

**Decision Notice**  
**& Finding of No Significant Impact**  
**Hawkins Rock Source Expansion**

**USDA Forest Service**  
**Detroit Ranger District, Willamette National Forest**  
**Linn County, Oregon**  
**T. 11 S., R. 6 E., Section 8, SE1/4 of NW1/4**

## **Decision and Reasons for the Decision**

### **Background**

The Willamette National Forest proposes to expand the existing Hawkins Rock Source in order to provide aggregate for road reconstruction and maintenance. There is an immediate need for material from the rock source in the Blowout Road Maintenance project, which has been approved and funded in accordance with the “Rural Schools and Self-Determination Act of 2002 (also known as “Payments to Counties” or Title II). The Hawkins Rock Source has provided an abundance of basaltic aggregate for Forest and Highway road construction and maintenance on the Detroit Ranger District for over 30 years. Within its current development area, however, the rock source may not provide sufficient material to meet the need. The purpose and need for this proposal is to provide aggregate for road reconstruction and maintenance in the Blowout Road Maintenance project in the short term, and to make material available for ongoing road maintenance activities in the area over the long term. The environmental assessment (EA) documents the analysis of alternatives to meet this need.

The proposed expansion area is located on the edge of the existing, developed rock source in an 18 year-old conifer plantation. It is approximately 2 miles west of Cub Point and 0.82 miles north of the confluence of Blowout Creek and Hawkins Creek at an elevation of approximately 2400 feet. Blowout Creek is a major tributary of the North Santiam River at the Detroit Reservoir. The site is at approximate milepost 0.8 of FS Rd. 1013 in T. 11 S., R. 6 E., Section 8, SE of NW and is within the Detroit Ranger District, Willamette National Forest, Oregon.

### **Decision**

Based upon my review of the environmental analysis of the alternatives, I have decided to implement Alternative 2. Under Alternative 2, approximately 1 acre of land immediately adjacent to the existing quarry will be cleared of existing vegetation, stripped of topsoil, and quarried. Rock extracted from the source will be stockpiled at the existing stockpile site.

Clearing of the land in the expansion area will involve removing the existing vegetation - an approximately 18-year-old conifer plantation. The timber growing on the expansion area is currently too young to be of commercial value. This material will be made available for use as down woody debris for the area in the existing development that is to be reclaimed. Excess could be piled and burned or made available for special forest products use (i.e. posts, poles, firewood).

The stripping of the expansion area will involve removing the soil overlaying the target rock material. This soil overburden will be placed and contoured in the area of the existing development that is depleted and no longer needed as part of its reclamation.

Rock will be quarried from the expansion area according to the pit plan and standard, generally accepted procedures. Applicable Best Management Practices will be followed in order to reduce impacts to other resources.

It could be necessary to build temporary roads within the development area of the rock source. These roads, if constructed, will eventually be removed along with the material beneath them as development of the pit progresses.

Under Alternative 2, site-specific engineering and hydrologic prescriptions will be developed to resolve the current development's drainage and erosion issues. This could be done by shifting the road 10 to 20 feet towards the pit in order to distance the road from the failing fill slope, and by restoring proper drainage - either through the narrow ridge/cat-road at the north of the current development, or by reconfiguring and maintaining the currently non-functional design. The floor of the pit will be shaped to reduce the flow of water onto the access road. Re-routing the road and drainage in this way will decrease erosion damage to the roads, sediment loads to Blowout Creek, and the possibility of future road failures and landslides.

### **Other Alternatives Considered**

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered one other alternative –the *No Action* alternative. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA on page 12.

Under the *No Action* alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. No rock source expansion would be implemented to accomplish project goals.

