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**Crescent Ranger District
Deschutes National Forest**

**Environmental Assessment
Crescent Butte
Land Conveyance Project**

USDA Forest Service
Crescent Ranger District
Deschutes National Forest
P.O. Box 208
Crescent, OR 97733

Responsible Official:
Kimberly Evert Bown
Director, Recreation, Lands and
Mineral Resources
Pacific Northwest Region (R-6)



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

Forest

Deschutes National Forest

1001 SW Emkay Drive
Bend, OR 97702

(541) 383-5300

Ochoco National Forest

3160 N.E. 3rd Street
Prineville, OR 97754

(541) 416-6500

**Crooked River National
Grassland**

813 S.W. Hwy. 97
Madras, OR 97741

(541) 475-9272



Crescent Butte Land Conveyance Project

Lead Agency:

USDA Forest Service
Crescent Ranger District
P.O. Box 208
Crescent OR 97733

Responsible Official:

Kimberly Evert Bown
Director, Recreation, Lands and
Mineral Resources
Pacific Northwest Region (R-6)
P.O. Box 3623
Portland, Oregon 97204

For further information, contact:

PHIL CRUZ
District Ranger
Crescent Ranger District
(541) 433-2234

I. Purpose and Need for Action

A. Introduction

This Environmental Assessment analyzes the proposed sale of a 0.8-acre parcel (a rectangle of 175 feet by 200 feet) of national forest system land atop Crescent Butte on the Crescent Ranger District, Deschutes National Forest. The legal location is described as: the NE 1/4 SE 1/4 of Section 29, T. 24 S., R. 9 E., Willamette Meridian. Refer to Figure 1 for a map of the location.

The parcel on Crescent Butte has been in federal ownership since the 1950s, after it was acquired by the Bonneville Power Administration for use as a radio tower site. In the 1960s, the BPA relocated its radio operations to Odell Butte and management of the site fell to the Forest Service. At one time the site served as a radio transmitter site for the Crescent Ranger District, but as technology changed, it was no longer used for that purpose. A cable television company began using the facility in 1992 with a temporary special-use permit and has maintained a television receiving antenna on the tower since. The facility provides over-the-air channels as part of the cable company's service to the communities of Crescent and Gilchrist. Previously, the cable company used a 40-foot utility pole to serve this purpose.

The parcel was not designated as a communications site in 1992 because of lack of the necessary funding to conduct environmental

analysis and develop a site plan. However, the cable company has continued to use the site under reissued special use permits since that time.

This parcel is surrounded by privately held lands (owned by Crown Pacific Corp.), with the nearest contiguous national forest system lands lying more than two miles away. Privately owned communication facilities also occupy the top of the Butte on the private land. The site has power and road access. The parcel includes an easement that provides access to the hilltop. Facilities, such as the tower, radio building, and cyclone fence would be sold along with the parcel. Equipment currently owned by the permit holder would not be included in the sale.

Surveys conducted in June 2001 indicate that the parcel contains no habitat for any species of plant or animal listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. No cultural resources are associated with this parcel of land.

This piece of land is one of seven tracts of land on four National Forests specified in the Bend Pine Nursery Land Conveyance Act of November 2000. This law authorizes the sale of these specific federal parcels in the State of Oregon. The proceeds of those land sales will be used for the acquisition, construction, or improvement of administrative and visitor facilities and associated land in connection with the Deschutes/Ochoco National Forest.

B. Purpose & need

The primary purpose of the proposed action is to sell a 0.8-acre parcel of Forest Land through a bidding process. The 1990 Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan identified "Group 4" lands as those isolated parcels of federal land situated away from contiguous blocks of federal land and within non-federal lands being managed for intensive uses (e.g. high yield forestry). Federal lands in this group will normally be available for disposal. Crescent Butte lies within this Group 4 area.

For more than 10 years, this isolated parcel has provided a small income to the federal treasury through special use permit fees, while requiring a small amount of administrative cost. The parcel has never been designated a communications site because of a lack of funding and because the site is a low priority for development as such a site on the Forest. Although the current use is suitable for the site, federal ownership will constrain future development and improvement of the site.

