

Hazeldell Fire Station Land Sale

Environmental Assessment

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Summary

The Willamette National Forest proposes to sell a two acre parcel of land to the Hazeldell Rural Fire Protection District for use as a fire station site. If implemented, this sale would be made under the authority of the Townsite Act of 1958.

The project area is located in the eastern end of the High Prairie rural residential area, about six road miles north of the City of Oakridge, and is within the Middle Fork Ranger District, Willamette National Forest, in the state of Oregon. This action is needed to provide a strategically located rural fire station site for the Hazeldell Rural Fire District.

The proposed action would result in the sale of public land to a local community service organization for use as a fire station site. Construction of the fire station buildings and parking areas would result in the clearing of about one and one half acres of the existing 75 year old single storied forest, permanently eliminating that amount and type of wildlife and plant habitat. In addition to the proposed action, the Forest Service also evaluated the No Action alternative.

Based upon the effects of the alternatives, the responsible official will decide whether or not to authorize this land sale.

Introduction

Document Structure

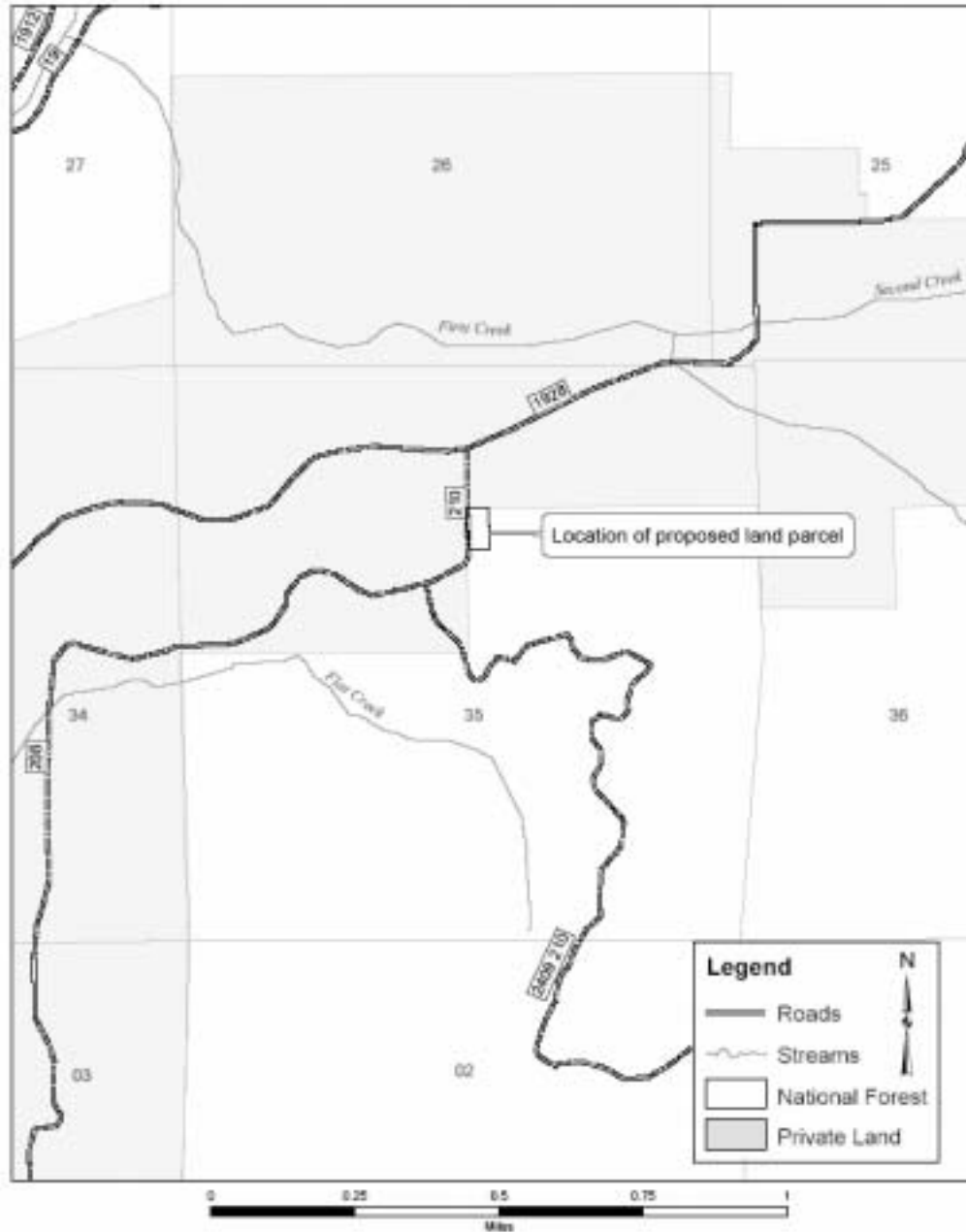
The Forest Service has prepared this Environmental Assessment in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations. This Environmental Assessment discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the proposed action and alternatives. The document is organized into four parts:

- **Introduction:** The section includes information on the history of the project proposal, the purpose of and need for the project, and the agency's proposal for achieving that purpose and need. This section also details how the Forest Service informed the public of the proposal and how the public responded.

