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Department of
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Forest Service

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Welcome Station Trail Connections Project Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact

**Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District
Deschutes National Forest
Deschutes County, Oregon**

Township 18 South, Range 11 East, Sections 5, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21, 22, 28, 32,
and 33 Willamette Meridian

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This Decision Notice documents my decision and rationale for the selection of Alternative 2 of the Welcome Station Trail Connections Environmental Assessment. Alternative 2 is described in the Environmental Assessment (EA, Ch. 2.4.2 pg. 27-31, Ch. 2.5 pg. 34-38) and on pages 7 to 14 of this decision. The Welcome Station Trail Connections project will provide a trailhead and approximately 3.4 miles of paved trail and 13 miles of mountain bike trail connections from the City of Bend, Oregon to the Welcome Station and existing mountain bike trail systems.

Opportunity to comment on the Environmental Assessment (EA) was provided November 22, 2013 through December 23, 2013. All comments submitted during the comment period for the EA and throughout the planning process have been considered and evaluated.

These additional connections will establish the Welcome Station as a portal to public lands, provide connections between established biking and hiking trail networks, and create an opportunity for multi-modal access and alternative forms of transportation between the city and public lands.

The Welcome Station Trail Connections project is located on the Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District on the Deschutes National Forest west of the City of Bend. The project area includes area parallel to the Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway (also known as Highway 46, FSR 46, Cascade Lakes Highway) from the Forest boundary to the Welcome Station, area parallel to Forest Service Road (FSR) 41 between the Slough Day Use access road and Highway 46, and areas within the Phil's trail system between the Welcome Station and Skyliners road (FSR 4601) (Figure 1).

Legal descriptions are as follows: Township 18 South, Range 11 East, Sections 5, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21, 22, 28, 32, and 33.

Welcome Station Trail Connections - Vicinity Map

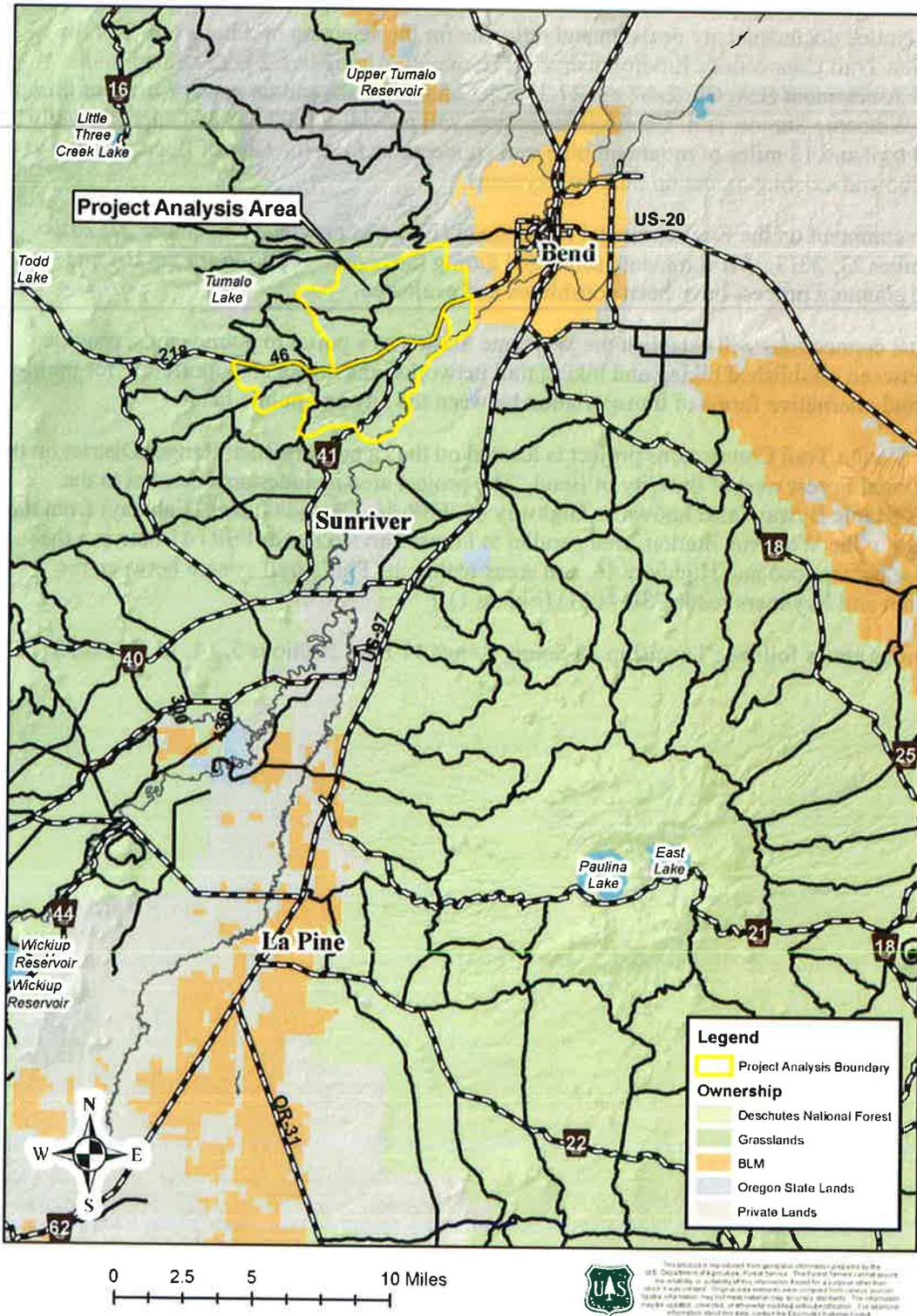


Figure 1: Welcome Station Trail Connections vicinity map

DECISION

It is my decision to implement Alternative 2 as described below. The full description of Alternative 2 can be found in the EA (EA, Ch.2.4.2 pg. 27-31) and in the section below. This decision addresses the purpose and need to provide non-motorized access between the Welcome Station and the City of Bend and between the Welcome Station and the Wanoga, Deschutes River and Phil's trail systems.

DESCRIPTION OF SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

Alternative 2 (Figure 2) was designed to meet the purpose and need to provide non-motorized access between the Welcome Station and the City of Bend and between the Welcome Station and the Wanoga, Deschutes River and Phil's trail systems. In order to accomplish the purpose and need the Deschutes National Forest will construct a paved non-motorized path, designated single-track mountain bike trails, and a trailhead facility on National Forest System lands adjacent to and around Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway Welcome Station. This project will establish the Welcome Station as a portal to public lands, provide connections between established biking and hiking trail networks, and create an opportunity for multi-modal access and alternative forms of transportation between the city and public lands. This project is consistent with Forest Plan standards and guidelines, laws, regulations and other policies

Specifically, this decision includes:

TRAILHEAD CONSTRUCTION

A new trailhead to accommodate approximately 40 vehicles will be constructed on the south side of Cascade Lakes Highway, approximately 0.5 miles west of the Forest boundary with the City of Bend. The parking area will utilize the existing access road to the dispersed parking area that has become known as 'Good Dog!' and also referred to as the Entrada area. The area's trees and a natural depression will help screen the trailhead from the Scenic Byway. This trailhead will serve users of the paved path as well as visitors currently accessing the area for dispersed recreation. It will include graveled parking areas, kiosks with visitor information, and interpretive signs and information. Interpretive signage will be designed to discourage winter use of the key elk area (WL-45, LRMP pg. 4-56). Restroom facilities may be installed in the future to address sanitation concerns if they arise. Development of this trailhead and interpretation of the 1990 Awbrey Burn is identified as the second priority for enhancement and development in the Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan (behind development of the Welcome Station).

