

FOREST ACCESS



Don George of the group Forest Access For All points to a large area of the Umatilla National Forest that will be impacted by the proposed Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision. George was in Heppner to instruct people how to comment on the plan. —Photo by David Sykes

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 use of their forests," says George, whose day job is as a mechanic in Baker City. As an example he says that, if allowed, the Forest Service seeks to close, and limit the use of, hundreds of miles of roads per year, and also dramatically increase the number of potential wilderness acres.

George says the forest plan also creates large areas where people will not be able to walk more than 300 feet off either side of the road and, in other areas, severely cuts back on all types of off-highway vehicles. He says, if the plan is adopted, the attitude of the Forest Service will be that all roads are presumed closed unless marked as open.

"Open unless specified" will now become "closed unless specified," he warns.

Being from the Baker City area, he says there are already "thousands of dollars of gating material"

stockpiled and waiting to be used to close forest roads.

"This plan will make thousands of more acres of land off-limits to the elderly, the physically challenged, and families wishing to camp and recreate in this forest," his group says.

At the heart of the whole issue is a 1,400-page document covering all three forests. The large document (actually three thick, spiral-bound books, one for each forest) is called the Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision, which George says has been in the planning stages for more than 11 years, and cost the government over \$10 million to produce. He has studied the documents and related materials extensively, and is now traveling to many communities teaching people how to write effective comments for submittal to the Forest Service.

His group hopes to get enough people concerned

about the forest closures that there will be "thousands of comments" submitted to change it." George says according to the rules the Forest Service must acknowledge and take into consideration all legitimate and correctly-written comments before adopting the final document.

"What we are doing now is getting people to comment on what they don't like about this plan," he told the Heppner group.

He cautions that without comments there cannot later be objections during the objection portion of the plan adoption. Then, without comment or objections, no one in the government will know that people are against this plan, he says. In addition, neither FFA nor other interested groups can later pursue litigation against the forest use plan in attempts to stop the closures.

"You need to let them know what you think. We have been sitting on our hands for the past 20 years while they, little by little, take away our use of public lands. People are fed up and beginning to push back," he says.

He also says many of the Forest Service employees he knows in the Wallowa-Whitman Forest are against the plan.

"If Forest Service employees come out and say anything against it they can have their lives made miserable. The boots on the ground, especially fire fighters, say 'This is ridiculous,'" George says. "But management says, 'This is the best way, trust us, we know the best way to do it.'"

George says the forests have been fine for many years with people having access, and there is no need to change and start locking people out. He says many of the people who use the forest roads carry chain saws with them, and when they come across downed trees they will cut them out of the road.

"We are not asking for super-highways. When I was growing up and we saw downed trees, we would remove the trees, we would fix the roads. This doesn't hurt the environment." He points out that the roads people don't use will go back to nature.

In advising people how to comment on the proposed forest plan, George said there are several ways to do it. They can mail, email, hand deliver or use the Forest Service website. He recommends using registered mail, or using email but always asking for an acknowledgement to later prove the comment was received and registered.

"When we appealed another plan," he relates, "thousands of comments mysteriously disappeared." He says whichever way a person comments, they should ask for confirmation so their comments don't get

"lost."

He says, when writing a comment, people should reference the particular area of the forest and how the plan will directly affect them.

"Explain how it will affect your life. If you have for years hunted in an area (that will now be closed or limited to access), explain that it is your heritage and your history," he says. "Tell them how it will negatively affect your life."

He urged people to be specific and document what they are commenting on.

"It is especially important to tell them three things," he told the crowd. "Number one, what is the issue you are commenting on? Number two, why is the issue an issue, and three, what can the agency do to satisfactorily resolve the issue?"

He said people can also comment on more than one issue and that the Forest Service is required to respond to every comment it receives. He handed out a suggested template to help people while they are writing their comments. He also recommended sending the comments to a person's U.S. representatives and senators. Deadline for submitting comments is August 15, 2014.

In a meeting the previous day in Hermiston, people there talked of forming a local FFA chapter, George said. People can also get more information off the group's website or by contacting them directly (see info section). He said the group's only funding is through donations, which he says are tax deductible. They also raise money by selling decals like those



pictured for \$5 on eBay.

A copy of the Blue Mountains Forest Plan is available at Forest Service offices, although when contacted Monday the local Heppner office said they were out, but more had been ordered and they should be receiving them in a few days. See info section on how to obtain a copy of the plan and submit a comment.

George urged people to become organized and contact ATV and snowmobile groups as well as hunters, loggers and others.

"If you use the forest for wood cutting, mushroom hunting or any other activity, you need to comment, because you will be impacted by this" he said. "I would like to see 3,000 comments."

Info on Blue Mountain Forest Plan

How to obtain a plan

Website: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/BlueMtnsPlanRevision>

CD or Hard Copy: Email request to: bluemtnplanrevision@fs.fed.us

Phone: 541-523-1246 or 541-523-1302.

