

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**Hellgate Viewpoints Renovation Project
Rogue National Wild and Scenic River**

EA# OR117-07-03

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD DISTRICT
GRANTS PASS RESOURCE AREA

August 2007

Dear Reader:

We appreciate your interest in the BLM's public land management activities. We also appreciate your taking the time to review this environmental assessment (EA). If you would like to provide us with written comments regarding this project, please send them to Abbie Jossie, Field Manager, Grants Pass Resource Area, at 2164 NE Spalding Avenue, Grants Pass, OR 97526.

If you would like to comment confidentially, please be aware that comments, including names and addresses of respondents, will be available for public review unless you request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name and address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this clearly at the beginning of your written comment. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or officials of organizations or businesses will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

I look forward to your continued involvement in the management of our public lands.

Abbie Jossie
Field Manager
Grants Pass Resource Area

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Executive Summary

This Environmental Assessment (EA) will analyze the renovation of two designated day-use areas located within the Hellgate Recreation Section of the Rogue National Wild and Scenic River corridor: the Hellgate Canyon Viewpoint and the Hellgate Bridge Viewpoint.

The project addresses management direction identified in the *Rogue National Wild and Scenic River: Hellgate Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP)* of July 2004, and the *Rogue National Wild and Scenic River, Oregon: Notice of Revised Development and Management Plan* of 1972.

The purpose of this project is to improve public safety, improve interpretive and educational signing, and enhance the day users' recreation experience, while protecting the environment and the outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs): natural scenic qualities, fisheries resources and recreational opportunities.

The BLM proposes to improve the Hellgate Canyon Viewpoint by repaving the parking area, replacing the existing concrete curb with a rock wall that surrounds the parking area, and updating the interpretive and educational signing. In addition, BLM proposes to improve the Hellgate Bridge Viewpoint by paving the parking area, constructing a rock wall around this site, and updating the interpretive and educational signing. Both sites are designated day-use only areas and are accessed by the Galice-Hellgate National Back Country Byway.

Two alternatives will be analyzed in this EA: 1) the No Action Alternative, which would not implement any aspect of the proposed action; and 2) the Proposed Action Alternative, which proposes to improve the Hellgate Canyon Viewpoint and the Hellgate Bridge Viewpoint parking with the actions listed above. The No Action Alternative serves as a baseline for evaluating the environmental effects of the Proposed Action Alternative.

1.0 Purpose and Need

Introduction

The purpose of this environmental assessment (EA) is to assist in the decision making process by assessing the environmental and human effects resulting from implementing the proposed action or alternatives. The EA will evaluate the alternatives, assessing regulatory compliance and efficacy in meeting project area needs. This EA will also assist in determining whether an environmental impact statement (EIS) or a finding of no significant impact (FONSI) is appropriate.

This EA conforms and tiers to the following documents:

- Final EIS and ROD for the *Medford District Resource Management Plan (RMP)* (1995).
- *Rogue National Wild and Scenic River, Oregon: Notice of Revised Development and Management Plan* of 1972
- *Rogue National Wild and Scenic River: Hellgate Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP) FEIS*, 2003 and Record of Decision, 2004.
- *Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl* (Northwest Forest Plan FSEIS 1994 and ROD 1994).
- *Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement: Management of Port-Orford-Cedar in Southwest Oregon* (FSEIS 2004 and ROD 2004).
- *Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendment to the Survey & Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines* (FSEIS 2000 and ROD 2001) and amendments or modifications as of March 21, 2004.
- *Medford District Integrated Weed Management Plan Environmental Assessment (1998)* and tiered to the *Northwest Area Noxious Weed Control Program* (EIS 1985).

1.1 Purpose of and Need for the Proposal

The Purpose for the Hellgate Viewpoints Renovation is to meet the direction in the Hellgate Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP) to provide for diversified recreational opportunities (RAMP p. 2) as well as addressing the needs to improve visitor safety at two developed day-use sites, the Hellgate Canyon Viewpoint and the Hellgate Bridge Viewpoint (RAMP p.5). The project seeks to improve the day use recreation experience by improving visitor safety, enhancing aesthetics, and providing resource interpretive information.

The Hellgate Canyon and Bridge Viewpoints are located along the well-traveled Galice-Hellgate National Back Country Byway and the Rogue National Wild and Scenic River (T35S R7W Section 10; T35S R7W, NE ¼ of Section 9) (Map A). Local residents, recreationists, and in- and out-of-state tourists use the road to access the Rogue National Wild and Scenic River corridor area for recreational opportunities (e.g., whitewater rafting, boat and bank angling, cycling, camping, hiking, sight-seeing, and driving for pleasure). The Hellgate Viewpoints Renovation Project EA addresses

two developed day-use sites: the Hellgate Canyon Viewpoint and the Hellgate Bridge Viewpoint. Visitors use the two day-use sites to view the Rogue's Hellgate Canyon and surrounding landscape.

