



# United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
Grants Pass Field Office  
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Grants Pass, Oregon 97526  
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Dear Interested Party,

The Grants Pass Field Office is in the initial stages of developing the Pickett West Forest Management Project on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administered lands. The planning area is located within the Hellgate-Rogue River, Deer Creek, and Lower Applegate watersheds.

The purpose of this letter is to continue the external scoping process. The BLM is requesting comments from interested members of the public. Your comments may influence the development and subsequent implementation of the project. A team of BLM resource specialists uses public comments and issues generated internally during the interdisciplinary team process to analyze the potential effects of the project in an Environmental Assessment (EA). The EA will document potential effects of the Pickett West Forest Management Project within policies set forth in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and will provide the decision maker with the information needed to determine whether to prepare a Finding of No Significant Impact or an Environmental Impact Statement.

### External and Internally Generated Issues

During the month of June, approximately 3800 postcards were sent to neighbors within the planning area (see map) and other interested stakeholders. The postcards invited recipients to contact the BLM for continued information. Approximately 135 people responded via email or by telephone. Beyond general interests in BLM activities, respondents noted issues around insect mortality, neighborhood impacts from increased worker presence, road use, wildfire risk, impacts to wildlife and water quality from timber harvest.

The team of resource specialists has internally identified issues within the planning area. Internally generated issues include but are not limited to: existing stand conditions, insect mortality, fire prone forests, and the northern spotted owl (NSO) and its habitat. Additionally, BLM employees will be conducting field work in the planning area which may include but is not limited to: NSO surveys, stream surveys, and forest inventories

### Need for the Project

The Pickett West planning area totals just over 200,000 acres, of which approximately half is managed by the BLM. These forests are made up primarily of the Douglas-fir - Dry Potential Vegetation Types that support diverse stand compositions of conifers such as ponderosa pine,

sugar pine, incense cedar, Douglas-fir, as well as hardwoods such as black oak and Pacific madrone. Before fire suppression and intensive management practices of the twentieth century, much of this area was characterized by high frequency, low severity fires that would have reduced fuel loading and maintained a mosaic of open stand conditions which is different from what is seen today. Under such an active disturbance regime, stands at lower elevations would have been dominated by drought-tolerant pines and oaks, as well as Douglas-fir that have developed fire resistant features. After missing several fire return cycles, the likelihood of uncharacteristic fire behavior and high severity fire has increased due to the buildup of fuels. A group of scientists<sup>1</sup> categorized the forest restoration needs across Oregon and Washington and found that not only does southwest Oregon demonstrate the highest need for active forest restoration in the region, but the three watersheds in the planning area are among those most in need of active management to promote forest resiliency.

While there has been a noticeable spike in Douglas-fir mortality from 2015-2016 in the Rogue Basin due to flathead borer activity, aerial insect and disease surveys from 2005-2015 also show that a disproportionate amount of tree mortality is occurring in pine trees in the Pickett West planning area. This is an undesirable shift as ponderosa pine dominated forests have been described as the rarest type of older forests in the region and should be the highest priority for fuels reduction and restoration<sup>1</sup>.

#### Purpose for the Project

Stands proposed for treatment exhibit a range of conditions due to the variety of past management activities or lack of disturbance. Without active management, these stands are on a trajectory that may result in reduced species diversity, diminished structural complexity, and an increased risk for high severity fire.

#### Project Objectives

This project will conform to the management direction in the 1994 Resource Management Plan/1995 Record of Decision. Project activities are being considered in Late Successional Reserves, Matrix, and Riparian Reserve Land Use Allocations (LUA). Late Successional Reserve lands include Adaptive Management Reserves and Matrix lands include Adaptive Management Areas. These LUAs are defined in the 1994 RMP/1995 ROD.

Potential prescriptions to address the need for the project and to meet the objectives of the LUA, (described below), include density management, restoration thinning, regeneration harvest, and fuels maintenance. Harvest operations needed to accomplish the project objectives would include tractor, cable and helicopter operations. Existing roads would be utilized where possible and new road construction may be proposed to access harvest units. The objectives of the project may differ depending on which LUA activities occur within.

