



Oregon Wild Amended Proposal to Conservation Alliance

January 2024

*Protecting 5.5+ Million Acres of Eastern Oregon Forests
for Conservation, Biodiversity, & the Climate*

1. Purpose/Mission:

Founded in 1974, Oregon Wild works to protect and restore Oregon's wildlands, wildlife and waters as an enduring legacy for all Oregonians. Formerly, Oregon Natural Resources Council (ONRC), Oregon Wild has been instrumental in securing permanent protection for some of Oregon's most precious landscapes, including 1.7 million acres of Wilderness, 95,000 acres of forests in Portland's drinking water source, the Bull Run/Little Sandy, and 2,200 miles of Wild & Scenic Rivers.

Oregon Wild has successfully achieved wilderness protections for some of Oregon's most special natural places including Opal Creek, Waldo Lake, North Fork John Day, and Hells Canyon. In 2009, after nearly a decade of campaigning and with the support of The Conservation Alliance, we accomplished a major victory with the passage of the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009 which permanently protected over 200,000 acres of Wilderness including areas around Mount Hood and in the Columbia River Gorge.

2. One sentence on what final success looks like. This should include the exact number of acres, miles of rivers, etc that will be protected when your project succeeds.

Through successfully advocating for strong revisions to the Blue Mountains Forest Plan (encompassing 5.5 million acres), we aim to secure improved management practices and protections for over 5.5 million acres of federal forests across three national forests – better protecting their critical climate and biodiversity benefits.

3. Tell us about the place you are working to protect. Detail any characteristics that impact climate resiliency and biodiversity. (2,500 characters max)

Covering 5.5 million acres, the three National Forests of Eastern Oregon's Blue Mountains - the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman - provide critical wildlife habitat and play an essential role in sequestering and storing carbon in the fight against climate change. These three national forests have been grouped together for a comprehensive revision process.

Starting in the early 2000s, a series of failed efforts at plan revisions have provided a sneak peek of the agency's intentions. Unfortunately, their proposals adopted an outdated vision of rural economics by prioritizing extractive industries like logging and livestock, while de-emphasizing the importance of natural and cultural values like clean water, recreation, salmon, wildlife, quality of life, and carbon storage.

The reasons to better protect the Blue Mountains region are as diverse and important as the region itself:

- There has been a substantial amount of recent science highlighting [the climate value of the forests of the Blues](#) as well as recent science from Bev Law ([recently named to list of world's best female scientists](#)) and David Mildrexler. Oregon Wild regularly works with both Bev Law and David Mildrexler, as well as other independent scientists. Their recent research has pointed to [the need for protecting large landscapes of the region as part of a national and regional system of carbon and biodiversity reserves](#).
- In addition to being important on their own merits, the Blues are increasingly seen as an essential connectivity corridor as the only forested corridor in the United States between the Rockies and the Cascades and habitats beyond. In an age of climate change, biodiversity loss, and increasing development, connectivity corridors such as this are becoming increasingly rare and more essential for the survival of the countless wildlife species.
- The Blue Mountains region is home to a myriad of at-risk wildlife species such as wolverine, moose, wolves, fisher, lynx, and more. It is also potential habitat for future reintroductions of keystone species like condors and grizzly bears.
- As their ancestral homelands, the Blue Mountains have held significant cultural value to the Nez Perce Tribe and others since time immemorial. Cultural values include what was, until very recently, the oldest known physical evidence of human presence in North America in the Snake River Watershed (>15k years).
- The Blue Mountains are also home to Oregon's largest protected Wilderness (Eagle Cap), North America's deepest gorge (Hells Canyon), countless headwater streams, the most complete assemblage of large wildlife in Oregon, and the largest intact bunchgrass prairie in the Western United States (Zumwalt Prairie).
- Due to the relatively low population densities, remoteness, and the quantity and quality of large unprotected unroaded landscapes, one might argue the restoration and protection potential of the region is unrivaled in the lower 48.

To further illustrate the importance of this unique ecological region, the Blue Mountains overlap with two larger landscape-level initiatives - Yellowstone to Yukon and Camas to Condors.

