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Environmental Assessment

Walker Mountain Communication Site and Forest Plan Amendment

Department of Energy / Bonneville Power Building and Tower

**Crescent Ranger District
Deschutes National Forest,**

Klamath County, Oregon

Township 26S, Range 8E, Section 24 Willamette Meridian

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents	1
Summary	2
Introduction	5
Document Structure	5
Background	5
Purpose and Need for Action	6
Proposed Action	7
Decision Framework	7
Public Involvement	7
Issues	8
Alternatives, including the Proposed Action	8
Project Design Features	8
Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Further Detailed Analysis	9
Alternatives	10
Alternative A - No Action.....	10
Alternative B - The Proposed Action.....	10
Forest Plan Amendment.....	20
Environmental Consequences	20
Cultural Resources	20
Scenic Quality	21
Recreation	28
Wildlife	28
Threatened, Endangered	28
Regional Forester’s Sensitive Species	28
Management Indicator Species	28
Rare and Uncommon Species	28
Botany and Invasive Plants	32
Soils.....	33
Consistencies.....	33
Other Disclosures.....	38
Consultation and Coordination	39

SUMMARY

Walker Mountain is a designated electronic site located on the Crescent Ranger District on the Deschutes National Forest. The Deschutes National Forest proposes to issue a special use permit to Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) authorizing the construction of a co-locatable communications tower and building to be located on the Walker Mountain Communication Site. In addition, BPA will remove two aged Forest Service towers and one building on the south end of the electronic site where historically significant buildings are located. Midstate Electric would remove the associated overhead powerline to those structures. All areas where removal takes place would be rehabilitated to a condition as close to the surrounding character of the site, as reasonable.

The project area is located on the top of Walker Mountain (elevation 7,078 feet) which is 18 miles south of the Crescent Ranger Station in Klamath County, Oregon. The legal description is: T.26 S, R.8 E., and Section 24, Willamette Meridian. (See Figures 1 and 2.)

This action is needed, because BPA has been given the responsibility to operate a power transmission system within five Northwestern states. The proposed site on Walker Mountain is required to provide communications reinforcement for power system information and controls related to the BPA transmission system.

The proposed action would require an amendment to the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and the Walker Mountain Communications Site 1995 Revised Management and Development Plan.

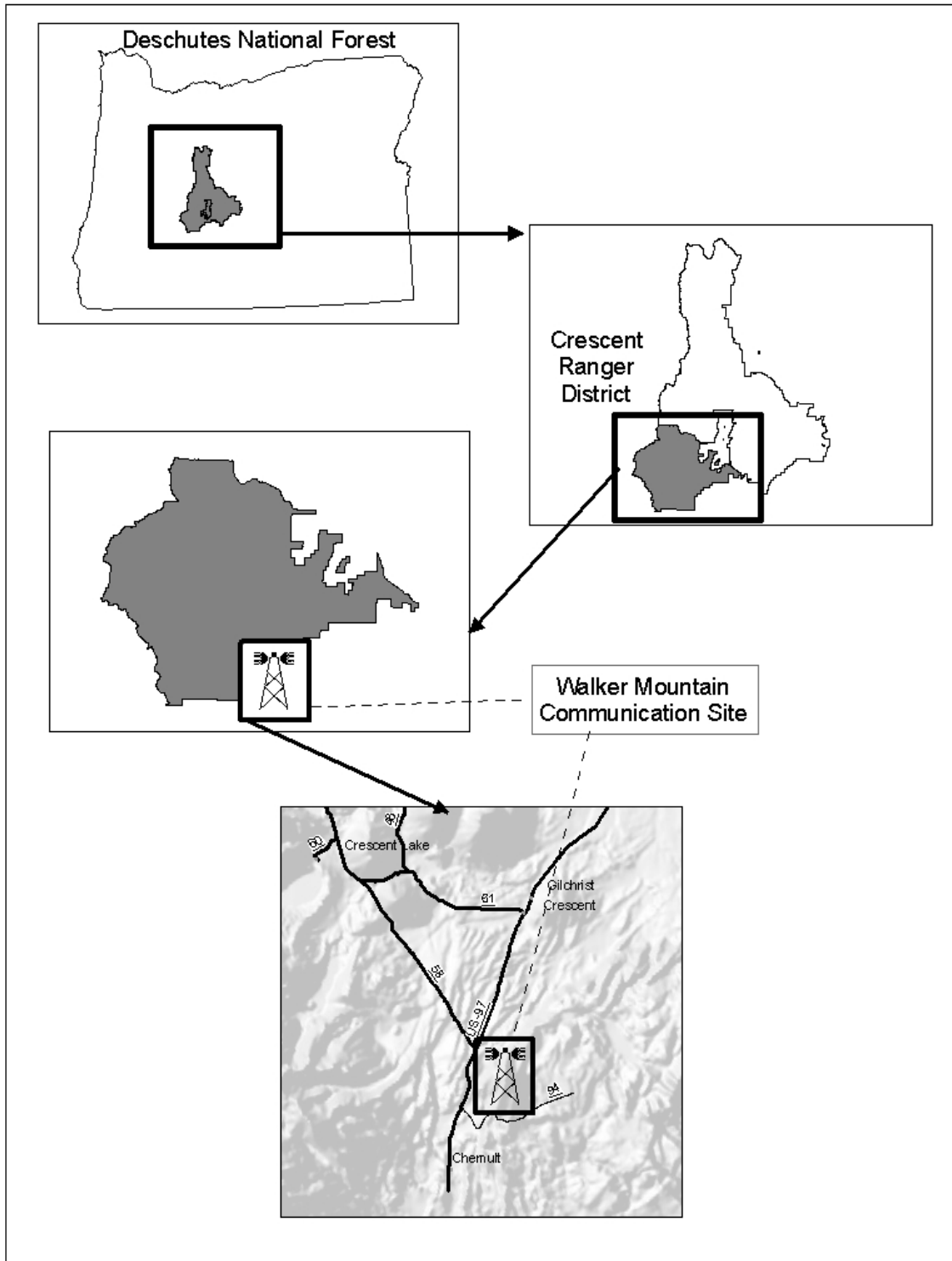


Figure 1. Walker Mountain Vicinity

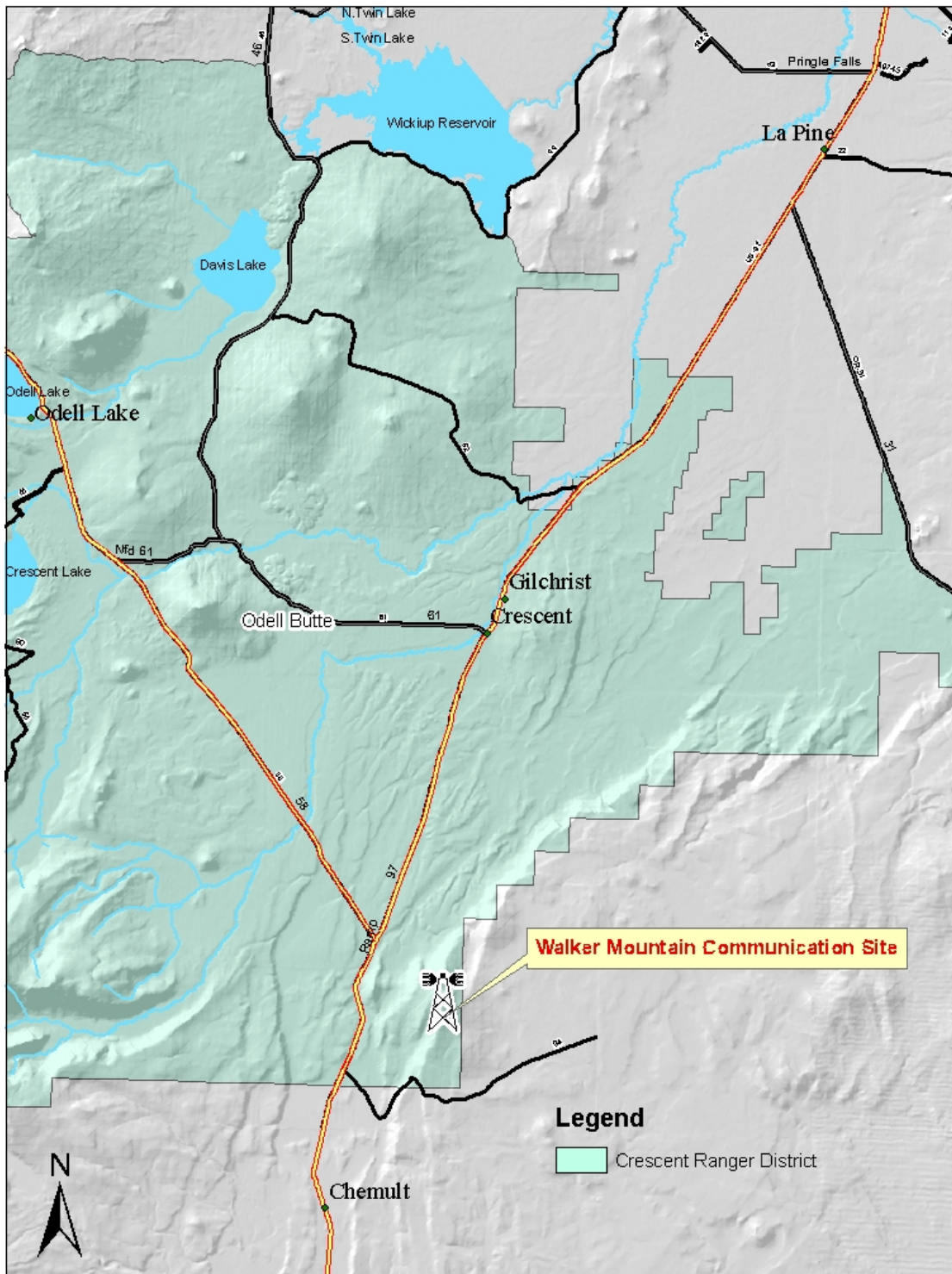


Figure 2. Walker Mountain Communication Site Locator

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: This 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.

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 issues raised by other agencies, other users, and the public.

Environmental Consequences: This section describes the environmental effects of implementing the proposed action and other alternatives. This analysis is organized by resource area. 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 alternative that follows.

Agencies and Persons Consulted: This section provides a list of preparers as well as agencies and individuals or businesses consulted during the development of this environmental assessment.

