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Metolius-Windigo Trail Reconstruction Environmental Assessment

Deschutes National Forest Bend/Ft. Rock and Sisters Ranger Districts Deschutes County, Oregon

Decision



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PLANS, ANALYSES, ASSESSMENTS

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We welcome your comments on our service and your suggestions for improvement.

Forest

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**Crooked River National
Grassland**

813 S.W. Hwy. 97
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I have decided to authorize implementation of the reconstruction and relocation of the Metolius-Windigo Trail (MWT) on the Bend Fort Rock and Sisters Ranger Districts. This decision is responsive to the need to reconstruct the MWT and meet trail management objectives.

This project will cover 61 miles of the trail and will include trail reconstruction and trail relocations. There are 8.6 miles of trail relocation in total. The remainder of the 61 miles will be reconstructed/ maintained to current standards. The standard for horse trails includes clearing of vegetation 6 feet wide and 10 feet high and 12 to 24 inch tread width.

There are two major relocations, which will move the trail from on roads to single track trail.

1. A 6.3 mile section of trail from the 4601 and 370 road junction to the Three Creeks Lake Horse Camp.
2. A 2.0 mile section of trail from the Many Lakes trailhead to Lemish Lake.

There is a total of 0.3 miles of minor relocations included in the stretch of trail from Todd Horse Camp to Lava Lake.

Relocations will include constructing new trail and obliterating old trail. Obliterated trail will be recontoured and disguised with rocks and woody material. Check dams may need to be installed on trails that are severely trenched. Drainage structures will be installed where necessary.

Reconstruction will include:

- Clearing brush from either side of the trail.
- Clearing logs from the trail corridor to horse standards.
- Defining tread by removing excess soil and filling where necessary.
- Installing or maintaining drain dips and/or water bars.
- Minor relocation of trail where drainage structures fail to adequately drain water from the trail.

These trails will be closed to motorized uses, but open to other non-motorized uses. Trail destinations will be signed with directional signs from all access points. Reassurance markers will be provided along the full length of the trail with a MWT logo.

Location

This project is located across 61 miles of the Bend Fort Rock and Sisters Ranger Districts from the Metolius River on the north to the Crescent-Bend Fort Rock District boundary on the south. The entire trail terminates on the south at Windigo Pass. See map.

Purpose and Need for Action

There have been marked increases in tourism and population as well as increased recreation demands in Central Oregon, which is known for its year-round recreational opportunities and its consistently favorable weather. Present annual projections indicate an approximate 5 percent increase in population, visitation and recreation. Horse use has grown as well and users are looking for varied opportunities of trail length and elevation, in order to use a full season.

The intent of the Metolius-Windigo trail since its conception has been to provide a lower elevation option to the Pacific Crest Trail. As a through route, it was located on available trail segments and roads and signed with yellow diamonds. Users would have the option of using the trail as a through route or using logical portions of the trail. **There is still a need to provide this type of trail opportunity, especially in years when heavy winter snows linger into summer, shortening the summer season.**

The MWT has received relatively low use over the years partially due to lack of obvious trailheads and unidentifiable portions of the trail. **There is a need to complete sections of trail and convert other sections from road to trail, as well as make the trail identifiable as the MWT from all access points and along the trail.**

The MWT is located for short distances where the trail is perpendicular to the slope, forcing water to run down the trail and preventing water from exiting off the trail at frequent low points. In these cases, the only solution is to move the trail to a new location where there is a side slope and water can drain off the trail in small increments. **There is a need to relocate portions of the trail where there is no other way to drain the trail. There is also a need to rehabilitate/obliterate the old trail in these cases.**

The MWT has numerous crossings of water drainages, mostly dry in the summer. These crossings haven't had regular maintenance for some time. Most of these are fords as they carry no water in the summer. **There is a need to improve drainage crossings by rock reinforcing. Crossings over continuous water will have bridges. One bridge is required over Bottle Creek in this project.**

Public Scoping

A summary of the proposed action was also included in the Schedule of Projects (SOP) since Spring Issue 2002. No comments were received from the public.