[Yellowstone to Yukon](#) is a conservation initiative aimed at maintaining natural connectivity corridors for wildlife, people and nature, communities and culture, and for habitat and waterways. While Y2Y is a decades-long, multi-national effort aimed at safeguarding a crucial north-south corridor, the Blues represent a critical east-west corridor between the Rockies and Cascades. [Camas to Condors](#) is a landscape-scale climate resilience initiative led by the Nez Perce Tribe, in collaboration with non-profit and academic partners in Oregon, Idaho, and Montana.

By securing reliable sideboards for the management of the Blue Mountain forests, Oregon Wild and allies will be able to dedicate longer-term efforts towards more proactive campaigns such as future Wilderness and Wild & Scenic River designations.

4. **What is your strategy and timeline for achieving final success? Include relevant project goals and objectives. Detail any expected economic and recreational impacts if your project succeeds. (5,000 characters max)**

The Forest Service has re-initiated a new revision process for the Blue Mountains very much in character with their previous attempts. A lot is at stake in this incredibly diverse region identified by scientists as being of global importance for wildlife connectivity and carbon storage. These forests have long been subject to logging, excessive road building, overgrazing, and the exclusion of natural fires. Their recovery from past abuse, and the promise of a healthy future - for the forests, streams, wildlife, and people who depend on this landscape - hangs on the plan's outcome.

The timing of this effort only adds to its importance. The Forest Service is embarking on this process at a time when the agency is pushing for more aggressive logging (e.g. massive "restoration" projects such as the Morgan Nesbit, Ellis, and Lower Joseph projects – all of which Oregon Wild has been vigilantly watchdogging and highlighting as examples of agency overreach), more discretion with regards to categorical exclusions, and empowering a narrow set of interests and communities aligned with extractive goals. Meanwhile, the Biden administration is pushing for old-growth and large tree protections. Independent scientists are increasingly highlighting the conservation values of the region along with the threats and protection potential. Indigenous peoples are asserting their rights and voices. Conservationists are pushing for long-term solutions with renewed vigor and a population that is increasingly engaged.

It's also worth noting that the agency has tried and failed to update the Blue Mountains Forest Plan more than once. It is only because of strong and savvy conservation involvement that we have not already been saddled with a significantly weakened plan that would put this region's ecological treasures more at risk. Moreover, the agency began this process by working with a narrow and exclusive set of interests called the Blue Mountain Intergovernmental Council (BIC) several years ago. While Tribes have officially had a seat at the table, they have told us the BIC does not represent them and that their involvement has been overstated. The remainder of entities at the BIC are generally aligned with extractive interests and/or hostile to conservation. The conservation community, independent scientists, and the general public are starting years behind and facing an uphill battle to level the playing field while fighting for this unique bioregion.

Oregon Wild is requesting a Conservation Alliance grant to help engage in the involved process of revising the Blue Mountains Forest Plan for over five million acres of national forests in eastern Oregon. As noted above, our work on the Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revisions aims to have a lasting impact on an essential western landscape. As working to pass Wilderness and Wild & Scenic River designations has long been a core of Oregon Wild's work, this administrative forest plan can ensure these areas are not degraded, establish strong sideboards for future management, and lay the foundation for potential permanent protection of roadless areas and wild rivers in the future.

The official process for the Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revisions is expected to start early this year. Revisions and amendments to forest plans can be a good opportunity to reflect evolving public values and offer beneficial guidance for managing our public lands for clean water, natural ecosystems, wildlife connectivity, climate stability, fire resilience, and more. Rather than loosening standards, what we need from forest plans are more enforceable sideboards that ensure the protection of large trees and mature forests, water, and connected wildlife habitat. They should make the case for Wilderness or Wild & Scenic River protection, and set the stage for the landscape-scale preservation of natural areas and restoration of ecosystems necessary to address the dual climate and biodiversity crises and help meet national land and water conservation goals.

Oregon Wild will be closely monitoring and participating in the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision process. This will include detailed policy analysis of proposed changes brought forth by the Forest Service, educating the public about the importance of these forests (and the threats of weakening forest plan protections), grassroots organizing such as generating public engagement during open comment periods, participating in meetings hosted by the Forest Service, and providing detailed organizational and coalition comments to the plan revisions. While preliminary meetings have already begun, the formal Blue Mountains Forest Revision process is expected to commence in early 2024.