TRAIL CONSTRUCTION

Trail 1 - Paved Path (3.4 miles)

The path will connect the Bend Park and Recreation District Haul Road trail to the Welcome Station paralleling the Cascade Lakes Highway. The proposed non-motorized paved path will be 10 feet wide with approximately 1 to 2.5 foot shoulders on each side. Vegetation clearing limits for the path will be

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less than 20 feet. Final design of this trail may include one to two turnouts to allow visitors a place to rest. The path will be closed to motorized uses other than wheelchairs and mobility devices¹.

Segment 1a (3.3 miles): Connects the Haul Road trail to the Welcome Station. Approximately 2 miles of the path will be located on an existing road that has previously been closed to public motor vehicle access.

A surface crossing of Cascade Lakes Highway will be located west of the intersection with the Meadow day use access road.

Segment 1b (0.1 miles): Connects the paved path north of Cascade Lakes Highway through the Cascade Lakes bicycle and pedestrian underpass (located east of the intersection with FSR 41). Construction of the paved path accessing the underpass will require some excavation. Site revegetation and constructing of terrace planting areas with finished grades will prevent erosion and hazardous drainage problems that may result in long-term maintenance issues for the paved path. Native vegetation will provide screening from the Cascade Lakes Highway. Proposed mountain bike trails (2a and 2b) will provide connections to the Seventh Mountain Resort and the Wanoga mountain bike trail system.

Trail 2 – Wanoga Trail System Mountain Bike Trail Connections (4.9 miles)

The trail will connect Tyler’s Traverse and Storm King mountain bike trails to the Cascade Lakes Highway bicycle and pedestrian undercrossing and will provide a connection between the Wanoga mountain bike trail system, Seventh Mountain Resort, the Welcome Station, and Phil’s trail system. These segments of single-track mountain bike trail will be of easier to moderate difficulty.

Segment 2a (4.8 miles): Parallels the northwest side of FSR 41 from Tyler’s Traverse mountain bike trail (across from the Slough Day Use access road) and connects into the paved path near the bicycle and pedestrian underpass.

Surface crossing of FSR 41 will be located near the intersection with the Lava Island access road (FSR 4100800).

Segment 2b (0.1 miles): Connects the bicycle and pedestrian underpass to the road currently used by Seventh Mountain Resort customers to access the Forest.

Trail 3 – Phil’s Trail System Mountain Bike Trail Connections (5.5 miles)

The trails will connect the Welcome Station, Phil’s trail system, and the Cascade Lakes Highway bicycle and pedestrian undercrossing, which will provide a connection to the Wanoga mountain bike trail system and Seventh Mountain Resort. These segments of single-track mountain bike trail will be of easier difficulty.

¹ A wheelchair or mobility device, including one that is battery-powered, is a device that is designed solely for use by a mobility-impaired person for locomotion and that is suitable for use in an indoor pedestrian area (Title V, sec. 507c, of the ADA; 36 CFR 212.1). “Designed solely for use by a mobility-impaired person for locomotion” means that the wheelchair was designed and manufactured solely for use for mobility by a person with a disability. Thus, this term does not include a motorized unit that has been retrofitted to make it usable by a person with a disability. “Suitable for use in an indoor pedestrian area” means usable inside a home, mall, courthouse, or other indoor pedestrian area.

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Segments 3a, 3b and 3c: Creates a loop trail from the Welcome Station and connects into the Phil's trail system. Approximately 0.7 miles of the trail will be located on an existing closed road.

Trail 4 – COD Trail Re-route (1.8 miles)

A section of COD mountain bike trail will be re-routed with the newly constructed section taking advantage of natural terrain to maintain the 'more difficult' trail rating. A section of the trail that is currently rated as easier difficulty (5c) will be obliterated.

Trail 5 – Trail Obliteration and Rehab (1.1 mile)

Segment 5a (0.1 miles): A short section of trail that currently connects COD trail to a surface crossing of Cascade Lakes Highway near FSR 41 will be closed, obliterated and revegetated. Bike traffic will be directed onto the paved path through the bicycle and pedestrian undercrossing to connect to proposed mountain bike trails (2a and 2b) which will provide connections to the Seventh Mountain Resort and the Wanoga mountain bike trail system.

Segment 5b (0.6 miles): A section of the existing COD trail will be obliterated. This section parallels the existing ODP trail and is redundant.

Segment 5c (0.4 miles): Re-routes a section of COD mountain bike trail that is currently rated as easier difficulty. A new section of COD trail will be constructed to take advantage of natural terrain in order to maintain a difficult trail rating (trail 4).

Trail 6 – Connection from the Trailhead to the Deschutes River Trails (0.3 mile)

The trail will connect from the trailhead to the Deschutes River trails. The single track mountain bike trail will be of easier to moderate difficulty and use existing user-created trails and closed roads.

CONSTRUCTION SPECIFICS

Short-term safety hazards, such as construction traffic and falling trees along roads and near construction sites, will be mitigated through contract safety provisions and are not anticipated to impact public safety. Standing trees that lean over or near roadways and present a hazard to public safety due to conditions such as deterioration or physical damage to roots, trunks, stems, or limbs will be removed from the project area.

Trailhead

Parking pods at the trailhead will be designed to avoid large trees (greater than 21 inches dbh) and to utilize as much of the existing vegetation as possible to provide screening from the Cascade Lakes Highway and shade for users. Trailhead construction may be accomplished in phases by initially providing approximately 20 parking spaces and then expanding the trailhead to accommodate up to 40 vehicles as the need presents itself or as resources become available.

Paved Path

At this time, the final construction design for the path is not complete. Based on initial design and on-the-ground surveys it has been estimated that fewer than 100 trees between 8 and 15 inches dbh and less than 25 trees between 16 and 20 inches dbh will be removed. No snags or green trees over 21 inches

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dbh are identified for removal. If hazard trees develop prior to construction, some snags or trees classified as a hazard might need to be removed for safety purposes. There is the possibility that fewer or more trees could be removed; in the case of the latter then the resource specialist will be consulted to ensure that effects are still within the acceptable levels and were disclosed in the EA.

Mountain Bike Trails

Trail placement for mountain bike trails is expected to avoid trees over 6 inches dbh and clumps of smaller diameter trees. Because of the smaller width of mountain bike trails many trees can be avoided; therefore no estimate on tree removal was made. Trail construction will be 24 to 48 inches wide with vegetation clearance limits of less than 6 feet. The max width for the majority of trails is not predicted to be over 24 inches but depending on sight, distances and terrain up to 48 inches may be needed.