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<sup>1</sup> For a list of references used in this document visit the project website located at: [tinyurl.com/BLMePlanning-PickettWest](http://tinyurl.com/BLMePlanning-PickettWest).

Within the Matrix LUA, project objectives include but are not limited to:

- The production of a sustainable supply of timber and other forest commodities to provide jobs and contribute to economic sustainability in the Matrix LUA (RMP, p. 38);
- Contributing to local, state, national and international economies through sustainable use of BLM-managed lands and resources as well as the use of innovative contracting and other implementation strategies (RMP, p. 80);
- Preserve or retain the existing character of landscapes on BLM-administered lands allocated for VRM Class I and II management (RMP, p. 240). Class I is the congressionally-designated Rogue River Wild and Scenic River Corridor; Class II is “the seen area” from the Rogue National Wild and Scenic River (wild section) (RMP, p.69).

Within the Late Successional Reserve LUA, objectives include:

- The protection and enhancement of conditions of late-successional and old growth forest ecosystems which serve as habitat for late-successional and old growth forest related species including northern spotted owl (RMP, p. 32).

Within the Adaptive Management Reserves and the Adaptive Management Areas, objectives include:

- Development and testing of new management approaches to integrate and achieve ecological and economic health and other social objectives. Specific emphasis for the Applegate Adaptive Management Area includes “development and testing of forest management practices including partial cutting, prescribed burning, and low impact approaches to forest harvest that provide for a broad range of forest values, including late-successional forest and high quality riparian habitat” (RMP, p. 36);

Objectives common to all LUAs include:

- Improve the health of the forest and associated habitats, to reduce tree mortality, restore the vigor, resiliency and stability of forest stands that are necessary to meet LUA objectives (RMP, p. 62);
- Manage timber stands to reduce the risk of stand loss from wildfires, animals, insects and diseases (RMP, p. 72);
- Manage and maintain road systems that reduce hazards to public health and safety, fire risks, and vandalism to public and private property (RMP, p. 88) in an environmentally sound manner (RMP, p. 84);
- Minimize negative effects to Threatened and Endangered species within the planning area; endeavor to contribute to the recovery of federally listed and proposed plant and animal species and their habitat (RMP, p.52).

#### Public Involvement Opportunity

As the Manager for the Grants Pass Field Office, I am seeking your input to help identify any issues or concerns specific to this project. Please join us for a public meeting on November 19, 2016 at the Grants Pass Interagency Office, (address below). The meeting will be an open house from 3:00 P.M. to 7:00 P.M. This will provide an opportunity to learn more about the project and speak with resource specialists. For more information about the meeting, please visit the website

below or call project contact Don Ferguson at (541) 471-6520 or email at [BLM\\_OR\\_PWest@blm.gov](mailto:BLM_OR_PWest@blm.gov).

More information about this project including the draft purpose and need, draft proposed action and a project area map with potential treatment units, may be found on the BLM's ePlanning website at [tinyurl.com/BLMePlanning-PickettWest](http://tinyurl.com/BLMePlanning-PickettWest). Please submit your written comments to the Grants Pass Interagency Office, 2164 NE Spalding Avenue, Grants Pass, OR 97526 before November 30, 2016 by close of business. Office hours are Monday through Friday, 8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M., closed on holidays. When submitting comments please be as specific as possible about the places, issues, concerns and opportunities that interest you. Those who provide comments or indicate an interest during this scoping period will be notified when the EA for this project is ready for public comment.

Comments submitted will become part of the public record for this project. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your personal information from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act you must state this prominently at the beginning of your written comment. Such requests will be honored by the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or businesses and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

We appreciate your consideration. Should you have any questions or need additional information please contact Don Ferguson, (contact information above).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Allen Bollschweiler". The signature is stylized with a large initial "A" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Allen Bollschweiler,  
Grants Pass Field Manager