

THE SISKIYOU MOUNTAIN ADVOCATE

IVM Project: Managing for 'resilience' with alternative facts

BY LUKE RUEDIGER

In the era of “alternative facts,” federal land managers like those at the Medford District Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have created a misleading narrative promoting heavy industrial logging as “restoration” and “fuel reduction,” while ignoring, or masking, the environmental impacts. According to this narrative, the solution to every environmental problem is more logging, more roads, and more resource extraction. Yet these same activities are leading to widespread biodiversity loss and contribute significantly to carbon emissions and climate change.

This campaign of misinformation has reached a crescendo with the innocuous sounding Integrated Vegetation Management for Resilient Lands (IVM) Project. Approval of the IVM Project (which could come any day) would authorize up to 20,000 acres of commercial logging and 90 miles of new road construction per decade on Medford District BLM lands. According to the BLM, these authorizations would have “no sunset date” and could be used to log many tens of thousands of acres and build many hundreds of miles of new roads across 800,000 acres of BLM forestland in southwestern Oregon.

To make matters worse, the project specifically targets Late Successional Reserve forests designated to protect old-forest habitat for the northern spotted owl. It also promotes logging in Recreation Management Areas, adjacent to communities, in Riparian Reserves, and other conservation management

areas currently located outside the “timber harvest land base.”

Although cynically identified as a “resiliency” project, the IVM is actually focused on implementing heavy industrial logging with little to no public input, no required public comment, almost no public transparency, and no scientific analysis or review. The project allows logging large, fire-resistant trees up to 36 inches in diameter and in stands more than 120 years old. It would also allow the removal of significant forest canopy, down to as low as 30 percent canopy cover, and the implementation of “group selection logging,” a form of staggered clear-cut logging that creates scattered four-acre “openings” across up to 20 percent of a mature forest habitat.

The staggered “openings” created by this form of logging will look, act, and respond like small clear-cuts. They will fragment forest habitats, damage or remove northern spotted owl habitat, degrade scenic values, reduce fire resilience, increase fuel loading, dry out forest stands, and embed mature forests in thickets of young growth wherever heavy canopy removal occurs. Rather than creating long-term resilience, these treatments will compromise forest values in our region, increase overstory mortality, and reduce the resilience of these landscapes to natural disturbance processes like fire, wind, drought, and bark beetle outbreaks.

Yet, perhaps most troubling is the proposal in the IVM Project to curtail the public involvement process. If the IVM Project is approved, large timber



A forest above the Williams Valley proposed for logging in the Penn Butte Timber Sale, the first timber sale implemented under the provisions of the IVM Project. Photo: Luke Ruediger.

sales could be authorized without specific environmental analysis, site-specific environmental review, adequate comment periods, and meaningful public involvement. Instead, large timber sales would be approved by the BLM through an internal, nontransparent process called a Determination of NEPA Adequacy. The public would be informed only after decisions have been made and timber sales approved. Under this scenario, litigation would become the public’s only form of meaningful involvement, leading to increased gridlock and legal action.

Currently, despite having no approval to do so, BLM is planning two large timber sales—Penn Butte and the Late Mungers—in the mountains above Williams under the provisions of IVM. BLM is busy marking trees and timber sale unit boundaries directly adjacent to the community of Williams but has refused to provide the public with any meaningful information on the projects.

The agency hopes to auction off the Penn Butte Timber Sale in March, yet still has not provided any detailed information on the project.

Late Mungers is proposed for auction in June and even less information is publicly available. What we do know is that eight million board feet would be logged on over 800 acres west of Williams.

The IVM Project signals the end of collaboration on BLM lands and will only increase the current lack of trust between BLM and the public it claims to serve. The IVM attempts to take the public out of public lands. This approach will degrade our forests, damage our local economy and nearby recreation areas, make our communities less fire resilient, emit large volumes of carbon into the atmosphere, and bring the timber wars back to southwestern Oregon.

Does that sound like resilience?

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