

DRAFT
Table Rock Wilderness
Plan Update



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United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management, Salem District

T6S-R3E, T7S-R3E, T7S-R4E, T7S R5E, Willamette Meridian
Clackamas County, Oregon

BLM
Salem District



Plan Update Organization

Part I: Introduction provides a brief introduction to the Table Rock Wilderness and background on this planning effort. It describes the purpose and scope of the Table Rock Wilderness Management Plan, completed in 1987, as well as the purpose and scope of this Plan Update.

Part II: Current Management Situation describes the current recreation management situation within Table Rock Wilderness. It reviews the management actions outlined in the 1987 plan, revisits its assumptions and summarizes any developments that have taken place since its completion. Part II lays out the available information regarding recreation use within the Wilderness and the characteristics of visitors to the area.

Part III: Management Goals and Objectives contains revised goals and objectives for management of Table Rock Wilderness, consistent with new developments and agency policy.

Part IV: Wilderness Management Program describes the proposed management policies and actions for the Table Rock Wilderness including trails, trailheads, signage, use authorizations and visitor services. It identifies prioritized projects, consistent with wilderness management goals and objectives.

Part I: Introduction

Background

Located in the western foothills of the Cascade Mountains and southeast of Molalla, Oregon, the Table Rock Wilderness contains 5,706 acres of rugged, heavily timbered ridges punctuated by several distinct basalt rock outcrops. Table Rock, the area's highest point, sits at 4886 feet. The lowest point in the wilderness lies just a few miles to the west at 1275 feet.

Table Rock Wilderness was designated as a component of the National Wilderness Preservation System by the Oregon Wilderness Act of 1984 (PL 98-328). It was the only BLM-administered land included in the 1984 Act and remains the only BLM-managed Wilderness within the boundaries of the Salem District.

Table Rock Wilderness Management Plan

Subsequent to its designation, a planning effort was begun to set direction for the management of Table Rock Wilderness (TRW). The Table Rock Wilderness Management Plan was completed and signed in February of 1987. The Plan took an interdisciplinary approach and provided management direction for the full range of resources contained within TRW: soil, water, vegetation, fisheries, wildlife, cultural resources and recreation.

The Plan was completed to serve three primary purposes: provide interdisciplinary management direction by establishing clear management objectives and prescribing management actions; establish a general sequence for completing these management actions; fulfill BLM policy directing the completion of a management plan for designated wilderness areas. The intended duration of the plan was 10 years.

Plan Update

The entirety of Table Rock Wilderness has been included within the recommended boundaries of the proposed Molalla River-Table Rock Special Recreation Management Area in recognition of its recreation opportunities, need for special management attention and close association with the adjacent Molalla River Recreation Corridor.

A Plan Update was initiated as part of the larger Molalla-River Table Rock planning process in order to determine how management direction should be adjusted given current use patterns, visitor expectations and resource conditions. This update is not intended to review or supplant management direction found within the 1987 Wilderness Management Plan for resources other than recreation.

The primary purposes of this document include: a) review the recreation management actions taken since the 1987 Plan and their effectiveness b) describe the current management situation including newly available data c) update the recreation management goals, objectives and policies for TRW and d) outline management actions that will be taken.

The Plan Update will be released with the Environmental Assessment for the Molalla River-Table Rock Recreation Area Management Plan. The public is encouraged to provide feedback on the proposed wilderness policies and actions during the 45-day comment period for the Environmental Assessment.

Part II: Current Management Situation

LOCATION AND SETTING

Table Rock Wilderness (TRW) is located in the western Cascades Mountains approximately 20 miles southeast of the community of Molalla, Oregon (population 7,800) and entirely within Clackamas County. TRW is reached by travelling south and east of the Molalla city center on a series of county roads, then along the BLM-controlled South Molalla Forest Rd. This road travels through the Molalla River Recreation Area and connects to the lowest and western-most portion of the wilderness near the confluence of the Molalla River and the Table Rock Fork of the Molalla River. From there, trailheads into TRW are accessed by travelling on high-standard gravel roads that define the wilderness area's northern and southern boundaries.

