

Chapter 1

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Chapter 1: Purpose and Need

Introduction

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations, the Heppner Ranger District has prepared this Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) to disclose the effects of the proposed projects within the Rimrock Project Area. This document is designed to inform the public of the No Action, Proposed Action, and alternatives to the Proposed Action and their effects. This FEIS discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts resulting from each alternative, and mitigation measures associated with each alternative.

Treaties

In 1885, treaties were signed between the U.S. Government and several Indian Tribes. The treaty with the Walla Walla, Cayuse, and Umatilla Tribes, and bands of Indians in Washington and Oregon territories (today referred to as the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation) was signed June 9, 1855. On June 26, 1855, a treaty was signed with the tribes of Middle Oregon (those groups are now known as the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Indian Reservation). The proposed project area is located on traditional lands these Tribes ceded to the U.S. Government. In these treaties, the tribes retained certain rights. In part, these include the rights to fish, hunt, gather roots and berries, and pasture stock on National Forest Lands. The right to have associated resources (habitat) protected from degradation is implied in these treaties.

Treaties and executive orders after 1971 obligate the United States and its agencies to certain trust responsibilities. This responsibility has been generally referred to as the federal trust responsibility. In addition to obligations in treaties and statutes, the Forest Service has an obligation to consult with federally recognized Indian Tribes on a Government-to-Government basis throughout our planning process.

Tribal concerns regarding past projects of this type have focused on the protection and restoration of fisheries and wildlife resources. The area encompassed by the Rimrock planning area is within the North Fork John Day drainage. Because the John Day river system has the best remaining native runs of spring chinook and summer steelhead in the Columbia Basin, both tribes stress that this irreplaceable resource must be protected. Big game populations and herd productivity are also a concern, with the focus on big game vulnerability.

Meeting government treaty obligations will necessarily involve protecting and restoring fish and wildlife habitat within the project area. This includes activities designed to restore fisheries habitat as well as restoration of problems created by past management practices within the project area.

Location

The Rimrock project area contains approximately 41,800 acres within the Umatilla National Forest in Grant, Morrow, and Wheeler counties, and lies about 25 miles southwest of Heppner, Oregon (Figure 1.1). It is within the boundary of the Wall watershed, and includes Lower, Middle, and Upper Big Wall; Porter; Lower and Upper Wilson; and Indian subwatersheds (Figure 1.2)