As the Forest Service is directing this process, Oregon Wild and allies will, by necessity, have to be somewhat reactive. However, we are already doing significant work that is in service and complimentary to this revisions process. In the year ahead, we will implement a multi-pronged strategy as the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revisions unfold including:

- Organizing and coordinating within the Eastside Forest Coalition. The Eastside Forest Coalition came together during [the Trump administration's efforts to weaken the Eastside Screens](#) (protections for large and old trees in E. Oregon and SE Washington). While we were ultimately forced to go to court, we (along with the Nez Perce Tribe) [prevailed on every argument](#) in an initial judicial finding. As of now, the Screens are back as an essential protection on the landscape. However, the agency will almost certainly address (and seek to weaken) large tree protections in other ways, including through the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revisions process. During that episode, our groups realized we had more energy, resources, and congeniality in Eastern Oregon than we have had in decades. We also realized that others were speaking for the conservation community here and we needed to begin coordinating more regularly and communicating with a unified voice. We now meet regularly and have made a lot of progress on related issues. Oregon Wild has been a leader

in this ongoing effort. It's worth noting that while not an official member, the Nez Perce Tribe is an active participant. We also regularly communicate with scientists, other organizations, community groups, etc. Official members include Oregon Wild, Central Oregon LandWatch, Greater Hells Canyon Council, Great Old Broads, Juniper Chapter Sierra Club, Western Watersheds, Blue Mountain Biodiversity Project, and WildEarth Guardians.

- Submitting thorough organizational and/or coalition comments through the plan revision process and generating public comments through grassroots outreach.
- Monitoring developments in process and on the ground. This may include field tours hosted by the Forest Service. We will also be documenting agency activities in the region.
- Participating in Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision meetings to both monitor the process and the agency's directives, as well as to be a voice for the public interest. This will include public meetings hosted by the Forest Service as well as coalition meetings and meetings with key decision-makers.
- Organizing, mobilizing, and activating grassroots public support throughout this process to ensure that the public's voice is (and continues to be) listened to and protected as the future management of these 5.5 million acres of public lands is impacted.
- Coordinating with scientists and others to thoroughly evaluate and analyze the potential ramifications of policy and management proposals within the revisions process using the best available science.
- Conducting community presentations on the values of the region to broaden the constituency for the area and get our message out.
- Communicating through social media, mainstream media (when we can), and our platforms (webinars, PIELC, etc.)
- Working with legal experts, including Oregon Wild's staff attorney, to ensure that all relevant laws (such as the National Environmental Policy Act, the Federal Land Policy & Management Act, and the Clean Water Act) are followed.
- **Coordination with Tribes** – Over the past two years, Oregon Wild has done a lot of work building relationships with Tribes in the region. We've begun reaching out to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation (CTUIR) with more intention and have worked with individual staff and tribal members on a few projects. Our deepest coordination and collaboration, however, has been with the Nez Perce Tribe. Oregon Wild was privileged to nominate the Nez Perce Tribe (as well as the Yurok Tribe in northern California) for an award honoring the Tribes as champions of the Endangered Species Act and joined them at an awards ceremony in Washington D.C. last September. We've given leaders, staff, and members platforms at the Public Interest Law Conference, on our webinars, in working groups, in news stories, and more.

Our Northeast Oregon Field Coordinator Rob Klavins, who is based in Enterprise and is our primary staffer monitoring the Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revisions regularly works and communicates with Nez Perce staff and some tribal members on projects, agency planning, dams, wildlife, protections campaigns (such as the River Democracy Act) and more, including through the Eastside Forest Coalition and Camas to Condors. We regularly support and receive support from the Tribe's *Nimiipuu Protecting the Environment* group. We have supported the Tribe in court, including recently filing a joint legal challenge last fall to defend salmon and steelhead protections and safe passage around dams and we have

been joined by the Nez Perce in court as they filed an amicus brief supporting our case to defend the Eastside Screens.

