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From: Karen Coulter, Director,
on behalf of Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project

November 9th, 2019

To: Brandon Houck,
ATTN: Dianne Shirley
Heppner Ranger District,
Umatilla National Forest
P.O. Box 7
Heppner, OR 97836

*Please let me know if
you would consider
our site specific survey
information and
recommendations from
survey sheets & photos
after this comment
deadline. Karen Coulter

Comments on the West End Farm Bill CE Project

We have many strong objections to this timber sale and the use of a Categorical Exclusion to rush through a heavy logging timber sale which includes clearcutting (so-called "Shelterwood" and "Seed tree" cuts which are just glorified clearcuts with few trees retained) and very low basal areas (e.g. 0-40 sq. ft. of basal area per acre) without any detailed environmental impacts analysis and very limited public process. The environmental impacts of the West End CE sale rise to a level of significance that ~~was~~ is not justified for a CE, as such heavy logging and clearcutting in this already severely logging-degraded area is not likely to allow for healthy forest recovery from such logging, the development of "forest resilience to disturbance agents" as promised in the extraordinarily skimpy and

P.12 Insufficient one page scoping later. The District Ranger and silviculturist preparing this sale apparently don't realize that clearcutting has long ago been abandoned by the Forest Service in this part of Eastern Oregon because the forest simply can't grow back. ~~clearcutting~~

Especially in this part of the Umatilla, soils are marginal and ash soils are easily displaced. We've seen North slope mixed conifer fail to regenerate fully for decades after clearcutting or come back as juniper. The planners have little or no familiarity with how hard it would be for this forest ecosystem to recover from such heavy logging in the wake of so many timber sales already having occurred within the last 28 years (the length of time I've been field surveying timber sales on the Heppner District and the Umatilla) and prior decades in the same area. It is a bad joke not based on best available science to claim that yet more logging would "improve the ability of trees to ward off insects and diseases" as claimed. Using a CE for this sale enables the Forest Service to evade analysis of cumulative effects of past logging, road building, livestock grazing, and "fuel" reduction in combination with the currently planned heavy logging of the West End CE sale. Such analysis would reveal significant impacts to soil integrity, carbon storage and sequestration, wildlife habitat, forest resilience, and forest structural integrity, as well as recreational and

cultural use values, including indigenous people's treaty rights cultural uses, from this sale going forward.

Using a CE for up to 3,000 acres of heavy logging also neatly evades consideration of best available science, disclosure of ^{being used} scientific controversy over clearcutting and logging to reduce insect and disease incidence. The Forest Service is also failing to consider effects to Sensitive plants, declining Mule deer, elk security habitat, and species dependent on denser mixed conifer forest being targeted for heavy logging, including Pileated Woodpeckers, American marten, and Northern goshawk, Management Indicator and Forest Plan focal species. The Forest Service is also sidestepping obligations to the public of full disclosure of potential environmental effects through a deceptive scoping letter that does not include all the information presented to far fewer people in a field trip and an open house presentation. The scoping letter gives the impression that only "commercial thinning, small diameter thinning, and fuel treatments" are being planned, when in fact heavy logging down to very low basal areas and virtual clearcutting are designated for the majority of the sale units on a map displayed at the open house meeting that was not included with the Scoping letter, which went out to far more people - at least theoretically.

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The pervasive statement that "(+)ree planting ~~will~~ may be considered where stands are understocked" does not disclose that the planned logging will cause

them to be "understocked." Rather than promoting tree species diversity, the Forest Service plans to create mini clearcut openings and larger virtual clearcuts to get rid of most Grand fir and Douglas fir currently present on these moister plant association natural mixed conifer sites (up to the CE limit of 21" dbh) and replant primarily Ponderosa pine and ~~Doyle~~ Western larch, the ~~finer~~ tree species preferred by the timber industry and thus by the Forest Service.

The Scoping letter is so lacking in informative detail for the public that it violates NEPA public disclosure requirements. For instance, the Scoping letter fails to identify what "current insect and disease infestation" they are addressing - likely because only the Fir engraver beetle is considered by Mike Johnson, the Epidemiologist at the West End CE open house meeting, to be at epidemic levels in the West End timber sale (aka "project") area. The field trip revealed a random assortment of "business as usual" sale units, only one sale unit stop of which had some evident fir engraver beetle killed and defoliated firs - and that was in a rare (for the area) old growth moist P&G mixed conifer stand that

p.5 would benefit ecologically from this recruitment of large snags and logs for old growth-associated wildlife such as Pileated woodpecker and American marten, as it seemed to be otherwise deficient in large snags and logs due to past logging. Yet the West End sale would remove those needed snags and future logs and reduce the number of firs that could otherwise become large live trees, large snags, and large logs to meet the needs of moist mixed conifer LOS (old growth)-associated species.

