

# Decision Record

## Tumalo Vegetation and Trail Management Project

DOI-BLM-OR-P060-2012-0008-EA

U.S. Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management

Prineville District

3050 NE Third Street, Prineville OR 97754

<http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/prineville/plans/index.php>

### Background

The Prineville District of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the proposed Tumalo Vegetation and Trail Management Project (DOI-BLM-OR-P060-2012-0008-EA). The actions included in this Decision Record were analyzed in that EA, and will occur on an 800 acre BLM-managed public land parcel located three miles southwest of the town of Tumalo, Oregon (see EA Map 1). The EA considered alternate ways to restore ponderosa pine and juniper woodland ecosystems, reduce fuel loading in a wildland urban interface, and design and construct a designated non-motorized trail system. The EA and FONSI are available at the Prineville BLM office and on-line (address at the top of this page).

### Public, Tribal and Other Involvement

A scoping letter was mailed to over 80 organizations, government agencies, tribal representatives and individuals in February, 2012 announcing that BLM was seeking help identifying issues and concerns regarding the proposed Tumalo Vegetation and Trail Management Project. Fifty-eight letters and e-mails were received. Many of the comments are summarized and addressed in the Issues section of the EA (pages 5-6 and Appendix B) and in Alternatives Considered but not Analyzed in Detail (page 13). Many comments also led to specific project design features (EA Appendix C) for the action alternatives. On March 24, 2013, notification was sent to the same scoping letter recipients that the EA was available for a 30-day public review. In addition, a press release was issued to the general public in late March describing the proposed project and announcing the availability of the EA for review. The BLM received 35 comment letters from a variety of recreation groups, conservation groups, tribal governments, state and local agencies, and individuals. Substantive comments are listed, with BLM responses, in the Decision Record Appendix, attached below.

Based on comments received from the public and internal staff, the BLM made some additions and several minor edits to the EA to clarify intent. We:

- Edited the description of clump management on page 9 to better describe how and where clumps would be left in treatment areas to allow for a more effective and safer fire buffer zone.
- Added the locations of the two primary administrative access points on page 19 to clarify where the ingress and egress would be for motorized administrative access.

- Added assumptions to Chapter 4 – Environmental Effects on page 23 to help describe cumulative effects.
- Added information in the effects section on page 26 to help explain how a reduction in access points and trail mileage would not diminish recreational opportunities.
- Added information on vegetation response and effects on mule deer hiding cover on page 27.
- Added information in the cumulative effects section beginning on page 32 for forest health, public safety (fuel loading and fire behavior), non-motorized recreation, access points, and wildlife habitat to clarify effects and address various comments and concerns.

These changes do not alter the conclusions of the analysis; therefore the BLM did not recirculate the EA for public review, although we did re-post the updated EA to our public website.

### **Proposed or Selected Alternative**

Based on the analysis documented in the EA and FONSI, it is my decision to implement Alternative 2 - Proposed Action, with modifications. This alternative was chosen because it best meets the Purpose and Need of the project as stated on pages 4 and 5 of the EA. This alternative is described in detail on pages 7-12 of the EA. The following is a summary of actions in Alternative 2 with the modifications clearly noted below.

- **Vegetative Treatments:** Treat 687-725 acres with an emphasis on ponderosa pine, juniper woodland and shrub-steppe restoration and fuels reduction for protection of life and property and firefighter safety.
- **Clump Management:** Clumps of healthy understory trees will be left for increased stand structure, habitat diversity, hiding cover, screening for trails, special area protection, and visual diversity. **A change from the original Proposed Action** is to allow the retention of larger clumps (greater than ¼ acre) only beyond 300 feet from residential lots. Clumps left within 300 feet of residential private property would be small (less than ¼ acre), infrequent and primarily for the purpose of screening non-motorized trails and roads from direct line visibility of houses. Some clumps in this zone may be lightly thinned to a tighter spacing to remove ladder fuels and treated to reduce ground fuels. Limiting the size and number of clumps within 300 feet of residential lots to ¼ acre or less will increase fuel break effectiveness and address comments and concerns regarding potential for spotting, crowning fire behavior, and firefighter safety. A light thinning and removal of ladder and ground fuels in some of these clumps will also allow some screening while providing a safe and effective fire buffer. Healthier understory vegetation will develop after treatment and provide additional cover and screening within 5-10 years.
- **Operating Season:** Operate for up to 10 months (August through May) of the year.
- **Area Closed to Public Access During Operations:** Approximately 33% of the area (239 acres) will be closed at any one time during active operations, including selected access roads used by contractor equipment. During evenings and weekends, when operations are not scheduled to occur, 100% of the area will be open to the public.
- **Years to Implement Vegetative Treatments:** Approximately 3-6 years, depending on funding.
- **Develop a 10-12 mile system of non-motorized trails:** The trail system will connect to adjacent Deschutes National Forest trails as well as provide a series of internal loops.

- **Equestrian and Bicycle Use Limited to Designated Non-Motorized Trails:** Horses and mountain bikes will not be allowed off designated trails.
- **Develop Parking Area at Tumalo Reservoir Road:** A small parking area will be designed to accommodate up to four vehicles, but not horse trailers. The parking area will be developed just south of Tumalo Reservoir Road at the existing BLM access road. It will be fenced and include a kiosk, gate and signs that will allow only non-motorized and administrative motorized access beyond the parking area. This action is a change from the original Proposed Action, but it was included in Alternative 3 in the EA. A few commenters expressed a desire to maintain easy vehicle access for short duration day use for non-motorized activities. Developing a small parking area at the existing BLM access road will allow continued limited vehicle access to the edge of the parcel while still allowing for the closure to motorized vehicles within the parcel. Concerns were also expressed for traffic safety for vehicles pulling out from the parcel onto Tumalo Reservoir Road. A Deschutes County Transportation Specialist did not indicate a hazard for ingress/egress of passenger vehicles at this location. For traffic safety, vehicle sighting distance will be improved with the thinning treatment adjacent to the road and parking area.
- **Seasonal Closure for Nesting Eagles:** The closure would prohibit access to approximately 80 acres and 1/3 mile of trail to all users from January 1 to August 31.
- **Project Design Features:** All Project Design Features listed in EA Appendix C are integral to the selected alternative and will be implemented.

### **Rationale for the Decision**

I selected the combination of actions listed above because they best meet the Purpose and Need detailed on EA pages 4-5. The rationale for each stated need is listed below:

**Forest Health:** Lack of natural fire and an absence of active BLM management (thinning) have resulted in unnatural conditions of overstocked stands of low-vigor trees, encroachment of western juniper, and occurrence of insects and disease. High tree densities and drought conditions are allowing insects and disease to occur at higher than normal levels, resulting in high tree mortality, low vigor and slow growth.

Rationale: The selected alternative will treat between 687-725 acres with a combination of mechanical and noncommercial thinning, mastication, spreading of mulch, piling and pile burning. Treatments will be designed to restore ecosystems to a more historically representative condition and structure, particularly the stands and woodlands that contain old-growth ponderosa pine and juniper. In addition, riparian areas in meadows and seeps (adjacent to canals and ditches) and shrub-steppe communities will be restored for habitat diversity. Alternative 2 will treat more acres than Alternative 3 for improved ecosystem health and resiliency to insects, disease, drought and wildfire. Long-term, more large and old trees will be protected and additional old-growth will develop. More acres of healthy understory vegetation will provide future habitat diversity and cover.

