

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 8/10/2026 6:29:30 PM

First name: John

Last name: Farrell

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I believe the Blue Mountains National Forests can and should be actively managed to improve forest health, reduce wildfire risk, and maintain the rural communities and economies that depend on these lands. Active forest management can improve forage and habitat for big game while also providing a dependable supply of forest products that helps sustain Eastern Oregon's remaining mills and skilled workforce. That infrastructure is important because a healthy local forest-products industry provides the capacity needed to carry out restoration work at the scale these forests require. At the same time, management should include measurable protections for watersheds, wildlife habitat, and water quality so that economic and environmental goals reinforce rather than compete with one another. I also support retaining core roadless protections, while allowing targeted restoration and appropriate temporary access where it can benefit forest health without unnecessarily fragmenting important backcountry habitat.

I strongly support making elk security a clear and measurable part of the final forest plans. Public lands should remain places where elk can live, move, and be hunted, rather than having elk concentrated on private property because of road access or other disturbances. Open and heavily traveled roads are a major factor influencing where elk spend their time during hunting season, so simply improving forage is not enough if elk are unable or unwilling to use that habitat. The final plans should therefore address open road density and seasonal access and should carry forward the desired elk-security conditions developed collaboratively by the Blue Mountains Intergovernmental Council. That locally developed work represents cooperation among counties, Tribes, and state and federal agencies and deserves to be reflected in the final plans. The decades of research conducted at the Starkey Experimental Forest provide additional, highly relevant scientific evidence about what elk need, and that best available science should be incorporated into enforceable management direction.

I also support strong protections for the cold, clean water and fish habitat that make the Blue Mountains so important to Eastern Oregon and the broader region. These forests contain critical headwaters for salmon, steelhead, bull trout, and other native fish, so the final plans should provide clear and enforceable protections for riparian areas, stream temperatures, sediment, floodplains, wetlands, and road-related impacts. Restoration should improve these systems rather than unintentionally degrading them. Finally, hunting and fishing should be recognized as important public uses of these forests-not only because hunting is one of the most popular recreational activities on the forests, but also because hunting and fishing provide meaningful food, recreation, and economic benefits to rural communities. Overall, I support a balanced approach that combines active forest management, healthy wildlife populations, clean water, responsible access, and strong public-land protections so that these forests remain productive, resilient, and available to future generations.