In this area, where so much old growth and mature moist mixed conifer forest has already been lost to past logging, the planned ~~reduction~~ ^{elimination} of more LOS and mature mixed conifer forest would be a significant impact to the viability of Pileated woodpecker, American marten, and denser mixed conifer-associated species such as Management Indicator Rocky Mt. elk and Northern goshawk, which is singled out by the Forest Plan Eastside Screens for special protection pending a science updated revised Blue Mountain Forest Plan for the Umatilla National Forest. All mature and old growth ("LOS") moist mixed conifer forest should be dropped from this sale. Potential environmental impacts need to be assessed through detailed analysis in an Environmental Impact Statement with full public opportunity to comment on

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the full disclosure of potential environmental impacts of the sale and full opportunity to file objections to the sale under the HFRA authority.

There is no significant evidence that the planned logging, burning, etc. will not further weaken the already stressed forest rather than develop more resilience to insects or reduce the claimed "risk" and extent of current insects and disease. The sale units profiled in the field trip ranged widely from an old growth stand with very limited and actually beneficial mortality to a completely green young Ponderosa pine plantation in ~~excellent~~ good growing conditions & marginal Ponderosa pine young forest next to lithosol habitat with no fir engraver beetle potential, and a younger mature Douglas fir stand with no evident excessive mortality on a North slope and an already thinned (and large fir removed) stand that appeared quite healthy and had openings with young to mature Western larch and some Ponderosa pine seedlings. Such randomness makes a mockery of the CE's focus on insect and disease epidemics. This sale would have such an expansive, overly broad interpretation of the Insect and Disease Clause of HFRA as to allow for virtually any timber sale under 3,000 acres to qualify for this insect and disease CE, calling into question the purpose of the CE.

P.7 and the Forest Service's presumed "need" to apply the CE to this sale. The more detailed sale map not made available to the public through the Scoping letter even reveals planned roadside "fuel break" logging that would have nothing to do with an insect and disease specific CE.

Having reviewed the documentation for multiple Categorical Exclusion timber sales planned in the Ochoco, Deschutes, and Malheur National Forests, this West End CE Scoping letter does not even meet typical Forest Service standards for Scoping documentation of Categorical Exclusion sales. Examples of far more detailed Scoping packets with much more information made public through them include (as much as we may disagree with these timber sales): the Soldier CE Scoping on the Malheur NF, the Walton Lake CE Scoping (although it, too, was very deceptive) ~~and the~~ ^{Project} on the Ochoco, and the Greater Snattle Lake Scoping on the Deschutes. We are opposing two of those three CEs, but at least they provided more detailed relevant information to the public through the Scoping packet, rather than withholding more detailed information limited to a later field trip and open house meeting that could be expected to attract fewer people.

Further problems with the West End CE Scoping

p.8 include apparent exclusion of some local residents from receiving the Scoping letter when it was first mailed out and a relatively narrow targeted audience for the information despite the Heggner District being part of a National Forest, not just a locally controlled forest. Not all local landowners, including myself and one of those who did not receive the Scoping letter mailing, support ^{MOFF} logging to reduce fire "risk", insect and disease "risk" or otherwise in this already overlogged forest that we use for enjoying recreation and wildlife, edible and medicinal plants (in my case), drinking water, firewood, hunting, Nature photography, and other uses. Treaty rights and cultural uses of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla ^(new staff) also need to be protected. Arguably the current planners of this sale do not know this Forest, this District, and this particular forest area as well as the native indigenous people and many local landowners or residents and have no "sense of place" for this area that we have developed over many years, lifetimes, or in the case of the Umatilla, hundreds or thousands of years. These uses of the Forest that we appreciate and are accustomed to using would be threatened by the West End CE sale, and our sense of place for the sale area would be destroyed. This sale warrants an EIS.

P.9 We ask you to scrap this timber sale.