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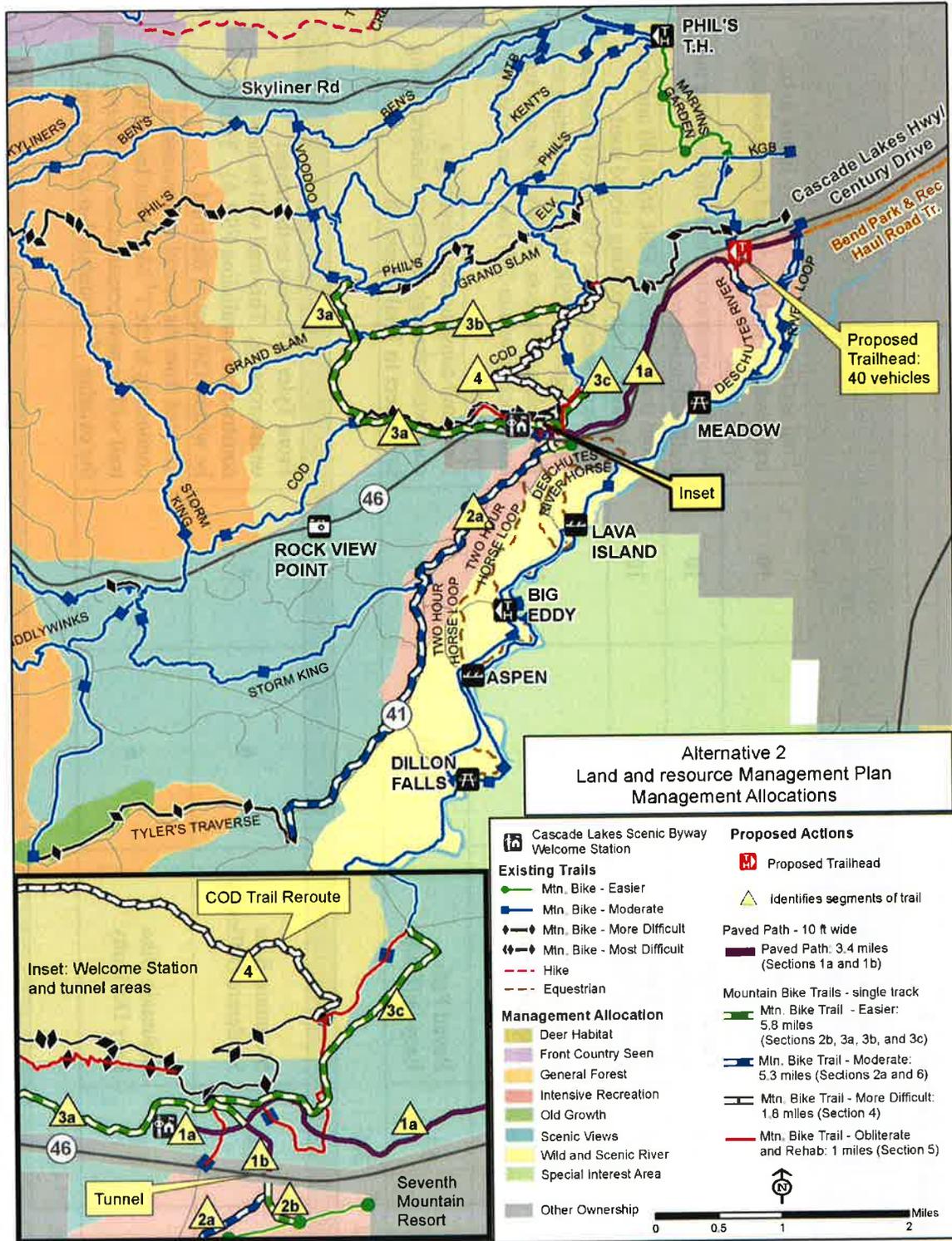


Figure 2: Welcome Station Trails Alternative 2

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The following table displays trail specifics for Alternative 2.

Table 1: Trail specifics for Alternative 2.

Trail Section	Miles	Designed Use and Difficulty Rating	Maximum Clearing Limits (feet)	Maximum Trail Width (feet)	Section Description
Trail 1a	0.5	Paved Path Easy Difficulty	20	10	Trail section begins at the city limits to the trailhead and will be located on an existing closed road.
	0.4	Paved Path Easy Difficulty	20	10	New trail construction to avoid crossing the trailhead access road.
	0.6	Paved Path Easy Difficulty	20	10	From the trailhead to FSR 4600100 and will be located on an existing closed road.
	1.8	Paved Path Easy Difficulty	20	10	Trail continues on the NW side of Cascade Lakes Highway (FSR 46) to connecting to the Welcome Station. This will be new trail construction within 100 feet of an existing open road.
Trail 1b	0.1	Paved Path Easy Difficulty	20	10	New trail construction providing a connection through the tunnel undercrossing to connect to Trail 2a and 2b.
Total	3.4				
Trail 2a	4.8	Mountain Bike Moderate Difficulty	6	4	From Tyler's Travers to the tunnel undercrossing. This trail will be new construction paralleling FSR 41. Trail will be within 150 feet of the road.
Trail 2b	0.1	Mountain Bike Easy Difficulty	6	4	Located from the tunnel undercrossing connecting to the 7 th Mountain Inn. This trail will be new construction connecting to the existing 7 th Mountain Inn access road.
Total	4.9				

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Trail Section	Miles	Designed Use and Difficulty Rating	Maximum Clearing Limits (feet)	Maximum Trail Width (feet)	Section Description
Trail 3a	0.6	Mountain Bike Easy Difficulty	6	4	Begins at the Welcome Station and makes a clockwise loop. New trail construction.
	1	Mountain Bike Easy Difficulty	6	4	Begins at the Welcome Station and makes a clockwise loop. This section is located on an existing closed road.
	1.5	Mountain Bike Easy Difficulty	6	4	Continues a clockwise loop and includes a connection to the Voodoo trail. New trail construction, paralleling FSR 4610.
Trail 3b	1.7	Mountain Bike Easy Difficulty	6	4	From section 3b, makes a clockwise loop. New trail construction, paralleling FSR 4610.
Trail 3c	0.6	Mountain Bike Easy Difficulty	6	4	From section 3b, makes a clockwise loop. New trail construction, rerouting trail to an easier alignment.
	0.1	Mountain Bike Easy Difficulty	6	4	Continues a clockwise loop. New trail construction.
TOTAL	5.5				
Trail 4	2.4	Mountain Bike More Difficult	6	4	Relocate the existing trail to provide a new COD reroute that maintains the more difficult rating.
Total	2.4				
Trail 5	0.7	Mountain Bike Easy Difficulty	6	4	Obliterate existing trail.
	0.7	Mountain Bike More Difficult	6	4	Obliterate existing trail.
	0.2	User Created	6	4	Obliterate existing trail.
Total	1.6				

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Trail Section	Miles	Designed Use and Difficulty Rating	Maximum Clearing Limits (feet)	Maximum Trail Width (feet)	Section Description
Trail 6	0.1	Mountain Bike Moderate Difficulty	6	4	New trail construction beginning at the trailhead and connecting to the Deschutes River trails.
	0.2	Mountain Bike Moderate Difficulty	6	4	New trail construction beginning at the trailhead and connecting to the Deschutes River trails. This section will utilize existing user-created trails and closed roads.
Total	0.3				

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

I have decided to implement Alternative 2 in this decision because of how well the alternative meets the purpose and need. This decision is based on my review of the analysis presented in the Welcome Station Trail Connections Environmental Assessment and the comments received from scoping and the comment period that lasted from November 22, 2013 to December 23, 2013. In selecting Alternative 2, I carefully reviewed disclosures in Chapter 3 of the EA. The analysis discloses predicted environmental consequences of the actions, including effects to recreation, wildlife, cultural, botanical, and soil resources. My conclusions are based on a review of the entire project record.

ALTERNATIVE 2 RESPONDING TO THE PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of this project is to provide non-motorized paved trail connectivity between the Welcome Station and the City of Bend, developed trailhead parking near Bend and mountain bike trail connections between the Welcome Station and the Wanoga, Deschutes River and Phil's trail systems. This would establish the Welcome Station as a portal to public lands, provide connections between established biking and hiking trail networks, and create an opportunity for multi-modal access and alternative forms of transportation between the city and public lands.

Alternative 2 of this decision responds to the purpose and need listed above by:

The Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan identifies enhancement and development priorities for the corridor. A visitor information center (the Welcome Station) was identified as the first priority and development of a trailhead and interpretive site near the Forest boundary with Bend to provide parking for forest users and tell the story of the 1990 Awbrey Hall fire is the second priority. The Plan also identifies one strategy to accomplish the goal of preserving the Byway as a major attraction in the Pacific Northwest is to create hubs for trail connectivity and multi-modal transit opportunities. Providing approximately 3.4 miles of a paved trail and close to 13 miles of mountain bike trails will establish the Welcome Station as a portal to public lands while providing connections between established trail networks and providing for alternative forms of non-motorized transportation. This will also help accomplish the shared vision of trail connections between Bend and the Welcome Station.

