



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Clackamas River
Ranger District,
Mt. Hood
National Forest

595 NW Industrial Way
Estacada, OR 97023
(503) 630-6861
FAX # (503) 630-2299

File Code: 1950

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Dear Interested Party:

The Clackamas River Ranger District is examining options to decommission roads for aquatic restoration.

Background

In 1994, the Northwest Forest Plan recognized the need for watershed restoration, stating, "Watershed restoration will be an integral part of a program to aid in recovery of fish habitat, riparian habitat, and water quality" (p. B-30). In response, the Mt. Hood National Forest has accomplished numerous watershed restoration projects including culvert replacement for improved fish passage, in-stream projects to create pools, riparian planting, and road decommissioning. The Forest has decommissioned over 400 miles of roads over the past fifteen years. Decommissioning unneeded roads on the Clackamas River Ranger District is part of our continuing efforts to improve hydrologic function and reduce adverse impacts to aquatic habitats.

In 2003 the Mt. Hood National Forest prepared a *Roads Analysis*, which addressed both the access benefits and ecological effects associated with roads. As highlighted in the *Roads Analysis*, Forest Service budgets have not kept pace with proper road maintenance costs. With this trend of declining budgets expected to continue, the Forest's backlog of roads needing maintenance continues to impact hydrologic function. In response, the *Roads Analysis* recommended decommissioning road segments having environmental risk factors coupled with low access needs.

Purpose of the Proposal

This particular restoration effort will analyze the roads in four sixth field watersheds within the Clackamas River basin: Last/Pinhead, Berry/Cub, Middle Upper Clackamas (includes Lowe, Tumble Rhododendron, Fawn and Hunter) and Upper Clackamas Headwaters (includes Squirrel, Olallie, Lemiti and Slow). Specifically, the proposal aims to:

- 1) Reduce impacts to water quality, aquatic habitat, and threatened, endangered, and sensitive aquatic species caused by landslides, gullyng, seasonal and permanent impassible culvert barriers, and surface erosion associated with unneeded roads.
- 2) Reduce road maintenance costs by removing unneeded roads.



Proposed Action

In order to improve hydrologic function and reduce adverse impacts to aquatic habitat, this project proposes to decommission approximately 100 miles of unneeded roads.

Road decommissioning would be accomplished by both active (i.e. mechanical) and passive (i.e. non-mechanical) methods. Decommissioned roads would no longer need maintenance of any kind, since the ground occupied by decommissioned roads would return to a more natural, forested landscape. All decommissioned roads identified in this project would be removed from Mt. Hood National Forest's transportation system.

Roads and road segments proposed for *active* decommissioning cross streams and require construction work, such as slope rehabilitation and culvert removal. Any drainage structures (i.e. culverts, bridges, or fords) removed or treated must be done as to restore natural drainage. Restoring natural contours of stream channels in these cases typically involves excavating road fill and removing culverts from drainages and streams. For road surface drainage and intercepted shallow groundwater (springs and sheet wash), cross drains are excavated, culverts are removed, and flow from ditches is routed to the cross drains. Cross drains are designed to be sufficiently large enough to capture all of the road related runoff and suitably spaced to limit the storm runoff to small and discharges and slow velocities. A barrier closure feature may also be constructed at the beginning of some actively decommissioned roads to deter vehicle access.

Roads and road segments proposed for *passive* decommissioning would be decommissioned by allowing them to return to a natural condition as native vegetation grows. Most of the roads identified for passive decommissioning have not been maintained and natural vegetation growth has already made them inaccessible by vehicle. Also, most of these roads are on relatively flat terrain where erosion and sedimentation are not risks. A barrier closure feature may also be constructed at the beginning of some passively decommissioned roads to deter vehicle access.

Preliminary Issues

The potential for consequences resulting from decommissioning roads are important considerations that need to be addressed in the analysis. The following issues were identified during the preliminary effects analysis:

- **Forest Products:** Roads provide access to the Forest for gathering products such as firewood, boughs, beargrass, mushrooms, huckleberries, Christmas trees, and landscaping plants. Reducing road density may affect the opportunity for gathering forest products.
- **Recreational Access:** Roads provide access to favorite dispersed recreation sites. Reducing road density may affect this recreational opportunity.
- **Hunting and Fishing Access:** Roads provide access to favorite or traditional hunting and fishing sites. For many, such as people with physical disabilities, it may be important to drive as close as possible. Reducing road density may affect opportunities for hunting and fishing.

Project Design Features

In order to avoid, minimize, and reduce impacts resulting from decommissioning, conscientious design features would be an integral part of the proposed action. The following design features have been identified by the interdisciplinary team so far:

- Disturbance to existing native vegetation in and around project areas would be minimized to the extent necessary to restore the hydrologic function.
- Off-site soil displacement would be minimized by the use of filter materials (such as silt fencing and straw bales).
- Project activities would be maximized during dry conditions when soil moisture and stream baseflow levels are low.

Public Scoping

The Mt. Hood National Forest is now seeking comments from individuals, organizations, local and state governments, and other federal agencies that may be interested in or affected by the proposed action. Comments may pertain to the nature and scope of the environmental, social and economic issues, and possible alternatives to the proposed action. Your comments will help us assess the proposed action, develop alternatives, and prepare an Environmental Assessment.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project, available for public inspection, and released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

The Forest Service would like your scoping comments by **September 3, 2008**. Questions or comments may be directed to: Wesley Wong, Restoration Biologist, Mt. Hood National Forest, Estacada Ranger Station, 595 NW Industrial Way, Estacada, OR 97023; FAX: (503) 630-2299; (503) 630-6861; wwong@fs.fed.us.

All those who comment will remain on our mailing list and receive future updates on this proposal. Electronic maps and other information about the project are available on the Internet at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/mthood/projects/#clackamas>.

Sincerely,

/S/ Sharon Hernandez

Acting for Andrei Rykoff
District Ranger