

1.0 Introduction and Background

1.1 Summary of Planning Area

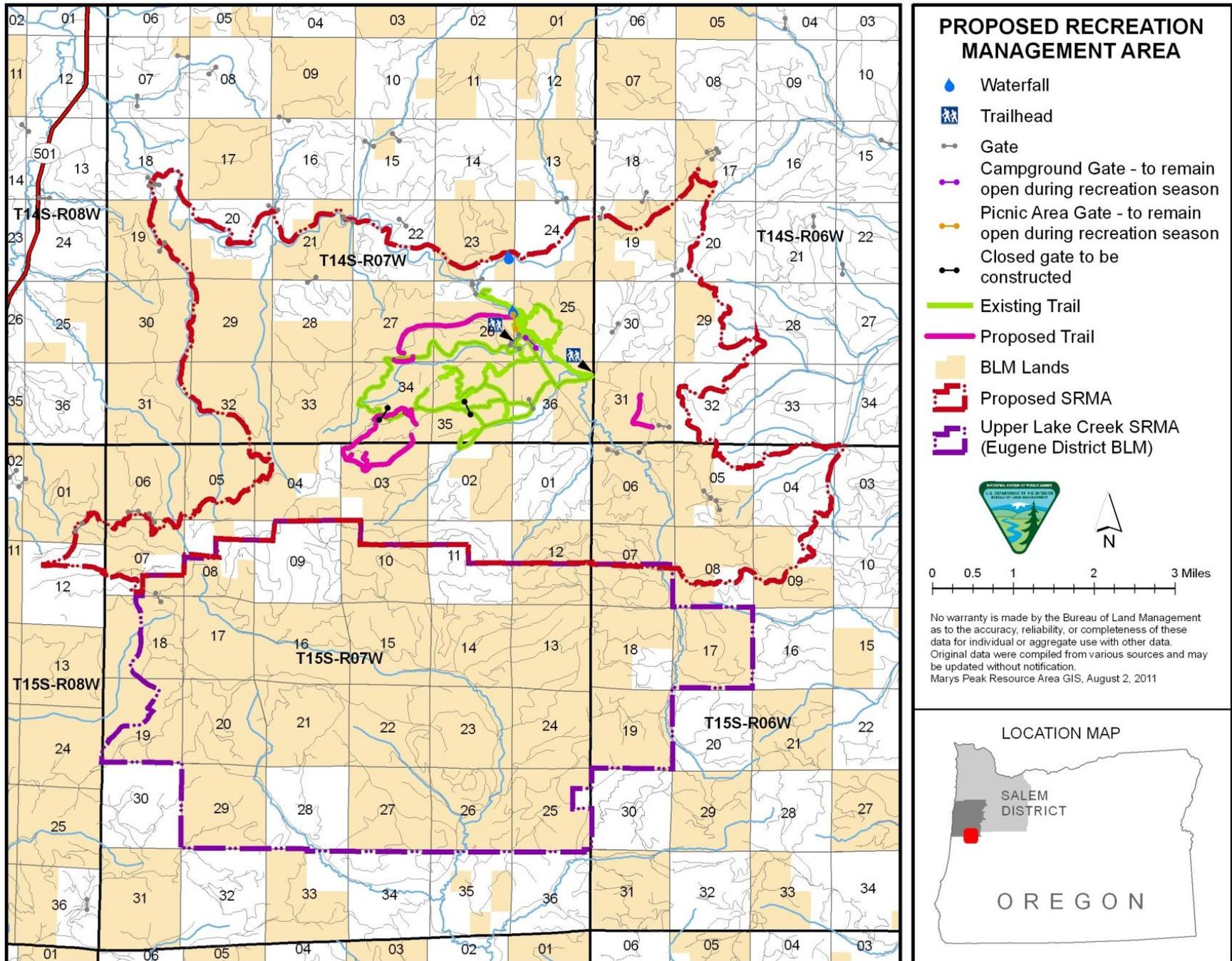
The 17,922-acre Alsea Falls Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) is located 27 miles southwest of the city of Corvallis, Oregon in the forested foothills of the Coastal Mountains between the Willamette Valley and the Alsea Valley in Benton County (Figure 1). The planning area includes 12,282 acres of BLM-administered land and 5,640 acres of private land mainly within the Upper Alsea River and minimal amounts in the Marys River, Lake Creek and Long Tom River fifth-field watersheds. Situated primarily along the South Fork Alsea River and National Back Country Byway, the watershed exhibits traits typical of the multiagency coastal mountains including dense coniferous forests patchwork of timber management practices and heavy precipitation. Elevations range from 3422 feet, the top of Prairie Mountain, to 400 feet to the southeast and northwest of the byway.

The Alsea Falls SRMA offers a wide variety of designated (BLM's Alsea Falls recreation site, associated non-motorized trail system and privately owned McBee site) and dispersed recreation opportunities. Camping, picnicking, swimming, angling, hiking, horseback riding, and mountain biking on the 17 mile non-motorized trail system, hunting, recreational driving, forest product collection, photography, relaxing, and recreational shooting are all within an hour's drive of the Corvallis and Eugene metropolitan areas.