- 1) The estimated 15,000 to 20,000 cubic yards of material remaining in the current development would be depleted with the next entry. Other rock sources could be needed to accomplish the Blowout Road Maintenance Project, and other rock needs in the area would have to be met by using other sources. The use of other sources could increase trucking distance and cost, decrease efficiency of projects requiring the material, and result in spread of off-site noxious weeds.
- 2) Under this alternative, repair of the development's drainage problem would likely be kept at a minimal level due to cost of fixing the problem, and would be governed by the contract associated with the resumption of operations. While extensive changes could be made to pit drainage and current damage could be repaired without expanding the rock source, additional expense of resources would be required. Extra expenditure on pit infrastructure for access to a resource that will probably be depleted with the next entry would divert already scarce resources from other, higher priority needs. See "Alternatives Not Considered in Detail" in this document for more discussion.

### **Alternatives Not Considered in Detail**

#### **Larger Expansion**

Internal and public comment on the project during scoping presented the possibility of a larger area of expansion (5 acres, for example). Such an expansion would provide for even longer-term needs than the proposed expansion. Assuming that the rock source will eventually need to be expanded beyond its proposed one-acre area in the future, it is valid to reason that performing the environmental analysis now would save time and money in the long run. However, there are two main reasons why this alternative was not considered in detail:

- The need for material is current, but the Willamette National Forest does not currently have the resources for the extensive exploration and drilling required to identify the distribution and extent of the rock present. High quality rock is virtually certain to continue through at least a major portion of the expansion area, but the extent and quality of the rock beyond those bounds is unknown.
- Road system closures and land allocation changes have reduced the need for material in the Hawkins service area. Because of apparent reduced need, further clearing and development may not be necessary. The wisest use of current resources appears to be to defer any larger scale expansion until such time as the need develops, if ever.

### Reconstruction and Repair of Existing Pit Access and Drainage without Expansion

There are three reasons why this option was not considered in detail as an alternative in and of itself:

- Implementation would not produce the material needed as defined in the Purpose and Need.
- The costs incurred would not be offset by the production of useful resources.
- The costs of performing the repair and reconstruction would divert scarce funding, equipment, and labor resources from higher priority needs.

This option was not considered in detail as an add-on to the continued use of the existing development for similar reasons:

- Due to potential need for material from the rock source for repair and reconstruction of the rock source itself, implementation of the option could reduce the amount of material available to the projects and purposes described in the Purpose and Need. The material currently available in the existing development may already be insufficient to meet those needs.
- Were the material to become insufficient to meet the defined need as a result of the additional repairs, it would be necessary to import material from another source, increasing the cost of the projects, complicating or slowing the progression of work, and possibly reducing the amount of work done.
- Economic and labor resources are scarce. Investment of time, money, and equipment in the infrastructure for access to a resource that would probably be depleted with the next entry would be unwise when compared with other, higher priority needs.

## **Public Involvement**

As described in the background, the need for this action arose in 2002. A proposal to expand the Hawkins rock source was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions in the summer of 2004. The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment during scoping in June and July of 2004. In addition, as part of the public involvement process, the agency sent letters to the local tribes, the local newspapers, and to those on the Willamette National Forest's mailing list. One response was received and was taken into consideration in this analysis. It was from Russ Frost of the Oregon Department of Transportation. He commented that:

*"If there was a reasonable possibility of ODOT use, the proposed expansion of 1 acre would potentially have been inadequate and may still be."*

*"even though ODOT does not see a specific need for the Hawkins Quarry, we do support the expansion of this source. Like mentioned above, normally when looking at source expansions, ODOT looks to clear a minimum of 5 acres due to the cost involved in completing all of the necessary environmental work and the flexibility it allows for long term development. It would seem that the USFS in this case may need to clear more than the projected 1 acre to allow for better long term development of the site and provide for the availability of additional materials over and above the projected project requirements in the event of unforeseen needs."*

Mr. Frost's letter is in the project file. Further analysis and response to the issues raised by Mr. Frost are detailed in the "Alternatives not Considered in Detail" section of the Environmental Assessment (see page 10).

