

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Hoodoo Alpine Slide

**McKenzie River Ranger District
Willamette National Forest
Lane County, Oregon**

June 2004

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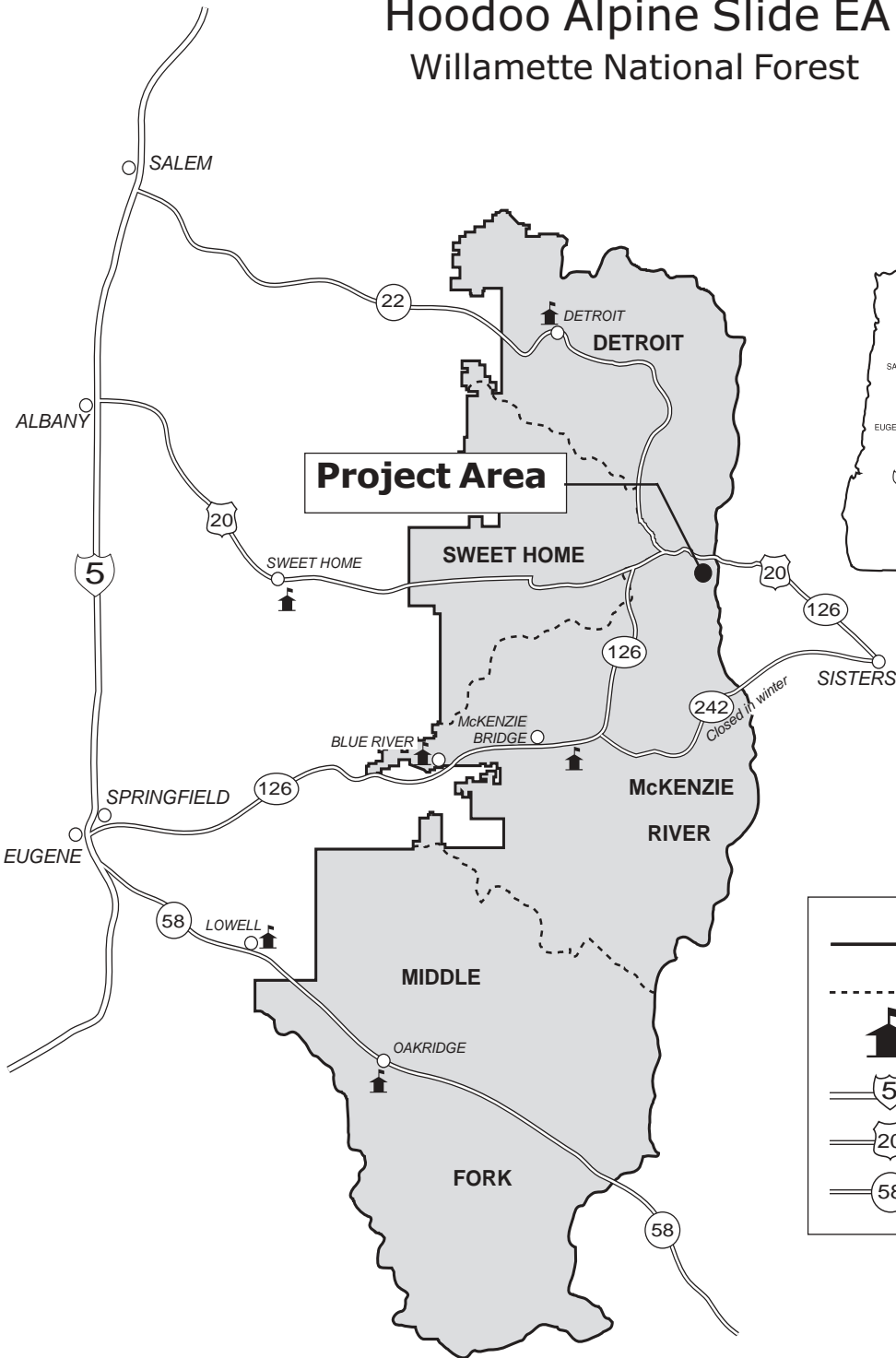
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Vicinity Map

Hoodoo Alpine Slide EA

Willamette National Forest



Locator Map

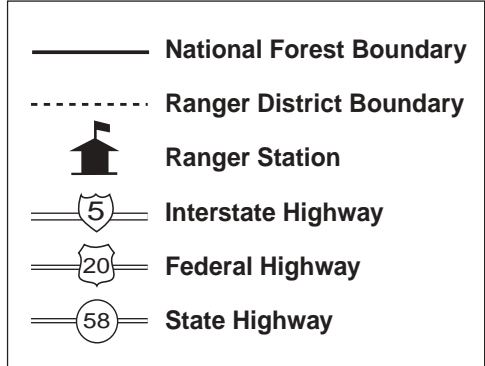


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Appendix A – Biological Evaluation, Spring Chinook Salmon and Bull Trout