Hazeldell Rural Fire District Land Sale Proposal Proposed Action - Alternative 2

Section 35, T20S, R3E

Vicinity Map



- **Comparison of Alternatives, including the Proposed Action:** This section provides a more detailed description of the agency's proposed action as well as alternative methods for achieving the stated purpose. These alternatives were developed based on significant issues raised by the public and other agencies. This discussion also includes possible mitigation measures. Finally, this section provides a summary table of the environmental consequences associated with each alternative.
- **Environmental Consequences:** This section describes the environmental effects of implementing the proposed action and other alternatives. This analysis is organized by components of the environment. Within each section, the affected environment is described first, followed by the effects of the No Action Alternative that provides a baseline for evaluation and comparison of the other alternatives that follow.
- **Agencies and Persons Consulted:** This section provides a list of preparers and agencies consulted during the development of the environmental assessment.
- **Appendices:** The appendices provide more detailed information to support the analyses presented in the environmental assessment.

Additional documentation, including more detailed analyses of project-area resources, may be found in the project planning record located at the Middle Fork Ranger District Office in Westfir, Oregon.

Background

The Hazeldell Rural Fire District (RFD) was formed in November of 2002 to provide fire protection services to non-incorporated areas in the Oakridge/Westfir community of Lane County. The Hazeldell RFD is a legal municipal entity formed under Oregon Revised Statutes Chapter 198 and 357. This organization was created by a majority vote of Oakridge/Westfir rural residents, is funded through property tax assessments, and serves an area of about 15 square miles. In order to provide those services in a timely manner to all rural residents, the Fire District needs to locate facilities and fire fighting equipment strategically across its area of responsibility.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of this proposal is to provide an appropriately located fire station site for rural areas of the Oakridge/Westfir community. The Middle Fork Ranger Station is part of this rural community and receives fire protection services from the Hazeldell RFD. This action is needed because the Hazeldell RFD needs to strategically locate fire fighting equipment across the rural community to provide effective fire prevention. The High Prairie portion of this community is problematic in this respect. It is a considerable distance from existing fire protection facilities and composed of mostly large, rural land parcels, many of which can not be subdivided under existing State land use laws. There is also an issue of response times to fires in the High Prairie area because of the lack of developed water sources in the area. Hauling water to a fire in the eastern end of High Prairie from

the current sources is difficult and time consuming and could result in an inadequate response time to a fire event.

Most lands in the High Prairie area that are subdivided into smaller parcels have been developed for rural residential use. These parcels are expensive to purchase, include buildings not needed by the Hazeldell RFD, and many are not available for purchase at any price, in particular at specific sites that would provide for a strategic location for such a facility.

The Hazeldell RFD is a not-for-profit, taxpayer-supported public entity and cannot afford to purchase developed land (meaning that containing buildings, in particular houses) on the competitive market, or purchase undeveloped parcels much larger than what is needed, in order to provide the services its charter requires. There are no undeveloped but developable private lands in the vicinity of where the fire station needs to be located. The Forest Service parcel proposed for this land sale meets the strategic needs of the RFD and is also close to Camp Six, the portion of the High Prairie area with the highest density of structures and rural residents.

Benefit to the local community - The Hazeldell RFD needs to establish a fire station facility in the general location of the proposed land transfer in order to provide quick and efficient service to all rural landowners. Sale of the land in question would benefit the Oakridge/Westfir rural community by helping to provide the fire protection needed in the rural/urban interface.

Benefit to general public – The Hazeldell RFD provides wildland fire fighting services. That organization's efforts could materially reduce fire threats to National Forest lands adjacent to rural residential areas, both through direct wild land fire suppression, as well as fire fighting on rural properties that, if not fought in a timely fashion, could move onto and damage public lands and resources.

As mentioned previously, the Middle Fork Ranger station is also protected by the Hazeldell RFD, however, the proposed station at the High Prairie site would not significantly increase protection for the Ranger Station since there are other existing fire stations that are closer.