**Public Safety:** The current stand conditions present a high risk of extreme fire behavior that would threaten human life, private property and natural resource values.

Rationale: The selected alternative will treat ground fuels, ladder fuels and crown bulk density on 687-725 acres in an urban-interface setting to increase public and fire-fighter safety and to protect homes,

natural resource values and Tumalo Irrigation District infrastructure. A higher level of treatment to include mastication and/or piling and burning will occur in a 300 foot zone adjacent to residential lots. The higher number of acres treated in Alternative 2 will provide an extra margin of safety from potential fire-spotting from untreated stands and wider buffers for increased fire-fighting safety and effectiveness. Ecosystem, recreation and aesthetic values will be better protected from fire-spotting from adjacent untreated leave areas.

**Wildlife Habitat:** Large ponderosa pine trees that provide suitable conditions for raptor (e.g. bald eagle) nest sites are at risk to mortality due to wildfire, insects and disease under the existing dense stand conditions. There are more than 20 miles of trails and numerous uncontrolled access points in the project area that are contributing to impacts on wildlife habitat in this area. Many of the trails are redundant and break up (fragment) wildlife (e.g., deer, eagle, etc.) habitat or are located too close to a bald eagle nest site.

Rationale: Forest health and restoration treatments, particularly around nest trees and other large and old trees will help ensure the longevity of these special habitat features for nesting, perching and roosting. Protecting and encouraging the growth of large tree habitat will provide a long-term supply of snags and down logs of varying stages of decay. The selected alternative will reduce 20+ miles of user-created trails down to a more strategically located system of 10-12 miles of designated trails, allowing for larger blocks of unfragmented habitat on the landscape (48% of the area would have unfragmented patch sizes of 26 acres or larger). Trails near sensitive habitats will be closed or moved. Equestrians and mountain bikes will be limited to designated trails (no cross-country riding). See "Access" discussion below. Implementing Alternative 2 with the closure of about 10 miles of trails and limiting cross-country riding will partially mitigate the short-term loss of hiding cover.

**Access:** The uncontrolled access points provide additional opportunities for motorized access to the area, which also contribute to habitat fragmentation (e.g., deer winter range). Some existing fences are not located on property boundaries leading to confusion for public access and legal land ownership.

Rationale: The "Non-Motorized Recreation Exclusive" designation in the Upper Deschutes Resource Management Plan will be implemented and enforced with implementation of the selected alternative. Many road and trail access points will be eliminated. Five motorized access points will be retained, gated and signed and used only for administrative access. Six non-motorized access points will be retained and controlled with gates, fences or barricades that will only allow passage of horses, bicycles or pedestrians. Non-functional fences in the interior of the parcel will be removed and some incorrectly placed fences near property boundaries will be relocated, based on funding, access control and other future fencing needs.

Based on the analysis of potential impacts contained in the EA, I have determined in the FONSI that the Tumalo Vegetation and Trail Management Project will not have a significant impact on the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2) (c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (FONSI pages 1-4). Thus, an EA is the appropriate level of analysis, and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

## Compliance

The decision is consistent with the Upper Deschutes Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision, 2005 (UDRMP). The UDRMP and associated EIS is available at the Prineville District Office (address at top of this Decision Record) or on the Prineville District public website <http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/prineville/plans/prinevillermpp>

The UDRMP made the following designations for the project area:

- Priority Ponderosa Pine Restoration Area (RMP Map 9). Old-growth ponderosa pine stands in this area have high habitat, recreation and aesthetic values and are at risk for insect, disease and wildfire damage and mortality.
- Wildland Urban Interface (RMP Map 9). Unnaturally high fuel loads pose a hazard to life and property in adjacent residential areas.
- Commercial Forestland (RMP Map 1). Wood products, including fiber, biomass and fuelwood are an integral part of natural resource management and provide social/economic benefits.
- Visual Resource Management Class 3 (RMP Map 10). VRM Class 3 allows changes to the landscape by management activities that are evident to the casual observer but do not dominate the existing landscape.
- Primary Wildlife Emphasis (RMP Map 4). Wildlife habitat is a primary management consideration in these areas and actions need to provide habitat that benefits wildlife and retains high wildlife use.
- Closed Year-Round to Motorized Recreation (RMP Map 3). Roads not needed for administrative access are to be closed or converted to designated trails.
- Non-motorized recreation exclusive emphasis (RMP Map 4). Trails will provide a variety of loops that offer diversity of trail experiences and serve to disperse users and provide regional trail link opportunities.

The purpose of this project is consistent with the UDRMP, which provides direction to:

- “Maintain and promote healthy and diverse ... ponderosa pine forest ecosystems” (page 32)
- “Maintain or mimic natural disturbance regimes so that stands are resilient following periodic outbreaks of insect infestation, disease or wildland fire” (page 33)
- “Maintain, promote, and restore the health and integrity of old forest structure and conditions in key habitat areas and in conjunction with wildland urban interface (WUI) management objectives” (page 33)
- “Maintain, promote, and restore the health and integrity of old-growth juniper woodlands/savanna throughout its historic range whenever practicable” (page 31)
- “Maintain/restore large contiguous stands of healthy, productive and diverse native shrub-steppe plant communities throughout their historic range where appropriate considering current conditions and potential for success” (page 30)
- “Restore and maintain ecosystems consistent with land uses and historic fire regimes through wildland fire use, prescribed fire, and other methods. Reduce areas of high fuel loading that may contribute to extreme fire behavior” (page 61)
- “In the WUI, live and dead vegetation will be managed so that a wildland fire would burn with fire behavior where firefighters can be safe and successful in suppression efforts under hot, dry summer weather conditions. Treatments will be designed for human safety while still

considering recreation opportunities, wildlife habitat and corridors, visual quality, air and water quality, and public access” (page 62)

- “Provide designated access points (includes entry points, parking areas, trailheads, and/or staging areas) to enhance visitor experience, protect resources, and minimize conflicts with adjacent landowners” (page 134)
- “Provide identifiable non-motorized recreation opportunities to provide visitor satisfaction, protect natural resources, and minimize conflicts among public land users and adjacent land owners” (page 134)
- “Provide habitat that benefits wildlife and retains high wildlife use. Wildlife habitat is a primary management consideration in these areas” (page 55)
- “During seasonally sensitive periods (e.g. breeding, nesting) or in sensitive sites avoid or mitigate for impacts from activities occurring in or near.....” (page 46)
- “Enhance the health of roost and nest trees by reducing competing vegetation” (page 46)

The implementation of this project will not have significant environmental effects beyond those already identified in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the UDRMP.

The selected action ensures compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. This compliance includes consultation with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office and interested tribes, and project design features that avoid disturbance to historic properties and paleontological resources.

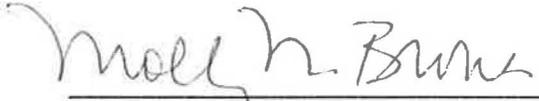
### **Appeal Opportunities**

This decision constitutes my final decision. Any person adversely affected by this decision may appeal to the U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Hearings and Appeals, Interior Board of Land Appeals (Board) in accordance with the regulations contained in 43 CFR, Part 4 and Form 1842-1 (form available at BLM address on front page of this document). If you file an appeal, your notice of appeal must be filed in this office within 30 days from receipt of this decision for transmittal to the Board. Only signed hard copies of a notice of appeal will be accepted; faxed or emailed appeals will not be considered. The appellant has the burden of showing that the decision appealed from is in error. If your notice of appeal does not include a statement of reasons, one must be filed with the Board within thirty (30) days after the notice of appeal was filed.

