

ORR LAKE RECREATION DEVELOPMENT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Chapter 1 – Purpose and Need

Background & Existing Condition

In 1997 the Klamath National Forest (KNF), in cooperation with the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF), and Ducks Unlimited (DU), acquired 4,562 acres of formerly private land around Orr Lake. The property is about 10 miles south of the town of Macdoel in Siskiyou County, California within the boundaries of the Klamath National Forest (see Figure 1, Vicinity Map).

The Orr Lake of today is much larger than that depicted on original Government survey maps [dated 1880]. Sometime after that date, ditches, a dam, and water control devices were constructed that diverted water from Butte Creek and changed seasonal water supplies to year-round supplies. The resultant lake became a popular recreation site (artifacts found along the lake edge suggest that the lake's recreation use dates to at least 1918). Roads were built to and around the lake, further encouraging use. At the time that the Forest Service gained management of the lake, some recreationists had developed the habit of leaving trailers permanently at the lake, for use throughout the late spring, summer and early fall. Such uncontrolled use has brought about rapid resource deterioration. Indiscriminate vehicle use along exposed shoreline areas on the north and east sides has loosened the soil, causing it to be carried away by wind and water. Excavation for drip-line ditches, gray water pits, pad leveling, fire pits, and latrines has occurred adjacent to Orr Lake. These activities further loosen soils, which has speeded erosion along the shores of the lake. Such accelerated erosion has become a resource concern, especially because the action takes place on an archaeological site at the north end of the lake.

Current recreation uses such as fishing, camping, hunting, and picnicking occur at the lake. We estimate that approximately 1,000-1,500 people per year visit Orr Lake. Use is believed to be mostly local, and many residents of the small Butte Valley towns enjoy visiting Orr Lake in the spring, summer, and fall seasons. Groups of 20-30 people, and sometimes as many as 50 people, regularly camp on the north end. On the east side of the lake the Forest Service constructed 3 campsites, installed an accessible vault toilet, and graveled the access road from Bray. With partnership funding from California Department of Boating and Waterways a boat ramp and floating dock have been installed on the east side of Orr Lake. Although it receives moderately heavy use, the north end of the lake has not been developed. Riparian vegetation consisting of willow, broad-leaved sedges, and cattails occurs in narrow strips along the north, east, and west sides of Orr Lake. Currently these areas receive fairly heavy use for fishing and boat launching, as the one existing dock is located on the east side of the lake.

Several cultural resource inspections have been completed in the area around Orr Lake. These include Archaeological Reconnaissance Reports (ARR) #05-05-1400 through 1400K and ARR #05-05-1455. Those cultural resource sites that fall within the area of potential effect for the proposed Orr Lake Recreation Development consists of two American Indian sites whose antecedents are unknown. Currently there are no noxious weeds occurring at Orr Lake (see

botany survey documentation in the project file).

Purpose and Need

When the Forest Service acquired the Orr Lake property a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was developed with partners CDFG, RMEF, and DU which states that the organizations will cooperate in managing the land for wildlife and fisheries resources. The KNF amended the Klamath National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) to include the Orr Lake Management Unit, and determined that management strategies for the area would emphasize wildlife and fisheries habitat (USDA KNF, 1999). The Forest Plan states that the desired future condition of Orr Lake includes facilities that provide for recreational opportunities including wildlife viewing and fishing, and roads that cause minimal impact to riparian and wildlife resources (USDA KNF, 1995).

Currently the camping area at the north end of Orr Lake has no sanitation facilities, and receives moderately heavy use throughout most of the year. Also, the campsites and roads on the north end of the lake lie on top of a known archaeological site. Comparing the existing conditions to the desired condition of facilities that cause minimal resource impacts identifies the need for sanitary facilities and campsites designed to meet health and safety standards, the need to limit use to a sustainable level, and the need to protect the archeological site from damage. The road that currently connects the north and east side camping areas is directly adjacent to Orr Lake within riparian vegetation. At the northeast corner of the lake this connecting road is lower in elevation than the lake and is subject to seasonal flooding. Comparing the existing condition of the roads to the desired condition of roads that cause minimal impact to riparian and wildlife resources identifies the need to relocate and/or close roads causing damage. The riparian vegetation on the north, east, and west sides of Orr Lake is subject to fairly heavy use for fishing and launching boats, as the only constructed dock occurs on the east side of the lake. Comparing the existing condition to the desired condition of restored wetland and riparian habitats identifies the need to concentrate use, where fishing occurs and boats are launched.

Proposed Action

The Goosenest Ranger District of the KNF proposes to build 2 campgrounds adjacent to Orr Lake, on the east side and north end. The proposed project is located in T44N, R1W, section 17, about 6 miles northwest of the community of Tenant. Orr Lake contains approximately 80 acres of open water and emergent marsh, and is surrounded by about 1000 acres of meadow, seasonal wetland, and streamside vegetation (USDA KNF, 1999). Open water and wetlands associated with Orr Lake are approximately 4,500 ft. in elevation. Refer to the enclosed map. Implementation of the project will occur in several phases. The toilets will be installed over approximately two days in the spring of 2005. New road construction will occur after July 31 during 2006-2008, and the remaining construction and development will occur over 2 – 3 months in the spring and/or summer of 2006-2008. We anticipate that the entire project will be completed in 2008 (see figure 2 map).

