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The good news: we don't have to choose between active management, healthy rural economies, clean water and quality wildlife outcomes. The Blue Mountain Forest Plan can deliver all four, and give the Forest Service an opportunity to demonstrate how these multiple use values can work together.

Hunters support increasing the pace and scale of active management in the Blue Mountains. Thinning, prescribed fire, and other restoration work helps reduce wildfire risk, restore resiliency to our forests, stimulate local economies, and create more forage. We are also encouraged that the draft recognizes the importance of continuing to provide wood products to local mills. Eastern Oregon's remaining mills, logging workforce, and forest-products businesses are essential infrastructure for getting that work done. Without viable local markets and processing capacity, accomplishing needed vegetation management becomes more difficult and expensive.

The final plan should provide a predictable foundation for restoration work that sustains rural mill infrastructure while ensuring that treatments are designed to improve forest health, wildlife habitat, and watershed conditions.

All of this active management only pays off for wildlife if elk feel safe enough to use it. Improving forage does little good if too many open roads in the wrong places keep elk on the move. Historically, the Forest Service has managed habitat and roads together, and the final plans should continue that approach.

The science that tells us how to keep elk on public land was produced right here in the Blue Mountains, at the Forest Service's own Starkey Experimental Forest. This plan is a chance to put that knowledge to work for hunters, for landowners, and for productive big game habitat.

The draft does not yet include clear, measurable direction to keep elk on public land. Water tells a similar story - the same forests that hold the elk herds also anchors some the regions most important salmon, trout and steelhead habitat. Here's how to help