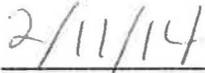
A copy of your notice of appeal and any statement of reasons, written arguments, or briefs, must also be served upon the Regional Solicitor, Pacific Northwest Region, U.S. Department of the Interior, 805 SW Broadway, Suite 600, Portland, Oregon 97232. Service must be accomplished within fifteen (15) days after filing in order to be in compliance with appeal regulations.

As provided by 43 CFR Part 4, you have the right to petition the Office of Hearings and Appeals to stay implementation of the decision; however, you must show standing and present reasons for requesting a stay of the decision that address your interests and the manner by which they would be harmed. A petition for stay of a decision pending appeal shall show sufficient justification based on the following

standards: (1) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied; (2) The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits; (3) The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted; and (4) Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.



Molly M. Brown  
Field Manager, Deschutes Resource Area



Date

Attachment:  
Appendix A – Response to Comments Received on the Tumalo Vegetation and Trail Management Project Environmental Assessment

## Appendix A

### Response to Comments Received on the Tumalo Vegetation and Trail Management Project Environmental Assessment

The Prineville District BLM received 35 comment letters during the 30 day public comment period that ended April 22, 2013. Most of the comments (32) came via email. Two of the comment letters were mailed through the U.S. mail, and one was hand delivered.

Comments below are sorted according to issue or resource categories (public access, trail design, wildlife, fuels, forestry, etc.). In instances where there were similar comments, representative samples of the comments are provided followed by a single statement summarizing the comments. A response to the summary statement is then given. Where there are unique, specific comments, the actual comment is quoted, followed by the BLM response. When there were repetitive statements or questions in the same letter, only one representative quote per topic was extracted and answered.

Brackets [like this] contain words that have been added to clarify the comment. Dots . . . indicate words have been left out for brevity. The BLM responses focus on comments that suggest: A) new alternatives that would meet the purpose and need described in Chapter 1 of the EA; B) information that was not considered in the analysis; C) faulty effects analysis; D) failure to follow law, regulation or policy; or E) corrections and clarifications. Comments often included a vote for a specific alternative or were generic in nature or did not apply to this project; these comments are noted but not responded to unless they also make one or more of the suggestions described above.

## Public Access

### **Sample Comments (Motorized access/vehicle parking):**

*"We would also like to continue to have access to the Tumalo Irrigation settling pond area. It is a beautiful place to watch wildlife. I have disabilities and cannot hike like I used to. We would not like to be locked out of an area we appreciate living near. There are specialty groups, horseback riders and mountain bikes, that would like to exclude motor vehicles from many areas. Let's hope that the public, who love the area just as much, does not get excluded. As seniors we know how important it is to keep roads open so everyone can enjoy the area."*

*"...also gating the existing vehicular access to our property would be preferred keeping in mind that ODF may need to have ready access for fire protection purposes."*

*"...the use of logs and rocks are mentioned to exclude motorized use of trails within the project area. Fire suppression in Central Oregon, particularly in the Wildland Urban Interface, utilizes an engine based strategy. In order for this to be effective, it requires rapid emergency vehicle*

*access. My recommendation, and that of the Cascade Timberlands, is to utilize gates instead of logs and rocks. Even gates on former roads can provide emergency access for both fire suppression and medical emergencies."*

*"While I am not opposed to tree thinning and fire abatement, I am strongly opposed to restricting access of any kind in this area. I've accessed public lands via this tract and would like to continue doing so in the future."*

**Summary Statement:**

The BLM should have an action alternative that does not close off motorized access or vehicle parking access in the Tumalo Vegetation and Trail Management Project parcel for public recreation and fire suppression.

**BLM Response:**

A decision was previously made through the Upper Deschutes Resource Management Plan, 2005 (UDRMP), RMP Map 3, to designate this area as "closed year-round to motorized recreation." The associated Final Environmental Impact Statement (2005) analyzed effects of this decision. Therefore, the issue of whether or not to close roads to motorized access is not readdressed in this EA. This EA describes two action alternatives that provide different ways of implementing the motorized restriction decision in the UDRMP. The UDRMP allows administrative access with motorized vehicles for management activities such as irrigation facility maintenance, fire suppression, and land treatment operations. The EA alternatives allow for a combination of both, physical barriers and locked gates, as appropriate, to implement road closures (Alternatives, page 7). The BLM acknowledges the need for emergency access to adjacent forest ownerships. Alternatives in the EA provide for adequate motorized access to the west, east and south for fire and medical emergencies (see EA Map 4, page 42 and Map 5, page 43) for locations of five proposed vehicle gates). Non-motorized access into the parcel would not be restricted.

**Sample Comments (Elimination of roads to benefit wildlife):**

*"...the proposed EA acknowledges that there are 5.45 miles of roads providing motorized access in the area and that the UDRMP guidelines are for only 1.5 miles of motorized routes per square mile. Substantial closures of roads are needed..."*

*"I would like to re-affirm the position that Bill Swartz of Cascade Timberlands has previously stated regarding public access to adjoining private property. Cascade Timberlands has and continues to experience remote camp site related human caused fires from recreating public who fail to recognize that they are on private property. ODF would prefer that the trail management project will be designed in a manner that limit public access (motorized and non-motorized) opportunities to adjoining private properties to assist ODF in our Fire Prevention efforts."*

*"In fact, you provided no response to our documentation of extensive unauthorized motorized use of the area. Rather than provide measures to stop the illegal use, the EA merely states at page 39: 'Since motorized recreation is not allowed and the proposed action would not change that, this issue will not be discussed further in this analysis.'"*

*"Our recommendation is to close all roads on the parcel with the exception of the canal road, and to gate it....This parcel is small; it is difficult to imagine justification for motorized access outside of the irrigation canal... We have had incidents of motorized trespass and vandalism on our property adjacent to the BLM parcel. We would like to see BLM make efforts to address this, perhaps with signage and gates."*

*"Opening up the area with such extensive thinning is also going to encourage continued unauthorized motorized use of the area."*

### **Summary Statement:**

The BLM should have an alternative that eliminates more roads in the Tumalo Vegetation and Trail Management Project parcel to benefit wildlife and prevent illegal activities.

### **BLM Response:**

As stated in the EA, all existing roads in the project area would be closed to public motorized use. Most of the existing roads in the project area were created during the construction of the irrigation canals and ditches and were authorized under the Carey Act in the early 1900s. Legally, the BLM must allow access and maintenance for issued rights-of-ways. The Tumalo Irrigation District (TID) has a valid right-of-way for ongoing maintenance activities. Administrative access must also be maintained for fire protection and other administrative needs. The existing TID right-of-way roads serve this dual purpose. As stated in the EA, Alternatives and Appendix C sections, all existing roads in the project area would be closed to public motorized use by signing and gating or blocking. Although portions of the area would have a more open appearance after treatments, physical barriers such as fence construction, rock placement, down logs, woody debris and post-thinning shrub growth would help reduce unauthorized vehicle use.

