

Resource Management Plans for Western Oregon

Bureau of Land Management

Purpose and Need Statement

Includes: Background, Timeline and NEPA Planning Steps, and the full text of the Purpose and Need Statement.

The proposed action is to revise the current resource management plans for the Coos Bay District, Eugene District, Medford District, Roseburg District, Salem District, and the Klamath Falls Resource Area of the Lakeview District (1995 RMPs) with land use allocations and management direction that best meet the purpose and need. This plan revision process takes place against the backdrop of past planning efforts.



Background of the Purpose and Need Statement

The Purpose and Need statement (P&N) describes why the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is revising the Resource Management Plans (RMP) in western Oregon and what outcomes the BLM intends the RMPs to achieve. The P&N defines the scope or range of alternatives that will be analyzed in the planning process.

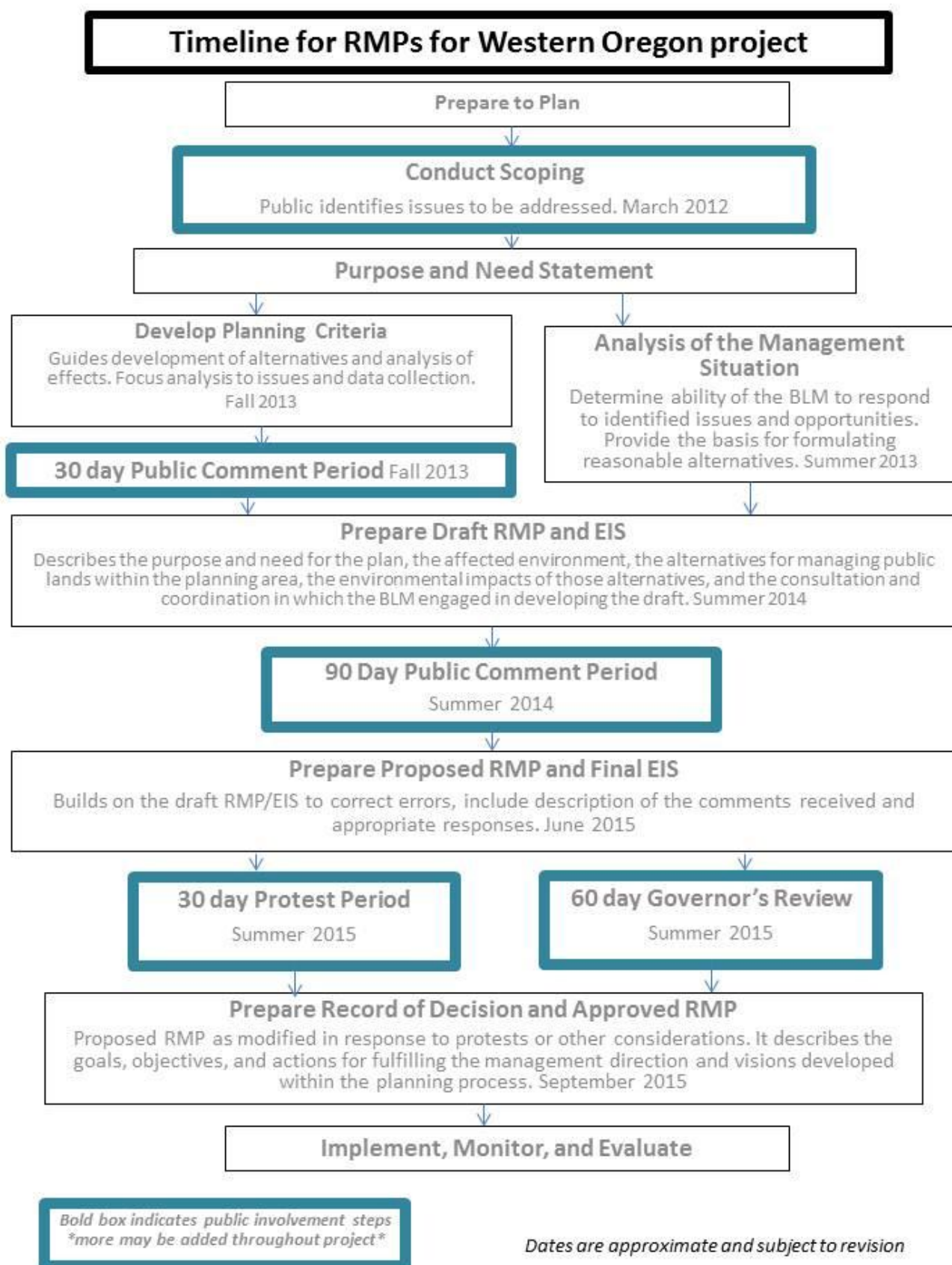
The purposes, also known as outcomes, described in the P&N are based on the BLM's almost two decades of experience with implementing the Northwest Forest Plan, plus new scientific information and advice from Cooperating Agencies and other federal agencies.

