

DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR

4310-33

Bureau of Land Management

(OR-117-6332-05; 3-432)

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Medford District Office, Grants Pass  
Resource Area.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement to revise the  
Wild and Scenic Rogue River's Hellgate Recreation Area Management Plan,  
Josephine County, Oregon.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that the United States Department of the Interior  
(USDI), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Medford District Office (MDO) will  
prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to revise the Wild and Scenic Rogue  
River's Hellgate Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP). The EIS may, in effect,  
amend or supplement the existing Josephine Management Framework Plan (MFP) or a  
future MDO Resource Management Plan (RMP).

The need for action is based on BLM visitor use reports that show major increases in  
water-based visitor use activities, on a recreation use study, and on a scoping effort  
which identified visitor use conflicts. A BLM funded recreation use study was  
conducted by Oregon State University's Department of Forest Resources in 1992. The

results highlighted a concern that there is evidence of on-river conflicts among users, particularly between jet boaters or motorized tour boats and floaters during the summer months, and between jet boaters and anglers in the fall fishing season.

The need for the action is also based upon a previous 20-month scoping process conducted by BLM from May 1991 to December 1992. There were 2,701 written responses analyzed during this previous scoping to revise the Hellgate RAMP through the use of an environmental assessment (EA) process. The issues identified by the public during EA scoping addressed several areas of concern: possible impacts to river resources from visitor use, health and safety concerns, socioeconomic benefits, motorized versus nonmotorized boating, and the social carrying capacity of the river. Social carrying capacity relates to the question of the increased visitor use altering or degrading the recreational experience. The jet boat or motorized tour boat service was clearly identified as the major point of controversy among users of the Hellgate Recreation Area. The common interests of all users and/or visitors were the opportunity to view scenery and wildlife, to be in a natural setting, and to enjoy the river. The BLM is concerned with protecting the recreational resources and reducing visitor use conflicts within the Hellgate Recreation Area.

The purpose of the action is to ensure recreational use levels are in alignment with the purposes of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of October 2, 1968, hereinafter referred to as the "Act" (Public Law 90-542).

**DATES:** Comments concerning the scope and implementation of this proposal must be received by November 30, 1993. Informal meetings may be scheduled before the comment period closes.

**ADDRESSES:** Submit written comments and suggestions concerning this proposal to Michael Walker, Planning Team Leader, BLM Medford District Office, 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, Oregon 97504.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Direct questions about the proposed action and EIS to Michael Walker, telephone (503) 770-2428, or Jim Leffmann, telephone (503) 770-2275.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The 27-mile Hellgate Recreation Area of the National Wild and Scenic Rogue River (i.e., from its confluence with the Applegate River to Grave Creek) provides a broad range of land and water-based recreation opportunities. Recreational use of this segment of the river is managed with a minimum of regulations. Campgrounds, several day-use recreation sites, and boat launching facilities are available. All commercial recreation is regulated by permit. Present commercial activities permitted are motorized tour boats, guided floats, and guided fishing trips. Private recreation activities are presently unregulated by the BLM. The river's proximity to Medford and Grants Pass, Oregon, abundant nearby recreation

support services (e.g., raft rentals and supplies, commercial guide services, shuttles, motels, restaurants, etc.), and a growing public interest in river recreation have led to a tremendous increase in visitor use.

The BLM, as the lead agency, requests other Federal, State, local, and tribal agencies to participate as a cooperating agency on the RAMP/EIS, as appropriate.

Public participation will be especially important at several points during the RAMP/EIS process, beginning with the EIS scoping process, but also including the development of a range of alternatives. Normally, in the EIS scoping process which is the first step toward forming a revised plan, commenters should identify issues, interests, and concerns regarding public lands in the planning area. However, the earlier EA scoping process which had almost 3,000 letters from the public helped identify eight (8) issues the BLM is proposing to address. The order of the following recommended planning issues reflected the level of public and agency interest.

