

## **Lewis River Hydroelectric Projects Relicensing**

Merwin Hydroelectric Project (FERC No. 935)  
Yale Hydroelectric Project (FERC No. 2071)  
Swift No. 1 Hydroelectric Project (FERC No. 2111)  
Swift No. 2 Hydroelectric Project (FERC No. 2213)

**USDA Forest Service  
Gifford Pinchot National Forest**

## **EXISTING INFORMATION ANALYSIS**

### **7. Drift Creek Dispersed Recreation Area**

Prepared by: Mitch Wainwright<sup>1</sup>, Wildlife Biologist  
Jim Nieland<sup>2</sup>, Recreation Planner  
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#### **I. Existing Situation**

An isolated parcel of National Forest System land, consisting of about 600 acres is located at the point where Drift Creek flows into the south side of Swift Reservoir. Due to the filling of the reservoir, Drift Creek now forms an inlet consisting of about 160 acres that divides the National Forest parcel into two pieces consisting of about 180 acres on the west side, and 260 acres on the east side. The upland habitat on the parcel is late-successional conifer stands. Inundation by the reservoir eliminated about 160 acres of late-successional wildlife habitat and 1.3 miles of Drift Creek, which represents about 25 acres of riparian habitat. The loss of upland and riparian habitat constitute continuing effects of the reservoir. The National Forest System parcel is bordered on the east, south, and west sides by private land. The surrounding private lands have been clearcut, and the stands in these cut areas are 10 to 20 years old.

The Forest Service and PacifiCorp signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in October 1993 that established a mechanism for coordinating resource management on the Forest Service parcel. Potential activities covered by the agreement include enhancing wildlife and riparian habitat, protecting and managing archeological and cultural resources, and maintaining and enhancing recreation and scenic aspects. PacifiCorp supplies the Forest Service with the results of their annual eagle and osprey nest monitoring under this MOU. The MOU expired in 1998, and the Forest Service initiated its reissuance in 1999.

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<sup>1</sup> (360) 247-3957

<sup>2</sup> (360) 247-3946

There is no direct road access to the National Forest parcel, but it attracts campers during the summer months that boat over from the Swift Reservoir boat launch. A steep-grade user trail is found on the west side of the inlet. This trail descends from private land to inventoried campsite #11. Road access to the trailhead is reported to be blocked.

Monitoring of recreation use at Swift Reservoir by PacifiCorp in 1998 revealed that there are 10 dispersed campsites on National Forest Land at Drift Creek that have had varying amounts of use and improvements added by users over the years. User-constructed developments such as tables, fire pits, small pit toilets were found at some sites. The remnant of a primitive boat dock was also found at one site. Soil compaction, accumulations of trash, enlarging of campsites, and sanitation have been identified as potential problems at some of these sites.

Prior to the construction and filling of Swift Reservoir there is no record of campsites or recreational use on Drift Creek. Gentle side slopes, and the protected nature of the inlet from winds that blow up or down the reservoir, encouraged the development of dispersed camping in the inlet. The inlet is somewhat unique on the reservoir in that it provides old growth forest stands with ample flat ground for camps and low wave-cut banks that allow easy access to the shore from boats. The inlet is popular for family camping, and provides a quiet water area for water-skiing. Most use occurs during the warm dry months of July, August and early September. Recreation use in Drift Creek started in the early 1960's, and was well established by the early 1970s.

The Drift Creek parcel supports a bald eagle nest that has been active every year since 1994. The nesting attempt failed in 1997 and 1999 for unknown reasons. Adverse weather conditions may have been a factor in 1999. One of the inventoried dispersed recreation sites (#8) is about 1,280 feet from the eagle nest, and another (#7A) is about 1,950 feet away. The remaining eight sites are between 3,675 and 5,280 feet away.

Soils in the Drift Creek inlet, as well as along much of the shoreline of Swift Reservoir are composed of pumice and volcanic ash. Wave action has resulted in erosion along the reservoir shoreline creating steep barren banks which stand as high as 50 feet above full pool level. The Drift Creek inlet is better protected from wind than most areas along the reservoir resulting in less, but noticeable bank erosion. Prevailing winds blow up and down reservoir, directed by the orientation of the Lewis River Valley.

## **II. Management Direction**

### **Forest Plan Direction**

#### **A. Management Area Category**

The Forest Service parcel at Drift Creek is classified as Wildlife Special under Amendment 11 of the Gifford Pinchot Forest Plan. In general, the goal of this management area category is to sustain or enhance a limited and significant habitat to support dependant wildlife. The desired future condition is that management activities are not evident over most of the area, there are few roads, and signs of other activities are

minimal. Vegetation is intended to generally be the product of natural succession, although some enhancement of habitat may occur. Recreational activities, which entail high densities of users, are not to be encouraged; however some hunting and fishing may occur. (Gifford Pinchot Forest Plan, 1995, p.4-33)

The standards and guidelines for the Wildlife Special management area allow for opportunities for viewing, photographing, and interpreting wildlife features when it is determined that it would not result in harassment to wildlife. Other than trails, recreation facilities should not be built.