Several of these outcomes are necessary for the BLM to be able to deliver a predictable supply of timber from BLM-administered lands on a sustained yield basis as required by the Oregon and California Railroad and Coos Bay Wagon Road Grant Lands Act (O&C Act). Harvesting timber on a sustained yield basis ensures that the BLM will continue to be able to provide, over the long-term, a sustained volume of timber to give certainty to the communities in western Oregon.

The P&N is a working document that may evolve during the planning process. We are sharing this P&N at this time for information purposes; however, it is not part of a formal public comment period. The P&N will be included in documents with formal public comment periods such as the Planning Criteria in summer 2013 and in the Draft EIS in summer 2014. The P&N will guide the development of alternatives throughout the planning process.

About the RMPs for Western Oregon project: The BLM is revising the current resource management plans for the Coos Bay District, Eugene District, Medford District, Roseburg District, Salem District, and the Klamath Falls Resource Area of the Lakeview District because:

- There has been a substantial, long-term departure from the timber outcomes predicted under the 1995 RMPs; and
- There is new scientific information and policies related to the northern spotted owl, including a revised Recovery Plan and a new designation of critical habitat.



Purpose and Need Statement for the RMPs for Western Oregon

Introduction

The proposed action is to revise the current resource management plans for the Coos Bay District, Eugene District, Medford District, Roseburg District, Salem District, and the Klamath Falls Resource Area of the Lakeview District (1995 RMPs) with land use allocations and management direction that best meet the purpose and need.

This plan revision process takes place against the backdrop of past planning efforts. These previous planning efforts and their supporting analyses, including the 1994 Northwest Forest Plan, the 1995 RMPs (the plans currently in effect), and the 2008 RMPs (which are no longer in effect), together with the results of the scoping process for this planning effort help to inform the BLM's discretion in determining the purpose and need for this action and to identify the scope of alternatives and impacts that need to be explored in this planning effort.

Need for the Action

The BLM conducted plan evaluations in accordance with its planning regulations, which require that RMPs "shall be revised as necessary based on monitoring and evaluation findings, new data, new or revised policy and changes in circumstances affecting the entire plan or major portions of the plan," 43 CFR 1610.5-6. These evaluations concluded that "[a] plan revision is needed to address the changed circumstances and new information that has led to a substantial, long-term departure from the timber management outcomes predicted under the 1995 RMPs." (BLM 2012, p. 12). These evaluations also concluded that the management direction for most of the other resource management programs needs to be modified or updated because of changed circumstances and new information. These evaluations concluded that changes are particularly indicated for the fisheries, aquatics, recreation, off-highway vehicle, and fire and fuels programs.

Moreover, the BLM needs to revise existing plans to replace the 1995 RMPs' land use allocations and management direction because of new scientific information and policies related to the northern spotted owl. Since the 1995 RMPs were approved, there have been analyses on the effects of land management on northern spotted owl habitat, demographic studies, and analyses of the effects of barred owls on spotted owls. In addition, since that time, new policies for northern spotted owls have been put in place, including a revised Recovery Plan and a new designation of critical habitat.