TRW is the last contiguous block of undeveloped forest in the Molalla River drainage. The wilderness is characterized by steep and heavily forested ridges, high gradient streams and prominent rock outcrops. Due to the steep topography (nearly 3,600 feet of vertical relief), four distinct vegetation zones including alpine, subalpine, montane and foothills are present within the wilderness. Typical of the western Cascades, TRW receives considerable precipitation in the form of rain and snow that may total up to 80 inches annually at higher elevations. This heavy snowfall typically prevents vehicle access to many areas above 2,500 feet during the winter and spring.

The wilderness offers opportunities for hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, photography and nature study. Use is concentrated in the summer and fall when winter snows have melted and trails around Rooster Rock and Table Rock are accessible. The rugged terrain limits most recreational use to the 20-mile developed trail system. The top of Table Rock, the most popular destination for wilderness users, offers excellent views of the high peaks of the Cascade Range stretching north into Washington and south into central and southern Oregon.

Oregon's largest cities, Portland and Salem, and other population centers in the Willamette Valley are located to the east and within a two hour drive of TRW. Since the completion of the 1987 Wilderness Management Plan these areas have seen significant population growth.

Several other wilderness areas in the western Cascade Range offer points of similarity and comparison to TRW. These include the Bull of the Woods, Middle Santiam, Menagerie, Mount Hood, Mount Jefferson and Salmon-Huckleberry areas designated alongside TRW in the 1984 legislation; Opal Creek, designated in 1996; and numerous small wilderness areas within the Mount Hood National Forest designated in 2009. All are within close proximity to the Willamette Valley region and protect remnant pieces of unmanaged forest that once covered the entire western Cascade Range.

REVIEW OF COMPLETED ACTIONS AND NEW CONDITIONS

Several developments resulting from direct management action as well as natural occurrence have influenced TRW and have a bearing on its management. This section also identifies several prominent actions identified in the 1987 that were not completed.

- 1) ***Acquisition of the Molalla River Recreation Corridor:*** A 1992 land acquisition between the BLM and Cavenham Industries brought 5,083 acres of land adjacent to Table Rock Wilderness into public ownership. The acquired lands lie along the mainstem of the Molalla River and the S. Molalla Forest Rd. Visitors to TRW now travel through this area, referred to as the Molalla River Recreation Area, prior to entering the wilderness. The main recreational corridor is heavily used for camping, swimming, picnicking, trail use, fishing and other activities. The exchange has resulted in increased administrative presence near TRW and changed the role of the wilderness from an isolated federal holding to part of a larger, integrated recreation area.
- 2) ***Changes to the Trail System:*** The trail system has seen two major changes since the 1987 plan, while another action item from the plan was not completed. The current extent of the trail system is shown in Figure 1.
 - a. ***Bull Creek and Image Creek Trails*** - A road, constructed in 1970 prior to wilderness designation, has been converted to full trail status and incorporated into the TRW's trail system per direction outlined in the 1987 Wilderness Management Plan. The trail, broken into two segments (the Bull Creek trail [formally the Old Jeep Trail] and the Image Creek Trail), traverses the area's main ridge and runs roughly 7 miles from Rooster Rock Rd north and east to its intersection with Summit Trail. After 30 years without vehicular use, the road has deteriorated and taken on a more trail-like appearance.

In 2004, a trailhead was developed at its south terminus at a wide section of Rooster Rock Rd. Signage was installed and parking was constructed, including a turnaround for horse trailers. The impacts of these actions were analyzed in Environmental Assessment OR-080-01-13.
 - b. ***Rooster Rock Trail and Trailhead*** - Subsequent to completion of the 1987 plan, a new trailhead was developed on Rooster Rock Rd that provided trail users access to an old motorcycle trail that climbed TRW's south facing slopes and connected to the High Ridge Trail. The road's excessive grades necessitated construction of a more appropriate trail which was completed in 2006. This project was also covered under EA OR-080-01-13.

- c. *Saddle and High Ridge Trail Re-Routes*- The 1987 plan identified 3 miles of trail in substandard condition that required new trail construction (re-routing) to address. The trails, primarily the western-most portion of the High Ridge Trail and the segment of the Saddle Trail descending the north side of Rooster Rock, exhibit excessive grades and eroding trail tread. These re-routes were never completed.
- d. *Summit Trail and access to Table Rock* - See below.