Figure 1.1 Location map

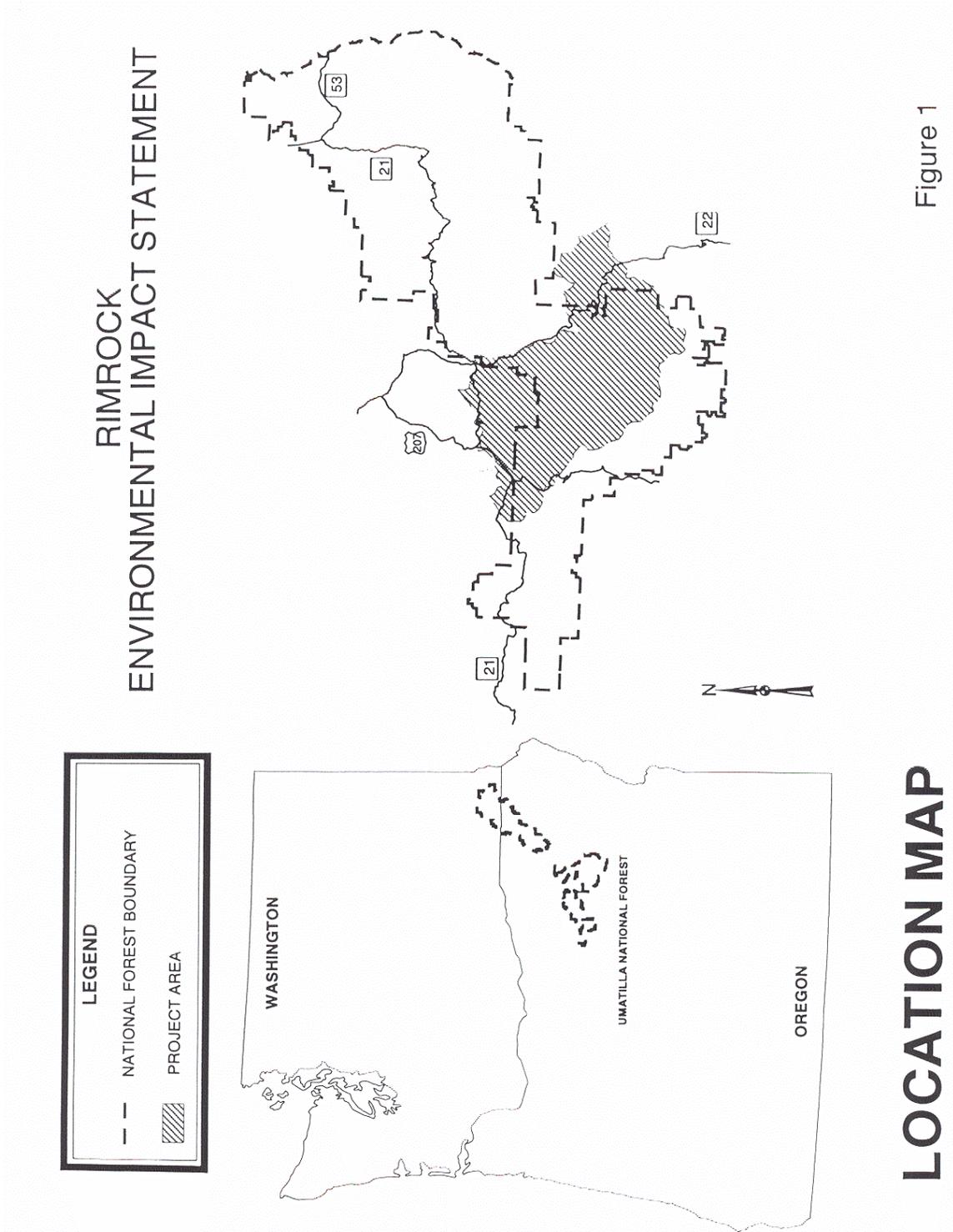


Figure 1.2 Subwatersheds

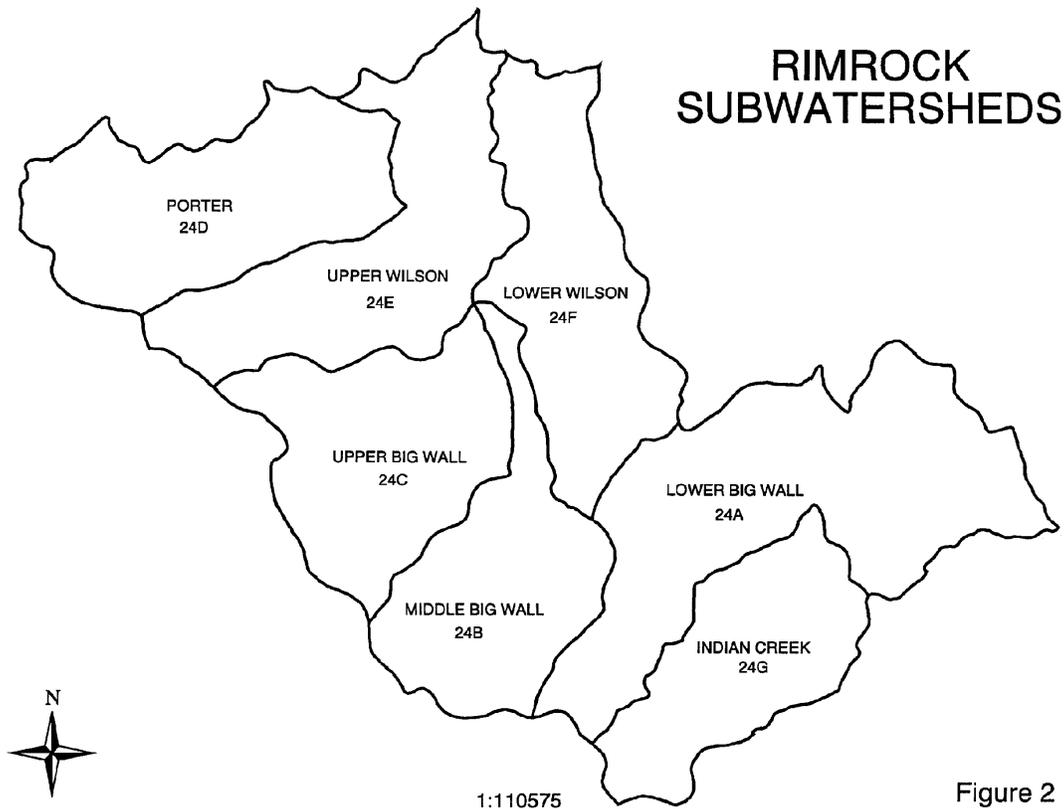


Figure 2

Wall watershed, located near the town of Monument, Oregon is a 200 square mile watershed in the North Fork of the John Day River (NFJD) subbasin, and comprises approximately 8 percent of the land base in the North Fork John Day River system. The confluence of Wall Creek is 22.5 stream miles upstream from the confluence of the North Fork with the main John Day River. Wall watershed arises at an elevation of 4,600 feet and flows east to south to the confluence with the NFJD River at an elevation of 2,060 feet. Major streams draining the Wall watershed include Big Wall, Wilson, Little Wall, Skookum, and Swale Creeks.

The legal description of the project area is as follows: R.25E. T.6S. sections 24-28 and 32-36; R.25E. T.7S. sections 1-5, 9-15, 23-25, and 36; R.26E. T.6S. sections 1 6, 19-23, and 26-35; R.26E. T.7S. sections 1-36; R.26E. T.8S. sections 1-6, 8- 16, and 24; R.27E. T.7S. sections 13-36; R.27E. T.8S. sections 2-10 and 16-19; and R.28E. T.7S. sections 19, 30, and 31, W.M. surveyed.

Background

Wall Ecosystem Analysis

The Wall Ecosystem Analysis was completed in September 1995. This document characterized the physical and biological conditions within the three main tributary systems, Wall (24), Little Wall (25), and Skookum (26). In addition, the document lists issues and key questions; compares

current resource conditions to reference conditions, and identifies resource protection and restoration measures to be used by the Heppner Ranger District to set short and long-term ecosystem management priorities.

The Rimrock project was initiated to address some of the issues and restoration priorities identified in the Wall Ecosystem Analysis. Rimrock is one of many projects designed to address those issues. Other projects completed since the Wall Ecosystem analysis in the Wall, Little Wall, and Skookum subwatersheds are shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1. Projects accomplished in the Wall Watershed since 1995.

Project Type	Wall (24A-G)	Little Wall (25A-C)	Skookum (26A-F)
Fisheries (1997) Sedge Planting	140 plants on Wilson Creek		
Fisheries (1997-98) Large Wood Placement	4.0 miles Indian Creek		1.5 miles on Dry Swale Creek
Hydrology	Keating Creek Gully Control Diverted Class 4 stream from abandoned temporary road which had gullied		
Hydrology	Removed 3 log string culverts on Road 2402-080		
Wildlife (1998) Water Trough Replacement	CCC Springs		
Wildlife (1997) Fence Reconstruction 6.6 miles - Sunflower Flats	Improved migration access – deer/elk	Improved migration access – deer/elk	
Noxious Weed Treatments (1995-1999), same each year	Grub – 274 acres Spray – 47 acres	Grub – 221 acres	Grub – 108 acres Spray – 23 acres
Riparian Exclosures 3-strand wire fence	Upper Wilson – 1.9 mi. Porter Creek – 0.8 mi. Indian Creek – 0.3 mi. Colvin Creek – 2.5 mi.		
Riparian Protection Electric fence	Upper Wilson – 0.2 mi. S.F. Big Wall – 2.5 mi. Colvin Creek - 0.75 mi. Grassy Creek – 0.75 mi.	Keeney Pasture – 3.5 mi. Red Hill Pasture – 4 . Hog Creek Past. – 2.2 mi.	Swale Creek – 1.5 mi. Alder Creek – 0.25 mi.
Prescribed Fire (1996-98)	4,316 acres	132 acres	4,825 acres
Recreation – Bull Prairie Lake (1998) (1999)	Stabilize 0.4 miles of trail Improve accessibility Installed fishing platforms		
Road Closure Improvements (1996)	4 earth barricades 1 mile ripped 7 miles of closure	6 earth barricades 1 mile ripped 6 miles of closure	
Road Closure Improvements (1997)	8 earth barricades 1 gate 1 guard rail		

Table 1.1. Projects accomplished in the Wall Watershed since 1995.

Project Type	Wall (24A-G)	Little Wall (25A-C)	Skookum (26A-F)
	11 miles of closure		
Road Closures 1999	3 Guardrails – 6 miles	4 Guardrails, 1 Gate – 9 miles	
Reforestation (1995-2002)	645 acres	117 acres	817 acres
Subsoiling	32 acres		
Precommercial thinning	34 acres (1996)		173 acres (1996) 17 acres (1998) 167 acres (2000) 81 acres (2001)
Harvest (1996)			Shelterwood – 151 acres Seed Tree – 23 acres Salvage – 48 acres
Harvest (1997)	Commercial Thin – 42 acres		Commercial Thin – 53 acres Shelterwood – 75 acres Seed Tree – 10 acres Salvage – 27 acres
Harvest (1998)			Shelterwood – 166 acres Seed Tree – 82 acres Salvage – 154 acres
Spring Improvements (1999)	Buck Springs - trough reconstruction		

Changes from draft environmental impact statement

A draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) for this project was published in August 2000. The comment period for the DEIS ended October 16, 2000. During the time since publication of the DEIS, a Douglas-fir tussock moth outbreak occurred in the project area. The tussock moth outbreak caused defoliation of trees within the project area. Defoliation ranged from very light, where the defoliation is barely detectable, to extreme defoliation where almost every tree within stands was completely defoliated. Many of the changes from the DEIS address the changed conditions caused by the tussock moth outbreak. A new alternative, Alternative 5, was added to respond to the outbreak.

A Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) was not prepared because the changes in the new alternative were not substantial in comparison to the proposed action or alternatives analyzed in the DEIS. The new alternative did not add any additional units or harvest areas. Roads and logging systems in the new alternative are identical to those analyzed in the DEIS. The interdisciplinary team review found no significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the proposed action or its impacts.

Numerous comments were received during the DEIS comment period. Additional analysis was completed in response to questions or concerns raised during the comment period.

Purpose of and Need for Action

The purpose of this project is to develop and analyze a mix of connected and similar actions that respond to needs identified in the Wall Ecosystem Analysis (September 1995). The needs focus on the implementation of ecosystem management projects that are designed to promote long-

term resilient and sustainable watershed conditions. In addition, one of the resource management goals for the Umatilla National Forest is to provide for production and sustained yield of wood fiber and insofar as possible meet projected production levels consistent with various resource objectives, standards and guidelines, and cost efficiency (Land and Resource Management Plan, p. 4-2). Rimrock provides an opportunity to contribute to meeting that objective by using commercial timber sales to attain forest vegetation management objectives. Rimrock also provides an opportunity to use Governor Kitzhaber's 11-point strategy for restoring ecosystem health in Eastern Oregon (Regional Forester Letter, 7/03/1997) and to address the Chief's Natural Resource Agenda that promotes watershed health and restoration, sustainable forest ecosystem management, recreation, and management of forest roads. The current condition of each resource is briefly addressed (see Chapter 3 for more specifics) with specific objectives identified following each heading.