Using the comments from the public, other agencies, and local tribes, the interdisciplinary team identified several issues regarding the effects of the proposed action. Main issues of concern included (see EA pages 4-5):

### **Economics**

The two most important factors affecting aggregate cost are rock quality and haul expense. Production costs are relatively similar between various sources, since clearing, drilling, shooting, and crushing all require approximately the same time and materials investment. The critical factors in determining the relative economic value of a rock source are: the type or quality of rock required, the location of the source, and the distance or difficulty of transportation of material between the source and the project using it. Rock quality can vary from asphalt quality material at the top of the chart to pit run and select barrow at the bottom. As quality needs increase, the willingness to haul rock farther also increases. The Hawkins rock source has provided an abundance of high quality basaltic aggregate for Forest and Highway road construction and maintenance on the Detroit Ranger District for over 30 years. Its continued use is considered the best economic option for aggregate within its traditional service area.

### **Noxious Weeds and Non-Native Invasive Species**

Rock sources inhabited by noxious weeds or other invasive plants result in contaminated rock. Weed seeds are then spread with the gravel to new areas during road construction and maintenance activities. The increased light found along roadsides, combined with continuous disturbance from traffic, provide good habitat for weed seed growth. Roads then become corridors for weed invasion and allow weeds to spread into the surrounding landscape. The Hawkins rock source noxious weed threat is not extreme, having only populations of weeds that are considered "established", and as such does not pose a dire and immitigable risk.

Several non-native, weedy species are present in the rock pit and stockpile area. The only State-listed noxious weed present in the pit itself is St John's wort. Other weedy species present in the pit include Queen Anne's lace, cudweed, tarweed, ox-eye daisy, and bull thistle. The stockpile site has patches of weed species of higher concern: scotch broom, Canada thistle, and horseweed. The density of these species is low to moderate. Clearing and stripping for rock source expansion may create conditions, which, for the short term, will assist in the dispersal of some noxious weeds. Weeds could be spread from the pit or the stockpile site to project areas using the rock in the absence of proper mitigation measures.

To address these concerns, the Forest Service created the alternatives described above.

### **Hydrology**

The drainage of the current development is problematic. The culvert that should be draining the pooled water that occurs during high rainfall periods of the year is not functioning as designed. Runoff and overflow of the ponded water in the pit is currently flowing down the cutslope ditch and road-grade at the entrance to the pit. This surface flow has caused soil erosion. Control of drainage from this pit is essential in meeting Best Management Practices. If current structural and soil erosion issues are not resolved, erosion will likely continue to worsen, perhaps

eventually leading to erosion damage to the roads, sediment loads to Blowout Creek, and the possibility of future road failures and landslides

### **Other Issues**

Several other issues were identified but were found not to be significant for the purposes of this project. Generally, non-significant issues are mitigated by standards and guidelines provided for in the Forest Plans, addressed through resource prescriptions, or decided upon by laws and regulations. These issues included peregrine falcons, big game, and northern spotted owls. The potential impacts of the alternatives on these issues and other environmental factors were analyzed in the EA on pages 19-25.

### **Finding of No Significant Impact**

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, 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). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

- 1) This action will have neither significant beneficial nor adverse effects. Sufficient information has been disclosed in the analysis to make a reasoned choice between alternatives and no significant impacts to the human environment have been identified.
- 2) There will be no significant effects on public health and safety, because the rock pit is located in a remote part of the Willamette National Forest and to avoid users conflicts and potential accidents, rock haul and blasting will be restricted to weekdays (see EA, page 19).
- 3) There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because no special habitats were found in the proposed expansion area (see EA page 24), no historic or cultural resources were found (see EA page 21), and the project area does not contain parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, or wild and scenic rivers. The vegetation and topography of this area is typical of the Detroit Ranger District and no known ecologically critical areas occur. Due to the above reasons and conditions, there will be no significant impact to the human environment in regard to these unique geographic characteristics.
- 4) The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. The Hawkins Rock Source Expansion analysis is based upon the best available scientific information and site-specific data. Methods used to estimate the effects presented in the EA on pages 15-26 are used in similar analyses. I am not aware of any credible, peer reviewed scientific questioning of the methods used in this analysis, nor of its results.
- 5) We have considerable experience with the types of activities to be implemented. The predicted effects of the rock pit expansion are not uncertain, nor do they involve any unique or unknown risks. This lack of uncertainty is due in most part to the long history of management in this area which allows us to predict with reasonable certainty, based upon the results of the last 50 years of forest management including rock pit development, road construction and maintenance. The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk.
- 6) The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because given the long history of timber management in this area and the current Forest Plan land allocations, the selected actions will not establish a precedent for future actions. The Forest Plan is the vehicle that makes decisions in principle about future considerations.