The SRMA would include the developed Alsea Falls recreation site, non-motorized trail system, South Fork Alsea River National Back Country Byway, and surrounding BLM-administered lands with recreation development potential.

The Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP) is a guide for recreation management within the proposed Alsea Falls SRMA. The Resource Management Plan (RMP) directs that a plan be prepared for each SRMA. The RAMP will provide direction only for the management of recreation use and resources within the planning area. It will *not*: prioritize projects for resources other than recreation; establish or increase recreation fees; establish or modify land use allocations which guide timber management activities; make modifications to land tenure; or establish on its own any new regulations. Many of these management decisions are outlined in a RMP through the land use planning process.

Figure 1: Alsea Falls Proposed Recreation Management Area



1.2 Purpose and Need

The Alsea Falls SRMA boundary defines the planning area, helps determine the management of recreation use, and represents a commitment from the BLM to provide a higher level of recreation related resources when compared with BLM-administered lands outside the SRMA. There is a need to provide resource protection while increasing site accessibility, safety, availability of amenities, and site interpretation that contribute to leisure and relaxation in a managed natural environment, and provide for high quality recreation experiences. Current management actions to address these issues are taking place without a long-term comprehensive plan in place. The purpose of the proposed action is to establish a plan for future development and management direction for recreation resources within the SRMA boundary for the next 15 years.

Site Accessibility, Safety, and Site Interpretation:

There is an opportunity to improve the management of day-use activities, which focus primarily around trail use, picnicking, swimming, leisure activities. The trail down to the falls and swimming hole could be modified to provide a safer descent by removing hazardous conditions. The development and integration of accessibility standards would provide accommodations for persons of limited mobility to experience nature.

The development of a cohesive interpretation and environmental education message would address visitor information needs and convey the BLM's management objectives within the SRMA.

Provide for Quality Recreation Opportunities:

Recreationalists who frequent the area expressed concern for the lack of adequate recreational opportunities, facilities, and infrastructure to provide for desired experiences. Members of the public came to BLM in 2009 with proposals for trail building within late-successional forests in the Alsea Valley, including areas around the Alsea Falls recreation site.

There is a need to improve existing non-motorized trails and increase non-motorized trail opportunities for hikers, mountain bikers, and equestrians within the SRMA to meet this demand. By providing up to 20 miles of additional non-motorized trail opportunities and modifying existing trails and trailheads, visitors to the SRMA would have adequate infrastructure to facilitate a better recreational experience.

Increase Camping Opportunities:

The potential for developed camping to meet future demand and growth is low given the number of available sites and opportunities. The Alsea Falls campground is often at capacity during summer weekends. An overflow of people, tents, and vehicles above the intended capacity in a campsite gradually expands the footprint and causes damage to resources. Vegetation and soils are damaged through trampling and creating undesigned trails to points of interest.

Bicyclists expressed a desire for walk-in or overflow camping opportunities. Equestrian users also expressed an interest in camping opportunities within the SRMA. Expanding camping opportunities for current non-motorized users would accommodate expected camping growth and demand.

1.3 Relevant Issues and Concerns

Issues identified and listed below resulted during the course of the internal and external scoping process. The issues brought forward help formulate alternatives, identify appropriate design features and analyze environmental effects of proposed management actions. These issues provide a basis for comparing the environmental effects of the proposed project and aid in the decision-making process. The goal of this planning effort is to effectively address these issues through a comprehensive recreation management strategy.

Contribute to Local Economy and Visitor Services: *What 'niche' should the Alsea Falls SRMA fill in the regional recreation market? What possibilities exist for partnerships that can boost recreation related tourism and improve recreation opportunities?*

Facility Development and Camping Opportunities: *Within the SRMA, what facility or amenity development would occur to meet present and future visitor demand for recreation opportunities? To what degree and in which locations is camping appropriate? Would additional developed campground(s) be constructed within the planning area?*

Trail Opportunities: *What management actions would occur on the existing non-motorized trail system to provide hikers, mountain bikers and equestrian users with additional opportunities to recreate in a forested setting within an hours drive from home? Would the non-motorized trail system expand? What actions would address the unsustainable portions of the trail system? What additional amenities would be provided?*

Weeds and Other Resources: *What management actions would reduce the effects to threatened or endangered flora and fauna species and the spread of noxious, non-native species based on existing and future recreation use? What management actions would reduce and minimize recreation-related impacts on area streams and other resources? What management actions would reduce the undesired social behaviors such as resource damage, dumping, vandalism, and human waste within the SRMA?*

Interpretation and Environmental Education: *What level of environmental education and interpretation would provide visitors with an enriching self-paced experience within the SRMA? What information are visitors seeking? What management practices do the BLM want visitors to know?*