The purpose of this letter is to state the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) whole heartedly supports the Blue Mountain Forest Resiliency Project and its statement of Purpose and Need. RMEF is particularly pleased to see the Purpose and Need statement includes enhancement of wildlife habitat and forage. We believe this landscape scale project will result in very significant improvement of wildlife resources as well as forest health.

Specific comments:
1. Establish and maintain a close collaborative relationship with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) throughout the planning process and particularly at the site specific project planning stage.

2. At the project planning stage, use the best science for provision of big game (elk and deer) security cover. The silvicultural treatments and prescribed fire treatments will likely result in improved forage habitat, but if adequate security is not provided the big game will not be willing to use the new forage created.

3. In planning site specific projects it will be particularly important to avoid displacing elk and deer off the national forest lands and on to private lands where their presence may not be wanted due to property damage. Such displacement can exacerbate the level of big game depredation complaints that ODFW must then respond to.

4. Site specific projects should include, concurrent with the project, actions for restoration of meadows and prairies wherever they occur within a project.

5. Site specific projects should include, concurrent with the project, actions for restoration of aspen stands wherever they occur within a project.

6. Use of new Blue Mountains Elk Forage and Habitat Utilization Models, developed by USFS Starkey Experiment Station, when they become available, to analyze elk impact of proposed action alternatives.

The Rocky Mountain Foundation is a non-profit conservation organization whose mission is to ensure the future of elk, other wildlife, their habitat, and our hunting heritage. The Elk Foundation also works to open, secure and improve public access for hunting, fishing and other recreation.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Blue Mountains Forest Resiliency Project.

Sincerely,
Bill Richardson