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**Appendix C – Biological Evaluation, Wildlife; Survey and Manage Summary;
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Table of Acronyms:

DN/FONSI	Decision Notice/Finding of No Significant Impact
EA	Environmental Assessment
EWEB	Eugene Water & Electric Board
IDT	Inter-disciplinary Team
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
ODFW	Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
ODOT	Oregon Department of Transportation
OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Administration
PETS	Proposed, Endangered, Threatened, Sensitive species
ROD	Record of Decision
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
SOPA	Schedule of Proposed Actions
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USDI	United States Department of Interior
USFS	United States Forest Service
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
WA	Watershed Analysis
WNF	Willamette National Forest

I. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

This environmental assessment is written to fulfill the purposes and requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), as well as to meet policy and procedural requirements of the USDA Forest Service. The intent of NEPA, its implementing regulations, and Forest Service policy is to evaluate and disclose the effects of proposed actions on the quality of the human environment. The intent of these procedures is to improve the quality of decision-making, as well as make the decision-making process more accessible and transparent to the affected public.

Introduction

The Hoodoo Ski Area (Hoodoo) is situated in the central Cascade Mountain Range in Oregon, just south of Oregon State Highway 20/126 near Santiam Pass. Hoodoo operates under a Special Use Permit administered by the Willamette National Forest. In January 1996, a Final Environmental Impact Statement was completed to evaluate the alternatives for a new Master Plan. A new Master Plan was required to meet the terms of Hoodoo Ski Area's Special Use Permit, as mandated by Forest Service Manual 2700. The approved Master Plan meets the terms of the special use permit to operate on National Forest land. The Record of Decision was signed on January 12, 1996.

On January 30, 2003, Hoodoo made a written request to the District Ranger on the McKenzie River Ranger District to construct and operate a summer use alpine slide within their permit area. This development was not addressed in the current Master Plan.

Legal description of the project area: T.13S., R.71/2E., Section 26.

Proposed Action

The District Ranger on the McKenzie River Ranger District proposes to amend the Special Use Permit to authorize Hoodoo Ski Area to construct and operate a summer use alpine slide within their permit area, estimated to be 3040 feet in length from the top of a central ski run to the base of a chairlift. Initial installation would consist of a single track, approximately 3 feet wide with a second track installed parallel to the first at a future date. The immediate impacted area for slide placement would be approximately 20 feet wide. The slide track will be fabricated using materials colored to blend with the natural surroundings. The slide will be constructed at ground level, and will be accessed by the existing Manzanita chairlift. It will be operated during the summer months, during daylight hours. Effects of evening operations, including lighting impacts to wildlife and wilderness are not analyzed in this EA.

Approximately 50 trees, 6" to 14" dbh will be removed, resulting in less than one acre of clearing to install and operate the slide. Disturbed ground will be planted with native

vegetation to reduce the spread and introduction of noxious weeds and to reduce erosion. No road construction is proposed.

Implementation of this proposal, listed within this document as Alternative A, would likely occur in fall 2004.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project is to provide opportunities within Hoodoo's permit area to encourage and increase summertime use of ski area facilities, and to increase year-round utilization of the lodge, consistent with Forest Service Manual policies (Forest Service Manual 2343.1 Winter Recreation Uses, 2343.11 Policy). Manual direction encourages summertime use of ski area facilities where that use is compatible with or enhances natural resource-based recreation opportunities. A need exists for the special use permit holder, Hoodoo Recreation Services to develop the facility, because of a lack of unique developments in the ski area to attract additional visitors during the summer months. The Hoodoo Master Plan identified and approved development of other summer recreation amenities to serve the growing recreation needs of Hoodoo's year-round guests. These included a mountain top restaurant with opportunities for summer scenic viewing and interpretive programs; a multi-purpose playing field for a variety of summer sports such as soccer and softball; development of a small children's playground and as an area for special summer programs such as concerts; a 50 site RV camping area; and mountain biking opportunities utilizing existing roads as trails. Since the ROD was signed in 1996, Hoodoo was authorized to significantly remodel and expand its day lodge at the base of the mountain in lieu of constructing a mountain top restaurant. The lodge includes a summer camp store.

Decision Framework

The McKenzie River District Ranger will decide which of the alternatives, if any, meets the purpose and need to increase summertime recreation opportunities at Hoodoo. The other summer recreation developments have not been implemented. The decision maker, in a Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact (DN/FONSI), shall document the rationale for selecting an alternative from this assessment, or any other action, and will establish findings from this assessment as required by NEPA. The Decision Notice should address consistency with the Willamette Forest Plan (1990, 1994, 2001, 2004).

The Forest Plan

This Environmental Assessment is tiered to the 1990 Willamette National Forest Land and Resource Plan (Forest Plan). The Forest Plan resulted from the extensive analysis and considerations addressed in the accompanying Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD). In April 1994, the Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Spotted Owl, April 1994 (USDA, USDI Northwest Forest Plan ROD, 1994) modified the

Willamette Forest Plan with overlaying management areas and their accompanying standards and guidelines.