Read in Person: Documents to read are available at Forest Service offices across the three forests and at local community libraries.

How to submit a comment

Electronically: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/BlueMountainForestPlanRevisionComments>

Fax: 541-523-6392

U.S. Mail: Blue Mountains Plan Revision Team P.O. Box 907 Baker City, OR 97814

Deadline for submitting a comment: August 15, 2014

How to contact Forest Access For All

Website: www.forestaccessforall.org

Email: keepitopen@forestaccessforall.org

U.S. Mail: PO Box 48 Baker City, OR 97814

Phone: 844-523-2323

DICKENSON AG AMBASSADOR



Beth Dickenson, agriscience teacher at Heppner High School and 2014 NATAA graduate Ambassador, will bring the latest in teaching techniques to local science classrooms after in-field study at DuPont Chesapeake Farms in Chestertown, MD. —Contributed photo

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 development institute sponsored by DuPont and a special project of the National FFA Foundation and the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE). This year, 49 highly-recommended agriscience teachers were selected to engage in inquiry-based activities, where they explore state-of-the-art teaching concepts, with a majority of their training time in hands-on activities on Chesapeake Farms 3,300-acre working farm. The dual farm and classroom approach is designed to invigorate teachers and to infuse that learning experience in the classroom with their students.

"By understanding global initiatives such as feeding the world and sustainability, teachers learn how to engage their students in real 21st century issues and finding real solutions," said Rik Miller, president, DuPont Crop Protection. "The Ag Academy embodies the professional development

component and boosts the enthusiasm necessary to help students flourish in agriscience-related fields."

With the Ag Academy training, teachers are able to instill in their students a better grasp of scientific concepts and open the door for new horizons to pursue careers in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and related fields such as agriculture. Each class of Ag Ambassadors impacts approximately 10,000 students. Combined with multiple workshop presentations to their peers, in the last eleven years approximately 12,000 teachers across the U.S. including Puerto Rico and Alaska have participated, having a direct impact on over a million students since inception.

"The Ag Academy has been an eye-opening experience," said Dickenson. "I'm very excited to start preparing my classroom curriculum with new techniques to share with my students and other teachers."

ALL NEWS AND ADVERTISEMENT DEADLINE:

MONDAYS AT 5:00 P.M.

HAPPY 90th BIRTHDAY
Open House for Valma's (Granny Felt) 90th Birthday
 Saturday, July 5 1pm - 3 pm
 Hospital Solarium
 Anyone who would like to drop in for cake & ice cream & wish her a happy birthday is welcome to come. No gifts please

Fire ban for Ione Fire District effective June 27. No open burning, No Burn Barrels. By Virgil Morgan, Ione Rural Fire Protection District Fire Chief.

YO CREAM IS BACK!
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CHECK OUT OUR DAILY LUNCH SPECIALS!!!
CLOSED FRIDAY JULY 4TH
 TOFFEE NOT LATTE \$3.50
 STRAWBERRY LEMONADE \$2.50

WEDDING TABLES

Kevin Drake & Brittany Farrell <i>Wedding</i> July 19, 2014	Keith Scott & Lynan Bingham <i>Wedding</i> July 5, 2014
Nichole Gibbs & Cody High <i>Wedding</i> July 19, 2014	Nathan Kennedy & Kasandra Stark <i>Wedding</i> July 12, 2014
	Brian Rust & Jordan Bemrose <i>Wedding</i> August 9, 2014

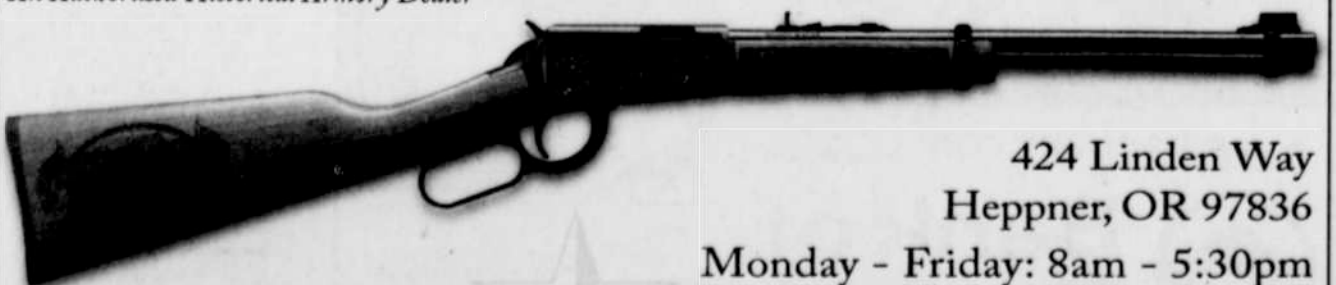
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