

**Second DRAFT for Participant Review**

Interagency Meeting  
on  
Seeley Lake Resource Protection Lands  
June 23, 2010  
Courthouse Annex, Room 201

This is a summary of the outcomes of the June 23, 2010 Interagency Meeting regarding Resource Protection lands in the Seeley Lake area. Limited background is provided as a context for the outcomes. Those participating were: Tim Love, Jim Moose, Chris Servheen, Lorin Hicks, Kathleen Sims, David Greer, Dick Ainsworth, Mike Thompson, Jay Kolbe, Debbie Austin, Carly Lewis, James McCubbin and Patrick O’Herren. Also in attendance were Jan Guelff, Tom Beers, Lorrie Woods and Jack Greenwood.

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The meeting was facilitated by O’Herren and began at 9:00 a.m. with a welcome, introductions and the establishment of ground rules for the meeting. Map 12 was introduced as the map currently being considered by the Board of County Commissioners as part of a possible amendment to the Seeley Lake Regional Plan.

The meeting then focused on agency comments (Austin, Thompson and Servheen) on the current status of their involvement in the planning process. The core of the meeting then began with an open discussion on Resource Protection lands and areas of agreement among the participants. Hicks presented a series of maps illustrating various topics such as regional and sub-area boundaries, the Wildland Urban Interface, Legacy Lands, the Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone, ownership, proposed land use densities, topography, the 2007 Jocko fire, past and current proposals and other illustrative information. The discussion continued into the history of Plum Creek’s discussions with resource agencies, agency comments on the statuses of wildlife and fishery conditions, and the desire to maintain a viable wildlife and fishery resource at the landscape level while concurrently providing appropriate residential values on private lands.

**Comment:** Note on recant of letter?

**Comment:** I do recall Ms. Austin stating that she had not reviewed the letter that went out with her name on it, but I’m not sure I would say she “recanted” (a strong word). I don’t recall her saying anything specific about what particular aspect of the letter she would no longer stand by.

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After considerable discussion and sharing of information, a collaborative effort resulted in the realization that the group agreed on many aspects, including the importance and sensitivity of several areas. The group discussion focused primarily around wildlife and fisheries issues. Other planning related matters are generally not the focus of the group but do play some role in the discussion (i.e., the WUI’s impact on wildlife, economics, etc.)

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One area of agreement was support for the prospect of future large-scale conservation land purchases as a means of providing permanent protection to at least some of the RP lands. Plum Creek representatives candidly explained that Plum Creek is interested in finding a buyer or buyer for such lands, but believes that the odds of such purchases would be increased if the Seeley Lake Regional Plan as adopted contemplates at least some level of residential development on such lands. Rural Initiatives staff therefore agreed to prepare language for consideration by the Board of County Commissioners expressing the County’s support for such purchases, to be achieved with either public funds or private funds. (See also discussion below in the paragraph entitled, “Non-Legacy Marshall Block.”)

### Recommended Changes to Map 12:

Specific changes to Map 12 were discussed and agreed upon and those changes are outlined below and are depicted in the attached maps. Map IAG-1, identifies where changes to Map 12 should occur, and Map IAG-2 incorporates those changes.

**#1. Placid Block.** The group defined a boundary around the Placid Lake area where alternative land use designations may be appropriate. This boundary (see Map IAG-1) incorporates Section 11 and the Plum Creek-owned portion of Section 10 (T16N R16W) in the northwest corner of the Placid Block, as well as Sections 31, 32, 33, and 34 (T 16N R15W) directly south of Placid Lake. Note that while Section 11 is incorporated into the Placid Block, it will be identified in the text as requiring mitigation measures to minimize extending the Wildland Urban Interface into adjacent sections. The consensus is that overall, development can be accommodated at higher densities in this block than in the other Resource Protection designations without causing wildlife impacts on a forest level.

The group did not reach consensus on density designations within the Placid Block. Ainsworth and the Placid Lake Cabin Owners will be visiting with Plum Creek to discuss possible density designations within the Placid Block.

**#2. Upper Vaughn Creek.** The upper high altitude portions of the Vaughn Creek drainage were identified by J. Kolbe as containing important boreal forest habitat that is known to be used by lynx, and certain south facing slopes in this area are winter range for elk. The group concurred that these areas are more sensitive and should receive lower density designations (Plum Creek's prior proposal was for 1:40. RI's prior proposal was split with half being 1:160 and half being 1:80, the Planning Board proposal designated these four sections as 1:80 designation), and that the highest standards of development and mitigation for lynx should occur with any future development of this area. *(Staff question: should the language regarding the WUI inserted in reference to Section 11 be added here as well?)*

**#3. Game Ridge.** Game Ridge creates part of the southwest boundary of the Plan Area, and is noted by FWP and Plum Creek as providing important winter range habitat for elk and other big game species. The ridge and the south-facing slopes below the ridge are important to protect. The group's consensus was that the area along Game Ridge as shown on Map IAG-1 will be recommended for a density of 1/160 to off-set the new densities in the main Blanchard Block. The legal descriptions for the Game Ridge area to be changed include the portions of the following sections that fall within the Plan Area: 13, 14, 15, 23, 24, 25, 26, and 36, all in T 15 N, R 16 W.

**#4. Blanchard Block.** The group defined the Blanchard Block as shown on Map IAG-1 (consisting of the following sections in T 15 N, R 15 W: S 1-4 and 9-36, as well as the portions of sections 2-6 in T 14 N, R 15 W that fall within the Plan Area). The group agreed to recommend that Map 12 be amended to change densities in the Blanchard Block from 1/80 to 1/40, given the lesser sensitivity of these lands in terms of wildlife habitat values and consideration for the new lower densities on Game Ridge.

