

**United States Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Oregon State Office  
Salem District, Marys Peak Resource Area**

**DECISION RECORD**

**School House Creek Restoration Project;  
Projects 1, 2, and 4**

Environmental Assessment Number: OR-080-04-22

Township 14 South, Range 8 West, Section 3; Township 14 South, Range 8 West, Section 5;  
Township 13 South, Range 8 West, Sections 33 and 35; Willamette Meridian,  
Benton County, Oregon.

**A. Background**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposes to restore riparian and aquatic habitat conditions in School House Creek, a tributary to the Alsea River. The proposed action would consist of three projects: Project 1 is a proposal to remove a metal trash rack located in School House Creek; Project 2 would entail felling conifers along existing roads and using them to place approximately 9 log structures in School House Creek; and Project 4 would decommission approximately 0.4 mile of BLM road 14-8-10.2 in the Riparian Reserve. The primary project site is located in T 14 S, R 8 W, section 3, approximately 2 air miles west of the town of Alsea, Benton County, Oregon.

School House Creek supports populations of winter steelhead, coho, and anadromous and resident cutthroat trout. However, the stream channel currently is deficient in large woody debris needed for structural habitat diversity. Based on data collected in 1995 by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), habitat indicators within School House Creek considered Not Properly Functioning by NOAA Fisheries Matrix of Pathways and Indicators include: large woody debris (LWD), substrate, pool (area, quality and frequency), off-channel habitat and stream bank condition. The reach surveyed is notably low in LWD, pools and off-channel habitat.

Currently, the metal trash rack (I-beam structure) installed in School House Creek is preventing the natural transport of materials by restricting the movement of sediment and coarse woody material downstream. This has led to building up of the stream bed upstream of the structure and scour/entrenchment immediately downstream; thereby reducing the availability of spawning gravels downstream.

Whereas the trash rack was originally installed to protect a road crossing from debris and prevent debris torrent materials from moving downstream, the road crossing has since been removed and only small amounts of sizable debris have been trapped by the trash rack during the past decade.

Historically, the School House Creek project area supported a riparian stand of mature conifer, which is essential for providing large woody debris material to the stream system. At present, the riparian canopy is dominated by hardwoods and areas adjacent to the 14-8-10.2 road and stream have become dominated by Himalayan blackberry. Because the riparian reserve of School House Creek has become dominated by these species, there is little opportunity for the recruitment of quality LWD into the stream, now or in the future. There is a need to reestablish or simulate habitat conditions and provide short term habitat until natural processes can supply the materials needed to recover good stream habitat.

The 14-8-10.2 road is within the School House Creek stream valley bottom, with two tributary crossings. The open canopy above the road prism has encouraged the spread of Himalayan blackberry throughout the project area's Riparian Reserve and floodplain. Restoring the road prism back to native vegetation (primarily conifers) would, over time, retard the spread of invasive species and help restore riparian habitat conditions. In addition, removing the two stream crossings would restore natural hydrologic function in these streams.

An environmental analysis was conducted and documented in the School House Creek Restoration Project Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), Environmental Assessment (EA) Number OR080-04-022. Chapters 2 through 5 of the EA focused on the Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences of six resource elements of the environment, for which potential impacts were identified including: invasive/non native plants, soils, hydrology, wildlife, fisheries and aquatic habitat, and fire hazard/risk. Other environmental elements were summarized in the EA under "Review of Critical Elements of the Environment" and "Review of Other Elements of the Environment" Tables (sections 2.3, 3.3, and 5.3).

A copy of the School House Creek Restoration Project Environmental Assessment and FONSI can be obtained from the Bureau of Land Management, Salem District Office, 1717 Fabry Road SE, Salem, Oregon 97306. Office hours are Monday through Friday, 7:30 A.M. to 4:00 P.M., closed on holidays. A copy is also available for review on the Internet at [http://www.or.blm.gov/salem/html/planning under Environmental Assessments, Marys Peak Resource Area](http://www.or.blm.gov/salem/html/planning_under_Environmental_Assessments_Marys_Peak_Resource_Area).