As the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision process gains more steam, Oregon Wild will be in regular communications with the Nez Perce Tribe and will identify and engage in opportunities to coordinate accordingly. While we in no way claim to speak for the Tribe, we have found that the majority of our positions are in alignment and we anticipate opportunities to coordinate with the Tribe during the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision process.

5. Identify the key decision makers you're trying to influence, the likelihood of securing their support, and your approach to interacting with them. (2000 characters max)

The decision-making agency for the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision is the Forest Service and they will be our primary target as we work to influence their decisions, watchdog their activities, and hold them accountable throughout the entirety of the process through many of the tactics noted above.

However, throughout the next year, Oregon Wild will also be participating in other federal processes that stand to have significant impacts on the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision and the landscape itself. So, we will be actively working to influence not only the Forest Service, but also the Biden Administration and the Bureau of Land Management.

As context, on Earth Day 2022, Oregon Wild's Climate Forests campaign took a major step forward when President Biden announced an Executive Order directing the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to conduct a thorough inventory of mature and old-growth forests so that policies can be adopted for protecting them. This was a significant step forward in Oregon Wild's campaign to protect these forests and fight climate change and represents arguably our best chance yet to enact sweeping protections for mature and old-growth forests in Oregon and beyond.

The Climate Forest Campaign's ultimate goal is to convince President Biden to make good on that Executive Order with a strong and durable rule, much like the Roadless Rule, that protects mature and old-growth trees and forests on federal public lands from logging. Part of that goal also includes keeping pressure on the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to fulfill President Biden's directive in a way that maximizes the future conservation of these forests for their climate, biodiversity, and recreation benefits.

Our Climate Forests campaign reached a big milestone in spring 2023 when the Forest Service and BLM announced a pathway for protecting mature and old-growth trees and forests as part of a strategy to improve the climate resilience of federally managed forests. This initiated a public comment period that offered a tremendous opportunity for the public to voice their support for stronger forest protections. Additionally, the Forest Service and BLM released a comprehensive

inventory of mature and old-growth forests nationwide, the first of its kind. By the close of the comment period, the Forest Service and BLM had received a combined total of 800,000+ public comments urging them to protect mature and old-growth forests!

Lastly, just last month, the Biden administration announced a proposed national forest plan amendment that would significantly restrict old-growth logging. This is a tremendous opportunity to not only better protect older forests in the Blue Mountains region, but also in the 128 other national forests across the country. This is an absolutely unprecedented process – never before have all forest plans been amended at the same time, and never before has there been a proposal to end commercial logging of old-growth on all of America’s National Forests!

So Oregon Wild will also be closely tracking and participating in that process as we help lead the national Climate Forests campaign with partners nationwide.

6. How are you working with and elevating voices of historically underrepresented groups and engaging grassroots citizen action? (2,000 characters max)

Grassroots citizen action is at the heart of nearly every Oregon Wild campaign. To generate the aforementioned public engagement on the Climate Forests campaign was a huge accomplishment and one that reinforces how much public support there is for protecting our forests for the climate benefits they provide. In the next year, Oregon Wild will continue to lead a national coalition, execute a comprehensive communications strategy, and further recruit and mobilize activists across Oregon to speak out for our climate forests.

We have begun outreach to indigenous tribes and tribal-led NGO’s, the climate movement, veteran’s groups, faith-based organizations, environmental justice and outdoor recreation voices. These groups will become the backbone of the national grassroots effort needed for the public process by signing onto letters, authoring or signing onto op-eds, attending lobby meetings and speaking at public events.

In particular, we have been working more and more closely with the Nez Perce tribe in northeast Oregon over the past year. While the Nez Perce are not one of the federally recognized in Oregon, their ancestral homelands very much include the forests that will be impacted by the Blue Mountains Forest Plan revision.

Over the past year, we’ve coordinated with the tribe on several conservation efforts – from proposing various river segments in northeast Oregon to be designated as Wild & Scenic Rivers through the River Democracy Act to coordinating a legal challenge (and successfully reversal) of a Trump administration rule change for the Eastside Screens that weakened protections for old-growth forests across seven million acres on six national forests in eastern Oregon and Washington. The Nez Perce have been closely monitoring and participating in the early stages of the Blue Mountain Forest Plan revisions and Oregon Wild is working closely with them to coordinate

strategies and activities to achieve shared goals wherever we can.