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

Background

The Deschutes National Forest began to develop Walker Mountain as an electronic communications site in the mid-1960s. According to the 1990 Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP), the Walker Mountain Communication Site was designated a communication site in 1971. The LRMP recognized and validated the previous 1971 designation.

An Environmental Analysis (EA), Decision Notice, and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) signed on February 2, 1982, analyzed further development and management of the site. This analysis directed the preparation of a management plan to provide orderly and environmentally sound development of the site. A management plan was approved June 2, 1982.

Management of the Walker Mountain site continued under that plan until the summer of 1993 when an interdisciplinary team reviewed the 1982 EA, the Site Management Plan, and the 1993 Historic Eligibility determination of the historic Forest Service structures located on Walker Mountain. It indicated the need to revise the Site Management Plan to protect the historic properties and provide for the orderly development of Walker Mountain as an electronic site. In June 1994, a decision memo was signed to approve the Walker Mountain Communication Site 1994 Revised Management and Development Plan.

In 1995, due to the increased demand for use of the site, proper development, visual quality effects, and concerns over the presence of a National Register-eligible historic property, another Environmental Analysis was conducted. This analysis indicated the need for a revision of the 1982 Walker Mountain EA that would re-designate the development emphasis of the site as a non-significant amendment of the Deschutes LRMP. This amendment consisted of adjustments to the designated area on Walker Mountain where site development may continue and established limits for continued use and development of the site. The site was divided into two zones, designated as Zone A and Zone B. Zone A is the area where the historic properties are located. With a goal of restoring the historic properties, further development in Zone A would not be allowed.

Zone B was the area where further development would be allowed. However, there would be a 100 foot limit to the height of towers and building size would be limited to 400 square feet with a 10 foot sidewall. Also the number of buildings and towers in Zone B would be limited to 8 and 16 respectively.

The Walker Mountain communication site is currently managed under the goals and objectives set forth in the 1995 Environmental Analysis, Decision Notice, FONSI and Forest Plan Amendment as well as the Revised 1994 Walker Mountain Communication Site Management and Development Plan (Walker Mountain Site Plan).

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of this initiative is to evaluate issuing a special use permit to the Department of Energy with Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) to authorize industrial microwave communications use and the construction of a new 140 foot tower, a 1,200 square foot two-level building, and an access road in Zone B of the Walker Mountain Communication Site. A Deschutes National Forest Plan Amendment would be required for the higher tower and larger building and necessary tree removal.

This action is needed, because BPA has been given the responsibility to operate a power transmission system within the five Northwestern states. To operate this system in compliance with the North American Electric Reliability Council (NERC) and the Western Electricity Coordinating Council (WECC), BPA has developed a communications infrastructure to monitor, maintain, and control the substations and power lines. The proposed Walker Mountain site, located on U.S. Forest Service land, is required to provide communications reinforcement for power system information and controls related to sites designated as Critical Infrastructure per NERC Standard CIP-002. In addition, protection and restoration of Critical Infrastructure is among the directives for Homeland Security coordination as provided in Executive Order 13228.

Walker Mountain is also part of a larger BPA project which would provide increased reliability for the operation of the power system in the vicinity of the California-Oregon Intertie. This Intertie is a critical link between BPA and major California utilities for transporting power between the regions based on load requirements.

In the past, this communications system was comprised mostly of analog microwave radios. These are no longer available on the market and therefore are being replaced with fiber optic cables and digital radios. In order to meet NERC & WECC reliability standards, the new digital communications network must be built in ring configurations. BPA telecommunication rings meet reliability requirements by providing alternate route capability for critical power system control circuits. Rings often use fiber optic cables installed on existing BPA transmission line structures. In some areas however, digital microwave radio systems must be used to complete the communication rings. The telecommunications fiber/microwave rings, would provide the necessary infrastructure to

migrate from the analog microwave systems, and would allow BPA to continue to operate and maintain power system facilities in Oregon.

BPA is in the first stage of a large multi-phase telecommunications project in Oregon to replace aging analog microwave systems. The first stage includes a cross-Cascades high-capacity digital microwave radio system between Eugene and Klamath Falls, crossing the Willamette, Deschutes, and Fremont-Winema National Forests. The digital radio system will terminate at three BPA substations, Alvey Substation near Eugene, Malin Substation near Klamath Falls, and the LaPine Substation. The radio system will interconnect with existing fiber optic systems in the Willamette Valley and Central Oregon, forming two rings.

Proposed Action

The action proposed by the Department of Energy with BPA to meet the purpose and need is to issue a special use permit authorizing industrial microwave communications use and the construction of a new 140 foot tower, a 1,200 square foot two-level building, and an access road in Zone B of the Walker Mountain Communication Site. The Forest Service would amend the site plan in this site-specific case. This would allow BPA to maintain and operate the power transmission system safely and reliably. The new tower, building, and associated access road would be located in the designated communication area known as “Zone B”, away from historic resources. The new tower would be sited slightly below the mountain top and “behind” current users to the west (as seen from Highways 97 and 58). This was to preclude interference and to keep facilities consistent with visual quality standards and guidelines. Power cables will be buried along the frontage of new facilities. The radio frequencies are coordinated with National Telecommunications and Information Administration to preclude any radio interference with current site users. Given the intent of the 1995 Walker Mountain Management Plan to consolidate users and move facilities into Zone B, the larger building and tower would allow other users to consolidate and share the new facilities and allow for the removal of up to two buildings and five towers from the site in the future, including the immediate removal of one building and two towers currently located in Zone A, the Historic Resource area. Construction would begin in the summer of 2009.

Decision Framework

Given the purpose and need, the deciding official, the Deschutes National Forest Supervisor, reviews the proposed action and the other alternatives in order to decide whether to authorize:

1. the construction proposed by the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA);
2. a Forest Plan Amendment; and
3. Project Design Features or mitigation measures which may apply to the project.

Public Involvement

BPA sent a scoping letter to interested parties and site users on September 9, 2008 including a plan of proposed construction and a comment form. They accepted written, telephone, fax, and internet comments and concerns. Comments were accepted through October 9, 2008. One user asked for additional information regarding the proposed site and Forest Plan Amendment. This was provided in a second scoping period described below.

The project was published in the Deschutes National Forest Schedule of Projects Fall publication (covering October 1- December 31, 2008) on October 01, 2008. A site visit, hosted by BPA, for current users was conducted on October 8, 2008 to discuss the preliminary design plans BPA would

propose to create detailed designs. Attendees included representatives from the US Forest Service, Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), Oregon State Police (OSP), and BPA.

Another letter from BPA was sent to existing communications use lease and permit holders at Walker Mountain on December 05, 2008. This second letter outlined the more technical and specific details of the proposed construction of facilities and included their technical data sheet (FS 2700-10), construction plan, and the visual quality study. Comments were accepted for 30 days ending January 8, 2009. No comments were received.

BPA also consulted with SHPO (State Historic Preservation Office), Klamath Indian Tribes of Oregon, and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation.

Issues

Using the comments from the public, other agencies, and site users, the interdisciplinary team determined there were no issues that would lead to development of additional alternatives. Other issues such as the potential for introduction of invasive plant species, are addressed in the Environmental Consequences section of this document.

ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

This section describes and compares the alternatives considered for the BPA Walker Mountain Communication Site project to display management options that respond to the purpose and need described in the previous section.

The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) approached the Crescent Ranger District with a proposal to construct a new tower and building in the area called “Zone B”, away from historic resources, as well as remove one building and two associated towers currently located in “Zone A”, the historic resources area. This proposal is further developed as Alternative B. Alternative A, the “no action” alternative, is developed as a baseline to display consequences of a passive management scenario.

Project Design Features

The following features are incorporated into the design of all activities included in the BPA Walker Mountain Communication Site proposal. These are features that are considered routine, have been used on similar projects, and are either incorporated into contract provisions or accomplished between appropriate resource specialists, and have proven to be effective. Project design features are used as a basis for determining and disclosing effects in the Environmental Consequences discussions.

The following are design features incorporated into this project:

Cultural Resources

If, prior to, or during construction work, items of archeological or historical value are reported or discovered, or an unknown deposit of such items is disturbed, the permit holder would immediately cease activities in the area so affected. The permit holder would notify the Forest Service Special Use Permit Administrator and would not resume construction until written authorization would be given.

Soils

Where soil disturbance would occur during construction, erosion control measures would be taken in the form of silt fencing. All material brought in from outside the construction area would have to be certified as clean and weed-free.

Scenic Quality

Materials used for the construction of the tower and building would consist of galvanized non-reflective material and would be compatible with existing improvements on the site.

Invasive Plants

This project would adhere to the Standards and Guidelines outlined by Forest Direction in the Region 06 Invasive Plant Record of Decision and Final Environmental Impact Statement:

1. Noxious weed risk assessment and management will be considered in all NEPA planning activities where soil disturbance or invasive plant introduction or spread could result from the activity. Prevention will be emphasized as the preferred strategy for invasive plant management. *Requirement R6 Standard #1.*
2. Remove mud, dirt, and plant parts from all heavy equipment that will operate outside the limits of the road prism prior to entering NFS lands AND before moving into a new or different analysis area. Cleaning must occur in areas where removed weed seeds will not create additional problems. *Requirement R6 Standard #2.*
3. Require all Forest Service employees to inspect, remove, and properly dispose of weed seed and plant parts found on their clothing and personal equipment prior to leaving a project site infested with weeds. *Guideline*
4. Inspect active gravel, fill, sand stockpiles, quarry sites, and borrow material for invasive plants before use and transport. Treat or require treatment of infested sources before any use of pit material. Use only gravel, fill, sand, and rock that are judged to be weed free by District or Forest weed specialists. *Requirement R6 Standard #7*
5. Environmental analysis for any and all ground-disturbing projects will evaluate weed risk and consider weed prevention in the development and evaluation of alternatives and mitigating measures. Silvicultural prescriptions, logging plans, road management, and other activities will include weed prevention measures (e.g., shade retention and minimal soil disturbance). Prevention will be emphasized as the preferred strategy for invasive plant management. *Guideline*

Wildlife

The objective is to minimize harm to any bat species that potentially reside in the communication buildings to be removed. Surveys for bats would be conducted prior to dismantling. If evidence of bats is found, then demolition of buildings can occur when they seasonally vacate the building.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Further Detailed Analysis

Federal agencies are required by NEPA to rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives and to briefly discuss the reasons for eliminating any alternatives that were not developed in detail (40 CFR 1502.14). Public comments received in response to the Proposed Action provided suggestions for alternative methods for achieving the purpose and need. Some of these alternatives may have duplicated the alternatives considered in detail or were determined to be unable to meet the

project's Purpose and Need. Alternatives that were considered but dismissed from detailed consideration and the reasons for dismissal are summarized below.