The Need for the Hellgate Canyon and Bridge Viewpoints Renovation relates to visitor safety. As visitor use continues to increase, there is a need to improve visitor safety and educational resources in the area. Improving the curbed "wall" and paving the parking area at the Hellgate Canyon Viewpoint will improve visitor safety and enhance the recreational users' experience. Visitors currently step over portions of the curb to walk to the rugged bluff's edge; and in some areas, the curb overlooks steep cliffs. Adding a wall at the Hellgate Bridge Viewpoint would also enhance visitor safety by keeping parked vehicles away from the edge. This would also reduce the visibility of the vehicles as seen from the river. Both renovation project sites would ensure safe areas for visitors to view and enjoy the Rogue National Wild and Scenic River's natural scenic beauty and recreational opportunities.

The existing curb at the Hellgate Canyon Viewpoint provides a barrier between the parking area and the cliff. The curb's height varies from approximately 6-9 inches. There are also potentially unsafe areas that are undercut beneath the curb. There is a need to increase the height of the curb at the Hellgate Canyon Viewpoint to improve visitor safety and provide a safe viewing area.

1.1.1. Management Direction

The 1972 River Plan and the Hellgate Recreation Area Management Plan sets forth programs designed to manage the mix of river recreation uses and users in a developed, recreational setting, while managing and protecting the environment and the outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs): natural scenic qualities, fisheries resources and recreational opportunities. The 1972 River Plan and the RAMP outline management goals, objectives, and direction. The following are pertinent to the purpose and need of this EA.

- Stabilize or re-vegetate all areas of exposed soils caused naturally or by human activities. Place special emphasis on preventing and controlling soil erosion near the water's edge. (1972 River Plan p. 13412; RAMP p. 7)
- Since boating, fishing, and sightseeing are the main recreational uses on the river, top priority for recreation development would be given to improving the quality of these activities. (1972 River Plan p. 13413; RAMP p. 9)
- Recreation facilities may be developed to provide a wide range of opportunities for river-oriented recreation consistent with management objectives and protection of the river environment. (1972 River Plan p. 13413; RAMP p. 9)
- There are places along the river where new developments or resource improvements may be desirable to meet public needs. (1972 River Plan p. 13414; RAMP p. 11)
- Structures that can be seen from the river, trail, or developed recreation sites will (1972 River Plan p. 13414; RAMP p. 11):
 - Be of attractive design.
 - Have sufficient topography or vegetative screening to make them as inconspicuous as possible to reduce visual impacts of improvements.
 - Contain no direct or indirect design features that are obtrusive or incompatible with the scenic qualities of the area. Structures that cannot be seen from the river will contain no indirect design features obtrusive or incompatible with the scenic qualities

of the area and will be designed so that little or no soil is left exposed when construction is complete.

- Structures permitted within the recreational area of the river, provided they are in harmony with their surroundings are: residential buildings, farmsteads and appurtenant facilities, and lodges or public recreation facilities needed to serve the river user. (1972 River Plan p. 13414; RAMP p. 11)
- Parking areas will be located out of sight of the river or recreation sites. Screening will be provided if necessary. Parking will not be permitted on the gravel bars in view of the river unless there is no other suitable nearby parking area. Where there is no suitable alternative, vehicles will be parked where they are least conspicuous. (1972 River Plan p. 13414; RAMP p. 12)

The RMP has designated the Congressionally-designated Rogue National Wild and Scenic River corridor as a VRM Class I area (RMP p. 70), which has the objective to preserve the existing character of landscapes.

1.2 Project Location and Land Use Allocation

The project sites lie within the Dunn Reach (between Hog Creek and Grave Creek) in the Congressionally-designated Rogue National Wild and Scenic River corridor. The sites include:

- The Hellgate Canyon Viewpoint (T35S R7W, Section 10)
- The Hellgate Bridge Viewpoint (T35S R7W, NE ¼ of Section 9)

The Hellgate Recreation Area, 27 miles of the Rogue National Wild and Scenic River, is classified as a recreational river area. A recreational river is defined by Congress as a river that is readily accessible by road or railroad, may have some development on its shoreline, and may have been impounded or diverted in the past. Management of this area gives primary emphasis to protecting the values that make it outstandingly remarkable, while providing a diversity of river-related recreational opportunities in a developed setting. The outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs) for the Rogue River, as identified by Congress are: natural scenic qualities, fisheries resources, and recreational opportunities. Responsible management of river resources is essential to the protection of these values.

1.3 Issues and Concerns

A variety of issues and concerns were raised during project scoping by interested individuals or groups outside the BLM and by BLM's interdisciplinary team. In this EA, an issue is something unique to the project area that may need particular consideration and which may contribute to defining a particular action alternative.

The pertinent planning issues are:

- Visitor Safety

- Visual Resources
- Resource Education
- Protect the Outstandingly Remarkable Values: Recreation Opportunities, Fisheries Resource and Natural Scenic Qualities

The following were raised during public scoping:

- Visuals
- Minimize disturbance to visitors, river users and at the cliff face below the overlook during construction

2.0 Alternatives

2.1 Alternative 1: No Action

In this EA, the “No Action” alternative is defined as not implementing any aspect of the proposed action. Therefore, the no action alternative also serves as a baseline for evaluating the environmental effects of the proposed action. Inclusion of this alternative is done without regard to whether or not it is consistent with the Medford District RMP.

