

File Code: 1950
Date: July 19, 2018

Dear Interested Party,

The Hood River Ranger District of the Mt. Hood National Forest (the Forest) has identified you as an individual, agency, group, or organization that might be interested in commenting on the Waucoma Huckleberry Enhancement (Waucoma) proposal. This project would improve the huckleberry understory across the planning area to provide for functioning stand conditions over time that would favor long-term huckleberry production and growth. This letter provides a brief description of the proposed planning area; background information describing the importance of huckleberries on the landscape; the purpose and need for the proposal; and a general description of the proposed action for the project. This letter also describes how you can participate during the scoping period for this project.

Planning Area

The Waucoma planning area is located at the northwest corner of the Hood River Ranger District. This area is bordered to the north and west by the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area and the Mark O. Hatfield Wilderness respectively; and to the east and south by non-Forest Service System Lands. The planning area boundary includes parts of the Lower West Fork Hood River watershed, and Green Point Creek subwatershed.

The planning area includes approximately 7,305 acres located within:

- Township 2 North, Range 8 East, Sections 25 and 36;
- Township 2 North, Range 9 East, Section 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, and 28-33;
- Township 1 North, Range 8 East, Section 1, 2, 11, & 12; and
- Township 1 North, Range 9 East, Section 4.

The Waucoma planning area is made up of several land use allocations which are described in detail in the Forest’s Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) as amended.

Table 1. Forest Plan land use allocations in the Waucoma planning area.

Land Use Allocation (LUA)	Approximate Acres in Planning Area (Percent)	Approximate Proposed Action Treatment Acres (Percent of LUA)
A5 Unroaded Area	324 (4%)	0 (0%)
A6 Semi Primitive Roaded Recreation	190 (3%)	0 (0%)
B3 Roaded Recreation	143 (2%)	80 (56%)
B10 Deer and Elk Winter Range	337 (4%)	0 (0%)
B12 Backcountry Lake Area	277 (4%)	125 (45%)
C1 Wood Product Emphasis	6,047 (82%)	3,022 (50%)
Total Acres	7,305	3,263 (45%)



Additionally, the Northwest Forest Plan Land Use Allocations within the planning area are shown in Table 2 below. Most treatments would be proposed within Matrix areas and some may occur within riparian areas and possibly LSR. The majority of the planning area consists of Matrix lands (C1 Timber Emphasis) as shown in Table 1 above and in Table 2 below. Treatments for huckleberry enhancement are not proposed within Region 6 Inventoried Roadless Areas or Congressionally Reserved areas.

Table 2. Northwest Forest Plan land use allocations and Region 6 Inventoried Roadless acres in the Waucoma planning area.

Land Use Allocation (LUA)	Approximate Acres in Planning Area (Percent)	Approximate Proposed Action Treatment Acres (Percent of LUA)
Riparian Reserves	1,299 (18%)	567 (44%)
Matrix	4,104 (56%)	2,660 (65%)
Late Successional Reserve (LSR)	114 (1%)	38 (33%)
Administratively Withdrawn	514 (7%)	0 (0%)
R6 Inventoried Roadless	1,288 (18%)	0 (0%)

Background

The Waucoma planning area was identified as an area of emphasis for huckleberry (*Vaccinium spp.*)¹ enhancement because of the existing ecological site potential and past cultural interest. The planning area contains a concentration of Pacific silver fir (*Abies amabilis*) plant communities unique for the east side of the Cascades. Huckleberry habitat is consistently found in a variety of stand conditions and stages within these Pacific silver fir communities. This cluster of huckleberry habitat has drawn berry pickers to the area for centuries, if not millennia.

Timber harvesting has been a major contributor to the change in vegetative conditions that have occurred across the project area as well as the Upper West Fork of Hood River watershed. The Davenport Bros. and later Stanley-Smith Lumber Companies extracted roughly 70% of the merchantable timber from the planning area between 1901 and 1916². By 1943, these clear cut units were mapped as containing Douglas-fir saplings². Additional logging followed in the planning area during the second half of the twentieth century.

Prior to the initial logging of the area, there were a combination of disturbance agents which encouraged huckleberry growth and production while maintaining low ground competition and minimal canopy. However, the relatively monoculture stands that have developed in the area over the last century are inhibiting huckleberry productivity. As the forest overstory matures and begins to close, huckleberry productivity decreases and available growing space is lost (Dahlgreen 1984). Recent treatments on the Mt. Hood National Forest demonstrate that an improved huckleberry response rate can be achieved by opening the canopy and reducing competing vegetation.