## **B. Decision**

Based on the analysis contained in the School House Creek Restoration Project Environmental Assessment, and management direction contained in the Salem District Resource Management Plan (RMP), I have decided to implement the proposed action for Projects 1, 2, and 4, as described in the EA, herein known as the “selected alternative”.

The selected alternative involves removing a metal I-beam (trash rack) structure from the School House Creek stream channel, felling of approximately 40 conifers and placing approximately 9 log structures in the stream channel, and decommissioning 0.4 mile of BLM road 14-8-10.2 on BLM lands.

Road decommissioning would include culvert removal on two live tributaries, blocking the road entrance to vehicular traffic and treatment of the road surface (ripping, water barring, scattering slash and/or grass-seeding).

## **C. Alternatives Considered**

The alternatives considered in detail included the “no action” alternative, and the proposed action alternative which initiated the environmental analysis process. Descriptions of the alternatives analyzed in detail are contained in the School House Creek Restoration Project Environmental Assessment, sections 2.2, 3.2, and 5.2.

## **D. Reasons for the Decision**

Considering public comment, the content of the School House Creek Restoration Project EA, the supporting project record, and the management direction contained in the Salem District RMP, I have decided to implement the selected alternative, as previously described. My rationale for this decision follows:

Project 1: Removing the metal trash rack from School House Creek would help to restore the natural transport function and hydrologic conductivity of the stream system. Materials currently being retained upstream of the rack would be allowed to move naturally downstream, supplying downstream reaches with woody and substrate materials (including spawning gravels). Over time, the stream would readjust to its new condition by establishing a more natural gradient.

Project 2: Placing LWD structures in School House Creek would immediately improve aquatic habitat for resident and anadromous fish species. The action would both increase the amount of spawning and rearing habitat and also provide the key elements necessary to maintain that habitat (by providing cover, initiating bed scour for pool development, retarding stream velocities and encouraging the deposition of gravels). In-stream work of this type is beneficial to both the habitat and the fish populations as they respond to the improved habitat.

Additionally, in order to prevent a substantial loss of substrate from the site where the trash rack would be removed (Project 1), a LWD structure would be placed at the former site of the rack to help stabilize some of the sediment being retained and minimize channel headcutting. This log structure would have a similar function as the trash rack (retarding water velocities and retaining materials), but would not be as rigid as the metal structure. The logs could shift over time in response to changes in streamflow and could naturally evolve and decay. The indirect benefits of the action on the stream system are anticipated to include improved sorting and routing processes, an increase in the amount of pool habitat, greater access of the stream to its floodplain, and greater summer and winter rearing potential for juvenile salmonids within this stream segment.

Project 4: Decommissioning the 14-8-10.2 road on BLM lands would restore and improve the ecological health of the Riparian Reserve by removing a road no longer needed for transportation or management. Culvert removal and tributary re-contouring would help restore natural hydrologic flow paths, sediment storage, and routing processes on these streams, and eliminate the risk of a culvert plugging. Road densities within the Alsea drainage are considered to be higher than the standard for “properly functioning condition”. Therefore, the removal of this 0.4 mile road segment within Riparian Reserve would be beneficial to the aquatic system and help attain ACS Objectives. Reduced road densities within the watershed, even at the local scale, would also improve the quality of adjacent habitat for a variety of wildlife species over the long-term.

Following decommissioning, vegetation would be expected to invade the old road bed quickly, reducing the risk of water channeling on the roadway and the potential for sedimentation into streams. During the recovery of the area back to a forested condition, vegetation growth would begin to rebuild soil structure and reduce much of the existing soil compaction. Additionally, as the vegetation continues to mature, it would eventually shade out invasive plant species.

If the no action alternative were selected, the riparian and aquatic habitat of School House Creek would remain degraded. The trash rack would continue to impede the natural transport of wood, substrate, and other materials downstream through the stream system. The stream channel would likely continue to build up sediment upstream of the trash rack and erode sediment (entrench) immediately downstream. The channel would remain constricted at the trash rack and be unable to evolve or migrate naturally. LWD in the stream system would continue to be a limiting factor for quality fish habitat, as there is little potential for the natural recruitment of large wood from adjacent stands. As the amount of pool area in School House Creek is so low, species that depend on pool habitat including coho, steelhead and cutthroat would not likely increase their use of this stream segment.