Construct the facility and tower in a different geographic location.

BPA considered communication sites on other mountaintops to locate a relay station. To maintain proper reliability standards, BPA needed to find an intermediate location to break up a longer microwave path that would also be able to see towards La Pine. Walker Mountain is the only site that can provide that need.

Construct at a different site location.

Various locations on site were proposed, evaluated and discarded due to the fact that the top of Walker is very densely populated with users, is less than five acres, and most users have radio paths north and south. To cause the least possible interference, the BPA building would be located lower, off the mountaintop on a side slope on the east side.

Construct a single story building.

The initial design plans were for a single story building. These were modified due to the steepness of the terrain at the new location, to a smaller foot print two story building, that could be built into the landscape. BPA designed the building to compensate for the steeper terrain and to potentially consolidate multiple users.

Change the tower design.

Several tower designs were considered and are on file. In order to be compatible with the multiple users and allow the potential for site consolidation, the current proposed action was set forth.

Alternatives

Alternative A - No Action

As required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the No Action alternative forms a basis for describing and comparing the effects of the proposed action. Under the No Action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. No construction in Zone B or dismantling of structures in Zone A on Walker Mountain would be implemented.

Alternative B - The Proposed Action

The Department of Energy/BPA proposes that the Forest Service issue a special use permit authorizing industrial microwave communications use and the construction of a new 140 foot tower, a 1,200 square foot two-level building, and an access road in Zone B of the Walker Mountain Communication Site. The building footprint would be approximately 600 square feet and appear as a single level from upslope and a two-level from downslope. BPA would occupy the top floor and the bottom floor would be available for future collocation and relocation of existing users at the site. A Deschutes National Forest Plan Amendment would be required to allow for the tower height and building size increases as well as small tree removal. The larger building and tower would allow other users to share the new facilities and allow for the potential removal of buildings and towers from the Walker Mountain site.

Actions associated with the development of this site would include the removal of the three towers (two performed by BPA), a building, and overhead power lines from the historic area, Zone A;

creation of adequate and safe access to the developments, trenching for underground buried utilities, modest reconstruction and grading of the existing site access at the hairpin corner entering the site, road construction for access, and the removal and disposal of small trees (averaging 6 inches in diameter) and vegetation as needed for construction site clearing. Disposal of vegetation and other debris would be at the discretion of the Forest Service, involving burning or removal of all debris from the site. The following specifies what actions would be carried out by zone:

Zone A (Historic Properties)

Actions associated with the proposed action would include the removal of the two towers, an overhead power line (Midstate Electric), propane tank, cable bridge and a building from the historic area, Zone A. (See Figures 3, 4, and 5 below). All expenses associated with decommissioning, removal, and appropriate recycling and/or disposal of the following items would be incurred by BPA and occur within 30 days of signal deployment from the new facilities the existing customers will utilize. Proposed actions in Zone A would remove visual elements that detract from the character of the historic properties and include the following items:

TOWER REMOVAL

As shown in Figures 4 and 5 below, these government-owned towers (Mapped as T1 and T2) along with the cable bridge shown, shall be decommissioned and removed from the site. All guy lines, piers, concrete, and anchors associated with the towers would be included.

BUILDING REMOVAL

As shown in Figure 3 below, this government-owned building complex (recognized as B1) shall be decommissioned and removed from the site.

POWERLINE REMOVAL

The site management plan requires: "Should the communication structures in Zone A be relocated to Zone B, associated power lines shall be removed and the site restored." Removal of the abandoned aerial power lines and support poles in Zone A will be coordinated with Midstate Electric Cooperative, Inc. Power supply must be maintained for existing site users in Zone B.

SITE RESTORATION

All material not native to Walker Mountain would be removed from the site and the surface naturalized in appearance. BPA would contact the appropriate Forest Service representative to schedule an inspection upon completion.

TEMPORARY STAGING

No temporary staging of materials and/or equipment would occur inside Zone A.

PROPANE TANK REMOVAL

Removal of the propane tank, supports, and visible distribution lines would be the responsibility of the existing facility customers (Oregon Department of Transportation/Oregon State Police). Where removal of segments of the distribution line would significantly disturb the natural character of the site, it would be cut and abandoned in place. Segment ends would be reburied and the surface naturalized.



Figure 3. Structure (B1) to be removed from Zone A



Figure 4. Tower (T1) to be removed from Zone A



Figure 5. Cable bridge and tower (T2) to be removed from Zone A

Zone B (Development Area)

The proposed activity to occur in Zone B would revolve around the construction of a new self-supported 140 foot tower and 1,200 square foot two-level building (600 feet square footprint) and associated access road to allow BPA to maintain and operate the power transmission system safely and reliably.

TOWER: The new tower would be sited slightly below the mountain top on the eastern slope to avoid any possible interference from or with existing users. The tower base would be a 30-40 feet square concrete pad. Approximately 150 yards of excavated material for the concrete pad would be used to level the area for the tower.

BUILDING: The construction of the new two-story communications building would involve the excavation of approximately 100 yards of material for the foundation. The footprint of the building would measure approximately 16 by 32 feet and the sidewall would be 10 feet at the highest point facing the access road. The east elevation shows a two-story profile, south elevation shows a one-story profile, and the west elevation shows a one-story profile. The BPA would occupy the upper level, leaving the bottom level completely for other users. (Refer to Figures 8 and 9). Complete floor plans and elevation profiles are available in the project file at the Crescent Ranger District, Crescent, OR.

SITE ACCESS AND ROAD IMPROVEMENTS: Some road improvement and/or reconstruction, such as blading, may be necessary at the hairpin turn just before reaching the site. This would involve smoothing and leveling to create an even slope throughout the hairpin turn. Access to the site for other users would not be impacted by the reconstruction work. Site access would involve the construction of a loop road around the building approximately 500 feet long with 10 foot entrances at both ends, widening to 18 feet to facilitate parking for users of the lower entrance. The proposed road surface would consist of gravel over a top-surface compacted to a 4" minimum depth. The entire access would be permanent.

POWER: Power lines would be relocated from aerial to buried should construction or operations interfere with safe operation of the existing aerial power line adjacent to the proposed development. For the power supply, a new transformer would be placed along the access road with excavation of a small trench approximately 4 feet deep, 2 feet wide, and 200 feet long. BPA would also bury all power lines along the frontage of the new facility. A propane tank would be installed to provide a secondary power source and backup generator capacity would be sufficient to support all future use.

EQUIPMENT AND STAGING: Equipment necessary for construction of the building and tower would include a backhoe, light duty trucks, cement trucks, and some type of crane. Road work would involve a bull dozer, dump trucks, roller and water truck. All staging of supplies and equipment would occur in Zone B only and would not restrict access for other users.

VEGETATION REMOVAL: The removal of approximately 50 small trees (averaging about 6 inches in diameter and 25 feet tall) and brush may be necessary during the construction process. These trees will be piled and burned or removed from the area by BPA under the supervision of Forest Service representatives.

The plot plan and site plan (Figures 6 and 7) of the proposed construction shows the location of the proposed new structures, as well as the location of existing structures. In addition the plot plan shows the expected beam paths for the new radio system. Full size drawings are in the project record and can be viewed at the Crescent Ranger District office in Crescent, Oregon.