## **Parking Area**

### **Sample Comments (Parking lot/trailhead):**

*"Alternative 3 is less desirable in that less area would be treated and the building of a parking lot under Alternative 3 is unnecessary and may in fact prove a traffic hazard as due to topography, approaching vehicles may have limited visibility of horse trailers slowly pulling onto Tumalo Reservoir Rd from the lot."*

*"In Alternative 3, I have issues with providing a small parking lot for up to three cars and three small horse trailers. First of all the horse traffic is much greater than up to three small*

*horse trailers. It would be better use of funds to improve the parking at the end of Tumalo Reservoir Road for horse trailers. On any given weekend there are many trailers, cars and trucks using the trailheads at the reservoir. This is a better site for equestrian users to congregate for their activities. I feel a parking lot will become a place to empty trash out of cars, and encourage individuals to 'hang out.' I have found drug and sex paraphernalia on trails and around the settling TID pond, these are not activities I like to see going on in my backyard. "*

*"Parking Provision in Alternative 3 is not useful for any of the Alternatives. The provision of additional parking in Alternative 3 alone seems illogical and piecemeal. Its scale is in any case inadequate as it is not in the same order of magnitude as even the current need. I suggest that this matter be deferred until implementation of the remainder of the Tumalo Block is undertaken."*

*"I don't see the value of creating a new parking facility at this point. It would be of very limited size and inevitably would become 'crowded' and risk overspill into surrounding areas."*

*"We do not see a need to build a trailhead on the property. There is adequate parking at the school bus turnaround at the end of Tumalo Reservoir Road, so we do not believe an additional trailhead is desirable."*

*"I think the parking area (if put in) should be for cars only and any trailer use should remain at the end of Tumalo Reservoir Road until such time that a proper staging area be established that can meet the needs of the time."*

**Summary Statement:**

The BLM should have an alternative that does not build a parking lot/trailhead on the parcel because it is not safe or would not be adequate for horse traffic needs. The BLM should improve the parking lot at the end of Tumalo Reservoir Road.

**BLM Response:**

Two alternatives, Alternative 1 (No Action) and Alternative 2, do not allow for the construction of a new parking lot. The BLM consulted with the Deschutes County Road Department regarding motorized access and traffic safety before including the option of a small parking area in Alternative 3. A county Transportation Specialist did not indicate a hazard for ingress/egress of passenger vehicles from Tumalo Reservoir Road. Improving the parking at the end of Tumalo Reservoir Road is beyond the scope of this EA. This land is owned by the Tumalo Irrigation District. A trailhead at this location would direct use onto lands not administered by the BLM (private and U.S. Forest Service). In order to consider placing a trailhead at this location an interagency regional recreation plan should be developed for the greater Tumalo area. The siting of additional parking areas and trailheads should be evaluated when all landowners are involved.

# Trail Design

## **Sample Comments (Further reduce trails):**

*“Route density is still very high, going from 16.53 miles per square mile for Alternative 1 to 10.01 for Alternative 2 and 9.73 for Alternative 3, which is much higher than the Department’s recommended route density of 1.5 miles per square mile for motorized routes and 2.5 miles per square mile for all routes...”*

*“The parcel currently has well over 20 miles of roads and trails, which greatly reduces habitat effectiveness for wildlife. While the proposed alternative would reduce this somewhat, the resulting 12+ miles of roads and trails is still excessive. They are both harmful to wildlife and an increased risk for fire and vandalism. ”*

*“BLM appears to take the view that if you don’t provide enough roads and trails, the public will just make more. This is a self-defeating form of management. The parcel should just have those roads and trails that are reasonable, and the public should be encouraged to use only those....Reduce trail mileage to 6-8 miles and restrict them to non-motorized use.”*

## **Summary Statement:**

An alternative should be included that would reduce trail density even more than the proposed 10-12 miles in the EA to protect wildlife and reduce risk of fire and vandalism.

## **BLM Response:**

The EA already includes alternatives (Alternatives 2 and 3) that would reduce trail miles to about half of what is currently available (about 20 miles). The project area is a small disjointed parcel of BLM land that does not have the capacity to meet all of the demands of multiple-use management or meet the UDRMP guidelines for areas with a primary wildlife emphasis. The UDRMP (page 56) recognized these situations exist and provides guidance in “Objective W-4d—Jurisdictional Limitations: Provide habitat conditions that move toward primary or secondary wildlife management emphasis to the extent practicable within jurisdictional limitations.” One guideline under this objective states “non-motorized trail systems will be developed in a manner that leaves some unfragmented areas across the geographic area.” The EA provided a range of trail densities, patches sizes and distribution and an analysis of wildlife effects using a suitability index for patch sizes directed at small ownership blocks. Wildfires and vandalism are seldom caused by users of non-motorized trails. Implementing the non-motorized closure would have a far greater benefit for reducing the risk of fire and vandalism.

### **Sample Comments (Restricting horse and dog access):**

*"Regrettably, it's common to see off leash dogs wander for hundreds of feet on both sides of a trail thereby causing wildlife disturbance. A solution could be to require dogs to be on a leash from December 1<sup>st</sup> through July 1<sup>st</sup>..."*

*"I have seen horses and dogs swimming in the pond....Is it possible to put restrictions in place for people/animals to not use the pond and surrounding canal system for their recreational use on an outing?"*

### **Summary Statement:**

An alternative should be included that would require owners to keep dogs on a leash and restrict horse access near the pond and canals.

### **BLM Response:**

As noted earlier, this BLM parcel is small, isolated and has jurisdictional limitations regarding the ability of management on this parcel to meet certain wildlife objectives. The UDRMP provides guidance (page 56) to manage "to the extent practicable within jurisdictional limitations." Requiring dogs on leash would be technically unfeasible and therefore not a reasonable option due to the parcel size, shape, and being located adjacent to homes and other properties where dogs can roam off leash. Alternative 2 would require horses to stay on designated trails, however, horses would continue to be allowed to cross the canal at designated trail crossings.

### **Specific Comments**

#### **Comment:**

*"Moreover, prior to treatments, trail defining vegetation can be identified and retained to increase user enjoyment of the designated trail while meeting wildlife objectives of keeping most users along predetermined routes. The EA does not acknowledge the use of this component of trail design to improve user compliance and enjoyment, but instead notes that 'Upon completion of the vegetation treatments, the trail system would be identified using input from BLM staff, the local trail user group, volunteer groups and special recreation permit holders (EA 10).'"*

#### **BLM Response:**

There are a number of acceptable ways to approach trail design and layout and there is no "one size fits all" approach. The trail design approach and project design features included in the alternatives (page 7) and project design features (PDFs) Appendix C, page 47-51, provide adequate direction and consideration appropriate for this vegetation type, geography, small size and shape of the BLM land parcel. This approach also fits well with the fixed features (existing ROWs and adjacent county roads that facilitate access). The PDFs provide for modified thinning around the bald eagle nest

and riparian area, the two main wildlife resources within the BLM parcel. Logical locations for new trail segments or loops, and trails to close, would become more evident once treatment is completed.