Therefore, the purpose of this sale is to provide more efficient management of federal land and resources to better meet the multiple use objectives for national forest system lands, while at the same time providing a means for more efficient development of the site for communications purposes once in private ownership. In addition, sale of the parcel will provide a source of funding to provide administrative facilities for the Deschutes/Ochoco national forests.

C. Scoping

On March 28, 2000, a letter describing the proposed sale of public land was sent to 95 individuals, groups, and agencies. A short article also appeared in The Bend Bulletin in early June describing the proposed project.

Four comments were received, ranging from support of the proposal, to concerns raised about the impact sale of the tract might have on local television service. Also, a suggestion was made that the Forest Service should seek to lease the site to the highest bidder, rather than sell it because of its potential value as a communications site.

No key issues arose during the scoping process.

D. Proposed Action

The proposed action is to convey 0.8 acres of US Forest Land through a competitive sale process.

E. Decision

The decision to be made by the Regional Forester is whether or not to sell the property on Crescent Butte. The decision will be based on the comments received and the contents of this environmental assessment.

II. ALTERNATIVES

A. Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study

One alternative was considered that would keep the property in federal ownership, and lease it to the highest bidder. The benefit of this alternative is that it has potential to provide a greater return to the treasury over time than an outright sale. This alternative was not considered in detail because this method would not serve to reduce administrative costs and would not provide a means of eliminating this isolated parcel from federal ownership. Also, funds acquired through the lease would not be available to meet the purpose of funding administrative facilities on the Deschutes and Ochoco national forests. Any generated funds would also be partially offset by the cost of administering the site.

B. No Action Alternative (Alternative 1)

As required by the National Environmental Policy Act, the No Action alternative forms a basis for describing and comparing the effects of the proposed action. In this case, the No Action Alternative means that the property would remain in Federal ownership. Current permitted use would continue, but once the permit expires, other communications uses could be considered.

C. Proposed Action (Alternative 2)

The 0.8-acre piece of national forest system land on Crescent Butte would be sold through a competitive bid process.

III. Environmental Effects

This section of the environmental assessment considers the environmental consequences of implementation of the two alternatives.

A. Main Considerations

Cultural Resources

A Cultural resource survey was completed at the project site. No cultural resources were found. There will be no effect on cultural resources from either alternative.

Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive wildlife and plant species

The proposed project area was evaluated to determine which species might occur based on the presence of required habitats and known locations. A field review occurred at the project site by the District Wildlife Biologist. It was determined that no suitable habitat exists for any listed species within the proposed sale area. No effects are expected to occur to any PETS or Candidate species under either alternative. Both No Action and the Proposed Action will have no effect on individuals or populations of PETS or Candidate Species or their habitat.

A plant survey was completed at the site. No habitat for any of the PETS plant species of concern was noted. Therefore, there will be no impact to those species from either Alternative 1 or 2.

Noxious Weeds

A survey was completed at the site. No noxious weeds were found.

Television Access

Currently, the permit holder provides cable television signals to the communities of Gilchrist and Crescent. Over-the-air signals are acquired from antennae on the tower and incorporated into the cable service. In either alternative, continued use of the site to provide this service could change over time.

Under the No Action alternative, this permitted use would likely continue until the current permit expires. At that time, a decision would be necessary as to the continued best use of the site. This may be continued use by the current permit, or it could mean that other communications uses may be more appropriate (e.g. cellular phone service). As a site already impacted by a communications facility, using this site for such expanded use may be preferable to impacting other national forest system lands by the increasing demand for cellular coverage. If use by the cable company were discontinued for a different use, the cable company would either be required to relocate or collocate with the new use, if compatible. In either case, over-the-air signals could still be captured and included with the cable company signal.

Under the proposed action, the site would be sold to the highest

bidder. The cable company would be eligible to bid on the site. Regardless of who owns the facility, it would remain available for use and improvement. As with the no action alternative, the cable facilities could either relocate or collocate on the Butte.

In either alternative, television access would continue in the area, either through over-the-air-signals, or via satellite service.