In January 2001, the Forest Plan was further amended by the Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (USDA, USDI Survey and Manage ROD, 2001). This Record of Decision amended a portion of the Northwest Forest Plan by adopting new standards and guidelines for Survey and Manage, Protection Buffers and other mitigating measures. Since that amendment was made, surveys for all applicable Survey and Manage species required by this amendment have been completed within the project area.

The March 2004 Record of Decision amended a portion of the Northwest Forest Plan by removing the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measure Standards and Guidelines. The decision is based on information and analysis in the Final SEIS to Remove or Modify the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measure Standards and Guidelines. The March 2004 ROD states:

Alternative 2, the proposed Action, would amend 28 land and resource management plans within the range of the northern spotted owl by removing the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measure Standards and Guidelines. Conservation of rare and little known species would rely on other elements of the Northwest Forest Plan and the BLM Special Status Species Policies and the Forest Service Sensitive Species Policies. The policies are referred to collectively as the Agencies' Special Status Species Policies.

The Agencies reviewed the 296 Survey and Manage species to determine their eligibility for inclusion in the Agencies' existing Special Status Programs. Based on that review, 152 of the of the 296 Survey and Manage species are eligible for inclusion in one or more of the Agencies' existing Special Status Species Programs.

In the interim, as the Agencies' Special Status Species Program policies are being updated and amended, it is the intent of the Responsible Official to take the more restrictive approach and maintain protection buffers that were prescribed for these former rare and uncommon Survey and Manage Species. These previously classified Survey and Manage species will be referred to in this document as "former" Survey and Manage species.

In March, 2004, the Northwest Forest Plan was again amended to change the documentation requirements with regard to the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS). The amendment clarifies that ACS objectives are not standards and guidelines and are not to be applied at the project scale. As this project is not in a riparian reserve, there is not need to document how the project is or is not consistent with ACS objectives.

Management Areas

Management Areas (MAs) are units of land with boundaries that can be located on the ground, each having specific direction for management as detailed in the Forest Plan. Management Area direction consists of an emphasis statement, goals, desired future condition, and a description of Standards and Guidelines. In addition, the Forest Plan

contains Forest-wide standards and guidelines that apply to all management areas unless specifically exempted by Management Area direction.

The proposed project activities take place within 12b, Developed Recreation, Special Use Sites. All design and implementation practices should be modified as necessary to meet Visual Quality Objectives of Partial Retention (MA-12b-08).

MA-12b, Developed Recreation, Special Use Permit

The primary goal of this management area is to provide a safe, healthful, aesthetic, non-urban atmosphere for the pursuit of natural resource-based recreation consistent with resource protection needs and anticipated user demand. Use and occupancy are regulated according to the terms of the special use agreement to protect natural resources and to ensure safe, enjoyable recreation experiences. Improvements will be designed to complement existing area developments and to expand the Forest's capacity to accommodate additional use.

MA-12b-08 Scenic Resources - Partial Retention

Another primary goal of this management area is to retain a visual quality objective of partial retention. In this area, new structures should be designed to protect resource values such as soil, water quality, vegetation and scenic quality. Some existing facilities may appear dominant in the natural landscape when viewed from certain locations. Human activity may be evident, but must remain subordinate to the characteristic landscape.

Issue Development

Scoping

Scoping is the process for determining issues relating to a proposed action and includes review of written comments, distribution of information about the project, Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) meetings and correspondence with the public, Tribes, government agencies, and elected officials (see Chapter V, Consultation with Others).

Significant Issues

Scoping occurred both internally and externally (see Chapter IV). No comments were provided from potentially interested publics. The IDT, through their internal scoping process, identified two Significant Issues. However, due to prescribed mitigation measures and design criteria, these issues did not generate the need to develop additional alternatives. Significant Issue descriptions are followed by criteria for measuring each alternative. The Significant Issues are tracked through issue identification (in this Chapter) and environmental consequences in Chapter III.

1. Soil Resources and Noxious Weeds.

The proposed action includes construction activities that would result in ground disturbance and soil displacement. Soils exposed in this manner would be vulnerable to increased

erosion, and an increased risk of noxious weed infestation. In addition, importation of soils, gravel, and straw, as well as the use of construction equipment, are potential routes of introduction of weeds and weed seeds to these vulnerable sites.

The effects of this project on soil and noxious weeds include:

- Increased potential for soil erosion due to ground disturbance and soil displacement associated with construction activities within the template of the alpine slide.
- Increased potential for the introduction of noxious weed species resulting from the creation of vulnerable, disturbed soils, and the possibility of weed and weed seed importation to these sites on equipment and materials.

2. Impacts to Scenic Integrity of the Area.

Proposed activities can influence the scenic integrity of the area. The proposed project area is viewed from within Hoodoo Ski Bowl, and the area is likely visible from peaks in the surrounding area, including those located within the Mt. Washington Wilderness Area to the south.