Forest Vegetation

Greater than ninety percent of the Rimrock analysis area consists of dry-forest sites where the plant association group is ponderosa pine or warm dry grand fir/Douglas-fir. Historically, the majority of these dry-forest sites were characterized by stands where open, park-like conditions dominated. Large, widely spaced ponderosa pines growing above dense undergrowth of tall grasses with scattered pockets of pine regeneration were typical across the landscape.

Recent assessments of forest conditions in the Blue Mountains of eastern Oregon and Washington have concluded that the area of old growth forests has declined significantly compared to historical levels (Caraher and others 1992, Lehmkuhl and others 1994, Hessburg and others 1999). On August 18, 1993, the Regional Forester for the USDA Forest Service, Region 6 issued direction to screen timber sales to ensure that all sales are consistent with the National Forest Management Act viability requirements for old growth-associated species (Lowe, 1993). That direction was modified and extended on May 20, 1994 (Lowe, 1994) and further modified in 1995 (USDA Forest Service 1995a). The 1995 document amended the Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) as Forest Plan Amendment #11. That current direction, often referred to as the "Timber Sale Screens", includes specific direction to pass each timber sale proposal through a set of interim ecosystem and wildlife standards.

The historical range of variability (HRV) refers to the historical pattern and abundance of structural stages within watersheds, using pre-settlement (1800 – 1900) conditions as a reference point (USDA Forest Service 1994). Under the Timber Sale Screens, the critical structural stages to consider in the Rimrock project are the late and old forest structural stages (LOS). Late and old structural stages are divided into two groups, single-story and multi-story. Based on historical survey records and early descriptions of the Blue Mountains, single-story LOS stands were believed to be the most common LOS stand conditions in the warm, dry sites that are prevalent in the Rimrock planning area. These are often described as open, park-like stands of mostly ponderosa pine. It is estimated that approximately 15 to 55 percent of the warm, dry sites were historically in a single-story LOS condition (Powell, 1998). Multi-story LOS stands were believed to have been a less common type of old forest stand condition, representing approximately 5 to 20 percent of the area in the warm, dry sites that are most common in the Rimrock area.

A historic range of variability analysis has been completed for the planning area and is available in the Rimrock project analysis file. A comparison of the existing and historic conditions within the two major subdrainages in the Rimrock project area (Lower Wall and Upper Wall) indicates that the dry forest LOS structural stages are outside of their respective HRV's. The analysis found that the planning area is well below the historic range in the percentage of dry site, single-story LOS. The amount of multi-story LOS is well above the historic range within the planning area. Encroachment of the fire intolerant species such as Douglas-fir and grand fir combined with the overstocked condition of the ponderosa pine component indicate the project area is outside of HRV with respect to species composition and structure.

The last twenty years have seen a period of rapid change for thousands of forested acres in the Rimrock analysis area. Much of that change is related to abnormally high levels of insect and disease infestations. Outbreaks of mountain pine beetle (*Dendroctonus ponderosae*) in the late 1970's and early 1980's, western spruce budworm (*Choristoneura occidentalis*) between 1944-1958 and 1980-1992, and Douglas-fir beetle (*Dendroctonus pseudotsugae*) and fir engraver (*Scolytus ventralis*) during the late 1980's and early 1990's exacerbated those insect attacks by reducing tree vigor and lowering stand resistance to insect damage (Gast et al 1991).

Current field examinations show evidence of high levels of spruce budworm defoliation that occurred from the mid 1980's to 1992. Many stands contain high stocking levels (tree densities) and multiple-storied mixed conifer species. These conditions are highly favorable for future budworm epidemics. Budworm defoliation predisposes grand fir and Douglas-fir to bark beetle invasion following an outbreak. Eighty percent of the Rimrock analysis area is rated at a high risk for future budworm defoliation (Wall Ecosystem Analysis 1995). Other insects identified at moderate to high frequencies within the project area include mountain pine beetle, fir engraver beetle, pine engraver beetle (*Ips pini*), and western pine beetle (*Dendroctonus brevicornis*) (Scott 1997, Schmitt 1998).

A severe Douglas-fir tussock moth (*Orgyia pseudotsuga*) outbreak occurred in the planning area in 2000 and 2001 (Scott 2002). During the first year of the outbreak, tussock moth larvae defoliated an area of approximately 1,000 acres: roughly 95% of the area received light defoliation, and the remainder received moderate defoliation. In 2001, the second year of the outbreak, an area of between 4,000 and 5,000 acres, plus additional scattered variable-sized patches of tussock moth host trees, were defoliated over a range of defoliation classes. Within defoliated stands, an area of approximately 500 contiguous acres of host trees was nearly 100% defoliated within the Indian Creek drainage.

A variety of diseases also exists within the analysis area. Severe Douglas-fir dwarf mistletoe (*Arceuthobium douglasii*) infestations are present throughout most of the project area and the Wall Ecosystem Analysis (1995) identified 71% of the Rimrock area at moderate to high risk of infection (Schmitt 1998). Additional disease agents identified in the Rimrock area include: 81% moderate to high risk of infection from western dwarf mistletoe (*Arceuthobium campylopodum*) in ponderosa pine; 93% moderate to high risk of infection from mixed conifer root diseases (*Armillaria ostoyae*, *Phellinus weirii*, and *Fomes annosus*); and 81% risk of infection from Schweinitzii root and butt rot (Wall Ecosystem Analysis 1995). Ponderosa pine heavily infected with dwarf mistletoe have lowered growth rates than uninfected trees, and may be sufficiently weakened that they are killed outright, or they may be predisposed to mortality caused by other insect agents (Schmitt 1996).

For the dry forests of the Rimrock project analysis area, the combined effect of 90 years of fire suppression and 50 years of selective harvest that removed large ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir has resulted in deterioration of ecosystem health and sustainability. Along with other human influence over natural processes, these practices have compromised ecosystem resilience by reducing vegetation diversity and complexity, especially at a landscape scale (Hessburg et al. 1994).

As these vegetation changes have accelerated, conditions that are conducive to landscape-scale wildfire continue to build, and have reached unprecedented levels over most of the project area. Changes in species composition and structure, the result of prolonged absence of periodic, low-intensity surface burning, have predisposed these dry forest ecosystems to severe stand replacing wildfires. Historic fuel profiles in large portions of the project area have changed considerably. Duff layers and woody debris have increased while the herbaceous component has decreased. The increase in surface fuels combined with the laddering effect of the small to medium to tall trees has increased the threat and occurrence of stand replacement fires that historically were rare (Walstad and others 1990).

Recommended stocking levels for the Umatilla National Forest have been developed to maintain stands in a condition where they are relatively resistant to attacks by the insects and diseases

discussed above (Powell 1999). Field surveys indicate that many stands within the Rimrock project area are stocked at levels much higher than recommended.

