3.13. WILDERNESS, INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREAS, AND AREAS WITH POSSIBLE UNROADED CHARACTERISTICS

INTRODUCTION

Congress and the Forest Service have identified Wilderness areas and Inventoried Roadless Areas through past actions. The National Forest Management Act regulations define unroaded areas as any area without the presence of classified roads, and of a size and configuration sufficient to protect the inherent characteristics associated with its roadless condition. Areas with Possible Unroaded Characteristics do not overlap with Inventoried Roadless Areas or Wilderness.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The American and Crooked River project area has historically supported a variety of uses. These include historic mining, past timber harvest, and a variety of recreational uses, including camping and off-highway vehicle (OHV) use. The roads across this landscape were built over a period of time for use by miners and for timber harvest purposes.

The Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) team reviewed the project area and found that there were areas that contained potential Areas with Possible Unroaded Characteristics and warrant further analysis. The Wilderness Areas, Inventoried Roadless Areas, and areas with possible roadless characteristics are identified on the attached map 13a and 13b.

No activities are proposed in Inventoried Roadless Areas or in Wilderness Areas. Harvest activities at various levels and intensities are proposed in alternatives B, C and D in the areas identified as having possible unroaded characteristics. Temporary roads are being proposed within these areas under these alternatives.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

PROJECT AREA

The project area for the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on the unroaded resource values consists of Areas with Possible Unroaded Characteristics found within the American and Crooked River project area and displayed on the attached map.

ANALYSIS METHODS

The value of lands for wilderness or official “roadless” designation is appropriately considered at a broader context and is evaluated at the forest planning scale. These determinations have been completed previously through the 1976 RARE II Inventory and the 1987 Nez Perce Forest Plan and are not appropriate for reconsideration at the project level. However, the site specific parameters used to make these broader scale determinations are closely related and useful in assessing the effects of site specific projects on unroaded resource values. For this analysis, we have used the wilderness features considered in Forest planning (FSH 1920) and the roadless characteristics identified in the Roadless Policy (36 CFR 294.11). The table below describes the link between these evaluation parameters. For purposes of this analysis, the characteristics “Remoteness” and “Solitude” have been combined as well as “Special Places” and “Special Features”. Note: The South Fork Clearwater River Landscape Assessment was completed in 1998 using different parameters that have since been rescinded, therefore the Inventoried Roadless Areas identified in that document may not correspond to those identified in this document.

Table 3.113: Wilderness Attributes and Roadless Characteristics

Wilderness Attributes R1 Effects Analysis Desk Reference (7/1990)	Roadless Characteristics 36 CFR 294.11
Natural Integrity (is the extent to which long-term ecological processes are intact and operating)	High quality or undisturbed soil, water, and air Sources of public drinking water Diversity of plant and animal communities Habitat for threatened, endangered, candidate, proposed, and sensitive species dependent on large areas Reference landscapes
Apparent Naturalness (means the environment looks natural to most people)	Natural appearing landscapes with high scenic quality
Remoteness (perceived condition of being secluded, inaccessible, and out of the way) and **Solitude** (personal, subjective value defined as the isolation from the sights, sounds, and presence of others and the development of man)	Primitive, semi-primitive non-motorized, and semi-primitive motorized classes of dispersed recreation
Special Features (unique geological, biological, ecological, and cultural or scenic features) and **Special Places** (what is it about the area that causes one to visit for pleasure or their livelihood)	Other locally identified unique characteristics Traditional cultural properties and sacred sites
Manageability and Boundaries (ability to manage a roadless area to meet the minimum size criteria (5,000 acres) for wilderness)	No criteria

No public drinking water sources are located in the unroaded areas where proposed activities would occur under this project. This characteristic will not be discussed further.

No reference landscapes have been identified. This characteristic will not be discussed further.

No special features or special places have been identified as characteristics contributing to the areas with possible unroaded characteristics. Historic properties are discussed in the Heritage section of the document. These characteristics will not be discussed further.

ALTERNATIVES

ALTERNATIVES A AND E

Alternative A is the No Action alternative. Alternative E proposes no treatment in the areas identified as having possible unroaded characteristics and therefore will have the same impacts as the no action alternative.

ALTERNATIVES B, C, AND D

These alternatives propose harvest activities at various intensities as well as prescribed fire within areas with possible unroaded characteristics.

3.13.1. INDICATOR 1 - NATURAL INTEGRITY

DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS

ALTERNATIVES A AND E

Due to past fire suppression, some habitat types have heavier fuel loads than would occur naturally, affecting vegetative diversity. No harvest activities are proposed within Areas with Possible Unroaded Characteristics in these alternatives.

Under Alternative A (No Action) and Alternative E the potential for increased surface erosion, stream channel blowouts, and short-term reductions in air quality within mapped Areas with Possible Unroaded Characteristics would increase in the event of a wildfire occurring. In addition, a larger percentage of the unroaded areas would remain in a stand replacement fire regime rather than in non-lethal or mixed severity fire regimes as they were historically.

