



File Code: 1950

Date: December 22, 2008

**PUBLIC SCOPING**  
**Ryan Ranch Wetland Restoration Project**  
**Bend/ Fort Rock Ranger District, Deschutes National Forest**  
**Deschutes County, Oregon**

Dear Reader:

***You are invited to review and comment on this proposal. For your comments to be most helpful, please respond by February 1, 2008. We would like to hear from you.***

The Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District is proposing to restore wetland hydrology and vegetation to Ryan Ranch Meadow along the Deschutes River. The meadow is a historic slough backwater area that has not received river water for nearly 100 years due to a man-made levee along the river bank. Approximately 0.3 miles of the levee would be lowered to level of the natural riverbank and three inlet/outlet channels would be excavated between the river and meadow area to allow river water to enter and exit the meadow during the spring, summer and fall months. Mechanized equipment would be used to lower the levee and excavating the channels. The project would also re-route the Deschutes River Trail around the existing meadow and construct an interpretive boardwalk across a portion of the wetland. Partnerships for implementation of the project are being pursued with the Oregon Department of State Lands, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Upper Deschutes Watershed Council. The project area is close to Bend and presents an opportunity for public education and training for future wetland restoration.

**Project Location:** The project area is located southwest of the City of Bend, along the Deschutes River immediately upstream of Dillon Falls. (Township 19 South, Range 11 East, sections 4 and 5; see **Figure 1**). The project area encompasses Ryan Ranch Meadow and extends west to FS road 4120-100, north to FS road 4120-200, east to the Deschutes River and south to a decommissioned road in the upland forest. The entire project area is on National Forest System lands managed under the *Inland Native Fish Strategy* (INFISH, USDA Forest Service, 1995) and is located within the Upper Deschutes 4<sup>th</sup> field watershed, the Pilot Butte 5<sup>th</sup> field watershed, and the Benham Falls 6<sup>th</sup> field sub-watershed. Additionally, the project area is located within the Upper Deschutes Wild and Scenic River and State Scenic Waterway corridor along a reach designated as 'Scenic' in the *Upper Deschutes Wild and Scenic River and State Scenic Waterway Comprehensive Management Plan* (USDA Forest Service, 1996).

**Existing Condition:** Ryan Ranch Meadow currently receives water only from direct precipitation or subsurface flow from the seasonal Kiwa Springs tributary entering from the west. The existing levee has been in place for nearly 100 years. The levee prevents water from the Deschutes River from entering and inundating the meadow through the summer and fall months unlike other slough systems located up and downstream of this site. Currently, the innermost basin of the meadow (approximately 20 acres) holds standing water into mid-June and dries out during the summer and fall months. The invasive species reed canary grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) has been identified throughout the meadow and on the levee and continues to spread under the current moisture regime.

The levee is being eroded by the river, which has created five significant 'nick' points along this reach. One nick point has reached the top of the levee where the River Trail is located and will likely erode through the levee if it is not reinforced. Three other nick points located on the levee banks continue to erode along this reach. A nick point located farthest downstream was reinforced with large boulders in the 1970's and 80's and remains stable (see **Figure 2**).