As stated above, the Scenic Byway Plan identified the development of a trailhead site near the Forest boundary with Bend. Constructing a trailhead to accommodate up to 40 vehicles will achieve this goal. Planned parking in this location is ideal for several reasons: 1) dispersed parking that is currently on going presents a safety concern for drivers, pedestrians and dogs; 2) the area is already disturbed; and 3) to the extent possible the existing vegetation will be maintained to provide screening from the highway

This decision will establish the Welcome Station as a portal to public lands, provide connections between established biking and hiking trail networks, and create an opportunity for multi-modal access and alternative forms of transportation between the city and public lands.

ALTERNATIVE 2 RESPONDING TO THE KEY ISSUES

Issues and concerns were raised by the public during the development of this project. In response, the EA (Ch. 1.9.3) identified two key issues: 1) *potential impacts on key elk habitat area* and 2) *providing parking for existing users and new use of the proposed paved trail.*

The following table compares each alternative, Alternative 1 No Action with Alternative 2 and Alternative 3, to the key issues and indicators identified in Chapter 1.9.3 (pg. 18-19) of the EA.

Table 2: Comparison of how the Alternatives Respond to Key Issues

Comparison Factors		Alternatives		
Key Issue	Key Indicator(s)	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3
Managing for recreation in a Key Elk Area (KEA)	Miles of trail within the KEA	50.01	60.81	56.05
	Providing parking for existing users and new use of Trail 1			
	Number of trailhead parking spaces	Undefined Parking Estimated Maximum of 19	40	22
	Parking area square footage	11,325	30,000	15,000
	Number of accessible parking spaces	0	2	2

Key Issue 1: Potential Impacts on key elk habitat area

Detailed discussions about this key issue can be found in the EA pages 18-19, 38, 81-84, 116-120.

The project area overlaps 6,631 acres of the Ryan Ranch Key Elk Area (KEA). The selected alternative, Alternative 2, will construct 10.8 miles of new trail within the Ryan Ranch KEA. Habitat loss is not a concern because I have kept trail locations within approximately 150 feet of existing roads to limit the amount of additional area that is subject to disturbance and to reduce habitat fragmentation. The Forest Plan has acknowledged that several KEAs, including Ryan Ranch KEA, are within important recreation areas and has provided measures to minimize conflicts between recreation and wildlife (WL-45, LRMP pg. 4-56).

There are currently 50.01 miles of designated non-motorized trails within the Ryan Ranch KEA a non-motorized trail density of 1.49 mi/mi². Alternative 2 will increase the amount of designated non-motorized trails in the KEA to 60.81 miles total with an overall trail density of 1.77 mi/mi², an 18% increase above baseline. To minimize impacts to elk I have kept trail locations within approximately 150 feet of existing roads to limit the amount of additional area that is subject to disturbance and to reduce habitat fragmentation. Trail 2a parallels FSR 41, a road that is currently open to the public year round. Forest Plan direction for the KEA (WL-45, LRMP pg. 4-56) states that facilities will not be developed nor activities promoted which would encourage public use during the winter. I also recommend that interpretation material strongly discouraging winter use of the KEA should be provided at the trailhead. Providing interpretative material that describes the importance of winter range for big game species can reduce winter use in the area and potential impacts to big game.

Key Issue 2: Providing parking for existing users and new use of the paved trail (Trail 1)

Detailed discussions about this key issue can be found in the EA pages 18-19, 38, 64, 70 and 73-74.

The trailhead location is primarily used by Bend residents and visitors of nearby resorts for walking, running and biking. It includes the area locally known as 'GoodDog!' which is popular with visitors recreating with dogs. This dispersed parking area has on average six vehicles parking there at one time with a maximum of 19 vehicles at one time. A concern was raised that 20 spaces at the trailhead will not be sufficient to support existing use and new use of the paved trail (Trail 1). Based on observed vehicle counts in 2013, this dispersed parking area has, on average, six vehicles parking there at one time with a maximum of 19 vehicles recorded at one time. Forest Service personnel has observed that when the number of vehicles parked at this site exceeds 8 to 10, there is potential for the safety of drivers, pedestrians and dogs to be compromised. The selected alternative includes up to 40 parking spaces at the trailhead. This parking area will safely accommodate existing use and the additional growth in use that is anticipated due to the development of the paved multi-modal path. The selected alternative also provides two accessible parking spaces and accessible trail connectivity. Currently there is no opportunity for accessibility. I have decided that the trailhead may be constructed in phases by initially providing approximately 20 parking spaces and then expanding the trailhead to accommodate up to 40 vehicles as the need presents itself or as resources become available.

CONSIDERATION OF OTHER PUBLIC INPUT

My decision to select Alternative 2 is based on thoughtful consideration of the public input received. Approximately 50 comments were received during scoping and 10 comments were received during the 30-day comment period. Appendix C of the EA details the consideration and response to public comments received during the 30-day comment period and Chapter 1.9 of the EA (pg. 15) discusses evaluation of scoping comments some grouped as non-key issue comments and other were brought forth as key issues in this analysis.

Other comments not described in detail in this decision but which were considered in my analysis included concerns about topics such as path design, parking, maintenance, funding, resource concerns (wildlife, botany, water, recreation), and other comments concerning NEPA regulations. These comments have been responded to in Appendix C of the EA.

Safety

Comment: Commenters brought up public safety concerns with Trail 1a's surface crossing of Cascade Lakes Highway, located west of the intersection with the Meadow day use access road.

Response: The safety of the highway surface crossing was raised during scoping and I determined this to be a non-key issue (EA Ch. 1.9.1 pg. 15) because the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) determined that the location is the safest crossing point for the public. The EA evaluated the alternatives described below to avoid a surface crossing. These alternatives were considered (EA Ch. 2.3 pg. 23) but eliminated from detailed study because of several reasons as listed in the EA.

Rerouting Trail 1a to the southeast side of the highway (EA, Ch. 2.3.2 Alternative B pg.24) would require the path to be constructed within ODOT's right-of-way across Widgi Creek Golf Course and the Seventh Mountain Resort. The path would closely parallel the highway and safety barriers would be needed between the paved path and the highway to protect users from highway traffic. In addition, the vegetation screen used to protect motor vehicles from stray golf balls would need to be removed to construct the path, leaving bicyclists, pedestrians and motor vehicles at risk of being injured by stray golf balls.

Placing the path along the north side of the highway was considered (EA, Ch. 2.3.3 Alternative C pg. 24-25). In order to meet the purpose and need of this project to provide non-motorized paved trail connectivity between the Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway Welcome Station and the City of Bend, the paved path would ideally connect into the Bend Park and Recreation Haul Road Trail located southeast of Century Drive. Therefore, if the trail on national forest system lands were located northeast of Cascade Lakes Highway, a surface crossing would be required. With the timeline for a future roundabout at the Tetherow uncertain, there was no good location for a surface crossing within the Bend city limits. The engineers determined that the safest and most feasible surface crossing would be on national forest lands.

Comments suggested that either a second undercrossing or an over crossing east of Widgi Creek Golf Course would eliminate the need for a surface crossing (EA, Ch. 2.3.6 Alternative F pg. 25-26). While a pedestrian undercrossing or overcrossing would eliminate the need for a surface crossing, ODOT was able to locate a safe location for a surface crossing, eliminating the need in the foreseeable future for a high cost underpass or overpass.

Concerns over this same subject were brought up in the 30-day comment period. FS engineers coordinated with ODOT to ensure that this was still the safest point to cross with the best sight distances and discussed options to make this crossing the safest possible. The crossing location will be signed with advance warning signs to alert traffic that a pedestrian crossing is ahead, with a recommended reduction in speed and double yellow lines. Public safety is extremely important to me, and I have considered the public's comments. ODOT has selected the safest crossing location and has sufficient safety standards and monitoring criteria in place for the surface crossing (warning signs for motor vehicles, double yellow, reduced speed recommendations, EA, Ch. 1.9.1 pg. 17, Ch. 2.6.1 pg. 38-39 and below page 19). I feel that that the decision I have made will provide the public with a safe crossing.