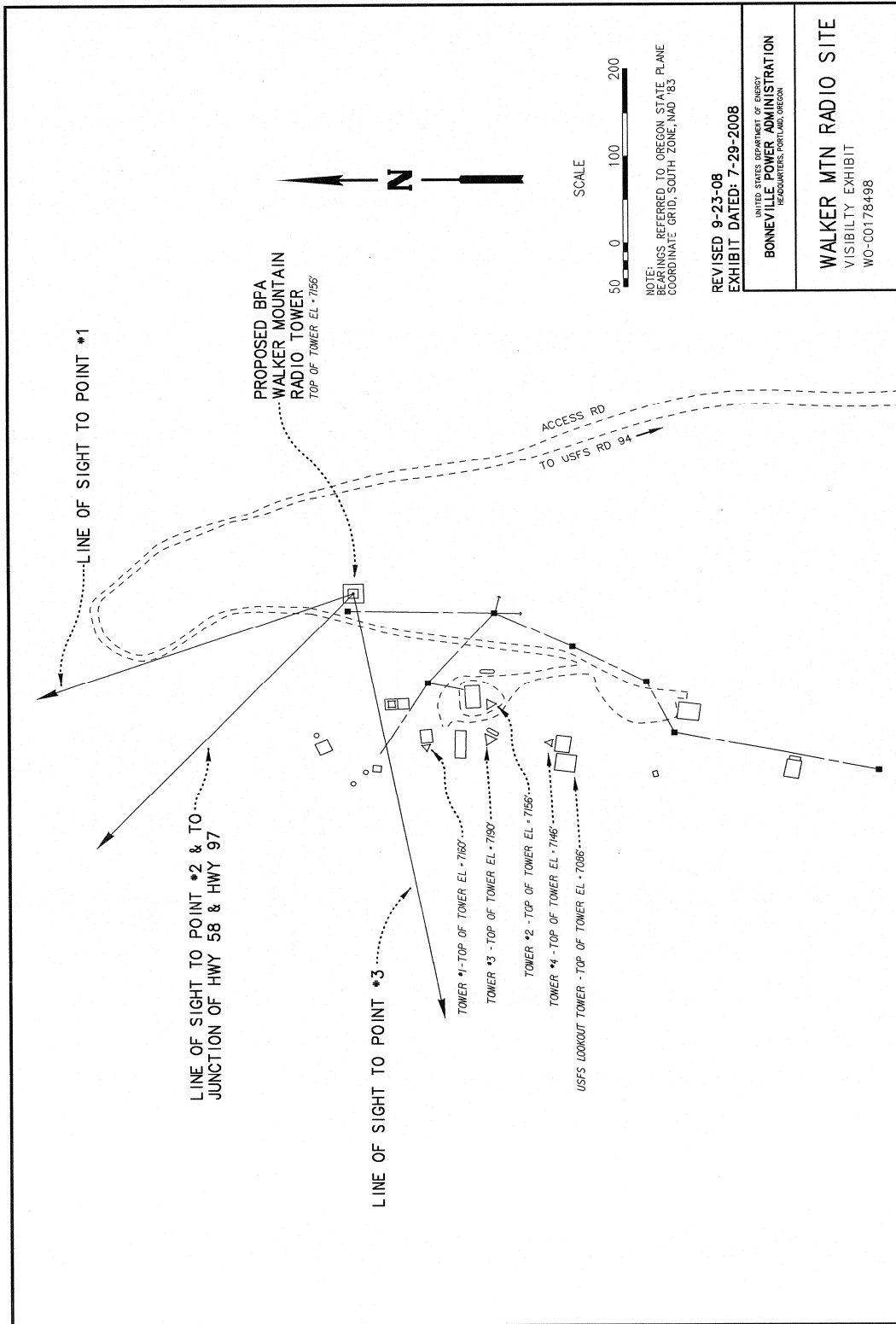


Figure 6. Plot Plan

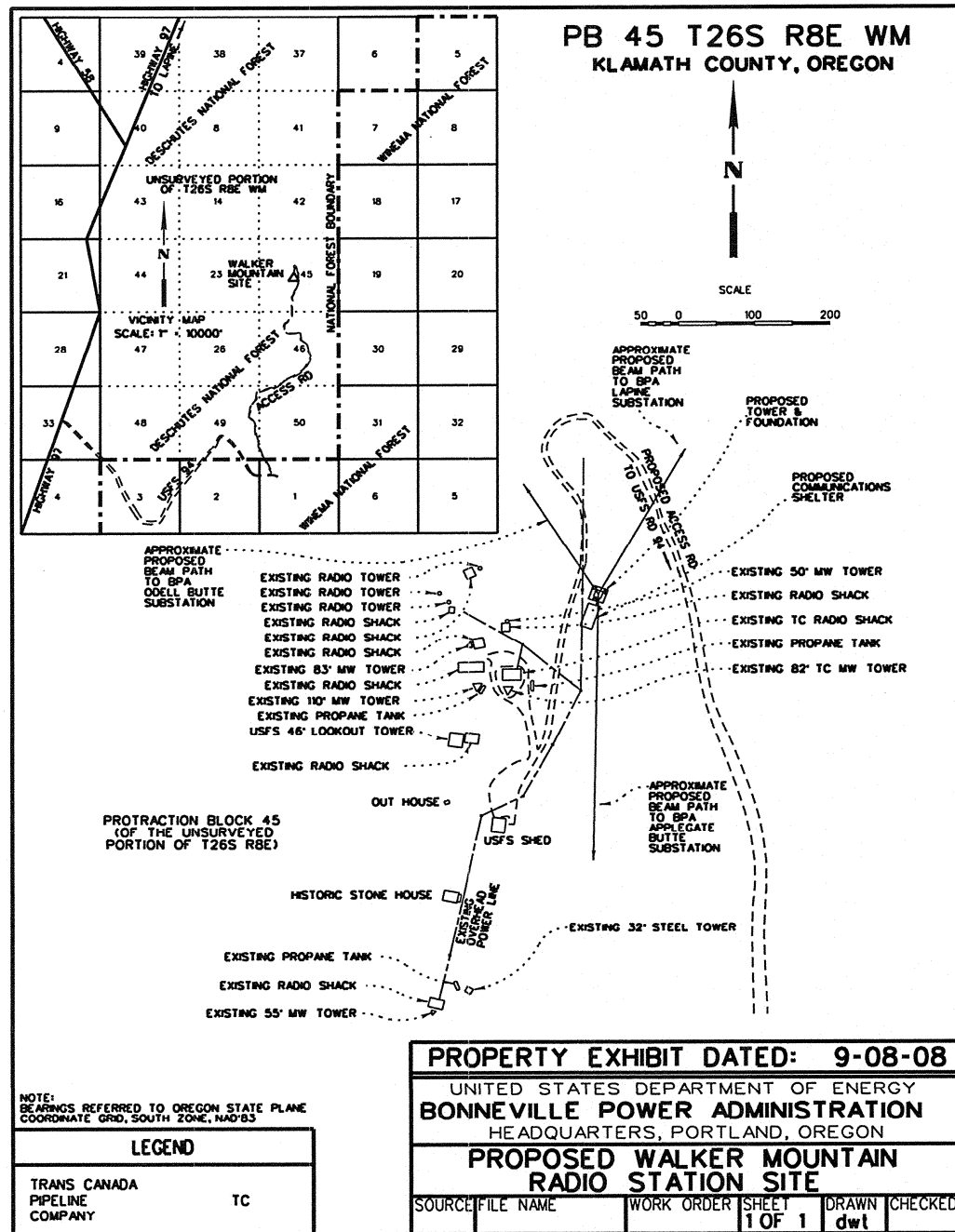


Figure 7. Site Plan

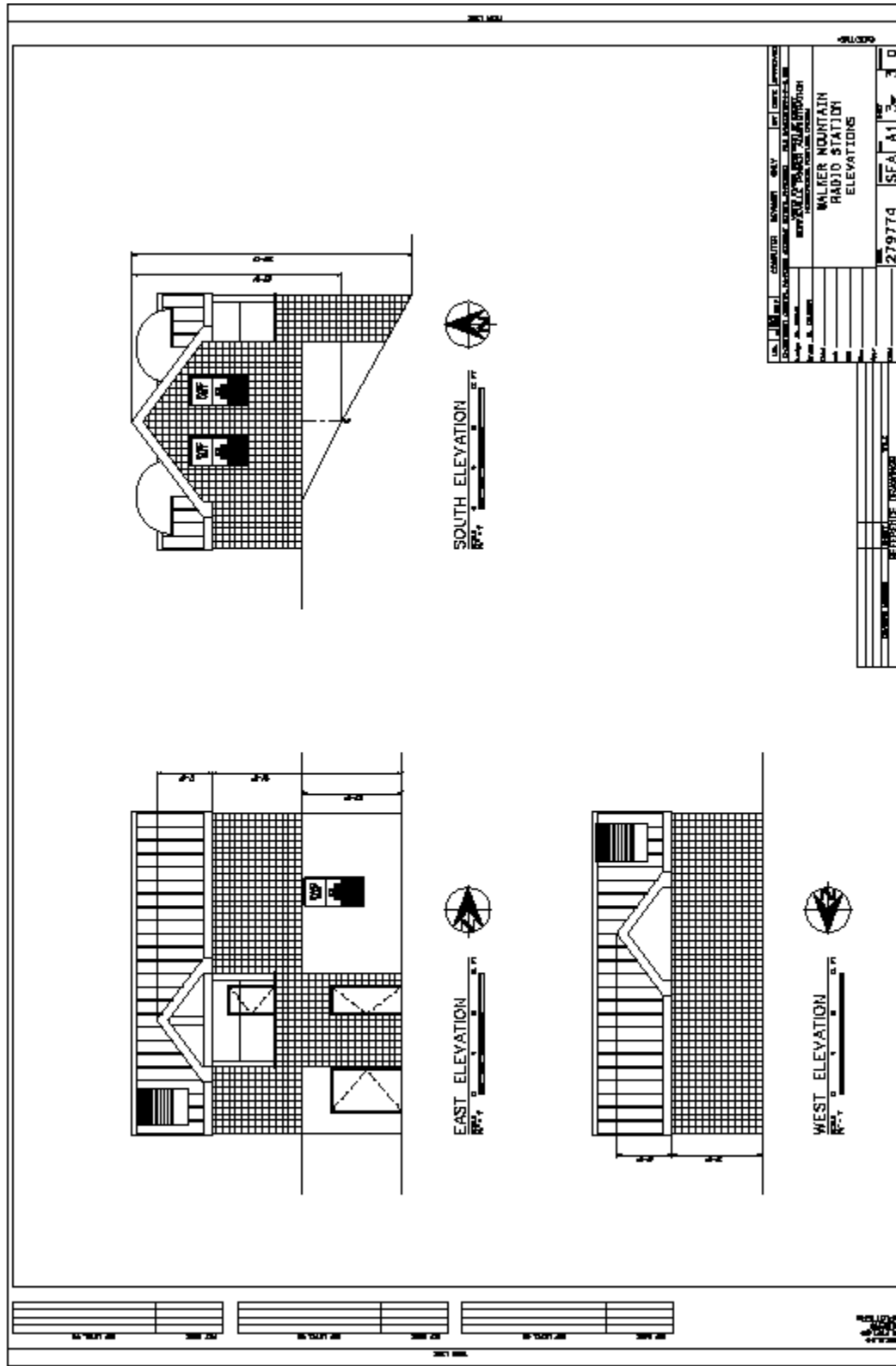


Figure 8. Building Elevation Profiles

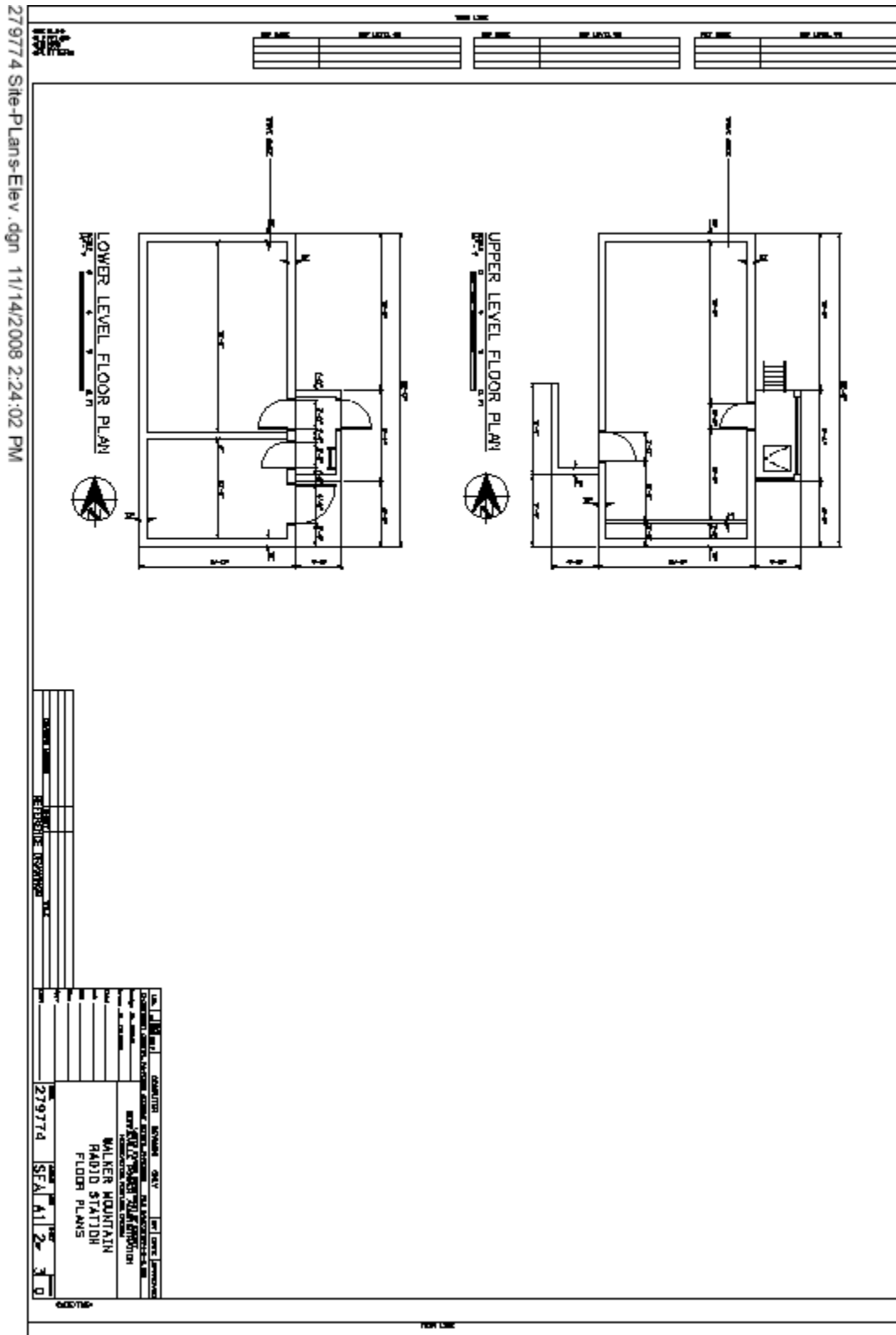


Figure 9. Floor Plan

Forest Plan Amendment

A Forest Plan Amendment of the building size, tower height, and tree removal guidelines in the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and Walker Mountain Communication Site 1995 revised Management and Development for this instance would be necessary. It is a site-specific change to the Walker Mountain Communication Site Plan to allow a taller tower, larger building, and cutting of trees for construction. The change would permit the tower height to increase from 100 feet above ground level (AGL) to a maximum of 140 feet (AGL) because it is assumed the original site plan did not account for changes in elevation within the boundary of Zone B. The 1995 Walker Mountain Communication Site Plan also did not facilitate current technology and consolidation of users. The change to the site plan would also permit the building footprint and height to increase from 400 square feet to 600 square feet with a maximum ten foot sidewall on the uphill side and a 20 foot side wall on the downhill side. Tree removal would be allowed for construction of the facility and access only.

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.

Cultural Resources

The Walker Mountain Historic Property is located on top of Walker Mountain at the south end in Zone A. It includes a lookout tower, garage, stone/log cabin, a cistern, three outhouses, two pits, a flagpole, a rock wall and a rock formation vision quest feature. Built in 1917, the cabin is the oldest administrative structure on the Forest.

In a Thematic Determination of Eligibility for lookout structures on the Deschutes National Forest, the lookout, cabin and garage were determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, and with its associated features, the cultural resource site is eligible as well.

Alternative A: There would be no effect relating to cultural resources as Zone A would remain as it is. The building, power line, and two towers would not be removed. Alternative A would not change the historical characteristics of the area.

Alternative B: There would be a change in the historic characteristics in Zone A with the removal of the structure, overhead power line, and two towers from the zone. This would improve the setting in Zone A as these structures are not representative of the turn of the century characteristics. This action would be consistent with the 1995 EA which states that within Zone A, visual elements that detract from the character of the historic properties will be phased out and activities and construction which would further diminish this historic character will not be permitted.