### **B. Management Prescription**

Within the Wildlife Special management area category, this parcel has the management prescription of “Roaded Natural.” According to the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Users Guide for Roaded Natural, the acceptable density of recreational users is up to 2.5 people per acre. In addition, the Roaded Natural prescription allows for a “natural setting (that) may have modifications which range from easily noticed to strongly dominant to observers within the area. However from sensitive travel routes and use areas these alterations would remain unnoticed or visually subordinate.”

### **C. Aquatic Conservation Strategy**

The Northwest Forest Plan outlines nine Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) Objectives that were developed to restore and maintain the ecological health of watersheds and aquatic ecosystems contained within them on public lands. The following ACS objectives address effects that may occur with the existing recreation use at Drift Creek:

3. *Maintain and restore the physical integrity of the aquatic system, including shorelines, banks, and bottom configurations.*
4. *Maintain and restore water quality necessary to support healthy riparian, aquatic, and wetland ecosystems. Water quality must remain within the range that maintains the biological, physical, and chemical integrity of the system and benefits survival, growth, reproduction, and migration of individuals composing aquatic and riparian communities.*
8. *Maintain and restore the species composition and structural diversity of plant communities in riparian areas and wetlands to provide adequate summer and winter thermal regulation, nutrient filtering, appropriate rates of surface erosion, bank erosion, and channel migration.*
9. *Maintain and restore habitat to support well-distributed populations of native plant, invertebrate, and vertebrate riparian-dependent species*

The following NFP standards and guidelines apply to recreation developments within riparian reserves. Riparian reserves area one site-potential tree height or 150 feet, whichever is greater, in width.

RM-1. New recreational facilities within Riparian Reserves, including trails and dispersed sites, should be designed to not prevent meeting Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives. Construction of these facilities should not prevent future attainment of these objectives. For existing recreation facilities within Riparian

Reserves, evaluate and mitigate impact to ensure that these do not prevent, and to the extent practicable contribute to, attainment of Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives.

RM-2. Adjust dispersed and developed recreation practices that retard or prevent attainment of Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives. Where adjustment measures such as user education, use limitations, traffic control devices, increased maintenance, relocation of facilities, and/or specific site closures are not effective, eliminate the practice or occupancy.

#### **D. Habitat Management Objectives for Raptors**

Amendment 11 of the Gifford Pinchot Forest Plan contains the following standard and guideline that pertains to bald eagle nests:

Picnicking, camping, power boat use, blasting, shooting, timber harvest, and low level aircraft operations should not be allowed within 2,600 feet from nests and roosts where eagles have line-of-sight vision. Critical nesting periods vary throughout the recovery area but generally fall between January 1 and August 3. Key wintering areas need protection from disturbance from approximately November 15 to March 15.

#### **E. Survey and Manage**

The NFP requires surveys for rare and uncommon plants and animals prior to habitat disturbing activities on suitable habitat on NFS lands.

### **III. Information Analysis**

In 1991 an environmental analysis was begun to evaluate the impacts of exchanging the Drift Creek parcel to PacifiCorp for land within the legislated National Volcanic Monument. The decision was subsequently made to retain the parcel as National Forest, and to cooperatively manage the site with PacifiCorp under a Memorandum of Understanding. Formal and informal surveys were conducted in conjunction with this analysis. Informal surveys characterized the timbered habitat as one of the few remaining stands of old growth on the south side of the reservoir. Many trees are 54+ inches in diameter and over 100 feet tall. Tree ages were estimated by the MSHNVM silviculturist at 400 years or older. No plant surveys were conducted, however it was recognized that sensitive plant species may exist there. Privately owned parcels on this side of the reservoir have nearly all been clearcut logged.

In 1998 ten dispersed campsites, created over time by repeated public use, existed along the shore. Since there is no road access to the Forest Service parcel, recreation use at these dispersed sites would not occur without the presence of the reservoir. No campsites existed on the Drift Creek inlet prior to reservoir construction. For this reason, the use is clearly project related. Recreation use takes place:

- Only when the reservoir is at or near full pool level
- During the summer
- By boat access

The parcel has been recognized as important bald eagle habitat for many years. It provides roost trees along the shoreline, and was identified as a potential nest stand in 1986. A bald eagle nest at the site was first documented in 1993, but no reproduction was noted that year. Between 1994 and 1999, the pair successfully reproduced every year except 1997, and 1999 when the nest attempts failed. The eagles selected the nest site with a given amount of recreational activity already occurring there. The majority of the current recreational use appears to be occurring between .75 and 1.0 mile from the nest tree; however currently there are no controls to ensure that harassment or disturbance is minimized, and there is concern that increasing recreation use would result in more dispersed recreation sites established within 2,600 feet of the nest.

In addition, the habitat on the National Forest parcel is suitable for many plant and animal species that are listed as Sensitive or as Survey and Manage under the Northwest Forest Plan.