The effects of this project on scenic integrity of the area include:

- Changes from constructed feature including materials used, glare and reflectivity, line form and scale of slide.
- Changes in vegetation pattern.
- Changes in existing landscape features and vegetation patterns due to construction, including rock cuts and fills.

Other Issues:

Forest Service regulations (1950, chapter 11(3)) require that issues that are not significant to the project or that have been covered by prior environmental review be identified and eliminated from detailed study. Discussion of these issues should be limited to a brief statement of why they will not have a significant effect on the human environment or a reference to their coverage elsewhere. The following issues were not identified during scoping as being significant issues but are required to be evaluated by regulations (40 CFR 1502-16) or management direction.

3. Impacts to Cultural, Fisheries, Water, Wildlife and Botanical Resources

This issue is not significant to the proposed action because:

- An onsite cultural survey and an internal programmatic review was completed and no heritage resources have been located within the project area. Therefore, consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office is not required.
- There are no streams or fish in the vicinity of the project. The nearest stream is Hoodoo Creek, an intermittent stream that is approximately 1200 feet away, and the

nearest water body with listed fish is approximately 9 miles away. In addition, stream channels that drain the Santiam Pass area where the project is located, have no surface connection to reaches of the McKenzie River where listed fish occur.

- The entire proposed project is located outside of riparian reserves, and due to the limited scope and intensity of the project, landscape scale effects of the project on aquatic resources in the Upper McKenzie Watershed are not anticipated.
- An onsite botanical survey was completed and no sensitive plants were observed.
- There are no known Threatened, Endangered, or sensitive wildlife species or their habitat within the project area.

4. Management Indicator Species, Neotropical Migratory Land Birds, Former Survey and Manage Species, Protection Buffer Species, and Other Mitigation Species

Habitat disturbance that occurs from tree removal may result in changes to habitat for these species. This issue is not significant to the proposed action because:

- Management Indicator Species (MIS) were addressed in the WNF LRMP (1990). They include the spotted owl, pileated woodpecker, marten, elk, deer, cavity excavators, bald eagles, peregrine falcons, and fish. Through Region-wide coordination, each Forest identified the minimum habitat distribution and habitat characteristics needed to satisfy the life history needs of the MIS. Management recommendations to ensure their viability were incorporated into all WNF Plan Action Alternatives. Both Alternatives A and B meet all applicable Standards and Guidelines from the WNF Plan. The amount or characteristics of required habitat for these species would not be not significantly changed. With the 1994, 2001 and 2004 Amendments to the WNF Plan (i.e. the Northwest Forest Plan, NWFP), persistence of populations would be maintained under the NWFP Standards and Guidelines (Appendix J2). The proposed action meets applicable Standards and Guidelines from the NWFP.
- Neotropical Migratory Birds and their required protection are outlined in the January 11, 2001 Executive Order “Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds.” Habitats vary broadly for this large group of species. The felling of a limited number of trees with this project may unintentionally take individual migratory birds, but is not expected to have a measurable negative effect on bird populations because of the limited extent of the habitat removal. Activity will occur after nesting season, limiting direct impacts to reproductivity.
- This project is not located within old-growth/late-successional habitat, therefore there is no potential for former survey and manage vascular plants, bryophytes, lichens or fungus. No habitat for former Survey and Manage Species, Protection Buffer, and Other Mitigation Species is located where the proposed actions will occur.

II. ALTERNATIVES

Using the Willamette National Forest Plan as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan and the Watershed Analysis as the framework, the interdisciplinary team designed two alternatives: a “No Action” and one “Action” Alternative. The Action Alternative is designed to meet the Purpose and Need as described in Chapter I and addresses the significant issues. The “No Action” Alternative is required by Federal law (National Environmental Policy Act, 1969). The No Action Alternative provides the baseline from which effects of other alternatives can be compared and measured.

Legal Requirements

The alternatives for this project were designed to comply with the following:

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Federal Laws:

The Preservation of Antiquities Act, June 1906 and National Historic Preservation Act, October 1966 – Field surveys where ground-disturbing activities would occur have been completed. Per the 1995 Programmatic Agreement between the Forest Service and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), the proposed action meets the conditions listed in Appendix B – Recreation 1 and is excluded from case-by-case review. SHPO consultation is not required.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 1969 – NEPA establishes the format and content requirements of environmental analysis and documentation. Preparation of the Hoodoo Alpine Slide EA is in compliance with these requirements.

The Endangered Species Act (ESA), December 1973 – The ESA establishes a policy that all federal agencies will seek to conserve endangered and threatened species of fish, wildlife and plants. Biological Evaluations for plants, fisheries and wildlife have been prepared, which describes possible effects of the proposed action on sensitive, and other species of concern that may be present in the project area.

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA), 1976 – The alternatives were developed to be in full compliance with NFMA through compliance with the Amended Willamette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (US Forest Service, 1990).