Under Alternative 1, renovation would not occur at either of the two day-use areas.

2.2 Alternative 2: Proposed Action

Under Alternative 2, the Hellgate Canyon Viewpoint parking area would be paved (approximately 125 feet long x 85 feet wide, triangular shaped) and the existing concrete curb that surrounds the parking area would be replaced with a rock wall (approximately 3 feet tall x 220 feet long) that would provide a safe barrier for visitors to sightsee from. The wall would be designed to visually blend with the colors and natural surroundings at this site. In addition, it is proposed to pave the parking area and construct a rock wall at the Hellgate Bridge Viewpoint; the wall would also visually blend with the colors and surroundings at this site. The two existing wall segments at the Hellgate Canyon Viewpoint, likely from the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) era, will be retained intact.

Site A – Hellgate Canyon Viewpoint – (T35S R7W, Section 10)

The existing rock wall would be rebuilt with a three foot high rock wall and concrete cap using native materials and colors that blend with the surrounding landscape. The concrete cap and three foot height would allow recreationists to safely enjoy the view. The rock wall would also prevent vehicles from stopping too close to the edge, as well as screen the view of the vehicles from the river corridor. To allow a space between the rock wall and vehicles, natural material (timber or

rounded split logs anchored with rebar, or a low curb) would be used as vehicle stops to define vehicle parking spaces. The existing parking area would be regraded and paved to be compliant with ADA accessibility requirements. The new rock wall would provide an integrated connection between the rock wall and existing guard rail along the road.

New interpretive signs and the existing bronze plaque would be arranged together as part of the new rock wall. One of the interpretive signs would describe the values of the Rogue National Wild and Scenic River as well as describe the array of recreational activities to be enjoyed throughout the area. Another interpretive sign would describe the cultural or natural history of the Rogue River corridor through the interpretation of special landmark features, historic sites, wildlife, or botanical species and unique vegetation zones found along the river.

Site B - Hellgate Bridge Viewpoint – (T35S R7W, NE ¼ of Section 9)

A rock wall similar to the one designed for the Hellgate Canyon Viewpoint would be built. It would also consider safety, function, and aesthetic issues with its three foot height, concrete cap, and use of native materials that blend with the surrounding landscape. The rock wall would be set back 10 to 20 feet from the edge to minimize the visibility of the wall as viewed from the river. The wall would have an opening to provide access to several informal trails that lead down to the river. A design element (such as large, semi-buried stones within a curbed landscape planter or a rock wall echoing the wall overlooking the river) would define a two-way exit and entry into the viewpoint parking area. The existing parking area would be paved to be compliant with ADA accessibility requirements and the existing interpretive signs and kiosk would remain.

2.3 Project Design Features

2.3.1 Water/Fisheries (ORV) & Soil

Sediment, toxic substances, human waste, or any substance that is deleterious to water quality resulting from building the rock walls or resurfacing the parking areas would be prevented from entering the river through control measures such as: traps, silt fencing, use of appropriate filters/filter fabric, and portable enclosed privies. This will be done in order to meet or exceed water quality standards listed in the Clean Water Act, specifically under section 303(d) for the Rogue River.

Work would occur seasonally during the dry period of May 15 to October 15 in order to avoid risk of heavy concentrated runoff from the sites.

2.3.2 Wildlife

The appropriate seasonal restrictions would be implemented if raptor nests are located adjacent to the project area (ranging from Jan 1 to Aug 31, depending on the species). Seasonal restrictions would only be necessary if the project activity noise would be above ambient noise levels during critical nesting periods.

2.3.3 Natural Scenic Qualities (ORV)

For wall construction, use native materials and colors that blend with the surrounding landscape to meet VRM Class I objectives.

Use the Visual Resource Contrast Rating system to analyze potential visual impacts of the proposed project (USDI 1986).

2.3.4 Recreational Opportunities (ORV)

Construction will occur outside of the high-use summer season.

ODOT and Federal Highway Administration safety standards would be implemented, requiring a safety plan for flagging, and for controlling vehicular traffic and work hours during project construction/implementation.

2.3.5 Cultural Resources

Any archaeological or historical artifacts or remains discovered during operations shall be left intact and undisturbed; if any are located, all work in the area shall stop immediately and the Area Archaeologist and Field Manager shall be notified.

Additional cultural resource surveys may be required in the event the project location is changed or additional surface disturbing operations are added to the project after the initial survey. Any such survey would have to be completed prior to commencement of operations.

All cultural resources, which include the two CCC historic features, would be protected and left in place. The new wall construction would be built to avoid the two small wall segments.

2.3.6 Noxious Weeds

All heavy equipment would be pressure washed to remove all dirt and debris prior to entering BLM lands.

Work in non-infested areas before working in infested areas if feasible. If working in infested areas before non-infested areas, equipment must be washed to remove all dirt and debris that may harbor noxious weed seed or vegetation prior to moving to non-infested areas.

Equipment and material would not be stored in known weed populations.

Rock and fill used for this project should be from a weed free source.

