

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT, EA NUMBER OR-105-98-14

BLM Office: South River Field Office, Roseburg District

Proposed Action Title: Cow Creek Day Use and Watchable Wildlife Sites

Location of Proposed Action: Section 32, T. 30 S., R. 6 W.; Sections 1 and 4, T. 31 S.; R. 7 W.; and Section 35, T. 31 S., R. 8 W.

Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plan

This proposed action conforms to the Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan, dated June 1995 (ROD/RMP) for the Roseburg District, Bureau of Land Management (BLM). All expected impacts are within the range of those analyzed in the Roseburg District RMP/EIS.

Need for the Proposed Action

The Roseburg District ROD/RMP states that the BLM should “ensure the continued availability of Public Land for a diversity of resource dependent outdoor recreation.” It also states that a wide range of developed and dispersed recreation opportunities shall contribute to meet the projected recreation demand within the planning area. The Cow Creek area has been designated as a Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA), with a written development plan in support of the Back Country Byway designation it received in 1993. It is currently nominated as an Oregon State Tour Route for the intent of public recreation, tourism and community support. An Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) was formed to propose, analyze, and develop a plan to help meet the identified need for developed and dispersed recreational opportunities. The Proposed Action would help meet the needs for dispersed and developed recreation sites identified in the ROD/RMP.

Description of the Proposed Action

The Island Creek Day Use site (31-7-1) along Cow Creek has recently been proposed for withdrawal from mineral entry, in order to retain the site for recreational activities. Along the corridor, there are also a number of sites (30-6-32, 31-7-4, and 31-8-35) with the potential to be developed into Watchable Wildlife Sites (WWS) for the viewing of either terrestrial or aquatic species and the enjoyment of the recreating public. To serve as both protection of the resources and as an invitation for use, the three WWS are proposed for development.

Island Creek Day Use Site

This site in 31-7-1 (at mile post 3.4) has historically been used by both day visitors and overnight campers. Past uses of the site have compacted many areas and have degraded the overall quality of the site. Proposed development of the site as a designated Day Use Area would provide facilities, allow limitations on activities that could further degrade the site, and opportunities for rehabilitation of the most impacted areas. The site design would include an asphalted parking area to accommodate four or five vehicles, restroom facilities, and three or four picnic sites with grills. Vehicular access by recreational users would be limited to the parking area and restroom facilities. A gate or stanchion would be built to block vehicle access to the picnic areas, but would be movable to allow access by maintenance vehicles.

Current roadways that would not be used for the parking area or maintenance access would be blocked, eliminated, or converted to walking paths to access the picnic areas and creek. The restroom and at least one picnic site would be Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible, with the intent of making as much of the site accessible without increasing impacts. To the extent practicable, picnic site pathways would retain their natural surfacing. If a fill is required, it will be of compatible material.

Picnic tables would be anchored to prevent movement and theft. If costs are within budget allowances, it would be desirable to utilize the concrete style of picnic tables. Any ADA accessible site would provide a table that is also ADA accessible. Grills would be placed so as to limit potential for heat damage to overstory vegetation, and they would be safely usable by individuals with limited mobility.

The restroom would be a single vault type that meets ADA approved standards. Placement would be on the west side of the site, near BLM Road No. 30-6-32.0 (Cow Creek Road). The parking lot would be located between the restroom and the road. A pre-cast colored toilet of the 'sweet smelling' design would best serve the site. Placement would be such that the vent tube on the back of the building faces a southern component. This placement would face the door and modesty wall toward the parking lot and road. The use of wheel bumpers to separate the parking lot and the facility would allow for a smooth transition from the parking lot to the restroom pad, and assure ADA access.

Preliminary surveys have identified four hazard trees requiring removal for safety reasons. An additional eight trees would require further evaluation and core sampling to determine if they also require removal or may be retained on the site. It is the intent of the project proposal to retain as many trees and as much vegetation as possible. Other than hazard trees removed for safety reasons, tree removal would be limited to those required for the installation of the parking lot and toilet. Before the removal of a hazard tree, all other options including limbing, topping, and doctoring would be considered. Safety of the visiting public would be of paramount importance in reaching these decisions.

Wetland Watchable Wildlife Site

Along the right-of-way of BLM Road No. 30-6-32.0 (at mile post .4) is a borrow pit, remaining from the construction of the access road in the mid-1950s. This site in 30-6-32 has filled with water and served as a wetland supporting a wide variety of aquatic birds and animals. The creation of a Watchable Wildlife Site (WWS) at this site would serve as a stopping point along the Back Country Byway.