Clean Air Act Amendments, 1977 – The alternatives are designed to meet the National Ambient Air quality standards through avoidance of practices that degrade air quality below health and visibility standards.

The Clean Water Act, 1987 – The alternatives meet and conform to the Clean Water Act, Amended 1987. This act establishes a non-degradation policy for all federally proposed projects. The selected alternative is not likely to degrade water quality below standards set by the State of Oregon. This would be accomplished through planning, application and monitoring of Best Management Practices (BMPs).

State Laws:

Oregon State Best Management Practices (BMPs) – State BMPs would be employed to maintain water quality.

Oregon State Forest Worker Safety Codes, The Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Code for Forest Activities would be met with implementation of the action alternative.

Alternatives Considered in Detail

Alternative A - Proposed Action

This alternative proposes the construction and operation of a summer-use alpine slide within the Hoodoo Ski Area. It is estimated to be 3040 feet in length from the top of a central ski run to the base of Manzanita Chairlift. Initial installation would consist of a single track approximately 3 feet wide with a second track-installed parallel to the first at a future date. The immediate impacted area for slide placement would be approximately 20 feet wide. The slide track will be fabricated using materials colored to blend with the natural surroundings. Design criteria will ensure the slide will be constructed at ground level, and will be accessed by the existing Manzanita chairlift. It will be operated during the summer months, during daylight hours only. Approximately 50 trees, 6” to 14” dbh will be removed, resulting in less than one acre of additional clearing to install and operate the slide. Disturbed ground will be planted with native vegetation to reduce the spread and introduction of noxious weeds and to reduce erosion. No road construction is proposed.

Alternative B – No Action

Alternative B – This alternative would not implement actions to construct and operate a summer use alpine slide at Hoodoo Ski Area and no amendments to the special use permit. Summer recreation opportunities identified and analyzed in the Hoodoo Master Plan EIS may still be developed at a future date.

The No Action alternative provides a basis for describing the environmental effects of the proposed action and other alternatives.

Mitigation Measures for All Action Alternatives

The following list describes the mitigation measures that would be applied in the implementation of Alternative A.

Soil Protection and Introduction of Noxious Weeds

Areas of disturbance and exposed soil would be seeded with non-invasive, native grasses, such as Idaho fescue, Squirrel tail and California brome. The District Botanist, prior to application, must approve use of species other than these. Seeding should be accompanied by mulching with a weed free material to enhance moisture retention and microclimate conditions that would enhance the possibility for successful re-vegetation. Materials that could be used include straw, coconut fiber and wood fiber products. Hydro-mulch application is acceptable.

Off road or ground disturbing equipment would be washed prior to entering National Forest land. Equipment would be free of all seed and debris that may contain plant seeds such as soil and vegetation.

Material brought in for construction, such as fill soil, gravel, and straw would be certified free of weeds and weed seeds.

Excavation would occur during the dry season, and disturbed soil would be covered with plastic or straw mulch to ensure that overland flow does not occur and carry soil off site. Water bars would be installed in conjunction with the mulch application, as needed. Straw bales would be used during wet periods to ensure soil in fill sections stays in place.

Soil fill heights would not exceed five feet and slopes will not exceed 15%.

Visual Quality:

6. If hydro mulch is used to re-vegetate disturbed areas, it would match the color of the surrounding soil.
7. The constructed feature would be fabricated using a natural color that would blend with the earth and/or rock color at the project site. The slide surface would be made with a non-reflective, low glare color and material.
8. The slide would be located to minimize cuts and fills and to fit the existing topography. Side slopes of track would be graded to have a rolling, natural appearance and to promote re-vegetation.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Chapter III describes aspects of the environment that could be affected by the alternatives and the potential environmental consequences of implementing the alternatives. Additional details on the affected environment can be found in the Project File, Watershed Analysis, and Appendices.

Significant Issues

1. Soil Resources and Noxious Weeds

Affected Environment

The soil resources within the project area are the product of volcanic activity that has reshaped the older glacial landforms underlying much of the area. These soils exhibit relatively simple profiles as a result of the limited time available for soil development processes to occur.

The soils within the project area are identified as Land-type 82 in the Willamette National Forest Soil Resources Inventory (Legard and Meyer, Willamette N.F., 1979). These soils are shallow to moderately deep, very cindery loamy sands. Slopes are generally less than 30 percent, but range from 40 percent to greater than 60 percent on the benches where the project is located. The soil and underlying parent material tend to be loose and unconsolidated. Soils in this area are excessively drained and stable. The potential for surface erosion on these soils is moderate to light and sediment transport potential is low, but since the project occurs on slopes at the steeper end of the range for the land-type, the potential for these effects will likely be moderate to high. Sheet and rill erosion and sediment delivery are most common on steeper portions of these landforms following high severity fire or other disturbance. Loss of vegetative cover increases the risk of erosion losses from these land-types.

The underlying geology is composed of hard, competent andesites and basalts that are extremely stable and produce landforms with virtually no susceptibility to mass failure.