RESOURCE PROTECTION MEASURES AND MONITORING

In order to minimize potential resource impacts from project activities, project design criteria have been incorporated into the selected alternative. Project design criteria are devised in the pre-analysis and analysis phases to reduce environmental impacts and comply with applicable laws and regulations. They include, but are not limited to; best management practices (BMPs), standards and guidelines (S&Gs), and standard operating procedures (SOPs).

RESOURCE PROTECTION MEASURES

The following resource protection measures are incorporated into Alternative 2:

Recreation

Recreational resource protection measures are as follows:

To maintain the natural appearances of the setting and maintain Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) norms:

- a) Restore areas impacted or denuded of vegetation as a result of project activities as soon as practicable after construction.
- b) Retain features in the landscape such as large trees or tree groupings and lava rock outcrops. Maintain as many trees as possible so recreationists travel through a natural-appearing setting.

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- c) To the extent possible, allow curvature in the trail layout and alignment vs. straight shots so the rider experience is enhanced and views to the surrounding landscape are captured.

To facilitate public safety:

- a) Utilize American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) standards with regard to trail surfacing, grade and turning radius.
- b) Coordinate with ODOT for surface crossing of Cascade Lakes Highway.
- c) Consider traffic control options such as signs, stenciled warnings on the path, ingress/egress for the parking lot and trail interface, and education patrols in order to improve safety of all users at the trailhead/path area.

To incorporate accessibility and universal design features as well as reduce conflicts between users:

- a) Construct the paved trail to meet the following Designed Use and Trail Class standards:
 - a. Designed Use: Hiker/Pedestrian²
 - b. Trail Class (EA, Appendix B): Trail Class 5, Fully Developed
 - i. Tread wide, firm, stable, and generally uniform
 - ii. Width generally accommodates two-lane and two-directional travel, or provides frequent passing turnouts
 - iii. Commonly hardened with asphalt or other imported material
- b) Utilize FS Outdoor Recreation Accessibility Guidelines (FSORAG) and Forest Service Trails Accessibility Guidelines (FSTAG)³.
- c) Ensure accessible parking facilities are designed into developed parking areas and are defined as accessible. Include accessible trail connectivity from developed parking areas to trail access points.
- d) Prohibit recreational use of motorized vehicles and equestrian use on all paved trail alignments. Allow motorized wheelchairs or mobility devices⁴ on the paved path in pursuant to 36 CFR 212.1.

To provide for sustainable recreation opportunities:

- a) Explore partnership agreements for construction and future maintenance of all proposed recreation developments.

² Designed Use: The Managed Use of a trail that requires the most demanding design, construction, and maintenance parameters and that, in conjunction with the applicable Trail Class, determines which Design Parameters will apply to a trail.

³ The FSTAG apply only to trails that meet all three of the following criteria:

- 1) the trail is new or altered. An alteration to a trail is a change in the original purpose, intent, or function for which the trail was designed.
- 2) and the trail has a designed-use (in accordance with the Forest Service trails terminology, design and management processes) for hiker/pedestrian use;
- 3) and the trail connects either directly to a trailhead or to a currently accessible trail.

⁴ A wheelchair or mobility device, including one that is battery-powered, is a device that is designed solely for use by a mobility-impaired person for locomotion and that is suitable for use in an indoor pedestrian area (Title V, sec. 507c, of the ADA; 36 CFR 212.1). "Designed solely for use by a mobility-impaired person for locomotion" means that the wheelchair was designed and manufactured solely for use for mobility by a person with a disability. Thus, this term does not include a motorized unit that has been retrofitted to make it usable by a person with a disability. "Suitable for use in an indoor pedestrian area" means usable inside a home, mall, courthouse, or other indoor pedestrian area.

Wildlife

To reduce potential negative impacts to wildlife species affected by Alternative 2 the following resource protection measures are recommended.

WL-RPM-1: Retain snags of all species and decay class unless removal is necessary for human safety. If removed, attempt to retain snags in place as down wood in longest possible length.

WL-RPM-2: To protect Lewis' woodpeckers using artificial nest structures, trail construction activities should not occur on the section east of the proposed trailhead area to forest boundary between April 15 and August 31. If annual nest box use monitoring by a qualified biologist shows these boxes are inactive by May 31 then the work may occur.

WL-RPM-3: To protect an active red-tailed hawk nest located east of the proposed parking lot disturbing activities should not occur within ¼ mile of the nest between March 1 and August 31. If annual monitoring shows the nest as inactive by May 15 then work may occur.

WL-RPM-4: Provide interpretation material at new parking lot describing importance of winter range to big-game species. Coordinate with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife on information regarding Tumalo Winter Range Cooperative Closure area.

WL-RPM-5: Do not encourage use of trails in the Ryan Ranch Key Elk Area between December 1 and March 31 to reduce potential disturbance to big game.

WL-RPM-6: Restrict disturbance activities within ¼ mile of any newly discovered nests. This condition may be waived in a particular year if nesting or reproductive success surveys reveal that the species indicated is non-nesting or that no young are present that year. The following are a list of raptors and their nest restriction dates in which habitat is identified within the project area:

- Red-tailed hawk: March 1 – August 31
- Northern goshawk: March 1 – August 31
- Cooper's and Sharp-shinned hawks: April 15 – August 31
- Osprey: April 1 – August 31
- Great gray owl: March 1 – June 30
- Great blue heron: March 1 – August 31

Fisheries and Water

Design stream crossings in Trail 2a section to use the most cost-efficient structure consistent with resource protection needs, facility needs, and types of use and safety obligations (National Core Best Management Practice Rec-4). Recommendation is to harden stream crossings (create fords) or install small bridges over the two channels to prevent rutting.

Soils

Establish and maintain construction area limits to the minimum area necessary for completing the project and confine disturbance to within this area (National Core Best Management Practice, Fac-2).

Rehabilitation of old trail segments shall include re-establishment of original slope contours, surface and subsurface hydrologic pathways where practicable and as opportunities arise (National Core Best Management Practice, Fac-10).

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Establish effective ground cover on disturbed sites to avoid or minimize accelerated erosion and soil loss (National Core Best Management Practices, Fac-10).

Scenery

Design criteria for the paved path should consider the following to meet standards and guidelines for the Scenic Views Management Area:

Trailhead

- Screen parking and future expansion area with existing vegetation from traffic passing on Cascade Lakes Highway.
- Provide site design and layout of parking area so it is perpendicular to the Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway and minimizes the viewshed width and visibility.
- Design parking pods to preserve large ponderosa pine ≥ 21 inch diameter and as much shade and natural vegetation for screening as possible.

Paved Path and Undercrossing

- Retain features in the landscape such as large trees or tree groupings and lava rock outcrops.
- Locate viewpoints and design interpretive sites that take advantage of any panoramic views or points of interest if applicable to the area.
- Consider providing shaded rest stops or pull-outs along the route.
- Provide signing that is minimal and low key by avoiding shiny or metallic materials and bright or white colors.
- Allow curvature in the trail layout and alignment vs. straight shots so the rider experience is enhanced and views to the surrounding landscape are captured.
- Use topography and existing vegetation to create a path that invites non-motorized use and limits access to motorized vehicles.
- Restore disturbed native vegetation to edges of path and provide landscape screens around parking areas so vehicles are not visible from surrounding areas.
- Use materials on the trail that blend with the surrounding landscape character and avoid white or light colored aggregate on the shoulders of the trail.
- Maintain as many trees as possible so recreationists travel through a natural-appearing setting.
- Provide screening between the Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway and the undercrossing on the north side of the Scenic Byway through natural appearing earth berms and native vegetation.
- Use native materials that blend with the surrounding landscape for site revegetation and construction of terraced planting areas along the undercrossing connection to the trails.