The proposed project planning area is located within the ceded lands of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon (CTWSRO). The Treaty of Tribes of Middle Oregon, 1855 ensured the right of the CTWSRO to fish, hunt game, and harvest other foods and materials from these lands was

¹ The two most common types of huckleberry species within the planning area are big leaf (*V. membranaceum*) and Alaskan (*V. alaskaense*) huckleberry.

² Timber Management Atlas, Mount Hood National Forest, 1943, on file Hood River Ranger District

reserved in perpetuity. In 1997, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Forest and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation. The MOU established a framework for a working relationship responsive to management of the huckleberry resource. The Tribes and Forest Service mutually agreed to work together on long-range objectives, plans, and programs for the management of huckleberry habitat on National Forest System Lands³.

Purpose and Need

Overstory competition to existing and future huckleberry fields within the planning area has created conditions that are no longer favorable to long-term huckleberry production and growth. There is a need to maintain a well-distributed huckleberry understory across the planning area that would provide for functioning stand conditions over time. If left untreated, the huckleberry production across this landscape would continue to decline. The purpose of the project is to create and maintain current and future huckleberry habitat across the landscape to benefit cultural and recreational uses. Also, there is a need to maintain opportunities for access to huckleberry fields in this location of the Forest. This project should be designed to achieve the project objective of huckleberry enhancement in an economically viable way.

Proposed Action

The Forest proposes treatments to enhance huckleberry habitat within the planning area. Treatments would allow sunlight to reach the forest floor, reducing the conifer encroachment to existing huckleberry plants, and would improve the overall function of stand conditions. Prescriptions may consist of variable density thinning from below, and shelterwood and intermediate thinning that would produce an approximate 30% canopy cover in treated areas. Thinning stands to reduce canopy closure would allow an increase of sunlight to reach the forest floor thereby encouraging productive huckleberry growth and yield. Skips and gaps would be utilized across all treatment types to create a variety of openings, structure, and stand density.

A Forest Plan project-level amendment for Forestwide standards (FW) FW-323 and FW-324 (Forest Plan pp. Four - 87) may be needed to help achieve the purpose and need for the project in different locations within the treatment areas. A Forest Plan project-level amendment would facilitate the proposed action by authorizing the creation of openings of approximately 5 acres in uneven age management stands. Additionally, an exception to FW-306 and FW-307 may be necessary for some stands that have not reached 95% of culmination. For FW-306 and FW-307 exceptions may be made where resource management objectives or special resource considerations require earlier harvest (Forest Plan pp. Four – 86). Treatments proposed within Forest Plan land use allocations B3 and B12 would encourage the removal of some dead and dying trees.

It is anticipated that wildlife habitat, and aquatic and riparian communities would potentially benefit from the improved stand conditions created through huckleberry enhancement. Additionally, dispersed and developed recreation site improvements and transportation management may occur where project and land management objectives could be met and where economically viable.

Your Involvement

This letter invites your participation during our public scoping process. Any comments related to the proposed action (as supported by the purpose and need) for this project are welcome during this scoping period. If you have information you feel the Forest Service may not be aware of, or have concerns regarding this proposed action, please send that information in writing to the address at the end of this letter. We anticipate that the level of review necessary for this proposal will be covered through an

³ Ecology and Management of Big Huckleberry Literature Review, USFS R6 Ecology Program, 2016.

Environmental Assessment (EA). This project falls under regulations regarding the [predecisional objection process](#). Please submit your responses within 30 days of the date of this letter.

Public involvement is a key element of the land management planning process. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) provides the framework for public participation in the federal decision making process. Public input at this point in the process will help identify issues associated with the Waucoma project area as well as inform the development of the proposed action. Comments will again be solicited from the public and from federal, state and local agencies when a Preliminary Assessment is available (anticipated in January 2019). Following that comment period, a final Environmental Assessment would be prepared along with a Draft Decision Notice.

A copy of this letter and map is available on the [Mt. Hood Forest web site](#). Questions or comments may be directed to:

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Sincerely,



JANEEN TERVO
District Ranger

Enclosure

Cc: Amber Sprinkle, Trent Skinner, and Christina Mead