The project area is in the vicinity of land that was burned in 2003 by the B&B Fire, and the fire is visible from the project site. However, the project area itself was not burned.

No noxious weed populations have been identified within the area where the proposed actions will take place. However, forest roads, State Highway 126, and U.S. Highways 20 and 22 are conduits for continual weed dispersal and expansion. Recreation vehicles and trail users including Off-Highway Vehicles and equestrians in the Big Lake Area can introduce noxious weeds and non-native species. Routine maintenance and construction activities within the ski

area contribute to the spread of weeds through continued ground disturbance, seed spread by the use of mowers, road equipment, and contaminated rock and fill material. Most weed species become established as a result of a soil disturbing activity, either natural or artificial. Once established, species are able to persist and reproduce with little competition from native vegetation.

Alternative A as it Responds to the Significant Issue of Soil Resources and Noxious Weeds:

Mitigation measures included in Alternative A incorporate five specific Best Management Practices (BMPs) that provide for the protection of soil resources and reduce the risk of noxious weed infestation. Specific BMPs such as application of mulch, installation of water bars, and application of erosion control seeding are all well tested and widely used methods to control the risk of soil erosion.

The requirement for all equipment that will be used in project construction and required restoration activities to be washed prior to moving onto National Forest System lands has been included in project contracts for several years, and has been an effective tool in limiting the introduction and distribution of non-native seed and propagules. The requirement that rock aggregate, fill, mulch, and plant materials imported to the site for project-related activities, must be from a source free of noxious weeds is a common sense preventative treatment as well.

The entire project will disturb less than a total of two acres of soil. During construction activities, there is a slight chance that isolated summer rainstorms could result in localized erosion, but due to the infiltrative nature of the soils, substantial sediment transport would not be expected to accompany the erosion. It is also during this short period that the risk for noxious weed infestation would be greatest.

Given the effectiveness of the proposed BMPs and the limited area of disturbance, it is anticipated that the only direct or indirect effect of the project will be a minimal increase of the risk of soil erosion, sediment transport, and noxious weed infestation for a period of several weeks during actual construction activities.

Cumulative Effects on Soil Resources and Noxious Weeds

Existing developments at Hoodoo Ski Area have incorporated similar effective BMPs. In many areas that required permanent elimination of vegetation pavement has been placed to stabilize these sites. Re-vegetation of disturbed areas, equipment washing, and the use of weed free mulches have all contributed to an area currently free of noxious weed infestation.

Much of the area surrounding the project area burned in 2003 during the B&B Complex Fire. The Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) report prepared in September 2003 concluded that approximately 87 percent of the fire area had experienced low severity fire with minimal detrimental burn damage to soil resources. The interdisciplinary team associated with the BAER assessment and associated fire evaluations confirm that this is the case with much of the fire area in the vicinity of this project (Kretzing, personal observations).

The BAER assessment further concludes: “the majority of the fire perimeter contains moderately deep soils located on slopes averaging 20% which are unlikely to incur significant erosion capable of altering soil productivity. The low and moderate burn severities left variable organic cover on the surface, which can decrease potential post-fire erosion risks. Surface vegetation in the form of perennial grasses and herbaceous shrubs is expected to return over the next few years, based upon inspections of the 2002 Cache Mountain and Eyerly Fires.”

Considering the very low risk of direct or indirect effects on soil resources associated with the proposed project; the favorable post-fire BAER assessment of soil conditions and resulting low probability of significant erosion; and the re-vegetation observed on fires from the previous year, significant cumulative effects on soil resources associated with this project are not anticipated.

Existing populations of noxious weeds near Hoodoo are located along major travel routes such as Highways 20/22 and 126. These sites are monitored by the District and treated through a contract with the Oregon Department of Transportation on an annual basis. Despite the aggressive treatment, new populations appear every year, most likely due to movement of seeds by vehicles traveling on the highways. This effect is not preventable at this time.

Reasonably foreseeable future actions include development of a new winter ski run, as identified and analyzed in the Hoodoo Master Plan EIS. Due to mitigation measures and best practices that will be implemented as part of ski run development, this action is not expected to perpetuate noxious weed infestation or soil erosion.

Given the prevention measures associated with the project and the annual monitoring and treatment of adjacent travel routes, significant cumulative effects caused by noxious weeds are not anticipated with this project.

Alternatives B (No Action) as it Responds to the Significant Issue of Soil Erosion and Noxious Weeds.

Alternative B proposes no activities that would create risks to soil. Alternative B will not increase the current risk of introduction of noxious weeds.

2. Scenic Integrity of the Area

Affected Environment

All design and implementation practices within the project area should be modified as necessary to meet Visual Quality Objectives of Partial Retention (MA-12b-08). All recreation management practices should result in a physical setting that meets or exceeds the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class of “Roaded Natural”. Modification of the natural setting in this ROS class is acceptable.

