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Title:

Comments: Comments from Russ Vaagen

Please see the attached document for my Forest Plan Comments

Thank you,

Russ Vaagen

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Colville National Forest
Forest Plan Comments

Forest Planning is inherently difficult due to the number of variables the Forest Service needs to consider. That being said I still think the Forest Service's ability to carry out Forest Planning efforts should be questioned at the highest levels.

As interested parties of the National Forest we are asked and encouraged to collaborate on all things related to the way those forests are managed. We form groups of people and organizations from various backgrounds to attempt to put aside our perceived differences and focus on our interests within those National Forest lands. When Rick Brazell (Former Forest Supervisor of the Colville National Forest 2003 - 2009) asked the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition (NEWFC) and the counties to come together to collaborate the upcoming Forest Plan for the Colville National Forest in 2006 we all took it very seriously. Over 100 people showed up at the Chewelah Peak Learning Center to kick off the meetings that were co-convened by NEWFC and the Stevens County Commissioners. This started a series of Saturday meetings that continued to be well attended for months. Topics included harvest levels, land allocations, Wilderness, recreation, roads, and a multitude of others. This was the first time in a long time where local citizens felt like their voice was about to be heard.

Unfortunately the Forest Planning Team had other ideas. About 2010 the team started conducting roll out

meetings to share their findings with certain community groups to get feedback. A group of NEWFC members including myself attended one of these meetings in Tonasket. The plan that they chose to unveil had almost nothing to do with the meetings that we all took part in. When we showed our displeasure in that meeting the group was surprised; as if we were supposed to just take their "professional opinions" and adopt them as being the best option. There's no real reason to hash out all of the details, but needless to say everyone was dismayed in the community. Unfortunately we no longer had Rick Brazell as the Forest Supervisor to force the issue with the planning team. New Forest Supervisor Laura Jo West promised to create an alternative that would reflect those collaborative forest planning meetings and agreements.

Alternative B was supposed to be the "Blueprint" alternative that was generated by following the suggestions of the NEWFC generated Blueprint. Although this is a step in the right direction, it misses the collaborative mark. The most glaring part is the volume of timber generated by this alternative.

NEWFC created three zones:

- 1.Active Management Areas
- 2.Restoration Areas
- 3.Inventoried Roadless Areas

The Active Management Area was studied using mapping information based on the available LIDAR at the time, taking into account open areas with no trees, sensitive habitat areas, and stocking levels. This resulted in 80 million board feet annually for a 20 year period, at which time we would evaluate what would be sustainable and renewable. Keep in mind that this covered approximately 490,000 acres of the Colville National Forest and didn't count volume that would result from efforts in the Restoration Area, which is about another 350,000 acres. To have volume targets on this alternative that doesn't reflect collaborative agreement is absurd. It is my understanding that this alternative was created to show what was agreed to by collaborative interests. Volume figures should be in line with those agreements and not the 37 million board feet annually shown in Alternative B.

The Wilderness Component of Alternative B of 220,300 acres is also taken out of context. It has always been the intent of NEWFC that we would work through the issues of each Inventoried Roadless Area with affected and interested groups to figure out balanced solutions to issues like recreation, grazing, and access. Some of our membership is very much for Wilderness as a core principle, yet as a group we're committed to protecting areas for their current "Wilderness Characteristics" until we can create agreements that would lead to some sort of protection including Wilderness Legislation. That in no way prevents NEWFC and other groups from coming up with solutions that protect areas in some other way besides a legislated Wilderness area.

My request is that Alternative B gets recalculated using 80 million board feet from the Active Management Areas. And Wilderness areas reflect current areas of agreement and set the tone for future agreements on areas that could include future Wilderness areas or some other agreed upon collaborative solution. This is the only way to accurately provide an alternative that was developed by community based collaboration.

Another interesting piece of information is the study

(<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0378112714005519>) conducted by The Nature Conservancy's Ryan Haugo in partnership with the Forest Service's own Tom DeMeo came up with the need to restore forests on the Colville National Forest that would result in over 90 million board feet of harvest. That would coincide with 80 million board feet from the Active Management area and 15 million board feet per year (+/-) from treatments within the Restoration Areas.

These plans need to consider the need for restoration treatment and not allow volume targets to be driven by budgets. It's not fair to the forests and it's absolutely not right for the communities that the Forest Service continues to do this. This is a general statement that applies to all National Forest System lands.

My next comment has to do with the request from multiple entities for an extension to this comment period. I find it appalling that the Forest Service would not grant this request. The reason is that multiple groups and individuals have finally been able to come together to discuss some very important topics that could result in some of the most helpful comments to date. If groups are able to come together collaboratively to discuss their differences and common ground it could really impact the quality of the comments for this Forest Plan. I understand the desire to move forward, but if the Forest Service really wants a plan that works and is supported by the people, then it should consider allowing those people more time to discuss these important changes to the landscape.

I have some real concerns about the Forest Service's ability to collect these comments and understand what the commenters are really attempting to articulate. There have been multiple occasions at the project level where comments were taken out of context. This results in Proposed Actions that do not accurately represent the intent of the comments. I would like the Forest Service to consider allowing a group like Sustainable Northwest to review these comments and reach out to the community for clarity. I would suggest that this be done on a contract and SNW report directly to the Regional Office in Portland. I must share that I am on the board of Sustainable Northwest, but in no way get any financial benefit from any contracts entered into by the non-profit organization.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider my comments. I am commenting as an individual as the organizations that I am a part of did not pre-approve these comments. That being said it's important to note that these affiliations absolutely affect gravity and detail of these comments.

Russ Vaagen

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