3.0 Environmental Effects

Only substantive site specific environmental changes that would result from implementing the proposed action are discussed here. If an ecological component is not discussed, it should be assumed that the resource specialists have considered effects to that component and found that the effects would have minimal or no effects.

Current conditions in the project area have resulted from natural events and human actions that have taken place over many decades. Cumulative effects are defined as the, “impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions” (40 CFR § 1508.7). A description of current conditions inherently includes the effects of past actions and serves as a more accurate and useful starting point for a cumulative effects analysis than by “adding up” the effects of individual past actions. “Generally, agencies can conduct an adequate cumulative effects analysis by focusing on the current aggregate effects of past actions without delving into the historical details of individual past actions.” (CEQ Memorandum ‘Guidance on the Consideration of Past Actions in Cumulative Effects Analysis’ June 24, 2005.) Cataloguing past projects and their individual effects would not be useful in discerning the contribution of the incremental impact of the project’s action alternatives. However, cataloguing and analyzing other present and reasonably foreseeable actions, put into the context of the current conditions, relevant to the effects of the proposed action is necessary, and is described below.

3.1 Soil and Water

3.1.1 Affected Environment

Both project sites are located on high bedrock points overlooking the river. Native soils are not located on these points; existing parking and observation areas have been built of imported broken rock and crushed rock fill over the bedrock.

Both project sites are within the Rogue River – Stratton Creek 6th field subwatershed. Both sites are located on rock bluffs overlooking the Rogue River. Runoff from both sites drains directly to the Rogue River, but only after approximately 120 feet.

The Rogue River, in the project area, is currently 303(d) listed (Water quality limited) by ODEQ under the Clean Water Act for two parameters (Table 1).

Table 1: Water Quality Limits for Rogue River in Project Area

Parameter	Season	Criteria	Beneficial Use
Fecal Coliform	Summer	Fecal coliform log mean of 200 organisms per 100 ml; no more than 10% > 400 per 100 ml	Water contact recreation
Temperature	Year Around (Non-spawning)	Salmon and trout rearing and migration: 18.0 degrees Celsius 7-day-average maximum	Salmon and trout rearing and migration

3.1.2 Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1: No Action

Soil condition and Rogue River water quality / quantity would remain unchanged. There would be no new effects. This determination includes short and long term direct, indirect and cumulative effects.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action

Since neither of these facilities would be built on native soil and no soil will be imported to the facilities, there would be no effect to soil or its productivity.

Improvements to the existing curb and parking area of the Hellgate Canyon and Hellgate Bridge Viewpoints would not affect existing shade, and therefore would not affect the temperature of the river.

Grading / regrading of existing parking surfaces can grind the old surface rock and asphalt to form powder that could become sediment where drainage runoff may occur, particularly during construction. However, PDFs for wall construction, and any new parking area grading and resurfacing, would keep sediment and toxic substances from reaching the Rogue River. Resurfacing the existing parking area at the Hellgate Canyon Viewpoint and surfacing the Hellgate Bridge Viewpoint is not expected to create sediment delivery mechanisms to the Rogue River in the short term due to PDFs that call for measures to trap sediment and seasonally restricted construction to normal dry periods. The resulting project would improve drainage and reduce existing sediment levels off the parking area in the Hellgate Canyon and the Hellgate Bridge Viewpoints in the long term.

There would be no fecal coliform contamination from project activities with implementation of the PDF's.

Project Design Features would prevent sedimentation from entering the Rogue River and resurfacing would reduce current sediment levels; therefore, no negative hydrologic effects are anticipated from the proposed action to these two day-use sites. This determination includes short and long term and cumulative effects. Impacts have been considered temporally (short and long term), and spatially at the project / site and watershed scales.

3.2 Fisheries Resources (ORV)

3.2.1 Affected Environment

Fisheries resources are considered one of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORV) for which the National Wild and Scenic Rivers were designated. The RAMP was based on the need to protect and enhance these values of the Rogue River pursuant to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, as amended (RAMP p. 3).

Special status species in the project area include Chinook and coho salmon and steelhead. Coho salmon are federally listed as threatened. Chinook and steelhead are strategic species in Oregon.

(IM OR-2007-072).

The Rogue River has perennial flows and anadromous fish use. The Rogue River Wild Section is a migration corridor for salmonids. Fall chinook are the primary salmonid using the area. Other salmonids, such as coho salmon, steelhead, and trout, migrate and spawn in tributaries of the Rogue River. The Riparian Reserve width is 360 feet at the project site locations (two site potential tree heights). The proposed activities are within the Riparian Reserve.

3.2.2 Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1: No Action

Fisheries would remain unchanged. There would be no new effects to the fisheries Outstandingly Remarkable Value (ORV). This determination includes short and long term direct, indirect and cumulative effects.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action

Improvements to the existing walls and parking areas of the Hellgate Canyon Viewpoint and Hellgate Bridge Viewpoint would not affect shade, temperature, or LWD of the river. PDFs for wall construction would prevent sediment delivery or toxic substances from reaching the Rogue River. Resurfacing the existing parking area at the viewpoint and surfacing the overlook is not expected to create sediment delivery mechanisms to the Rogue River in the short term due to PDFs and would improve drainage and decrease erosion in the long term.