As a result of these conditions, there is a need to:

- Promote the sustainability and vitality of current and future forest stands by reducing stocking densities to the levels recommended for plant associations on the Umatilla National Forest; and favor seral species, such as ponderosa pine, within warm dry Douglas-fir/grand fir ecological settings.
- Use landscape prescribed underburning as a periodic, low-intensity tool to reduce fuel loadings and the risk of large stand replacing wildfires
- Promote tree species composition and age classes more representative of the Historical Range of Variability (HRV)

Bull Prairie Campground Recreation

The Bull Prairie area is mixed conifer stand types made up of components of ponderosa pine, western larch, Douglas-fir, and grand fir in poor condition. The oldest trees in the area include large, mature, or over mature, ponderosa pine with fewer scattered large western larch and even fewer large Douglas-fir. There is a well-developed understory of shade tolerant Douglas-fir and grand fir that have become established since the exclusion of periodic fire. While these trees provide screening, they are not natural to the site at the current density, and the high stocking density is stressing some overstory pines. Some of the large pine trees have died and others are declining (Schmitt and Scott 1998).

There is evidence of bark beetles, dwarf mistletoe, and Indian paint fungus decay. Trees exhibiting advanced evidence of these insects and diseases pose extreme hazards for users of this recreation site due to breakage and falling of unsound limbs and trees.

As a result of these conditions, there is a need to:

- Manage hazard trees for the safety of site users
- Reduce stocking densities to maintain the vigor and viability of the large overstory trees and the current forest stand

Soil, Water, and Fish Habitat

Wall and Wilson Creeks were listed as water quality limited for water temperature, habitat modification, and sediment in Oregon's 1998 List of Water Quality Limited Water Bodies. High water temperatures are primarily related to the relatively low elevation of the watershed, and, normally associated high air temperatures and low stream flow during the summer months. Streamside shade also influences water temperature. Riparian vegetation has been reduced by past management practices such as timber harvest, road construction, and livestock grazing.

Summer low flows can be detrimental to resident and anadromous fish species. Pools prove especially important during summer low flows. Stream temperature records from the deepest part of the pool and from the water entering the pool indicate that water at the bottom can be notably cooler. These pools are apparently intercepting some subsurface flow. Some of the pools may enhance fish survival by providing a small cool-water refuge area during low, late summer stream flows (Wall Ecosystem Analysis 1995).

Soil erosion occurs when the rainfall or snowmelt rate exceeds the infiltration rate of the soil. Even though rainfall intensity in eastern Oregon is relatively low, occasional intense local thunderstorms can cause overland flow and soil erosion on forested sites after the soil has been disturbed by management activities such as logging and road construction. These activities contribute to a decrease in infiltration rate through compaction and the removal of ground cover. Compaction also inhibits root growth of vegetation (this particularly affects establishment of trees). In addition, roads interrupt subsurface water flows causing water to surface and add to

overland flows. Sediment from roads is contributed to streams from the road surface, unvegetated cut/fill banks, and from alterations to the drainage pattern.

Elevated stream temperatures and increased sediment contributions combined with changes in the channel structure have degraded the aquatic habitat and may be affecting resident and anadromous fish populations. Fish habitat indicators for baseline conditions are: water temperature, sediment, physical barriers, chemical contamination/nutrients, substrate embeddedness, large woody debris, pool frequency/quality, large pools, off-channel habitat, refugia, width/depth ratio, streambank condition, floodplain connectivity, change in peak/base flows, road density/location, disturbance history, and riparian conservation areas.

The majority of the indicators within the watershed are either **functioning at risk** or **functioning at unacceptable risk**. Using existing data, it was determined that within the Big Wall Creek Watershed, water temperature, sediment, large woody debris, pool frequency/quality, off-channel habitat, refugia, and road density/location are functioning at “unacceptable risk”. Substrate embeddedness, large pools, width/depth ratio, streambank condition, physical barriers, and riparian conservation areas were found to be “functioning at risk”. Indicator’s “functioning appropriately” are chemical contamination/nutrients and disturbance history. When all indicators are considered, the Big Wall Creek Watershed’s environmental baseline condition was classified as “functioning at risk”.

Historically, fish habitat improvement began with in-stream structures. Within the Wall watershed, 86 in-stream structures exist in Big Wall Creek and 225 in-stream structures exist in Wilson Creek. The in-stream structures were designed to provide smolt survival through critical summer low flow periods by providing better quality rearing habitat. The in-stream structures were built between 1986 and 1991 with a 20-year life expectancy, along with periodical maintenance to reach the life expectancy. According to the 1999 physical inventory and assessment of in-stream structures, 59 percent of the structures in Big Wall Creek and 46 percent of the structures in Wilson Creek require maintenance to achieve designed goals. After further analysis of the 1999 inventory data collected on both Wilson Creek and Big Wall Creek it has been determined that 51 in-channel structures rather than the originally noted 55 in-channel structures, along Wall Creek, need maintenance or restoration and 104 in-channel structures along Wilson Creek, rather than the original 126, would need maintenance or restoration (see Appendix C).

Currently there are unhardened fords across Wall Creek and Little Wilson Creek (three on Road 23 and one on Road 2300100). Traffic fording across Wall Creek and Little Wilson Creek disturb streambed material causing short-term increases in turbidity. There is also the possibility that steelhead may be killed by vehicular traffic crossing thru these streambeds.

As a result of these conditions, there is a need to:

- Improve pool habitat during summer low flows in Big Wall and Wilson Creeks to provide rearing habitat for Threatened and Sensitive fish species
- Reduce the amount of sediment contributed from open roads to improve water quality within the watershed
- Remove vehicle traffic from the streambed of Big Wall Creek and Little Wilson Creek at the four water crossings along Forest Road 23 and 2300100 to eliminate disturbance to fish habitat and reduce sediment contribution to the stream
- Improve effectiveness of road closures and decommission roads from the network system to increase infiltration, reduce sediment contributions, and promote revegetation of riparian areas (stream shade).

Aspen

Aspen clones that once covered larger areas have been reduced to small, disconnected stands or individuals. Inventories on the Heppner Ranger District have identified aspen stands to be in decline and at risk of extirpation. The identified stands are exhibiting 3 to 4 of the risk factors associated with serious aspen decline: conifer encroachment is moderate to severe, aspen

canopy cover is less than 40 percent, and stands are at an advanced age (>100 years old) with little to no reproduction occurring. Viable aspen regeneration (5-15 feet tall) in these stands is commonly less than 10 stems per acre due primarily to grazing pressure from wild and domestic ungulates (e.g. deer, cattle, and elk).

As a result of these conditions, there is a need to:

- Increase reproduction, reduce browse damage, and remove conifer competition to promote stand age diversity and occupancy in identified aspen stands

Proposed Action

In response to the purpose and need, the Heppner Ranger District of the Umatilla National Forest proposes the following actions within the Rimrock project area:

Forest Vegetation

- Commercial thinning of approximately 4,615 acres resulting in an estimated 37,009 ccf (19,300 mbf) of wood products. Stand densities would be reduced to stocking levels appropriate for the plant association. All stands would remain fully stocked upon completion of harvest activities. Proposed units would be harvested using tractor, harvester/forwarder, animal, and helicopter logging systems. Access for harvest would require reconstruction (hardening, resurfacing, improvement of cross-drains) of about 17 miles of existing roads and construction of approximately 11.3 miles of temporary roads. The temporary roads would be closed and obliterated upon completion of harvest activities. Activities occurring concurrently or in association with timber harvest include subsoiling of landings and temporary roads to mitigate soil compaction, water barring, seeding of skid trails and landings for noxious weed control, and burning of created slash.
- Precommercial thinning of approximately 374 acres. Saplings (generally up to 6 inch dbh) would be thinned to promote growth, restore and maintain a more sustainable species composition, and improve visual quality as well as improve winter safety along Hwy 207 by providing more sunlight to reach the road surface, thus allowing snow melt on the highway.
- Precommercial thinning of approximately 500 acres within the proposed commercial thinning harvest units to occur within five years following commercial harvest. This would treat the patches of overstocked sapling regeneration present in the understory.
- Control and prevention of noxious weeds. Control of any new sites would include manual treatment only.
- Prescribed underburning in the Rimrock analysis area by hand and aerial ignition to reduce fuel loadings. Implementation would occur over a 3-5 year timeframe with approximately 30,000 acres prescribed for burning. Approximately 18,000 acres would be burned in either the spring or fall, 4,300 acres would be burned in the fall only, and 6,800 acres would be burned in the spring only.