Proposed Action

The action proposed by the Forest Service to meet the purpose and need is to sell, at market rates, a two acre parcel of land to the Hazeldell RFD as shown on the following map. The purchase price would be based upon the value of bare forest land, plus the value of the timber that currently exists on the site. This parcel is located in the northwest corner of the south ½ of the NE ¼ of section 35, T. 20 S., R. 3 E., W.M. This parcel is located near the east end of the area known as High Prairie, along Forest Road 2409.210 (the Dead Mountain Road), about one quarter mile south of that road's junction with the High Prairie road (Road 1928). The parcel is immediately adjacent to private

agricultural land along its north boundary, and private forest land along its western boundary. The parcel includes a 350 foot long section of the Dead Mountain road (2409.210) and an equal segment of a power line maintained by the Lane electric Cooperative. Right-of-way would be retained for both the road and the power line.

Should this proposed land sale be consummated, the Hazeldell RFD would clear most or all the trees currently occupying the site, construct an access road into the site, construct a 40 foot by 60 foot fire station and a six to eight thousand gallon above ground water tank, as a surfaced parking area associated with the buildings and the access road. They would also bring electric service lines to the site.

This proposed sale is made under the authority of the Townsite Act of July 31, 1958. This Federal legislation gives the Forest Service (through the Secretary of Agriculture) authority to transfer land, after public notice and at a fair market value (as per direction contained in 36 CFR 254.20(b) and 254.26), to an established community when such transfer would serve community objectives that outweigh broader public objectives and values served by maintaining said tract of land in Federal ownership.

If this action is implemented, the Hazeldell Fire Protection District would construct a fire equipment garage, a six to eight thousand gallon water storage tank, and the associated access road and parking lot on the property.

Decision Framework _____

Given the purpose and need, the Willamette National Forest Supervisor, the Deciding Official will review the proposed action and the other alternatives in order to make the following decision:

Whether or not it is the greater public benefit to sell the identified two acre parcel of National Forest System lands to benefit the local public community.

Public Involvement _____

The proposal was listed in the Spring, 2005 Edition of the Willamette National Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions. The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment during scoping, initiated through a mailing of a scoping document on May 2, 2005. This document was mailed to about 26 people and organizations that have experienced past interest in proposals such as this.

The only comments received from the public during scoping and project development expressed a lack of support for the Hazeldell RFD rather than the specifics of the proposed action. The comments did not raise issues directly relevant to the proposed land sale or public impacts of the lands sale and were considered outside the scope of this analysis.

Issues

The Forest Service separated the issues into two groups: significant and non-significant issues. Significant issues were defined as those directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action. Non-significant issues were identified as those: 1) outside the scope of the proposed action; 2) already decided by law, regulation, Forest Plan, or other higher level decision; 3) irrelevant to the decision to be made; or 4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence. The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations require this delineation in Sec. 1501.7, "...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)..."

As for significant issues, the Forest Service identified 2 topics raised during scoping. These issues include:

1. **Community benefit** – Does the benefit to the local community in terms of providing adequate fire fighting facilities outweigh the loss of this particular piece of public land?
2. **Loss of forest habitat** – would the loss of two acres of closed canopy young forest habitat significantly affect the resources, in particular wildlife habitat, provided in the general area?

Alternatives, including the Proposed Action

This chapter describes and compares the alternatives considered for the Hazeldell RFD land sale proposal. This section also presents the alternatives in comparative form, sharply defining the differences between each alternative and providing a clear basis for choice among options by the decision maker and the public.

Alternatives

Alternative 1 – No Action

Under the No Action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. The identified parcel would not be sold to the Hazeldell RFD for construction of a fire station facility. Hazeldell RFD would likely continue to dispatch fire fighting equipment, including water tankers from existing facilities in the City of Oakridge.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

This alternative would entail the sale of the proposed two acre parcel as shown on the attached map to the Hazeldell RFD for a payment based upon an appraisal of the value of the bare land and the timber volume currently growing on the land (as per direction contained in the Townsite Act of 1958 and 36 CFR 254.20(b) and 254.26). This sale would result in the removal of most of the existing trees and construction of an access road, an approximately 40 foot by 60 foot garage building, a six to eight thousand gallon above ground water tank, a gravel access road and parking area associated with the structures. Electricity would also be brought to the site.

Other Alternatives Considered

Other possible locations on Forest Service lands for this facility were not considered in detail because of the lack of parcels that meet the site requirements. The fire station needs to be centrally located, sited on buildable (flat) ground, and adjacent to private land to avoid additional right-of-way needs and avoid public land management conflicts. As previously discussed in the Purpose and Need section no reasonable opportunities to locate this facility on non-Forest Service System lands were identified.

