

harvested annually using clearcut harvest methods. This method of management is expected to be fully compatible with the multiple use management goals for those lands. The lands on which less-than-full-yield timber management occurs reflect modifications for resources such as riparian habitat, visual corridors, and uneven-aged management or even-aged management in the General Forest Management Area to produce more ponderosa pine volume in later decades. Under Alternative I, growth on commercial forest lands will be increased from an average of 21 cubic feet per acre per year to 39 cubic feet per acre per year by the year 2039.

Over the past decade, there have been serious insect epidemics and several forest fires on the Malheur National Forest. In view of these events, and more, there are many people who suspect that the timber inventory for the Forest has been significantly reduced, thereby casting doubt on the ASQ calculation. I am very concerned that the timber inventory may not accurately reflect the current conditions. The Forest shares this concern and has initiated a new vegetation inventory (including timber). The vegetation mapping phase will be complete in 1991 and managed stand survey data is expected to be available in 1992. This new data will be compared with the inventory used in the Forest Plan and if significant differences are apparent, adjustments in the projected ASQ will be made and a plan amendment issued.

The entire timber inventory will be completed around 1995 or 1996. At that time breakage and defect data will be available. If breakage and defect data, along with the entire timber inventory, reflects significant differences from the data used in developing this Plan, adjustments will be made in the ASQ and the Plan amended.

After reviewing the analyses, I selected a revised land allocation for Alternative I that will provide an additional 2 MMBF annually on the southern half of the forest, particularly in the Malheur and Silvies drainages. This was accomplished by increasing the amount of area to be managed for timber emphasis by reducing satisfactory cover standards on the southern half of the Forest. My intent was to ensure that an adequate, stable timber supply can be realized. This subject is discussed in more detail under the issue big-game habitat.

The decision I have made has not been easy, but I feel confident that I have weighed the trade-offs and selected an alternative which not only provides for an adequate supply of timber, but increases the emphasis on ponderosa pine while protecting other multiple resource uses; however, I am also aware of a rapidly changing insect and disease situation and fully expect the Forest Supervisor to analyze and treat the forest accordingly to promote a healthy forest and range ecosystem. This may require an amendment to the plan in the near future.

ISSUE AREA : Road Management

- How can road management be used to make timber harvest, big-game habitat needs, and recreation opportunities more compatible?

Currently the Malheur National Forest, in conjunction with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, has four Cooperative Travel Management Areas. These seasonal road closures are designed to protect wildlife habitat, minimize harassment of wildlife, maintain adequate buck and bull escapement, and promote nonmotorized hunting. These management areas are under the "green dot system" during the hunting seasons, with enforcement through the State Police and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Total National Forest land affected by these seasonal closures is approximately 172,000 acres.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the public have expressed concerns about the lack of a specific road and access management policy for the Forest as a whole and for some resources, in particular. General concerns include a belief that road densities are too high, that local roads should be closed and put back into resource production immediately following timber harvest, and that in many cases road construction and maintenance standards were too high.

The greatest concern is the road management policy in relation to big-game habitat and hunting. Specific desires expressed included permanently or seasonally closing roads to enhance big-game summer and winter range. Included in this was increasing big-game habitat effectiveness, providing escapement areas, and providing for a nonmotorized hunting experience.

Access management planning will strive for 1.0 miles of road per square mile area (mi/mi^2) on winter range and 1.5 mi/mi^2 on summer range unless these densities do not allow activities that maintain a healthy and productive Forest as envisioned in the desired future condition, or interfere with access to private land. Open road densities will be no greater than 2.2 mi/mi^2 in winter range (Management Area 4a), 1.5 mi/mi^2 in wildlife emphasis areas (Management Areas 20a, 20b & 21) and 3.2 mi/mi^2 in summer range (all other Management Areas) by the end of the first decade. These densities will be monitored on a watershed basis.

Road density concerns will be addressed through the access management plan which will establish road management objectives for each road on the Forest. The existing road system will be reviewed to identify roads to be closed or obliterated because they no longer contribute to integrated land management objectives. The status of all roads will be determined by integrated land management analysis, incorporating objectives such as big-game habitat needs (including security needs), high quality recreation, timber harvest, and firewood cutting. This will be an open process with public involvement, meeting the full intent of NEPA.

Currently, there are an estimated 8,570 miles of Forest Service roads on the Forest. Under this Forest Plan 618 miles of new road will be constructed by timber purchasers during the Plan period (1990-1999). This represents a 250-mile decrease from Alternative F (the preferred alternative in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement). In addition, road reconstruction by timber purchasers will approximate 1,320 miles during the first decade. By 1999, roads on the Forest will approximate 9,188 miles. Approximately 30% of the 9,188 miles of road (or roughly 2,688 miles) will be closed to vehicle traffic or obliterated and removed from the transportation system. This will result in 6,500 miles of open Forest Service roads at the end of the decade.

Forest goals, objectives, and standards have been strengthened and expanded in the Forest Plan to emphasize that roads will be planned, designed, constructed and maintained to the minimum level necessary to meet the needs of all resources. FOREST PLAN, CHAPTER IV provides direction on how these objectives will be accomplished and how the transportation system will be managed.

OTHER DECISION FACTORS

The following issues also factored into my decision. I encourage readers to also review Chapter V of the FEIS. It provides detailed answers to many questions posed by the reviewers of the draft documents on a variety of Forest management topics.