Bull Prairie Campground Recreation

- Included within the 4,615 acres of harvest are 29 acres (three harvest units) located within the Bull Prairie Campground recreation site (the site is 207 acres in size). Harvest within these units would be accomplished by animal logging and would consist of removal of diseased, decaying, or dead trees (these present a hazard to site users) and commercial thinning to reduce stocking densities to maintain the vigor and viability of the current forest stand. Hazard trees over 21 inches in diameter could be removed from the Bull Prairie site.

Soil, Water, and Fish Habitat

- Maintenance and restoration of 51 in-channel fish structures on Big Wall Creek and 104 in-channel fish structures on Wilson Creek. These structures are in need of repair or removal because they are causing damage to the stream channel. Activities may include pool deepening, boulder placement, rebuilding of outside wings, total structure rebuild, or removal of structures. Heavy equipment may be used to repair some structures.
- In addition to the roadwork associated with harvest, 27 miles of open forest system roads (Forest Roads 23 and 24) would be resurfaced. Resurfacing may include blading, placement of 4-6" deep aggregate, and maintenance of drainage structures such as drain relief culverts. This road maintenance would reduce future contribution of sediment from road surface erosion.
- Decommission 4 miles of unneeded closed roads by removing culverts and opening filled in draws. Obliterate 10 miles of unneeded closed roads by recontouring fill/cut slopes. Improve closures on 22 roads. Restoring natural drainage patterns would reduce sediment contributions to streams.
- Improve four low-water fords with structures designed for fish passage (large gradation crushed aggregate approaches with a suspended cattle guard type grates). The improvements would reduce sediment in Wall Creek, protect fish from moving vehicles and produce streambed shade where vegetation would be limited. The work on the Wall Creek ford at milepost 11.39, Forest Road 23, and the Little Wilson Creek ford at milepost 10.01, Forest Road 23, would be associated with the timber harvest. The work on the Wall Creek fords at milepost 9.85, Forest Road 23, and on Forest Road 2300100 at its junction with Forest Road 23 would be done as funds become available.
- Close two roads that are currently open. The Access and Travel Management Plan shows road 2309020 (2.08 miles) as open, although it has been physically closed and inaccessible to vehicle traffic. Road 2300101 (0.50 miles) was originally open to allow access to a dispersed campsite. The campsite has not been used in several years and is very close to Wall Creek.

Aspen

- Girdling of encroaching conifers or cutting of encroaching conifers less than 21 inches dbh, construction of ungulate-proof fences, prescribed burning, mechanical root stimulation, and planting in 12 identified aspen stands (24 acres). Conifers cut within an RHCA would be left on site. Conifers outside of RHCA's would be cut and removed.

Management Direction

This Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process and documentation has been prepared according to direction contained in the *National Forest Management Act* (NFMA), the *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA), the *Council on Environmental Quality* (CEQ) regulations, *Clean Water Act*, and *Endangered Species Act* (ESA). This EIS is tiered to the *Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan FEIS, Record of Decision* (June 11, 1990). Included is the clarifying direction of Plan Amendment #10 *The Interim Strategies for Managing Anadromous Fish-producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho, and Portions of California* (PACFISH), dated February 24, 1995; and Plan Amendment #11 *Continuation of Interim Management Direction Establishing Riparian, Ecosystem, and Wildlife Standards for Timber Sales*, dated June 12, 1995.

This EIS incorporates by reference the *Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan)*, *Environmental Assessment for the Management of Noxious Weeds* and its *Decision Notice* (May 24, 1995), the *Wall Ecosystem Analysis* (September 1995), and other sources of information, documents, published studies, and books referred to in this document and its analysis file.

The Forest Plan allocated each part of the Umatilla National Forest to a management area, which emphasizes particular resources and values. A management area's Desired Future Condition

(DFC) describes how the Forest should look to provide the associated resources and values. Standards and Guidelines provide the guiding direction for achieving the DFC. The project area includes the management areas listed below (see Map 1).

A3 - Viewshed 1 (Forest Plan p. 4-90 to 104): 672 acres - manage the area seen from a primary travel route, use area, or water body, where forest visitors have a major concern for the scenic qualities (sensitivity level 1) as a natural appearing landscape. Viewsheds will be managed primarily to meet the visual objectives of retention and partial retention. An attractive, natural appearing landscape will be created or maintained...

A4 - Viewshed 2 (Forest Plan p. 4-105 to 110): 786 acres - manage the area seen from a travel route, use area, or water body, where some forest visitors have a major concern for the scenic qualities (sensitivity level 2) as a natural appearing to slightly altered landscape. Viewsheds will be managed primarily to meet the visual objectives of partial retention and modification. An attractive, near natural landscape will be maintained or created.

A6 - Developed Recreation (Forest Plan p. 4-117 to 120): 207 acres - provide recreation opportunities that are dependent on the development of structural facilities for user conveniences where interaction between users and evidence of others is prevalent. Readily accessible, appropriately designed recreation facilities shall provide for concentrated use by people seeking a variety and convenience of developed recreation opportunities and experiences...

C1 – Dedicated Old Growth (Forest Plan, p. 4-144 to 146): 1,629 acres – provide and protect sufficient suitable habitat for wildlife species dependent upon mature and/or overmature forest stands, and promote a diversity of vegetative conditions for such species. Areas will be characterized by trees of relatively large size, past the point of rapid growth, with visible evidence of decay and decline...Stand characteristics include a multi-layered, deep canopy with trees of two or more age classes and an abundance of both standing dead and down wood material. Management activities will normally be excluded except to enhance or perpetuate old growth forest habitat conditions.

C3 - Big Game Winter Range (Forest Plan p. 4-151 to 154): 6,951 acres - manage big game winter range to provide high levels of potential habitat effectiveness and high quality forage for big game species. Big game winter ranges will appear primarily as a mosaic of managed forests, brush patches, and large grasslands...Management activities may be locally apparent...Most roads and trails will be closed to vehicle traffic during the winter and there will be minimum human disturbance to big game during this period... Management activities will be restricted, where necessary, during the big game winter use period of December 1 through April 15.

C5 - Riparian (Forest Plan p. 4-163 to 166): 1,687 acres - maintain or enhance water quality, and produce a high level of potential habitat capability for all species of fish and wildlife within the designated riparian habitat areas while providing for a high level of habitat effectiveness for big game. A near natural setting will predominate adjacent to the stream, with a wide variety of plant communities of various species, sizes, and age classes...

E1 – Timber and Forage (Forest Plan, p. 4-178 to 181): 29,795 acres - manage forestland to emphasize production of wood fiber (timber) and encourage production of forage. Intensive management of forests for timber production and other commodity products will be apparent. Forage use will be high with improvements installed to facilitate stock distribution and the effective use of available forage. Recreation opportunities will be available for hunters, fisherman, off-highway vehicle operators, and other motorists.

Decisions to be Made

This Environmental Impact Statement documents results of the environmental analysis conducted for the proposed action and its alternatives. The Heppner District Ranger will determine which alternative best implements the Forest Plan at this time. Specific determinations to be made are:

- Whether harvest and associated activities should occur and, if so, how much, using

- which logging systems, and where.
- Whether other restoration activities are needed and, if so which ones and where.
- Which mitigation measures are necessary?
- What monitoring measures should be taken?

