



Decision Memo

Walton Lake Campground Improvement Project

USDA Forest Service
Ochoco National Forest
Lookout Mountain Ranger District
Crook County, Oregon
Township 13 South, Range 20 East, Section 21

Background

The Walton Lake Campground is the most developed and popular campground in the Ochoco National Forest. Its facilities and accommodations were designed and built more than two decades ago (1986) and do not meet nationally-defined and locally adopted standards for developed recreation facilities. High density public use and associated traffic volume have led to management concerns related to traffic safety. In addition, American Disabilities Act (ADA) access and accommodations are not adequate.

On July 23, 2008, the Ochoco and Deschutes National Forests completed a Recreation Facility Analysis (RFA) display the proposed tasks needed over the next five years to bring the Forest's recreation infrastructure into alignment with the resources available to operate and maintain it to standard. The public was advised of the RFA, and was offered the opportunity to attend a public meeting to review the analysis in June, 2008. Public comment on the RFA and the proposed 5-year Program of Work was accepted in the summer of 2008. Based on popularity, use levels, and maintenance needs, Walton Lake Campground was ranked within the top 50% of analyzed sites in terms of management priority.

Funding for the Walton Lake Campground Improvement Project is provided through the Recreation Site Improvement (RSI) initiative, which was authorized by the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act. The RSI allowed the Ochoco National Forest to compete for money collected through recreation use fees. Walton Lake Campground was eligible to receive funding through the RSI initiative because it is a recreation fee site, and was selected for funding based on its deferred maintenance needs, its need to be brought current with national standards, and its prioritization through the RFA. Funding authorized through the RSI is available only to the site for which it was made available; recipient Forests are not allowed to reallocate the funding to other sites or resource needs.

The purpose of the Walton Lake Campground Improvement Project is to reconstruct and improve the Walton Lake Campground to provide a safe, enjoyable recreation experience and achieve ADA compliance, while continuing to maintain the natural character of the area.

Decision to be Implemented

I have decided to implement the proposed action for the Walton Lake Campground Improvement Project. The project will focus on the south side of Walton Lake, and will make the following improvements:

Roads

- The main entrance corridor will be widened to standard double lane for two way traffic and for public safety.
- A formal intersection will be created where the loop road intersects the entrance road before leading down to the parking lot.
- A safer pull off to the temporary parking for garbage and recycling center will be provided.
- The road serving sites #6 thru #16 will become one-way and narrow turns will be widened.
- All campsite parking pads will be oriented for one-way access/egress.
- The outer loop road encircling the lake will be one-way.

Parking lot

- The parking lot will be leveled and the entrance road slightly tapered to provide a better and safer approach into the parking lot and safer parking and visitor use
- ADA approved parking will be created that will serve two ADA compliant day-use sites and a portion of lake side trail.

Campsite modifications

- Sites #1 thru #17 and the small and large group sites will be upgraded with the following:
 - Existing picnic tables and fire rings will be replaced with concrete picnic tables and ADA fire rings; picnic tables will be colored and textured to blend in with natural scenery.
 - Native surface tent pads may be replaced with aggregate pads.
 - Waste water cleaning stations will be replaced.
 - Paved parking spurs will be reoriented for one way access/egress to accommodate the range of vehicles that regularly visit this campground; spurs will be 14' x 50' with 1' gravel shoulders¹.
 - Campsites #6 and #7 will be combined (will become site #7); parking spur will be reoriented to accommodate standard dimensions for campsite parking.
 - Site #6 will be relocated adjacent to the toilet, and will have ADA parking and site features; parking spur will accommodate standard dimensions for campsite parking.
 - Campsite #16, which is currently located in terrain that does not accommodate Forest Service standards, will be relocated (on the existing loop road) to a site with a stable surface; parking spur will accommodate standard dimensions for campsite parking.
- In addition, degraded wooden railing and native surface parking at the small and large group sites will be replaced with barrier rock and surfaced parking.
- Tread on the walking paths associated with the group sites will be improved and hardened.
- Campsites #18 and #19 will be removed and allowed to return to a natural condition, to resolve issues related to sanitation, riparian condition, and management of the sites. Site removal will involve removing all asphalt and aggregate surface, fire rings, and picnic tables, and placing rock barriers to control access.