**Comment:**

*“Specifically, we would like to see a stacked loop trail system that includes feeder trails from neighborhood access points to existing routes on Forest Service and Cascade Timberlands property. Such a trail network would provide shorter loops for hikers and dog walkers, longer loops for horses and bikes, and through routes for trail users wanting to access the adjacent recreational trails.”*

**BLM Response:**

The proposed trail systems described and displayed in Alternatives 2 and 3 of the EA would provide a reasonable amount of access to the BLM parcel, with short and longer loops within the confines of the BLM parcel. The BLM intends to coordinate with adjacent Forest Service and private landowners during implementation regarding specific trail locations.

**Comment:**

*“The proposed action would reduce trail length from 20.75 miles to 12.63 miles. Through good planning and management, it often is possible to sustain trail miles while sustaining or enhancing wildlife habitat. When necessary, it also may be possible to reduce trail mileage while sustaining recreation opportunities (the quality of opportunities is not dependent solely on the number of miles). However, I do not see analytical support that this is the case here. Therefore, I assume the mileage reduction will lead to a reduction in opportunities. I request that this be documented, explicitly incorporated into the analysis, and evaluated regarding its desirability.”*

**BLM Response:**

The small size of the project area (800 acres), the intermingled ownership pattern and the redundancy of trails limit recreation opportunities within this parcel. While there would be a reduction in trail mileage, the opportunities for connecting to adjacent larger public land parcels (e.g. Forest Service) using shorter internal loops, would remain, as would options for short out and back trail opportunities within the parcel. Based on your comment, additional information has been added to the EA on page 26.

## **Forestry**

**Sample Comments (Operating seasons):**

*“Tree cutting and brush clearing are described as occurring during winter months. While this is perhaps best for fire considerations, it is extremely detrimental to wintering mule deer and other wildlife. Mule deer are essentially starving to death during winter; if the winter doesn’t last too long, they survive, and if it lasts too long, many die. They need to be as undisturbed as*

*possible during the winter months. That is the reason for road closures on public roads in the Tumalo Deer Winter Range. Project work should be undertaken outside of the December 1 to March 31 time frame."*

*"Seasonal closures imposed during the nesting period should also err on the side of being longer rather than shorter. Thinning should be done when it will have the least impact on wildlife."*

*"We'd like the BLM to focus the non-operating season on avoiding the spring reproductive season as well as the peak recreational season..."*

**Summary Statement:**

Tree thinning and fuels reduction operations should not occur during the winter or spring months due to potential impacts to wintering mule deer and other wildlife.

**BLM Response:**

The EA includes an alternative with no operations during the winter or spring (Alternative 1, No Action). Alternative 2 and Alternative 3 have 10 and 8 month operating seasons respectively and both would allow operations during winter and spring months. The alternatives include design features that would help reduce potential effects to wildlife; for example, under both action alternatives, only 33 percent of the area would have active operations during any given time to limit impacts to wildlife and recreation. In order to complete the project in a reasonable amount of time (3-6 years), and thereby limit the overall duration of project disruption and impacts, operations would be allowed to proceed for most of the year in these alternatives. The alternatives present tradeoffs in effects between wildlife and other considerations (e.g., irrigation season, fire hazard, dust, recreation use). As stated in the EA, the amount of BLM public lands in this area is small compared to other ownerships. Operations can only occur on up to 239 acres (33% of 725) at any one time under the highest treatment alternative. This represents about one-fifth of one percent of the total 110,936 acre Tumalo Winter Range. Since it is such a small area located on the very east edge of the winter range, the impact on mobile wintering deer is considered to be low as described in the cumulative effects analysis.

**Sample Comments (Firewood):**

*"One complementary course of action might be to make thinned timber available to the public for firewood, though we recognize the feasibility of this suggestion is uncertain."*

*"Please explore the possibility of that wood being available to those in need in our community through planned and responsible harvest by groups such as prison crews, non-profit organizations, shelters, or appropriate other community-oriented groups. This would be beneficial for all."*

### **Summary Statement:**

Is there an alternative that allows the public to gather firewood from the trees that have been thinned?

### **BLM Response:**

Alternative 2, Proposed Action, (page 7) says: "Most of the thinned tree material would be harvested and removed for a variety of wood products including...firewood..." Because of the strict guidelines of this project regarding timing of operations, fuel clean-up and visual and wildlife habitat concerns, there would not be a designated "public woodcutting area." During the course of the commercial thinning operation, the contractor may produce firewood that could then be resold to the public at the wholesale or retail level.

### **Miscellaneous Specific Forestry Comments:**

#### **Comment:**

*"Regarding discussion on page 8 EA regarding basal area: On page 7 of the EA it was specified of the thinning in the overstory (trees 13-20"dbh): 'In this last size class thinning would be variable and based on site productivity, tree health and vigor, presence of disease, and hazard tree criteria, rather than strict spacing guidelines.' Why is this more ecologically sound variable density thinning concept then abandoned on page 8 for strict basal area target?"*

#### **BLM Response:**

The EA action alternatives call for a basal area range within the ponderosa pine stands of 60-80 square feet per acre. As described in the EA, this tree density takes into account that these stands are on the dry fringe of the ponderosa pine range and some of the denser areas are being artificially supported by seepage from the canals and ditches. One of the assumptions in the EA, page 23, states that the canals and ditches in the project area are expected to be piped within 10 years. The basal area ranges and various spacings would allow for a highly variable density after treatment. BLM does not expect to achieve a specific target density on every acre. After treatment, some acres would be at a higher basal area and some acres would be at a lower basal area, for an overall average within any given stand within the target basal area. BLM is aware that mature ponderosa pine trees tend to occur at a variable density, including occasional groups. The action alternatives would maintain such structure where it occurs.

**Comment:**

*“Regarding p. 14 EA, last paragraph: The EA fails to mention that part of the reason for the project area now having less large old ponderosa pines is probably past logging of large old trees there. Why are the effects of past logging not analyzed?”*

**BLM Response:**

The EA says: “Past selective logging practices and single lightning strikes have also removed or killed several large ponderosa pines in the project area” (page 16, Affected Environment). The historical logging that occurred in the project area was not extensive and is estimated to have occurred at least 50-60 years ago. BLM has no written record of this activity. Any logging effects are reflected in the current stand condition and structure which is described in the Affected Environment (pages 15-22).

**Comment:**

*“We ask you to consider not logging any trees greater than 15” dbh due to their apparent scarcity (i.e. the trees causing any excess density due to fire suppression and past logging are apparently only up to 12” dbh at the most).”*

**BLM Response:**

Both action alternatives (page 7-12) say: “An estimated 90 percent of the trees removed would be in the size range of 4-12 inches DBH.” Trees to be cut that are greater than 15 inches DBH would consist of juniper trees; pine trees that are considered ladder fuels and competing with larger and older pine trees; trees that are a hazard to private property or TID facilities; or trees that pose a safety risk to contractors, recreationists, or adjacent homeowners.

**Comment:**

*“Re: p. 9 EA: We ask that you avoid the building of new ‘temporary’ roads. There’s already far too many roads in the area and not every part of the project area needs to be logged.”*

**BLM Response:**

The EA includes an alternative where no new temporary roads would be built (the No Action Alternative). An action alternative to not build any temporary spur roads would not meet the project’s purpose and need because it would not allow treatment of a substantial portion of the project area, particularly near homes that are at risk from wildfire. Therefore, such an alternative was not included. The proposed temporary spur road access in Alternatives 2 and 3 would be kept to the absolute minimum necessary to access isolated areas for fuels reduction and old-growth ponderosa pine restoration. The routes are located on level terrain and can be easily eliminated upon conclusion of the thinning project. As specified in EA Appendix C – Project Design

Features (page 47), one or more of these temporary access routes may be turned into non-motorized trails. These routes would be integrated into the non-motorized trail network only if they are in logical trail locations, otherwise they would be effectively erased after use.

