

April 16th, 2025
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APR 16 2025

Shaun McKinney, Forest Supervisor
Wallowa Whitman National Forest
1550 Dewey Ave
Baker City, Oregon 97814

ATTN: Baker City Watershed Fuels Management Project OBJECTIONS

Mr. McKinney,

As a private citizen and as a professional forester, I have OBJECTIONS to the released plans to restore forest health and reduce fuel loads in the Baker City Watershed. With over decades of professional forestry experience I find multiple flaws and pitfalls with the proposed alternative of the Whitman Ranger District. It does not provide for the removal of diseased, dead and dying trees above 21 inch DBH.

In my personal observations, having multiple clients who own land adjacent to the Baker City Watershed and having been a primary operator of the Foothills Stewardship Contract in 2006, I have personally observed dozens, if not hundreds, of trees, including Doug Fir with high levels of Mistletoe infestation and Grand Fir infected with bark beetles. These large diseased trees are not fire resilient and need to be removed to protect the water supply for over 10,000 + Baker City residents. A large catastrophic wildfire would not only destroy the domestic water supply for the Baker City residents, it would put in danger hundreds of private residences from Auburn Lane to Goodrich Creek area.

And what about the lives of professional fire fighters? To date, the professional firefighters have been able catch numerous fire starts from lightning strikes when still small in size, but sooner or later these firefighting crews will not be able to catch these fires when still small, and have to pull out for their personal safety. My observation there is in excess of a hundred tons of fuel per acre in many areas. It is time to reduce these excessive fuel loads with a professionally managed timber sale!

In addition to cutting trees above 21 inch DBH, I strongly urge the Whitman Ranger District to create a wide fuel break on both sides of the Marble Creek Road. The current plan is totally inadequate. A mile-wide shaded fuel break on both sides of the Marble Creek Road would be totally justified. This would include re-constructing the Marble Creek Road to allow for quick and efficient access for firefighting vehicles, as well as passenger cars. From recorded observation by USFS firefighting staff, visitation with senior firefighting staff of the Oregon Department of Forestry, and from my personal observations, wildfire events can propel burning embers from over a mile or more in front of an advancing wildfire.

My proposed action would be to use professional logging and forestry contractors to reserve healthy Western Larch, healthy Ponderosa Pine, and healthy Doug Fir, without pathogens or Mistletoe infestation. This would create a shaded fuel break on either side of the Marble Creek Road. This fuel break should be to the bottom of a draw or creek drainage, or to a ridgetop for a defendable fuel break. The Marble Creek Road must be reconstructed and made passible for all vehicles that are needed for wildfire control or want to use this public road for recreation. The forest service staff can figure out the proper buffers along drainages.

The Eastside Screens was to be a temporary 18 month rule in 1994. This rule is now over thirty years old. The Eastside Screens, which contain the 21 inch no-cut rule, needs to be discontinued. In March of 2025 the Trump Administration signed an executive order streamlining the management of forest health restoration and fuel load reduction operations. The Whitman Ranger District needs to follow this executive order on forest management decisions. This must include the Baker City Watershed forest health and fuel reduction project.

Having served as a Baker City councilor from 2016 to 2020, I know a new water treatment plant will cost approximately \$20 million. The results of a wildfire will cause every Baker City resident to pay over \$2,000.00 to have a clean glass of water. There are 4,549 delivery points being served water from the Baker City watershed. When a stand-destroying wildfire occurs there, the results will be that each delivery point will have to bear a \$4,396.57 cost to continue to receive treated water. Inflationary cost will have the \$20 million figure out of date and the cost will be more. This is an unacceptable financial cost for Baker City residents.

It would be very appropriate for the WWNF to take a more aggressive and proactive action plan to restore forest health and reduce fuel loads within the Baker City Watershed. The only action plan that comes close to fulfilling this need is proposal 2; including using tethered logging systems wherever needed and appropriate, and larger fuel breaks on the Marble Creek Road.

Sincerely,

Arvid E. Andersen

Arvid E. Andersen

Andersen Forestry Consulting

PS: I drink water from Baker City watershed

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