I feel personally affronted by this new sale so soon in the same area of the Heppner District as the Kahler sale, which I negotiated recently with former staff of the Heppner District for a reasonable, though not ideal, objection compromise. The West End sale demonstrates that the Forest Service is throwing out any pretense of ecological sustainability or a reasonable timber sale rotation period of time before the next timber sale to allow for regrowth and recovery from the last logging. The Kahler sale included full environmental analysis. The Forest Service is now ignoring their responsibilities to fully consider and prevent environmental negative impacts, fully inform the public of the consequences of the West End CE sale, and allow for concerned people to file an objection and negotiate for a more ecologically sound outcome. This is unacceptable. We are concerned about such cavalier mismanagement of the Forest further exacerbating climate change cumulatively and directly. Climate change is the biggest global crisis of our time, unprecedented in pace and effects, and capable of eliminating 10 to 50% of all species, and at a 5° Celsius global average temperature increase, capable of ending human civilization as we know it.

Maintaining mature and large trees, forest cover, and forest moisture retention are essential for carbon storage and sequestration to slow the effects of climate change (including the forest's contribution of carbon to forest soils), while logging removes carbon from the ecosystem in an unnatural way that is not mimicked by wild fire, which retains much more carbon in the ecosystem for the longer term. Further, such heavy forest cover removal and mature forest liquidation as is planned with the West End CE threatens the ability of species whose habitat is rendered unsuitable by extreme climate change to disperse to more suitable, cooler, moister forest in this area, which is targeted for opening upland drying out. This threatens the already precarious viability of species adapted to cool moist forest with maladaptive higher canopy closure, such as adapted Neotropical migratory songbirds, Pileated woodpeckers, and American marten. Yet using a CE enables the Forest Service to ~~just~~ ignore and fail to disclose such significant negative effects. Categorical exclusions were designed for projects with relatively insignificant effects and very high levels of public acceptance, not for virtual clearcutting.

We are also concerned that cumulative effects

of the West End CE sale, the Kahler sale still being logged, the Wheeler Point Fire (removal of most mature forest cover about 23,000 acres total, most of that in the West End area of the Heppner District), past logging, overgrazing by livestock, and climate change combined are not being considered, and would be very significant in this sale area. If up to 3,000 acres of forest cover are mostly removed (through ϕ -40% and ϕ -60% of basal area retention, shelterwood and seed tree clearcutting, etc.) through this sale, where will the elk and deer find sufficient security habitat and thermal cover for summer heat and winter storms? Elk appear to be declining in this area since the Wheeler Point Fire and Mule deer populations are already in decline on the Malheur and Deschutes National Forests. The Forest Service likes to pass the buck by saying that the Oregon Dept of Fish and Wildlife is responsible for elk and deer populations, but the Forest Service is responsible for providing habitat, including security (hiding) cover and thermal cover. Will there still be viable populations of American marten and Pileated woodpeckers in the West End area after this? Where is the wildlife biologist in the planning room? Where is the botanist? What will happen to rare and sensitive plants that are dependent on more shade and moisture retention than will be left? What will happen to ~~the~~ populations of Neotropical migratory

songbirds coming to the area who are dependent on multistoried canopy and denser, moister forest? Many of the species at risk are Management Indicator species that the Forest Service is supposed to be monitoring and protecting for their viability. Yet the Forest Service is not doing any wildlife population studies that are necessary for determining current population ~~status~~ status, ~~also~~ reproductive success rates, population trends, and viability thresholds - all key to protecting species viability.

The Forest Service is prone to taking a de minimus approach, by saying, in essence, "What's so significant about logging 3,000 acres?" Yet context is everything, and recognition of context is something this West End CE planning lacks. This area has been virtually destroyed already by Forest Service timber sales and associated road construction, as well as past livestock overgrazing. There is very little old growth ("LOS") habitat left in the West End of the District and very little structurally intact mature and old growth moist mixed conifer forest left in the West End in particular. So I am very disturbed and upset by planned heavy logging (again) in some of the last good moist mixed conifer mature and old growth forest in the West End area. Since the Open House and field trip, I've field surveyed 8 more sale units and a volunteer

