

**DECISION NOTICE
and
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

GOVERNMENT CAMP TRAILS PROJECT

**USDA FOREST SERVICE
MT. HOOD NATIONAL FOREST
ZIGZAG RANGER DISTRICT
CLACKAMAS COUNTY, OREGON**

An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared for the Government Camp Trails Project. This area is located in T4S, R9E; T5S, R9E; Willamette Meridian. The project area is located in the Zigzag and Salmon River Watersheds.

The purpose of the Government Camp Trails Project is to provide a safe, low maintenance, trail system designed for year-round recreation that links Government Camp to key destinations in the Mt. Hood National Forest that surround the community. The trail system and trailhead parking are designed to reduce conflicts with local businesses, ski areas, and residences.

DECISION

I have decided to select Alternative 2 as outlined in the Environmental Assessment (EA).

Alternative 2

As detailed in the EA, Alternative 2 proposes to

1. Construct 9.6 miles of new trails and reconstruct existing trails to a safe standard that is designed to minimize erosion and heavy maintenance.
2. Locate these new trails so that they are contiguous with the existing trails system, connect to the core areas of Government Camp and link to key recreation destinations including Trillium Lake, Timberline, Ski Bowl and Summit Ski Areas.
3. Construct one new trailhead parking area along the Lake Road. Enlarge one trailhead near Thunderhead Lodge. Improve directional signing to these trailheads and Glacier View and ODOT sno-parks to encourage trail users to park here and not in the parking areas adjacent to businesses and residences.
4. Upgrade bridge crossings along the existing Crosstown Trail for winter grooming to enhance Nordic skiing and snowshoeing.
5. The projects would be implemented between 2005 and 2010 as construction plans and funding is finalized.

Best Management Practices (BMPs) and Design Criteria outlined in Section 2.4.4 of the EA and Appendix G of the EA are included with this decision. No significant impacts were found that would require any mitigation or further design criteria.

RATIONALE

I have chosen Alternative 2 over Alternative 1 – No Action and Alternative 3 Multorpor Mountain because Alternative 2 best meets the purpose and needs outlined in Chapter 1 of the EA.

Alternative 2 will provide a continuous trail system around community and accesses key recreation destinations including Timberline, Ski Bowl, and Summit Ski Areas and Trillium Lake. Proposed trails, trailhead and signing will provide better destination amenities for tourism and lodging developments in the community, making those more attractive for destination lodging.

Proposed trails in Alternative 2 are designed to accommodate intended use with appropriate sight distance, width, grade and surface. The proposed Timberline to Town mountain bike trail will address the existing safety issues on the Alpine and Glade Trails which, as downhill ski runs, were never designed to accommodate mountain bikes. This alternative will also provide hikers and bikers an off road alternative to walking along busy Rd 2656 to Trillium Lake. The proposed trails are designed to accommodate intended use with appropriate grade, side slopes, drainage structures and erosion control.

Proposed trailhead construction as well as destination signing will direct trail users to appropriate parking areas that minimize conflicts with permittees, core business area, and private property owners.

The existing trail through the congested area near Lake Road and Multorpor Lodge at Ski Bowl will be fenced and/or signed to the mutual agreement of the permittee and the Forest Service to ensure that the common public corridor will be available for year round public use, with no special fees or restrictions, and with minimal impact to Ski Bowl permit operations. The development of the West Summit Fen Trail would get winter and summer trail users off of most of Summit Trail/Lake Road to minimize conflicts with ski area maintenance vehicles and ski area special use operations including their fee mountain bike park. This agreement will be incorporated into their operating plans.

Other Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 - This is the no-action alternative. It was not selected because it would not provide any of the benefits described in the purpose and need to enhance recreational trail opportunities around Government Camp. If no action is taken, there would continue to be resource impacts and safety issues on existing trails and a lack of a contiguous designed trail system around the town. There would not be adequate recreational access to surrounding recreation destinations on the Forest. The complete description of this Alternative is on page ** of the EA.