¹ Based on FSH 7709.56, spur designs are to accommodate a newer motor home or 5th-wheel with crew cab.

Garbage and recycling

- The existing small vehicle pullout that accesses both the fee payment station and the information kiosk will be enlarged and the facilities separated to provide for safer pedestrian use.

Vehicle Turnout

- To maintain the character of the road around Walton Lake and to provide additional public safety, a turnout will be constructed between the intersection with the fee station and the intersection with the access road to Campsites #1 - #16.

Signing

- Signing will be intentionally minimized to emphasize the campground's natural appearance.
- One-way routes, parking and campsites will have appropriate signing.
- A new information kiosk board will replace the existing feature.

My decision includes the following design criteria:

- Ensure ground-based equipment would be free of soil or plant material that could introduce or spread noxious weeds. Cleaning of such vehicles, especially the wheel wells and undercarriage, may be necessary to reduce risk for introduction and spread of weeds. Any soil, mineral material, straw or other vegetative matter used would come from a weed-free source (the Botany Specialist's Report is located in the project file at the Lookout Mountain Ranger District office).
- Activities at campsites #18 and 19 will be restricted from March 1 to May 31 to prevent impacts to Columbia spotted frogs during their egg laying/hatching season (the Aquatics Specialist's Report is located in the project file at the Lookout Mountain Ranger District office).
- Plan improvements to adhere to weather, time of year, and ground conditions that will help achieve the desired results and minimize impacts on water quality and quantity.
- Do not locate material and motorized equipment in riparian management areas.
- Do not travel through riparian management areas with motorized equipment.
- Construct simple diversion ditches or turnouts at intervals as needed to direct surface runoff off a road or other disturbed area and onto undisturbed forest floor or vegetation for dispersion of water and soil particles.
- Revegetate disturbed areas with adapted herbaceous species. Native plants are preferable when there are adequate sources of seed.
- Maintain the vegetative canopy and ground cover on steep, erodible slopes.
- Maintain a minimum 100 foot vegetative buffer strip to trap the sediment and nutrients that could be transported quickly into the lake. Where not possible (for instance, on the boat ramp), utilize silt fencing or other methods to capture and redirect sediment.
- Where possible, limit motorized equipment and material staging locations to previously disturbed or hardened sites to limit soil compaction and displacement.

Categorical Exclusion

The Walton Lake Campground Improvement Project falls within a category of actions identified in FSH 1909.15 Chapter 30, Section 31.12(5) that may be categorically excluded from documentation

in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement. I have concluded that this decision is appropriately documented under Category 31.12(5), Repair and maintenance of recreation sites and facilities, because the activities are routine, are within the existing footprint of the developed campground, and there are no extraordinary circumstances associated with the activities that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment. The project is consistent with the Ochoco National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. My conclusion is based on information summarized in this document and on the entire project record.

Public Involvement and Scoping

The proposal and maps for the Walton Lake Campground Project were mailed in a scoping letter to thirty-eight members of the public and other agencies on February 12, 2009; recipients were invited to comment on the proposed activities. Project scoping information was also available on the Central Oregon Forests website (<http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/centraloregon/>). On February 22, 2009, the Bend Bulletin (Bend, Oregon) and on February 23, 2009, the *Central Oregonian* (Prineville, Oregon) published articles describing the project and advising the public of the scoping comment period.

The Lookout Mountain District Ranger received comments from eleven people or organizations. Comment letters, emails, and conversation records are included in the project record. A summary of comments and description of how each comment was considered by the Forest Service is also in the project record.

Several commenters expressed support for the project. However, some concerns were raised.

