



File Code: 1950

Date: November 23, 2010

Dear Citizens,

This letter is to notify you that the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Upper Middle Fork Watershed Restoration and Road Closure project is available for public comment as directed by 36 CFR Part 215. You have been sent this notification because of your past interest and involvement in this project.

A copy of the EA can be mailed to you upon request, or the EA can be found on the internet at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/willamette/projects-all>, or a copy of the EA can be viewed at the Middle Fork Ranger Station, 46375 Highway 58, Westfir, Oregon. A large color map (22 x 34") is also available for viewing at this website and in addition, has been divided into six 8½ x 11" tile maps. If you would like to come in to the Middle Fork Ranger Station to look at maps or discuss the project, district personnel will be available on December 6th, 1:00 -4:00 p.m. and on December 7th, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon, in the front office public room at the ranger station.

The Middle Fork Ranger District of the Willamette National Forest is proposing to close approximately 132 miles of roads in the Upper Middle Fork Willamette River and Hills Creek Reservoir watersheds to motorized traffic, and place these roads into maintenance storage condition. Of the 132 miles, approximately 75 miles of road are currently open on the Willamette National Forest Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM), which was released to the public in April, 2010. The 75 miles represents closure of approximately 10% of the roads currently shown as open on the MVUM in the two watersheds in this project area. Most of the roads proposed for closure (approximately 81%) were rated in the District Roads Analysis as being a moderate to high risk for failure. Roads proposed for closure would be placed in a hydrologically stable condition.

Implementation would occur beginning in the Spring of 2011. Closures would be enforced with Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) road closure orders prohibiting motorized vehicle traffic.

The roads proposed for closure in this project occur within the Upper Middle Fork Willamette River and Hills Creek Reservoir watersheds on the Middle Fork Ranger District, Willamette National Forest, Oregon. The general legal description of the area is T21S, R2&3E; T22S, R2,3,&4E; T23S, R2,3,4,5, &5.5E; T24S, R2,3,4,5,&5.5E; T25S, R3,4,5,&5.5E; Willamette Meridian.

A public open house meeting was held at the Middle Fork Ranger Station on June 16, 2010. Approximately 40 people attended the open house. We received 21 comment sheets from open house attendees, 9 comment letters, 15 emails, and 3 phone calls. After receiving the public input and with further IDT analysis and discussion of public input, the proposed action was reduced to 132 miles of roads for closure, only 75 of which are currently open to the public.

Purpose and Need

The purpose for this proposal is to:

- Protect water quality and aquatic habitats by reducing impacts associated with roads.



- Improve use of terrestrial habitat by big game and other wildlife through reduction in open road density.
- Reduce the number of road miles that require regular maintenance.
- Reduce the spread of non-native invasive plants associated with roads.

There is a need for action because:

- There are many miles of roads on the District that have not been maintained to standard or repaired to desired Forest standards. If roads are not either maintained or closed in the near future, there is an increased risk for surface erosion, gullying, and landslides, which can affect water quality and aquatic habitat.
- High densities of open roads affect habitat use by a variety of threatened, endangered, or sensitive species as well as Willamette LRMP Management Indicator Species. Closing roads could promote more secure wildlife populations.
- Roads serve as conduits for non-native invasive plants. Closing roads reduces the potential for invasive plants to spread and displace native plants.
- Closing roads is a cost-effective way to protect resources for the long term.

Alternatives

The EA contains two alternatives that were fully developed and analyzed. The No Action alternative (Alternative 1) provides a benchmark for estimating effects of the action alternatives. The Proposed Action (Alternative 2) was developed around the major issues of public/administrative access and water quality. The Proposed Action may limit recreational and forest activities that involve driving motorized vehicles to access areas of public interest.

- Ø Alternative 1 is the No Action alternative. We would not implement any restoration if this alternative is selected.
- Ø Alternative 2 is the Proposed Action. About 132 miles of roads in the Upper Middle Fork Willamette River and Hills Creek Reservoir watersheds would be closed to motorized traffic and hydrologically stabilized. Most of these roads would be placed into maintenance storage condition. Roads that will not be needed again would be decommissioned. All roads proposed for closure would be placed in a hydrologically stable condition using various methods such as culvert and fill removal, lowering fill heights over culverts, side cast pull back, road sub-soiling, waterbar installation, ditch cleaning, and culvert cleaning to reduce the potential for erosion and road failure. Road entrances would generally be closed with an earthen berm or other types of treatments.

