



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Columbia River Gorge
National Scenic Area

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DECISION MEMO

Special Use Permits: Cascade Fish Hatchery & Mark O. Hatfield Trailhead
Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area
USDA Forest Service; Hood River County, Oregon
Section 22 & 23 in T.2N., R.7 E., W.M.
Section 31 of T.3N, R.11E., W.M.

Proposed Action: The Forest Service proposes to reissue a permit for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Cascade Fish Hatchery and a permit for Oregon Parks and Recreation Department's Mark O. Hatfield Trailhead.

Background: Cascade Fish Hatchery was legally established in 1956 under the Mitchell Act as part of the Columbia River Fisheries Development Program as a way to enhance declining fish runs. The facility is used for egg incubation and rearing of Coho salmon and provides stock for both conservation and harvest. The permit area includes the structures, utilities and infrastructure necessary to operate the hatchery.

Construction of the Mark O. Hatfield trailhead was legally established through review under the National Environmental Policy Act, and the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act Management Plan (Decision Memo, 9/10/1997 and Finding of Facts, 9/9/1997). The Forest Service issued a permit to Oregon Parks and Recreation Department for the construction, operation and maintenance of this trailhead on National Forest System lands that includes: a visitor center, parking lot, restrooms, camp-host site, and ancillary infrastructure associated with the trailhead facilities.

Both of these permits are legally established uses that have been in full time operation since their construction. The new authorizations will not expand the operations of either facility, or change the type of use that was previously permitted. Therefore, neither of these uses will require additional reviews for consistency under the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act.

Location: Cascade Fish Hatchery: The hatchery is located west of Cascade Locks, Oregon in Multnomah County, adjacent to the Eagle Creek trailhead and campground. The facilities are accessible from Exit 41 off Interstate-84. The permit area is in portions of Section 22 and 23 in Township 2 North, Range 7 East, W.M.

Mark O. Hatfield Trailhead: The trailhead and facilities are located east of Hood River, Oregon in Hood River County. The facilities are accessible from the Historic Columbia River Highway, east of Highway 35. The permit area is located in Section 31 of Township 3 North, Range 11 East, W.M.

Purpose: Under the Code of Federal Regulations 251.50, all uses of National Forest System lands, improvements, and resources, except those provided for in the regulations governing the disposal of timber and minerals and the grazing of livestock, are designated "special uses", and requires a special use authorization from the authorized officer.



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Need: There is a continued need to provide recreational facilities and access to the Historic Columbia River Gorge Highway's Mosier Twin Tunnel Trail. The State of Oregon has a need to meet the Columbia River Fisheries Development Program's goals of enhancing the fish runs in the Columbia River watershed. The Forest Service chose to support that need by permitting the construction and operation of the hatchery over the last 52 years.

Scoping and Public Involvement: A scoping letter describing the project was sent to a mailing list of known interested parties posted on the planning website for the Scenic Area on July 14, 2008. One letter was received during the scoping period. This letter commented on both the proposed permit renewals. For the Mark O. Hatfield trailhead, the comment was for the Forest Service to review the scenic impacts and mitigate for any impacts as they relate to the scenic resource protection standards in the Management Plan, and to check for compliance with the conditions of approval from the 1997 consistency determination. For the Cascade Fish Hatchery, the comments related to the Forest Service reviewing the impacts on water quality and the wild salmon populations along the Columbia River and lower reaches of Eagle Creek.

Response to Comments: The Mark O. Hatfield Trailhead facility was reviewed for consistency with the original review. It was found that the upper parking lot was not being utilized, and will be removed from the proposed permit area, and the above-ground water system will be decommissioned. The camp host site that is visible from the Historic Columbia River Highway will be screened to reduce the impacts to that Key Viewing Area. A new permit would require that the vegetation planted around the paved parking lot and visitor center must be maintained.

The Cascade Fish Hatchery is in full compliance with their National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit, which requires quarterly reporting. The NPDES permit is a pollution control program authorized by the Environmental Protection Agency and permits are issued by the Department of Environmental Quality to maintain the environmental quality of hatchery effluents. The State's impact analyses of Cascade Hatchery effluent temperature data suggest that hatchery effluent has not adversely affected the migration, spawning, and juvenile rearing of salmon and steelhead within the sub-basin. The Total Suspended Solids (TSS), Settleable Solids (SS), pH etc. of hatchery effluents were within full compliance of the NPDES permit. The water quality requirements in the NPDES permit are set as per Oregon Water Quality Standards for fish habitats. The Cascade Fish Hatchery is in good standing with the Army Corps of Engineers for their annual maintenance work on the water diversion. The Forest Service will work with the Army Corps of Engineers and Cascade Fish Hatchery to reintroduce the gravels that are currently being captured behind the water diversion into the stream system below the diversion. This will be considered a fish habitat restoration project to place the fine gravels used for spawning beds back in to the lower stretch of the river.