Several commenters expressed the opinion that the project is too expensive and that the funding for the project should be used for other types of projects or at different locations on the Ochoco National Forest. As described in the “Background” section of this Decision Memo, funding was awarded specifically for the Walton Lake Campground Improvement Project through the Recreation Site Improvement initiative. The Ochoco National Forest does not have the ability to reallocate this funding.

Some commenters expressed concern that activities associated with this project would lead to soil compaction, increased sedimentation into Walton Lake, and impacts on wildlife or wildlife habitat. The analysis for this project was conducted by an interdisciplinary team of resource specialists. No extraordinary circumstances were identified. Design criteria to reduce or prevent effects to resources have been recommended by resource specialists and are incorporated into this decision (see page 3 of this Decision Memo). The effects analyses are summarized in the “Findings” section of this Decision Memo; specialist reports are located in the project record at the Lookout Mountain Ranger District.

Some commenters were concerned that the camping capacity would increase or the nature of use would change at Walton Lake Campground; other commenters were concerned that camping capacity would decrease. This project would reduce the overall site capacity by three campsites on the south shore of Walton Lake and would not change the number or layout of sites elsewhere on the lake shore. The project would not change the types of use that currently are present at Walton Lake (see the Recreation Specialist’s Report, project record, Lookout Mountain Ranger District).

One commenter expressed the opinion that sites #18 and #19 should remain open, that riparian impacts at these sites are acceptable, and that the “top site” is not in a riparian zone. Personal

observation by a recreation specialist indicates that both sites are in seasonally wet areas (Barb Smith, pers. comm.). The aquatic species analysis indicates that removing these sites would be beneficial to riparian species (particularly the Columbia spotted frog). Additionally, removal and rehabilitation of these sites is consistent with management of the Riparian Habitat Conservation Area around Walton Lake. However, riparian resource concerns were secondary to concerns related to sanitation and management of the two sites.

One commenter expressed the opinion that an environmental assessment should be conducted on the RFA prior to implementing any project identified in the RFA. The RFA was an analytical process, not a planning process, and as such was not subject to NEPA. However, any actions associated with the RFA that require compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act will generate site-specific analysis and associated public involvement prior to implementation. Appropriate NEPA will be conducted on actions associated with the RFA if and when funding becomes available to propose, plan, and implement the activities.

One commenter requested that wooden picnic tables be installed instead of concrete, for aesthetic reasons. Concrete tables will be colored with dark brown stain and textured to blend in with natural scenery.

One commenter requested that trees be planted between campsites to improve screening. I considered adding this activity to my decision, but decided that it would be preferable to look for opportunities to improve screening after project activities are completed. Tree planting in a developed campground can be accomplished without additional analysis and should be part of ongoing maintenance.

Several commenters expressed concern about a fisheries management project planned by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) at Walton Lake. The Walton Lake fishery is under the jurisdiction of ODFW and actions related to the management of this fishery are State actions, not Federal, and are therefore not subject to NEPA. Although ODFW plan to time their activities to occur when the campground is closed, the fishery management activities are not connected in any way to the Walton Lake Campground Improvement project proposal. The public are encouraged to contact ODFW with questions and/or concerns related to fisheries management activities.

Extraordinary Circumstances

In determining the appropriateness of using the categorical exclusion, a determination of the potential impacts to the resource conditions identified in FSH 1909.15 Section 30.3(2) must be made². The following is the list of the potential effects to the resource conditions from the project activities.

1. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated habitat or species proposed for federal listing or proposed critical habitat.

No endangered or threatened flora, terrestrial fauna, or aquatic species are known or expected to occur within the project area. Biological evaluations are included in the project record located at the Lookout Mountain Ranger District.

² As defined by the Interim Direction "Clarification of Extraordinary Circumstances for Categories of Actions Excluded from Documentation" appearing in the Federal Register Vol. 67, No. 164, August 23, 2002.