Invasive Plants

Noxious weed sites will be treated via herbicide and manual removal prior to implementation. Each site will receive at least one herbicide treatment before implementation. These treatments have been authorized in previous NEPA decisions.

Trail 2b will be re-routed to avoid a Medusahead population located adjacent to the current trail used by Seventh Mountain Resort. District Botanist will flag areas to avoid.

To avoid the spread of weeds, if a significant weed site is located in a proposed trail, an alternate, uninfested site will be used, unless a workable solution is found between the noxious weed coordinator and the project coordinator to avoid having to move it.

Any fill material brought into the project will be examined by the district botanist or their designee for the presence of invasive plants.

Machinery involved in project activities must be washed prior to entry into the project area.

Machinery will be cleaned daily and after leaving a weed site to prevent the spread of weed seeds. A portable air compressor is recommended for ease of use and efficiency in cleaning the tires and undercarriage.

To help alleviate the concern that weeds will enter the new seedbed that will be created with this project, disturbed areas, in particular project areas, which intersect with weed sites, will be seeded with locally adapted native seed making it more difficult for weeds to establish.

Engineering/Roads

Locate the paved path to the south side of the parking area to avoid paved path and road crossings.

Cultural Resources

All known cultural resources located within the area of potential effect (APE) will be flagged for avoidance prior to commencement of the project by the District Archaeologist.

If previously unknown items of prehistoric or historical value are discovered or disturbed during construction, activities will cease in the area affected and the District Archaeologist will be notified. A mitigation plan will be developed in order to address the effects of the project on the resource.

MONITORING

Recreation

Due to the proximity to Bend and the expected duration of visitors site visit, a toilet facility is not planned at the new trailhead. The site will be monitored for human waste and, if necessary, a toilet will be installed to maintain public safety.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

In addition to the selected alternative, nine other alternatives were considered in the environmental assessment. Seven alternatives were considered but eliminating from detailed study because they were outside of the scope of the project, did not meet the purpose and need, would not be consistent with laws, policies, or Forest Plan direction, or were not feasible to implement (EA, Ch. 2.3 pg. 17-20). The alternatives described below were analyzed in detail.

ALTERNATIVE 1 – NO ACTION (EA, CH. 2.4.1 PG. 27)

The interpretation of this no action alternative is that the proposed action will not take place. Under this alternative, a non-motorized paved path and trailhead between Bend and the Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway Welcome Station (Welcome Station) would not be constructed along with key mountain bike trails connecting the Welcome Station to the Wanoga and Phil's trails systems. I have decided not to select Alternative 1 for the following reasons:

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- This alternative does not meet the projects purpose and need to provide non-motorized paved trail connectivity between the Welcome Station and the City of Bend, developed trailhead parking near Bend and mountain bike trail connections between the Welcome Station and the Wanoga, Deschutes River and Phil’s trail systems.
- A mountain bike trail connecting Tyler’s Traverse and Storm King trails up to the Cascade Lakes Highway undercrossing would not be constructed. Bikers would continue to use the Deschutes River trail to get back to Bend and Sunriver. This section of the Deschutes River trail located within the Upper Deschutes Wild and Scenic River corridor and recreation is identified as an outstandingly remarkable value. The trail is a high use trail, and the growing number of mountain bikers using these sections would continue to add to trail congestion.
- The long-term goals for alternative transit options, enhanced access to trail networks close to urban areas, and providing connections between the city and public lands will not be met
- Parking at Entrada will remain unplanned compromising the safety of users, pedestrians and dogs. No accessible options will be provided at the trailhead

ALTERNATIVE 3 (EA, CH. 2.4.3 PG. 32)

Alternative 3 had all the same components of Alternative 2 except the following: The trailhead would instead accommodate approximately 22 vehicles and Trail 2a would not be constructed.

I have decided not to select Alternative 3 for the following reasons:

- I have considered that dispersed parking at the trailhead location has been observed to have up to 19 vehicles at one time with an average of six vehicles (EA Ch. 3.4.1 pg. 56-58). Scoping comments also raised concerns that constructing a trailhead to accommodate approximately 20 vehicles would not provide enough parking for existing use and new use of Trail 1a (Key Issue 2). In addition to the size of the trailhead, the existing dispersed parking area currently does not safely accommodate the level of use it receives and as parking approaches or exceeds 8 or 10 vehicles safety is compromised for drivers, pedestrians and dogs. In order to meet existing use and new use of Trail 1a a trailhead that may provide up to 40 parking spaces will better meet the purpose and need.
- Forgoing construction of a mountain bike trail (Trail 2a) from Tyler’s Traverse trail up to Storm King trails to the undercrossing accessing the Welcome Station would continue promoting bikers to use the Deschutes River trail to get back to Bend and Sunriver. This section of the Deschutes River trail located within the Upper Deschutes Wild and Scenic River corridor and recreation is identified as an outstandingly remarkable value. Alternative 3 will not reduce trail congestion between Slough Day Use and Bend.

ALTERNATIVE OVERVIEW

The following table compares each alternative, Alternative 1 No Action with Alternative 2 and Alternative 3, to one another (EA, Ch. 2.5 pg. 34-38).

Table 3: Comparison of Alternative 1, Alternative 2, and Alternative 3

Alternative Elements	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3
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Alternative Elements		Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3		
Paved Trail (Trail 1) Characteristics	Path Width (feet)	0	10	10		
	Grave Shoulder (feet)	0	2.5	2.5		
	Max Clearing Limits (feet)	0	20	20		
	Path Length (miles)	0	3.4	3.4		
Mountain Bike Trail Construction (miles)	Trail 2a Moderate Difficulty	0	4.8	4.9 total	0	0.1 total
	Trail 2b Easier Difficulty	0	0.1		0.1	
	Trail 3a Easy Difficulty	0	3.1	5.5 total	3.1	5.5 total
	Trail 3b Easy Difficulty	0	1.7		1.7	
	Trail 3c Easy Difficulty	0	0.7		0.7	
	Trail 4 Difficult	0	1.8	1.8		
	Trail 6 Moderate Difficulty	0	0.3	0.3		
Mountain Bike Trail Characteristics	Max Trail Width (feet)	0	4	4		
	Max Clearing Limits (feet)	0	6	6		
Mountain Bike Trail Obliteration (miles)	Trail 5	0	1.1	1.1		
Trailhead Construction	Number of Parking Spaces	Undefined Parking Maximum of 19	40	22		
	Accessible Parking Spaces	0	2	2		
	Parking Area (square feet)	11,325	30,000	15,000		
	Number of Restrooms	0	1	0		

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Welcome Station Trail Connections project was first published to the Deschutes and Ochoco National Forest project webpage on 1/31/2013 at: http://data.ecosystem-management.org/nepaweb/nepa_project_exp.php?project=41207

This project was first published in the Deschutes National Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA), a quarterly publication, in April 2013 and has appeared in each quarterly SOPA since then. This is a quarterly report that is distributed to interested individuals, organizations, and agencies Forest-wide.

The SOPA is automatically updated and available on the Deschutes and Ochoco National Forest webpage at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/forest-level.php?110601>.

A detailed description of the proposed action was mailed on February 6, 2013, to approximately 100 forest users and concerned publics, soliciting comments and concerns related to this project. Approximately 50 letters or emails of response were received, which were considered and evaluated. Discussion of public comments can be found in the EA (Ch. 1.9 Issues Ch. 2.3 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study). This letter was also mailed to the Burns Paiute Tribe, The Klamath Tribe, and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs. Coordination and consultation with the tribes is ongoing.