The 14-8-10.2 road would continue to provide public access along School House Creek. Human disturbance and potential dumping would continue to have a slightly negative effect on the quality of habitat available to wildlife species in the vicinity.

The roadway would remain compacted, retarding the establishment of native vegetation and encouraging the spread of invasive Himalayan Blackberry in the Riparian Reserve. Without future maintenance of the tributary culverts, there is the potential for these culverts to fail; culvert failure could cause sedimentation in School House Creek and further degrade water quality and adversely effect fish.

## **E. Public Involvement and Comment Period**

A description of the School House Creek Restoration project was included in the Salem Bureau of Land Management Project Update mailed in September 2004 and December 2004 to more than 1200 individuals and organizations. A Scoping letter was mailed September 22, 2004 to 66 potentially interested parties. One telephone call was received requesting additional information about the projects and a project area map. A map and project description was mailed to the party and no further comments were received.

The School House Creek Restoration Project EA and FONSI were made available for a 30-day public review period starting on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2005 and ending on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005. Fifty five letters announcing the availability of the EA and FONSI were sent out to notify agencies, tribes, groups, legislators, adjacent landowners, and individuals that have expressed general interest in environmental planning and decision-making processes. A legal notice announcing the availability of the EA and FONSI was also published on January 31<sup>st</sup> in the City of Corvallis' *Corvallis Gazette Times*. A copy of the EA and FONSI was also made available for review at the Salem District Office, Marys Peak Resource Area Office, 1717 Fabry Road SE, Salem, Oregon 97306 and on the Internet at <http://www.or.blm.gov/salem/html/planning>.

## **F. Comments Received**

No public comments were received as a result of the public notices or letters sent out requesting public input.

## **G. Conclusion**

I have determined it is not necessary to change the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI –January 2005) for the School House Creek Restoration Project. The School House Creek Restoration Project EA fully covers the three projects. There are no significant new circumstances or facts relevant to environmental concerns about the selected alternative or its impacts, which were not addressed in the EA.

## H. Right to Appeal

This decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals in accordance with the regulations contained in 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 4 and Form 1842-1. Form 1842-1 can be obtained from the Salem District website at <http://www.or.blm.gov/salem/html/planning/index.htm>.

*If you appeal:* A public notice for this decision is scheduled to appear in the *Corvallis Gazette Times* newspaper on Thursday, March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2005. Within 30 days of this notification, a *Notice of Appeal* must be filed in writing to the office which issued this decision – [District or Field] Manager, Bureau of Land Management, 1717 Fabry Road SE, Salem, OR, 97306. A copy of the *Notice of Appeal* must also be sent to the BLM Regional Solicitor (see Form 1842-1). The appellant has the burden of showing that the decision appealed from is in error.

If you wish to file a petition pursuant to regulation 43 CFR 4.21 (58 FR 4939, January 19, 1993) or 43 CFR 2804.1 for a stay of the effectiveness of this decision during the time that your appeal is being reviewed by the Board, the petition for a stay must accompany your *Notice of Appeal*. A petition for a stay is required to show sufficient justification based on the standards listed below. Copies of the notice of appeal and petition for a stay must also be submitted to each party named in this decision and to the Board and to the appropriate Office of the Solicitor (see 43 CFR 4.413) at the same time the original documents are filed with this office. If you request a stay, you have the burden of proof to demonstrate that a stay should be granted.

*Standards for Obtaining a Stay:* Except as otherwise provided by law or other pertinent regulation, a petition for a stay of a decision pending appeal shall show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

- (1) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied,
- (2) The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits,
- (3) The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted, and
- (4) Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

*Statement of Reasons:* Within 30 days of the filing of the *Notice of Appeal*, a complete statement of reasons why you are appealing must be filed with the Interior Board of Land Appeals (see Form 1842-1).