Mitigation Measures Common to All Alternatives

No mitigation measures were needed to mitigate impacts of the proposed action due to the limited scope of the project and the nature of the land and vegetation to be cleared.

Environmental Consequences

This section summarizes the physical, biological, social and economic environments of the affected project area and the potential changes to those environments due to implementation of the alternatives. It also presents the scientific and analytical basis for comparison of alternatives presented in the chart above.

Issue - Public Benefit

The sale of the land in question would benefit the Oakridge/Westfir rural community by helping to provide the fire protection needed in the rural/urban interface. The Townsite Act, the statutory authority under which this land sale is proposed, requires that such transfers occur only if the community objectives served by the sale outweigh broader public objectives and values of maintaining the land in Federal ownership.

The two acres of forest proposed to be sold does not provide any special public uses, or extraordinary or unique features for the general public that cannot be found on similar lands

throughout the High Prairie area and the Middle Fork District as a whole. The primary tangible general public benefit provided by this parcel is the growth and production of timber products. The parcel is currently classified as Matrix lands with a scenic emphasis (see the Forest Plan standards and guidelines for Partial Retention middle ground land allocations starting on page IV-205), and as such is programmed to produce a sustained yield of forest products consistent with other resource objectives.

No Action: This Alternative would not provide for the community benefit of increased fire protection, but would maintain the limited benefit of retaining this two acres of land in general public ownership. These benefits are not noteworthy or substantial since there is no known public use of this land for recreational purposes other than occasional and limited hunting. This alternative would provide for continued, sustained production of timber products in the future.

Proposed Action: Implementation of this Alternative would provide considerable benefit to the local community in that a fire station site would be provided to the local rural community at a relatively low cost and in a strategic location in the High Prairie area. Fire response times to the High Prairie would be reduced from the current situation providing the Hazeldell RFD the ability to more effectively respond to fires. This facility would be close to the highest housing density on High Prairie, that area where fire starts would be more likely and numerous. A water source would be available to provide quick water delivery to any fire in the High Prairie vicinity. Without a fire station in the High Prairie area, response times for fire fighters could be as long as one half hour from existing facilities in the City of Oakridge.

The effect to the general public of selling this land for development of a fire station would be removing two acres from timber production and reducing the amount of National Forest land for recreational uses such as hunting or hiking. There are 175,000 acres on the Middle Fork Ranger District available for sustained timber production. Removing the two acre parcel from the public land base would have no measurable effect on the District timber production or potential future revenues from sale of the timber. There are over 700,000 acres available on the Middle Fork Ranger District for dispersed recreational use. A reduction of two acres of second growth forest, adjacent to private land would have no noticeable effect on recreational opportunities available to the general public. No specific or unique public uses of this parcel were identified during the public scoping.

Use of this land by the Hazeldell RFD would enhance the protection of those adjacent lands in terms of providing additional wild land fire suppression services. The Hazeldell RFD also provides wildland fire fighting services. By having a station and equipment located in the High Prairie area, the RFD could reduce fire threats to the National Forest lands in the High Prairie area that are adjacent to rural residential areas both by direct wildland fire suppression, as well as fire fighting on

rural properties that, if not fought in a timely fashion, could move onto and damage public lands and resources.

In terms of benefits, or lack thereof, for the greater general public, the land and timber upon it would be purchased by the Hazeldell RFD at fair market value (as per 36 CFR 256.20(b) and 254.26).

There is private land on two sides of the proposed land parcel so transfer of ownership from public to private would not affect future access to adjacent public lands. The use of this proposed site by the Hazeldell RFD would not interfere with the protection, management and development of adjacent or contiguous National Forest System lands (it would not create a private/public land boundary that would make management of either type of land difficult), and such use would enhance the protection of those adjacent lands.

Issue - Loss of Habitat

The parcel proposed for sale is currently undeveloped and occupied by an approximately 75 year old uniform forest of Douglas-fir and incense cedar with an average diameter of about 15 inches. The stand has no large snags and few large logs on the ground. The understory of this forest is open and the plant association is Douglas-fir/dwarf Oregon grape-salal, indicative of relatively dry sites. It is a single storied stand that apparently developed after a similarly aged forest stand was killed by the 1910 Dead Mountain fire. The stand of trees killed by the fire appears to have been harvested. Given the time it took for reforestation the stand may have been grazed until conifers reoccupied the site.