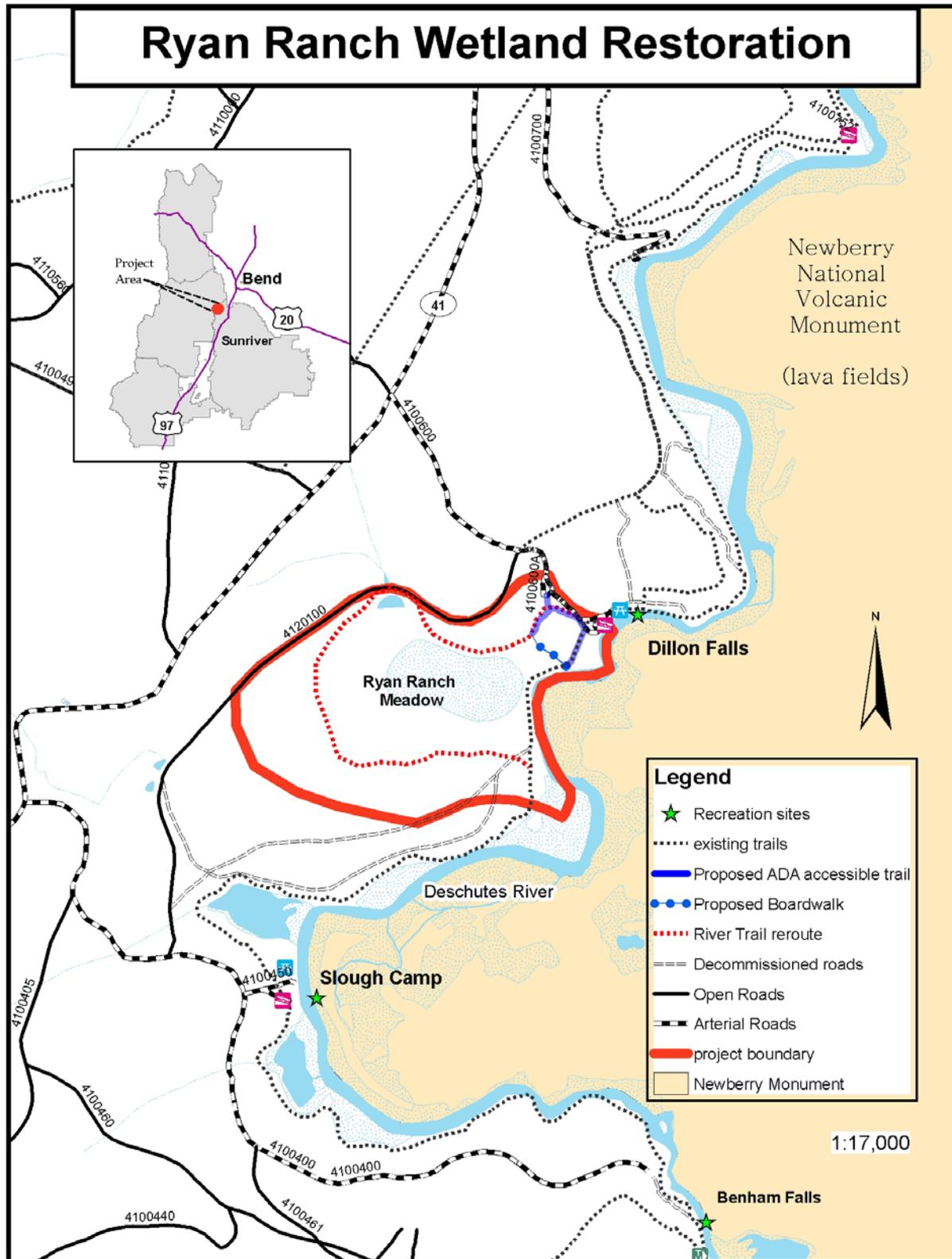


Figure 1. Ryan Ranch Wetland Restoration location map



**Figure 2.** Active nick point crossing the River Trail (left) and boulder reinforcement (right).

**Purpose and Need:** The purpose of this project is to restore the hydrologic interaction of the Deschutes River with a historic slough. There is a need to address the existing degradation and erosion of the river and levee banks, as well as the spread of the invasive species reed canary grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) into the meadow.

**Proposed Action:** The Ryan Ranch Wetland Restoration Project proposes to inundate approximately 60 acres of National Forest Land by reconnecting the hydrology of the Deschutes River with an historic slough. The project would alter an existing levee and excavate three inlet/outlet channels between the river and slough basin in order to create bank and floodplain conditions capable of being saturated by the hydrology of the current flow regimes and allow river water to inundate the slough basin as the river flows are ramped up for irrigation season. Additional proposed actions include vegetative planting, trail construction, and the construction of fish habitat structures.

Specifically, the project would:

- Lower approximately 0.3 miles of constructed levee to a natural bank and floodplain elevation along the margin of the meadow/slough. The surface of the established bank and floodplain profiles would be de-compacted and planted with sedge and willow species to stabilize the river bank along this reach. Sedge mat ‘plugs’ measuring up to 9 square feet would be removed from other riparian areas along the Deschutes River and placed along the river bank on top of the newly established and exposed floodplain elevation. Willows would be planted along the reach approximately 5 to 10 feet away from the riverbank edge, mimicking conditions on other reaches and across the river.
- Create three inlet/outlet channels between the river and the meadow to allow river water to enter and exit the historic slough habitat. Levels would be excavated to an elevation approximately 0.5 feet below high summer river flows. Two channels would be created where apparent historic connections existed and one would be created through the nick point identified in Figure 2 (left photo).
- Inundate approximately 60 acres of National Forest land capable of storing water and providing wetland slough habitat suitable for migratory birds, Oregon spotted frogs and many other species of flora and fauna. Extensive inundation is expected to contain and reduce the existing reed canary grass populations over time.

