

DECISION RECORD/RATIONALE/FONSI  
GRANTS PASS ACTIVE CLUB  
AMENDMENT TO SPECIAL RECREATION USE PERMIT MRP-251  
2000

I. **DECISION:** Grant authorization for an amendment to the Grants Pass Active Club Special Use Permit, MRP-251, authorizing a jet boat race, to be held on May 27 and 28, 2000 in addition to their existing permit authorization. The amendment activity will be implemented as described in the proposed action of the 1999 environmental assessment for this action. All elements in the proposed action will be implemented. This authorization is only applicable for the event taking place on the dates specified in the permit (5/27-28, 2000). Future proposals for any amendment to the existing permit will be evaluated on a case by case basis until a Record of Decision is prepared on the Recreation Activity Management Plan for the recreation section of the Rogue River. An EIS is in the process of being prepared and should be completed this year. Future authorization of Boatnik events, including the unlimited boat event will be part of the decisions made at that time.

**In addition, the following actions will be adhered to and must be incorporated into the permit. A pre-permit authorization meeting will be held with the applicants to emphasize the terms and conditions of the permit and the conditions identified in this Decision Record.**

1. Safety of race participants, spectators and other river recreationists (float boaters, fishermen, swimmers etc.) will be the primary focus of the permittee. Special emphasis will be placed at county parks and other heavy use areas along the event route. The Grants Pass Active Club will have a presence at these locations to distribute information about the event and to insure the safety of other recreationists.
2. Applicants will clearly post race information, including river stretches to be used for the event, river closure times and event times at ramps and other high use areas along the race route at least two weeks prior to the jet boat event. This race information will also be distributed through the Grants Pass Courier and to local float boat rental establishments in the Grants Pass, Merlin and Galice areas two weeks prior to the Boatnik event. Failure to implement the above could be cause for cancellation of the permit.
3. BLM representatives designated to monitor the race and/or State Of Oregon Marine Board Representatives, will shut down the race, and/or close down the river to other river users, if in their opinion, safe racing conditions, spectator safety or other public safety is compromised. Safe operating standards are found in the "Marine Unit Operations Manual for Boatnik 1999" developed by the Josephine County Marine Deputy.

4. Authorization of this permit is limited to two one-hour use periods for each of two days. Event activities will not exceed these time limitations. However, the river may be closed for longer than two hours, if unsafe situations occur and number three above needs to be initiated. The section of the river being used for the jet boat race will be “cleared” and reopened after the last boat passes through the course. River clearance will be as efficiently and as quickly as possible in order to allow other water-based recreation activities to resume.

5. Within sixty days after the race event, the permit holder will host a meeting to review the jet boat event authorized by this permit amendment. The BLM Grants Pass Field Manager, Boatnik organizers, Josephine County law enforcement, and a State Marine Board representative should be in attendance. The objective of the meeting is to thoroughly review/critique the event. Safety and interaction between event participants, spectators and other river recreationist will be the primary focus of the discussion.

6. The permit will include language informing the Grants Pass Active Club that they will submit any future proposed amendments to Permit MRP-251 prior to **November 30** of any given year. Applications for proposed modifications to the existing permit will not be accepted after that date. Applications will include a detailed description of the requested amendment. The Field Manager will determine the detail necessary to analyze the application. This date is important as to insure enough administrative time to complete the necessary environmental analysis, allow adequate public input and to ensure adequate time for appeals to be reviewed prior to issuing the permit. This stipulation may be waived in the future if the Rogue River Recreation Management Plan Record of Decision authorizes this event.

**Any person adversely affected by this decision may appeal under 43 CFR part 4. Appeals of this decision should be made within 30 days of publication of the notice of this decision in the Grants Pass Daily Courier and sent to the Medford District Office, 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, Oregon 97504. A petition for stay of this decision should be filed with the Office of Hearings and Appeals, Department of Interior.**

II RATIONALE: The above stated decision is consistent with management objectives described in the Medford District Resource Management Plan, Rogue National Wild and Scenic River Activity Plan for the Hellgate Recreation Section (11/9/78) and the Rogue National Wild and Scenic River revised development and management plan (7/7/72). This decision is also consistent with management objectives found in the Record of Decision for the Northwest Forest Plan. This decision will not jeopardize the outstanding remarkable features for which the river was designated under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Implementing this decision clearly meets the test for allowed activities on page 69 of the Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan (June 1995) for the Medford District. The plan states that “Under interim protective management, all authorized actions on BLM administered land within the one-half mile wide corridor must have either a positive or neutral effect on the identified outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs) that resulted in rivers being

found eligible/suitable....” Motorized boating activities including events authorized under this decision have taken place historically since the 1950's. Jet boat use on the recreation section is a normal activity that regularly occurs from May to October.

The decision to implement the permit amendment was based on the following:

### Safety

- Safety to race participants, spectators, and other river users has been a primary concern of mine as well as those involved with organizing the race and those providing comments from the general public. After participating in discussions with race organizers, organizers of other races similar to this race (Gold Beach race on the lower section of the Wild and Scenic Rogue River), reviewing the “Marine Unit Operations Manual for Boatnik”, reviewing post race safety evaluation in 1997, 1998 and 1999, and discussing the 1997 and 1998 race with BLM staff and the public, it is my opinion that those involved have identified the potential safety issues and have developed an action plan to make the activity as safe as possible. The State of Oregon Marine Board, who is primarily responsible for boating safety, concurs and will be considering issuing their permit authorization based on similar findings. A primary safety concern is the ability to clear all river users from the race course prior and during the racing event. The applicant has submitted a plan to insure that other river users are notified of the event. Typical boat launch areas will be occupied by event volunteers with radios to prevent river access during the race, communication mechanisms are in place to deal with unsafe situations, and over a dozen law enforcement boats will be on the river to clear river users from the river during the race. The Rogue River Boating Safety and Conflict Study (WRC, 1995) was used to determine safety issues and formulate actions to mitigate them. In addition, 1997 and 1998 post race safety recommendations have been incorporated into the proposed action and this decision.