Alternative 3 - This alternative is similar to Alternative 3 but proposed to construct an additional 1.7 mile trail to route winter trail users from the West Summit Fen Trail south to

around the back side of Multorpor Mountain and connect near the Barlow Tie Trail. This alternative was suggested by staff at Ski Bowl who proposed it to reduce congestion and user conflicts around the Multorpor Lodge. While this alternative trail might be used by some winter users, those that are aware of the quicker and more direct connection through the permit area to the East Summit trail would likely continue to use this route. Conflicts in this congested area can be mitigated with fencing and/or signing as outlined in Alternative 2 security.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (40 CFR 1508.27)

Based on the site-specific environmental analysis documented in the EA and the comments received from the public, I have determined that this is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not needed. This determination is based on the design of the selected alternative and the following factors:

1. Adverse and beneficial impacts have been assessed and found to be not significant. The analysis considered not only the direct and indirect effects of the projects but also their contribution to cumulative effects. Past, present and foreseeable future actions have been included in the analysis (EA Section 3.5.3 and 3.6.4.5). The analysis considered the proposed actions with Best Management Practices (BMPs) and design criteria. The EA elaborates on cumulative impacts related to resources such as water quality, range, soils and wildlife. No significant cumulative or secondary effects were identified.
2. The project will not affect public health and will correct existing public safety conditions along trails (EA Sections 1.3.2, 3.3.2, 3.3.3 and Table III-1). Proposed projects would improve safety along trails designed for their intended transportation use. The effects to recreational use in the area are disclosed in the EA in Section 3.3.3.2.
3. There will be no effect to Wild and Scenic Rivers and State Scenic Waterways, wilderness areas, research natural areas or any other areas with unique geographic characteristics. Trails through short sections of wetlands that cannot be avoided, will have special design criteria and associated best management practices implemented, that require trails within wetland areas to be constructed on puncheon structure or turnpiked to minimize impacts to the wetlands. Trails will be designed to avoid wet areas when possible and to minimize the amount of overstory vegetation to be cleared in wetland areas.

A portion of the Timberline Trail to Town Trail is within a mapped portion of a 2004 wilderness proposal by Senator Wyden. Every effort was made to minimize the amount of trails within the proposed wilderness map area while still providing a safer trail grade (requiring the switch backs) and avoiding the Glade and Alpine Trails to the east. The adjacent terrain and the need to have switchbacks to maintain suitable trail grade necessitated part of the trail being within the mapped area of proposed wilderness. However, the text of the proposed bill (which generally takes precedence over mapping in

designated wilderness bills) specifically excluded those areas containing the proposed Government Camp trail system from proposed wilderness.

There are no proposed roads or trailhead parking areas planned within inventoried roadless areas. A portion of the Timberline to Town Trail is within inventoried roadless area. Construction of this trail would not alter the roadless qualities of this area, nor would it eliminate this trail from being included in a future roadless or wilderness designation. The use of mountain bikes on the trail could be restricted if the area was designated as wilderness in the future. However, this would negate the purpose of the trails dominant use for bikes. Another option is that any future wilderness boundary could skirt the west side of the trail.

No significant adverse effects are expected to riparian areas (EA Section 3.6.3, 3.6.4, 3.7.2, 3.12.4 and Table III-1).

4. The effects of this project are not likely to be highly controversial. The analysis completed and comments received did not identify any significant controversy or disagreement concerning effects of the decision on the quality of the human environment (EA Section 1.4.3, Response to Comments, Appendix A).
5. The effects of this project are not highly uncertain, and do not involve unique, or unknown risks. The Mt. Hood National Forest has implemented similar trail construction projects.
6. This action will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects because other similar actions have occurred in the past. The decision implements the Mt. Hood Forest Plan, as amended.
7. The cumulative effects of other potential federal actions in Timberline Ski Area have been assessed in concert with this project. The decision will not result in any known cumulatively significant impacts on the environment (EA Sections 3.5.3, 3.6.3, 3.7.2, 3.9 and Chapter IV).
8. Field surveys have been conducted for heritage resources on all but the Timberline to Town Trail. The heritage resource report concludes that there will be no effect to any properties on or eligible to the National Register of Historic Places (Heritage Resource Report 01/06/03). Documentation was forwarded to the State Historic Preservation Office. Concurrence on findings was received on all inventoried trails. Field surveys, findings and SHPO consultation will take place prior to any construction on the Timberline to Town Trail. (EA, Section 3.8.3).
9. The proposed action is not likely to adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or critical habitat as determined by the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Northern Spotted Owls: - The effect to the Northern spotted owl is a “**may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect**, the spotted owl or its habitat. But the effect would be minor to non-existent for the project area due to the low amount of suitable habitat the trails would impact and the small magnitude of the habitat alteration. The Government Camp Trails Project would have little effect on suitable habitat. The current proposal would not further add to the fragmentation of late-seral stands within these watersheds. The effects determination for disturbance related issues determined at the time of the biological assessment is, “may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect,” but the effect determination would be reduced to “**no affect**” due to implementation of seasonal restrictions for chainsaws and heavy equipment within 65 yards of small stands of suitable habitat. The seasonal restriction would be from March 1 through July 15th in areas of suitable habitat. This seasonal restriction is only necessary for the small amount of trail on the west side of the project area in Sections 13 and 24 (West Blossom Connection, Cross Town Thunderhead, and West Summit Fen).

Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was initiated on the Government Camp Trails project in December of 2004 through the document titled “The Willamette Province Fiscal Year 2005-2006 Habitat Modification Biological Assessment for Listed Species.” The Fish and Wildlife Service issued the Biological Opinion in March 2005. The conclusion reached in this Biological Opinion for the Government Camp Trails project as well as all others included in the document is as follows: “After reviewing the current status of the bald eagle and spotted owl, including critical habitat, the environmental baseline for both species, the effects of the proposed action, and the cumulative effects, it is the Service’s biological opinion that the FY 2005-2006 Habitat Modification Projects in the Willamette Province are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the bald eagle or spotted owl and is not likely to destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat for the spotted owl” (USDI, 2005). A letter has been sent to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service amending the Biological Assessment to reflect effects determinations based on better information on project alternatives.

I have considered the new information that has been recently published about northern spotted owls in the *Status and Trends in Demography of Northern Spotted Owls* (Foresman et.al., 2004). The new information would not lead to a change in the effects determination and no additional analysis is needed for this project.

Northern Bald Eagle - For the Northern Bald Eagle, the effect determination is, “May affect, but is not likely to adversely affect,” the Bald Eagle or its habitat due to the low amount of suitable habitat near the trails and the small magnitude of the habitat alteration.

Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was initiated on the Government Camp Trails project in December of 2004 through the document titled “The Willamette Province Fiscal Year 2005-2006 Habitat Modification Biological Assessment for Listed Species.” The Fish and Wildlife Service issued the Biological Opinion in

March 2005. The conclusion reached in this Biological Opinion for the Government Camp Trails project as well as all others included in the document is that the proposed projects within the Biological Assessment may affect, but are not likely to adversely affect the bald eagle.

Threatened Steelhead and Chinook and Proposed Threatened Coho -

Implementation of the trails projects in Alternatives 2 warrants a "**No Effect**" (**NE**) determination for Lower Columbia River steelhead, Lower Columbia Chinook, and Lower Columbia River/Southwest WA coho salmon because of low potential for adverse conditions of sedimentation, stream temperature, or flows to occur in areas where these species are known or suspected to occur. (EA Section 3.7.2)

The proposed trails and other improvements are not within critical habitat identified by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries for any listed fish species.

Threatened Bull Trout - Implementation of this project warrants a "**No Effect**" (**NE**) determination for and Columbia River Bull Trout because these fish are not expected to occur in the Upper Sandy River Basin. (EA Section 3.7.2)

T&E Plants - There are no threatened or endangered plant species in the planning area (EA, Section 3.4.3.2).

10. The project does not threaten a violation of any Federal, State, or local law. The project complies with Executive Order 12898 regarding environmental justice (EA, Section 3.12.3). No disproportionately high adverse human or environmental effects on minorities and/or low-income populations were identified during the analysis and public information process (EA, Section 3.12.6).

OTHER FINDINGS AND REQUIRED LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The proposed action is consistent with Management Area goals, desired future conditions, and standards and guidelines identified in the Mt. Hood National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended (Forest Plan).