There would be no effect to cultural resources with the proposed construction in Zone B since there are no identified cultural resources within the proposed construction footprint.

Scenic Quality

The Deschutes LRMP designates the Visual Quality Objective (VQO) as “Modification” for Walker Mountain where human activities may dominate the characteristic landscape. These activities must also utilize naturally established form line, color, and texture. The Visual Quality Objective is designated for both Highways 58 and 97 as Partial Retention. This objective means human activities may be evident, but must remain subordinate to the characteristic landscape. The Revised Walker Mountain Site Plan of 1995 states that the cumulative effects to scenic quality will be assessed from designated viewpoints along Highways 97 and 58. To remain consistent with this VQO, future development should remain subordinate to the characteristic landscape which is a forested mountainside enframed by the vegetation seen along the highways. This is to ensure that the site will not become a dominate feature on the landscape as viewed from the two highways. It is unlikely for this to occur due to the large scale of the mountain in comparison to the small scale of Zone B, where the development would occur. However, the 1995 Revised Site Plan calls for a Visual Quality Analysis to be done before any new development takes place at the site.

For the Visual Quality Analysis, there are four designated viewpoints along the highways from which the objectives are based. They are:

1. **Viewpoint 1:** Highway 97 approximately 2 miles north of the junction of 97 and 58,
2. **Viewpoint 2:** Highway 58 approximately 1 mile northwest from the junction of 97 and 58,
3. **Viewpoint 3:** Highway 97 approximately 2 miles south of the junction of 97 and 58, and
4. **Viewpoint 4:** Highway 58 and Highway 97 junction.

The communication facilities are most visible from the above four locations. Visibility from the four points has been documented in the following photographs (Refer to Figures 12-15) and analytically studied to determine the potential impact of the new BPA tower. Elevation readings were taken at the viewpoints and the existing tower locations, including tower height, to model how much of the new tower would be visible from the viewpoints.

The following map (Figure 11) shows the designated visual viewpoints along the two highways.

