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Organization: Columbia County Commissioners

Title:

Comments: To: The Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision Team

We, the commissioners of Columbia County, wish to voice our support for Alternative 2 for the forest revision plan.

Of the 3 options, alternative 2 best fits the needs of our region and its citizens. Whether or not one agrees with climate change we are undoubtedly in an era of unprecedented catastrophic wildfires. The cause of which is certainly multifaceted; that being said, Alternative 1, keeping the current plan in place, would most certainly lead us to more of the same. Alternative 3, which would make both preventative actions such as logging, grazing and other brush clearing actions and suppression actions more difficult and less effective, is an equaling unwise direction to go.

* With nearly 1/3 of our county falling within the Umatilla National Forest, actions taken, or not taken, in the forest have a significant impact on our county and its residents, economically, recreationally and in enumerable quality-of-life ways.

* Although far from what would be considered aggressive, the substantial fuel reduction treatments outlined in Alternative 2 show a committed and impactful step toward a more managed understory. A more robust timber managing policy would also pay dividends. The local economy, forest health and a revenue source to fund non-revenue producing brush management methods are all areas that would benefit from increased timber sales.

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* Although there is currently minimal public land grazing in Columbia County, Alternative 2 seeks to maintain AND expand targeted grazing to manage weeds as well as fire control. As technology in the livestock industry continues to employ and perfect the use of GPS guided collars to control animals, this tool will become increasingly practical and effective. Targeted grazing is now a viable way to use stock as a holistic way to suppress weeds and promote the growth of desirable plants.

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* Expanding the Wilderness acres in the forest would also be detrimental to our county and its citizenry. While Wilderness does serve a purpose, the current footprint is more than ample. Added acres not only make fire prevention and suppression more complicated, but it can also be argued that the underutilization of the plant resources leads to a lack of palatability and ultimately less wildlife. Another issue that is seldom mentioned is the number of potential forest users that are left without an opportunity to enjoy the area. While the fact that the wilderness is only accessible by foot or horseback is undoubtedly the main draw to many, those same limitations leave out many who are challenged; mobility-wise, by age, or physical limitations. For these reasons and others, leaving the Wilderness area at its existing footprint as recommended in alternative 2 is the best option.

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* Preserving and maintaining the current roads in the forest is also good policy. There are ample guidelines in place to ensure that roads are responsibly made and preserved in a manner that has minimal if any negative, erosion type, consequences on the environment. As previously mentioned, existing roads aid in fire suppression activities not only as access but also as fire breaks. Infrastructure is also essential to support law enforcement, search and rescue services, emergency medical response, and other critical activities that occur. Again, alternative 2 best meets these goals.

As the current board members of the Columbia County Commission, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on this revision. Your organization, as well as ours, is tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that our area forests are thriving, resilient, and active in assuring the social, economic, and quality of life components they are so capable of.

For these reasons it is our hope that you will push forward with Alternative 2 in the forest revision plan. It best addresses the fuel reductions, grazing needs, and public access that is needed by our region.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The Board of Columbia County Commissioners

Marty J. Hall Commissioner

Ryan R. Rundell Chairman

Jack G. Miller Commissioner