

*Hells Canyon Preservation Council
Oregon Wild v. The United States Forest Service*

Two environmental groups have filed suit challenging the Forest Service's Bald Angel timber project in Oregon's Wallowa Whitman National Forest. The Forest Service's plans allow commercial logging of 10.9 million board feet on more than 4,000 acres of land in the La Grande Range district, including eight miles of rebuilt forest access roads and more than a mile of new permanent roads.

In March 2006, the Forest Service released an environmental assessment of the proposed project. Plaintiffs filed an administrative appeal, and the Forest Service released a second assessment in December.

Central to federal requirements are management indicator species that represent the condition of area wildlife – what happens to them is likely to occur with other animals. The Forest Service must, according to regulations, monitor and take into account impacts to these species before starting any major project.

In the Wallowa area, indicator species include Rocky Mountain elk, pileated woodpecker, northern goshawk, pine marten, and steelhead trout.

According to plaintiffs, who have operated as non-profit organizations in Oregon for more than two decades, the Forest Service's assessment "contains only a cursory analysis of the number of acres of habitat for goshawk and primary cavity excavators impacted, and fails to analyze the impacts of the loss or changes to the habitat on the species themselves."

Additionally, the assessment does not analyze impacts to the pileated woodpecker or pine marten, nor does it take into account the cumulative impacts to wildlife of converting multi-storied, old-growth to single-storied forest. The suit says it omits impacts to Rocky Mountain elk entirely.

Plaintiffs ask the court to prevent the Forest Service from initiating the Bald Angel project until it can show it has met required criteria. They also seek a declaration that the Forest Service is violating federal law and abusing its discretion.