To - Regional Forester Pena, Chief Tidwell, Secretary Vilsack and Mr. Bonnie

I would like to first express my great disappointment in the attached letter from your forest supervisors on the Wallowa Whitman, Malheur and Umatilla National Forest (WWNF, MNF, and UNF). I have taken the time to export it to a PDF format as well, as it was sent to me in a DOC only format and not everyone can access DOC formats.

The document that we currently have to comment on is unclear as to it's intentions, and is not written in any "Plain Writing" manner that would will allow the public to assess what the document will do, per USDA policy http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=PLAIN_WRITING .

I, along with 50 other Eastern Oregon residents attended a meeting in Baker City Oregon on March the 1st where Mr. John Laurence forest supervisor for the WWNF expressly told our group, Forest Access For All, that the upcoming meetings at that time, March 17th - April 3rd on the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision (BMFPR) would be "informational meetings to get the public informed on the BMFPR, and that official comment meetings would be scheduled so the public would have an opportunity to verbally comment."

My level of disappointment comes most from this fact, the answer did not come from hearsay from another, or from my "misunderstanding" of Mr. Laurence's response to a question asked by someone else, as Mr. Laurence was directly addressing a question I asked him in the meeting, and he was standing directly in front of me, addressing my question in front of the rest of the group. My question was, if you are releasing the BMFPR on March 14th, and holding "public comment meetings" starting March 17th in John Day, how is it that the public is supposed to read, comprehend and formulate substantive comments on a 1,400 page document in less than three days? This was all in the light that a great deal of people were having to wait on even receiving their copies of the BMFPR and many didn't receive those copies until after the meetings were held because of the USFS's in ability to have the documents available for the public to start reviewing.

I want to be frank with you Gentleman, your staff on these three forest are doing a horrible job with the roll out of this plan, and the product they have produced in the plan.

When a forest supervisor states in a public meeting "additional public comment meetings WILL BE HELD" stressing the "will be held" the public expects additional meetings "will be held." When staff of the USFS intentionally and vocally harasses members of the public off the floor of a public informational meeting, it creates the context that meetings are not "open" but simply a sham process to "check the box" and move on with making a decision because federal employees hollering "move it along" during a public meetings does not allow for an "open and free comment" process, not in any country, and especially not in the USA.

These official public comment meetings by your staff are needed, because of the demographics of the area. In the response your staff notes the various ways people can "comment" on the plan revision, all relying heavily on some means of written correspondence, which is a severally limiting factor to the people of Eastern Oregon.

Communication methods in Eastern Oregon are based around predominantly verbal interaction in our cultural norms & social structure and while written and electronic means are tools that we are adopting it is not the primary way we communicate with each other or express our concerns, it is through verbal, face to face interaction.

You're staffs unwillingness to allow the public meetings to take place, that were guaranteed on March 1st is very troubling and speaks directly to why people in Eastern Oregon do not trust your agency and do not interact with your leadership anymore, there is simply no trust that anything that is said by anyone in these three forest can be taken for the truth and at their word, and we strongly hold that a man or woman are only as good as their word, and your agencies word holds less and less clout on a daily basis in our region.

Secondly, I would like to ask what the assessment process is that triggers the decision for a 30, 60, or 90 day extension of a comment period and the need for public comment hearings. In the attached letter from Ms. Harris, on behalf of the three forest supervisors, the following reason is given for no need to allow for public comment meeting -

1. **When county governments and interest groups, including yours, originally requested an extension of the comment period, the Regional Forester considered a 30, 60, or 90 day extension. Based on a number of factors, including the complexity of the plan revision effort, he settled on 60 days as the appropriate extension. We support that decision and would recommend that he continue with the plan to end the comment period on August 15, 2014.**

Since the original extension by Mr. Connaughton (now retired) was a 60 day extension and there was obviously a number of factors in making that decision, I would like to know what drove that extension and also, what the extension has to do with the additional "public comment meetings" Mr. Laurence spoke of on March 1st, 2014.

In closing I would ask this.

How much more "complexity" do you need to have as an agency to trigger true public comment sessions?
The BMFPR will affect a population base of people residing in a geographic area larger than the size of state of Virginia, with a population of roughly 102,000 people. These people are heavily dependent on open access to these resources as open access is what was kept these communities sustainable throughout generations. The people of Eastern Oregon live and work in a very rural setting with is directly impacted by federal actions as the majority of the resources they need to sustain themselves come from the public lands the USFS administers to. Eastern Oregonians spoke very clearly in 2012 that a closed forest system is not the desired condition of the local residents, and that any plan would limit access to The Blue Mountains was not acceptable, however the BMFPR directly puts into place the foundation for a closed forest system through a "designated route" management policy that allows your staff the ability to pick and choose where the public may access the landscape, simply put, you will be criminalizing our basic existence on the landscape for doing nothing more than existing.

I understand your supervisor's position in the local community, and the lack of desire to hold these public hearings. They are contentious, passionate and at times can be confrontational, but in all honesty, in looking at the BMFPR it's obvious that someone needs to hear again what the public has to say about access, as the message is not getting through to the writers of this document, which is, we want our access left alone and to remain in place as it has been for the last 150 years, free and unrestricted.

I am formally requesting of you gentlemen the public meetings we were assured would happen on March 1st so that the people of Eastern Oregon can fully comment on the BMFPR and your staff can make the needed corrections to the document and not simply be given the opportunity to be "educated" on a plan that even your own staff could not answer questions about in the March 17th through April 10th set of meetings.

John George
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