Recreation staff coordinated with Central Oregon Trail Alliance (COTA) on trail location and design for the mountain bike trails. COTA has agreed to construct the mountain bike trails and maintain them under volunteer agreement with the Forest Service.

Recreation staff and the District Ranger discussed the project with DogPAC in January 2014. The group identified that the Entrada area is important for their recreation access because it provides year-round dog off-leash access to the Deschutes River close to Bend. The group was concerned that a single parking area serving multiple trail users would create the potential for conflict among visitors. The District Ranger agreed to include DogPAC in the design of the parking area and to consider design elements that would reduce the potential for conflict.

On November 22, 2013, a legal notice in The Bulletin (the newspaper of record) initiating the 30-day comment period was published. Comments were accepted until December 23, 2013. During the comment period, the Forest received approximately 11 comments letters. Comments were provided on various topics, some expressed concern while others provided support or recommendations for the project. Response to comments is included the Appendix C of the final EA. All comments submitted during this planning process have been considered.

The Forest continues to coordinate and discuss project design and public safety with our recreation partners including DogPAC, a group advocating for off-leash dog recreation opportunities.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have reviewed the EA and associated documents and believe there is adequate information within the project record to provide a reasoned choice of action. Implementing the selected alternative with the specified management requirements, constraints, and mitigations measures will cause no unacceptable cumulative impacts to any resource.

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA (EA pg. 43-151), I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27); therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed. I base my finding on the following:

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse are discussed in Chapter 3 of the EA (EA pg. 43-151). These impacts are within the range of the Forest Plan and will not have significant impacts on resources identified and described in Chapter 3 of the EA. The selected alternative provides the best combination of physical, biological, social and economic benefits.

This project will meet the long-term goals for alternative transit options and enhanced access to trail networks between the City of Bend and the Deschutes National Forest (EA, Ch. 3.4.1

Recreation pg. 67). Trailhead and trail construction could minimally affect some species or their habitats through tree removal or paving (EA Ch. 3.4.2 Wildlife pg. 80-135, Ch. 3.4.4 Botany pg. 138-139, Ch. 3.4.6 Fisheries pg. 143-144).

2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety. Short-term safety hazards, such as construction traffic and falling trees near roads, will be mitigated through contract safety provisions and are not anticipated to impact public safety. Standing trees that lean over or near roadways and present a hazard to public safety due to conditions such as deterioration or physical damage to roots, trunks, stems, or limbs will be removed from the project area. (EA Ch. 2.4.2 pg. 29)

This dispersed parking at Entrada does not safely accommodate the level of use it currently receives, as parking approaches or exceeds 8 or 10 vehicles; safety is compromised for drivers, pedestrians and dogs (EA Ch. 3.4.1 pg. 56-58, 67-70, 75-76). The trailhead will improve driver and pedestrian safety (EA Ch. 3.4.1 pg. 70-71, 75, 79)

Temporary closure of sections of existing trails and of areas used for dispersed recreation off trail may occur for public safety reasons under either action alternative. (EA Ch. 1.9.1 issue #1 pg. 16)

ODOT determined that the proposed location of Trail 1a crossing the Cascade Lakes Highway is the safest crossing point for the public. This location has the best sight distances for trail users and vehicles is the shortest crossing distance of potential crossing locations, and minimizes the conflicts with turning movements. The crossing location will be signed with advance warning signs to alert traffic that a pedestrian crossing is ahead, reduction in motor vehicle speed will be recommended along with double yellow lines (EA Ch. 1.9.1 issue #6 pg. 17, Appendix C). Discussions with ODOT over specific safety design measures to take are ongoing (EA Ch. 2.6.1 Recreation pg. 38-39)

Public safety was considered in the design of this project and evaluation of effects. (EA, pg. 16-17, 23, 29, 38-39, 42, 55-57, 67-72, 75-76, 78-79).

3. There will be no significant unique characteristics of geographic areas such as cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, old growth forests, range land, research natural areas, experimental forests, inventoried roadless areas or other ecologically critical areas because these areas do not exist within the project area (EA pg. 146-147, 148, 150).

A portion of the analysis area is within the corridor for the Upper Deschutes Wild and Scenic River (EA pg. 3-4). The project is at a much smaller scale than the analysis area boundary. The larger analysis area boundary serves to encompass all the trail systems proposed trails could provide connections to (EA pg. 3-4, 9-14, Table 1-1 and 1-1a). Trail and trailhead construction is located entirely outside of the Upper Deschutes Wild and Scenic River corridor (EA pg. 9-14, 143-144). Project activities will not occur in wetlands or riparian areas. The project will have no effect on Executive Orders 11988 (Floodplains) and Executive Order 11990 (Wetlands) as adverse effects are avoided. (EA pg. 143-144, 151)

4. Based on public participation and analysis in the EA, the effects on the quality of human environment are not likely to be highly controversial (EA, pg. 15-19, 19-22, 43-151, Appendix C). There is no known credible scientific controversy over the impacts of the project. Although

there are sometimes competing interests surrounding recreation, the conclusions of effects were not shown to have any scientific controversy.

5. There are no known effects on the human environment that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks associated with this project. Trail and trailhead construction are common practices and the effects are well known. The EA effectively addresses and analyzes the environmental impacts associated with the project and incorporates well-established best management practices to minimize negative impacts (EA Ch. 3 pg. 38-42, 43-151).

These actions pose no disproportionately high or adverse human health or environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on minority or low-income populations (EA pg. 150, FONSI Element 2). This project has shared in the Federal government's overall trust responsibility to Indian tribes where treaty or other legally defined rights apply to National Forest System lands. Consultation with the Burns Paiute Tribe, The Klamath Tribe, and Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs has occurred. Consultation has incorporated opportunities for tribal comments and contributions to the proposed project (EA pg. 15, 21, 146-147, 147-148, 152).

6. This action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions that may be implemented to meet the goals and objectives of the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. This project is consistent with management direction set forth by the Forest Plan (EA pg. 9-14, 19-20, 76-77, 79-80, 86, 86-135 (Determinations), 136-138, 138, 139, 143-144, Appendix A).
7. There are no known significant adverse, cumulative, or secondary effects between this project and other projects (completed, active, or planned). Effects to the basic resource values of soil, water, fish, plants, and wildlife are estimated and determined to be localized, limited, or small in scale (EA Ch. 2.6, Ch. 3 Soils pg.145-146, Water and Fish pg. 143-144, 151, Botany pg. 138-143, Wildlife pg. 80-135). This determination is based on the results of cumulative effects analyses discussed in the EA.
8. Based on the cultural resource inventory and report, the sites located have not yet sufficiently been evaluated for eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). These sites will therefore be treated as eligible and will be protected and/or avoided during project implementation and future maintenance. For the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) inventory report, a determination was made of "No Historic Properties Affected." (EA pg. 21, 42, 146-148). Project design criteria (EA pg. 38) provide guidance for protection of any newly discovered unknown sites. Avoidance of these areas will provide protection to the fullest extent possible.
9. The biological evaluation for plants proposed, endangered, threatened or sensitive species determines that this project will have no impact on these species. No habitat for proposed, endangered, threatened or sensitive species exists within or in the immediate vicinity of the project area (EA pg. 138-139, Botany Report located in the project record).

A biological evaluation for wildlife proposed, endangered, threatened or sensitive species has been prepared and located in the project record. Analysis of wildlife species indicates that this project will have no impact on federally listed species gray wolf, Northern spotted owl, North American wolverine, Oregon spotted frog or their critical habitat within the project area (EA,

pg. 84-90). The project will have no impact on Region 6 sensitive species Townsend's big-eared bat, fringed myotis, bald eagles (EA pg. 92, 93, 94, 134). The project may adversely impact individuals, but not likely to contribute to a trend toward a federal listing or loss of viability to the population or species for the following Region 6 sensitive species Lewis' woodpecker and white-headed woodpecker (EA pg. 126-127, 134). Project design features, such as timing restrictions (EA pg.39-40), are incorporated to limit impacts to these species.