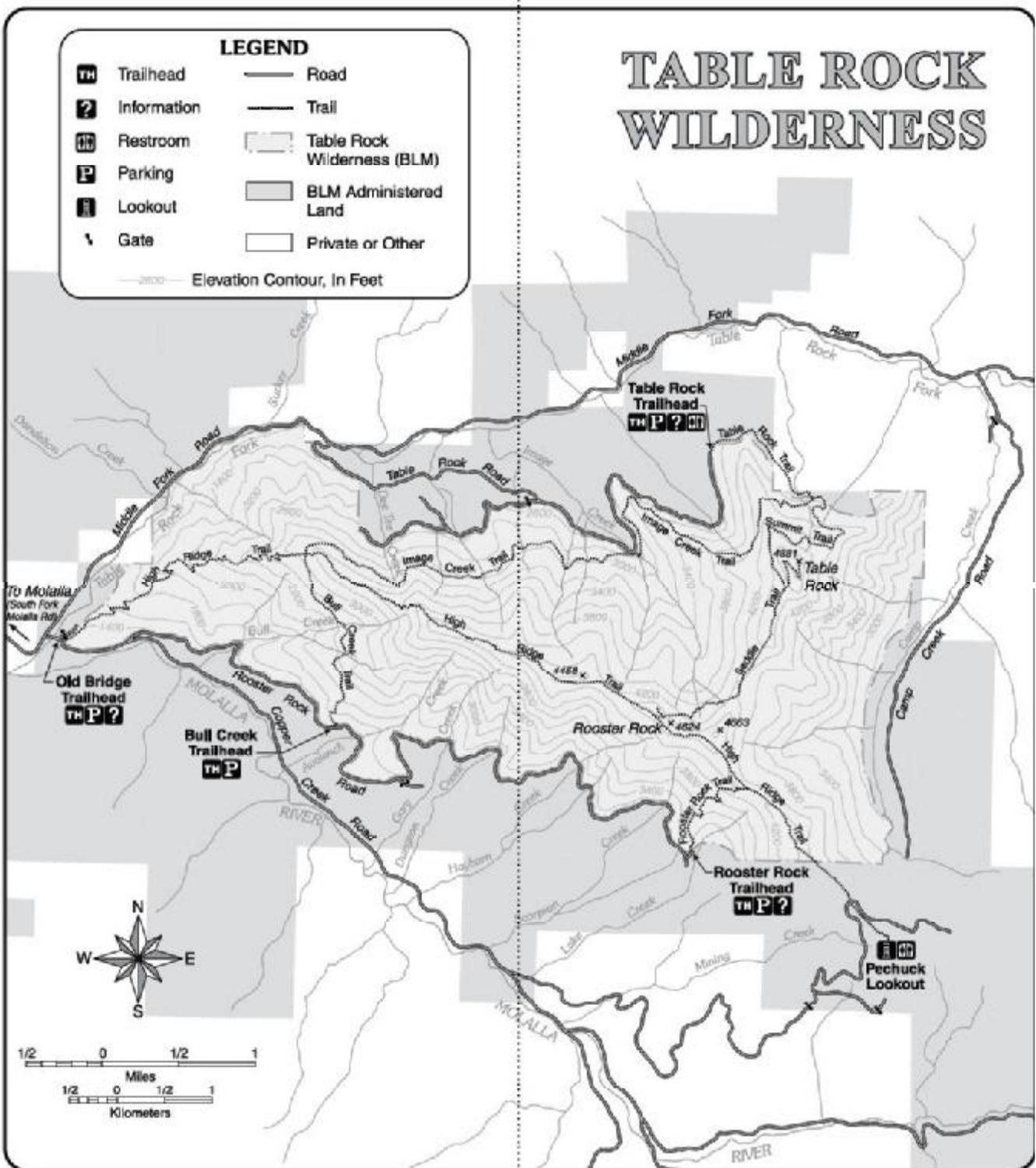
3) Changes to Transportation Network: The forest roads surrounding TRW have seen several changes since 1987.

