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Michael J. Korn
Bureau of Land Management
Field Manager
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Roseburg District of the BLM
10/10/2017

Dear Mike Korn:

This protest, from Umpqua Watersheds, Inc., is directed at the Woodchuck Timber Sale Decision Document, part of the Revised Days Creek-South Umpqua Harvest Plan **DOI-BLM-ORWA-R050-2014-0008-EA**.

Introduction

Umpqua Watersheds, Inc. (UW), is a 501 C3 non-profit conservation, restoration, education organization, with offices in Roseburg, Oregon. On March 31, 2017, UW filed timely comments on the Days Creek-South Umpqua Harvest Plan EA, **DOI-BLM-OR-R050-2014-0008-EA**. On July 3, 2017, UW filed timely comments on the Revised Days Creek-South Umpqua Harvest Plan EA, **DOI-BLM-OR-R050-2014-0008-EA**. In this protest, UW asserts that those comments were substantive and both broadly and specifically relevant to issues raised by the BLM in that document.

Our reading, in the Woodchuck Decision Document's Appendix B, of BLM's responses to the low streamflow issues raised by Umpqua Watersheds in its comments on the Revised Days Creek-South Umpqua Harvest Plan EA, leads us to believe that the agency continues to deny the relevance and to discount the implications of the Perry-Jones 2017 Special Paper to its management proposals; this denial, we allege, being based, in part, upon a myopic overview of the ownership pattern and management of significant portions of these watersheds. That is, BLM persists in assessing the impacts of its extractive proposals on low summer streamflow, as upon other ecological watershed functions, as if it were the only ownership presence on this entire analysis area, and as if the Northwest Forest Plan and other environmental protections were the general management prescription, thereon. BLM appears

to have arrived at these conclusions, vis a vis Perry-Jones 2017 and the dire hydrological implications of that study for watershed function, as though the environmentally damaging, widespread extractive activities on adjoining and proximate private industrial timberlands were not present and continuously imposed on those intervening private holdings; as though those clear cut/plantation creation activities did, and do not impose any continuing and significantly harmful impacts upon low summer streamflow or other ecological parameters; and as if that depleted low summer streamflow condition were a suitable baseline from which to measure those impacts, as opposed to measuring from actual historic streamflow data, across all ownerships. For its part, Umpqua Watersheds chooses, by means of this protest (as with its Daydream Timber Sale Protest), to once again, raise its observant voice, simply emulating the voice of the innocent child in the famous tale, who cried out to the adults, watching silently all around it: “The emperor has no clothes!”

Flowing from the above-mentioned “tunnel vision,” and as carefully demonstrated by UW in its aforementioned comments, BLM is attempting to use the present degraded low summer flow, chronic in our estimation, as the base line from which to gauge the impact of its management proposals. By UW's best reckoning, BLM appears to hold that the vast conversion of primary forest to plantation, on lands public and private across this analysis area, for decades, in conjunction with the persistent clear cut/plantation activities currently conducted on private holdings, actually collectively constitute that very baseline, degraded as it may be. Forcefully, and not for the first time, we say no. Such a chronically depleted baseline cannot, does not, and must not be allowed to be used in this way. By not referring NEPA participants to actual, accurate historic low streamflow data (or credible modeling, where such data is unavailable); historic data with which to credibly compare current low summer streamflow data, BLM is, in effect, attempting to “pull the wool” over participants' eyes. UW prefers to think that such obfuscation, by BLM, is not deliberate, but simply the result of long practice, however mistaken and ill-informed; and perhaps due in part as well to loss of institutional memory; and even, perhaps, and however regrettable, to undue, outside political pressure brought to bear on BLM.

Rightly or wrongly, it is inferred by UW that such a mistaken analysis position implies a willingness, by the agency, to maintain this depleted low summer streamflow condition and, thereby, wittingly or not, to prevent the recovery of salmonid species, whether formally listed under the ESA (e.g., Oregon Coastal Coho), or unofficially threatened or endangered because of its being greatly reduced from historic numbers (e.g., South Umpqua Spring Chinook, Lamprey, Umpqua Chub etc.). Further, it serves to convey to the concerned public the unwanted impression that the BLM is in accord with this degraded condition and with the depletion, in both quantity and quality, of water resources available to the denizens of these watersheds, including human beings, in the immediate vicinity and downstream. As with Daydream, so too with Woodchuck: it remains UW's studied position that such offhand reference to overall watershed condition is no substitute for a well researched, clearly disclosed comparison of current with historic low summer flows on these waterways, as with others on the heavily logged watersheds within the Roseburg District. Lacking such a credible comparison, there is no valid way for a concerned NEPA process participant to reliably assess the environmental impact a particular management proposal may impose upon a given watershed, such as that of either the Daydream or, as in this case, the Woodchuck Timber Sale; or, for that matter, upon an entire analysis area, such as that encompassed by the Revised Days Creek-South Umpqua Harvest Plan EA.