The proposed improvements include:

East Side

1. Add one additional campsite (including camping spur) with picnic table, fire grill, lantern hanger, and fire ring.
2. Relocate one campsite to provide greater separation between sites.
3. Construct an information & interpretive station.
4. Construct an entrance sign.
5. Add 2-3 picnic tables for day use.
6. Add a second 1 unit vaulted toilet (one 1-unit vaulted toilet currently exists).
7. Construct a new connecting road from east side to north end further uphill of existing road location. Close existing road and convert to a hiking/biking trail.
8. Drill a water well and provide drinking water at one faucet.
9. Place parking barriers along roads and camping spurs.

North End

1. Place filter fabric and native material over archaeological site.
2. Construct 3 group campsites (2 families each) with double picnic tables and large fire rings.
3. Construct an information & interpretive station.
4. Construct an entrance sign.
5. Construct a day use parking area with 5-6 parking spaces.
6. Construct hiking/biking trails with benches.
7. Plant native vegetation (trees and grasses).
8. Construct a hardened walk-in lake access.
9. Construct a graveled campground road with parking barriers.
10. Install 2 two-unit vault toilets.
11. Drill water well and provide drinking water at one faucet.
12. Place parking barriers along roads and camping spurs.
13. Construct trails to toilets and fishing platforms.

Other

Construct and install 3 fishing platforms, one on the east side of Orr Lake and two on the west side.

Decision to be Made

The decision to be made is whether or not to construct campgrounds and the associated recreation facilities on the north and east shores of Orr Lake, and if so, to determine what design should be used.

Management Direction

National Forest management is guided by various laws, regulations, and policies that provide the framework for all levels of planning. This includes Regional Guides, Land and Resource Management Plans, and site-specific planning documents such as this environmental assessment. These higher-level documents are incorporated by reference and can be obtained from Forest Service offices.

The Forest Plan provides guidance for managing National Forest System lands within the Forest. Guidance from the Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (April 13, 1994) is incorporated in the Forest Plan. The Forest Plan was amended by the Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standard and Guidelines on January 12, 2001, by the Record of Decision To Remove or Modify the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measure Standards and Guidelines on March 22, 2004, and by the Record of Decision Amending Resource Management Plans for Seven Bureau of Land Management Districts and Land and Resource Management Plans for Nineteen National Forests Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl on March 22, 2004.

The Forest Plan provides two types of management direction, Forestwide direction and Management Area direction. Forestwide direction, which applies to all management areas, is located on pages 4-3 through 4-66. (Note: All page references in this document refer to the version of the Forest Plan that includes all amendments as of 11/21/01 and can be found on the following Forest web page: <http://www.r5.fs.fed.us/klamath/mgmt/lmp/index.html>). Management Area direction for the Orr Lake Management Unit can be found on pages 4-139 through 4-145 of the Forest Plan. The Forest Plan management goals, and standards and guidelines specific to the proposed project are listed below.

Pertinent Management Goals

- 1) Manage the Orr Lake Management Unit as a special area within the Klamath National Forest, with an emphasis on fish and wildlife resources.
- 2) Manage for a productive and resilient wetland, riparian, and upland ecosystem.
- 3) Provide and enhance habitat for Federal and State listed Threatened and/or Endangered species and R5 Forest Service Sensitive species.
- 4) Enhance quality and temporal distribution of wetland and streamside hardwood habitat to benefit water and riparian associated birds including waterfowl, bald eagles, willow flycatchers, greater sandhill cranes, and neotropical migratory birds.
- 5) Manage for a productive recreational fishery, including fishing for a variety of native and

nonnative species, while retaining viable components of wild fish populations that are compatible with habitat conditions.

- 6) Enhance recreational opportunities as long as they complement protection and management of wetland, riparian, aquatic, and upland ecosystems and wildlife habitat needs.

Pertinent Standards & Guidelines

ORR-1: Cooperate with CDFG, RMEF, and DU in the management of the Orr Lake Management Unit, as per the MOU between the KNF and these agencies.

ORR-2: Provide a productive recreational fishery in Orr Lake and in the portion of Butte Creek downstream of the lake. Manage for a native and desired non-native coldwater fishery in the Butte Creek stream system upstream of the lake.

ORR-10: Manage the 44N30X road (the primary access to Orr Lake) as a Moderate Sensitivity Road, offering near natural appearing scenery (Partial Retention) in the road foreground. Manage the Orr Lake Management Unit to display scenery that meets the intent of the updated Forest Visual Quality Objectives map (see Appendix A glossary for unfamiliar terms).

ORR-11: Manage recreational settings to generally achieve Roaded Natural or Semi-Primitive, Motorized Recreation Opportunity Spectrum conditions (see Appendix A glossary for unfamiliar terms).