**Comment:**

*“So what is the ‘natural’ rate of old-growth tree mortality in this area, and how is that determined? How old are the trees that are dying?... Additional late and old forest structure would develop over time if the forest was left alone (No Action).”*

**BLM Response:**

The “natural” rate of old-growth tree mortality is a complicated question that would be based on many biotic and abiotic factors, both “natural” and human influenced. Because old-growth ponderosa pine stands, by some definitions, have trees that are greater than 150 years old, it is impossible to determine the life span of individual trees at any point in time. Site conditions change greatly over such a span of time, particularly when in close proximity to human development and management activities (e.g., human-caused fires, human-suppressed wildfires, canal construction, etc.). Ponderosa pine can live up to about 500 years under the best of circumstances. Ponderosa pine of all age classes are dying in the project area, primarily as a result of drought stress, followed by secondary attack by bark beetles. Lightning strikes are another major source of mortality in the tall older trees. The “historic” or “natural range of variability” is a metric that is used as only one of the criteria that guide BLM management of old-growth ecosystems. The UDRMP states: “Maintain, promote and restore the health and integrity of old forest structure and conditions...” The objective to “maintain, restore and promote” may, at times, mean not letting mortality by “natural causes” reduce numbers of large and old trees below what has already occurred in certain areas. Human prevention of historic frequent low-intensity natural fires and lack of density management has resulted in forest conditions and structure such that “natural processes,” as would occur with the No Action Alternative, would no longer result in a natural stand structure and condition.

## **Fuels**

**Sample Comments (Fuel treatment options):**

*“We are concerned about burning the debris from the thinning activities, because of the impact of the smoke on nearby residents and the potential for a burn pile to exceed control. Abstaining from burning essentially ameliorates any chance of unintended brush fires resulting from project activities, thus enhancing public safety. The local residents in our group strongly urge that the debris be chipped and spread rather than being burned, especially green materials.”*

*“...It would be a good idea to consider some mastication as well. We have seen that a one time entry with mastication will prepare the forest for future beneficial underburning”*

*"I am in favor of mulching as opposed to burning."*

**Summary Statement:**

The EA should include an alternative that does only mechanical fuels reduction techniques (such as mastication, chipping, mulching and spreading) for the ecosystem benefits they provide, and avoids burning due to smoke and fire risk issues.

**BLM Response:**

The action alternatives do allow for mastication (mulching), chipping and some limited spreading, subject to fuel loading, recreation and visual considerations, but they also allow for burning of slash piles. All BLM prescribed burns require an approved Burn Plan which includes strict guidelines for smoke and fire risk management. Any burning within the project area would occur in the winter months under wet conditions to help limit any chance of an escape. Depending on chip and hog fuel biomass markets at the time of operations, biomass removal or only mechanical operations may not treat/remove enough material to make on-site disposal or spreading feasible.

**Specific Comments**

**Comment:**

*"This EA document points to several reasons, or needs for the project (page 4), public safety being one of them. Public safety includes human life, private property and natural resource values. All that being said, I have too often seen wildlife clumps (basically jackpots of fuel) bordering private property and roads. This project appears to have ample room to strategically leave clumps well interior of the project area. I am recommending the amendment of paragraph titled "Clump Management", on page 9 to reflect public safety as a priority in the placement of these clumps.*

*- A 300' clump free buffer along all private property boundaries.*

*- A 300' clump free buffer on both sides of all green highlighted roads of the Alt. 2 map.*

*- A 100' clump free buffer on both sides of the remaining red highlighted roads of the Alt 2 map. Buffer areas as stated above would substantially increase the probability of success of Initial Attack fire suppression efforts. They would also provide safer egress for the general public and firefighters through reduced fuel loading and higher visibility along the roads. A clump free buffer along private boundaries reduces fire behavior and resource damage to both federal and private interests when a fire occurs."*

**BLM Response:**

The action alternatives allow for some leave clumps or higher thinning densities within a fire safety zone (within 600 feet of homes) and near certain roads and trails in order to provide some wildlife habitat cover and screening of trails and roads while meeting fuel loading and fire behavior objectives. The design and size of these leave clumps and modified thinning prescription would be such that any potential fire risk is low. The description of Clump Management on EA page 9 has been changed to more clearly describe clump management and proposed implementation near homes.

# Wildlife

## **Sample Comments (Hiding cover):**

*“Optimal habitat for mule deer is commonly considered as having 40% cover. Both Alternatives 2 and 3 are a long way from this threshold... Alternative 3, with its proposed 25-40% proposed hiding cover, is better aligned with the UDRMP guidelines for the area and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife standards for hiding cover for mule deer (40%). However, the overall consequences of this dramatically diminished cover are not adequately addressed.”*

*“Yet the proposed alternative (alternative 2) would result in only 5-10% hiding cover for mule deer (40% is the accepted target). We also suspect that the projected increase in hiding cover to 30-35% in 5-10 years for the proposed alternative is overly optimistic, and the lack of hiding cover would be unnecessarily harmful to the struggling mule deer population.”*

*“In particular, the proposed EA fails to adequately provide for adequate hiding cover or thermal cover for deer.”*

*“Re: p. 26 EA: The 40% cover requirement should be met, not violated.”*

*“Nowhere in the EA could we find mention of thermal cover, which is also of critical importance on mule deer winter range. In severe winters, thermal cover is essential to retention of body heat and energy stores. We would like to see an analysis of thermal cover for the alternatives.”*

## **Summary Statement:**

The alternatives in the EA do not provide adequate hiding cover or thermal cover for mule deer.

## **BLM Response:**

The alternatives in the EA provide for a range of hiding cover. Alternative 1 would retain the current estimated 75percent, Alternative 2 would provide 5-10 percent post-treatment and 30-35 percent after 5-10 years, and Alternative 3 would provide 25-40 percent post-treatment. Based on past experience, vegetative response post-treatment is usually substantial; the shrub and seedling/sapling tree component is expected to contribute quality hiding and camouflage cover within 5-10 years after thinning, particularly within the subsurface irrigation zone near the canals and ditches. The UDRMP (2005) does not provide guidance to manage for hiding cover in the Tumalo Recreation Area like it does for higher productivity forest habitats such as the BLM La Pine block. The UDRMP does not specify a hiding cover requirement in dry-site ponderosa pine forest and western juniper woodland habitats in order to be consistent with other UDRMP objectives related to old-growth forest, woodland and shrub-steppe restoration and historic conditions and structure. Thermal cover, while previously

being a standard management guideline, has more recently been questioned by researchers. In a review of studies done to test the hypothesis of thermal cover needs for large ungulates, including deer, Cook et al. (2005) could find no evidence to support the hypothesis that thermal cover provided positive energetic benefits affecting body mass or condition. Since the literature does not show a clear connection of thermal cover to increased winter survival rates, this issue was not analyzed in detail in the EA.

