



**ROCKY MOUNTAIN
ELK FOUNDATION**

April 15, 2020

Lyn Medley, District Planner
Willamette National Forest
Detroit Ranger District
HC 73 Box 320
Mill City, OR 97360

E-mail: <https://cara.ecosystem-management.org//Public//CommentInput?Project=56803>
and
lynise.Medley@usda.gov

Subject: Scoping Comments – Divide Project

The purpose of this letter is to state the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) strongly supports the active forest management activities proposed in the Divide Project scoping letter. RMEF recommends adding an additional purpose to those proposed in the scoping letter – development of early seral vegetation in an amount sufficient to equal historical range of variability (HRV) for the project area.

RMEF proposes development of early seral be a purpose of the Divide Project for the following reasons:

1. Available overhead imagery of the project area shows the early seral vegetation type to be a rare commodity, and likely well below HRV.
2. The Forest Plan designates elk and deer as management indicator species of habitat quality.
3. Deer and Elk are obligated to the early seral vegetation type because that is where they find most of their forage.
4. Deer and elk are two of more than 100 other species that are also obligated to the type (O'Neil et al, 2001). Several of the early seral obligated species are on the Regional Forester's Sensitive Species List.
5. The Divide Project area is within the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) Santiam Wildlife Management Unit (WMU). Published ODFW records indicate deer and elk populations are in decline in the Santiam WMU with populations well below ODFW management objective, and hunter success is very poor.

Bill Richardson | Oregon and Washington Senior Lands Program Manager
24550 Ervin Road | Philomath, OR 97370 | (541) 929-3011 | brichardson@rmef.org

5705 Grant Creek Rd. | Missoula, MT 59808-8249 | (800) CALL ELK | WWW.RMEF.ORG

6. ODFW has published management plans for both elk and black-tail deer that indicate lack of quality and quantity of forage is a principal contributing factor to declining game populations.

Additionally, RMEF provides the following comments regarding the proposed Divide Project:

1. We are pleased to note the meadow enhancement and noxious weed abatement aspects of the project.
2. Recommend thinning to 35% canopy cover to allow maximum sunlight to reach the forest floor to stimulate understory vegetation, big game forage and browse.
3. Increase the acreage of regeneration harvest and gap creation to increase amount early seral vegetation type to approach HRV.
4. Seed all disturbed soil with native grass and forbs of high forage value to big game, i.e. landings, skid trails, decommissioned roads, etc.
5. Use the Western Oregon and Washington Elk Nutrition and Habitat Utilization Model (Rowland et al, 2013) to analyze the impacts on elk from the various action alternatives that will be developed as project planning proceeds.
6. Establish and maintain collaboration and the ODFW District Wildlife Biologist at Corvallis (Adair).

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation is a non-profit conservation organization whose mission is to ensure the future of elk, other wildlife, their habitat, and our hunting heritage. The Elk Foundation also works to open, secure and improve public access for hunting, fishing and other recreation.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on this project.

Sincerely,



Bill Richardson
Oregon & Washington Sr. Lands Program Manager
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

References:

O'Neil, Thomas A., et al, Matrix for Wildlife-Habitat Relationships in Oregon and Washington. Northwest Habitat Institute. 2001.

Rowland, M., et. al. 2013. User guidelines for application, summary, and interpretation of westside elk nutrition and habitat use models. Draft Version 2.0. U. S. Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station, La Grande, Oregon. N. p.

Reply Refer To: 2600(FS)/6500(BLM) (OR930) I

Date: February 21, 2013

FS-Memorandum

**EMS TRANSMISSION
BLM-Information Bulletin No. OR-2013-**

To: Forest Supervisors, Westside NF, Region 6
District Managers, Westside BLM Districts, Oregon and Washington

Subject: Westside Elk Model

The U.S. Forest Service's (FS) Pacific Northwest Research Station (PNW) recently released two new landscape models that predict elk nutrition and habitat use across western Oregon. These models represent the best available information for evaluating elk habitat on Westside public and forest lands and should be considered in project and land use planning as appropriate.

The elk nutrition and elk habitat use models, reflect key elk research findings from the last twenty years, and will help managers evaluate the nutritional and habitat conditions of Westside landscapes and their likely use by elk. They also can be used to project the effects of land management activities, like road closures and thinning, on this ecologically and economically important ungulate. The models, which are combined in a single downloadable toolbox along with sample datasets, are available online at <http://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/research/elk>.

The models were developed and validated in collaboration with a wide range of partners including the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife; the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife; the National Council for Air and Stream Improvement, Oregon State University, and over twenty other partners. In addition, the models were beta-tested for more than a year by biologists and technicians from a variety of agencies, including the FS and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

The modeling team will continue to offer training sessions and other technology transfer activities to help managers with efficient and timely application of the models. For general questions on the Westside elk models, please contact Todd Thompson (t1thomps@blm.gov) or Robert Alvarado (ralvarado@fs.fed.us). For technical assistance, please contact Barb Wales (bwales@fs.fed.us) or Lisa Renan (lrenan@blm.gov). For assistance with BLM National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Land Use Planning, please contact Anne Boeder (aboeder@blm.gov) or, for Forest Plan Amendments, Michael Hampton (mhampton@fs.fed.us).

/s/ *Kent P. Connaughton*
KENT P. CONNAUGHTON
Regional Forester, Region 6
USDA Forest Service

/s/ *Jerome E. Perez*
JEROME E. PEREZ
State Director, Oregon/Washington
USDI Bureau of Land Management

Distribution:

Robert Alvarado, Forest Service
Barb Wales, Forest Service
Michael Hampton, Forest Service
Todd Thompson, Bureau of Land Management
Lisa Rena, Bureau of Land Management
Anne Boeder, Bureau of Land Management
Donald Hampton, OR930, Bureau of Land Management

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