Scoping Process

The scoping process required by NEPA (40 CFR 1501.7) was conducted to invite public participation, encourage an open process, and determine the key issues to be addressed. The Forest Service sought information, comments, and assistance from Federal, State, and local agencies, and from other groups and individuals interested in or affected by the Proposed Action.

The formal scoping period opened with publication of the Notice of Intent to produce an Environmental Impact Statement, which first appeared in the *Federal Register* on February 25, 1999. A proposed action, purpose and need, and maps were mailed to 128 interested groups, individuals, permittees, and to local, state, and tribal governments on March 26, 1999. Additional public notification was completed through the Forest's *Schedule of Proposed Actions*. Meetings were held with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in July 1999 and with the National Marine Fisheries Service throughout preparation of the DEIS.

Notification of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was printed in the Federal Register on September 1, 2000. A legal notices was published in the East Oregonian newspaper and letters were sent out to notify the public of the availability of the DEIS and that comments were being sought. The comment period ended on October 16, 2000. Eleven comment letters to the DEIS were received. A public field trip to view tussock moth defoliated stands was conducted on July 26, 2002.

Key Issues

Management concerns and public comments generated many issues. The interdisciplinary team and the Responsible Official reviewed these issues and determined which were key issues. Key issues are defined as resource or other values that drive the development of an alternative, may be adversely affected by the proposed action, or “unresolved conflicts regarding alternative uses of available resources” [NEPA sec. 102(2)(E)]. Key issues provide the focus for the analysis and are used directly in the formulation of the alternatives. The key issues are tracked through the analysis process, and through the remaining sections of this document.

Key Issue 1: Vegetation Removal

The principal plant associations within the proposed treatment units in the Rimrock project are warm grand fir, Douglas-fir, and ponderosa pine associations in lesser degrees (grand fir/pine grass), (grand fir/elk sedge), (Douglas-fir/elk sedge), (Douglas-fir/pine grass). Typically, major disturbances in these plant associations are fairly infrequent. The fire regime associated with these groups is one of low intensity and short return interval (Hall 1991). Historically, these warmer sites consisted principally of ponderosa pine. Periodic low intensity surface fires help thin the smaller established regeneration and maintain an open forest structure. Douglas-fir and other fire intolerant species may be able to occupy the cooler, moist northerly sites but are usually unable to tolerate the frequent fire intervals. Within the Rimrock project area, the practice of past fire exclusion, while well intentioned at the time, failed to consider the impact of a major shift in species composition and has resulted in fir establishment and invasion outside its historic range.

Proponents of commercial timber harvest believe that harvest is a viable tool to manage forest stands when used correctly. They support the proposed harvest activities, in addition to the use of prescribed fire, as a way to achieve desired stocking densities and species composition in the aim of achieving long-term sustainable ecosystems in the project area. Supporters of commercial harvest are concerned about the risk in overstocked stands of an insect epidemic and

subsequent fuel loading increases. Supporters also believe that harvesting overstocked or unhealthy stands of green trees is the fastest way to return these stands to sustainable conditions.

Others support a more custodial approach to forest management and do not want to see timber harvest used as a tool to achieve restoration. Some suggest that prescribed fire is the best way to control stocking densities and return the forest to more historical conditions. Opponents to harvesting believe that past harvesting removed too much vegetation and adversely impacted wildlife habitat. Soil disturbance from harvesting and road building has increased sedimentation in creeks and altered riparian habitat to the detriment of fish.

Measurements used to compare the results of each alternative in response to this issue include:

- Treated acres moving stands toward desired late/old structural characteristics and to meet desired seral species composition

Key Issue 2: Water Quality/Fish Habitat/Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Fish Species

Baseline data for the Big Wall Watershed finds water temperature, sediment, large woody debris, pool frequency/quality, off-channel habitat, refugia, and road/density/location to be “functioning at unacceptable risk”. Indicators within the watershed “functioning at risk” are: substrate embeddedness, large pools, width/depth ratio, stream bank condition, physical barriers, and riparian conservation areas. Indicators’ “functioning appropriately” are chemical contamination/nutrients and disturbance history. Working with all the indicators, the Big Wall Watershed baseline is functioning at risk.

Wall and Wilson creeks were listed as water quality limited with respect to water temperature, habitat modification and sediment in Oregon’s 1998 List of Water Quality Limited Water Bodies. Causes for excessive water temperatures include a harsh climate, channel conditions that expose more channel area to heating, and management activities that have reduced streamside shade and exacerbate inherent conditions. Most of the streams in the Big Wall Watershed are vulnerable to climatic conditions (drought), the lingering effects of severe flood events, and the continual, chronic effects of streamside roads, livestock grazing, and early seral riparian vegetation (Wall Ecosystem Analysis 1995).

Water quality can be degraded by sediment eroded from soils adjacent to streams. Soil erosion occurs when the rainfall or snowmelt rate exceeds the infiltration rate of the soil. Overland flow rarely occurs in undisturbed forest, so upland soil erosion is not a major concern. Even though rainfall intensity in eastern Oregon is relatively low, occasional intense thunderstorms can cause overland flow and soil erosion on forested sites after the soil has been disturbed by management activities, such as logging and road construction. These activities primarily decrease the infiltration rate through compaction and removal of ground cover. After timber harvest activities, vegetation typically regrows and soil erosion decreases to pre-disturbance levels within several years. If the soil is left compacted, vegetative recovery is delayed. Sediment from roads is derived from the road surface, unvegetated cut/fill banks and from alterations to the drainage pattern.

Within the Big Wall Watershed there is occupied habitat for one federally listed fish species and one species designated as sensitive by the Regional Forester. The middle Columbia River steelhead was listed as threatened on March 16, 1999. Redband trout are designated as sensitive. Wall watershed also falls within the proposed designated critical habitat for Snake River Fall Chinook salmon.

Pool frequency in the Wall Creek system within the Rimrock Project varies from 0.04 pools per mile (reach 2 of Happy Jack Creek) to 29.9 pools per mile (Wilson Creek, reach 2). The Forest Service constructed most of the pools in reach 2 of Wilson Creek to improve degraded habitat. Those stream reaches with pool frequencies >15 pools/mile contain a high proportion of constructed pools (Wall Ecosystem Analysis 1995). Pools are relatively scarce in the Wall Creek system within the Rimrock Project and most of those pools are shallow. Only seven out of 32

reaches surveyed have pools deeper than one meter, and most of these were mechanically constructed.

There is concern regarding the maintenance and restoration of the in-channel fish structures. Some of the structures require reconstruction in order to provide the intended habitat functions of rearing and spawning habitat. Some have questioned the effectiveness of the structures as well as the reason for failure of the structures (why the structure didn't last the intended timeframe).

Opponents to the proposed activities argue that there are too many roads and that any logging activity in the area will contribute to further degradation of the watershed and riparian systems that are already functioning at risk. There is also concern that the proposed activities will further prevent recovery of the threatened and sensitive fish species present in the area. Concern has also been expressed that the proposed activities will affect efforts to bring streams within the analysis area into compliance with state water quality standards.

Others argue that sustainable upland forests protect threatened and endangered species habitat by improving landscape hydrologic functions (timing and release of water) and protecting against the risk of high intensity losses due to large wildfires. Supporters of harvest argue that any sedimentation caused by logging activities would be negligible when compared with sediment increases resulting from fire, and that the use of sensitive logging systems and mitigation would offset any harvest-related increases. They feel the risks involved with harvest are minimal and that restoration projects and road improvements associated with harvest would mitigate undesirable effects.