### Recreational Opportunities

The goal of managing the recreation section of the Rogue River Wild and Scenic River is to provide for a wide diversity of water associated recreational activities in such a manner that the outstandingly, remarkable values for which the river received its status are not adversely affected. The Bureau tries to balance the various recreational activities associated with the Rogue River in a way that provides a diversity of recreational experiences while providing for commercial and non commercial uses. This decision carefully considered effects to those traditional river uses and existing river permit holders. Early scoping for the 1997, 1998, and 1999 events identified adjacent land owners, Hellgate jet boat excursions, float boaters and campers as river associated uses that could be affected if the event was authorized. Race organizers have adjusted race times and implemented processes to have a minimum affect on other permit holders and other traditional uses. It is my opinion that the major conflicts and use periods for other river users have been minimized. The short term effects from authorizing this event, primarily an inconvenience to those river users not interested in the boat race, should not jeopardize the issuance of a permit for the proposed two hours a day, for two days, jet boat race. The river environment will be used by a recreational user group (boat drivers and crews) that are participating in the race and by those observing the event (approximately 40,000 viewers are anticipated) for about three hours each of two days. Other river users will be displaced for up to two hours each day during the race event.

### Biological/Ecological Considerations

Although some species of wildlife, primarily birds, may be temporarily displaced from their habitat adjacent to the river during this event, the environmental assessment, observations during past events and public comments did not identify any other significant effects to species behavior or habitat. Most wildlife species who use the riparian habitat are accustomed to the existing 19 jet boat trips a day from May through September and other motorized boat activity that takes place regularly on the river. The potential short term displacement effects do not weigh significantly in the decision. Event monitoring in 1997, 1998, and 1999 by BLM personnel observed several wildlife species continuing their normal behavioral activities during the jet boat event. No wildlife were observed to be abnormally disturbed by the boat activity. A pair of Bald Eagles are known to fly in the area. Informal consultation, per the endangered species act, has been completed with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. They have concurred that the subject activity is not likely to adversely affect species listed under the endangered species act.

Some publics expressed concern about affects to fisheries. Again, neither the environmental assessment or public comments identified any substantive affects to fish or their habitat. Studies conducted for BLM show that jet boat activities have little if any affects on fish during the time periods permitted to commercial jet boats (Effects of Boat Traffic on Juvenile Salmonids in the Rogue River. (Satterthwaite, 1995). Formal consultation with the National Marine Fishery Service (NMFS), per the Endangered Species Act, has been previously completed for activities such as this event. A biological assessment for the 1999 event has been completed. It has been concluded that conditions have not changed since the 1997 programmatic biological opinion which concluded that motorized boating activity is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of listed, proposed or candidate anadromous salmonid species.

Some comments addressed the possibility of soil and bank erosion caused by the the wake of the jet boats. Studies completed for BLM have concluded that wakes are not a significant cause of erosion in the Rogue River (Cordes, Nam, 1993). Observations of the boats in the subject race, during race conditions, indicate that their wakes are considerably less than those jet boats normally using the river.

#### Economic Stabilization and Community Benefits

The Grants Pass area has traditionally been dependent on the extraction of wood products from public lands. Recently, reduced timber quantities from the public lands have caused local communities in Southern Oregon to look for other opportunities to maintain the economic stability of their communities. Most smaller communities in the area have looked to the marketing of recreational opportunities as a mechanism to stabilize their economy. The Grants Pass Active Club identified the additional race activity as an opportunity to draw additional people to the Grants Pass area and increase the length of stay through the Memorial Day weekend. More people and longer stays increases dollars to the local community. In addition, the increased dollars realized from an expanded Boatnik event will increase funds received by the Grants Pass Active club for distribution to youth activities throughout out Josephine County.

Pre and post event public comments from the 1999, 1998 and 1999 events as well as comments and concerns received during “scoping” for this year’s event were reviewed and used as part of the development of this decision. There were approximately 38 letters of comment (21 supporting 16

objecting), 1 petition with 26 signatures favoring the boating activity, a survey with 440 responses (378 supporting, 72 objecting) and proclamations supporting the event from the Mayor of Grants Pass and the Josephine County Commissioners. In 2000, we received 11 comments (3 objecting and 8 supporting).

III. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT: On the basis of the information contained in the 1999 environmental assessment for the subject proposed action, on site observations during the 1997, 1998 and 1999 events, and review of public comments relating to specific environmental, social and economic affects anticipated due to implementing the permit amendment, it is my determination that the decision stated above does not constitute significant effects to the quality of the human environment. Furthermore, it is also my determination that the subject action will not significantly affect the outstandingly remarkable values of the recreation section of the Wild and Scenic Rogue River. Therefore, it is my determination that an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary and will not be prepared. It is also my determination that this decision is consistent with the Medford District Resource Management Plan, Northwest Forest Plan, and laws and regulations guiding the management of actions permitted on lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management.

/s/ Douglas W. Parker

March 3, 2000

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Douglas W. Parker  
Field Manager, Grants Pass Resource Area  
Medford District, Bureau of Land Management

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Date