Therefore, no effects to fisheries or aquatic resources are anticipated from the proposed actions. This determination includes short and long term, direct and indirect, and cumulative effects. Impacts have been considered temporally on the short and long term scales, and spatially at the project / site and watershed scales.

Wild and Scenic River Act

The Rogue River was recognized under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 for its Outstandingly Remarkable Value of salmon and steelhead sport fisheries. None of the proposed activities are anticipated to have any adverse effects on the Fisheries Outstandingly Remarkable Value (ORV) in the Rogue River. Project design features would protect fall chinook spawning areas and the Rogue River as a migration corridor for coho, spring chinook and winter and summer steelhead. In addition, all proposed activities are located at previously disturbed areas. There would be no alteration of the biological processes which are the basis of the fisheries ORV.

3.3 Wildlife

3.3.1 Affected Environment

There are no known federally listed threatened or endangered (T&E) or candidate wildlife species within or adjacent to the project area. The project area is not located within or adjacent to suitable spotted owl nesting, roosting, or foraging (NRF) habitat. Bald eagles, osprey, and great blue herons nest and forage within the river corridor; however, no active nests are located in the vicinity of

project area. There are no known Survey and Manage (S&M) or Bureau special status wildlife species sites located within or adjacent to the project area. The project area is a highly used recreation area that does not provide suitable habitat for T&E, federal candidate, Bureau special status, or S&M wildlife species.

3.3.2 Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1: No Action

Conditions at the proposed sites would remain the same. There would be no effects to T&E, federal candidate, S&M, or Bureau special status wildlife species.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action

No effects are anticipated to T&E, federal candidate, S&M, or Bureau special status wildlife species since there are no known locations within or adjacent to the project area and no habitat would be removed or disturbed as a result of this project. Minimal ground disturbance would occur since the proposed activities would occur in areas that have already been disturbed. Since there are no bald eagle, osprey, or great blue heron nests located in the vicinity of project area, no seasonal restrictions are necessary. However, if new nests are discovered prior to implementation, the appropriate seasonal restrictions would be applied (see PDF Section). This PDF would only be necessary if project activity noise levels would be above the typical noise levels at the site during the critical nesting period. The typical noise levels at this site are often high since the project area is located within a high volume traffic area, especially during the summer rafting season. The proposed action would not affect long term population viability of any species known to be in the area or lead to the need to list sensitive wildlife species as no habitat modification would occur, and seasonal restrictions during the critical nesting season would preclude disturbance.

Cumulative Effects

No cumulative effects are expected because there would be no effects at the project level. Project construction would be limited in duration and timing and therefore would cause minimal additional disturbance to wildlife within the Hellgate Recreation Area.

3.4 Recreational Opportunities Outstandingly Remarkable Value

3.4.1 Affected Environment

Recreational opportunities are considered one of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORV) for which the National Wild and Scenic Rivers were designated. The 1972 River Plan and the RAMP were based on the need to protect and enhance these values of the Rogue River pursuant to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, as amended (RAMP p. 3).

The Dunn Reach section begins at Hog Creek Boat Ramp and ends at Grave Creek. The Dunn Reach is primarily used for white water rafting although a small amount of power boat use occurs there (RAMP p. 1).

In 1991, 700,000 people visited the Hellgate Recreation Area (Austermuehle 1995). The period of highest visitor use typically occurs from May to mid-September, in conjunction with good weather

for floating, the motorized tour boat's operation season, and school vacation. The period of next highest use is from January to March when there is increased boat angling activity associated with the winter steelhead and spring salmon runs. The period from mid-September through December, recognized as the "fall fishing season", gets the least amount of use.

Off-water or land-based use varies considerable with each activity. Driving for pleasure, bicycling, horseback riding, picnicking, and hiking are a few of the many uses that are not water-based dependent, but these activities comprise a portion of land-based visitor uses.

While motorized tour boating accounts for the largest number of visitors on the river, nonmotorized activity accounts for the largest number of float craft occupying the river during peak use months. Vehicular traffic on the backcountry byway is light to moderate in November through April, consisting mainly of residential and some recreation traffic. Moderate to heavy use occurs May through October, particularly on the weekends, with a significant increase in recreational traffic during the summer.

Each year thousands of tourists, recreationists, and residents travel the designated Galice-Hellgate National Back Country Byway. It is unknown how many visitors stop at the Hellgate Canyon and Bridge Viewpoints.

Currently, there is no barrier to keep vehicles away from the edge at the Hellgate Bridge Viewpoint. The parking area is not paved, and vehicles could skid off the edge at this site.

3.4.2 Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1: No Action

Recreational opportunities remain unchanged. There would be no new effects to the Recreational Outstandingly Remarkable Value (ORV); water and land-based activities would still occur. This determination includes short and long term direct, indirect and cumulative effects.