Mitigations

Wildlife

Construction/reconstruction work to be done near Nesting/Roosting/Foraging habitat for the Northern Spotted Owl must be accomplished outside of the spotted owl nesting season (March 1 through September 30), or with non-motorized tools.

Botany

1. Wash all equipment and vehicles before entering National Forest System lands. Remove mud, dirt, and plant parts from all project equipment including hand tools before moving any into the project area.
2. Monitor the project work area in the period after work is completed, map and pull any new noxious weed sites as necessary.
3. Educate trail crews how to recognize and remove noxious weeds. Currently, there are no known sites of noxious weeds within the project areas, but there is always a potential for invasion.
4. All trail work should be kept away from the pond and a visual barrier of trees between the pond and the proposed trail should remain undisturbed. Although this species, as a whole, is not in danger of extirpation, the pond area is one that has not seen the human disturbances that affect many gentian sites. Gentian grows in sub alpine meadows where people hike, ride horses and participate in other forms of recreation. It is unusual to find a site in such pristine condition.
5. Avoid damaging Newberry's gentian plants where possible. The gentian at Bottle Creek should be flagged for avoidance so that few plants will be lost. Access to the area by trail personnel should be flagged away from the creek and out of riparian areas.

Cultural Resources

Specific areas where the trail is located through existing sites will be monitored during reconstruction. Reconstruction work in these areas will be minimized. All other sites were avoided through trail design.

Fish /Hydrology

New trail construction activities would occur at a time of the year when soils are relatively dry, to prevent possible overland flow of sediments to watercourses.

Locate new trail construction and reroutes in areas that would avoid adverse effects to water quality. Areas likely to have adverse effects are: in riparian areas or adjacent to streams; steep slopes; and areas devoid of vegetation upslope of streams.

Sidecast material can be difficult to stabilize and is susceptible to erosion, settling, and mass instability. Any waste areas from excess

materials generated during trail construction should be deposited and stabilized in areas that won't contribute sediments to streams.

Installation of water bars in appropriate places and frequency can reduce erosive energy generated by overland flow of water, and prevent sediment input into water bodies. Whenever possible, out slope water bars to drain away streams. If water bars must drain toward the streams, choose drainage areas that allow settling of sediment prior to water entering water body, i.e., areas that are well-vegetated, areas with downed wood, or areas that have a valley bottom or floodplain relatively wide and gentle-sloped to allow settling of sediments.

Environmental Considerations

Appropriate surveys for Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive species were completed and a determination of "No Effect" or "No Impact" was reached for each species. The portion of the trail near the pond where Newberry gentian exists will be located to avoid a view of the pond from the trail. Biological evaluations are contained in the project file.

An appropriate cultural resource inventory has been completed and there would be no effect to known historic or prehistoric properties eligible for listing under the National Register of Historic Places if mitigations area followed. See mitigations.

Even though none were found in the project area on USFS lands, there may be known noxious weed sites on adjacent areas. See mitigations.

One new water crossing is included and will be bridged to lessen impacts to water.

Findings

This decision is categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement in accordance with 40 CFR 1508.4 and Forest Service Environmental Policy and Procedure Handbook 1909.15. This decision falls within category 31.2 (See Note 1) as established by the Chief of the Forest Service to provide for construction and reconstruction of trails. I have reviewed the physical and biological conditions with resource specialists. I have concluded that the proposed activities are consistent with the intent of trail management plans and objectives and are in accordance with the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1990) as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan (1994). I have concluded that no extraordinary circumstances exist which would indicate this action could have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. This decision may be implemented immediately upon my signature, and is

not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.8 (a) (4).

WALTER C. SCHLOER, JR.

DATE

Note 1: As defined by the Interim Direction "Clarification of Extraordinary Circumstances for Categories of Actions Excluded From Documentation" appearing in the Federal Register Vol. 67, No. 164, August 23, 2002.

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