



File Code: 1950

Date: December 7, 2009

Dear Interested Citizen,

The Mt. Hood National Forest is now preparing an Environmental Assessment to improve hydrologic function and reduce adverse impacts to aquatic habitat by proposing to decommission approximately 223 miles of unneeded roads on the Clackamas River Ranger District. Road decommissioning efforts would occur in the following nine subwatersheds: East Fork Collawash River, Elk Lake, Farm Creek-Collawash River, Happy Creek-Collawash River, Lower Hot Springs Fork Collawash River, Nohorn Creek, North Fork Breitenbush River, Pot Creek-Clackamas River, and Upper Hot Springs Fork Collawash River (see enclosed maps). Of the 223 miles of roads being proposed for decommissioning, 121 miles would *not* be decommissioned until vegetation management activities have occurred (in about five to ten years). Also, one road in the Happy Creek-Collawash River subwatershed, which is about 1.5 miles long, is being proposed to be converted to a non-motorized trail and will connect with Trail #553 in the Bull of the Woods Wilderness. Once the project has been completed, about 200 miles of road would remain in the project area.

The purpose for this proposal is as follows:

- Reduce impacts to water quality and aquatic habitats associated with unneeded roads.
- Reduce road density to improve terrestrial habitat utilization.
- Reduce the spread of non-native invasive plants associated with unneeded roads.
- Reduce road maintenance costs.

There is a need for action because:

- There are miles of unneeded roads on the Forest that have not been maintained or repaired. Many roads are no longer driveable due to brush encroachment. Routine inspection of culverts and ditches on these roads is not always possible because of lack of access, personnel, and funding. If roads are not maintained or decommissioned in the near future, there is an increased risk for surface erosion, gullyng, and landslides. Such potential risks may result in increased sediment delivery to streams and reservoirs, thereby affecting water quality and aquatic habitat.
- High open road densities are associated with habitat fragmentation and wildlife harassment. Decommissioning roads could allow for wildlife species to utilize more contiguous habitats and promote healthier wildlife populations.
- Roads serve as potential conduits for non-native invasive plants. Managing the spread of invasive species is important for maintaining healthy native ecosystems. If unneeded roads are not decommissioned, there is the continued threat for invasive plants to spread and displace native plants.



- Forest Service budgets for road maintenance have not kept pace with what it costs to maintain all roads so they function properly. With this trend of declining budgets expected to continue, the Forest's backlog of roads needing maintenance could impact hydrologic function.

The Mt. Hood National Forest is now seeking comments from individuals, organizations, local and state governments, and other federal agencies that may be interested in or affected by the proposed action. Comments may pertain to the nature and scope of the environmental, social, and economic issues, and possible alternatives to the proposed action. Your comments will help us assess the proposed action, develop alternatives and prepare an Environmental Assessment.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project, available for public inspection, and released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

The Forest Service would like your scoping comments by January 11, 2010. Please send your written comments to: Michelle Lombardo, Mt. Hood National Forest, 16400 Champion Way, Sandy, Oregon 97055; FAX: (503) 668-1413. You may also hand-deliver your comments to the above address during normal business hours which are 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays. Electronic comments may be submitted to comments-pacificnorthwest-mthood@fs.fed.us in a format such as an e-mail message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc). All those who comment will remain on our mailing list and receive future updates on this proposal.

Electronic maps and other information about the project are available on the Internet at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/mthood/projects/>. If you have any questions concerning this proposal, please contact Michelle Lombardo at (503) 668-1796 or mlombardo@fs.fed.us.

Sincerely,

/s/ Kathryn J. Silverman for
GARY L. LARSEN
Forest Supervisor