p. 13 who has been working with us for years field surveyed two more sale units that were not in the field trip. I selected them based on my knowledge of the area from doing old growth inventory on the Heppner District in 1992 (as well as sensitive plant surveys) for the Forest Service and field surveying timber sales on the District since then, and based on assessment of the more detailed sale map, which I did not have until the Open House on November 7th. I selected for high elevation North Slopes and slopes facing riparian areas in particular in areas where I knew there was mixed conifer forest - the Wheeler Point Notch area (less than 16 miles from my land), Stahl Canyon, and around Brown Creek. The enclosed survey sheets in all their detail are part of our comments, including our recommendations, subjective evaluations, and photo descriptions. I may not be able to print and submit the actual photos before the comment deadline but am willing to send them to you later if you will consider them as part of our comments. I would also like to survey more sale units if I am able to (time and weather permitting) later this month and am willing to send them to you if you will consider them. Our survey sheets and photos are evidence of conditions on the ground. Following are some of our findings

from our surveying over three days so far. Usually we would survey all or most of the commercial logging sale units and send in (usually) survey sheets for 80-95% of planned commercial logging sale units with our Scoping or EA or EIS comments. However the expedited, less inclusive process of a Categorical Exclusion prevents us from doing this, as usually we would have a longer timeline and more advance notice as well as more detailed information sooner in the NEPA process. I did not realize how intensive the logging would be until the Open House meeting. Both the Scoping letter and, ~~to~~ to a lesser extent, the later field trip, were deceptive. The Scoping letter lacked any detailed description of what management was planned and implied that logging would be "commercial thinning," not virtual clearcutting and logging to very low basal areas. The field trip showed relatively random sites but only one that was mixed conifer old growth, so I wondered how many more sale units were mixed conifer old growth - we found 7 ~~or 8~~ out of 10 sale units that we field surveyed had significant mixed conifer old growth - most of it high quality for the area. Logging in old growth habitat is a significant issue and impact - especially when the logging planned is down to only 0-60 sq ft of basal area, and in a sale area with very little old growth left -

especially moist mixed conifer old growth. We also found three sale units that apparently had never been logged before - extremely rare for the West End area - no signs of logging within the interior (beyond roadside hazard or ^{the} firewood cutting) of the sale unit. Logging never logged forest and old growth forest is not appropriate under a CE. There is no detailed analysis under a CE disclosing the effects to wildlife, recreation, soils, etc. and logging never logged and old growth forest is controversial both scientifically and with the public. An EA or EIS could disclose scientific controversy and change planning accordingly, preventing irreparable negative effects through the analysis process, but a CE does not offer the opportunity to address significant issues like logging never logged ~~or~~ and/or old growth forest. Further the CE scoping and open house meeting did not disclose that there would be heavy logging in forest never logged before and in old growth forest. Just leaving large trees $\geq 21"$ dbh in old growth ("LOS") forest is insufficient to protect suitable habitat requirements for old growth mixed conifer-associated species such as Management Indicator species: Pileated woodpecker and marten, who both need large snags and relatively unfragmented forest with higher canopy closure. Both species need structural complexity and down logs, including abundant down and elevated logs

for martin winter foraging under snow. Both Pileated woodpecker and Northern goshawk need much higher canopy closure for nesting and foraging than would be left after logging down to 0-60 square feet of basal area per acre. Both species need about 60% canopy closure and ~~about 40%~~ for nesting and about 40% canopy closure for foraging.

Pileated woodpeckers are otherwise subject to predation from large raptors and goshawk otherwise have too much competition from large raptors and owls for prey, yet none of these impacts are avoided with a CE's lack of analysis and short-circuited public process.

Other Management Indicator species - primary cavity excavating woodpeckers - would also be negatively affected including Williamson's Sapsucker and Northern Flicker, who need abundant large trees (most mature trees next in line to become large old trees would be removed by the logging) and Black backed woodpecker needs abundant snags. Beetle killed snags would be removed by logging, removing a primary habitat component needed by woodpeckers, including also Lewis' woodpecker, Hairy woodpecker, and Whiteheaded woodpecker. See our survey sheets for evidence of Pileated woodpecker, Northern Flicker, and Hairy woodpecker, as well as extensive black bear foraging in suitable

Pileated woodpecker habitat and possible marten rootwad burrows and abundant down and elevated logs for marten winter foraging in many of the old growth mixed conifer sale units. In some sale units there were also suitable habitat conditions for Northern goshawk, including higher tree density, large trees and snags, and large Douglas fir mistletoe brooms for nesting.