Hazardous Materials

A review of the site found no hazardous materials present.

B. Other Environmental Considerations

Hydrology

Because of the site's location at the top of a butte, no issues with water exist. Soils have been previously impacted by development, and neither alternative would cause any additional impacts to soils.

Wetlands and Floodplains

Executive Orders 11988 and 11990 direct Federal agencies to avoid, to the extent possible, both short-term and long-term adverse impacts associated with the modifications of floodplains and wetlands. No wetlands would be affected by the proposed project. The project is not located within a floodplain.

Consumers, Civil Rights, Minorities, and Women

Although a cable television company currently uses the communications site, other alternative sources of television signals exist in the community for approximately the same cost. Therefore, this proposal is consumer neutral.

Civil Rights legislation and Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice) direct an analysis of the proposed alternatives as they relate to specific subsets of the American population. The subsets of the general population include ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and low-income groups. The project is not located in a minority community and would not affect residents of low or moderate income. Therefore the proposed action would not pose a disproportionately high or adverse effect to those populations.

In addition, the effects of this project on the social context of these protected groups are within those described in the Deschutes National Forest Plan. The benefits and risks associated with implementation of any alternative are provided to all members of the public. Therefore, the action alternatives would not pose disproportionately high or adverse effects to minority communities or to low income groups.

Analysis of effects on these groups was beyond the scope of this project. The effects are within those described in the Deschutes National Forest Plan.

Prime Lands (Farm, Range, and Forest)

All alternatives are with the intent of the Secretary of Agriculture Memorandum 1827 for prime farmland, rangeland and forestland. National Forest system lands would be managed with consideration of the impacts on adjacent private lands, and the objectives of the action alternatives would be to reduce potential impacts on adjacent lands from severe disturbances (insect, disease, wildfire). This project area does not contain any prime farmlands or range lands.

Prime forestlands on private lands in the project area would benefit indirectly from a decreased risk of impacts from wildfire.

There are no lands within the boundaries of the Deschutes National Forest that meet the definition of prime farmland, or are considered prime farmland as discussed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. This proposal would not affect prime forest lands.

Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

Irretrievable commitments of natural resources involve the loss of production or use of the resources because of changes in management objectives. This represents opportunities foregone for the period of time that the resource cannot be used. Though National Forest Lands would be transferred to private ownership, the production and/or use of these lands would not be expected to change from current conditions.

Irreversible Commitment of Resources

Irreversible commitments are decisions affecting nonrenewable resources such as soils, wetlands, and cultural resources. Such commitments are considered irreversible because the resource has deteriorated to the point that renewal can occur only over a long period of time or at great expense or because the resource has been destroyed or removed.

As stated above, no cultural resources, PETS plants, or TES species exist at the site. There will be no irreversible commitment of these types of resources with the sale of the land.

Cumulative Effects

The piece of land to be sold is located in the Gilchrist subwatershed. Besides the Crescent Ranger District's administrative site, it is the only piece of federally owned land within the subwatershed. When considered with other recent land conveyances, this project will have a negligible effect on land ownership patterns, but will help reduce number of isolated parcels.

IV. Consultation with Others

A. Public Notification and Participation

Scoping for this project has been discussed in Section I above. Ninety-five individuals, groups, and agencies or were contacted about the project. In addition, consultation has commenced with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Officer, the appropriate tribes, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Those who commented on the proposed action include the Crown Pacific Corp., Country Cable Vision, SBA Communications.

B. Interdisciplinary Team

Sandy Hurlocker, Team Leader
Beth Peer, Writer/Editor
Carolyn Close, Botanist
Rick Cope, Soils/Hydrologist

Joan Kittrell, Wildlife Biologist
Jerry Vroman, Lands and Special Uses

C. Agencies and Tribal Governments Consulted

Ongoing consultation is underway with the following agencies:

- US Fish and Wildlife Service (through the 2001 Programmatic Biological Assessment).
- Oregon State Historic Preservation Officer (through the "Tract C and other Isolated Parcels Cultural Resource Report).

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