Figure 11. Visual Quality Analysis Viewpoints

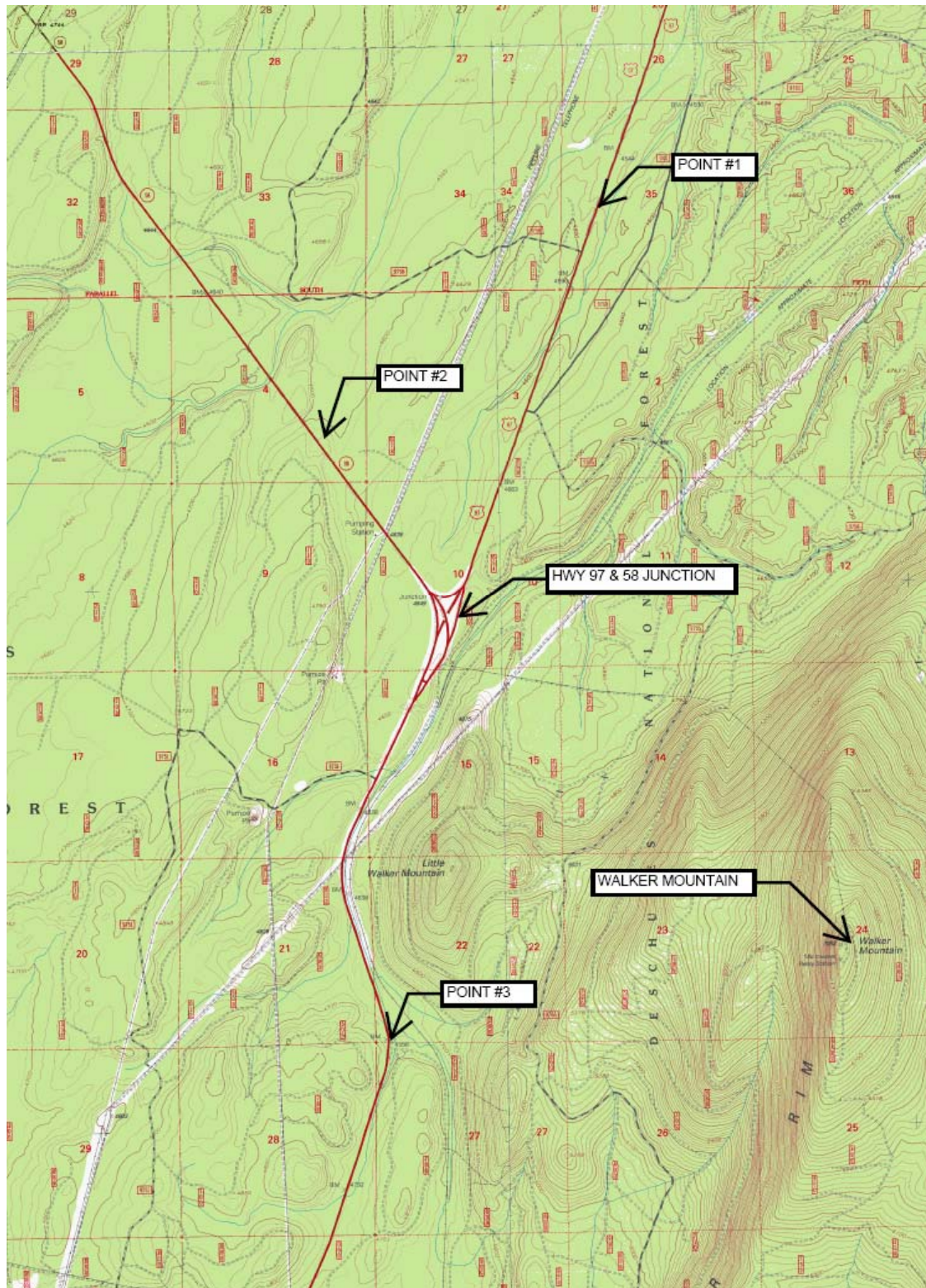




Figure 12. Visibility from the junction viewpoint



Figure 13. Visibility from Viewpoint 1

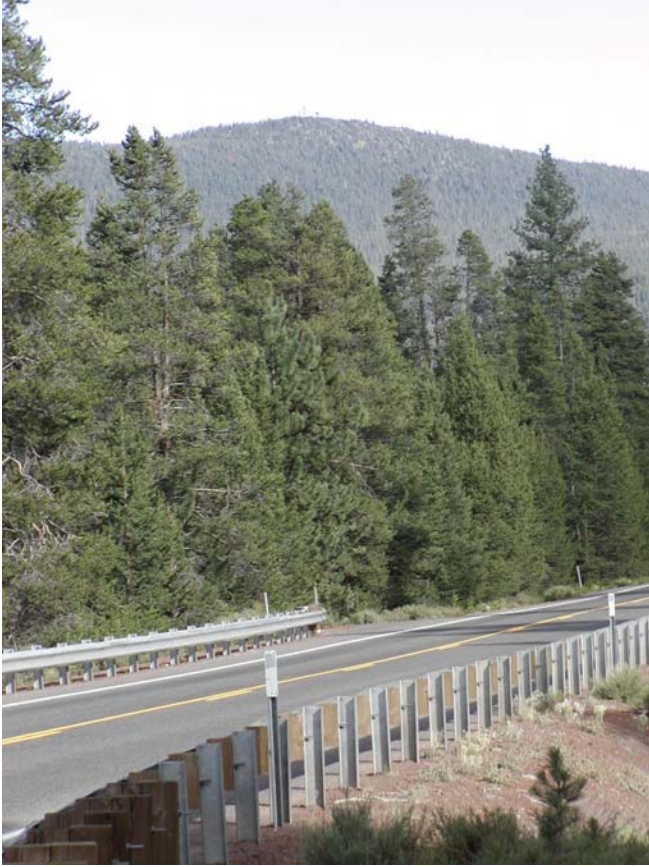


Figure 14. Visibility from Viewpoint 2



Figure 15. Visibility from Viewpoint 3

The Walker Mountain electronic site currently has four prominent towers located in close proximity to the Forest Service Fire Lookout tower. Measurements were taken to display the relative heights of the existing towers with the proposed BPA tower.

Table 1. Tower Comparisons

Tower Location	Ground Elevation (feet)	Tower Height (feet)	Antenna Height (feet)	Overall Elevation (feet)
Tower #1	7077	80	83	7160
Tower #2	7074	75	82	7156
Tower #3	7080	100	110	7190
Tower #4	7086	60	60	7146
USFS Lookout	7086	46	N/A	7132
New BPA Tower	7046	140	115	7186

The table above displays the relative heights of prominent towers at the site. Tower 3 will be taller than the new BPA tower due to its higher base location on the mountain. The new BPA tower will be built on the northeast side of the mountain and will have a lower base elevation than all the existing towers.

Additionally the viewing angle was calculated from the two most visible points. Considering viewers would be looking up at the mountaintop from the viewpoints, towers located farther away will seem shorter in reference to towers that are closer. In the analysis, this angle was calculated and demonstrates that the new BPA tower will appear shorter than all existing towers, including the Forest Service Lookout when viewed from Point 3 and the Highway Junction location. (See Figures 16 and 17).

Alternative A: The photographs illustrate the visibility of existing structures on Walker Mountain from the four designated viewpoints along Highways 97 and 58. The scenic quality would not change. The Walker Mountain Lookout tower is visible in the top/middle skyline.

Alternative B: The new tower would be constructed using a non-reflective, galvanized metal which decreases visibility from a distance. The Visual Quality Analysis indicates the new tower and building would not dominate the views and therefore are subordinate to the landscape. As Figures 12 through 15 display, the facilities would not be evident from some viewpoints. Where it is potentially visible, it is behind the existing, more dominant towers on the western edge of the site.

Also in the above figures, the more visually dominant Forest Service tower and building as seen on the skyline would be removed. For more detail, the Walker Mountain Tower Visibility Study is available in the project file at the Crescent Ranger District office in Crescent, Oregon.

Based on the visual analysis, the BPA tower as seen from identified viewpoints is consistent with the Deschutes National Forest Plan and the 1995 Walker Mountain Communication Site Plan.

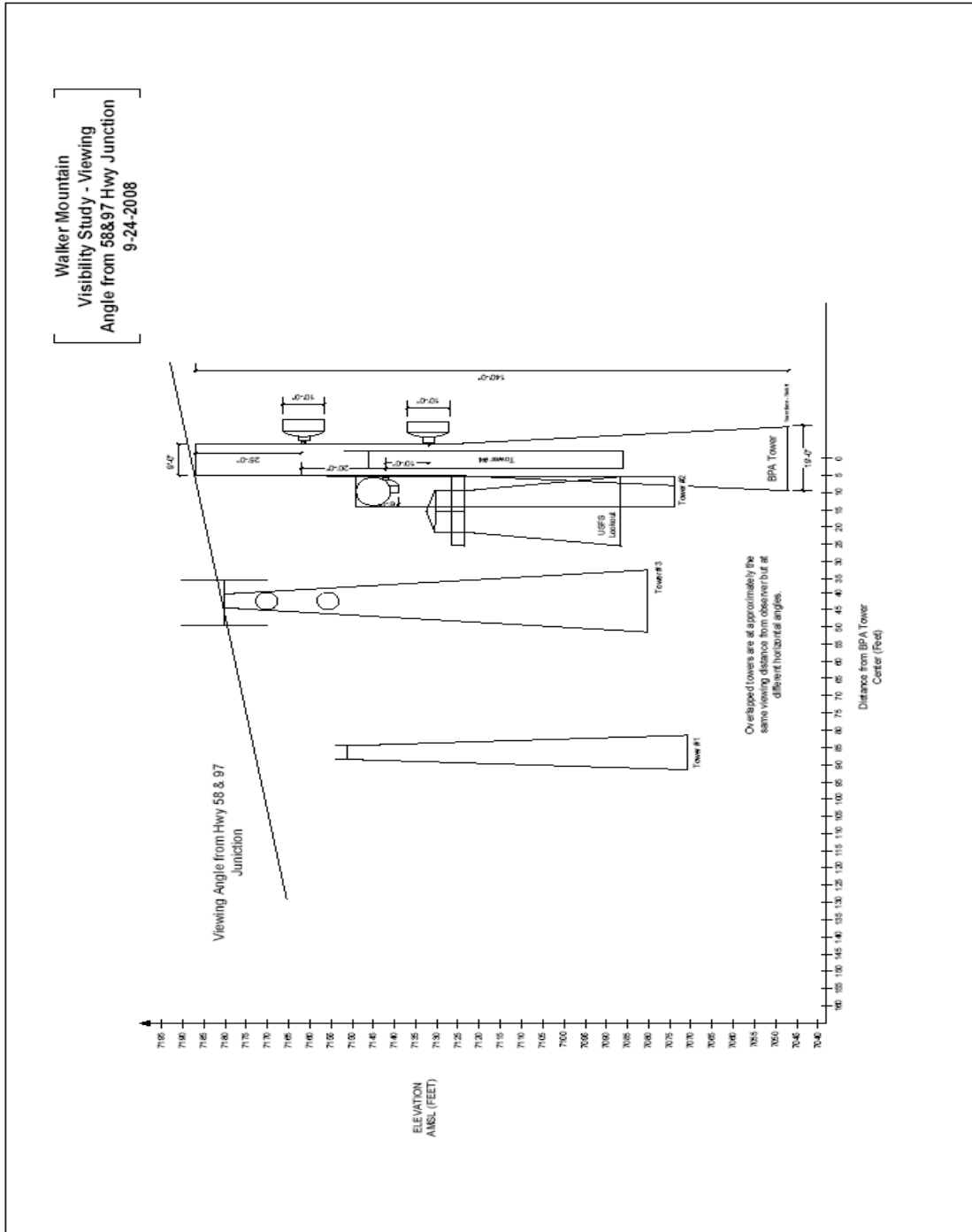


Figure 16. Viewing angle from Highways 58 and 97 junction

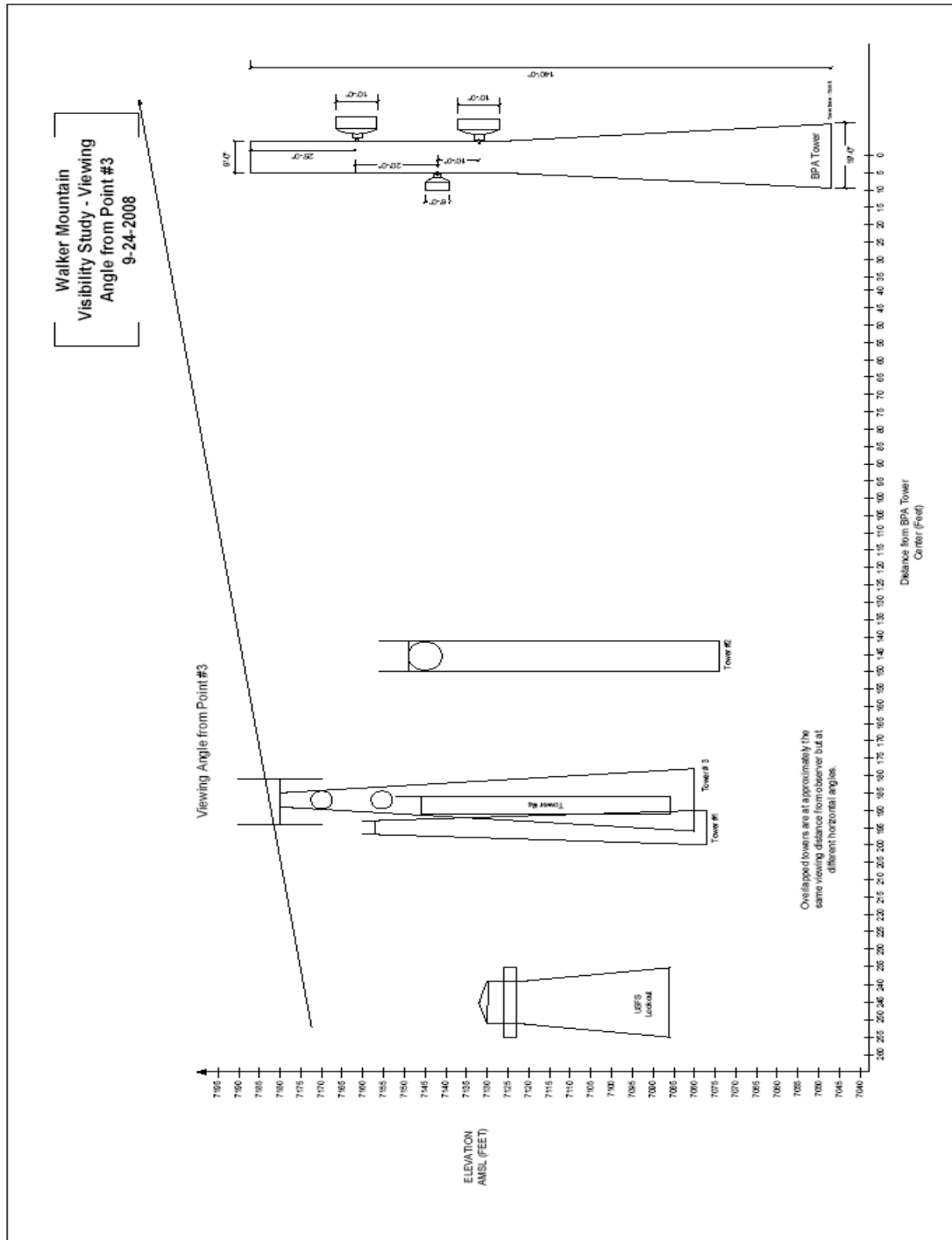


Figure 17. Viewing angle from Viewpoint 3

Recreation

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) is a system used to identify broad categories of recreation opportunities and settings on Forest lands. The Walker Mountain ROS is classified as Roded Modified. This classification is given to settings heavily modified by human activity where access is generally easy for highway vehicles. Since the project area is currently designated as an electronic site in the Deschutes LRMP, within such sites, recreational opportunities are “limited to non-existing”. Some recreational use occurs at the site primarily in association with the historic properties and the scenic views afforded from Walker Mountain.

