

# **Finding of No Significant Impact Tumalo Vegetation and Trail Management Project**

DOI-BLM-OR-P060-2012-0008-EA  
US Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management  
Prineville District, Oregon

## **Introduction**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has completed an Environmental Assessment (EA), DOI-BLM-OR- P060-2012-0008-EA, that analyzes the effects of two action alternatives that would thin ponderosa pine and juniper, designate 10-12 miles of non-motorized trail, control public access, and develop a small parking area on an 800 acre parcel of BLM-administered public land located three miles southwest of Tumalo, Oregon. The EA is incorporated by reference in this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations state that the significance of impacts must be determined in terms of both context and intensity (40 CFR 1508.27).

## **Context**

The project area is BLM-administered public lands within the “Tumalo Recreation Area” and would have local impacts on affected interests, lands, and resources similar to and within the scope of those described and considered in the Upper Deschutes Resource Management Plan (UDRMP) Record of Decision, September, 2005.

The project area lies in a transition zone between the ponderosa pine forest of the east-slope Cascades and the juniper woodland/shrub-steppe vegetation type of the high desert region. The current forest stands consist of a mixture of dense ponderosa pine and juniper with inclusions of drier juniper woodland and sagebrush-steppe. Due to fire suppression and a lack of active management in the last 150 years, the current forest stand structure is much denser and the understory plant communities are less productive and diverse than what would have existed here historically. Large and old ponderosa pine trees in the over-story have declined in numbers, health and vigor as they compete for limited resources within unnaturally dense stands. Wildfire threatens old-growth pine and juniper trees as well as the entire forested landscape, habitats and watershed. Dense stands, together with an overabundance of dead and down trees and ladder fuels, are creating an unacceptable risk to life and property in a popular recreation site and adjacent residential areas.

The area is popular for non-motorized recreation activities including hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking and dog walking. There are currently over 20 miles of existing user-created trails and old roads being used within the parcel. The area receives both casual local and

regional destination recreational use. Currently there are more than 10 access points into the parcel and cross-country travel is not restricted. Two special recreation permit (SRP) holders also operate within the area for guided non-motorized recreational activities, primarily horse-back riding and mountain biking. The SRP holders use the area for short to intermediate rides on internal loops as well as longer rides connecting to the adjacent Deschutes National Forest and Cascade Timberland property to the west. The area is designated for Non-Motorized Recreation within the UDRMP, although public motorized access is currently not being controlled or enforced. Peak recreation season is normally from spring through fall.

The area is on the eastern-most edge of the designated Tumalo Mule Deer Winter Range. Few deer have been seen in the project area during field surveys and there is minimal evidence of deer use as would be expected in high-use winter range. The existing levels of year-round recreation use, high density of human travel routes, motorized access, cross-country recreation use, close proximity of residential properties, and dogs allowed off-leash may be contributing to lower use levels of deer in the project area. The density of all travel routes in the project area is greater than 16 miles per square mile. The guidelines within the UDRMP for motorized route density for deer winter range in primary wildlife emphasis areas is 1.5 miles or less of motorized routes per square. The UDRMP did not provide route density guidelines for non-motorized trails. A nest within the parcel may belong to bald eagles, although, they have not been seen using the nest. Adjacent land owners and BLM staff have observed an adult bald eagle perched in the adjacent stand on multiple occasions and bald eagle feathers were observed at the base of the tree. Due to this evidence, the analysis in the EA assumes the nest is being used by bald eagles during the breeding season. Nesting bald eagles are at risk to human disturbance by the use of two nearby trails and high levels of human recreation use in close proximity to the nest site during nesting season. The nest tree is also at risk of mortality from wildfire, insects, disease and drought stress from dense tree completion.

The Tumalo Irrigation District operates and maintains 2.3 miles of canals, ditches and associated facilities and access roads within an authorized right-of-way within the parcel. Irrigation season and most of the ROW maintenance activities are from mid-April to the end of September each year.

## **Intensity**

I have considered the potential intensity and severity of the impacts anticipated from implementation of a Decision on this EA relative to each of the ten areas suggested for consideration by the CEQ. With regard to each:

**1. Would any of the alternatives have significant beneficial or adverse impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(1)? No.**

**Rationale:** There are no potentially significant adverse effects (see EA Chapter 4 – Environmental Effects). Benefits of Alternative 2 (the proposed action) and Alternative 3 include a decrease in potential for intense wildfire and its effects on the watershed, soils,

visuals, recreation, wildlife habitats and old-growth ecosystems. Treatments would promote the health and longevity of large and old pine and juniper trees and encourage diverse grasses, forbs and shrubs. Non-motorized recreation opportunities would improve by taking actions that would control motorized access and develop a logical trail system. Wildlife habitats would be protected and improved by controlling the type, timing and location of human recreation use and by protecting habitats from fire, drought, insects and disease.

