

Steve McClure
Union County Commissioner
Subcommittee on PL&ER Legislative Hearing
H.R. 4272 (Walden), the *"Forest Access in Rural Communities Act"*
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Thank you Mr. Chair and members of the sub-committee for the invitation to testify on H.R. 4272. My name is Steve McClure I have had the honor of serving the citizens of Union County, Oregon for nearly 24 years as a County Commissioner. During that time I have had the opportunity to observe and participate in the changes that have occurred in the management of Natural Resources.

Today I would like to relate to you the experiences of not only Union County, but also of Baker and Wallowa counties as it relates to the process the Forest Service went through to develop the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Travel Management Plan.

When the Wallowa-Whitman did their last Forest Management Plan, travel management was not included in the plan. At the same time the Umatilla National Forest did their plan and they did include Travel Management except for the Heppner Ranger District. The outcome of those resulted in a situation where two National Forests side by side on Interstate 84 had two entirely different travel restrictions-one that was extremely limited in access and the other that had no restriction at all as it related to ORV use. As you can well imagine the Forest with no restriction became the preferred recreation site for ORV recreation.

Even though the three National Forests in Eastern Oregon, together with the ten counties in Oregon and Washington, were in the process of developing a new Forest Plan notice came that the Wallowa-Whitman would also do a Travel Management Plan at the same time rather than including it in the ongoing plan process.

The Forest Supervisor of the Wallowa-Whitman made public his proposed conditions which was to close all ML 1 and reduce some ML 2 to ML 1 and at the same time assured the Counties and the local communities that it was not going to be the final outcome and invited each of the three Counties to examine the proposals and submit changes that the counties wanted

All three counties then submitted to the Forest Service the changes they wanted to see in the ROD and they were all rejected but a few minor changes in Baker County. (I have included Union County's request and rationale that we submitted as part of the record).

I could spend an hour in telling all the details of what happened but rather than that I would just like to finish by summarizing what I consider to be the major problems and issues with the Travel Management Plan for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

First, this was a top down decision. The decision had already been made with the initial proposal and the counties were involved because of public governmental requirements, but that input was never seriously considered by the decision makers. At least some part of the counties' requests could and should have been acceptable.

Second, the Wallowa –Whitman National Forest did not know or represent current conditions as they existed when they made their initial proposal. The counties discovered that