ORR-12: Manage recreation use at Orr Lake to minimize impacts to wildlife habitat (including bald eagle use areas) and other resource values.

MA 10-2: Identifies interim Riparian Reserve widths.

Public Involvement, Coordination, and Consultation

Scoping is defined as an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the significant issues related to a proposed action. Among other things, the scoping process is used to invite public participation, to help identify public issues, and to obtain public comment early in the analysis process.

Notice of the proposal first appeared in the Fall 2003 Schedule of Proposed Actions for the Klamath National Forest, dated October 3, 2003. The schedule is updated four times a year, posted on the Forest Web Page, and mailed to those who have requested a paper copy. A scoping letter dated June 23, 2004 was mailed to 60 people, groups, and agencies. The scoping letter was sent to those who had expressed interest in an earlier proposal, who were partners in the original land acquisition, and to agencies with responsibilities for local resource management. The scoping letter requested input by July 16, 2004. Two comment letters, one phone call, and one office visit were received in response to the initial scoping.

Archaeologist John Hitchcock has been involved in coordination with Gerald Skelton and Perry Chocktoot of Klamath Tribes concerning the proposed developments at Orr Lake. The Tribes approve of this project; and express continued interest in cooperating and protecting cultural resources on the Goosenest Ranger District.

Meetings were held with representatives of the CDFG, RMEF, and DU. They were asked to review the preliminary site plans for the design of the proposed action. Based on comments received from the CDFG, the Proposed Action was modified to reduce the number of group campsites on the north end. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, through informal consultation with Bobbie DiMonte (wildlife biologist), has agreed that the use of a limited operating period for construction activities will avoid potential effects to the bald eagle, which is federally listed as Threatened. A historic bald eagle nest site is located in the analysis area about 1.3 miles south of the proposed activities. The west side of Orr Lake is commonly used by bald eagles for foraging; thus a bald eagle management area has been designated in this area to protect eagles from habitat loss and disturbance during the breeding season. This management area is less than ½ mile from project activities occurring on the north shore of the lake, and within line of sight of the proposed development on the east side. Considering the historic and current human activity at Orr Lake, it is expected that implementing the proposed project will not disturb eagles that are breeding in the area. Only the new road construction has the potential to disturb foraging and nesting bald eagles. **New road construction will be restricted January 1 – July 31 to avoid direct disturbance to bald eagles during the breeding season.**

The Public Involvement File for the Orr Lake Campground Project documents the efforts made to involve interested members of the public, appropriate agencies, and tribal members in the planning process and the results of those efforts. The file is incorporated by reference and available in the project file. Using the comments from the public and resource specialists, the interdisciplinary team developed a list of issues to address.

Issues

Issues are points of discussion, debate, or dispute about the environmental effects. The Forest Service separates issues into two groups: significant and non-significant issues. Significant issues are identified because of their extent, the duration of the effects, or the intensity of the resource conflict. Due to expert project design, no significant issues were identified for the Orr Lake Recreation Development.

Non-significant Issues

Reasons issues are categorized as non-significant may include: 1) they are outside the scope of the proposed action; 2) they are already decided by law, regulation, Forest Plan, or other higher level decision; 3) they are irrelevant to the decision to be made; or 4) they are conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence. The Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) explain this delineation in Sec. 1501.7, "...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)..." The non-significant issues determined for this project are discussed below.

Retention of Natural Appearance. The developments proposed at Orr Lake will be designed to be consistent with the Roaded Natural setting currently existing at Orr Lake. The Roaded Natural setting is the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) determined for this area in the Forest Plan. Project features such as road surfacing, picnic tables, information/interpretive stations, and signs will be constructed with native materials (gravel, wood, etc), compatible with the recreation setting. Colors selected for materials will be environmentally sensitive earth tones.

Disturbance to bald eagles. Unfamiliar noises above ambient level and human presence within ½ mile of an active nest can disturb eagles during the critical breeding period (USDA KNF, 2002). A historic bald eagle nest site is located in the analysis area about 1.3 miles south of the proposed activities. The west side of Orr Lake is commonly used by bald eagles for foraging; thus a bald eagle management area has been designated in this area to protect eagles from habitat loss and disturbance during the breeding season. Considering the historic and current human activity at Orr Lake, it is expected that implementing the proposed project will not disturb eagles that are breeding in the area. Only the new road construction has the potential to disturb foraging and nesting bald eagles. **New road construction will be restricted January 1 – July 31 to avoid direct disturbance to bald eagles during the breeding season.** If the proposed recreation development project caused a significant increase in visitors to Orr Lake, then bald eagles could be indirectly affected by the increase in ambient noise levels of the campgrounds. However, the proposed project is designed to accommodate existing use and we do not expect that visitor use of the site will increase as a result of this project (Talley pers. communication with Bobbie DiMonte, 2004). We do not expect use to increase because use did not appear to increase following significant access road improvements several years ago, and because there will continue to be no directional signs for Orr Lake on the highway or county road. Due to project design, the proposed action will not affect bald eagles in the Orr Lake area.