Purpose of the Action

The purpose of this proposed action is to make land use plan decisions to guide the management of BLM-administered lands as described below.

Several of the purposes of the action are necessary for the BLM to be able to deliver a predictable supply of timber from the BLM-administered lands, based on the BLM's almost two decades of experience implementing the Northwest Forest Plan, new scientific information, and the advice of other federal agencies, as discussed below. Harvesting timber on a sustained yield basis for the O&C Act purposes is required under the O&C Act. Harvesting timber on a sustained yield basis ensures that the BLM will achieve the purposes of the O&C Act, which include continuing to be able to provide, over the long-term, a sustained volume of timber within the management direction in the RMP. Declining populations of species now listed under the Endangered Species Act have caused the greatest reductions and instability in the BLM's supply of timber in the past. Any further population declines of

listed species or new species listings would likely lead to additional reductions in timber harvest. Contributing to the conservation and recovery of listed species is essential to delivering a predictable supply of timber. Specifically, the BLM recognizes that providing large, contiguous blocks of late-successional forest and maintaining older and more structurally complex multi-layered conifer forests are necessary components of the conservation and recovery of the northern spotted owl. Providing clean water is essential to the conservation and recovery of listed fish, and a failure to protect water quality would lead to restrictions that would further limit the BLM's ability to provide a predictable supply of timber. Furthermore, the O&C Act recognizes the importance of water quality; the purposes of sustained yield include, among others, "protecting watersheds and regulating stream flow." Finally, in fire-prone ecosystems in southern Oregon, the BLM must manage forests to reduce the likelihood of catastrophic fires and the attendant loss of timber. These purposes require the BLM to exercise its discretion to determine how best to achieve sustained yield timber production over the long term and avoid future limitations on timber production.

Provide a Sustained-Yield of Timber

The purpose of the action includes providing a sustained-yield of timber. The O&C Act requires that the O&C lands be managed "for permanent forest production, and the timber thereon shall be sold, cut, and removed in conformity with the principal of sustained yield for the purpose of providing a permanent source of timber supply, protecting watersheds, regulating stream flow, and contributing to the economic stability of local communities and industries, and providing recreational facilities." 43 U.S.C. 1181a. The O&C Act goes on to state that "[t]he annual productive capacity for such lands shall be determined and declared ... [p]rovided, [t]hat timber from said lands ... not less than the annual sustained yield capacity ... shall be sold annually, or so much thereof as can be sold at reasonable prices on a normal market." 43 U.S.C. 1181a. In meeting the various requirements for managing the O&C lands, the Secretary of the Interior has discretion under the O&C Act to determine how to manage the forest to provide for permanent forest production on a sustained yield basis, including harvest methods, rotation length, silvicultural regimes under which these forests would be managed, or minimum level of harvest. In addition, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) specifically provides that if there is any conflict between its provisions and the O&C Act related to management of timber resources or the disposition of revenues from the O&C lands and resources, the O&C Act prevails (i.e., takes precedence) (43 U.S.C. §1701). Thus, the multiple-use management direction of the FLPMA does not apply to the O&C lands that are suitable for timber production. The planning process established by the FLPMA is applicable to the O&C lands, because it is not in conflict with the O&C Act's management direction for those lands.

For the public domain lands, the FLPMA requires that public lands be managed "on the basis of multiple use and sustained yield unless otherwise specified by law" 43 CFR 1701 [Sec. 102.a.7]. The FLPMA also requires that that "the public lands be managed in a manner which recognizes the Nation's need for domestic sources of minerals, food, timber, and fiber from the public lands" 43 U.S.C. 1701 [Sec. 102.a.12].