The landscape currently has a modified appearance as viewed from within Hoodoo Ski Area. This area has a lower scenic condition than the surrounding area as viewed from the highway due to a number of modifications that have occurred within the ski area. Modifications and developments include a 1000 car parking lot, buildings, cleared vegetation, rope tow poles,

ski lifts, signs and lights. There is also a communications site located at the top of Hoodoo Butte. In the current condition, the landscape view on the east slopes making up Hoodoo Ski Area, and in the area of the proposed actions, does not meet the recommended standard of partial retention. The area of the lodge and the lower slopes of the adjacent mountains are more modified than meets the recommended standards for the Recreation Opportunity Setting of Roded Natural. This is a result of the built elements, number of people and vehicles encountered in the area, and the intensity of the type of use.

Alternative A as it Responds to the Significant Issue Scenic Integrity:

There would be minimal effect on the existing scenic integrity of the area with this alternative. Removal of a limited number of green trees from the slope would not significantly alter the visual quality of the immediate area as viewed from within the ski bowl or from vista points in adjacent wilderness areas. However, the added structures including the slide and the installation of associated signage, would increase the development level within the immediate area of the ski bowl. Construction of the slide will alter the natural grade, and resulting cut and constructed fill sections of the slide bed will be required. This may result in unnaturally occurring, linear features that are perpendicular to the natural slope. Mitigation measures included in Alternative A incorporate specific design criteria that will lessen the visual impact of the new developments. Use of natural colors and non-reflective materials, and grading and re-vegetation of side slopes are practices consistent with design requirements for past developments in the project area to help retain naturalness of the landscape setting.

Cumulative Effects on Scenic Integrity

Existing developments within the Hoodoo Ski Area have contributed to a landscape where the visual quality objective of partial retention is exceeded.

The Hoodoo Master Plan describes specific measures to improve existing scenic quality conditions and to mitigate anticipated effects of proposed improvements. Improvements have been authorized under the Special Use permit to unify the use of natural color schemes, to consolidate base facilities, to use building styles appropriate to the setting, and to maintain uniform and consistent signage.

A new lodge was constructed at the base of the mountain, using both an open area and the footprint of the existing base facility area. This option minimized development sprawl at Hoodoo and consolidated activity in a previously disturbed, central area.

Reasonably foreseeable future actions that could affect scenic quality include the development of a new winter ski run, as identified and analyzed in the Hoodoo Master Plan EIS. While the proposed ski runs and associated lift development do not actually upgrade the quality of the existing visual condition to partial retention, they do provide opportunities to improve the overall appearance of development through mitigation measures. Mitigation measures such as feathering edges of ski runs to minimize visual contrast between forested and developed runs and reflecting natural patterns of the surrounding landscape during ski run design will minimize visibility of unnatural patterns. There are no current proposals for implementing additional summer recreation opportunities identified in the Master Plan EIS ROD.

Considering the existing development level within the ski area, the recent decision to construct and consolidate the lodge and restaurant as part of the base facility, mitigation measures for foreseeable developments, and the minimal effect on scenic integrity associated with the proposed project, cumulative effects on scenic integrity associated with this project are similar to or less than those described in the Hoodoo Master Plan EIS.

Alternative B as it Responds to the Significant Issue of Scenic Integrity:

There would be no effect on the visual quality of the area with the no action alternative because no new developments would occur within the ski bowl that would further detract from the natural appearance of the landscape setting.

Non-Significant Issues:

3. Cultural, Fisheries, Water, Wildlife and Botanical Resources

A. Affected Environment

An onsite cultural survey and internal programmatic review were completed and no heritage resources have been located within the project area.

The project is located in a topographic bowl with no outlet, and with no stream channels within the vicinity of the proposed action. The nearest stream to the actual activity site is Hoodoo Creek, which is an intermittent stream, located approximately 1200 feet to the west. The actual project site is separated from Hoodoo Creek by a topographic divide.

Hoodoo Creek flows into Lost Lake, which occupies the bottom of an even larger topographic bowl with no surface outlet to the rest of the Upper McKenzie River Watershed, and the McKenzie River where listed fish species occur.

B. Environmental Consequences

As previously discussed under the soil resource issue, land-types in the project area are highly infiltrative and are not particularly prone to sediment transport. Low risk of sediment transport and the topographic separation of the project area from live drainages results in no anticipated direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to water resource or fisheries as a consequence of the proposed action or the no action alternative.

There are no known Threatened, Endangered or sensitive (TES) wildlife species located within the proposed project area. A prefield review showed that no habitat for TES species occurs in the project area, and that habitat removed or disturbed is of a small scale not measurable for TES wildlife populations.

A prefield review showed that no known sensitive plant species are located in the project area. There is potential habitat for one sensitive plant. No botanical plant species of concern were observed during a sensitive plant survey of the project area.

Since implementation of the action alternative would result in no direct, indirect or cumulative effects on cultural resources, fisheries, wildlife, and botanical resources; no formal or informal consultation was required with any other agencies.