- a. *Table Rock Rd* – A major rain on snow event in 1996 caused a landslide and related road damage that required the closure of a road segment on Table Rock Rd (BLM Rd 7-4E-1). This road provided vehicle access to the Table Rock Trailhead. The road segment affected by the landslide was evaluated and found to be too unstable for long-term repairs. The landslide removed the much of the road surface approximately 5 miles east of the road’s intersection with the Middle Fork Rd. To provide continued access to the trails associated with Table Rock TH (Image Creek and Summit Trails), the BLM established a new trailhead at a wide point in the roadway just west of the landslide. A trail was constructed that skirts the landslide to the south. Trail users must now use this detour in combination with the intact roadway on either side of the landslide before reaching the former location of Table Rock TH. This adds roughly 1 mile to the hike each way.
- b. *Access Restrictions* – Public access BLM forest roads surrounding TRW has been progressively reduced since the 1987 Plan. In addition to the flood damage described above, gates have been installed in several other locations in the road system to reduce unwanted impacts and threats to wilderness character. These include:
 - i. Quarry Rd (BLM Rd 7-4E-8) was gated at Table Rock Rd
 - ii. Camp Creek Rd (BLM Rd 7-4E-2), which lies just east of TRW’s boundary, was gated on private property
 - iii. A dead end spur road off of Copper Creek adjacent to Old Bridge Trailhead was gated to prevent dumping and motorized entrance into the wilderness.

- 4) ***Pechuck Lookout-*** The historic Pechuck Lookout is located southeast of TRW and serves as a trailhead providing access to the High Ridge Trail. The lookout is a wood and stone cupola-style structure constructed in 1932 by the Clackamas/Marion Fire Protection Association. It was added to the National Historic Lookout Register in 1990. The lookout was restored by volunteers in 1997 and is now open to overnight visitors on a first-come first-served basis. Its location is listed on TRW maps, but its recreational opportunities are not prominently advertised to the public at present. Current access is through privately-owned industrial timberland.

- 5) ***Inholding Acquisition and Potential Wilderness Additions-*** The 1987 identified an 80-acre inholding owned by Brazier Forest Products (located in T7S- R4E, Section 16) for acquisition. The parcel was acquired in 1988. Despite being surrounded by TRW, the parcel can only be designated as wilderness by Congressional action. The Salem District BLM has made a recommendation to designate this parcel as wilderness.

Figure 1: Table Rock Trail Map



CURRENT MANAGEMENT SITUATION: VISITOR USE

Available Information Sources

In addition to field observation, two primary data sources are available that provide information on recreation use within Table Rock Wilderness.

A visitor survey completed in 2007 by Arizona State University for the Molalla River-Table Rock area provides useful information visitor characteristics, preferences and behavior. The survey was conducted during the summer of 2006 by providing visitors a self-administered survey questionnaire. The survey achieved a 93% on-site response rate and was completed by 51 wilderness visitors.

During the summer of 2009, traffic data was collected using vehicle counters deployed on Table Rock Rd, the access route to TRW's most popular trailhead. The counter collects data on an hourly basis that can be aggregated and analyzed in daily, weekly or monthly intervals. Data for October through May is unavailable at this time. Information needs have been identified for this period, as well as other main access routes adjacent to TRW.

Visitor Use Summary

Table Rock Wilderness offers opportunities for hiking, camping, horseback riding, nature study and photography. Due to the heavy winter snowfall at higher elevations, recreation activity within TRW is mostly confined to the snow-free months from May through October. The highest period of use is mid-June through late September when all wilderness trailheads and trails are accessible, wildflowers are in bloom and Cascade peaks are visible.

Field observation, available visitor survey information and traffic counter data make it clear that day-use activities are preferred over those requiring an overnight stay. Roughly 93% of visitors report non-overnight use. This is likely due to the wilderness area's small size and lack of suitable water sources. The average length of stay is 4.6 hours.

The most popular activities engaged in by wilderness visitors are trail hiking, photography, picnicking and nature study. The table below identifies participation rates for the most popular activities.

Selected Visitor Characteristics

100% have a high-school degree or above

60.5% have a Bachelor's degree or above

100% self-identify their race as white

88% report TRW as their main destination

75% visitor in groups of 2 or more

93% have no more individuals under 16 years old in their group

74% agree or strongly agree they are 'very attached' to the wilderness

Equestrian use within the wilderness is limited. Only 7.8% of visitors to TRW reported horseback riding during their visit. Limitations on equestrian use include the scree field found along Summit Trail and steep grades that prevent beginner equestrian users.