However, the concern of visitors' safety at these viewpoints would remain an issue.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action

Recreational opportunities would be enhanced. The concern of visitors' safety at these viewpoints would be improved by providing necessary safe viewpoints to the visitors who stop at these two designated day-use sites. The updating of interpretive information at the Hellgate Canyon Viewpoint would enhance resource education, informing visitors about the Rogue National Wild and Scenic River. The experience of sight-seeing from these two sites is accepted as a necessary component allowing the observers to experience the Hellgate Canyon and greater landscape within the river corridor. This determination includes short and long term direct, indirect and cumulative effects.

In addition, increasing the height would detour visitors from walking to the cliff's edge.

Adding a wall at the Hellgate Bridge Viewpoint improves public safety, by keeping vehicles away from the site's edge, ensuring visitors have a safe environment to view the river and surrounding landscape.

Cumulative Effects

Because project level effects are expected to improve visitor safety, and enhance interpretive resource education and observers' viewing experience, cumulative effects are expected to be beneficial.

3.5 Natural Scenic Qualities Outstandingly Remarkable Value (ORV)

3.5.1 Affected Environment

Natural Scenic Qualities are considered one of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORV) for which the National Wild and Scenic Rivers were designated. The RAMP was based on the need to protect and enhance these values of the Rogue River pursuant to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, as amended (RAMP p. 3).

The Rogue River has carved its way through the narrow Hellgate Canyon, with near-vertical, dark gray, rugged-textured basalt cliffs / bluffs almost completely devoid of vegetation. The horizontal form of the river contrasts with the near-vertical cliffs that contain the Rogue River. The Hellgate Canyon, with its vertical relief and near complete enclosure of the view, creates a dramatic visual portal as people enter the canyon. When traveling downriver, the Hellgate Canyon Viewpoint can be seen while leaving the canyon by looking up the vertical cliff to the designated site; however, the site is not evident to the casual observer unless there are vehicles or people there. It would be seen while traveling upriver in a motorized watercraft if recreational users are at the site.

Below Hellgate Canyon, approaching the Hellgate Bridge Viewpoint, the landscape opens up to long vistas of varied vegetation (conifers, hardwoods, early to mid-seral vegetation) on slight, angular hills to steep, rugged mountain slopes. Soft textures and rounded lines are mixed with medium to coarse textured land and rock forms, creating visual diversity and varying focal points of interest. The Hellgate Bridge Viewpoint is on a flat above the river. Below the flat are pockets of vegetation, rock forms, and informal trails created by recreational users that lead to the river. This site has an interpretive kiosk located in the center of area and is within the view from the river.

When people are on the river or on the byway, they realize they are in a somewhat modified setting, yet they obtain impressions that they are viewing a natural-appearing landscape even in areas outside the immediate foreground of developed sites along the riverbanks (e.g., homes, county parks, boat ramps) and along the road. There are numerous developed and primitive sites within the river corridor that are managed by the BLM, state and county. The existing Hellgate National Back Country Byway, the Hellgate Bridge, the Hog Creek Boat Ramp parking area, and interpretive signs are structures visible in the immediate foreground when traveling this road or while on the river.

Viewing areas often need special considerations in meeting visual resource management objectives. To be functional, facilities in the immediate foreground must be visible and ordinarily create more contrast than would be acceptable in areas designated as VRM Class I. However, they are actually part of the expected image and serve the needs of the public in a recreational classified Wild and Scenic River area. The somewhat modified and visible immediate foreground setting of the highway and current day-use sites is accepted as a necessary component to allow the observer to experience the greater landscape the Rogue National Wild and Scenic River has to offer.

3.5.2 Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1: No Action

The Natural Scenic Qualities ORV would remain unchanged at both day-use sites. There would be no new effects to this ORV. This determination includes short and long term direct, indirect and cumulative effects.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action

The Hellgate Canyon Viewpoint would not be noticeable to the casual observer on the river since its rock-walled design and colors would blend in with the existing environment; however, the observer would be drawn to the canyon viewing area if sightseers or vehicles are at this designated day-use site. As viewed from the Galice-Hellgate National Back Country Byway (aka the Merlin-Galice Road), this site would blend in with the existing area and would not be an immediate visual attraction to the casual observer traveling the byway because the colors and materials would match and blend in with the geological landscaped character of the cliffs at the overlook area.

The casual observer (river user) would probably detect only a portion of the wall at the Hellgate Bridge Viewpoint; however, it will be set back far enough from the flat's edge to minimize the contrast of the edge effect the wall may have. Paving this site would not be noticeable from the river, although it would be from the Merlin-Galice Road.

As viewed from the Merlin-Galice Road, the addition of a rock wall at this site would be noticeable; however, the colors and materials would blend in and match the general area. Additionally, it would meet the expected need for people to have a location to view the outstanding scenery by bicycle, car, or other recreational vehicles (e.g., RVs, motorcycles, shuttles, etc). While the addition of a rock wall would attract attention, the existing kiosk already in place at this day-use site does as well. The proposed wall would be constructed in a manner to blend with the color and texture of the area to minimize a visual contrast, and to keep vehicles away from the edge, enhancing visitor safety.