Alternative A: This alternative would continue the current recreation setting by retaining unneeded structures in Zone A which would further detract from the rustic setting and limit scenic views from the cabin in the historic area.

Alternative B: Alternative B would increase the recreational opportunities and quality of recreational experiences by removing non-conforming structures within Zone A. The rustic setting and historic characteristics would be enhanced. This de-emphasizes development within Zone A. Zone B would remain essentially unchanged in terms of recreational opportunities and the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum of Road Modified would remain.

Wildlife

Threatened, Endangered

Regional Forester’s Sensitive Species

Management Indicator Species

Rare and Uncommon Species

A site visit and search of historical records was conducted for proposed threatened, endangered, or rare and uncommon species and their habitat and none was found. There were no identified effects to these species as well as any federally listed, threatened, or endangered species associated with either alternative. A Wildlife Biological Evaluation has been prepared and is available in the project record at the Crescent Ranger District.

The following table lists Management Indicator Species, and Rare and Uncommon species that may be present or have habitat on the Deschutes National Forest. For Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC), the geographical extent is the Great Basin. The following table displays species by presence and/or habitat within the project area.

Table 2. Wildlife Species Potential within the Project Area

Species		Habitat/Present within the Project Area?	Species Presence Within The Analysis Area?
Three-Toed Woodpecker	Management Indicator Species	No, Large, open Ponderosa Pine stands	No
American Marten	Management Indicator Species	No	No
Northern Goshawk	Management Indicator Species	No	No
Osprey	Management Indicator Species	No	No
Northern Bald Eagle	Management Indicator Species, Regional Forester Sensitive	No, Lakes, Reservoirs, Large Trees for Nesting	No
Northern Spotted Owl	Management Indicator Species, Federal Threatened	No, Late and Old-structured Mixed Conifer Forest	No, outside range
Mule Deer	Management Indicator Species	Yes	Yes
Elk	Management Indicator Species	Yes	Yes
Woodpecker Guild	Management Indicator Species	No	No
Great Blue Heron	Management Indicator Species	No	No
Great Gray Owl	Management Indicator Species	No	No
Peregrine Falcon	Management Indicator Species	No	No
Wolverine	Management Indicator Species	No	No
Townsend's Big-eared Bat	Management Indicator Species	No. Existing buildings are sealed and species preference is for caves, mines and bridges	No
Waterfowl	Management Indicator Species	No	No
Golden Eagle	Management Indicator Species	No	No
Red-tail Hawk	Management Indicator Species	No	No
Cooper's Hawk	Management Indicator Species	No	No
Sharp-shin Hawk	Management Indicator Species	No	No

Species		Habitat/Present within the Project Area?	Species Presence Within The Analysis Area?
Horned Grebe	Regional Forester Sensitive	No, Lakes	No
Red-necked Grebe	Regional Forester Sensitive	No, Lakes	No
Oregon Spotted Frog	Federal Candidate and Regional Forester Sensitive	No, Ponds, Marshes	No
Pacific Fisher	Federal Candidate and Regional Forester Sensitive	No, Mixed Forest with Complex Structure	No
Bufflehead	Regional Forester Sensitive	No, Lakes, Snags	No
Harlequin Duck	Regional Forester Sensitive	No, Fast Flowing Streams	No
Tricolor Blackbird	Regional Forester Sensitive	No, Lakeside, Bulrushes	No
Lewis' Woodpecker	Regional Forester Sensitive, BCC	No, Open woodland habitat (oak, ponderosa, or cottonwood) near water	No
White-Headed Woodpecker	Regional Forester Sensitive, Rare and Uncommon, BCC	No, Ponderosa pine or mixed conifer forests dominated by ponderosa pine	No
Northern Waterthrush	Regional Forester Sensitive	No, Riparian hardwoods (willows)	No
Western Sage Grouse	Regional Forester Sensitive	No	No
Yellow Rail	Regional Forester Sensitive	No, Marshes	No
Pygmy Rabbit	Regional Forester Sensitive	No, Sagebrush Flats	No
Crater Lake Tightcoil Snail	Regional Forester Sensitive	No, Riparian	No
Silver-Bordered Fritillary	Regional Forester Sensitive	No, Wet meadows, marshes, bogs and more open parts of shrubby wetlands	No

Species		Habitat/Present within the Project Area?	Species Presence Within The Analysis Area?
Johnson's Hairstreak	Regional Forester Sensitive	No, Mostly in late and old structured coniferous forests with mistletoe presence	No
Pygmy nuthatch	Rare and Uncommon, BCC	No, Large trees, Ponderosa Pine	No
Chipping sparrow	BCC	No, Ponderosa Pine, Open understory with regenerating pines	No
Brown creeper	BCC	No, Mixed Conifer Late-Successional, Large trees	No
Williamson sapsucker	BCC	No, Mixed Conifer Late-Successional, Large snags	No
Flammulated owl	Rare and Uncommon, BCC	No, Mixed Conifer Late-Successional, Interspersion grassy openings/dense thickets	No
Hermit thrush	BCC	No, Mixed Conifer Late-Successional, Multi-layered/dense canopy	No
Olive-sided flycatcher	BCC	No, Mixed Conifer Late-Successional, Edges and openings created by wildfire	No
Black-backed woodpecker	Rare and Uncommon, BCC	No, Lodgepole pine, Old-growth	No

Species		Habitat/Present within the Project Area?	Species Presence Within The Analysis Area?
Sandhill crane	BCC	No, Meadows, Wet/dry	No
Red-naped sapsucker	BCC	No, Aspen, Large trees with regeneration	No
Blue grouse	BCC	No, Subalpine fir, Patchy presence	No
Clark's nutcracker	BCC	No, Whitebark pine, Old-growth	No

Alternative A: There would be no change to wildlife use effects since no activities would occur at the site.

Alternative B: The wildlife type most potentially affected is big game (mule deer and elk) and some species of bats. Walker Mountain is currently a developed communications site and has been for many years. Big game potentially use the area for foraging and in transition between winter and summer range. Zone B has concentrated use with very little potential to alter current habitat. The tower and building and access to those facilities would not appreciably change how big game use the area. A foreseeable action implementing the Travel Management Rule and designation of a motorized trail system would not have a measurable additive effect because of the scale of the proposed facilities. Also, designation of trails would allow big game areas of more solitude compared to the current unrestricted access.

There are no known caves or mines on the Crescent Ranger District (L. Hickerson, pers comm. 2008) and there are no documented reports of Townsend's big-eared bats occurring on the district. Townsend's big-eared bats are known to occur within cave systems on the Bend-Ft. Rock Ranger District of the Deschutes National Forest. There is potential habitat in the communication buildings to be removed. However, they are typically sealed tightly for temperature efficiency and anecdotal evidence has not indicated their presence (personal communication, R.D. Buell, February 2009). A Project Design Feature was developed to protect existing bats, if they exist, by surveying presence and a delay in building demolition activities until they are gone. Although a small amount of potential habitat may be lost, there are ample alternative sites in cracks in the rocks and boulders which are characteristic of the site. Construction of a building, tower, with associated access would not appreciably change how bats use the area.

There are no other past, present, or foreseeable actions that have potential for additive effects to bats.

Botany and Invasive Plants

A botanical survey of the Walker Mountain Communication site was conducted twice. Survey records are located in the Crescent Ranger District Botany files. In both surveys, no habitat or occurrences of endangered, threatened, or rare and uncommon plants were found. Therefore, there is no effect. The results of these surveys also indicate there will be no effect from implementation of the proposed project to any habitat or species on the Region 6 Forester's Sensitive Plant List.

No invasive plants were observed during either survey of the Walker Mountain Site.

Alternative A: There would be no effects regarding plants or invasive plants with Alternative A since nothing would change in either zone.

Alternative B: Equipment and ground disturbing activities have the potential to introduce invasive species. PDFs were designed to address this potential. Please refer to Project Design Features on page 8. Ongoing monitoring of the site for invasive species would continue, post implementation.

There were no direct or indirect effects identified, therefore there are no cumulative effects.

Soils

The Deschutes National Forest Soil Resource Inventory (1976) indicates two soil types exist on or near the summit of Walker Mountain. One type (mapping unit 9N), occurs on steeply sloping hillsides and has well to excessively drained soils formed from a thick layer of pumice and volcanic ash over older soils on glacial till, volcanic rocks, and colluvium. The other type (mapping unit 9W), occurs on relatively gentle slopes and plateaus at high elevations. This landtype has well to excessively drained soils derived from a very thick pumice mantle on older soils over glacial till or volcanic bedrock materials. This soil is very stable and has low surface erosion potential. Zone A is predominately surface rock.

Alternative A: There would be no additional detrimental soil effects in Zones A or B since no new activities would be occurring.

Alternative B: The construction activities would increase detrimental soil conditions to the construction footprint (less than .1 acre) in Zone B. In Zone A the current detrimental soil conditions would continue to exist. This is an irretrievable effect to the area because vegetation will be removed with no regrowth potential while Walker Mountain is serving as a communication site. There were no past, present, or foreseeable actions identified as this project does not overlap previous activities.