1. How should motorized boating, both commercial and private, be managed (e.g., how much, what kind, permitted season, mix between commercial and private, etc.)?
2. How should nonmotorized boating be managed (e.g., how much, what kind, permitted season, mix between commercial and private, etc.)?

3. How should commercial services or activities along the Hellgate section of the Rogue River be managed (e.g., how much, what kind, permitted season, etc.)?
4. Should user fees be levied for private use of the Hellgate section of the Rogue River?
5. How should a quality fishing experience be maintained or enhanced?
6. What types of recreational opportunities should be provided?
7. How should visitor services be provided?
8. What actions should BLM take in river related law enforcement?

A "scoping" document, which summarizes the public concerns during the previous 20-month EA scoping process, was completed within the MDO and is available on request by writing Mike Walker, River Planner, in Medford, or by calling (503) 770-2428.

The EA scoping process to revise the Hellgate RAMP and its identification of public concerns were the major influences in the design of the Rogue River Studies Program. It is a combination of the eight contracted studies (i.e., cultural resources, economic

effects, erosion, fisheries (expert panel on adult salmon spawning), fisheries (juveniles), Indian history, safety, and visitor attitudes) and BLM staff resource or background papers.

In considering solutions to the various issues in the Hellgate Recreation Area, a wide range of possibilities exist. Some solutions to the identified issues could create a more developed and highly used environment. At the other end of the spectrum, a less accessible river could be restored with fewer visitors accommodated. A general description of a possible range of RAMP/EIS alternatives follows:

Alternative A would stress the protection of the natural environment with a visitor use level consistent with the time before the general controversy over river management began. This alternative would include permits and fees for commercial and private watercraft use at a visitor use level much lower than today. There would be no new recreational facilities developed.

Alternative B would be current management with the level of visitor use expected to occur in 1995, a higher level of use than today. Permits and fees would only be applicable for commercial use. Market forces would control the level of commercial use. Private use would be unregulated. The existing restrictions for the jet boat or motorized tour boat service would remain in effect.

The number and type of recreational facilities would, in general, remain consistent with the level of development in 1993.

Alternative C would stress the enhancement of the angling and floating experience. The alternative would be designed around management actions which would minimize the potential to impact the fisheries resource, increase fishing opportunities and the fishing experience, and maximize the floating opportunity and floating experience.

Motorized boating would be prohibited during the spring and fall spawning/fishing seasons. Total daily motorized tour boat trips would be limited to the historical number for the year 1985. Motorized boat traffic would be prohibited downstream of Hellgate Canyon to Grave Creek from October through May. The interim permit stipulations for the motorized tour boat service would remain in effect. Anglers and floaters would be unregulated. Market forces would control the level of commercial use. Visitor use for floaters and anglers would equal alternative B as adjusted for 2005.

The number and type of recreational facilities would, in general, remain consistent with the level of development in 1993 except that several new fishing access sites would be developed.

Alternative D would be the maximum visitor use which would occur with the minimum of management necessary to administer commercial use. For example, there would be no fees for private use, almost no limits to visitor use (i.e., private and commercial except for motorized tour boats), and except for trips per day, elimination of the interim permit stipulations for motorized tour boats. There would be no restrictions on private motorized use. Visitor use for anglers and floaters would equal alternative B for 2005. Watercraft use for motorized tour boats would be increased from the existing level of 19 trips per day to 25 trips per day. The use patterns for motorized tour boats would equal alternative B as adjusted to estimate visitor use for all months during 1995.

The number and type of recreational facilities would increase above all other alternatives. Many additional facilities would be developed including a multi-million dollar information, administration, camping, and recreation complex.

Additional information concerning the Rogue River Studies Program and possible alternatives is also available by writing or calling Mike Walker.

Dated: **SEP 22 1993**

**WAYNE M. KUHN**

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Wayne M. Kuhn

Acting District Manager