

Decision Record Decision Notice

Environmental Assessment (EA) Number: OR-056-07-108

Title: Crooked River Ranch Trails Project

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Office: Prineville

Resource Area: Deschutes

UDSDA Forest Service (FS): Crooked River National Grassland (CRNG)

Decision

It is our decision to implement the proposed action and to construct two trailhead parking areas and approximately 6.65 miles of new and reconstructed trail. The project will include closure of approximately 1.6 miles of road and obliteration of another 1.2 miles of road/ways. In addition, numerous multiple trail segments will be rehabilitated. A wildlife closure will be defined by the boundaries of the Otter Bench inland trail and Crooked River.

The project is located in portions of T. 13 S., R. 12 E., Sections 4, 9 and 10; T 12 S., R 12 E, Sections 33 and T 13 S, R 12 E, Sections 7 and 8. The purpose of this project is to reduce erosion and loss of vegetation due to unmanaged vehicle use and unmaintained roads and trails in the vicinity of the Crooked and Deschutes River canyons. The proposed action will increase and enhance nonmotorized trail opportunities in the Crooked River Ranch area. The action provides for increased protection of wildlife habitat.

Mitigation Measures

- All trail and road rehabilitation work that is located within $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ miles of established raptor nesting areas will be done between September 1 and January 31, which is outside the sensitive period (2/1 - 8/31). Heavy equipment will not be used from December 1 to April 30 to avoid disturbance of deer and elk. Project implementation will not occur during prime migratory bird nesting season between April 15 and July 30 unless the proposed activity areas are field checked by a biologist and it is determined that no nesting activity is actively occurring in those areas.
- A seasonal wildlife closure area would be defined by the boundaries of the Otter Bench inland trail and Crooked River. The trail access to this area would be closed to the public from February through August to protect sensitive bird foraging and nesting habitat. If it is subsequently determined that no nesting activity is actively occurring in those areas, then trail access could be opened.
- The 1.6 miles of Horny Hollow road beyond the Otter Bench parking area would remain accessible for administrative and emergency uses.
- Information on the proposed recreational development will be limited to signage within the project area to reduce the potential to attract additional visitation/use.
- Development of the trailhead parking area with informational and regulatory signage is expected to reduce conflicts with adjacent landowners.
- Direct impacts to the one rockshelter along the Scout Camp trail will be eliminated by maintaining the existing user created trail with no modification or reconstruction where it passes near the site.

- Sensitive and strategic bird species nesting activity would be monitored seasonally to determine effectiveness of closure and potential adjustments to the area boundary and closure period.
- Heavy equipment brought into the project area would be cleaned of debris prior to entering the project area; with the objective of eliminating or reducing the introduction of noxious weed seeds into the project area or adjacent lands.

Alternatives Considered

A No Action Alternative was the only other alternative considered.

Rationale for Decision

Constructing a designated trail system for Scout Camp and Otter bench areas will provide an increased and safe nonmotorized recreational opportunity for the public. Rerouting and rehabilitating roads and trails will reduce erosion and loss of vegetation. Road and trail closures/rehabilitation will protect and enhance the outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs) associated with the Crooked and Deschutes Wild and Scenic Rivers and wilderness characteristic of the Steelhead Falls WSA. The affected ORVs include scenic, wildlife, botanical and hydrologic resources. The seasonal wildlife closure at Otter Bench will protect sensitive bird foraging and nesting habitat as well reduce disturbance of deer and elk. Development of the trailhead parking area with informational and regulatory signage should reduce conflicts with adjacent landowners.

Compliance and Monitoring

Monitoring would be done in accordance with the Middle Deschutes/Lower Crooked Rivers Management Plan as described in part IV, section C of the plan. Additional monitoring will be added to determine if the wildlife closure can be lifted prior to the prescribed end date.

Public Involvement

The project was presented at two Crooked River Ranch organizational meetings. The CRR Trails Group scoping presentation occurred on September 29, 2007 and the CRR Birding Group presentation was made on October 2, 2008. At both meetings the participants were very supportive of the proposed action.

The Agencies solicited comments on the Environmental Assessment (EA) during a 30 day review period beginning September 4, 2008. The EA was provided to 23- members of the public, other agencies and the Tribes. Three responses supporting the project were received from individuals. All comments were in support of the proposed action. The complete record of public involvement is available for review in the project record at the BLM, Prineville District.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

The FONSI for this EA is attached as a separate signed document.

Findings Required by Other Laws (required for FS Decision Notice)

National Forest Management Act

This decision is consistent with the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Crooked River National Grassland (CRNG), as required by the National Forest Management Act. The Plan is amended by the Inland Native Fish Strategy, which provides standards and guidelines for protection of watersheds and riparian habitat conservation areas. There are no riparian habitat conservation areas within the project area.

- The Forest Plan was amended in November 2005 by the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Pacific Northwest Region Invasive Plant Program. The ROD directs that prevention of invasive plant introduction, establishment and spread will be addressed in vegetation management plans. Populations of invasive plants are known to occur within the project area. Heavy equipment brought into the project area will be cleaned of debris prior to entering the project area. In addition materials such as gravel and seed will be weed free.

National Historic Preservation Act. A cultural resource inventory has been completed for the proposed action. On October 7, 2007 the Ochoco National Forest completed the "Project Review for Heritage Resources under the Terms of the 2004 Programmatic Agreement" with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). Project activities have been designed to have No Effect to cultural resource sites through avoidance.

Endangered Species Act. Biological evaluations have been prepared to document the effects of project activities on threatened and endangered species in the project area. There are no endangered species known or suspected to occur on the CRNG. Threatened species that are known or suspected to occur on the CRNG include the bull trout. Potential effects to this specie was analyzed (see the July 9, 2007, Biological Evaluation for Aquatic Species). The analysis documents that there will be no effect to bull trout.

Environmental Justice (E.O. 12898)

No minority or low-income populations are expected to be adversely impacted by this decision.

Clean Water Act

The Crooked and Deschutes Rivers are adjacent to the project area; however no sediment is expected to be delivered into the river. Trails are routed outside the riparian zone of the rivers.

Implementation, Administrative Appeal and Review for FS Decision Notice

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(1). Actions for which notice and opportunity to comment have been published and on which all comments received during the comment period were in favor (215.6), and on which the Responsible Official's decision does not modify the proposed action. This decision may be implemented immediately.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Thomas Mottl (project leader) at 3050 NE Third Street, Prineville, OR 97754 or by telephone at (541) 416-6859.


for Molly M. Brown, Deschutes Area Manger

Oct 7, 2008
Date


Slater Turner, Crooked River
National Grassland District Ranger

Oct. 1, 2008
Date