Cumulative Effects

Because project level effects are not expected to be visually adverse, no cumulative effects are expected. The proposed additions to these sites would further enhance the visual experience of visitors as they travel the Merlin-Galice Road. This would complement the facilities that currently exist within the BLM-administered 27-mile stretch of the Rogue River's "recreation" section.

3.6 Cultural Resources

3.6.1 Affected Environment

Historic sites along the Rogue River reflect many of the major themes of this region's history. These themes include: the Rogue Indian wars from 1851-1856, gold mining in southern Oregon, the development of small-scale subsistence economies and communities in the Siskiyou Mountains, the development of recreation, the impact of the Depression in the 1930s, and the development of logging and forestry.

Several groups of Native Americans lived along the stretch of the Rogue between the Applegate River and Marial at Mule Creek. The territory of the Takelma extended from the Rogue Valley to some point between Grave Creek and Marial, possibly around Rainie Falls. Various bands of Athapaskan speaking peoples inhabited the river corridor to the west of the Takelma. Athapaskan speakers also lived along Galice Creek and the Applegate River.

At the Hellgate Canyon Viewpoint, there are two short (approx. 5 ft. by 1ft.) wall segments located behind the existing curbed wall. These two segments are most likely CCC era wall segments. These two segments will be left in place and intact during project renovation to maintain cultural resources from this historic era.

3.6.2 Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1: No Action

The current level of cultural resource site protection would be maintained.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action

A Class I records search of the BLM Cultural Resource Data files was performed on June 26, 2007. The records search indicated that there are no known cultural resources, other than the CCC era wall segments, that could be impacted by the proposed action. These will be retained intact and protected from damage during project activities. In addition, the immediate project area has experienced previous natural ground disturbance that has modified the surface so extensively that the likelihood of finding additional cultural properties is negligible.

The nature of the proposed action is such that no impact is expected on cultural resources. However, if cultural resources are inadvertently discovered they will be protected according to the PDFs outlined in the EA.

The renovation of the Hellgate Canyon Viewpoint would not impact either of the two wall segments.

Cumulative Effects

Because no project level effects are expected, no cumulative effects are expected.

3.7 Botany

3.7.1 Affected Environment

Special Status Botanical Species

The Hellgate Overlook project area consists of two locations that have very little vegetation present because they are highly used recreation areas. A pre-field review showed no known sites of federally listed plants, Bureau Special Status (BSS) or Survey and Manage (S&M) botanical species. A field review of project sites showed no suitable habitat for federally listed plants, BSS or S & M botanical species.

Noxious Weeds

The noxious weed yellow star thistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*) is present at the Hellgate Bridge Viewpoint. No other noxious weeds are present in the project area. The project area is adjacent to the Merlin-Galice Road, a road that gets heavy traffic use, especially in the summer when weed seeds are easily spread by vehicles. Vehicles on this road are a continual source of noxious weeds and cannot be mitigated for.

3.7.2 Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1: No Action

Special Status Botanical Species

The No Action Alternative would have no effect on federally listed plants because they are not present in the project area. Similarly, there would be no impact to Bureau Special Status botanical species or Survey and Manage botanical species because they are not present and there is no habitat in the project area.

Noxious Weeds

The No Action Alternative would pose no greater risk of spreading or introducing noxious weeds than what is present because of the road because ground disturbing activities would not occur. The existing population of yellow star thistle would be added to the list of sites to treat under the Medford District Noxious Weed Program.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action

Special Status Botanical Species

The proposed action would have no effect on federally listed plants because they are not present in the project area. Similarly, there would be no impact to Bureau Special Status botanical species or Survey and Manage botanical species or habitat because they are not present in the project area.

Noxious Weeds

The proposed action would not introduce or spread noxious weeds in the project area at a level above what is caused by the road because PDFs (Chapter 2) have been designed to minimize the introduction and spread of noxious weeds that may occur with implementation of this project.

Cumulative Effects

There would be no cumulative effects to Special Status Botanical Species because there are no project related effects. There would be no cumulative effects to noxious weeds because PDFs will be implemented to minimize the introduction and spread of noxious weeds.

4.0 Agencies Consulted and Public Involvement

4.1 Public Involvement

During scoping (June 2007), 195 letters describing BLM's proposal were sent to interested individuals, local and state governments, organizations, river-related businesses/outfitters and neighboring landowners. Four scoping letters were received; two from individuals, one from an organization and one from a Confederated Tribe of Indians.

Two commenters responded that they wanted to be kept informed about the project, but had no comments to offer. There were no comments opposing the project. Other comments were submitted in support of the project, but expressed concerns regarding visuals and safety. Commenters requested that the changes (design and materials) not be intrusive, and that safety be addressed during project implementation.