Conservation and Recovery of Threatened and Endangered Species

The purpose of the action includes contributing to the conservation and recovery of threatened and endangered species within the planning area, including the northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, and threatened and endangered anadromous fish. The Endangered Species Act requires agencies to ensure that their actions are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of listed species or result in the adverse modification or destruction of critical habitat. Since the adoption of the Northwest Forest

Plan, BLM has recognized that additional species listings could have the effect of further limiting the BLM's ability to provide a sustained yield of timber under the O&C Act (Northwest Forest Plan ROD at 49-50). Using its discretion and authority under the O&C Act and the FLPMA, the BLM can direct sustained yield management of the O&C lands and public domain lands in western Oregon in a manner that contributes to the conservation and recovery of listed species and helps limit or avoid future listings, and thereby best ensures a permanency of timber production over the long-term, while, among other benefits of sustained yield, contributing to the economic stability of local communities.

The purpose of contributing to the conservation and recovery of the spotted owl necessarily includes maintaining a network of large blocks of forest to be managed for late-successional forests and maintaining older and more structurally complex multi-layered conifer forests, based on the existing scientific information on the conservation needs of the northern spotted owl and the results of previous analyses as described below.

Large, contiguous blocks of late-successional forest

Large, contiguous blocks of late-successional forest have been an element of northern spotted owl conservation strategies for over two decades. Thomas et al. (1990, 23-27) described that a conservation strategy for the northern spotted owl requires large blocks of nesting, roosting, and foraging habitat (i.e., suitable habitat) that support clusters of reproducing owls, distributed across a variety of ecological conditions and spaced so as to facilitate owl movement between the blocks. Courtney et al. (2004, 9-11, 9-15), in the status review for the northern spotted owl, evaluated the conservation needs of the northern spotted owl and concluded that, based on existing knowledge, large contiguous blocks of suitable habitat are still necessary for northern spotted owl conservation. Culminating this confirmation of the scientific information on the conservation needs of the spotted owl, the Spotted Owl Recovery Plan recommends managing for large, contiguous blocks of late-successional forest (US Fish and Wildlife Service 2011, III-19).

Based on the results of previous analyses, large contiguous blocks of late-successional forest would not develop in the absence of a land use allocation reserving a network of large blocks of forest. The 1994 Supplemental EIS for the Northwest Forest Plan explicitly required that all alternatives analyzed in detail include the allocation of a network of Late-Successional Reserves (Northwest Forest Plan, p. 2-22). Other previous planning efforts have considered alternatives that would not allocate such a network, including:

- Alternative A in the 1994 RMP/DEIS, which would have reserved no late-successional forest outside of special areas and sites occupied by listed species;
- Alternative B in the 1994 RMP/DEIS, which would have reserved small blocks of late-successional forest;
- Alternative 3 in the 2008 RMP/EIS, which would have allocated the majority of the landscape to a General Landscape Area that directed timber harvest on long rotations.

For each of those alternatives, the analyses concluded that these alternatives would have resulted in less contribution to spotted owl conservation than alternatives that allocated a network of large blocks of forest. Notably, Alternative 3 in the 2008 RMP/EIS would have resulted in a total acreage of spotted owl habitat comparable to most other action alternatives, but would have failed to meet the conservation needs of the spotted owl because of the arrangement of that habitat. Overall, these previous analyses demonstrated that large, contiguous blocks of late-successional forest would not have developed under these

alternatives, further demonstrating that reserving a network of large blocks of forest from programmed timber harvest is a necessary part of the purpose of contributing to the conservation and recovery of the spotted owl.

Older and more structurally complex multi-layered conifer forests

The scientific foundation for the importance of older, more structurally complex multi-layered conifer forests as habitat for the spotted owl has been clearly established. Thomas et al. (1990) described high-quality owl habitat as older, multilayered, structurally complex forests characterized by large-diameter trees, high amounts of canopy cover, numerous large snags, and lots of downed wood and debris. Courtney et al. (2004, 5-18), in the status review for the northern spotted owl, evaluated the existing scientific information on spotted owl habitat and confirmed that nesting, foraging and roosting habitat is associated with older, more structurally complex multi-layered conifer forests in the Pacific Northwest. The 15-year spotted owl monitoring report concluded that the highest stand-level habitat suitability for spotted owls is provided by older, more structurally complex forests (Davis et al. 2011, 38).