We are also concerned by the sale units with steep slopes and easily displaced ash soils in mixed conifer sale units around the Notch (near Wheeler Point), Stahl Canyon, and Brown Creek. Heavy logging on these sale units would likely displace significant amounts of ash soil top layers, causing erosion, loss of soil nutrients, loss of water retention, sedimentation of downhill or adjacent creeks such as Brown Creek and Stahl Canyon Creek, and very difficult regeneration after logging especially for Grand fir and Englemann spruce, which need more soil moisture retention. Such heavy logging and erosion is also problematic for sensitive and rare plants, including shade and greater moisture-dependent plants such as mosses, sword ferns, fungal species, Mt. Lady's Slipper, Calypso orchid, etc. Removal of woody biomass will also negatively affect many plant species and small mammals, eliminating or reducing small mammal prey.

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for hawks, owls, bobcats, lynx, and Pacific fisher. And yes, Canada lynx and Pacific fisher exist on the Umatilla National Forest. We've seen two Canada lynx at different times (years) recently within 5 and 12-15 miles of the West End project area south boundary. And yes, there were positive daylight sightings and I do know the difference between lynx and bobcats and teach all our volunteers how to reliably tell them apart. I also had a sighting of what must have been a Pacific fisher on the Heppner District and the Forest Service used to admit that there are Pacific fisher on the Umatilla - look up the Fox Roadless Area. A Black wolf was seen in the Ellis sale this summer and our volunteers found wolf trap signs in the area, so all three of these rare keystone predators could be on the Heppner District and in the West End area, yet there is no consideration of effects to these Threatened (wolf and lynx) and Sensitive (fisher) species of the West End CE sale under the CE. The West End CE logging is highly likely to displace elk out of the West End area, affecting both dispersing Gray wolves and hunter success in the area. Marten are now ranked as Vulnerable in the state of Oregon and could be extirpated from the West End area as a result of the West End CE sale, ^{contributing to} ~~contributing~~ an upward listing trend.

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So we are asking you to scrap the West End CE sale altogether (our preference) or at least prepare an Environmental Impact Statement to fully analyze and disclose the ecological impacts of the sale, find alternatives that would avoid significant impacts, and provide a full 45 day public comment period and opportunity for the public to file objections and negotiate for changes in accordance with the significant impacts posed by planned heavy logging up to virtual clearcutting over up to 3,000 acres in an area already severely compromised by past similar industrial logging.

If you decide to plow ahead with this CE regardless of the significant impacts it poses to wildlife species, soils, carbon sequestration, and recreational values and treaty rights, we ask you to significantly reduce ecological and social impacts by doing the following (which you should do without using a CE):

- * Drop all virtual clearcutting (seed tree, shelterwood, 0-40 sq ft ba & 0-60 sq ft ba/acre) and increase basal area, live tree, snag, & down wood retention to meet wildlife species' habitat needs, including sufficient canopy closure and security cover.
- * Drop all sale units in: mixed conifer LOS/old growth habitat and never logged areas.
- * Drop all logging on steep slopes and adjacent to RHCA's on slopes.
- * Drop all logging where detrimental soil impacts would exceed Forest Plan standards →

p.20 without mitigation such as tillage (subsoiling), which is not always effective.

- * Drop all logging in riparian drainages and around springs, seeps, and fens.
- * Survey for sensitive plants first and buffer sensitive plant populations.
- * Don't do prescribed burning in active or suitable Pileated woodpecker or marten habitat, as it destroys soft snags and down logs they need for foraging and snags used for nesting and denning.
- * Drop all logging of large snags, ^{and} the next largest size class of snags wherever wildlife snag requirements would otherwise not be met. (i.e. no large snag logging and reduce overall snag removal.)
- * Buffer all existing down large wood from logging and burning.
- * Drop any logging in designated wildlife corridors, Dedicated old growth areas, and Replacement Old Growth areas and Pileated woodpecker feeding areas. Drop all logging in any other designated areas not subject to scheduled logging.

For the wild and future generations,
Karen J. Peltz

By the way, exactly how would you avoid violating Forest Plan standards under this CE with up to 3,000 acres of very heavy logging? I don't think you would avoid violating Forest Plan standards for soils, old growth, wildlife connectivity corridors, elk and deer cover, etc. under your current logging plan for the West End CE sale. Please send me a list of forest type and stand structure for each sale unit.