Based upon the effects of the alternatives, the responsible official will decide which alternative meets the needs of the forest users and government agencies, best protects the forest resources.

Preferred Alternative

After a review of the EA, I have identified Alternative 2 as the preferred alternative. This alternative would close all or portions of 139 roads for a total of about 132 miles. We would implement hydrological stabilization measures on these roads. Level of closure would vary by road as determined by present road condition, location on the landscape, location in relation to resource values requiring protection or management, and availability of funds.

Each road was previously evaluated utilizing the Roads Analysis process. This process evaluates the impact that leaving a road open or closing the road would have on the following use categories: administrative use, public use, terrestrial and aquatic wildlife.

The Proposed Action was modified from the original proposal presented during public scoping. The Proposed Action (132 miles) would close fewer miles of road than the original proposal (150 miles) for the reasons outlined in the following table.

Road number	Miles deleted (-) or added (+)	Reason for change from original proposed action
2118480 (Coffee Pot Rd.)	-3.89	Public comment. The first 3.9 miles would be kept open. The remainder of the road would be closed.
2153353	-4.86	Public comment. The first 4.86 miles would be kept open. The remaining 2.18 miles of the road would be closed.
2136300	-5.06	Public comment. The entire length of the road would remain open.
2154342	-0.99	Public comment. This road is used by volunteers that stock fish for the Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife. The entire length of the road would remain open.
2120447 2120448 2120470 2120101 2120102	-3.14 -1.15 -0.57 -0.10 -0.07	The Buck Creek bridge on Rd. 2120447 was determined to be unsafe for vehicular travel during the summer of 2010. These roads behind the bridge were hydrologically stabilized and the bridge was removed in October, 2010. The first 0.68 miles of Rd. 2120447, before the bridge, would still be closed under the Proposed Action for this project.
2117143	+1.96	This road was displayed in the original proposed action during public scoping as a closure of 1.09 miles. This was an oversight, as this road actually has 3.05 miles that would be closed by default behind the proposed closure of 2117148 at Gold Creek.
Total	-17.87	

This alternative proposes activities that meet the purpose and need for action described in Chapter 1 of the EA. The proposal is preferable because it:

- Ø Responds to the purpose and need to manage the road system in an environmentally sound manner.
- Ø Protects soil and water resource values, maintains and enhances wildlife habitat.
- Ø Is responsive to public needs and desires,
- Ø Is affordable and efficient and can be maintained within the current and projected Forest financial abilities.

How to Submit Comments

If, after review, you have comments on the EA or the preferred alternative, you may send them to:

- 1) Attn: Duane Bishop, Middle Fork Ranger District, 46375 Highway 58, Westfir, Oregon 97492;
- 2) Or fax to 541-782-5306;
- 3) Or e-mail to comments-pacificnorthwest-willamette-middlefork@fs.fed.us.

The opportunity to comment ends 30-days following the date of publication of the legal notice in the Register Guard, Eugene, Oregon. Only persons submitting timely comments regarding this proposal may appeal the final decision (36 CFR 215.6). For appeal eligibility, each individual or representative of an organization must sign the comments or verify identity upon request. Timeliness of comments will be determined by postmark, time, and date stamp at the Middle Fork Ranger Station or the agency's electronic acknowledgement for electronically submitted comments.

Please include in your response the following information: 1) name, address, and (if possible) telephone number; 2) title of the project on which comment is being submitted; 3) specific comments along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision. Please refer to 36 CFR Part 215.6 for details on the format for submitting comments such as signatures, oral comments or electronically mailed comments. Comments received will become a matter of public record.

The office of General Council in the Department of Agriculture determined that the names and addresses of persons that respond to solicitations for comments for Forest Service projects are subject to the Freedom of information act and subject to public review. Comments received in response to the proposed action, including names, addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on the proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments received anonymously will be accepted and considered; however those who only submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Part 215. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied; the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 15 days.

If you have any questions, or would like further information, please contact Eric Ornberg at the Middle Fork Ranger Station, 541-782-5217.

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

/s/ Duane F. Bishop

DUANE F. BISHOP
District Ranger