Measurements used to compare the results of each alternative in response to this issue include:

- Number of pools improved or maintained
- Percentage of fish structures functioning properly
- Miles of road improvements where a reduction in sediment contributions occurs
- Miles of road decommissioned or obliterated
- Miles of temporary road constructed
- Miles of closed road reopened for haul use (relates to miles of stream where shade may be reduced which correlates to stream temperature)

Key Issue 3: Economic Viability of Timber Sales

Proponents of commercial timber harvest argue that it is an objective in the Forest Plan to provide timber commodities to the local communities. Receipts from timber sales are important to local residents and contribute to the local economy in several different ways. They also argue that the desired future condition of several of the management areas within the analysis area include harvest as an expected activity.

Proponents of commercial timber harvesting argue that an objective in the Forest Plan is to provide timber commodities to the local communities (Forest Plan Management Goal #15, LRMP, p. 4-2). They are concerned that so many restrictions are included in Forest Service timber sales that they can no longer be operated economically. Harvest proposals should include as much volume in the largest diameter class as possible, low cost logging systems such as tractor where slopes permit, less helicopter logging systems, and include utilizing trees in riparian areas. Some people are concerned about payments to counties from timber sale receipts and point out this is an important source of funding for local schools and roads (the *Secure Rural School and Community Self-determination Act of 2000* changed this funding allocation whereas county monies are no longer dependant on timber receipts). Employment and income associated with timber harvesting is another important consideration to some residents of the local and regional area.

Other people believe that commercial harvest of timber is not necessary. They feel precommercial thinning, which leaves the material on the ground, and the use of prescribed fire can meet silvicultural objectives without removing timber for a commercial product. They feel that a custodial approach using wildland and prescribed fire as tools for controlling stocking densities will return the forest to historical conditions with less impact. They feel that economic considerations should not be a primary factor in determining which management activities are appropriate. They feel that resource concerns should be given primary consideration and that removal of timber for economic value should not be a driving force behind the project. Some people feel that all values including non-market economic values should be a consideration in evaluating the proposed management activities.

Others argue we should not be selling timber because it costs more to log than returns, thereby subsidizing the timber industry.

Measurements used to compare the results of each alternative in response to this issue include:

- Projected bid rate of sales

Other Issues Considered

Issues that were not considered key issues, but were determined to be important or required to be disclosed, were considered as "other" or "non-key". These other issues are generally of high interest or concern to the public, or are necessary to understand the full extent of the alternatives. "Other" issues provide additional information for the analysis but do not drive the formulation of alternatives.

Long-term Soil Productivity

The proposed action includes some activities that can affect the long-term productivity of the soil. For example, timber harvest and associated activities can cause compaction and displacement of soils and can increase potential for soil erosion. Fire can reduce surface litter, duff, and soil organic matter; and expose soils to a greater risk of erosion. Intense fire can change the chemistry and texture of the upper layer of the soil and can greatly increase the risk of erosion. Standards and guidelines for the Umatilla National Forest "are designed to maintain a minimum of 80 percent of a project area (or cutting unit) in a non-detrimental soil condition with respect to the effects of compaction, displacement, and erosion." (Forest Plan, 4-43).

Aspen

Aspen stands within the analysis area are displaying low vigor and poor reproduction. The general poor condition and lack of regeneration is the result of a combination of factors including fire suppression, conifer encroachment, and grazing of sprouts. There is concern that we need to protect the stands that have been identified and implement aggressive management techniques or risk loss of this vegetative component.

Air Quality

The Clean Air Act dictates consideration of the effects of prescribed burning on air quality and the surrounding communities. Particulate emissions, timing and duration of prescribed burning are items of importance. Concerns have been expressed related to prescribed fire causing short-term degradation to air quality and visibility in the local area.

Heritage Resources

Historic and prehistoric sites exist within the project area, as identified from past cultural heritage surveys. Ground disturbing activities related to harvest and fish structure maintenance would have the potential to disturb these sites that could require avoidance or mitigation.

Recreation

The Bull Prairie Campground is very popular during the summer and fall months and is often at overfull capacity on the summer holiday weekends and during big game hunting season. Proposed harvest units within this developed recreation site raise concerns about safety, access to facilities, and visual quality.

The analysis area is a popular place to hunt and experiences heavy use during hunting seasons. There are approximately 38 dispersed campsites within the analysis area, many near proposed harvest units. Harvest activities, logging traffic, and prescribed burning could change the use of these sites.

Transportation

The District Motorized Access and Travel Management (ATM) Plan (1992) identified the desired open or closed status for each road on the District. During the ATM planning process it was realized that on the ground changes would be required and would be documented through the NEPA process for site specific projects. Two changes to the ATM are proposed in the Rimrock area. Road 2309020 (2.08 miles) would change from open to closed. This road has an earth barricade and has not been accessible to vehicle traffic. Road 2300101 (0.50 miles) would also change from open to closed. During ATM planning this road was left open to allow access to a dispersed campsite. The campsite has not been used for several years and is very close to Wall Creek. In addition to the road closures, 22 existing barricades would be improved. The proposed closures would not change the roaded status of the area.

Noxious Weeds

There are six inventoried, high priority noxious weed species within the Rimrock analysis area. These species are Scotch Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*), diffuse knapweed (*Centaurea diffusa*), hounds tongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*), tansy ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*), Klamath weed (*Hypericum perforatum*), and scotch thistle (*Onopordum acanthium*). These weeds are considered noxious because they displace native vegetation and are rated as high priority because they are invasive, persistent, and prolific reproducers.

At present, weed infestations occur at a level that is feasible to treat. However, it is believed that more infestations may occur than are actually inventoried. The known infestations are treated on an annual basis with manual and chemical treatments and are either decreasing in area of occupation or are remaining static. While the Environmental Assessment for the Management of

Noxious Weeds on the Umatilla National Forest allows for chemical treatment of inventories infestations, any new infestations would be treated manually.

Precautions would be needed if ground-disturbing activities would occur near presently infested locations. Noxious weeds are easily spread by vehicular traffic, bird excrement, wind, logging equipment, livestock, and recreationists especially along transportation corridors. Weeds establish easily where mineral soil is exposed, and certain species are favored by burning.

Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Species – Plants

The project area has been completely covered by botanical surveys. These surveys show that no presently listed plant species occur within the project area.

Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Species – Wildlife

In 1999, the Forest Service requested, from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a list of threatened and endangered species that may occur within the Rimrock planning area. The Fish and Wildlife Service provided that list on June 29, 1999. The following shows species that are currently U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Listed (USDI 1999) or Proposed (USDA 1999) Species and Regional Forester's (R-6) Sensitive Species (USDA 1990a) addressed in the Rimrock Environmental Impact Statement.

Species	Fish and Wildlife Service	Regional Forester's (R-6) "Sensitive" List
Northern Bald eagle (<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>)	Threatened	Sensitive
Steelhead (Middle Columbia River) (<i>Oncorhynchus mykiss</i>)	Threatened	
Bull trout (Columbia River pop) (<i>Salvelinus confluentus</i>)	Threatened	
Snake River Chinook Salmon (<i>Oncorhynchus tshawytscha</i>)	Threatened (Critical habitat)	
Canada lynx¹ (<i>Felis lynx canadensis</i>)	Threatened	Sensitive
Gray wolf² (<i>Canis lupus</i>)	Threatened	
Columbia spotted frog (<i>Rana luteiventris</i>)	Not listed by US F&WS.	Sensitive
California wolverine (<i>Gulo gulo luteus</i>)	Not listed by US F&WS. Identified as a "species of concern"	Sensitive
Gray flycatcher (<i>Empidonax virighlli</i>)	Not listed by US F&WS.	Sensitive

Species	Fish and Wildlife Service	Regional Forester's (R-6) "Sensitive" List
Redband trout (<i>Oncorhynchus mykiss gibbsi</i>)	Not listed by US F&WS. Identified as a "species of concern"	Sensitive
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Canada lynx was identified as "proposed" for listing in the June 1999 letter from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Its status was changed to "Threatened" in 2000 2. Gray wolf was not identified as a listed species in the June 1999 letter from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 		

Three additional species, the Pacific western big-eared bat, the Preble's shrew, and the Blue Mountain cryptochian were shown as sensitive species in the Rimrock DEIS, but have been removed from the Regional Forester's Sensitive Species list.