Activities Engaged in by TRW Visitors	
<i>Activity</i>	<i>% reporting participation</i>
Trail Hiking	86.3 %
Taking Photographs	60.8%
Picnicking	47.1%
Studying Nature	41.2%
Wildlife Viewing/Birding	33.3%
Driving For Pleasure/Sightseeing	27.5%

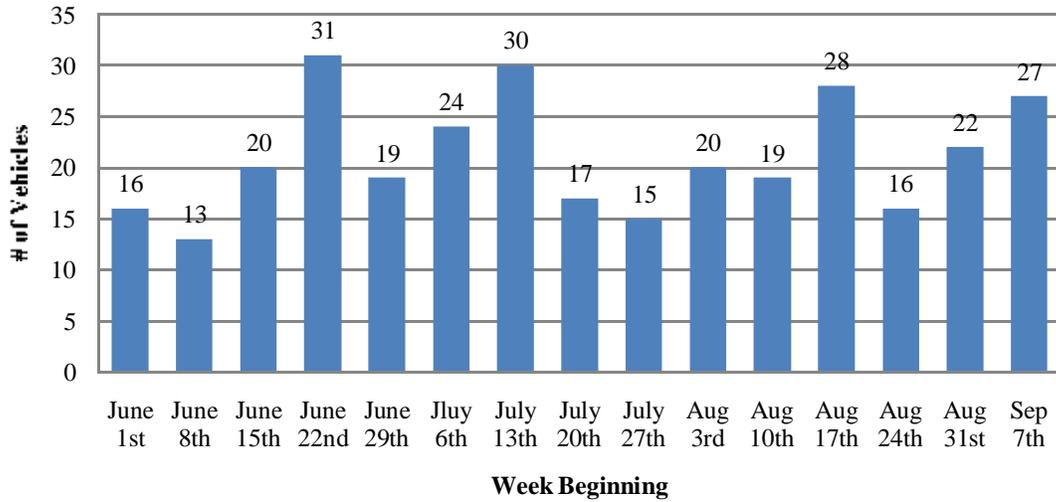
Total Wilderness Visitation

The 1987 TRW Management Plan estimated visitation to be 500 annually. The Plan anticipated increases in this figure as TRW’s attributes became more widely known. Relying on available data for the June through September period and personal observation for the remaining months of the year, total visitation to Table Rock Wilderness is estimated to be 1650 annually. This is based on three primary assumptions:

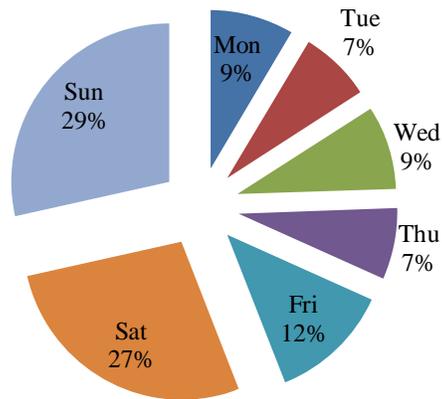
- a) visitors along Table Rock Rd account for 75% visitors to the wilderness
- b) administrative visits by BLM personnel make up 5% of recorded traffic totals
- c) each vehicle contains an average of 2.5 visitors

This visitation total represents a three-fold increase from the figures estimated during completion of the 1987 Plan, indicating that usage of TRW has increased as a rate slightly higher than overall population growth. The figures below illustrate wilderness usage trends.

**Table Rock Trailhead,
Traffic Totals by Week June-September 2009**



**Table Rock Trailhead,
Visitor Use by Day**



Part III: Wilderness Management Goals

BLM Policy, as outlined in Manual 8561, identifies four primary goals for the management of designated wilderness areas. The objectives, policy and specific management actions identified in this Plan Update have been crafted with these goals in mind.

GOALS

To provide for the long-term protection and preservation of the area's wilderness character under a principle of non-degradation. The area's natural conditions, opportunities for solitude, opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, and any ecological, geological or other features of scientific, educational, scenic or historical value present will be managed so that they will remain unimpaired.

To manage the wilderness area for the use and enjoyment of visitors in a manner that will leave the area unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness. The wilderness resource will be dominant in all management decisions where a choice must be made between preservation of wilderness character and visitor use.

To manage the area using the minimum tool, equipment or structure necessary to successfully, safely and economically accomplish the objective. The chosen tool, equipment or structure should be the one that least degrades wilderness values temporarily or permanently. Management will seek to preserve the spontaneity of use and as much freedom from regulation as possible.

