

C3 BIG GAME WINTER RANGE

GOAL

MANAGE BIG GAME WINTER RANGE TO PROVIDE HIGH LEVELS OF POTENTIAL HABITAT EFFECTIVENESS AND HIGH QUALITY FORAGE FOR BIG GAME SPECIES.

DESCRIPTION

The Big Game Winter Range strategy applies to all or parts of winter ranges delineated in coordination with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Washington Department of Wildlife. Big game winter ranges are generally located on the lower elevation, 'front' country, of the Forest. The designated winter range boundaries encompass areas that provide habitat for 90 percent or more of the wintering elk population during the winter use period 6 years out of 10. Each winter range is assigned a winter use period ranging from 4 to 4 1/2 months. A total of 21 winter range areas are identified on the Umatilla National Forest totaling 277,677 acres.

All or parts of the following defined big game winter ranges are included in the management area:

WINTER RANGE	NO.	STATE
Touchet	1	WA
Tucannon	2	WA
Asotin	3	WA
Wenaha	5	WA/OR
Wenatchee	6	WA
Phillips Creek	10	OR
McKay Creek	11	OR
Birch Creek	12	OR
Albee	13	OR
Cable Creek	14	OR
Bridge Creek	15	OR
Bone Point	16	OR
Desolation	17	OR
Heppner	18	OR
Kahler Basin	19	OR
Monument	20	OR
Mt. Emily	21	OR

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

Big game winter ranges will appear primarily as a mosaic of managed forests, brush patches, and large grasslands. Forested areas will contain a mix of harvested even-aged, uneven-aged, and natural stands, creating patterns of cover patches and forage areas for big game.

Management activities may be locally apparent: created openings will range up to 25 acres in size. Where natural potential exists, cover areas will be developed and/or maintained to occur as groups of larger trees, 10 acres or more in size, with dense canopies. Use of prescribed fire will be apparent. Areas of early spring green-up and other forage changes due to prescribed fires and other means will occur in a mosaic pattern over the winter ranges; quality forage will be abundant because of management. 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. Livestock use will compliment big game management. As a result of management, quality big game habitat will be achieved and assist in meeting state big game populations and productivity goals, and Forest recreation objectives. During an 'average' winter, most of the wintering big game will remain on public lands keeping impacts to private lands low.

MANAGEMENT AREAS STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

RECREATION

A Roaded Modified social and physical setting Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS), may result in meeting the goal. Dispersed recreation activities that meet the goal are permitted.

Recreation site modification and facility development levels 1 and 2 (see Glossary) are permitted.

Access will be mostly for walk-in or horseback opportunities on trails or closed roads, with some road-oriented activities.

Off-highway vehicle (OHV) use will be permitted on designated routes. OHV use will be curtailed by closures where this use is determined to be detrimental to wintering big game species.

Trail and associated facility construction, reconstruction, and/or maintenance shall be permitted. Trail activities and use will be curtailed by closures where and when determined to be detrimental to wintering big game species.

VISUAL

A range of visual quality objectives from Retention to Maximum Modification will apply.

CULTURAL

Meet Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines.

WILDLIFE

Elk habitat will be managed on designated big game winter ranges to achieve a habitat effectiveness index of no less than 70, including discounts for roads open to motorized vehicular traffic as described in Wildlife Habitats in Managed Forests (Thomas and others 1979). The habitat effectiveness standard will be measured on an individual winter range basis.

Cover

Marginal and Satisfactory cover will be managed to the extent possible to meet optimum size and distribution criteria as described in 'Habitat Effectiveness Index for Elk on Blue Mountain Winter Ranges' (Thomas and others 1988).

Where possible, a minimum of 10 percent of each winter range will be maintained and managed as satisfactory cover (15-20 percent is desirable). If this is not attainable because of low natural potential, the highest possible percentage of satisfactory cover will be created or maintained. Where possible, a minimum of 30 percent of an area will be managed as total cover (satisfactory and marginal).

Stands managed for satisfactory cover will meet the following criteria:

- Provide stand width of 600-1,200 feet. Exceptions may be made according to Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines;
- be at least 40 ft. in height with a canopy closure of at least 70 percent in mixed conifer types and no less than 50 percent in the ponderosa pine types; and
- should be at least 10 acres in size. Larger cover areas are preferred.

The desired cover condition will generally appear as a multi-layered stand and meet elk 'hiding' criteria by obscuring 90 percent of a standing elk at a distance of 200 feet or less.

