

Hells Bells - September 2026



Photo taken from a Forest Service road within the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest
by GHCC's 2026 "Wild Blues AiR" Artist-in-Residence TaraJ Graves.

Blue Mountains Forest Plan - Final Days to Comment!

Comments due this Wednesday, September 30th. This Plan is another attempt to strip away important standards and protections for the management of nearly 5 million acres of the Wallowa-Whitman, Umatilla, and Malheur National Forests, and it's happening without the proper analysis and amount of public input an important decision like this deserves. That's why your comment matters right now, while the record is still open. [Join us in speaking up for Eastside forests today!](#)

Big Picture: What issues and discussions are on the table?

This draft forest management plan seeks to answer some big questions about what is best for Northeast Oregon and Southeast Washington's forests. Unfortunately, the U.S. Forest Service is answering many of them in ways that will harm fish, wildlife, and the landscapes the public cares about deeply. A few of those questions include:

Should we have rules anymore?

Enforceable standards, or rules (i.e. something that the Forest Service must do) are a very important part of the current forest management plan. Standards create clear lines that cannot be crossed unless the Forest Service can demonstrate a specific need. The current forest plan has a variety of standards protecting old growth trees and sensitive habitat for species like elk and salmon, and those benefits ripple out to other fish and wildlife (and people!). The new draft plan largely does away with enforceable standards, instead asking the public to trust that the Forest Service will choose management strategies that promote ecological integrity without being required to do so. A century of cozy relations with the timber and grazing industries and varying directives from one president to the next demonstrate otherwise.

Should we start unregulated logging of old growth again?

The Forest Service's current preferred option would allow commercial logging of any tree, regardless of age, size, or species. This is a huge departure from the protections that have been in place for the last 30 years, which were put in place when it became apparent that the agency could not seem to stop logging the few large trees that were left. Currently, just 3% of the trees in the region's forests are considered large or mature, yet these few remaining giants account for 42% of the above-ground carbon storage and are some of the most fire-resistant trees on the landscape. [Read more about old and mature trees in the proposed plan here.](#)

Will any of these places be considered too special to be logged, roaded, or otherwise manipulated?

The Forest Service's current preferred option intends to remove protections from over 722,000 acres of Inventoried Roadless Areas (when the Trump Administration follows through on its promise to repeal the Roadless Rule early next year). This will substantially increase logging, grazing, excessive roadbuilding, and mining in sensitive habitats. These plans also significantly underestimate the unprotected Wilderness-quality lands that exist in this region. The Forest Service recommends 0 acres in its preferred alternative for consideration for future Wilderness protections, which is wildly different from the last round of forest planning in 2018, when the agency's analysis found over 500,000 acres of Wilderness-quality lands.

What are the on-the-ground impacts of the proposed changes?

There's so much nuance in this question, and nobody has a crystal ball, but pushing for all of the industry-related (timber, mining, grazing, etc.) goals while rolling back countless protections and critically defunding/de-staffing the Forest Service is a recipe for disaster. With the exception of private companies and individuals that stand to benefit financially from extracting profit from our public lands, this draft plan is not setting anyone up for success.

Does it need to be like this?

Great question - no! This is the Forest Service's third attempt to complete this planning process, and we all had a pretty good idea of what the public's many shades of concern would be before this started. But the national direction is to deregulate everything and rush through things as fast as possible, which is also not setting this process up for success.

[We've been writing a series of blogs that can be found here](#) that dig into specific issues in the proposed Blue Mountains Forest Plan. The latest, [Oregon's Climate Plan vs the Blue Mountains Forest Plan](#), puts the draft plan side by side with Oregon's Seventh Climate Assessment, the state's own climate science report, and looks at where the two part ways on logging, roadless areas, drought, and fire.

The Forest Service is accepting comments through September 30th, and they're required to review and respond to substantive public comments. Whether you have one minute or ten, we have multiple commenting options for you, including a guide to help you craft a meaningful comment letting the Forest Service know that you care about the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests.

Submit Your Comment



Fall Gala and Community Dinner

Once your comment is in, let's gather! Come join us knowing that we've done our part to engage in shaping the future of the Blues, and spend an evening with the community that makes this work possible.

Join us this Saturday, October 3rd at 5 pm for our Fall Gala and Community Dinner at the OLV Catholic Church Parish Hall (1002 L Avenue, La Grande). Our special guest is dear friend and board member Marina Richie, who will read from her new book, [*Feathered Forest: Aloft with Birds in Ancient Trees*](#), as part of her Pacific Northwest book tour.

We'll also have a silent auction of local goods from our amazing business supporters, plus a raffle for a gorgeous handmade quilt (73" x 92") made specially for the event by the La Grande Quilting Club. Raffle tickets are \$10, available in advance, and you don't need to be present to win. All proceeds support our work to protect a thriving Blue Mountains Ecoregion.

[Purchase Gala Tickets](#)

[Purchase Quilt Raffle Tickets](#)

Other News We're following...

[Beavers are having a moment](#)

Once treated as a nuisance, beavers were only legally recognized as wildlife in Oregon in 2024. Research linking beaver ponds to much higher coho salmon survival is now driving restoration from the Warm Springs Reservation to Portland wetlands, as well as in Colorado and Great Britain.

[Walla Walla City Council opposes roadless rule rollback over Mill Creek Watershed risks](#)

Walla Walla's city council voted 7-0 to oppose rescinding the 2001 Roadless Rule, warning that logging and road building could threaten the Mill Creek Watershed in the Umatilla National Forest, which supplies drinking water to more than 35,000 residents. The city argues that federal reviews failed to account for erosion, wildfire risk, and higher water treatment costs downstream.

[WRITERS ON THE RANGE: Oregon forests are test case for stripping protections](#)

Defenders of Wildlife's Keats Conley argues that the draft Blue Mountains Forest Plan is the first in the nation written on the assumption that roadless protections will disappear. She says it offers a bleak preview: tripled logging, old growth opened to cutting, and weaker safeguards for elk security and salmon streams.

[Trump officials move to dismantle key protection for US endangered species](#)

A September 14 memo from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service director Brian Nesvik reinterprets what it means to "take" a listed species, so that harming or killing one would be illegal only if that was the specific intent. Critics say the change effectively exempts logging, mining and industrial development even when those activities foreseeably kill or injure wildlife, putting more than 1,600 protected species at risk.

[Guest commentary: Blue Mountains National Forest Plan proposal may be pie in the sky.](#)

Retired OSU forestry professor K. Norman Johnson cautions that the Forest Service's projection of tripled timber harvests in the Blue Mountains is a computer-model estimate, not a commitment. He notes it doesn't account for elk habitat, riparian protections, agency capacity or likely court fights. He argues that a durable plan must protect the region's remaining large, old ponderosa pines.

[Tons of toppled trees keep volunteer trail crews busy in Northeastern Oregon](#)

The Wallowa Mountains Hells Canyon Trails Association has cleared a record 2,300-plus downed trees this year across the Eagle Cap Wilderness and Hells Canyon, mostly with crosscut saws. Rain-loosened soil, a December windstorm, and aging burn scars all added to the load. A \$666,000 fundraising haul will seed a permanent endowment for future trail work.

Let's Protect the Greater Hells Canyon Region Together



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