It is consistent with **late-successional reserve** (LSR) objectives. The project is not in an LSR or any 100-acre LSRs. Nor is it in Critical Habitat. (EA, Section 3.5.3.1)

There will be no significant adverse effects to **sensitive species**. The project will not jeopardize the continued existence of any listed aquatic species nor will it cause a trend to federal listing or loss of viability for any proposed or sensitive species. A no impact determination is warranted to resident interior Redband trout, and Columbia dusky snail (EA, Section 3.7.2)

For wildlife species, the analysis determined that there would be no impact to Painted turtle, Western Pond Turtle, Horned Grebe, and Pacific Fringe-tailed Bat. The analysis concluded that

for Larch Mt. Salamander, Oregon Slender Salamander, Cope's Giant Salamander, Cascade Torrent Salamander, Bufflehead, Baird's Shrew, California Wolverine, Pacific Fisher, and Crater Lake Tightcoil, the decision may impact individuals but would not likely cause a trend towards federal listing of the species (EA, Sections 3.5.1 and 3.5.3).

Two sensitive mosses (*Schistostega pennata* and *Rhizomnium nudum*) were found within the project area and one sensitive moss (*Tetraphis geniculata*) was assumed to be present. A determination of no impact from the project was made for these species. One sensitive fungus (*Ramaria aurantiisiccescens*) was found within the survey area and an additional 19 sensitive fungi species were assumed to be present due to the existence of potential habitat in the project area. A finding of "May Impact Individuals or Habitat but not likely to lead to a trend toward federal listing" was determined for these fungi species as a result of project implementation. (EA, Section 3.4.3.2).

I have considered the effects to **management indicator species** (MIS) as disclosed in the EA (EA, Section 3.5.3 and 3.5.4). Wildlife MIS include blacktailed deer, Rocky Mountain elk, American marten, pileated woodpecker, and snag and down log associated species, and fisheries include all salmonids.

I have considered the relevant information from the Zigzag and Salmon River Watershed Analyses. The project is consistent with the **Aquatic Conservation Strategy** objectives. I have also considered the existing condition of riparian reserves, including the important physical and biological components of the fifth-field watersheds and the effects to riparian resources. I find that Alternative 2 is consistent with the recommendations of the watershed analyses, is consistent with riparian reserve standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan, and will maintain the health of the fifth-field watersheds over the long term (EA, Section 3.6.4).

The selected alternative is consistent with other Forest Plan management direction for heritage resources, air quality, noxious weeds, and scenic resources. It is consistent with the National Forest Management Act regulations for **vegetative management**. There will be no regulated timber harvest as part of this project.

Alternative 2 of the Government Camp Trails Project is consistent with Forest Plan objectives for long-term **soil productivity**. Trail construction will be done with hand tools and a small tracked excavator. The excavator will not operate in streams or wetlands. Erosion control methods during trail construction will maintain soil productivity..

Public Involvement:

Informal scoping for this trail project began when the Government Camp Trails Master Plan was being prepared in 2000 and completed in 2001. Documentation of scoping done for the Master Plan appears in Appendix F. In late 2002 and early 2003, the forest staff met with Clackamas County staff, Government Camp TIF Advisory Board members, the TIF Trails Subcommittee, the Oregon Nordic Club, and a consortium of winter recreation representatives to discuss the Trails Master Plan, identify issues, and discuss how to proceed with NEPA analysis.

The TIF Trails Subcommittee (made up of some local ski area permittees, Government Camp residents and business and property owners, and Zigzag District trails staff who provided technical input), met for nearly monthly meetings in winter/spring of 2003 and again in 2004 to review the Government Camp Trails Master Plan and finalize a Proposed Action and potential alternatives to the proposed action. The TIF Trails Subcommittee recommended the proposed action to the TIF Advisory Board, who in turn, recommended that the Clackamas County Commissioners (as the project proponent) allocate County TIF funds for the Forest Service to conduct NEPA planning to study the Proposed Action.

The formal scoping process began when the Forest posted an announcement and description of this project in the Winter (January) and Spring, 2004 issue of *Sprouts*, the Forest's quarterly newsletter that was used to provide information on proposed actions and encourage participation in and comment on proposed projects. *Sprouts* was sent to several hundred individuals as well as being available to the public at two Forest Service offices, visitor centers, and the Mt. Hood National Forest web site:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r6mthhood> (click on "Forest Publications").

In addition, the project was listed in the Summer and Fall, 2004 and Winter, Spring and Summer 2005 issues of the *PALS Report (Planning, Appeals, and Litigation System)* which has replaced *Sprouts* in order to be more inclusive about all project actions and their status.

