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Comments: The USFS's Alternative plan for the Blue Mountains is placing the fragile Oregon ecosystem at risk. I'm writing to urge stronger protections for the Blue Mountains' habitat, water, and forests in the revised management plans. These forests are home to robust elk herds, salmon, steelhead, mule deer, wolverines, and a remarkable diversity of species, and they sit at a critical wildlife corridor connecting the Rockies, Cascades, Great Basin, and Columbia Plateau - a rare opportunity for connectivity across all three forests that the proposed alternatives squander. They're already among the most roaded forests in the country, with nearly 26,000 miles of road in the Blue Mountain Ecoregion, and the Forest Service can't maintain what it has, let alone add more.

These forests also hold the headwaters of rivers that supply drinking water to Walla Walla, Baker City, and La Grande, and mature forests filter and store that water in ways roads and logged hillsides cannot. In a warming, dryer climate, the larger and older trees in the Blue Mountains need protection. Eliminating the 21-inch rule would strip away one of the only protections for the largest, most fire-resistant, carbon-storing trees - trees that can't be replaced on any timeline that matters to us. I respectfully ask that the final plan reject road expansion, keep the 21-inch rule, and prioritize habitat connectivity and watershed protection across all three forests.