



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
REGION 10  
1200 Sixth Avenue  
Seattle, WA 98101

January 9, 2008

Reply to  
Attn Of: ETPA-088

EPA Ref: 91-0079-BLM

Edward W. Shepard, State Director  
USDI Bureau of Land Management  
Western Oregon Plan Revisions  
P.O. Box 2965  
Portland, OR 97208

Dear Mr. Shepard:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Revision of the Resource Management Plans of the Western Oregon Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Districts of Salem, Eugene, Roseburg, Coos Bay, and Medford, and the Klamath Falls Resource Area of the Lakeview District (CEQ No. 20070332). Our review has been conducted in accordance with our responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

The Western Oregon Plan Revision (WOPR) will establish management guidelines for approximately 2.6 million acres of BLM-managed land in Western Oregon. The DEIS considers a "no action" alternative (current management under the Northwest Forest Plan) and three additional action alternatives. The current annual timber harvest level is 268 million board feet and riparian management area (RMA) widths range from 180 feet to 360 feet depending on stream type. Alternative 1 proposes an annual timber harvest level of 456 million board feet and proposes RMA widths of 90 feet to 180 feet depending on stream type. The preferred alternative, Alternative 2, proposes an annual timber harvest level of 727 million board feet, proposes RMA widths of 25 feet to 100 feet depending on stream type, and increases timber harvest levels within RMAs. Alternative 3 sets annual timber harvest at 471 million board feet and employs a riparian strategy similar to Alternative 2.

EPA recognizes the management challenges created by the mixed private/federal ownership of the WOPR landscape, the diverse resource needs, and multiple statutory requirements. The BLM EIS interdisciplinary team is to be commended for their effort in this ambitious and difficult undertaking. We also want to recognize BLM's efforts to engage and inform the public in new and innovative ways and trust this will help inform BLM's selection and development of the proposed action in the final EIS.

EPA has served as a cooperating agency on this project for over two years. In that capacity, EPA has consistently raised concerns about the sufficiency of the aquatic/riparian strategy in Alternatives 2 and 3 in meetings, during WOPR planning criteria and alternatives development, and in writing. EPA's concerns have not been addressed in the DEIS. These concerns are heightened by what EPA believes to be the lack of a sound scientific basis for the aquatic/riparian strategy proposed in Alternatives 2 and 3.

EPA is concerned that Alternatives 2 and 3 would result in substantial, long-term impacts to water quality and exacerbate current exceedances of water quality standards in streams listed as impaired under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act (impaired waters). EPA is also concerned about significant impacts to drinking water and aquatic species that could be corrected by project modification or choosing

another feasible alternative. Direct, indirect and cumulative impacts would affect waters on both BLM and non-BLM lands. Therefore we have assigned this draft EIS a rating of EO-2 (Environmental Objections - Insufficient Information). A copy of the rating system used in conducting our review is enclosed for your reference.

Watersheds covering approximately one million acres of the BLM planning area include streams that do not meet water quality standards (WQS) designed to protect drinking water, aquatic life, and other beneficial uses. Over 900 stream miles on BLM lands in the planning area are listed as impaired due to management-related temperature, sediment, and other pollutant loadings. Over one million Oregonians receive their drinking water from source water originating in watersheds on BLM lands in western Oregon. Salmon and trout species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and numerous at-risk fish stocks are dependent on cold water refugia on BLM lands within a fragmented western Oregon landscape where degraded conditions exist on non-BLM lands. To ensure that management of BLM lands protects and restores water quality, drinking water, and aquatic life, EPA recommends inclusion of a demonstrated, conservative aquatic protection strategy in the proposed action alternative in the final EIS.

On streams listed as impaired for failing to meet WQS, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and EPA are required to develop total maximum daily loads (TMDLs) that address water quality impairments. The Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) under the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) has been a cornerstone of the federal land contribution to water quality improvement for BLM lands and for developing and implementing TMDLs. Monitoring and assessment efforts have demonstrated the success of the ACS in improving watershed health on federal lands. EPA considers these improvements to be an important achievement and we are deeply concerned that alternatives 2 and 3 would reverse positive trends achieved under the ACS. Extensive research and assessment efforts support continued application of the ACS as necessary to protect riparian functions critical to maintenance and restoration of water quality and beneficial uses.

For example, there are 710 stream miles in the WOPR planning area that do not meet the State WQS for temperature. The RMAs currently in place under the ACS will provide the system potential shade as well as the full complement of large wood inputs and sediment filtering necessary for improved stream conditions and reduced stream temperatures. In addition to the broad body of science related to water quality and riparian function (please see our enclosed detailed comments), modeling conducted by EPA indicates that application of WOPR Alternatives 2 and 3 would increase stream temperatures substantially more than predicted in the DEIS.

Additional water quality concerns identified in our review include impacts to sediment loading and peak flow from increased harvest levels and decreased riparian protection. Our analysis, also detailed in the enclosure, indicates that the modeling approach taken in the DEIS likely underestimates the contribution of sediment from the road network, land management activities, and debris flow events. It appears that the DEIS underestimates the number of watersheds susceptible to peak flow increases and related water quality impacts, due to the nature of data and assumptions that were used in the peak flow analysis.

Finally, we are concerned that the action alternatives in the DEIS do not afford additional protection for BLM lands in the WOPR planning area that provide drinking water to over one million Oregonians through 113 community water systems. Given the importance of BLM lands to drinking water in Oregon, the potential direct water quality impacts under the action alternatives, and the cumulative effects to water quality from harvest on BLM and adjacent private lands, EPA believes that a more protective approach should be pursued in source water areas on BLM lands.

In order to address the issues we have identified in our review, we recommend that the final EIS consider the adoption of a more conservative approach to RMAs as follows:

- In those watersheds currently meeting water quality standards, and which are not designated for fish recovery or public water supply, EPA recommends adoption of RMAs as described in the no action alternative or as described in Alternative 1.
- In watersheds with impaired waters, and watersheds designated for fish recovery or public water supply, we recommend adoption of RMAs as described in the no action alternative.
- Where Key Watersheds have been identified, EPA recommends that they be maintained, and managed consistent with direction obtained from watershed analysis and source water protection plans.
- We also recommend that the final EIS consider the adoption of a requirement for continued watershed analysis and a monitoring and adaptive management program.

Our detailed comments and recommendations are enclosed. EPA appreciates the opportunity to engage with BLM as a cooperating agency and recognizes the challenges posed by adhering to the rigorous schedule assigned to this EIS. EPA remains committed to working with BLM to address these issues. If you have any questions regarding EPA's comments, please contact me at 206-553-1272, or Christine Reichgott, Manager, NEPA Review Unit at (206) 553-1601.

Sincerely,

/s/

Michelle Pirzadeh, Director  
Office of Ecosystems, Tribal and Public Affairs

cc: ODEQ, Neil Mulane  
NOAA, Mike Tehan  
USFWS, Kemper McMaster  
EPA, Dave Powers

Enclosures: 1) EPA Region 10 Detailed Comments  
2) EPA Rating System for Draft EISs