It remains UW's informed opinion that it is mere speculation by the BLM to maintain, if the proposed actions of Woodchuck are accomplished, that stands in the 15 to 50 year age cohort on these watersheds will be well below the threshold of measurable low flow effects cited by Perry-Jones

(depleted summer flows that may persist well beyond 50 years), when BLM fails to disclose stand age data on the proximate and adjoining private industrial forest lands in this analysis area. We have made this salient point before; however, BLM persists in ignoring the absolute relevance of a credible disclosure of actual stand conditions across all ownerships, thus preventing an accurate assessment of the true impacts of its management proposals on low summer streamflow. The following statements by BLM in no way satisfy the need for actual, current and accurate stand and flow data across all ownerships.

“In order to have the effect across large basins as Perry and Jones (2017) suggest, the proportion of stands in the 15 to 50 year age classes would have to increase above current levels. Roughly 8,427 acres (24%) of the BLM-administered lands are currently approximate to the 15 to 50 year age class described by Perry and Jones. As described in the REA (p. 22 and Table 1-2), the proportion of the affected subwatersheds in the 15 to 50 year age class decreases through time. As such, the effects to low summer flow from regeneration harvest of up to 571 acres is non-existent at the project and subwatershed scale.

Implementation of Alternative B Modified in its entirety would regeneration harvest up to approximately 571 acres, which represents approximately two percent of the affected subwatersheds. Assuming the highest harvest intensity scenario where all VRH units in Alternative B Modified are harvested in 2017, the harvested units would potentially be in a condition to affect summer flow as described by Perry and Jones (pp. 6, 7) in 2032 (15 years post-harvest). At that time, representation of the 15-50 year age group on BLM-administered lands shift from 24% to 20% (REA, p. 22 and Table 1-2).”¹

And: “BLM Response: The BLM has considered and discussed the hydrological and other impacts of past forest extraction. As described on (pp. 53-54) of the Revised EA, it is assumed that late-seral forest stands on private land have been converted to early-seral conditions and large industrial owners will continue to be managed primarily for timber production on a rotation of 40 to 65 years. In order for timber harvest to have the effect across large basins as Perry and Jones (2017) suggest, stands in the 15 to 50 year age class would have to increase above current levels, proportionally. Nonetheless, the general trend shown in Table 1-2 of the Revised EA, shows a trend of a decreasing proportion of BLM lands in the 15 to 50 year age class (Revised EA, pp. 22-24).”²

UW framed its position on this issue in its EA comments thus:

*“From this, in effect, the BLM appears to characterize, and to accept, the potential impacts of this revised Days-Creek-South Umpqua management proposal as being **adverse change from present condition**. That is, BLM seems to hold that projected departures, if any, from that presently impaired low summer flow condition are the only metric by which the potential environmental impacts of BLM's management actions are, and will be, assessed. However, Perry-Jones and simple, logical, common sense, as well as environmental integrity, indicate to the objective observer that the true impact of certain of BLM's proposed management actions on this watershed (e.g., the creation of still more relatively large openings on the public lands it manages, these openings in addition to existing and future large clear cuts/plantations on adjoining and proximate private forestlands in the analysis area) amounts to **the worsening and/or perpetuation of the present highly degraded, flow-depleted***

1 Woodchuck Timber Sale Decision Document, pg. 10

2 *ibid.*, pg. B 2

condition. (Which, it stands to reason, might very well be a large part of why small-stream-reliant, cold water dependent species like coho salmon, although ESA listed, and the object of numerous riparian restoration efforts, are failing to recover to a truly reliable and sustainable degree; and why warm water species, such as bass, continue to colonize the South Umpqua, the Coquille and other area rivers.)”³

UW stands by these statements. By not disclosing stand age data on the private timberlands adjoining and proximate to those of the Woodchuck Timber Sale, as on the entire Days Creek-South Umpqua Analysis Area, BLM tacitly admits that its metric for measuring the impact of its management actions on streamflow, particularly upon low summer flows, is that very “... **adverse change from present condition.**” and remains the “...**worsening and/or perpetuation of the present highly degraded, flow-depleted condition.**” cited by UW in its comments on the revised EA, excerpted above.