**2. Would any of the alternatives have significant adverse impacts on public health and safety (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(2)? No.**

**Rationale:** The action alternatives are designed to protect public safety by reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire. Recreationists and residents would be safer after treatments that would remove unstable trees near homes, access roads and trails. Prescribed pile burning would follow strict guidelines to minimize smoke intrusion into populated areas.

**3. Would any of the alternatives have significant adverse impacts on unique geographic characteristics (cultural or historic resources, park lands, prime and unique farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, designated wilderness or wilderness study areas, or ecologically critical areas (ACECs, RNAs, significant caves)) (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(3)? No.**

**Rationale:** There are cultural resource properties and sites in the project area but project design features in Alternatives 2 and 3 would ensure no impacts would occur (see EA Appendix B). All treatments would be designed to avoid disturbance to historic properties and resources. Project design would avoid treatment to sensitive areas or modify treatments to avoid impacts. Any new discoveries of cultural resources during implementation would temporarily stop project activities and the district cultural specialist would be contacted. Treatments would result in a finding of no adverse effect because portions of the historic Tumalo Irrigation District canals have been determined eligible to the National Register of Historic Places and the canal segments, whether determined contributing or non-contributing, would be protected and retained

There are no park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, designated wilderness or ecologically critical areas within the project area, and there would be no effects on these resources.

**4. Would any of the alternatives have highly controversial effects (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(4)? No.**

**Rationale:** While the visual effects of vegetation treatment would be evident in the short-term, long-term benefits to recreation, ecosystems and public safety would be expected to outweigh short-term visual concerns. Project design features would help mitigate immediate visual effects of vegetation treatments. Scoping efforts revealed general support for reducing wildfire risk, controlling motorized access and developing a designated non-motorized trail system.

5. **Would any of the alternatives have highly uncertain effects or involve unique or unknown risks (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(5)? No.**

**Rationale:** There are no unique or unusual risks. The BLM has implemented similar actions in similar areas. The environmental effects are fully analyzed in the EA. There are no predicted effects on the environment that are considered to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

6. **Would any of the alternatives establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(6)? No.**

**Rationale:** Similar treatments and actions have occurred numerous times for many years throughout BLM lands. There is no evidence that these actions have potentially significant environmental effects. This management activity does not commit the BLM to pursuing further actions, and as such would not establish a precedent or decision for future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.

7. **Are any of the alternatives related to other actions with potentially significant cumulative impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)? No.**

**Rationale:** The actions considered in Alternatives 2 and 3 were considered by the BLM interdisciplinary team and the Field Manager within the context of past, present, and reasonable foreseeable future actions. Significant cumulative effects are not predicted. An analysis of the effects of the proposed action is described in the EA.

8. **Would any of the alternatives have significant adverse impacts on scientific, cultural, or historic resources, including those listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Resources (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(8)? No.**

**Rationale:** The proposed action and alternatives would not have adverse impacts on scientific, cultural, or historic resources. The historic Tumalo Irrigation District canal system is an eligible property on the National Register of Historic Resources. The proposed action and alternatives include design features to prevent or reduce effects on identified cultural resource sites and properties. These design features would minimize impacts to the historic property which would result in a finding of no adverse effect under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

9. **Would any of the alternatives have significant adverse impacts on threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(9)? No.**

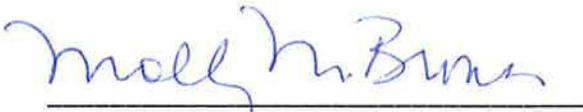
**Rationale:** The proposed action and alternatives would have no effect on these species. Appropriate mitigation measures, such as controlled access and trail design, have been incorporated into the project to minimize effects on possible nesting bald eagles.

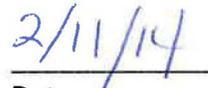
10. Would any of the alternatives have effects that threaten to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(10))? No.

**Rationale:** None of the alternatives would have actions or effects that violate any laws.

### **Finding**

On the basis of the information contained in the EA, the consideration of intensity factors described above, and all other information available to me, it is my determination that: (1) implementation of the alternatives would not have significant environmental impacts beyond those already addressed in the Upper Deschutes Resource Management Plan EIS; (2) the alternatives are in conformance with the Upper Deschutes Resource Management Plan; and (3) none of the alternatives would constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an EIS or a supplement to the existing EIS is not necessary and will not be prepared.

  
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