Consistencies

Telecommunications Act of 1996

Section 704(c) of this act (sec 97, ex. 13) requires Federal agencies to facilitate the development and placement of telecommunications equipment on buildings and land they manage when placement does not conflict with the agency's mission or current or planned use of the property.

Title V, Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of October 21, 1976

This act authorizes the use of National Forest System lands for telecommunications uses.

National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended

This Act requires Federal agencies to consult with American Indian Tribes, State and local groups before nonrenewable cultural resources, such as archaeological and historic structures, are damaged or destroyed. Section 106 of this Act requires Federal agencies to review the effects proposed projects may have on the cultural resources of the analysis area.

Following guidelines in a 2003 Regional Programmatic Agreement among USDA-Forest Service, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, a

finding of “Historic Properties Avoided” was determined. This finding is based on the practice of avoiding all eligible and unevaluated sites.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

This project followed the format and content requirements of environmental analysis and documentation. The entire process of preparing this environmental analysis was undertaken to comply with NEPA.

FSH 2709.11, Chapter 90 Communications Site Management;

94.5 – Requirements before Issuance of Authorization states:

“Issue an authorization only after all of the following requirements have been satisfied:

1. *National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements have been met (FSH 1909.15).*

This has been accomplished for the proposed BPA facilities through this Environmental Assessment.

2. *Coordination with other agencies has been completed, including appropriate coordination with the FAA concerning tower height, placement, and lighting and with the DOD when site activity could affect local military operations;*

This requirement is not applicable in this case.

3. *Coordination with facility owners and facility managers at the site has been completed, including a 30-day comment period concerning the application;*

A scoping letter was sent out to all parties on September 9, 2008 and a 30 day comment period was initiated. On October 8, 2008 a site visit was hosted by BPA to discuss their proposal with users. Another, more technical letter from BPA, was sent to existing communications use lease and special use permit holders on December 5, 2008. Another 30 comment period for users on the Walker Mountain site was provided. No comments were received.

4. *Acceptable design measures or other satisfactory resolution of potential incompatibility has been agreed to by the applicant and the existing users at the site, including the Forest Service if applicable;*

During the initial 30-day comment period, Western Radio requested more information. A site visit and more technical material was provided, with another 30-day comment period. No further comments were received.

5. *The applicant has received the appropriate authorization from the FCC or the National Telecommunications and Information Administration Committee (NTIAC);*

These agencies have given the appropriate authorizations for the BPA proposal and they are on file at the Crescent Ranger District.

6. *The building design has been approved by the Forest Service.*

The building design has been reviewed by the appropriate specialists and the application has been accepted by the Responsible Official.

1990 Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP)

SU-10 Developed, planned and denied electronic sites are listed and shown on the Electronic Sites and Major Utilities Corridor Map.

Walker Mountain Communication Site is shown on the Electronic Sites and Major Utilities Corridor Map.

SU-12 Site plans for planned sites must be completed prior to installation of facilities. Plans must be compatible with the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) and visual classification of the area.

The Walker Mountain Communication Site 1994 revised Management and Development Plan calls for a Visual Quality Objective as Partial Retention. This objective means human activities may be evident but must remain subordinate to the characteristic landscape. A Visual Quality Analysis has been performed for the BPA tower and building visibility and it was found to be subordinate and consistent. The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) is classified as Roaded Modified which is given to settings heavily modified by human activity where access is generally easy for highway vehicles. The ROS will not change. A site plan has been developed by BPA for its proposed facility and tower.

SU-13 Applicants for electronic facilities will be directed toward use of the developed sites before use of planned sites is considered.

The BPA proposal for a facility would be on the developed site known as Zone B on Walker Mountain.

Roads Analysis

According to the Forest Service Road Management Policy published January 12, 2001, all NEPA decisions after that date need to be informed by a road analysis. This project includes approximately 500 feet of access to and around the construction site off of road 9402. A roads analysis has been completed commensurate with the level of detail which the Responsible Official needs to be informed. It is on file at the Crescent Ranger District.

Forest Plan Amendment

The proposed revised standards and guidelines would not significantly change the forest-wide impacts disclosed in the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement, based on the following factors:

Timing: The Forest Service Planning Handbook (1909.12, 5.32) indicates that a change is less likely to result in a significant plan amendment if the change is likely to take place after the plan period (the first decade).

This plan amendment would take place on the 18th year of the Forest Plan, would take place immediately, and is specific to this project only.

Location and Size: The proposed revised specifications for building and tower would only affect the area within the Walker Mountain Communication Site area boundary for less than an acre.

Goals, Objectives and Outputs: The proposed revised building size and tower height standards and guidelines would not alter the long-term relationship between levels of goods and services projected by the Land and Resource Management Plan. This amendment would not change management allocations where programmable timber harvest could occur. There would not be any change in timber outputs over what might be available if the project was designed without the proposed amendment.

Management Prescriptions: The proposed revised building size and tower height standards and guidelines would not change the desired future condition for land and resources from that contemplated by the existing management direction in the Land and Resource Management Plan in

the short-term. It would not affect the whole Land and Resource Management Plan planning area, but only less than an acre of National Forest System lands within the Walker Mountain Communication Site area. The proposed amendment would not change the Land and Resource Management Plan allocations or management areas.

Walker Mountain Communication Site; 1995 Revised Management and Development Plan

This plan continues the strategy of allowing compatible uses; primarily in both the Two-way Radio Category and Microwave Category. This revised plan incorporates the 1990 Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan standards and guidelines for electronic sites (SU-10 through SU-14).

The 1995 Walker Mountain Electronic Site Environmental Assessment Revision and Forest Plan Amendment considers historic and visual resource concerns by limiting the total number of buildings while allowing for increased use. The objectives set forth are as follows:

Defines the boundaries of the sites into Zones A and B with no further development allowed in Zone A, the historic properties area. Within Zone A, visual elements that detract from the character of the historic properties will be phased out and activities and construction which would further diminish this historic character will not be permitted.

The BPA proposal would be consistent with this objective. BPA would remove uncharacteristic towers and a structure from Zone A and development would take place solely in Zone B.

“The number of towers and buildings would be limited to 16 and 8 respectively.”

With the removal of the two towers and one structure from Zone A, as part of the proposed development, the numbers of towers and buildings on the site will not exceed the thresholds outlined.

“Tower heights will not exceed 100 feet.”

As the base of the proposed tower would be considerably further downslope than the tallest tower on site, the top of the 140 foot tower would be below that of the tallest existing tower.

The proposed Amendment would read:

“Tower and antenna height will not extend above the current tower height ceiling and be limited to 140 feet in overall height.”

Visual quality analysis will be required prior to increasing the height or changing locations of existing towers.”

A Visual Quality Analysis was performed for this project on September 24, 2008. The Forest Landscape Architect reviewed this analysis and the proposed design of the tower and building.

Trees will not be removed unless absolutely necessary for construction, safety, fire hazard or obstruction of beam paths. In all cases, topping is preferable to removal.

Some trees and vegetation would be removed to accommodate installation of all facilities.

The proposed Forest Plan Amendment would read:

“Trees will not be removed unless absolutely necessary for construction, safety, fire hazard or obstruction of beam paths. Topping is preferable to complete removal except to allow for authorized construction.”

Walker Mountain Electronic Site Technical Standards

“Single story, with a maximum of 400 square feet in area and ten foot sidewalls”

The building would have 10 foot sidewalls showing above ground level on the upslope side of the facility. The downslope side of the building would have approximately 20 foot sidewalls to facilitate a two-level construction design. The footprint would be 600 square feet with an overall area of 1200 square feet.

The proposed Amendment would read:

“Single-level structures shall be limited to ten foot sidewalls. Two-level structures shall be limited to twenty foot sidewalls and be considered on sideslope developments where upslope sidewall of the building does not exceed 10 feet above ground level.”

“Square footage shall be limited to a reasonable area commensurate to accommodate the collocation of proposed and future use.”

Executive Order 13112 (invasive species)

This 1999 order requires Federal agencies whose actions may affect the status of invasive species to identify those actions and within budgetary limits, “(i) prevent the introduction of invasive species; (ii) detect and respond rapidly to and control populations of such species... (iii) monitor invasive species populations... (iv) provide for restoration of native species and habitat conditions in ecosystems that have been invaded;... (vi) promote public education on invasive species... and (3) not authorize, fund, or carry out actions that it believes are likely to cause or promote the introduction or spread of invasive species... unless, pursuant to guidelines that it has prescribed, the agency had determined and made public... that the benefits of such actions clearly outweigh the potential harm caused by invasive species; and that all feasible and prudent measures to minimize risk of harm will be taken in conjunction with the actions.”

There is a risk for spreading or introducing noxious weeds for the action alternative in this project. The risk is proportional to the area of ground disturbance and miles of roads used in the action alternative. The Region 6 Invasive Plant Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) Record of Decision (ROD) (USDA Forest Service, 2005) adopted Standards and Guidelines that would be followed to address this risk and prevention is the overall objective.

State and Local Laws

There are no identified inconsistencies with State and local laws, land use, and environmental policies.

Clean Water Act

There is no water in the vicinity and proposed activities are not likely to affect ground water resources.

Clean Air Act

The proposed action is to be consistent with the Clean Air Act. The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is responsible for assuring compliance with the Clean Air Act. In 1994, the Forest Service, in cooperation with the DEQ, the Oregon Department of Forestry and the Bureau of Land Management, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to establish a framework for implementing an air quality program in northeast Oregon. All prescribed burning is

coordinated with the DEQ through the State of Oregon smoke management program. Any pile burning would be conducted in compliance with the State of Oregon Smoke Management System and would meet smoke management objectives for total emissions.

Other Disclosures

1. 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 action. Walker Mountain is not located in a floodplain.

2. Civil Rights and Environmental Justice

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 proposed action would not pose a high or adverse effect to those populations.

3. Prime Lands (Farm, Range, and Forest)

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 Deschutes LMRP. National Forest Land is generally not considered “prime” forestland. This project, therefore, would not affect prime lands.

4. Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions near the Project Area

The Travel Management Rule which would limit motorized travel to designated routes is expected in 2010. The Three Trails OHV project would designate routes prior to or at the same time the Travel Management Rule is in place. Both projects overlap the project area; however no additive effects have been identified with construction of facilities and associated access on Walker Mountain in addition to these two projects.

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