Where is the historic stream flow data with which to compare the current conditions cited here: “All available information was utilized at the time of the EA analysis. As described on (p. 8) of the 2016 Roseburg District Annual Program Summary & Monitoring Report, stream flow and water temperature are monitored with 18 stream gauges which are located at six monitoring sites. The information provided by these monitoring sites did not present changes, or new information that may result in significant impacts not previously considered.”⁴? Does this statement imply to a participant in the NEPA process that no historic stream flow data is available for this analysis area? Has BLM engaged in the data search requisite to justify such a position? If such a search for historic data was successful, where is this actual hard data, and the impacts inferred from that data, disclosed? What has BLM got to refute UW's contention, inferred from the actual existing hard data undergirding Perry-Jones 2017, that BLM's metric for measuring the impact of its extractive activities on Woodchuck is not simply a departure from the “...*presently degraded, flow-depleted condition.*”? Where is that historic low streamflow data?

We refer back to the 18 gages at six sites, BLM mentions above: “The information provided by these monitoring sites did not present changes, or new information that may result in significant impacts not previously considered.” Where then is the historical low streamflow data that has been compared with the current data from these 18 gages that encourages BLM to claim “...*did not present changes, or new information...*”? Changes from what, we ask; information that is new compared to what, we wonder?

The fact that BLM, in citing Moore and Wondzell (2005), claims relevance for data, and conclusions from such data, derived, in part, from studies conducted at great distance from this analysis area (in Australia), while dismissing the relevance of the data Perry-Jones derived from the South Umpqua Experimental Forest, only some twenty-five to thirty miles upriver from the Woodchuck Timber Sale area, defies both logic and common sense.

Further, it appears to UW that, in all of its responses, in Appendix B, to comments regarding the actual stand condition on private industrial timberlands adjoining and proximate to the Woodchuck Timber Sale, BLM is too often misleading, although whether deliberately or not is beyond our ken. Quite frankly, it makes no sense to us when BLM makes statements about the percentage of trees on this sale, or this analysis area, that will be in a given stand age class following implementation, subsequent extraction and restocking, when it repeatedly and only refers to stand age data on BLM managed lands.

3 UW Comments, Revised Days Creek-South Umpqua EA, pg. 6

4 Woodchuck Timber Sale Decision Document, pg. B 2

Such disclosure is grossly incomplete and of limited value to the interested participant in the NEPA process. For the actual impacts of proposed BLM actions to be fairly judged, stand age data for the entire watershed proximate to Woodchuck must be disclosed. Anything less must result in pure guess work. Just as for the Daydream Timber Sale, the surrounding and intervening private lands are the actual sylvan, topographic and yes, hydrological context for Woodchuck, as for the entire Days Creek-South Umpqua Analysis Area. For effects upon hydrologic and other ecological parameters to be accurately assessed, stand age data for the entire contextual area must be discovered, analyzed and the conclusions of that analysis fully and transparently disclosed.

Further, in comparing the map on page 178 of the Revised Days Creek-South Umpqua EA with the map depicting unit #1 of the Woodchuck Timber Sale, one sees that approximately 6,000 feet of waterway and accompanying riparian reserves have been eliminated from Woodchuck Unit #1. While it may not, as yet, be scientifically determined, we strongly suspect this official “discovery” of depleted stream activity, disclosed on the Woodchuck map for Unit #1, is indicative of the very depleted flow condition so strongly inferred by the Perry-Jones 2017 Study. Such a suspected strong hydrologic signal can only add emphasis to our insistence, repeated below, of the need for USFWS and NMFS consultation and a full blown EIS examination of this strongly inferred, and very likely chronic, low flow condition; one that is likely well outside a true, historic low flow range of variation baseline.

Thus again, it is UW's surmise, based upon the hard data supporting the Perry-Jones 2017 Special Paper, that the heavily logged watersheds of the Days-Creek-South Umpqua Analysis Area, including the Woodchuck Timber Sale Area, as well as other watersheds on the Roseburg District, where primary forest has been similarly converted to plantation on a vast scale over time, currently suffer from a chronically depleted low summer flow condition. Therefore, we protest the imposition of additional large canopy openings, regardless of configuration, onto these watersheds, at this time.

Extractive proposals by the BLM need to be reexamined in light of this low flow condition. If BLM believes, based on hard data, that such a condition does not currently obtain on these watersheds, then let BLM demonstrate that purported fact. Perhaps an Environmental Impact Statement supported by USFWS and NMFS consultation, based, in part, upon USGS and Oregon Department of Water Resources, USFS and BLM's own current data, as compared to credible historic low flow data or valid modeling, would suffice to do so? UW made a similar suggestion in its comments on the Revised Days Creek-South Umpqua Harvest Plan EA. (That timely suggestion, made well before either the Daydream or, in this case, the Woodchuck Timber Sale was publicly offered, appears to have been ignored; thus, in part, this protest.) Until such time, managerial probity and the wider public interest suggest that low summer flow impacts upon these watersheds and their denizens, ought to be assumed to be adverse, until proven, by means of hard data and/or scientifically credible modeling, to be otherwise. For the BLM to arrive at its hydrological and other environmental conclusions based upon questionable assumptions, might well be seen as irresponsible; to persist in acting from such a scientifically problematic basis may well be judged cavalier.