The Spotted Owl Recovery Plan recommends maintaining older and more structurally complex multi-layered conifer forests. As noted in the Spotted Owl Recovery Plan, the maintenance of older, more structurally complex multi-layered conifer forests has scientific support at several scales: “At the scale of a spotted owl territory, Dugger et al. (in press) found an inverse relationship between the amount of old forest within the core area and spotted owl extinction rates from territories. At the population scale, Forsman et al. (2011) found a positive relationship between recruitment of spotted owls into the overall population and the percent cover of spotted owl NRF [nesting, roosting, and foraging] habitat within study areas.” (US Fish and Wildlife Service 2011, III-67). The US Fish and Wildlife Service noted that, in dry forest areas, maintaining these older and more structurally complex multi-layered conifer forests may require active management to meet the overlapping goals of spotted owl recovery and restoration of dry forest structure, composition, and processes including fire, insects, and disease.

Previous planning efforts have considered a wide variety of approaches to the management of older, more structurally complex multi-layered conifer forests, including:

- Alternative A in the 1994 RMP/DEIS, which would have reserved no late-successional forest outside of special areas and sites occupied by listed species;
- the 1995 RMP, which reserved approximately 83% of old-growth forest;
- the Proposed RMP in the 2008 RMP/EIS, which would have reserved 81% of old-growth forest and would have deferred harvest of any forest older than 160 years old for 15 years;
- Alternative E in the 1994 RMP/EIS, which would have reserved all old-growth forest;
- a subalternative for Alternative 1 in the 2008 RMP/EIS, which would have reserved all forests older than 200 years old; and
- a subalternative for Alternative 1 in the 2008 RMP/EIS, which would have reserved all forests older than 80 years old.

None of these alternative approaches defined management direction explicitly in terms of older, more structurally complex multi-layered conifer forests, but used a variety of different terms, such as older forest, old-growth forest, late-successional forests, or a specific stand age.

Nevertheless, these different management approaches would have resulted in the maintenance of differing amount of older and more structurally complex multi-layered conifer forests. Those analyses demonstrated that alternatives that would have maintained more older and more structurally complex multi-layered conifer forests would have maintained more spotted owl habitat and would have provided better conditions for spotted owl movement between large blocks of habitat than alternatives that would have maintained less older and more structurally complex multi-layered conifer forests.

The existing science clearly establishes the importance of older and more structurally complex multi-layered conifer forests as spotted owl habitat; the Spotted Owl Recovery Plan recommends the maintenance of older and more structurally complex multi-layered conifer forests; and the results of previous analyses demonstrate that maintaining older and more structurally complex multi-layered conifer forests would contribute to meeting conservation needs of the spotted owl. Therefore, maintaining older and more structurally complex multi-layered conifer forest is a necessary part of the purpose of contributing to the conservation and recovery of the spotted owl.

To respond to this purpose for the action, alternatives would explore differing approaches to defining older and more structurally complex multi-layered conifer forest, by such criteria as stand age, structure, size, or landscape context. In addition, alternatives would explore differing management approaches to maintaining older and more structurally complex multi-layered conifer forest, such as active management in dry forest areas to reduce fire risk and restore fire resiliency.

The purpose of this action includes maintaining marbled murrelet habitat. The status review of the marbled murrelet prepared for the US Fish and Wildlife Service reviewed the existing scientific information and confirmed the importance of maintaining suitable nesting habitat to the conservation and recovery of the marbled murrelet (US Fish and Wildlife Service 2004, 4-61 – 4-63). Additionally, the Recovery Plan for the Marbled Murrelet (US Fish and Wildlife Service 1997) recommends protecting adequate nesting habitat for marbled murrelets.