Dispersed camping that would be consistent with Forest Plan standards and guidelines would meet the following conditions:

- Discrete designated campsites
- Campsites designed to accommodate single families (about 6 people)
- Lacks user constructed improvements
- No visible human waste around campsites
- No visible garbage around campsites
- Will not prevent meeting Aquatic Conservation Strategy Objectives.
- At least 2,600 feet from eagle nest sites

The Roded Natural management prescription allows for up to 2.5 people per acre, and the current density of people during an average week in the summer is probably within that number. The management prescription also requires that modifications to the natural setting are unnoticed or visually subordinate from sensitive travel routes, such as forest road 90. The campsites are not noticeable from outside the inlet, and are visually subordinate from within the inlet. The current condition of the dispersed campsites meets Roded Natural requirements.

The existing campsites have discrete, and limited, areas of soil compaction and vegetative removal. Flat areas have been cleared to allow placement of tents, and primitive fire rings. There is evidence of multiple fire rings at some campsites. Several small box privies, without walls, are found placed over holes in the woods. These are found over 150 feet from the water edge in areas screened by vegetation. At other campsites no sanitation facilities exist, resulting in random distribution of human waste away from campsites. At this time there is no evidence of campsites merging, one to another, or turning into “strip” campgrounds.

Throughout the inlet are found wave cut banks eroded into pumice and ash soil. These banks vary from a few feet to many feet high depending upon the exposure and steepness of the surrounding land. Most wave action appears to come from wind driven waves, though boat wakes may play a minor role. Most boats are landed by grounding on a sandy underwater shelf created by the deposition of bank eroded soil and pumice. No evidence was found of pulling boats ashore in a manner that increases bank erosion or damages vegetation. At several locations shallow steps were found carved into the wave eroded bank to provide a foothold for climbing from the wave cut bench to the campsites above. The impact caused from this user-caused disturbance is insignificant when compared to the effects of wave erosion.

Two campsites are within the buffer specified in the Forest Plan for line-of-site distance from bald eagle nests. These two sites are identified as 7A and 8 in PacifiCorp's survey of dispersed campsites.

#### **IV. Preliminary Forest Service Objectives**

The desired future condition for recreation on National Forest system land at Drift Creek is for the Drift Creek parcel to be managed as part of a comprehensive recreation plan for the project area. (18 CFR 2.7(c), (e))

Specific objectives are to remove all user created facilities at the dispersed sites and in coordination with FS personnel, replace with FS approved facilities (e.g., picnic tables, toilets):

- a. Retain and harden campsites 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13 (site identification from the EDAW survey). Campsites will have installed a metal fire ring, one picnic table, and a small composting toilet. Where campsites are close enough to each other that a toilet can be shared, a single toilet may be installed.
- b. Rehabilitate (eliminate) sites 7A and 8, nearest to the eagle nest.
- c. Remove any new dispersed campsites which may develop in the future. Only the campsites listed in a., above, will be retained.
- d. Post signs at campsites listed in a. above stating: "camping permitted here." Other signing will be provided at the boat launch, and other appropriate locations, indicating that camping is permitted at designated locations only.

Designating and hardening a limited number of campsites at Drift Creek will achieve compliance with management direction while not attracting additional use. There would be up to eight designated dispersed campsites that would have permanently constructed improvements such as tent pads, fire pits and picnic tables, and composting toilets. The hardened sites would be built at the dispersed sites numbered 4-7 and 10-13 in PacifiCorp's 1998 survey. Sites 7A and 8 would be closed and rehabilitated. The south shore trail would pass near the campsites, with a short connector trail to the sites. Site size would be adjusted to accommodate 6 people, and will retain vegetative screening between campsites in order to remain within the user density requirements described

under the Roaded Natural Management Prescription. Restoration of vegetation, using native species, may be needed if campsite size is reduced.

PacifiCorp would maintain campsite improvements, including facility repairs and routine maintenance.

## **V. Information Needs**

- Conduct Survey and Manage plant, salamander, and mollusk surveys on the Drift Creek parcel to document whether species listed by the Forest Service as Sensitive or Survey and Manage occur in the area used by dispersed campers. The surveys will be done to Forest Service protocol. These surveys have been started and are ongoing as part of studies TER 3 and TER 4.
- Monitor recreational use to evaluate the success of efforts to control where camping is taking place, to determine trends in the amount, season, and kind of use of the area, and to determine the effects, if any, to the bald eagle and/or other species of concern.

### **Progress of Studies**

Surveys conducted on the Drift Creek parcel as part of relicensing have found two mollusk species that are listed as Survey and Manage (*Cryptomastix devia* and *Hemphillia glandulosa*). This is one of only two known sites for *C. devia* on the Mount St. Helens NVM. Final salamander survey visit at Drift Creek completed. No Survey and Manage salamander species were detected.

TER 4: Botanical surveys completed. No TES species detected on USFS land.

Efforts to control camping and monitoring of recreation use at Drift Creek have not begun.