Cascade Fish Hatchery is in compliance with the Native Fish Conservation Policy, Hatchery Management Policy, and the Fish Health Management Policy which were adopted by Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission. The hatchery is following the Hatchery and Genetic Management Plan (HGMP), which is a federal requirement. The hatchery is funded through the Mitchell Act, which gave the Secretary of the Interior authority to direct and establish these hatcheries. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is the agency within the Department of the Interior which regulations these hatcheries.

The permit for Cascade Hatchery facilities is for occupancy and use of National Forest System lands, and requires that the operations are compliance with all applicable state and federal laws. Based on all the information available, the hatchery is operating in compliance with laws and regulations related to the facility. It is outside the scope of this project and the authority of the

U.S. Forest Service to analyze the conservation strategy of anadromous fishery resources of the Columbia River Basin.

Reason for Categorically Excluding the Proposed Action: I have determined that the proposed action is categorically excluded. Therefore, neither an environmental impact statement nor environmental assessment will be prepared. I make this determination based on the following findings:

1. The proposed action fits under Category 15, Section 31.2 Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 30 (July 24, 2008): *"Issuance of a new special use authorization for a new term to replace an existing or expired special use authorization when the only changes are administrative, there are not changes to the authorized facilities or increase in the scope or intensity of authorized activities, and the applicant or holder is in full compliance with the terms and conditions of the special use authorization."*
2. I have found the proposal does not involve extraordinary circumstances:
 - a. The biological evaluation concluded that there would be no effects to any threatened, endangered or sensitive (TES) species of plant or animal or habitat for either permit renewal. Operation of Columbia River fish hatcheries comply with all applicable ESA regulations. The scope of this analysis is limited to habitat and sensitive species on National Forest Service lands, as may be affected by the annual operation of the Cascade Fish Hatchery. The previous operating plan required dredging of approximately 20 to 50 cubic yards of spawning-sized gravel annually to maintain the water diversion intake structure. The mitigation to retain this spawning gravel within Eagle Creek will greatly benefit fish habitat downstream, specifically from river mile 0.2 to 0.8. The on-going management for existing recreation use at Mark O. Hatfield Trailhead is not anticipated to have new impacts to TES species and wildlife habitat.
 - b. Forest Service reviewers did not identify any adverse effects to flood plains, wetlands, municipal watersheds or other special areas or resources through the continued use of either permit renewal and the included hatchery mitigations.
 - c. Both areas are in the congressionally designated Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. The trailhead has been reviewed for compliance with the Management Plan, and the hatchery has been in continued operation since before the area was congressionally designated.
 - d. The project is not located within or adjacent to any inventoried roadless areas, or Research Natural Areas.
 - e. The project does not affect any reserved treaty rights of Native Americans.
 - f. There are no unusual effects to minority or low-income populations by the proposed action.
3. I have determined that the proposed action is consistent with the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Mt. Hood National Forest, as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan.
4. The Mark O. Hatfield Trailhead is not adjacent to wetlands or riparian reserves, so the activities are not expected to have a potential effect on these resource conditions. The Cascade Hatchery permit area is adjacent to wetlands and in areas meeting the definition of a riparian reserve, but the activities were in operation prior to both the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Management Plan and the Northwest Forest Plan. This use is grandfathered in, since it is a continued use that has not changed since either plan was signed.

Decision: It is my decision to special use authorizations for the Cascade Fish Hatchery and the Mark O. Hatfield Trailhead for 20 year terms.

Implementation of the project meets the stated purpose and need and can be accomplished with minimal environmental impacts. Operating conditions will be included in the permit for protection of resources. Operating plans will be updated every 5-years or if conditions change significantly, that an update is required sooner. All permittees must follow State, Federal and local regulations under the terms and conditions of their permit.

Implementation Date: This project may begin immediately. This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215.12(f) and can be implemented upon signature of this Decision Memo.

Contact Person: The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area staff prepared an analysis file in conjunction with this project. For further information, contact Jennifer Wade at the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, 541-308-1705.


DANIEL T. HARKENRIDER
Area Manager