2. Forest Service sensitive species.

Habitat is present in the project area for sensitive plants *Carex abrupta*, *Carex lasiocarpa* var. *americana*, *Carex retrorsa*, and *Potamogeton diversifolius*. Project implementation **May Impact Individuals or Habitat, but is not likely to contribute to Federal listing** of these sensitive plant species.

Of the wildlife species that may be present or have potential habitat in the project area, project implementation would have **No Impact** on the northern bald eagle, the American peregrine falcon, Townsend's big-eared bat, and the California wolverine. Project implementation **May Impact Individuals or Habitat, but is not likely to contribute to Federal listing** of bufflehead, Lewis's and white-headed woodpeckers, and Johnson's hairstreak.

Of the aquatic species that may be present or have potential habitat in the project area, project implementation **May Impact Individuals or Habitat, but is not likely to contribute to Federal listing** of the Columbia spotted frog (the project is anticipated to have a beneficial effect on spotted frog habitat).

Resource reports are in the project record at the Lookout Mountain Ranger District.

3. Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.

The project area does not contain floodplains or municipal watersheds. Wetlands will be protected through project design criteria (see Hydrologist's Report, project record, Lookout Mountain Ranger District).

4. Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, and national recreation areas.

There are no congressionally designated areas within the project area. Bridge Creek Wilderness is the closest congressionally designated area; it is about five miles to the northeast of Walton Lake Campground.

5. Inventoried Roadless Areas.

There are no Inventoried Roadless Areas in the project area. The Lookout Mountain Roadless Area is about five miles to the south of Walton Lake Campground.

6. Research Natural Areas.

There are no existing or proposed Research Natural Areas in the project area. Ochoco Divide RNA is about four miles to the north of the project area.

7. American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, or historic properties of areas.

This project was found to be exempt from further case-by-case review under the 2003 Programmatic Agreement (PA) among the Forest Service, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), because it meets Stipulation III(A)2: Undertaking meets the criteria listed in Appendix B of the PA (12: Campground, recreation residence, organizational camp and resort operation maintenance where there may be new ground disturbance but no alterations to historic properties). Project Review for Heritage Resources is in the project record at the Lookout Mountain Ranger District.

Other Findings

The proposed action has been designed to be consistent with the Ochoco National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). The campground is located within Forest Plan land allocation MA-F13, Developed Recreation. The desired condition of the Developed Recreation allocation is a natural-appearing area with obvious man-made controls and structures that direct users, provide for comfort and sanitation, and protect the natural resources while providing a variety of outdoor recreational opportunities. The displacement or impact to the human environment and recreational opportunity is considered minimal and temporary and the gains of long term improved accessibility, public safety, and improved services and facilities warrant the short term disruption for long term benefits. See the Recreation Resource Report, project record, Lookout Mountain Ranger District.

There is a Category 3 Riparian Habitat Conservation Area (RHCA) surrounding Walton Lake. This area is subject to the interim direction provided by the Inland Native Fish Strategy (aka INFISH) which amended the Ochoco LRMP. Activities in the RHCA would improve the existing campsites and roads. INFISH standards RM-1 and RM-2 would be met. Campground modifications would help attain Riparian Management Objectives (see Aquatic Species report, project record, Lookout Mountain Ranger District).

No increases in sedimentation or runoff into Walton Lake are predicted from activities proposed in this project. No effects to flow, wood recruitment, or stream temperature are anticipated as a result of project activities (see Hydrologist's Report, project record, Lookout Mountain Ranger District).

Best Available Science and Conclusion

My conclusion is based on a review of the record that shows a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk. Based on the conclusions regarding the effects to the resource conditions listed above, I have found that no extraordinary circumstances exist with the proposed project activities that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment.

Implementation, Administrative Appeal and Review

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215.4. This decision may be implemented immediately.

Contact Person

For further information contact Kent Koeller at the Lookout Mountain Ranger District, 3160 NE 3rd Street, Prineville, OR; (541) 416-6500.

/s/ William R. Queen

WILLIAM R. QUEEN
District Ranger

April 8, 2009

Date