A portion of the analysis area is within the corridor for the Upper Deschutes Wild and Scenic River (EA pg. 13) but all trail and trailhead construction is located entirely outside of the Upper Deschutes Wild and Scenic River corridor (EA pg. 9-14, 143-144; FONSI Element 3). Outstandingly remarkable values will not be affected by this project (EA pg.76 (Recreation), 138 (Scenery), 144 (Fisheries))

10. The actions described for this project in the EA do not threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (EA pg. 19-22, 147-151) and this project is consistent with the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan as amended (EA pg. 9-14, Appendix A, resource reports located in the project record, FONSI Element 6).

There are no commitments of resources that cannot be regained such as the extinction of a species or the removal of mined ore. There are no irreversible commitments of resources. Irretrievable commitments are those that are lost for a period of time such as the temporary loss of timber productivity in forested areas that are kept clear for use as a power line right-of-way or road. The development and use of the trails and trailhead are considered irretrievable commitment of land to a non-vegetative state until such time that the path is abandoned and the disturbed sites are returned back to productive capacity.

This decision is made with consideration of past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions on National Forest lands and other ownerships within potentially affected areas which could have a cumulatively significant effect on the quality of the human or natural environment.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AND POLICY

In reviewing the EA and actions associated with Alternative 2, I have concluded that my decision is consistent with the following laws and requirements. Section 1.10 and Section 3.5 of the EA (pg. 19-22 and 147-151) also discloses the effect of the alternative on the human environment as specified by law, regulation, policy or executive orders that is not covered by the following.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

NEPA establishes the format and content requirements of environmental analysis and documentation as well as requirements for public involvement and disclosure. The entire process of preparing this environmental assessment was undertaken to comply with NEPA (EA pg. 20).

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA)

I find this decision to be consistent with the long term management objectives as discussed in the Deschutes National Forest Plan as amended. All other Forest Plan direction, including from the Northwest Forest Plan, the Upper Deschutes Wild and Scenic River and State Scenic Waterway Comprehensive Management Plan, Inland Native Fish Strategy, and Regional Forester's Forest Plan

Amendment #2 (Eastside Screens) has been adhered to and incorporated into the project's design (EA pg. 9-14, 19-20, Appendix A).

I find the selected alternative to be consistent with the requirements of the National Forest Management Act and in compliance with the Forest Plan as amended; specifically under Alternative 2 (EA pg.9-14, 19-20, Appendix A).

The Preservation of American Antiquities Act of June 1906 and the National Historic Preservation Act: The Oregon State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO)

A cultural resource inventory has been completed for the project area. For the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) inventory report, a determination was made of "No Historic Properties Affected". On August 18, 2013, the Deschutes National Forest completed the "Project Review for Heritage Resources under the Terms of the 2004 Programmatic Agreement" with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). The report was then forwarded on to SHPO for their information. (EA pg. 146-147) The activities in the selected alternative have been designed to have no effect to cultural resource sites through both protection and avoidance (EA pg. 42). The project is compliant with the SHPO regulations (EA pg. 21,146-147, 147-148).

The Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended

Biological Evaluations were prepared to document the possible effects of the proposed activities to threatened and endangered species within the project area. The selected alternative will have no impact on proposed, endangered, threatened or sensitive plant species (EA pg. 138, Botany Report located in the project record). There will be no impact on federally listed species gray wolf, Northern spotted owl, North American wolverine, Oregon spotted frog or their critical habitat within the project area (EA, pg. 84-90, 134). The project will have no impact on Region 6 sensitive species Townsend's big-eared bat, fringed myotis, bald eagles (EA pg. 92, 93, 94, 134). The project may adversely impact individuals, but not likely to contribute to a trend toward a federal listing or loss of viability to the population or species for the following Region 6 sensitive species Lewis' woodpecker and white-headed woodpecker (EA pg. 126-127, 134). There will be no effect on listed fish species, fish habitat or Region 6 Sensitive species (EA pg. 144).

The Clean Water Act, 1982 and 303(d)

The selected alternative will comply with the Clean Water Act. In compliance with the Clean Water Act, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality lists the Deschutes River within the project area as a water quality impaired river (303(d) list). The 2010 Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) list of water quality impaired water bodies (303(d) list) includes the Deschutes River within the project area. Management direction regarding 303(d) listed rivers is that any project activity should not further degrade the parameters for which it is listed (Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Protocol for addressing Clean Water Act Section 303(d) Waters).

I find that the selected alternative will not compromise the quality of any water sources (EA pg. 22, 143-144).

The Clean Air Act

The selected alternative will comply with the Clean Air Act. The Act prescribes air quality to be regulated by each individual state. There are no smoke generating activities (EA pg. 22, 27-31).

Civil Rights and Environmental Justice

Executive Order 12898 on environmental justice requires federal agencies to identify and address any disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority and low income populations. The analysis focuses on potential effects from the project to minority populations, disabled persons, and low-income groups.

After evaluating the discussion in the EA, pages 21, 146-147 and 147-148, I have determined that there will be no discernible impacts from any of the alternatives on Native Americans, women, other minorities, or the Civil Rights of any American citizen.

PREDECISIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW PROCESS

This project was subject to predecisional administrative review pursuant to 36 CFR 218, Subpart B. Also called the “objection process” the predecisional review process replaced the appeal process (36 CFR 215) in March 2013. The primary difference with the objection process is that a person may object to a project prior to the final decision, whereas under the appeal process, appeals were made after the decision. The full text of the rule can be found here:

<http://federal.eregulations.us/cfr/title/5/28/2013/title36/chapterII/part218>.

A draft Decision Notice was distributed according to 36 CFR 218.7 providing a 45-day period for objections to be prior to making a final decision. Objections were filed by Kreg Lindberg and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Informal objection resolution meetings were held on June 2, 2014 and June 17, 2014 with the Responsible Official. Based on results of the resolution meeting, I agreed to continue to consider traffic control options for the parking lot and trail interface in order to improve safety of all users at the trailhead/path area. I will also design interpretive signs to strongly discourage winter use of the KEA. I believe this is the right course of action and I have assessed these changes and find them to be well within the range of environmental effects analyzed in the EA for the two action alternatives. In addition, the Forest Supervisor (Objection Reviewing Officer) has provided a written response to the objectors. No further review from any other Forest Service or USDA official of the reviewing officer’s written response to the objections is available (36 CFR 218.11(b)2)).

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of this project is expected to begin in the summer of 2014 beginning with the construction of mountain bike trails and the design for the paved path and trailhead. Construction of the paved path is expected to begin in spring of 2015.

CONTACT AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Welcome Station Trail Connections project record is on file at the Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District office at 63095 Deschutes Market Road, Bend, Oregon 97701. The EA and decision are also available on the Deschutes and Ochoco National Forest webpage http://data.ecosystem-management.org/nepaweb/nepa_project_exp.php?project=41207.

Welcome Station Trail Connections DN and FONSI

For additional information concerning the specific activities authorized with this decision, you may contact:

Amy Tinderholt, Team Leader, Recreation
Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District
63095 Deschutes Market Road
Bend, OR 97701
(541) 383-4708

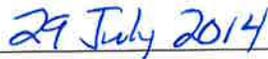
Alicia Underhill, Team Leader, NEPA
Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District
63095 Deschutes Market Road
Bend, OR 97701
(541) 383-4012

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL

The District Ranger of the Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District on the Deschutes National Forest is the official responsible for deciding the type and extent of management activities in the Welcome Station Trail Connections project area.



KEVIN W. LARKIN



Date