7. **What are 3-5 measurable on-the-ground outcomes (NOT activities) that you hope to accomplish over the next year? (1000 characters max)**

- ✚ Achieve measurable gains in the revised draft Blue Mountains Forest Plan. This includes a higher emphasis in the management plan on conservation, wildlife connectivity, and recreation.
- ✚ A more active and engaged grassroots base of support in eastern and northeastern Oregon. With so many significant conservation opportunities in this region, it will be extremely helpful to have cultivated a more informed and mobilized group of pro-conservation advocates in this part of the state.
- ✚ The adoption of a national forest management plan amendment to restrict old-growth logging. Largely restricting the threat of logging old growth via the national forest management plan will vastly improve the conservation safeguards for national forest plans all across the United States, including the Blue Mountains Forest Plan.
- ✚ Identify fewer timber sales proposed by the Forest Service in the Blue Mountains region that continue to deprioritize conservation and contradict the climate and biodiversity goals of the intent of the federal rulemaking process or the national and regional forest plan.

8. **How will you evaluate your progress and success? (1,000 characters max)**

The ultimate success of this project will be measured by how many acres of forests we're able to protect and the strength of those protections. However, Oregon Wild thoroughly monitors and evaluates the progress of every one of our conservation campaigns. We track campaign and organizational outputs in a custom outreach database to assess the effectiveness of chosen strategies. We utilize a custom EveryAction database and online communications platform to efficiently implement our communications, program, outreach, and fundraising strategies.

Additionally, each staff member works with their supervisor to develop a short-term and longer-term work plan for their respective role within the organization. These work plans stem from the Oregon Wild's four-year strategic plan, which is developed with the input of every board and staff member over a process that lasts several months as we identify the areas of most need, conservation threats and opportunities, and organizational capacity.

9. **How do you plan to use funding from The Conservation Alliance? (1,000 characters max)**

A grant from The Conservation Alliance will help support the staff time necessary to carry out the campaign strategies aimed at protecting 5.5 million acres of the Blue Mountains region in eastern Oregon. In particular, this will be focused on conducting the grassroots organizing, activist recruitment/training/mobilization, coalition building/coordination, and a comprehensive media

strategy that includes both traditional and creative social media campaigns. Funds from The Conservation Alliance will largely help support the staff time necessary for Oregon Wild to participate in the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision process and carry out the aforementioned strategies to result in the best possible outcome for these incredible forests and the myriad of values they provide.

10. Tell us about your organization's efforts to address justice, equity, diversity and inclusion over the last year. How has this impacted your organization (e.g., demographics, processes, policies) and the work that you do? (1,000 characters max)

Since making a formal commitment to be a more just, equitable, diverse, and inclusive organization in 2015, Oregon Wild has to more fully integrate and prioritize our JEDI values into each and every aspect of our conservation programs, communications, development, and organizational practices. We have a formal JEDI committee to monitor and evaluate Progress.

We've become a more diverse organization as our board and staff now better represent Oregon's diversity. Recently, we launched our Public Lands for All campaign to reshape modern conversations about conservation by amplifying the voices of marginalized and under-represented communities. The three pillars of this campaign are: Recreation, Education, and Policy-Making.

In recent years, we've deepened partnerships with several Oregon tribes. This includes working with the Siletz tribe to reintroduce sea otters, supporting the Yurok tribe to reintroduce condors, and several efforts with the Nez Perce tribe.

11. Elements of your proposal may be shared with member company employees during the ballot process. If there is anything in your proposal that must be kept confidential, please indicate that here. (750 characters max)

The Eastside Forest Coalition will be one of the avenues through which Oregon Wild will be working to monitor and improve the outcome of the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision. We'd ask that any specific tactics and strategies not be shared publicly.

Also, while we work increasingly more frequently with the Nez Perce Tribe, are in alignment on the vast majority of conservation issues, and anticipate opportunities to collaborate with them throughout this process, we do not in any way want to provide the impression that we claiming to speak for the Tribe or their positions.

Lastly, no foundation funding will be used for any lobbying activities.