the previous regional forester in Portland, retired July 3. The Forest Service has not yet named his replacement.

In general, forest supervisors for the Umatilla, Wallowa-Whitman and Malheur said the plans strive for more active management to improve forest health and reduce the risk of the large and dangerous wildfires plaguing the West.

Part of that is doubling the annual timber harvest across all three forests from a recent average of 101 million board-foot to 205 million board-foot. Between forest products, live-

stock and recreation, the Forest Service estimates the revised Blue Mountains Forest Plan will create up to 1,173 new jobs and \$59.5 million in added income in the region.

Warness said that all sounds good, but she — and others — question how the Forest Service will achieve such ambitious numbers.

"The plan itself is fairly vague in their desired future conditions as to what they're trying to achieve on the landscape," Warness said. "I think that is causing a lot of frustration for a lot of people who have been highly involved."

### Long overdue

Forest plans are generally updated every 10 to 15 years, though the current Blue Mountains Forest Plan was

adopted in 1990. The revision process, which started in 2003, has lasted as long as the plan it will produce.

A draft of the plan was released in 2014, though it was universally panned by the Eastern Oregon counties and environmental and industry groups. The Forest Service received more than 4,300 comments, nearly all of them negative.

In 2015, the agency decided to re-engage the public, holding a series of meetings to hear concerns and ideas. Officials developed two new plan alternatives, including the latest preferred alternative, dubbed "E-Modified."

Steve Beverlin, the Malheur National Forest supervisor based in John Day, said E-Modified should lead to an

overall increase in the pace and scale of restoration across the forests, working with local partners and collaborative groups.

"I think those opportunities are really interwoven across all three forests," Beverlin said.

The Forest Plan itself does not make any decisions on specific projects, but it does establish the sideboards for future work, setting goals and desired conditions on the landscape. The overarching goals are ecological integrity and economic and social well-being, leading into guidelines on timber, grazing, access, wilderness, recreation and other uses.

To fully implement Alternative E-Modified, the Forest Service estimates it would need an annual budget of \$78.5 million, which is \$6 million more than recent allocations. Beverlin said he does not expect funding to increase, but he pointed to several other agency-wide initiatives that will help do work quickly and more efficiently.

For starters, Beverlin said the Forest Service is looking to tweak how it reviews projects under the National Environmental Policy Act, putting crews to work faster while avoiding costly lawsuits.

Congress also recently passed legislation ending the practice of "fire borrowing," in which the Forest Service took money from its fire prevention programs to pay for fighting wildfires. Wildfires will now be covered under a \$2 billion federal disaster fund.

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## Demand exceeds supply: Prairie City faces water emergency

Trucks bringing in water from John Day

By Richard Hanners  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Drought conditions have taken their toll on Prairie City, forcing the city into emergency restrictions and now trucking water from John Day.

Prairie City Mayor Jim Hamsher told the Eagle he wants to use available water tenders to build up the city reservoir level now before a wildfire comes to Grant County and ties them all up.

The city declared a water emergency Aug. 6, as demand exceeded supply from the city's two pumps and the reservoir dropped to a foot and a half. Output from the infiltration galleries on Dixie Creek, which reached 200 gallons per minute in August 2005, had dropped to about



The Eagle/Richard Hanners

Residents continue to arrive at the Prairie City council chambers Aug. 8 for what turned out to be a heated discussion on water restrictions announced by the city for the second summer in a row.

15-20 gpm as the creek dried up and basically stopped running, Hamsher said.

Two water tenders from the Grant County Road Department went into

operation Aug. 12 transporting water from John Day to Prairie City, Roadmaster Allan Hickerson said. There's no cost to the city because it's an emergency, he said.

The Prairie City Fire Department's water tender was also put to work, and the city contracted with L&L Excavating and Marciel Well Drilling to deliver water. Hamsher said he hopes a federal grant will reimburse the cost of the trucking.

The city of John Day is providing the water for free, City Manager Nick Green said. He said he felt comfortable making that call, given Prairie City's current need.

"We are in a position to help them out until they are back on their feet," he said. "It's just the right thing to do, and I am confident they would be there for us if we needed it."

### Water violators

Hamsher called John Day's offer "generous," but he had strong words for water customers in Prairie City who are ignoring the restrictions.

"Some residents continue to water their gardens," he said. "They

don't understand what kind of water emergency this is."

He said he drove around Prairie City Sunday night looking for violators. He noted that last year, when water restrictions were imposed not because of drought but because of damage to the water system's electrical controls by a lightning strike, continuing violations prevented the city from lifting the restrictions sooner.

"Stopping five or 10 violators could make a real difference," he said.

Hamsher expressed frustration over the attitudes of some violators who say they don't care if their neighbor's home burns down because there's not enough water, just so long as their garden is green.

Locating violators is not difficult — all one has to do is drive around

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Prairie City 4-H Community Club member Jaycee Winegar coaxes her steer along Thursday at the Heritage Barn in John Day. Amanda Rockhill and Kim Jacobs are advisers for the 4-H club.

## Preparing for the fair

By Angel Carpenter  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Seven Prairie City FFA Beef Club members walked their animals around the Heritage Barn arena Thursday in preparation for the Wednesday through Saturday, Aug. 15-18, Grant County Fair in John Day.

Working with their animals were Rilee Emmel, Brianna Zweygardt, Declan Zweygardt, Abby Winegar, Carson McKay, Lucas McKinley and Jayden Winegar.

Members of 4-H, including Strawberry Riders Etc. and Juniper Ridge clubs, were also in the arena Thursday with Prairie City FFA adviser Lindy Cruise helping the youths, and parents

watching.

Rilee Emmel, 16, who will soon be a junior at Prairie City School, said this is the seventh steer she's shown since fourth grade.

The black Angus is 18 months old, and she acquired him last winter.

"In December, I spend a lot of time with them — get in there with them and get to know them," she said. "I put their halter on and get them used to people and other steers."

When asked what she enjoys most about raising steers, she said, "It's a great experience and a good thing to be involved in all around. It gets you ready for life. It's a huge responsibility."



Eagle photos/Angel Carpenter

Eleven-year-old Clyde Holliday of John Day practices with his steer Thursday at the Heritage Barn. Holliday is part of the Strawberry Riders Etc. 4-H Club with Didgette McCracken as steer adviser.



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