To manage non-conforming but accepted uses permitted by the Wilderness Act and subsequent laws in a manner that will prevent unnecessary or undue degradation of the area's wilderness character.

OBJECTIVES

Recognize recreation as a legitimate use of Table Rock Wilderness and provide opportunities for visitors to experience solitude and participate in primitive and unconfined recreation.

Provide a developed trail system which allows visitors an opportunity to test wilderness skills and view the unique attributes of TRW.

Preserve the primitive and spontaneous nature of recreation in the wilderness by limiting regulation, visitor information and administrative presence within wilderness boundaries.

Reduce the effect of human activity and recreational use on the biotic communities within the wilderness and allow for natural ecosystems processes to take place.

Reduce or eliminate the effect of human activity and recreational use on the cultural resources within the wilderness.

Direct uses and recreational activities not dependent on wilderness to other areas.

Limit provision of regulatory and information signs to trailheads and locations where their placement is necessary to protect specific resource values or public safety.

Adequately monitor the use of TRW and the condition of resources within its boundaries to determine when management action is required.

Prohibit the use of mechanized equipment or construction of permanent or semi-permanent structures within wilderness boundaries.

Part IV: Wilderness Recreation Management Program

For each component (General, Trail System and Trailhead Access, Visitor Information and Signage) outline:

- Management Assumptions - (what we think the next 15 years will bring, Ex “Availability of maps and brochures will reduce the need for signage within TRW”)
- Management Direction (ex. “Directional signage will be limited to trailheads only and will not be utilized at junctions unless substantial creation of social trails is occurring”)
- Management Action (ex. “Install routed wooden signage to indicate the wilderness boundary along each of the 5 trails that access TRW).

General Recreation Management

Management Assumptions

Visitation to Table Rock Wilderness will increase at a rate similar to overall population growth. Visitors will continue to access TRW by travelling along the BLM-controlled S. Molalla Forest Rd. Access to roads surrounding TRW will remain blocked with gates and other barriers to vehicle access. A regulatory or permit system limiting the number of visitors will not be needed within the next 15 year period. Proposals for research or scientific studies within Table Rock Wilderness will be infrequent. Responsibility for wilderness search and rescue operations will reside with county law enforcement personnel.

The current make-up of visitors (including place of origin and demographics) will continue. Visitor preferences and satisfaction will continue similar to their current levels. Winter recreation will remain an extremely small portion of overall wilderness recreation. Overnight use will remain an extremely small portion of overall wilderness recreation and the establishment of hardened camp areas will be limited in number and extent. The summit of Table Rock and its southern saddle will continue to experience the highest levels of overnight use.

Management Direction

- Gather sufficient traffic and visitor data to monitor use trends within and adjacent to TRW.
- Prefer the use of data collection methods (i.e. trail counters) that do not require direct visitor engagement.
- Establish a group size limitation to protect trail conditions and visitor experience
- Voluntary, on-site visitor registration will be utilized only to collect specific user data and implemented for short, set periods.
- If visitor use is having adverse impacts on wilderness resources, regulations limiting the number of visitors to TRW will be put into effect only after all other direct and indirect control measures have been unsuccessful.

- Facilities and improvements should be provided to protect wilderness resources and public safety, rather than for user comfort and convenience.
- Permit use of the wilderness for monitoring, research and scientific study so long as planned activities are compatible with overall wilderness goals and objectives.
- Monitoring, research and scientific studies will be conducted without the use of mechanized equipment or construction of permanent structures.
- Minimize the establishment of new hardened camp areas within sight of the developed trail system.
- Established camp areas will be monitored for rate of spread and loss of native vegetation.
- Encourage visitors wishing to camp on Table Rock summit to utilize established sites west of the developed trail system.