The purpose of this action includes protecting existing habitat and restoring degraded habitat for threatened and endangered anadromous fish. The status review of threatened and endangered anadromous prepared by the National Marine Fisheries Service reviewed the existing scientific information and confirmed the importance of maintaining existing habitat and restoring degraded habitat to the conservation and recovery of threatened and endangered fish (Good et al. 2005). The National Marine Fisheries Service has prepared several final and draft recovery plans for listed salmonid fish within the planning area, including the Upper Willamette River Conservation and Recovery Plan for Chinook Salmon and Steelhead (National Marine Fisheries Service 2011), which recommend maintaining existing habitat and restoring degraded habitat.

Provide Clean Water in Watersheds

The purpose of the action includes continuing to comply with the Clean Water Act, which directs the restoration and maintenance of the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation's waters. The policy declaration in the FLPMA states that the BLM should manage the public lands in a manner that protects many resources and their values, including the water resource (43 USC 1701[a][8]). The

FLPMA directs that land use plans provide for compliance with applicable State and Federal air, water, noise, or other pollution control laws, standards, or implementation plans (43 USC 1712[c][8]).

In addition, the O&C Act includes reference to protecting watersheds and regulating stream flows, requiring that the O&C lands be managed “for permanent forest production, and the timber thereon shall be sold, cut, and removed in conformity with the principal of sustained yield for the purpose of ... protecting watersheds, regulating stream flow,” 43 U.S.C. 1181a.

Restore Fire-Adapted Ecosystems

The purpose of the action includes restoring fire-adapted ecosystems to increase fire resiliency. Previous analyses have shown that active management in the dry forest landscape of southern Oregon can positively influence fire risk and fire resiliency, thereby restoring fire-adapted ecosystems (2008 RMP/EIS). Further, as noted in the Spotted Owl Recovery Plan, natural landscape resilience mechanisms in the dry forest landscape of southern Oregon have been decoupled by fire exclusion and wildfire suppression activities. The Spotted Owl Recovery Plan recommends active management within the dry forest landscape to restore ecosystem resiliency. Additionally, in order to provide for sustained yield of timber from public lands under the O&C Act, BLM management must account for potential loss of this timber to fire. Based on the BLM’s authority under the O&C Act, the results of previous analyses showing the benefits of active management in restoring fire-adapted ecosystems, and in light of the recommendations in the Spotted Owl Recovery Plan, the purpose of this action includes restoring fire-adapted ecosystems to increase fire resiliency.

Provide for Recreation Opportunities

The purpose of the action includes providing for recreation opportunities. The FLPMA requires that, among other uses, “the public lands be managed in a manner that will ... provide for outdoor recreation” 43 CFR 1701 [Sec. 102.a.8]. In addition, the O&C Act states that O&C lands shall be managed “... for permanent forest production, and the timber thereon shall be sold, cut, and removed in conformity with the principal of sustained yield for the purpose of ... providing recreational facilities.” 43 U.S.C. 1181a. Finally, changes in BLM policy since the 1995 RMPs for recreation land use allocations and management objectives necessitate plan revision, as concluded in the BLM plan evaluations (BLM 2012, 28-29).

Coordinate Management of Lands Surrounding the Coquille Forest with the Coquille Tribe

The management of the Coquille Forest is subject by law (25 U.S.C. 715c (d)) to the standards and guidelines of forest plans for adjacent or nearby Federal forest lands. Title V of the Oregon Resource Conservation Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-208) created the Coquille Forest to be held in trust for the benefit of the Coquille Indian Tribe. The Act states that the Coquille Forest shall be managed “under applicable State and Federal forestry and environmental protection laws, and subject to critical habitat designations under the Endangered Species Act, and subject to the standards and guidelines of Federal forest plans on adjacent or nearby Federal lands, now and in the future.” The Act also requires the Secretary of the Interior to take the Coquille Forest lands into trust for the benefit of the Coquille Indian Tribe. As such, the purpose of the action includes coordinating the management of BLM-administered lands “adjacent or nearby” the Coquille Forest with the Coquille Tribe.