Implementation of the proposed action would remove about two acres of young to mature (mid-seral), closed canopy and single story forest habitat. This forest type is common in the project vicinity and throughout the Middle Fork Ranger District. There are about 12,000 acres of similar forest habitat (although different plant associations) north of the Camp Six area generated by timber harvest in the 1930's. Another 5,000 acres of similar habitat west of the High Prairie area was also created by harvest in the 1920's. Several thousand acres of similarly aged and structured forest exist south and east of the land parcel that was created by the 1910 Dead Mountain fire. The proposed parcel is adjacent to agricultural and pasture lands. Removing two acres of the described habitat would have no measurable or noticeable effects on any plant or wildlife species. No wildlife or plant species populations would be put at risk if the two acres of habitat was removed from public ownership and converted to non-forest.

Biological evaluations for wildlife and botanical species have been completed for the proposed parcel and it was determined that there would be no effect to any Threatened, Endangered or

Sensitive species from the proposed land sale. Fish biologists have reviewed the proposal and determined there would be no effects to fish or fish habitat. The parcel has been reviewed for the presence of any Survey and Manage Species according to the direction in the 2001 Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer and other Mitigation Measure Standards and Guidelines. No species habitat was identified on the proposed parcel.

Alternative 1, No Action, would retain this two acres of young, closed canopy forest habitat and would result in no change in the amount of this type of habitat in the North Fork of the Middle Fork of the Willamette River

Additional, Non-Significant Issue Effects

Visuals: As mentioned above, the proposed parcel is part of a larger area that is allocated to scenic – partial retention middle ground management by the Willamette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. The management goal for this allocation is to create and maintain desired visual characteristics of the forest landscape through space and time; visually sensitive landscape will be managed for a moderate level of scenic quality. Alterations of this landscape will remain subordinate to the overall landscape by repeating form, line, color and texture elements which are characteristic (page IV-205). If the proposed action is implemented this area will no longer be part of the National Forest System and will no longer have a scenic allocation and management goal. Removal of those goals and removal of two acres of closed canopy forest would not have any significant effect upon the scenic resources of the High Prairie area since the parcel in question is immediately adjacent to agricultural land and the boundary between forest and open land is straight and abrupt and does not now conform to the above scenic goals. The quality of the view from road 1928, the only place where this area can be seen, would be essentially unchanged if either alternative is implemented; the fire station complex would be similar in appearance to existing rural residences and agriculturally developed lands on the boundary of local Federal lands.

Cumulative Effects

There have been no public land sales in the High Prairie area previously and no future land sales in this area have been proposed for the future. The only proposed lands sales on the Middle Fork Ranger District are associated with Ranger District facilities (former Ranger Station locations, warehouses, government housing) in the area around Oakridge and Westfir. There are no cumulative effects from the proposed sale of the two acre parcel beyond the direct and indirect effects previously discussed.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Effects.

Implementation of the proposed action would permanently remove the two acres from the timber production land base. The timber volume that would have grown on this piece of ground in future years would be irretrievable, but this effect could be reversed if the buildings were removed and the ground tilled and planted to trees some time in the future. The permanent loss of the closed canopy forest habitat would also be irretrievable in the short-term but could also be reversed in the future.

If the Proposed Action is implemented, the use of quarried rock and other non-renewable resources for paving and construction of various structures would be an irreversible loss of those resources.

Consultation and Coordination

The Forest Service consulted the following individuals, Federal, State, and local agencies, tribes and non-Forest Service persons during the development of this environmental assessment:

ID TEAM MEMBERS:

Tim Bailey – team leader and recreation specialist;

Carol Winkler, archaeologist;

Kim McMahan, botanist;

Chris Hayes, fuel specialist;

David Murdough, soils scientist;

Debra Quintana, wildlife biologist

Doug Larson, fisheries biologist

FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES:

The City of Oakridge

Hazeldell Rural Fire District

USDA – Rural Development

University of Oregon Outdoor Program

Cascade Program Group, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Documents Department, University of Oregon Library

TRIBES:

Chairman, The Klamath Tribes

Chairman, Siletz Tribal Council

Chair, Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians

Chairperson, Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon

Chairman, Tribal Council, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation

OTHERS:

Oregon Natural Resources Council

Middle Fork Watershed Council

Dead Mountain Echo (Oakridge weekly newspaper)

Lane County Audubon Society

Tasker Houston

Guadalupe Quinn

Native Plant Society of Oregon

Sierra Club, Eugene Chapter

South Willamette Earth First!

Cascadia Wildlands Project

Sherri Moe

Susan LaDuke

Linda Swisher.

Western Lands Project