

Will wilderness classification save area elk herd?

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Despite the fact that the administration has made its final RARE II proposals to Congress, a great deal of debate and controversy still surrounds the ultimate designation and utilization of lands in the Heppner Ranger District. After considerable input and comment on RARE II and the Heppner Draft Environmental Impact Statement, a new proposal has lately surfaced that alleges that only a wilderness classification can "save" the Heppner elk herd.

Before such a drastic and unrevocable designation is made, a comprehensive and concise examination of the facts in regard to the Heppner and Ukiah Ranger Districts is needed in order that a genuine assessment, devoid of emotionalism, can be made. It is of vital importance that many aspects of real and potential land use are considered, and that singular interests do not become prominent.

Amid charges of "exploitation" a case has been made in the Wapiti report purporting that only a final wilderness classification for a number of areas in the Heppner Ranger District will "save" the resident elk herd. Subsequent to this claim, it has been alleged that multiple use management, including timber sales, will create an adverse economic impact in the area. Such a simplistic evaluation fails to take into account present facts and future effects.

Recent statistics compiled by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife show a dramatic increase in the numbers of resident elk in the Heppner unit, as well as accompanying 100 per cent increase in hunter success. This success has taken place commensurate with multiple use and management activities, including road construction and timber harvesting within the area.

Additionally, data from the Draft Environmental Impact Statement indicates that critical elk habitat cannot only be maintained, but also improved, in conjunction with the management of the timber resource in the roadless area. Preferred elk habitat is found in a wide variety of terrain, including land that is presently utilized for timber management.

The Stillman report published recently also contends that in addition to elk, steelhead habitat also can be maintained if a wilderness classification is assigned to the area. This statement must be weighed in comparison to the results of present management of numerous areas. A Umatilla Forest stream, whose headwaters originate in lands that consist of 48 per cent managed timber, was chosen as recently as the most desirable sight for an anadromous fish hatchery. This stream, located in an area where timber harvesting has historically taken place, demonstrated superior water

quality in a variety of tests.

Perhaps the greatest effects of all that will be felt by a wilderness classification will be in the pocketbooks of residents of the Heppner area. Total economic analysis of the plan reveals that the loss of timber harvest in the region that would occur if such a plan were adopted could create serious job losses, a resultant local recession, as well as reduced dollar returns to Morrow County from timber revenues.

The Wapiti area holds a currently programmed yearly harvest of 9 million board feet of timber. Removal of this considerable volume from the timber base on which the local industry depends could directly affect some 144 annual jobs and reduce returns to counties, used primarily for schools and roads, by about \$450,000 per year. Adoption of the wilderness proposal could ultimately spell a serious deterioration of the quality of life that is now enjoyed in the area.

Outlined in the Wapiti report are criteria for timber management. Specifically cited, and critical to the basis of the report, is the claim that forest lands producing less than 50 cubic feet of wood per acre are not feasible for timber production. It has been a well demonstrated fact in recent years that many areas with less than 50 cubic feet per acre production have been successfully and profitably harvested. Current cost-benefit analysis of timber sales within the Heppner District on lands producing less than 50 cubic feet per acre per year have been favorable.

The report alleges that the five alternatives for the Heppner Land Use Plan will result in "a loss of taxpayer's money." What this allegation fails to take into account is the full meaning of the dollar figures outlined in the draft plan. Operating under the assumption that the total

operating budget figure of \$2,023,263 was solely used for timber management, the Wapiti Wilderness Report maintains that the cost to the taxpayer is \$59.50 per thousand board feet while the return amounts to only \$46.00. What was omitted in the formula used is that the total budget for the Forest Service includes, in addition, to money for timber sales, funds that are used for wildlife management, livestock grazing and recreation management. The total budget also includes monies for road maintenance, fire protection, land management and overhead. The reference to "returns from Government" fails to include important considerations like capital investment.

In addition to the revenue that is returned directly to the county, the harvesting of timber also provides a strong stimulus to the local economy through the jobs it provides and the subsequent contributions from property taxes to the local tax base. The increase in employment from the timber industry has spelled an increase in secondary jobs, especially in service related industry and commerce. Harvesting of timber also affects the other major economic base of the area (farming) by maintaining and enhancing grazing land.