4. Management Indicator Species, Neotropical Migratory Land Birds, Former Survey and Manage Species, Protection Buffer Species, and Other Mitigation Species

Management Indicator Species (MIS) were addressed in the WNF LRMP (1990). They include the spotted owl, pileated woodpecker, marten, elk, deer, cavity excavators, bald eagles, peregrine falcons, and fish. Through Region-wide coordination, each Forest identified the minimum habitat distribution and habitat characteristics needed to satisfy the life history needs of the MIS. Management recommendations to ensure their viability were incorporated into all WNF Plan Action Alternatives. meet all applicable Standards and Guidelines from the WNF Plan. With the 1994, 2001 and 2004 Amendments to the WNF Plan (i.e. the Northwest Forest Plan, NWFP), persistence of populations would be maintained under the NWFP Standards and Guidelines (Appendix J2).

Neotropical Migratory Birds and their required protection are outlined in the January 11, 2001 Executive Order “Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds.” Habitats vary broadly for this large group of species. Habitat for Former Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and Other Mitigation Species from the 2001 ROD for the NWFP were reviewed.

There are no expected impacts to these species from implementation of the action alternatives because the amount or characteristics of required habitat for these species would not be significantly changed. The felling and removal of a limited number of trees with this project may unintentionally take individual migratory birds, but is not expected to have a measurable negative effect on bird populations because of the limited extent of the habitat removal. Former Survey and Manage Species habitats were reviewed as necessary and none were found in the project area.

Indirect, Cumulative, and Unavoidable Effects

The above analysis of cumulative effects considered past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions on soil resources and noxious weeds and impacts to scenic integrity of the area.

This Environmental Assessment is tiered to the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Willamette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan as amended and the analysis of cumulative effects therein.

Potential changes in the physical and chemical nature of the earth's climate are likely to have impacts on the Nation's agriculture, forest, and related ecosystems. The extent and magnitude

of these changes are uncertain at this time. There is a lack of sufficient information to predict and detect changes in health, diversity, and productivity of these systems due to global climatic change. The Department of Agriculture and Forest Service are researching issues of global climate change, and the implications for forest management activities. Current Forest Service direction states that NEPA disclosure documents at the regional or project levels are not the appropriate means for addressing the global climate change issues.

Required Disclosures

There are no proposed activities on prime farmlands or rangelands within the planning area, and therefore, there would be no adverse affects to these resources. Floodplains do not occur in the planning area.

American Indian rights, including those covered by the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, would not be affected by the implementation of this project.

Proposed actions would be conducted in a manner that does not exclude persons (including populations) from participation in, deny persons (including populations) the benefits of, or subject persons (including populations) to discrimination because of their race, color, or national origin, as directed by Executive Order #12898.

The proposed action is not likely to affect aquatic systems, recreational fisheries, or designated Essential Fish Habitat.

The U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, religion, sex, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited basis applies to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's Target Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410, or call 202-720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Civil Rights/Environmental Justice

Civil Rights legislation and Executive Order #12898 (Environmental Justice) directs an analysis of the proposed alternatives as they relate to specific subsets of the American population, which include ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and low-income groups. The Hoodoo Ski Area is not located in a minority community and would not affect residents of low or moderate income. Proposed actions would be conducted in a manner that does not exclude persons (including populations) from participation in, deny persons (including populations) the benefits of, or subject persons (including populations) to discrimination because of their race, color, or national origin.

IV. CONSULTATION WITH OTHERS

On July 7, 2003, a Scoping Letter was mailed out to a list of 44 addresses that included individuals, organizations, Tribes, and governmental organizations that have expressed an interest in similar projects on the McKenzie River Ranger District. The letter was mailed to the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians, Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, and The Klamath Tribes.

The project was also listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) beginning in July 2003. The SOPA is available on the forest internet and is updated quarterly to notify the public of proposed activities on the Willamette National Forest.

The project was also presented at a McKenzie Watershed Projects public open house in Walterville on April 3, 2004.

No comments were received in response to scoping.

V. REFERENCES

Jessica Dole, Assessment of Expected Effects on Forest Scenery, Proposed Alpine Slide, December 2003.

USDA Forest Service. 1990. Final Environmental Impact Statement, Land and Resource Management Plan, Willamette National Forest.

USDA, USDI. 1994. Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Spotted Owl, April 1994 (Northwest Forest Plan ROD).

USDA Forest Service. 1996. Final Environmental Impact Statement, Hoodoo Master Plan, Willamette National Forest.

USDA, USDI. 2001. Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (Survey and Manage ROD).

USDA, USDI. 2004. Record of Decision to Remove or Modify the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measure Standards and Guidelines.

VI. APPENDICES

Appendix A – Biological Evaluation, Fisheries

Appendix B – Biological Evaluation, Botany

Appendix C – Biological Evaluation, Wildlife; Survey and Manage Species; Migratory Birds.