

MY OPINION FROM BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR

Here we go again!

BY CHRIS BRATT

Let's face it. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has a fixation—an ongoing belief that timber extraction is the “dominant use” of the public forests they manage for us (over two million acres in western Oregon). In spite of the environmental risks and the laws that prohibit ravaging these forests, the BLM has again raised the specter of maximized timber production. They are determined to continue managing these public forests “primarily for timber extraction activities, which include timber harvesting, reforestation and tree release programs.” To be fair, they do manage other resources like wildlife habitat, soil and water quality, and recreational opportunities. But the bulk of their energy, funding, expertise, and actions continues to go into maximizing timber extraction. Over the years, this obsession has led to unsustainable amounts of timber being sold and cut, resulting in the degradation of other forest resources.

In 1937 Congress passed the Oregon and California Lands Act (O&C), the first environmental law to specify “sustained yield management.” Since that time, this federal legislation has guided the BLM's forest management

activities specifying “sustained yield management.” Sadly, the BLM has construed the essential “sustained yield” language—the heart of O&C—to include only timber, leaving out sustainability for the rest of the resources they manage. Don't the spotted owl, salmon, old-growth trees, and unique ecosystems deserve some sustainability rights too? They are as integral to the life of the forest as the trees. I believe the O&C is a true “multiple use” law where logging shares the sustainability requirements with all the other valuable forest resources. Not so, says the BLM, who insist they have the wherewithal, legal mandate, and plenty of trees to cut higher volumes of timber than they have in the recent past.

All of the BLM's management dilemmas and contradictions in terms are about to become more important to our Applegate community. Everyone who cares about our surrounding public forests should be aware that the BLM has drafted new Resource Management Plans (RMPs). These draft RMPs project an increase in timber harvest. An increase in cutting would be accompanied by a decrease in dependent species.

This planned overcutting comes

from trying to satisfy politicians, timber industry folks, county officials, and others who insist that timber sales would generate a lot more money to help Oregon's financially strapped forested counties. While that is true, it omits the other half of the equation: if you want to log sustainably—i.e., if you want to have continual timber production—you cannot finance all the struggling forest counties, satisfy the timber industry's timber needs, and manage for all the other environmental values and resources, especially those protected under state or federal laws. There are simply not enough merchantable trees in these forests. These new RMPs, if approved, will return the BLM to a path of such widespread habitat degradation that many of our public forests and resources may not last.

During the past 20 years, the BLM was committed to managing our forests by using scientifically creditable data from the region-wide Northwest Forest Plan (NFP). The BLM's current RMPs also directed the BLM to manage all the Northwest forestlands jointly with the US Forest Service (USFS) to prevent further fragmentation of these ecosystems. In addition, the Northwest Forest Plan gave the Applegate community (500,000 acres

of BLM, USFS, and private lands) the unique opportunity to work with the agencies in deciding the future health of our diverse local forests through the Applegate Adaptive Management Area (AAMA). The local community was given “extensive public participation” opportunities.

But these opportunities for our community to plan and participate in the future of our local forests are being sacrificed on the altar of more “intensive management.” Now the BLM is reverting to their old ways. Maintaining such things as wildlife habitat, biological diversity, carbon storage, and water quality at more sustainable levels, while cutting a lesser volume of board feet, will be a thing of the past. The two conflicting interpretations of the O&C over the years—multiple use and dominant use—have kept the BLM in a vacillating position. Their wavering actions continually threaten the integrity of our public forest ecosystems and the integrity of the BLM itself.

If you think I'm wavering, please let me know.

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The BLM's RMP is a failure

BY JACK DUGGAN

I really wanted this one to work.

After the spectacular failure of the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM's) last planning effort, the Western Oregon Plan Revisions (“The Whopper”), I had hoped that the people we pay to manage our public lands understood that we need to see a clear, understandable plan—a plan with a realistic view of the current state of our public lands along with a plan to restore them to a healthy, productive state that will serve future generations. Like it says in the Oregon and California Lands Act (O&C), providing “permanent forest production...in conformity with the principle of sustained yield for the purpose of providing a permanent source of timber supply.” The O&C lands are not now in a sustainable state and cannot provide a stable and predictable supply of timber to give us the kind of economic stability they should.

Unfortunately, the BLM's “DRAFT Resource Management Plan (RMP)/ Environmental Impact Statement” for western Oregon fails completely to show us, the citizens who own those lands and are neighbors of those lands, how they intend to create a balanced, forward-looking management plan.

At 1,600 pages, the BLM has obviously put a lot of work into this plan. But for the public reviewers, it's like the BLM dumped a bunch of puzzle pieces on the table, then walked away with the box top showing us what the picture should look like. Full of statistics, charts, maps, tables, indexes, glossaries and appendices, the overwhelming amount of information fails to come together in a way that allows us to see clearly what will happen.

The BLM admits their limits. The document contains numerous disclaimers to “the scope of this analysis” and frankly admits the lack of data on some issues. The data that is presented is supported by citations of many studies on various topics, but it has been my experience that the BLM cherry-picks their studies to support a particular direction. There are many peer-reviewed studies that come to different conclusions than this BLM document, but they are ignored.

The BLM also puts off taking action. They intend to designate numerous recreation areas, but will not determine how those areas will be used until they complete implementation planning in five years. In the meantime they will limit

activities to “existing roads and trails.” But I have attended two recreational workshops hosted by the BLM and they cannot define what they mean by “existing roads and trails.” So this ten-year plan is short-circuited, in recreation and other areas, by future work that will take half the life of the plan.

Two BLM proposals that have generated a great deal of controversy: to return to clear-cutting (“regeneration harvest”), and to reduce streamside setbacks.

Clear-cutting is the most efficient and economical tool for harvest in the short term, but the long-term consequences make it unsuitable for some areas, particularly southern Oregon. Anyone who watched the videos of last year's Douglas Complex fire saw those flames burn with greater speed and intensity through monoculture plantations that resulted from clear-cuts. We live in one of the most biologically diverse regions in the world, and converting the landscape to a monoculture will destroy our ecological balance.

At a time when water is in high demand, it is insane to impact even the smallest feeder stream by allowing increases in water temperature. Reduction of streamside setbacks also impacts wildlife, often causing many species to seek a better environment.

The O&C Act requires that the BLM manage our lands by “protecting watersheds, regulating streamflow, and contributing to the economic stability of local communities and industries, and providing recreational facilities.” Yet the BLM shows, by this proposal alone, that they have failed to take a comprehensive view of its management practices.

The BLM bases nearly every study and analysis on the impacts to cutting timber. It claims: “The terms ‘annual productive capacity,’ ‘annual sustained yield capacity,’ and ‘allowable sale quantity’ are synonymous.” Obviously economics are determining forest management rather than scientific forest management determining the best economic outcomes.

Clear-cutting, warmer streams, and an overall failure to address the non-sustainable conditions of our public lands will not result in “economic stability.” The BLM has worked hard, but failed to present us with a plan that allows us to tell our grandchildren what the landscape will look like when they are our age. The BLM needs to go back to the drawing board.

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More information on the BLM's plan is available at www.blm.gov/or/plans/rmpswesternoregon/.



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