**Sample Comments (Cumulative effects for wildlife):**

*"... the EA's discussion of cumulative effects at pages 30-31 omits mention of any Forest Service projects on adjacent or nearby lands... Additionally, the EA fails to address recent fires in the area, one of which burned extensively in the Tumalo Deer Winter Range to the northwest of the project area. Furthermore, the discussion of activities on private lands is very general and fails to adequately describe the extensive thinning that has occurred on these lands."*

*"Re: p. 30 EA: This is inadequate cumulative effects analysis for wildlife.... This lack of data leads to inadequate effects analysis overall and to potentially poor decision making that could result in loss of species viability in the project area and cumulatively to uplisting of species, especially if this is a chronic problem with BLM projects."*

*"We believe that there has been an insufficient analysis of cumulative effects on wildlife habitat."*

**Summary Statement:**

The cumulative effects analysis for wildlife is inadequate because it does not include effects from wildfires and past and proposed projects on U.S. Forest Service and private lands.

**BLM Response:**

Analysis has been added to the cumulative effects section for wildlife to address current and foreseeable future actions occurring on federal and private lands across the Tumalo Winter Range.

**Sample Comments (Bald eagle nest protection):**

*"...the bald eagle nest should be 'sheltered' from human activity and having the main trail run close by the nest would be a concern. I suggest the main trail be diverted to increase the distance between the nest site and regular human traffic."*

*"...the bald eagle nest area cited in your assessment is now known to be active and it is directly adjacent to a main trail. A new route for this trail is imperative. In addition, the potential for adverse impact from non-motorized users is increased if they are invited to linger and meander on loop trails. A 'rapid transit' trail design would mitigate wildlife disturbance."*

*"Re: p.24 EA: We support the 8 month closure of the Bald eagle nesting area, but with no open trail within the Bald eagle area closed to be used at any time, as with alt. 3."*

*"Monitoring of the timing of irrigation ditch maintenance by Tumalo irrigation District in the ditch under the eagle nest should be done."*

*"Trails should be directed away from known eagle nests."*

### **Summary Statement:**

The EA should include an alternative that permanently closes or reroutes non-motorized trails and limits other human activity near the bald eagle nest site.

### **BLM Response:**

The EA has alternatives that allow for rerouting non-motorized trails. The National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines (2007) recommend a minimum buffer of 330 feet of non-motorized activity from a nest site to avoid disturbance. Alternatives 2 and 3 propose a seasonal closure to all human uses within an area more than twice that, at least 750 feet from the nest site. The proposal for trail design in Alternative 2 and 3 includes new trail construction to reroute users along the boundary of this 750 foot radius closure area. Alternative 3 would not designate any routes in the 750 foot radius closure area, including the route below the nest tree. Alternative 2 would include one designated route in the closure area. This route would be within 50 feet of the nest tree; however, it would be seasonally closed (page 28 and Map on page 42).

### **Miscellaneous Specific Wildlife Comments:**

#### **Comment:**

*"We are concerned by the lack of any specific information on wildlife populations except for bald eagles....Regarding Lewis' woodpecker, managing to prevent or reduce the incidence of stand replacement fire negatively affects this species, yet this is not discussed in the EA.... Lewis' woodpecker...Flamulated owl...Northern goshawk...Bald eagle...Williamson's sapsucker...White-headed woodpecker...Willow flycatchers...Are any of these bird species actually there other than the bald eagle? How can you manage to protect birds of conservation concern if you don't know where they are? How can you prevent impacts to these birds and to Management Indicator or listed species without any relevant population studies or wildlife surveys in the project area? If none have been done, why not? ...Are there any Columbia Spotted frogs or other listed amphibians or fish in the project area? Have there been surveys done for listed fish and frogs?"*

#### **BLM Response:**

The BLM used available literature, past and present surveys, and professional experience to identify potential habitat and effects to species based on changes in

vegetation structure and composition. The EA includes specific information on species we expect to be affected by the proposed actions; the project record for this EA includes additional information regarding species that may be present but would not be affected by the proposed actions. Surveys were done for species that were potentially present (e.g., Northern goshawk) but not for species when there was not habitat for them (E.g., there is no habitat present for listed amphibians). Although Lewis's woodpeckers utilize burned stands they also prefer open ponderosa pine forests. Management recommendations in the Birds of North America (2013) for Lewis's woodpeckers include managing for open, park like stands of ponderosa pine, therefore they would benefit from treatments proposed in the project.

**Comment:**

*"We are concerned by the lack of any specific information on...local habitat structure such as down logs and snags, as well as specific information relevant to specific project locations.... Why doesn't the BLM do... snag and log abundance assessments, and field surveying of specific project locations?"*

**BLM Response:**

Snags and down logs assessments were done to quantify their abundance in the project area (these are in the project record and available upon request). The results from the assessments were used to direct implementation of project design features for retention of snags and down logs described in the EA Appendix C (page 49).

**Comments:**

*"No assessment was presented that showed how each action Alternative would change the existing habitat effectiveness index of 21% toward or away from the desired condition of 70%. Please provide this information."*

*"The parcel currently has well over 20 miles of roads and trails, which greatly reduces habitat effectiveness for wildlife. While the proposed alternative would reduce this somewhat, the resulting 12+ miles of roads and trails is still excessive. They are both harmful to wildlife and an increased risk for fire and vandalism. We would like to know how the different alternatives affect the habitat effectiveness index, which is already below optimum."*

**BLM Response:**

The habitat effectiveness index is derived from an analysis that uses the density of roads open to motorized travel as a variable (Thomas et al., 1988, p. 12). The habitat effectiveness analysis does not consider non-motorized routes. The project area is closed to motorized vehicles; the action alternatives do not propose opening the area to motorized travel, therefore habitat effectiveness would not change under any alternatives.

**Comment:**

*"I request that the wildlife analysis differentiate between 1) game species, 2) non-game species that are not listed, and 3) species that are listed. With respect to game species, they are by nature common and not in danger of becoming listed. According to NatureServe (<http://www.natureserve.org/explorer/>), mule deer are secure (the status of least peril) in both Oregon and the US as a whole. Moreover, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) sells the right to kill mule deer, presumably because there is a harvestable surplus of this species... Why are trail recreation opportunities reduced in the context of a species that benefits from anthropogenic mortality? Why is the impact of trail recreation on population numbers considered negative and sufficiently large that trail recreation must be restricted, while other human-caused mortality is beneficial in acting to "regulate population numbers so they align with the limits of the habitat"? If it is not possible to sustain recreation opportunities while sustaining habitat in this case, I request that the BLM clarify why trail-related impacts on deer populations are unacceptably negative while other anthropogenic impacts are positive. For non-game species, I request that the BLM clarify, using best available science, why recreation restrictions are needed to avoid unacceptable impacts. I ask that this include consideration of alternative tools, such as BLM's practice of closing access only during specific periods (e.g., for nesting eagles). In short, I request clarification of 1) whether the proposed trail mileage reductions will reduce recreation opportunities and, if so, 2) the justification for those reductions in light of the considerations noted above."*

**BLM Response:**

The BLM is not required to analyze issues in the context of "game and non-game species." In this EA we analyzed issues for both game and non-game species that were simply referred to as mule deer and bald eagles. To address species with population concerns we use designations such as threatened, endangered, sensitive, and strategic. As described in Chapter 3 in the wildlife section of the EA, the UDRMP (2005) directs the BLM to improve habitat and provide larger patches of un-fragmented habitat to benefit wildlife, and in the Tumalo area the primary emphasis is for mule deer. To meet the requirements of the management plan, it was determined that reducing route density from 16 miles per square miles to 10 miles per square mile would increase un-fragmented patch sizes and thereby improve mule deer security habitat. Scientific literature indicates human activity, including recreation, can be a disturbance to mule deer (Stankowich, 2008; Taylor and Knight, 2003). Reducing trail densities and providing larger un-fragmented patches improves the opportunity for deer to avoid recreation associated disturbances and seek refuge after these disturbances occur. The Tumalo project is not eliminating recreation opportunities, only reducing miles of trail in order to meet project objectives. The BLM often cooperates with ODFW to help improve mule deer habitat in support of ODFW's management objective numbers for deer populations.