Management Actions

1. Establish and post a 12-person group size limit for all activities within TRW *FY 2011*
2. Implement a three-year traffic monitoring program on Table Rock and Rooster Rock Roads and evaluate need for longer term study. *FY 2011-2014.*
3. Annually monitor wilderness boundaries for vehicle incursion and threats to wilderness character. *FY 2011 ongoing*
4. Annually monitor the type, location and size of established campsites with TRW to determine need for management action. *FY 2011 ongoing*

Trail System and Trailhead Access

Management Assumptions

Use of the developed trail system will continue to be dominated by day use trail hiking. The area's rugged terrain and steep slopes will limited the vast majority of wilderness use to the developed trail system. Trail use will continue to focus on the high elevation trails that access Table Rock and Rooster Rock available from early summer through mid-fall. Other portions of the trail system will experience low rates of use. Wilderness visitors will continue to rely on the developed trail system and prefer its use over cross country travel. Equestrian use will continue to be limited within wilderness boundaries. No new trailheads will be required, unless access is restricted to existing trailheads.

Management Direction

- Develop and maintain trails in a manner consistent with TRW's wilderness character.
- Regularly patrol and maintain TRW's 5 wilderness trailheads.

- To prevent the expansion or spread of unauthorized trails, rely on direct control methods such as visual screening and blockages rather than on-site signage or visitor information.
- Maintenance should focus on minimizing resource impacts and assuring public safety rather than user comfort or convenience.
- Primary maintenance tasks will include downed tree removal and brushing, with lower emphasis on tread maintenance.
- Solicit assistance from volunteer group and individual volunteers in the prioritization and completion of trail maintenance.
- In completing trail construction and maintenance projects, utilize minimum tool as a guiding principle.
- Trail construction will not be undertaken without an approved trail project plan.
- Trail design standards in line with wilderness character will serve as the basis for project design.
- Available resources for trail maintenance should be focused, in priority order, on the following trails:
 - Table Rock and Summit Trails
 - Rooster Rock Trail and High Ride Trail from Rooster Rock to Pechuck Lookout
 - Saddle Trail
 - High Ridge Trail from Old Bridge Trailhead to Rooster Rock
 - Image Creek Trail
 - Bull Creek Trail

Management Actions

1. Construct a new trail segment (up to 3500') that would connect the existing Table Rock Trailhead to Image Creek Trail, bypassing the need for wilderness visitors to hike on the abandoned Table Rock Rd. *FY 2012-2013*
2. Evaluate need to construct re-route of Saddle Trail to address ongoing erosion and visitor experience concerns and complete as necessary *FY 2011- 2015*
3. Complete enhancements to Old Bridge Trailhead including defined parking and visitor information, consistent with its status as TRW's most accessible trailhead *FY 2012-2014*
4. Complete a bi-annual review of trail conditions in order to identify and prioritize needed maintenance. *FY 2011 (ongoing)*
5. Establish volunteer agreements with wilderness user groups and/or individuals to complete priority trail maintenance and wilderness monitoring tasks. Regularly renew and update these agreements as they are established. *FY 2011 (ongoing)*

Visitor Information and Signage

Management Assumptions

Maps, brochures, guidebooks and online information will reduce the need for posting some signs within TRW. Signage elsewhere in the Molalla River-Table Rock SRMA will guide visitors towards recreation opportunities within Table Rock Wilderness. Sign vandalism, particularly at high visibility trailheads such as Old Bridge, will continue. The need for regulatory and directional signage within the wilderness will remain minimal.

Management Direction

- Preserve the spontaneity of recreation by purposefully limited type and extent of information dispersal
- Make information about TRW available without advertising its use
- Directional signage should be limited to wilderness trailheads and their immediate vicinities and will not be utilized at trail junctions other than Summit Trail
- No interpretive information will be placed within TRW's developed trail system
- Trailhead information should focus on providing wilderness etiquette information and maps, rather than interpretive information
- Information interpreting TRW's resources and character should be limited to brochures and developed settings within the Molalla River-Table Rock SRMA
- Transportation signage program to the wilderness should guide visitors equally to the northern and southern portions of the wilderness

Management Actions

1. Install routed wooden wilderness boundary signs at each TRW trailhead *FY 2011*
2. Streamline trailhead visitor information, with a focus on providing wilderness etiquette information and trail maps *FY 2011-2012*
3. Create a basic website for Table Rock Wilderness that provides a brief description of the area's attributes, an electronic map and directions. *FY 2011*
4. Continue brochure re-production and make available at Salem District Office and regional outlets without providing on-site at wilderness trailheads. *FY 2011 ongoing*
5. Update visitor information including brochures, website and on-site signage as information or conditions change. *FY 2011 ongoing*