Marginal cover will include stands no less than 10 feet in height, with a canopy closure of at least 40 percent, and meet elk 'hiding' criteria.

Forest stand harvest and management may be permitted in cover areas to meet long-term, big game cover objectives as determined on each winter range. Forest stands that can only qualify as marginal cover due to site potential (generally ponderosa pine stands) may receive timber harvest and management (see Timber) as long as big game habitat management objectives are met.

Forage

Both the quantity and quality of forage for big game will be enhanced or maintained through improved livestock grazing systems, controlled seasonal use, an active prescribed burning program, and other measures.

Available forage will be allocated to meet big game management objectives. Available forage in excess to wildlife needs may be allocated to domestic livestock.

Big game forage and cover improvement projects such as prescribed burning, seeding and planting, browse planting, release, mechanical ground and vegetative disturbance, fertilization, and others may be employed. Structural improvements may be used to protect these investments.

Other

All management activities will be restricted, where necessary, during the big game winter use period of December 1 through March 30 or April 15.

Management activities will not create barriers to impede movement of big game animals.

Dead and down tree habitat will be managed to provide or maintain 60 percent of the potential population level for all primary cavity excavators as described in Wildlife Habitats in Managed Forests (Thomas and others 1979).

FISH

Fish habitat improvement projects and their maintenance will be permitted.

RANGE

Domestic livestock grazing is permitted at Range Management Strategy C. All available range and livestock management practices consistent with the primary management goal of maintaining or enhancing the big game winter ranges may be used.

Structural range improvements are permitted to the extent they are compatible with big game winter ranges. This may entail the use of let-down fences, etc.

TIMBER

Timber will be managed on a scheduled basis with the exceptions noted below. All timber management practices and intensities consistent with achieving the big game and other wildlife habitat goals will be permitted. The selected silvicultural systems applied to timber stands within suitable forest lands will be based on a site-specific examination and analysis and will be designed to achieve wildlife habitat management goals.

EXCEPTION: Designated big game winter range located between Skookum Creek and Potamus Creek on the Heppner District will have no scheduled timber harvest activity during the first 10 years following approval of this Plan.

Harvest practices will emphasize uneven-aged management including individual tree and group selection, but may also include even-aged management practices of clearcutting, shelterwood, and seed tree. Salvage of mortality is to be permitted, consistent with meeting objectives; commercial thinnings may also be utilized consistent with the need to maintain satisfactory cover. Other permitted cultural practices will include natural and artificial regeneration, planting

genetic stock when available, precommercial thinning, and animal damage control protection. Logging and road building should be done with conventional practices including helicopter.

Fuelwood cutting is permitted consistent with the established goals of enhancing big game habitat and maintaining prescribed levels of dead and down tree habitat.

WATER AND SOIL

Meet Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines.

MINERALS AND ENERGY

Meet Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines.

LANDS

Delineated winter range acres in Federal ownership will generally be retained.

Acquire inholdings within delineated winter range lines where opportunities exist.

Other Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines for lands and land uses apply.

TRANSPORTATION

Roads will be closed to motorized use as needed, and especially during the winter use period, to meet big game habitat effectiveness objectives, unless the roads are needed as through routes or to access private lands.

FIRE

For moderate to high intensity wildfires (average flame lengths over 2 ft.), all wildfire suppression strategies may be emphasized.

Under appropriate fire prediction conditions, wildfires may be permitted to play a natural role on the winter ranges to meet big game habitat objectives.

FUELS

Fuels should not exceed an average of 9 tons per acre in the 0 to 3-inch size class and an average residue depth of 6 inches, as depicted in the Photo Series for Quantifying Forest Residues (Technical Report PNW 52) (USDA Forest Service 1976b):

Even-aged Management	3-PP-4-PC	4-PP-1 -TH	1 -PP&ASSOC-4-PC	2-LP-3-PC
Uneven-aged Management	2-PP4-PC	2-LP-3-PC	4-PP-1 -TH	5-PP&ASSOC4-PC

All types of prescribed fire may be used including broadcast burning, underburning, or range burning.

PESTS

Use integrated pest management (IPM) principles and strategies in managing insects and disease to meet management objectives. Monitoring and detection of pest conditions and populations will be done so that corrective treatments consistent with resource objectives can be prescribed at the earliest opportunity.

Consistent with resource objectives, protect forest stands (habitats) by practicing prevention activities. Emphasis will be on the prevention of stand and fuels conditions that favor pests increases above epidemic levels. Aggressively suppress insects and disease using cost efficient strategies when outbreaks threaten resource objectives.

