

## **The Bear Grub Timber Sale Is Counterproductive**

The controversial Bear Grub timber sale being proposed by the Medford Bureau of Land Management has clearly touched a nerve. Lawn signs throughout the Applegate Valley state that the neighbors most effected by the BLM timber plan would like to “Stop Bear Grub.” Other signs implore the BLM to “Save the Wellington Wildlands.” Letters to the editor expressing concern over the BLM’s plan to log large fire-resistant trees through “gap creation” mini-clearcuts are common. Over 1,200 people participated in the BLM’s initial commenting period voicing a nearly unanimous request for the BLM to meaningfully engage with the public to protect and restore, rather than log and exploit, the forests and watersheds in the planning area. These requests fell on deaf ears and the BLM continues to barrel ahead with its logging plans.

## **How Did the BLM Planning Process Go So Far Off the Rails?**

For several decades, the wildlands, old-growth forests, and hiking trails that the BLM has targeted for logging in Bear Grub were largely part of the Applegate Adaptive Management Area (AMA) of the Northwest Forest Plan. In the AMA both the BLM and the Forest Service were encouraged to work collaboratively with the public and stakeholders to develop projects and timber sales that incorporated public values and ideas.

In 2016 the BLM withdrew from the Northwest Forest Plan and scrapped the AMA in favor of writing itself a new Resource Management Plan designed to increase timber outputs. According to BLM planners this new management plan eliminates the agency’s ability to incorporate community concerns into timber sale layout and requires the BLM to log the “Harvest Land Base” regardless of impacts to fire hazard, recreation, wildlife, or watersheds. Hence, in the Bear Grub timber sale the BLM intends to remove large fire-resilient trees, log along popular hiking trails, “downgrade” hundreds of acres of old-growth forests, and log within riparian reserves.

In contrast, the Forest Service has largely maintained the Adaptive Management collaborative model in the Applegate Valley with the result being that its projects tend to be far less controversial than those proposed by the BLM.

## **Public Meetings in Which the Public Can’t Speak**

The BLM’s tone-deaf approach to public engagement was on full display during the June 23<sup>rd</sup> and June 25<sup>th</sup> “virtual public meetings” in which BLM planners read pre-scripted presentations and the public was precluded from speaking or providing information. The “public” portion of the virtual meetings consisted of a “question and answer box” into which one could type questions that the BLM might or might not respond to. The process was a monolog as opposed to a dialogue and largely consisted of the BLM telling the public and stakeholders not to worry about the proposed logging.

It is informative to see which questions BLM planners chose to ignore during the “virtual public meetings” for the Bear Grub timber sale. The BLM refused to discuss why it abandoned the

Applegate Adaptive Management collaborative planning process. The BLM elected not to respond to concerns over the decision to mark logging units for harvest prior to the public commenting period. The BLM declined to provide an answer to whether it has secured funding for non-commercial portions of the project. The BLM did not want to discuss if there was any real difference between “group selection” logging and mini-clearcuts. The BLM refused to address the age or size of trees to be logged. Perhaps most importantly, the BLM did not want to explain why the public was precluded from speaking during the “virtual public meetings” concerning management of public lands.

### **A Better Way Is Possible**

Only a few years ago there appeared to be a thaw in the longstanding cold war regarding the BLM timber program. The Medford BLM engaged with the public to develop a series of “dry forest restoration pilot projects” that sought to retain old-growth forest character while carefully thinning smaller-diameter trees in forests that had been fire suppressed for decades. The process was transparent and collaborative and the result was increased buy-in from the public and stakeholders. None of the dry forest restoration projects ended up in court and all of them were purchased by local companies for more than the appraised timber value.

The BLM’s determination to abandon real collaboration and restoration in a rush to meet artificial timber targets is unfortunate and ultimately counterproductive.

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