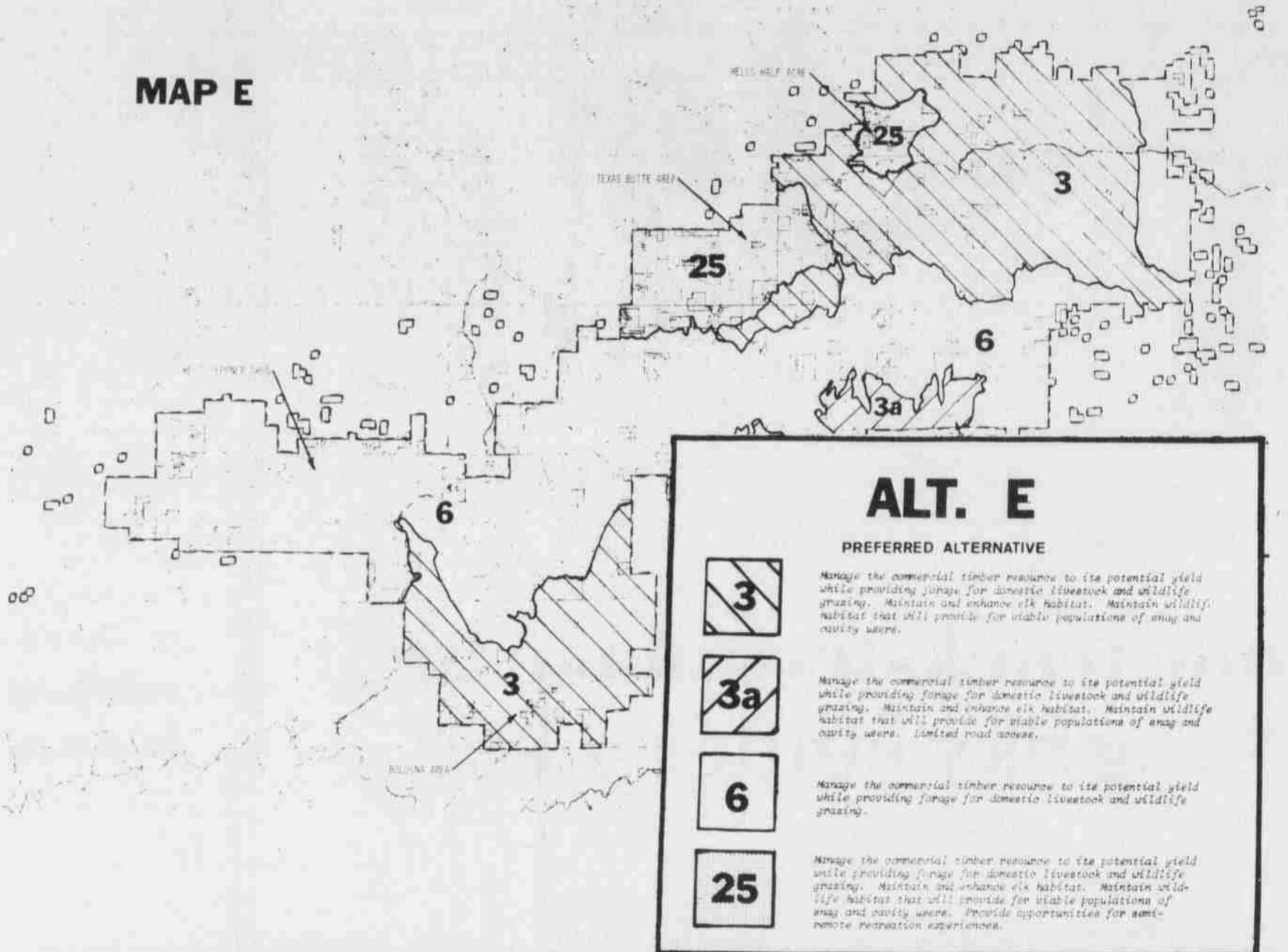
Locally, Kinzua Corporation employs 430 people, with an annual payroll of over \$8 million. The mill alone paid Morrow County more than \$250,000 in property taxes in 1978.

The Heppner District will generate \$7½ million in timber sales this year. Twenty-five per cent of this revenue is returned directly to the counties as property tax offset. Morrow County will receive approximately \$336,000 from the Forest Service in 1979. Last year the Forest Service receipts totalled 11 per cent of the entire county budget.

Cont. on page 8

GENERAL AREA MAP
HEPPNER PLANNING UNIT
—UMATILLA NATIONAL FOREST
---PLANNING UNIT BOUNDARY
□ PRIVATE LAND WITHIN FOREST

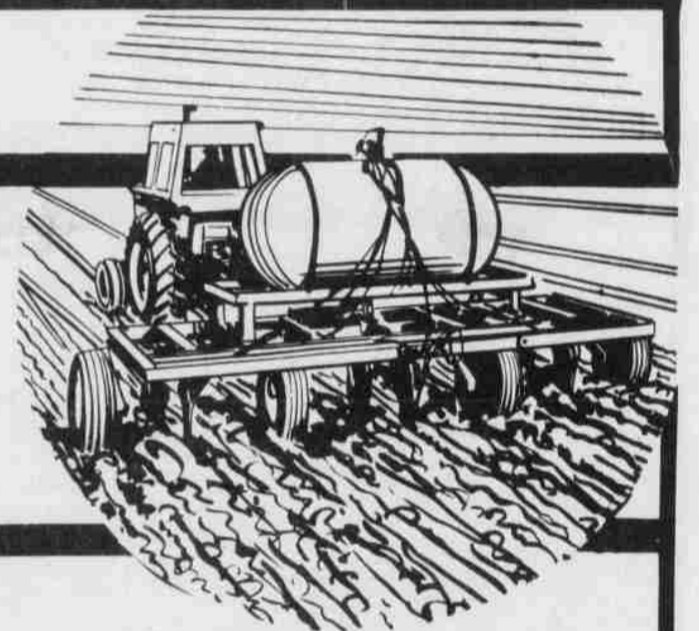
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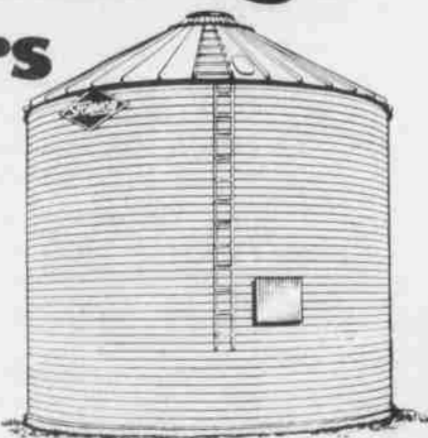


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