Concerns about Red Tree Vole (RTV) Presence

Over the years, we have visited, closely observed and enjoyed portions of the area of the Days Creek-South Umpqua Analysis Area generally, and that of the Woodchuck Timber Sale in particular. In the company of former Roseburg District Director, Mr. Jay Carlson, and other district personnel, as well as such sylvan luminaries as Drs. Jerry Franklin, Norm Johnson and Richard Waring, we have visited Unit

#1 of the Woodchuck Timber Sale. We are aware that active RTV nest trees were located at the end of that unit's Spur Road #2. On a very recent visit to this very site, we saw that a number of these RTV marked trees were now listed, on posted tags, as unoccupied.

This development (i.e., occupied/unoccupied) was not discussed in the decision document. Rather, the BLM has thrown the "RTV ball," so to speak, to the USFWS and the USFS. These agencies have declared the RTVs at issue here to be, in a word, expendable. Much as with the BLM's repeated statements concerning the beleaguered and declining Northern Spotted Owl (in whose prey base the RTV resides), and the impacts of carbon release from this, and other BLM extractive proposals, on climate change, this amounts to "death by a thousand cuts," so to speak. That is, taken together, all of the harmful impacts of these repeated proposals on RTV, NSO, GHG/Climate Change constitute palpable cumulative impacts. They need to be treated as such at the level of each individual project, each management proposal and subsequent action a contributor to these wildlife and general environmental conditions. In our view, such an overall "cumulative purview" satisfies both the letter and the spirit of NEPA etc.

BLM, the USFWS and the USFS are all well aware, or they should be, that the clear cut/monoculture fiber farm/herbicide management paradigm on the vast privately owned industrial timberlands in this analysis area have, in the past, and most likely will, in future, give short shrift to existential concerns for any wildlife, or for the natural systems that are their habitats, let alone for listed species and species of concern. The stark differences between the environmental rules of the Northwest Forest Plan, NEPA, FLPMA etc. and those of the Oregon Forest Practices Act, as currently and widely implemented on the private industrial timberlands of Western Oregon, upon those of the Days Creek-South Umpqua Analysis Area in general, and proximate to the Woodchuck Timber Sale units, in particular, are proof enough of this assertion. It is UW's studied view that the BLM and other federal agencies need to keep this contextual management condition well in mind and manage the public forestlands they are responsible for accordingly. That they do not appear to do so; that in this case the BLM, in particular, does not appear to do so, is a point of protest for UW.

The Northwest Forest Plan and its survey and manage ancillary mandates, court decisions etc. require the BLM to discover, disclose and protect RTV nest sites accordingly. With the above-mentioned accumulation of harmful impacts in mind, UW protests this cavalier management of known RTV nest sites. At this late date, given current conditions across all ownerships on these watersheds, no part of the natural world, its creatures and habitats, which still exist on public lands should be considered to be expendable.

Pacific Connector Gas Pipeline

We are aware that the proposed Pacific Connector Pipeline route does not directly impact the Woodchuck Timber Sale, itself. It does however impact the overarching Days-Creek-South Umpqua Analysis Area. The proposed route is not that far away from Woodchuck. Its potential relative proximity to this sale should have been considered and analyzed for impacts on Woodchuck.

While Umpqua Watersheds has primarily concerned itself, in these comments on the Revised EA, with hydrological and other ecological impacts, we are also very concerned about the acquiescence of the BLM in amending its RMP to accommodate a foreign originated enterprise that will create undesirable environmental impacts on the public lands BLM manages in trust for all of the people of the United

States. This concession made, in large part, in order to enhance the energy position of our nation's commercial (and, in some cases, its political and military) competitors.

This economic consideration coupled with the admitted impacts to NSO and other species, terrestrial and aquatic, imposed by creation of this right of way, is very much in opposition to the wider public interest. The creation of hundreds of miles of new permanent “edge” across many watersheds, including some managed by the BLM, in addition to the potential harmful disturbance to rivers and their tributaries made by this massive construction project, so unnecessary to the public good of the American people, is outrageous and should have been rejected out of hand. That it has not been, to date, is further evidence of the weak kneed protection of watersheds and regulation of streamflow, which has unfortunately characterized much of the management of lands public and private across these beleaguered watersheds in decades past, and, in some instances, down to this very day.

Sincerely,

Joseph Patrick Quinn
Volunteer Conservation Chair,
Umpqua Watersheds, Inc.