An active bald eagle nest was found in May 1994. This nest is located approximately 2 miles outside of the analysis area. Foraging habitat, associated with the nesting eagle, occurs within the analysis area.

Regional Forester's Sensitive species considered in the analysis area include the California wolverine. Surveys for furbearers have been conducted in the analysis area since 1991, and this species has not been documented. Potential natal denning habitat for wolverine does not exist in the analysis or adjacent areas.

Management Indicator Species

The Forest Plan identifies seven "management indicator species" that were selected to represent animals associated with the major habitat types on the Forest (Forest Plan, page 2-9). The habitat requirements of the selected indicator species are presumed to represent those of a larger group of wildlife species. The following table shows the seven management indicator species, along with the habitat types they represent.

Species	Habitat Types
Steelhead (anadromous fish)	Streams/riparian habitats
Rainbow trout (resident)	Streams/riparian habitats
Rocky Mountain elk	General forest habitat and winter ranges
Pileated woodpecker	Dead/down tree habitat (mixed conifer) in mature and old growth stands
Northern three-toed woodpecker	Dead/down tree habitat (lodgepole pine) in mature and old growth stands
Pine marten	Mature and old growth stands at high elevations
Primary cavity excavators	Dead/down tree (snag) habitat

The Forest Management Indicator Species: steelhead, rainbow trout, Rocky Mountain elk, northern three-toed woodpecker, pileated woodpecker, and a guild of primary cavity excavators inhabit the Rimrock analysis area. Another indicator species, the pine marten, is believed to be absent from the area because historical records do not indicate its presence and there have been no documented sightings.

Summer and winter foraging habitat for the Rocky Mountain elk is present throughout the entire analysis area. Elk calving and rearing areas are also abundant. These areas are important and must be maintained to continue to provide quality forage and calving habitat.

Comments from ODFW (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife) indicate a concern that commercial thinning will decrease cover and increase vulnerability of big game during hunting season. They have also expressed concern that with the combined loss of cover and the increase in management activities, there is also the potential for elk to move to private lands resulting in impacts to crops, pastures, and fences. They support prescribed burning but would rather that it occur prior to April 15 to protect nesting birds or in the fall at a time that does not conflict with hunting season.

The pileated woodpecker represents species that require old growth habitat characteristics including snags, logs, high canopy closure, and multi-layered forest stands. The Dedicated Old Growth (C1) in the Rimrock analysis area is not designated for the pileated woodpecker because it does not meet acreage requirements; however, pileated woodpeckers are known to nest and forage within the area.

The northern three-toed woodpecker is an indicator species for mature and old growth lodgepole pine forest habitat (C2). There are no old growth lodgepole pine areas in the Rimrock area. However, the Dedicated Old Growth (C1) patches scattered within the planning area do function as viable habitat. Of the Dedicated Old Growth patches in the planning area, all are designated for three-toed woodpeckers. While the northern three-toed woodpecker is believed to occur in the analysis area, no observation records of its presence exist.

Proposed management activities would not occur within the designated C1 areas and habitat conditions should remain stable for both the pileated and the northern three-toed woodpeckers.

Species of Interest

The northern goshawk, white-headed woodpecker, spotted frog, bald eagle, mid-Columbia steelhead, bull trout, Canada lynx, pale western big-eared bat, pacific western big-eared bat, spotted bat, California wolverine, small-footed myotis, long-eared myotis, long-legged myotis, Yuma myotis, olive-sided flycatcher, northern sagebrush lizard, pacific lamprey, interior redband trout, Washington monkeyflower, little mouseltail, and arrow-leaf thelypody are addressed in this analysis because of public interest at the local or regional level, or because they are identified as listed species, proposed species, candidate species or species of concern by the Fish and Wildlife Service (updated Federal Register 1997 list). A goshawk sighting occurred in 1999 and is believed to be nesting in a stand along Road 23. A goshawk nest was found within the project area in 2002 near Indian Creek. The white-headed woodpecker is not known to occur although potential nesting and foraging habitat is scattered throughout the analysis area. The spotted frog is suspected to occur. Suitable habitat for the frog occurs in scattered locations (wetlands) across the analysis area. Suitable habitat for the frog occurs along Indian Creek, Wilson Creek, Wall Creek, Bull Prairie, and the wet meadows and springs throughout the analysis area. No habitat for the Canada lynx exists in the analysis area.

Issues Outside the Scope of this Analysis

Concerns that were not considered to be key or other issues will not be analyzed in depth to narrow the scope of this analysis (40 CFR 1501.7(a)(3)). These issues were determined to be outside the scope of the proposed project because they are resolved through higher direction or were not relevant to this proposal.

Bull Prairie Reservoir Excavation

There is an opportunity to improve fishing at Bull Prairie Reservoir. A proposal was made to dredge or excavate material from designated areas around the shoreline of the lake. The shoreline has silted in over the years since the construction of this facility. As the shoreline has

silted in, cattails and other vegetation have filled in along the shoreline. While this vegetation provides habitat for wildlife, birds, and waterfowl, it also restricts fishing access. Removal of this material would create several deeper holes along the shoreline and improve fishing opportunities. Addressing this issue is outside the purpose and need of this analysis.

Fish Genetics

Bull Prairie Reservoir is stocked by ODFW with hatchery fingerlings on a biannual basis. Concerns have been raised about genetic effects of hatchery fish on natural fish populations, especially those that have been listed as “threatened” or “endangered.” The decision whether or not to release hatchery stock into Bull Prairie is a State responsibility and is therefore outside the scope of this analysis.

Harvest From Private Land

Residents on Wall Creek have concerns about improving the crossings on Forest Road 23. The improved crossings would open up the road for haul use by private landowners within the national forest who may wish to use the road to harvest their property. They have suggested that a weight restriction could be imposed to prevent timber haul on this road and reduce further impacts to Big Wall Creek and the fish populations. The decision to harvest private land is not controlled by the Forest Service and therefore outside the scope of this analysis.

Project Record

This FEIS hereby incorporates by reference the Project Record (40 CFR 1502.21). The Project Record contains Specialist Reports and other technical documentation used to support the analysis and conclusions in this FEIS. These Specialist Reports are for Upland Forest Vegetation, Recreation, Fish and Aquatic Habitat, Water Resources, Fuels/Air Quality, Transportation, Non-Forest Vegetation, Wildlife Habitat, Economics and Social, and Range for the Rimrock Ecosystem Restoration Projects.

Relying on Specialist Reports and the Project Record helps implement the CEQ Regulations’ provision that agencies should reduce NEPA paperwork (40 CFR 1500.4), that EISs shall be analytic rather than encyclopedic, and that EISs shall be kept concise and no longer than necessary (40CFR 1502.2). The objective is to furnish enough site-specific information to demonstrate a reasoned consideration of the environmental impacts of the alternatives and how these impacts can be mitigated, without repeating detailed analysis and background information available elsewhere. The Project Record is available for review at the Heppner Ranger District, Heppner, Oregon.