**Comment:**

*"The EA says "The largest and healthiest ponderosa pine trees in the stand would be retained."*

*This is generally a good idea, but recognize also that forked, broken, leaning trees and trees with mistletoe (not to mention dead trees) often have disproportionate wildlife value so please retain medium and large "unhealthy" trees as well."*

**BLM Response:**

The BLM recognizes that old trees often have disease, decay, broken tops, forks, etc, and provide valuable wildlife habitat. Since old-growth would be managed/enhanced, and large trees would be retained, most trees with these characteristics would be left in all alternatives. In addition, both action alternatives call for leaving stable green wolf trees. "Wolf trees" are generally large stable trees with unusual crown shape or structure, large, horizontal branches, stem decay, witches brooms, etc. that would provide habitat suitable for perching, roosting or nesting (EA Appendix C, pages 47-48).

## **Public Safety - Firearm Discharge**

**Sample Comments:**

*"We are also very concerned about the shooting that goes on (especially in the Fall) on this property. I understand it is a no shooting area, and you might consider signage and enforcement there also, because it's been an ongoing problem."*

*"Specific flaw, implementation of the closure to all firearm discharge outlined in the Upper Deschutes Resource Management Plan (USDI, 2005) for this area is not mentioned in this plan. This would be the time to address the steps necessary to fulfill the implementation for the UDRMP regarding firearm discharge."*

**Summary Statement:**

The BLM should implement a ban on all firearm discharge in this area for public safety. The EA did not address this issue.

**BLM Response:**

A ban on firearm discharge was not included in alternatives in the EA because it would not meet the purpose and need for this project, and the decision was already made in the UDRMP for this parcel to be "Closed to all firearm discharge" (RMP Map 7). The closure to firearm discharge would be implemented concurrent with this project with implementation of road closures, signage and monitoring.

## **Other Specific Miscellaneous Comments**

**Comment:**

*"Does grazing fall under veg management? Does moving grazing fences fall under the trail management EA?"*

**BLM Response:**

Grazing is authorized under an existing permit, but the permittee has applied for non-use in recent years. Decisions on grazing are outside the scope of this EA because changes in grazing would not be responsive to the Purpose and Need described in Chapter 1 of the EA.

**Comment:**

*"Some of the fencing, although not often on the property boundaries, does provide a barrier between private land and public land. This barrier is useful for livestock containment on private and public land, and as a demarcation point for the general public that it is a boundary."*

**BLM Response:**

The BLM recognizes that livestock fences serve a secondary purpose of identifying property boundaries and controlling public access, however, some existing fences deviate significantly from the official cadastral survey of property boundaries. The EA, Appendix C – Project Design Features (p. 46) says: "Construct or reconstruct new segments of fence in strategic locations to close gaps, tie in with gates, or otherwise facilitate control of public access and unauthorized OHV travel." An assessment would be made by the BLM to determine which fences would be removed and/or relocated.

**Comment:**

"Look at retiring the Columbia Southern right-of-way south of the silt pond for Tumalo Irrigation District. With this section of canal no longer in use and the piping of the canals in the area, the ROW should be adjusted."

**BLM Response:**

That will be evaluated in the future after the piping of the canal and ditches is complete.

**Comment:**

*"...we are not interested in any additional access to our [Cascade Timberlands] property."*

**BLM Response:**

No additional access would be provided to Cascade Timberlands. Access would be reduced in both action alternatives from seven trails that currently access Cascade Timberlands, down to three. In addition, gates at three locations adjacent to Cascade Timberlands would further limit access to only administrative or emergency use (see EA Map 4, page 42 and Map 5, page 43).

**Comment:**

*"I would prefer the main roads/trails were graveled at the conclusion for better durability. If access to portions of this parcel are via the main line road, 4606, I would like to see that road periodically graded/maintained."*

**BLM Response:**

Gravelling roads or trails is not in the action alternatives because it is not needed for limited, short duration road use or for non-motorized trails in this area. Some spreading of chip material on trails may occur depending on current chip markets and proximity of chipping operations to trails. Haul road maintenance, such as blading, watering and repair, is a standard provision in contracts and is a part of both action alternatives (EA Appendix C).

**Comments:**

*"I wish to ask you to consider granting as much public trail access for non-motorized users as safety will allow. I appreciate the necessity of the proposed [thinning/fuels reduction] maintenance, but I have also appreciated the natural and historic value of the Tumalo Reservoir area for over 10 years."*

*If temporary closures are needed to ensure public safety, it should be temporary with closure dates listed for the public, as well as estimated re-opening of this area to the public."*

**BLM Response:**

As stated in the EA - Alternatives section (page 12), only about 1/3 of the project area would be closed at any one time during operations to provide for public safety while contractor equipment is actively working. Active treatment areas would be open during evenings and weekends. Contract operations would rotate within the project area as the work progresses. The BLM would provide updated information periodically as to closure periods and closure areas. The public may access this information via our web-site, posted signs or by calling our district office.

**Comment:**

*"The settling pond is the source for both my irrigation water and household drinking/use water. I have seen horses and dogs swimming in the pond as well as campers using the pond to wash dishes etc. I would like to feel safe that this water is not at further risk with the increase usage of the area. Is it possible to put restrictions in place for people/animals to not use the pond and surrounding canal system for their recreational use on an outing? I pay for the right to have this water and do not feel it is up to the public to put it at risk. Are there any discussions going on with TID regarding this issue and I did not see it included in the document as your project having an impact or effect on the pond and canals for the TID endusers."*

**BLM Response:**

The water delivered by TID is intended primarily for irrigation purposes and not domestic consumption. The action alternatives and project design features would help limit sediment and water quality impacts. In particular, designated crossings for equipment during operations, and designated trail crossings for horses and mountain bikes would reduce potential impacts to canal banks that could cause sedimentation. Post-operations rehabilitation measures (i.e. recontouring of canal and ditch banks) would further reduce sedimentation effects. Use of the TID settling pond by dogs or for other recreation-related use is beyond the scope of this EA.

**Comment:**

*"The administrative road that runs SE from the Tumalo Irrigation District's settling pond cuts across the SW corner of my parcel (17-11-3A 600) for a short distance. My property corner is actually on the SW side of the Tumalo Feed Canal. It is difficult to see on the map whether the road has been moved or if it's in the current location. If it has not been relocated will it be as part of the plan?"*

**BLM Response:**

There is not an alternative that moves this road. The BLM would either use the TID right-of-way road for access through this area, or request permission from the land owner to use an existing road that crosses private land, rather than relocate or build a new road.

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