**#5. Hwy 83 Migration Corridor.** The group agreed that an area between the Blanchard Block and Hwy 83 serves as a migration corridor for big game and other wildlife species moving from upper parts of the Clearwater watershed to the Blackfoot-Clearwater Game Range, and thus should receive high levels of resource protection. Agreement was reached on recommending amendments to Map 12 to change the density of this area from 1/80 to 1/160.

**Comment:** If the intended meaning here is that everyone participating agreed with everything that was done to the map, I'm not certain that would apply to me. I did not object to the changes made to the RP 1 boundary, but am still not enthusiastic about 40-acre parcels in the Blanchard Block, as I believe that density will generate levels of vehicle traffic that the dirt roads in the area may not be able to handle. It is true that I did not raise that concern during the discussion. My concerns about densities in the Blanchard Block will diminish if, at the end of the day, the Seeley Lake Regional Plan does not include language creating the possibility of a TDR program that would permit the transfer of some of the permissible residential densities in the Blanchard Block to the Placid Lake block.

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**Comment:** My notes indicated that we discussed minimizing expansion of the WUI rather than disallowing it altogether.

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**Comment:** I would agree that the RP 1 areas are generally more ecologically sensitive than the lands in the Placid Lake Block. And I'm not sure what is meant by the phrase "on a forest level" in this context. I would note, however, that I remain concerned that densities being discussed in the Placid Lake Block have the potential for adverse effects on fish and wildlife.

**Comment:** I'm not sure if we actually agreed what the allowable density should be here.

**Comment:** Not 1:80?

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**Comment:** I remain concerned that, if the Plan as approved includes or allows a TDR program, 1/40 designations in the Blanchard Block could generate more transferrable credits that the Placid Lake Block could absorb without unacceptable environmental impacts. I am prepared to accept 1/40 in the Blanchard Block in consideration for elimination of the TDR concept.

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#6. **RP Designations.** Agreement was reached to recommend collapsing Map 12's RP1 and RP2 designations into one Resource Protection area with a density of 1/160. The issue of transferring densities out of the 1/160 areas remains under discussion.

**Other discussion topics where consensus remains to be achieved**

**Conservation, development and sensitive lands**

The group agreed that it would be desirable to reach consensus on the identification of very high value resource areas that are desirable for conservation, and other 1:160 lands in the area that could sustain some development without jeopardizing landscape level wildlife and fishery resources or jeopardizing sustainable management of Lolo National Forest lands. Servheen noted that the larger the block of protected area (such as that attained in the Montana Legacy Project), the greater the level of protection afforded to grizzly bears versus protecting isolated sections of checkerboard ownership. All agencies committed to study this issue in depth in hopes of reaching a consensus recommendation. Two areas in particular were mentioned in the discussion:

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- o **Non-Legacy Marshall Block:** Both Kolbe and Dr. Servheen pointed to the importance of the non-Legacy lands in the Marshall Block that generally fall in the Fawn and Deer Creek drainages, where lynx, grizzly bear, and bull trout conservation are of concern. This block consists of 12 sections of Plum Creek land that are designated 1:160 (Sections 22-29, and 32-35 of T 17 N, R 16 W, as identified on Map IAG-1), and suggested that residential development of these areas should be heavily discouraged, or that densities be transferred out of these areas. Sims suggested that precluding all development or requiring transfer of density out of these lands would hinder future conservation sales in two important ways: first, if there is no risk of conversion of these lands to residential use, these lands will automatically become a low priority for highly competitive conservation dollars even if they have very high conservation values. Second, the agency-mandated Yellow Book appraisal process does not account for high conservation values and eliminating residential development potential would severely decrease the appraisal value causing landowners to consider alternatives to conservation for use of the land. While these may be unintended consequences, they are important considerations if the goal is to permanently conserve these lands and the resources. Sims also suggested that residential development of these lands at very low densities and in thoughtful ways could cause less impact to the lands than keeping them in permanent timber production.
- o **Checkerboard:** Plum Creek owns approximately 20 whole or partial sections of land in the area identified as the Checkerboard (see map IAG-1), where PC ownership is interspersed with primarily Forest Service lands. The group will share information between now and the next meeting (July 23, 2010) regarding lands in the Checkerboard, in an effort to better understand the resource values of these lands, and to inform further discussion about resource protection tools that could be used to ensure protection of the most important areas.

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**Comment:** I would like more discussion of this topic at the next meeting, unless Rural Initiatives chooses to no longer recommend language holding out the possibility that some sort of TDR or TDC program could be initiated in connection with future zoning decisions. For Placid Lake property owners, this is one of the two most important remaining issues associated with the proposed plan, with the other one being densities in the Placid Lake Block.

- TDC:** The concept of transferring development credits (TDC) seems particularly difficult to address in the region. It is possible that if solutions to the density issues identified above are found, TDCs may not be necessary at this time in this area. ||

**Conclusion and Next Meeting**

The meeting involved active participation by all at the table and the group believes that positive steps were made in resolving controversial and difficult issues. Consequently, a follow-up meeting is scheduled for 9:00 a.m. in Room 201 of the Courthouse Annex on Friday, July 23, 2010.

Second Draft Submitted by:

Patrick O’Herren  
(7-7-10)

DRAFT