Future projects to implement the Forest Plan direction will be analyzed in separate NEPA planning processes. Decisions based upon the Hawkins Rock Source Expansion analysis will not directly affect how such future decisions may be made.

- 7) The cumulative impacts are not significant (see EA pages 15-19). The analyses presented constitute an evaluation of cumulative impacts on the significant issues related to the Hawkins rock pit expansion. The discussions include effects of the selected alternative on economics (EA, pages 15-16), noxious and invasive weed (EA, pages 17-18), and hydrology and watershed effects (EA pages 18-19). Other effects on access and travel, recreation, peregrine falcons, bat species, big game, fish, soils, heritage resources, management indicator species, migratory birds, northern spotted owls, sensitive wildlife species, special habitats, snags and down wood habitat, and vegetation were also discussed in lesser detail (EA, pages 19-25). All these effects are within the levels anticipated by the Willamette National Forest and the Northwest Forest Plans. No significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to the economics of the project, noxious and invasive weeds, water, soils, fisheries, wildlife, or other components of the human environment are anticipated.
- 8) The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, because an appropriate review has been conducted by this undertaking, and no significant property (s), which may be eligible for inclusion in the National Register Historic Places, were found to be present in the project area. The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources, because no cultural resources were found in the proposed expansion area. The proposal will have no adverse effects to cultural resources (EA, page 21). The surveys were conducted according to an inventory plan approved by the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). This inventory is consistent with an agreement between the USDA Forest Service R6/PNW, Oregon SHPO, and the advisory council on historic preservation. A provision will be included in the project plan to provide for protection of this resource in the event that new material is discovered during ground disturbing activities. This document meets the requirements of Section 106 and 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act.
- 9) The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973, because the project would have no effect to spotted owl nesting, roosting, or foraging habitat or peregrine falcons nesting habitat. A Biological Evaluations (BE) was prepared and evaluated the effects upon endangered and threatened species and their habitat. The summary of the effects to threatened northern spotted owls and peregrine falcons can be found in the EA on page 23 and page 19, respectively. The rock source expansion will create a potential noise disturbance to spotted owls and peregrine falcons during the nesting season that is mitigated with a seasonal restriction. Consultation with USF&WS was not required because no suitable habitat was affected.
- 10) The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. The action is consistent with the Willamette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (EA, page 3). The proposed action meets State air and water quality standards and complies with all regulations in the National Historic Preservation Act, National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, Clean Air Act, and Clean Water Act. These findings are based on how the Hawkins Rock Source Expansion environmental assessment was prepared in accordance to Forest Plan Management Areas and

Standards and Guidelines, compliance with the Water Quality Management Plan for Blowout Creek (EA, page 18), Biological Evaluation of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species (EA, pages 19, 23, and 24), project review for cultural resources (EA page 21) and with various recent Executive Orders (EA, pages 26-28).

## **Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations**

This decision to expand the Hawkins rock source is consistent with the intent of the Forest Plan's long-term goals and objectives listed on pages 3. The project was designed in conformance with land and resource management plan standards and incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan guidelines to provide access to National Forest lands in order to meet management direction and resource protection objectives while also providing user safety, convenience and efficiency of operations, and minimizing total life cycle costs of roads (FSM 7700).

## **Administrative Review and Appeal Rights**

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(e)(1). The decision and action is not subject to appeal because no substantive comments were received prior to the end of the 30-day comment period, which ended July 27, 2005.

## **Implementation Date**

This project may be implemented immediately after the date of the Decision Notice.

## **Contact**

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Gary Marsh, Resource Planner at the Detroit Ranger Station; telephone number (503) 854-4235 during normal business hours.

/s/ Paul Matter  
Paul Matter  
District Ranger  
Detroit Ranger District

August 8, 2005  
Date