Public meetings for scoping on the Government Camp Trails Project, where the proposed trails projects were explained and discussed were held in several venues including:

- Government Camp Tax Increment Finance District Advisory Board Meetings open to the public and generally attended by Government Camp business owners, residents, property owners, and county staff. The trails project was on the agenda or discussed at more than seven of the monthly meetings between October, 2003 and March, 2005. Discussion took place about the Trails Master Plan and Forest Service NEPA planning process, finalization of the proponent's proposed action, and status reports on NEPA planning progress including alternatives to the proposed action.
- Oregon Nordic Club Annual Winter Fair in November, 2003 and November, 2004 and a presentation at their March, 2003 meeting. The components of the Master Plan were presented at the March meeting, with more specifics at the November 2003 meeting. More specific information about the proposed action and alternatives to the proposed action were presented at the November, 2004 meeting.
- A Zigzag Ranger District Open House held May 11, 2004 at the Lion's Club in Welches to present and get public participation and input on District projects including the Government Camp Trails Project.

- Oregon State Parks and Recreation, Metro and Assorted City/County Trails Planning staff and Trail User Representatives. The Government Camp Trails project was described to the group for general information sharing.
- Mt. Hood Chamber of Commerce Meeting held March 1, 2005 in Welches, where the proposed trail system was presented to the Chamber members and feedback was requested.

Zigzag Recreation staff met with the ski area permittees (Jeff Kohnstamm at Timberline and Kirk Hanna at Ski Bowl), to discuss the Government Camp Trails Project. Portions of proposed trails pass through their permit area and discussions centered on design criteria to ensure their concerns were addressed and conflicts were minimized.

There have been numerous conversations with Clackamas County Transportation and Development staff and Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) personnel to review preliminary trail plans, discuss Highway 26 ODOT maintenance projects, and prepare funding collection agreements for completing NEPA.

The proposed action and a preliminary analysis were available for a 30-day public comment period that began on July 11, 2005. The preliminary analysis included the need for the proposal, alternatives to the proposed action, and an analysis of environmental consequences. I have considered the substantive comments that were received. The responses to the comments are contained in Appendix * of the EA.

Appeal Rights:

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215. Any individual or organization who submitted substantive comments during the comment period may appeal. Any appeal of this decision must be in writing and fully consistent with the content requirements described in 36 CFR 215.14. The Appeal Deciding Officer is Gary Larsen, Forest Supervisor. An appeal should be addressed to the Forest Supervisor at the following address. Postal: ATTN.: 1570 APPEALS, 16400 Champion Way, Sandy, Oregon 97055. Street location for hand delievery is the same (office hours: 8-4:30 M-F); fax: 503-668-1413; or Email: appeals-pacificnorthwest-mthood@fs.fed.us. Electronic appeals must be submitted as part of the actual e-mail message, or as an attachment in Microsoft Word (.doc), rich text format (.rtf), or portable document format (.pdf) only. E-mails submitted to email addresses other than the one listed above, or in formats other than those listed or containing viruses, will be rejected. It is the responsibility of the appellant to confirm receipt of appeals submitted by electronic mail. The comment and appeal rule 36 CFR 215, (2003) is available on the following web site - <http://www.fs.fed.us/emc/applit/36cfr215.htm>.

The appeal, including attachments, must be postmarked or received by the Appeal Deciding Officer within 45 days of the date legal notice of this decision was published in the Oregonian. For further information regarding these appeal procedures, contact the Forest Environmental Coordinator Mike Redmond at 503-668-1776.

Should this project be appealed, the responsible official offers to meet with appellants to attempt to informally resolve the appeal at the Zigzag Ranger District, 70220 E. Hwy 26, Zigzag, OR 97049.

Project Implementation:

Implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the 45-day appeal filing period described above. If an appeal is filed, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of appeal disposition (36 CFR 215.10).

The EA can be downloaded from the Forest web site at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/mthood> in the Projects & Plans section.

For further information contact Kathleen Walker, Zigzag Ranger District, 70220 E. Hwy 26 Zigzag, Oregon 97049. Phone (503) 622-3191 ext. 641 Email: kwalker@fs.fed.us

Responsible Official:

COLLEEN PELLE MADRID
District Ranger

Date Signed

Date Published