Currently, there is a wide turnout area on the opposite side of the road, but allowing pedestrian traffic to cross the road would be dangerous. Construction of a turnout and viewing platform on the wetlands side of the road would be safer and more desirable. Location of the WWS at the west end of the wetland would have the least impact on wildlife using the wetland. The right-of-way extends 30 feet either side of the center line of the road. This would be sufficient to construct a 13 foot wide turnout approximately 300 feet in length, and to install a 6 foot wide viewing platform beyond the current edge of the asphalted roadway.

The existing turnout on the south side of the road should have fill added to bring the shoulder up to the level of the roadway. Currently the existing area is approximately two feet below the road surface and poses a safety hazard since no shoulder exists. This fill area will stay well within the existing flat area and not impact creek bank.

Fill material will be needed to bring the turnout up to the level of the road, and it would be kept out of the wetland. A turnout of this length would provide increased sight distance allowing for safer separation of traffic as vehicles exit and enter the roadway. The turnout would provide parking off of the road and allow safe personal exit and entry from vehicles. Paving would allow for lane striping for safety reasons, reduced maintenance costs, and provide for ADA accessibility. Signing along the road would inform visitors of the viewpoint and of the potential for traffic congestion in the area.

The fence installed at the time of road construction was not constructed on the right-of-way boundary. A portion of this fence would require relocation to facilitate construction of the WWS viewing platform. The reconstructed section of the fence would be located on the right-of-way boundary and would match the original fence in design. Relocation of the fence would not impact the viewshed of the site but would discourage pedestrian traffic within the wetland. Additional portions of the fence would require renovation as some of the wire and posts have been removed from the site.

The platform would be constructed of materials that would allow precipitation to drain through, but not impede the movement of wheelchairs or walker-type mobility aids. A wooden surfaced platform on concrete or metal supports would likely meet these requirements. The wooden deck would be treated with non-leaching preservatives in a manner that does not introduce contaminants into the waters of the wetland. A railing would not be necessary as long as the platform is no more than three feet above the ground surface. Wheel stops at a maximum 4 inch height would be placed around the perimeter of the platform to prevent viewers from accidentally slipping off of the platform.

To prevent vehicles from being driven onto the platform, cement parking barriers would be placed along the edge of the turnout where it meets the viewing platform. Spacing of the barriers should be wide enough to allow the passage of wheelchairs.

Interpretation would be provided by signs mounted on or near the edge of the platform. The panels would be located so that they would not interfere with viewing. The subject matter of the interpretive panels would deal with wetland flora and fauna.

Salmonid Watchable Wildlife Site

Following an IDT review of an inventory list of eight potential sites, a spawning bed (at mile post 7.1) in the NE 1/4 of 31- 7- 4, was selected. Of the eight candidate sites with interpretive potential, the Iron Mtn. Creek site was determined to be the most suitable. Criteria employed in making the selection included protection of spawning fish, a vantage point for viewing, and viewer safety. Additionally, this site had the highest number of spawning fish during the fall activity period.

The following sites were considered, but eliminated:

<u>Road Mile Post</u>	<u>T-R-S</u>	<u>Quarter Section</u>
1.9	30-6-31	SW 1/4
5.1	30-7-35	NW 1/4
6.8	31-7-4	SE 1/4
9.7	31-7-9	SW 1/4
10.4	31-7-8	SW 1/4
12.7	31-7-17	NW 1/4
14.8	31-8-24	NE 1/4

The Iron Mtn. Creek site would require expansion of the existing turnout. The expanded turnout would provide for safe vehicle ingress and egress, as well as provide for viewer safety. Turnout width would be approximately 12 feet, with an additional 10 foot expansion to accommodate the viewpoint.

The expansion would be accomplished through construction of a retaining wall off of the stream side of the road shoulder. Placement of rip-rap would protect the fill slope or wall from flood event waters. The turnout area would be asphalted to complement the Byway surfacing. Depending on the final design, installation of a guard rail or some other form of a barrier may be required to protect vehicles from accidentally leaving the turnout area.

Signing would be installed along the Byway to inform visitors of the WWS and the potential for traffic congestion. Interpretive panels may be free standing or integrated into the guard rail design.

Osprey Watchable Wildlife Site

Uphill from the existing Recreational Gold Panning site in 31-8-35 (at mile post 17.5), is an osprey nesting site that the interdisciplinary team would like to interpret. The nest can best be viewed from the southern end of the public gold panning area. The only construction that would be necessary would be the installation of an interpretive panel. The existing turnout is of sufficient length and width to offer a safe ingress, egress and allow for viewing.