4.2 Availability of Document and Comment Procedures

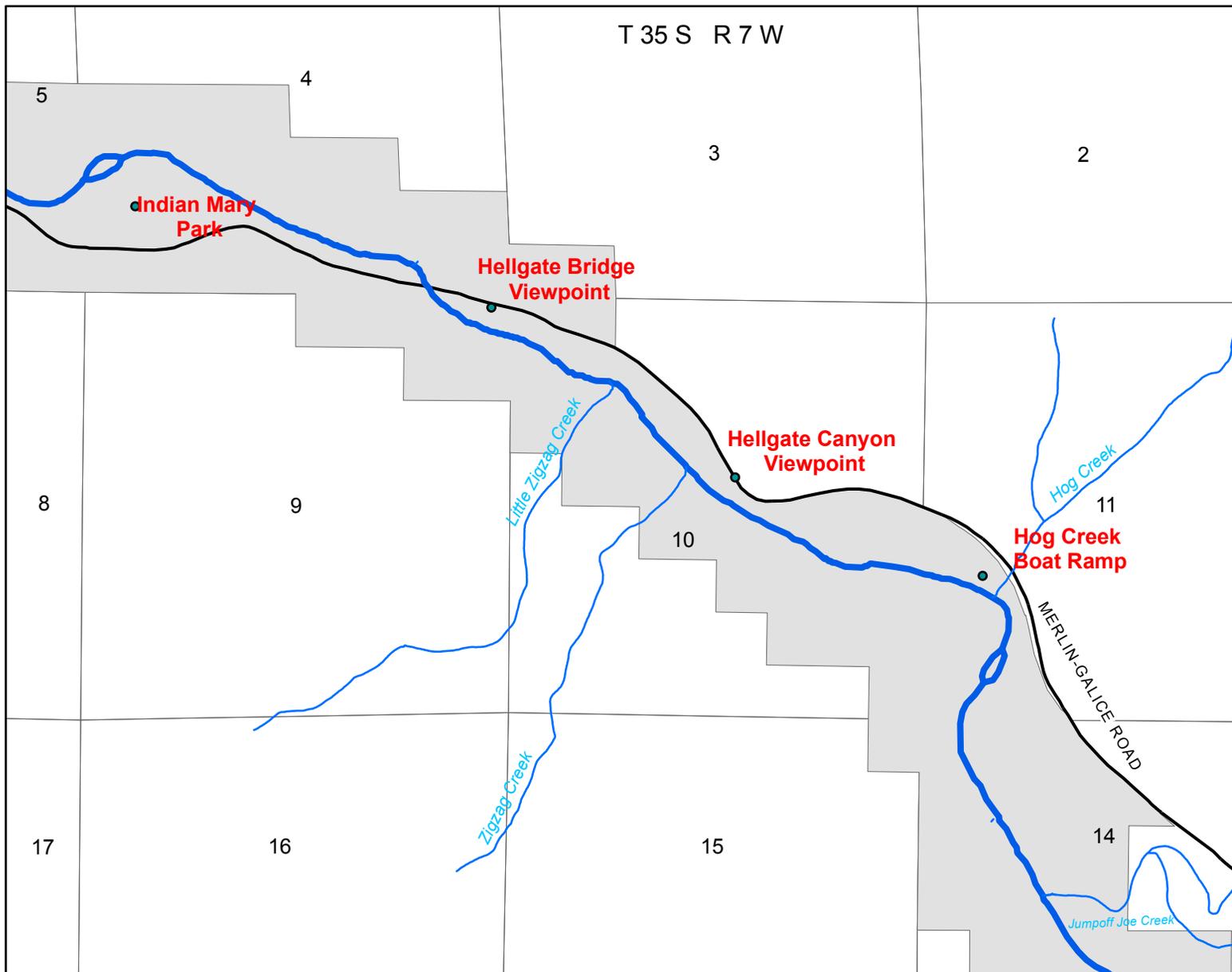
Copies of the EA will be available for public review in the Grants Pass Interagency Office. A formal 30-day public comment period will be initiated by an announcement in the Grants Pass Daily Courier. If you would like a copy of the EA, please stop by the office or contact Cori Cooper, project leader at (541) 471-6556, or Tony Kerwin, NEPA Planner at (541) 471-6564.

Written comments should be addressed to Abbie Jossie, Field Manager, Grants Pass Resource Area, at 2164 NE Spalding Avenue, Grants Pass, OR 97526. E-mailed comments may be sent to: Medford_Mail@blm.gov. Because of the potential for BLM's email access to be interrupted and to ensure your comments are received, you are encouraged to send a hard copy of your comments in addition to emailed comments.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
 Bureau of Land Management
 Medford District
 Hellgate Recreation Area

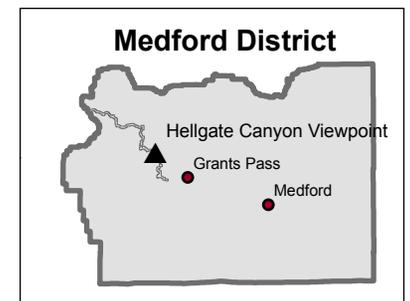
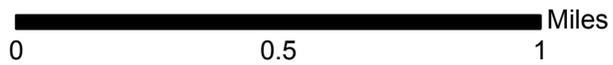


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Legend

- River rec sites
- Rogue River
- Merlin-Galice Rd
- Hellgate Rec Area



Map A: Hellgate Viewpoints Renovation Planning Area.

Appendix B. References

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