- Re-route the Deschutes River Trail around the wetland area and construct an interpretive American Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible boardwalk/trail loop in the northeastern lobe of the meadow/slough. Approximately 600 feet of boardwalk would be constructed across the northeastern lobe of the slough for foot traffic and interpretive access, and approximately 1.5 miles of naturally treaded trail would be defined around the outside boundary of the slough as a re-route of the 0.30 miles of the River Trail currently located on the levee. There is possibility for additional boardwalk construction leading to wildlife viewing platforms.
- Create three fish habitat structures along the ordinary high water mark of the river to improve the complexity and variety of habitat for redband trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss gairdneri*) and brown trout (*Salmo trutta*). Approximately 30 trees would be removed from a restoration thinning project area located west of the meadow or from other, as yet unspecified locations, to create structures that mimic log jams and woody debris accumulations. Each structure would be comprised of 8 to 10 whole trees that are interconnected and keyed into the bank for security. Whole trees with branches, and some with root wads, would be placed using an excavator working from the existing levee or by a walking hoe 'spyder' machine working from within the channel. Structures would be angled into the current to slow water velocity and deflect flow away from the river bank. No structures would span the channel or impede river navigation.
- Excavate an estimated four to seven pools measuring approximately ten feet in diameter and four feet in depth along the western margins of the meadow to create habitat for the Oregon spotted frog (*Rana pretiosa*). The excavated material would be used to construct small islands within the meadow for waterfowl nesting habitat. A berm levee in the northwestern portion of the meadow would be removed and an existing drainage ditch would have earthen plugs placed at approximate intervals to create separate pools.

**Land Management Allocations:** The project area is within Management Area 17, Wild and Scenic Rivers, of the Deschutes National Forest *Land and Resource Management Plan* (Deschutes LRMP, 1990)LRMP. Standards and guidelines for management activities within the river corridor area are described in the Wild and Scenic River Plan. The project area is also located within the Ryan Ranch Key Elk Area designated under the Deschutes LRMP and is within a riparian habitat conservation area (RHCA) designated by INFISH, which amends the Deschutes LRMP. Proposed treatments would meet Riparian Management objectives of INFISH.

The project area contains redband trout, a Forest Service sensitive species, and potential habitat for the Oregon spotted frog, a candidate species for listing by the US Fish and Wildlife Service as threatened or endangered. There are no known proposed, endangered, threatened, or sensitive (PETS) plant species within the project area. There are no inventoried roadless areas or wilderness in or adjacent to the project area. Measures to reduce or eliminate unwanted impacts include, but are not limited to:

- Identification and adherence to standards and guidelines of INFISH within RHCAs to ensure attainment of Riparian Management Objectives.
- Protection or avoidance of cultural sites.
- Mitigations to reduce the risk of noxious weed introduction and spread.
- Implementation of Water Quality Best Management Practices.

## How to Comment and Timeframe

I am inviting your comments on this proposal. This scoping comment period is intended to provide those interested in or affected by this proposal an opportunity to make their concerns known prior to a decision being made by the Responsible Official. Your comments will be used to help us determine if this proposal is appropriate to implement as described or if alternate activities should be considered. Your comments would be most useful if received on or before February 1, 2008.

Comments may also be submitted electronically to [comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes-bend-ftrock@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes-bend-ftrock@fs.fed.us). They must be submitted as part of the actual e-mail message, or as an attachment in Microsoft Word, rich text format (rtf), or portable document format (pdf) only. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a comment, a verification of identity will be required for appeal eligibility. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification. E-mails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed above, in other formats than those listed, or containing viruses will be rejected.

Comments may also be submitted in writing by mail or in person. Written comments should be sent or delivered to: Shane Jeffries, District Ranger, Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District, 1230 NE 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Suite A-262, Bend, Oregon 97701. Hand delivered and oral comments may be delivered to the same address during normal business hours: 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral comments may also be provided via telephone (541) 383-4000 during normal business hours.

This activity may be excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA) and considered under a Categorical Exclusion (CE) if it is determined to meet the requirements of Forest Service Handbook (1909.15; 30.3).

**For additional information on this project, contact Peter Sussmann at (541) 383-5594 (email [prsussmann@fs.fed.us](mailto:prsussmann@fs.fed.us)) or Tom Walker at (541) 383-4787 (email [twalker@fs.fed.us](mailto:twalker@fs.fed.us)).**

Sincerely,

/s/ Sean Ferrell (for):  
A. SHANE JEFFRIES  
District Ranger