Description of Mitigation/Potential Impacts

The objectives of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) would be met by the proposed projects through the implementation of Best Management Practices (BMP) found in Appendix D of the Roseburg District ROD/RMP (pp. 129-143), and project design features (PDF). An assessment of the project's ACS consistency is appended to this EA (Appendix A). The IDT worked through site location, project design and selection of appropriate BMP to mitigate potential long-term impacts. Current and past usage of the sites in their unimproved state, have had substantial negative impact. Improvements and designed facilities would lessen impacts by focusing use away from more fragile areas, and by decreasing indiscriminate uses. Any construction activities that would involve in-stream work or have the potential to impact water quality would be restricted to the period of July 1 to September 15 during summer low flows.

The proposed Wetland WWS and Island Creek Day Use sites are located in proximity to prime farmlands identified by the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service in their cataloguing of Douglas County Soil Surveys. Through field exams, the Area soil scientist determined that the sites did not meet the prime farm land qualities, and the development of the sites would not cause irreversible impacts to the adjacent prime farmlands.

Impacts from the potential construction of a retaining wall at the Salmonid WWS would be mitigated through the design of the structure. Such design features would be implemented with the necessary contract provisions. Design would assure the mitigation of flood impact. Construction could have the potential to adversely affect sediment and substrate, but the effects would be expected to be short-term of a year or less. Sediments that may be generated by the construction would be expected to be flushed during normal high flows in the winter months. Road densities would not be measurably increased, and the only effects would be due to construction of the turnouts within the Riparian Reserves. There would be no appreciable long-term effects to the aquatic systems in this reach of Cow Creek.

There are no conflicts with the Visual Resource Management (VRM) objectives for the corridor. VRM objectives for the area would not be negatively impacted by the proposed facilities and structures associated with the proposal.

Special Status Species

Threatened and Endangered Fish

The Cow Creek Watershed has been documented to contain both the endangered Umpqua River cutthroat trout (*Onchorhynchus clarki clarki*) and the threatened Oregon Coast coho salmon (*Onchorhynchus kisutch*). The proposed action would constitute a “may affect, not likely to adversely affect,” and would not result in a “take” of a listed or proposed species, nor would it result in destruction or adverse modification of designated or proposed critical habitats. Therefore, the proposed action would not result in an irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources that would violate Section 7(d) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Threatened and Endangered Plants

Surveys for listed plants were accomplished for all proposed sites. No T&E plants were found.

Threatened and Endangered Wildlife Species

No threatened or Endangered wildlife species have been located or observed in any of the proposed construction sites. The Salmonid site and the Osprey site fall inside the fifty mile zone for Marbled Murrelet habitat. Murrelet habitat is found within one quarter mile of the project areas. Construction noise associated with the project is a “may affect, not likely to adversely affect”. Restrictions on equipment operation will be imposed from two hours before sunset to two hours after sunrise, between April 1 and Sept. 1. The proposed project will not remove or modify potential Marbled Murrelet habitat.

The Island Cr. site contains suitable spotted owl habitat but the project is more than 1/4 mile from any known spotted owl activity center. The project will not remove or modify spotted owl habitat. Thus the proposed action is considered a “no effect” on the owl.

None of the sites will have detrimental affects on the Peregrine Falcon, as they do not contain adequate habitat. Planed site construction will not degrade required habitat for the Bald Eagle. All sites are outside the range for the Columbia White Tail deer. Thus each site will have a “no effect” on these three species.

Special Attention Species

A site survey for Del Norte salamander habitat was done, and none was found. All proposed sites do contain rocks and rock fragments, associated with prior road construction and day use. The rock present is all rock on soil, not rock on rock. This rock is not Del Norte Salamander habitat. Surveys for Del Norte Salamander are not required.

The three WWS' are not considered to contain suitable habitats for any Survey and Manage Species (S&M) that might be expected to inhabit the areas. The proposed Day Use site at Island Creek does contain potentially suitable habitat for certain Survey and Manage mollusk species. Prior to ground disturbing activities, a survey of this site would determine the presence or absence of occupancy. Discovery of any S&M populations on the site will invoke standard protection mitigation.

Critical Elements of the Human Environment

<u>Potentially Affected</u> <u>Critical Elements</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>Specialist's</u> <u>Initials</u>
Air Quality	X		_____
ACEC/RNA	X		_____
Cultural Resources	X		_____
Farmlands, Prime/Unique	X		_____
Floodplain		X	_____
Native American Religious Concerns	X		_____

Critical Elements of the Human Environment (continued)

T & E Species:	Fish	X		_____
	Plants	X		_____
	Wildlife	X		_____
Waste Hazardous/Solid		X		_____
Wetlands/Riparian Zones			X	_____
Wild and Scenic Rivers		X		_____
Wilderness		X		_____
Visual Resources (VRM)		X		_____

Agencies and Persons Consulted

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 National Marine Fisheries Service
 State Historic Preservation Office

Gary Basham - South River Field Office Special Status Plant Coordinator

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