Information provided in: Watershed, Soils, and Fisheries Resources; Vegetative Resources; Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Plant Species; Old Growth; Snags; Wildlife Resources; Air Quality; and Noxious Weeds section is applicable to the unroaded areas.

ALTERNATIVES B, C, AND D

Vegetation treatments within the areas with possible unroaded characteristics, could improve the Natural Integrity by restoring a more natural stand structure and composition.

Air quality would remain good in all areas except during limited periods of broadcast burning, pile burning, or wildfire. Since state air quality standards would be met, air quality would remain high. Fuel reduction and harvest treatments could move vegetative conditions closer to historic conditions that existed prior to aggressive fire suppression actions. Habitat for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species would be protected consistent with the Biological Opinion from National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

3.13.2. INDICATOR 2 - APPARENT NATURALNESS

DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS

ALTERNATIVES A AND E

Alternatives A and E would have little direct or indirect affect on Apparent Naturalness in the Areas with Possible Unroaded Characteristics. Wildfire is a natural occurrence. There would be a higher probability of having more lethal fire events in areas where fuel loads would not be treated. Wildfire suppression activities may include fireline construction as well as other activities that may have a short-term negative effect on the naturalness of the area. However, if no human caused disturbances were visible, the areas would still appear natural.

ALTERNATIVES B, C, AND D

Apparent Naturalness would be decreased in the short term by harvesting timber. In the alternatives where harvest is proposed, the majority of treatment would be commercial thinning which would result in a more natural appearing landscape in the middle and background viewing area. However, some change in canopy densities would be apparent. Stumps would still be visible in the foreground. In areas where tractor skidding and skyline yarding are proposed, corridors might be visible, but would diminish over time as vegetation grows back in the skid trails and skyline corridors.

3.13.3. INDICATOR 3 - REMOTENESS AND SOLITUDE

DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS

ALTERNATIVES A AND E

Neither Alternative A nor E would affect the feeling of remoteness.

ALTERNATIVES B, C, AND D.

The proposed activities would have a negative effect on the feeling of remoteness within the areas with possible unroaded characteristics. Signs of activities, such as stumps, soil disturbance, and slash, would be visible from within each of the areas with possible unroaded characteristics.

There would be a short-term interruption of solitude with any of these alternatives due to timber harvest, prescribed burning and watershed improvement work within and/or in the vicinity of the areas with possible unroaded characteristics.

3.13.4. INDICATOR 4 - MANAGEABILITY AND BOUNDARIES

DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS

ALTERNATIVES A AND E

The Areas with Possible Unroaded Characteristics boundaries are not easily defined using topographical features. For the most part, the boundaries are formed by existing roads and would be subject to change either through road obliteration or additional road construction.

ALTERNATIVES B, C, AND D

The unroaded area boundaries are not easily defined using topographical features. For the most part, the boundaries are formed by existing roads and would be subject to change either through road obliteration or additional road construction.

All these alternatives could increase the size of the Areas with Possible Unroaded Characteristics due to road obliteration and vegetative recovery of roads. The increase would be a long-term effect resulting from vegetative recovery of obliterated roads and harvest units and would occur only if additional disturbance, such as harvesting or watershed improvement work, did not occur in the areas.

3.13.5. CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

COMMON TO ALTERNATIVES B, C, AND D

The cumulative effects for individual resources will vary, and for the various past, ongoing, or reasonably foreseeable activities the cumulative effects of the proposed actions on the resources are discussed below. Past activities (including grazing, timber harvest, and road/trail construction and maintenance) have been incorporated into the discussion of the existing conditions. The table below displays the activities that are ongoing or reasonably foreseeable.

Table 3.114: Reasonably Foreseeable Activities within the Areas with Possible Unroaded Characteristics

Activity	Status	Wilderness Attribute Potentially Affected
Fire suppression Prescribed burning	Ongoing Reasonably Foreseeable	Natural Integrity, Solitude
Motorized trail use, camping, hunting, hiking, firewood cutting	Ongoing	Solitude, Natural Integrity, Apparent Naturalness
Noxious weed treatment	Reasonably Foreseeable	Natural Integrity
Aquatic habitat improvement – Modifying dispersed recreation sites	Reasonably Foreseeable	Solitude, Apparent Naturalness
Outfitter and Guide permits	Ongoing	Solitude, Apparent Naturalness

The cumulative effects of the activities are listed in the order they appear in the above table.

Across Areas with Possible Unroaded Characteristics, ongoing fire suppression may have a long-term impact on Natural Integrity as well as a short-term impact on Solitude. Prescribed burning to reduce fuels could have a long-term effect of increasing Natural Integrity and create a short-term decrease in Solitude, as burning activities occur.

Recreational use might cause a short-term effect in Solitude as it occurs individually, but repeated activities will make the effects long-term. Motorized and non-motorized recreation is expected to increase within the Areas with Possible Unroaded Characteristics.

Aquatic habitat improvements would have a short-term negative effect on Solitude due to equipment noise. A long-term negative effect to solitude and naturalness may occur from recreation site improvements being implemented.

Outfitter and Guide permitted actions could have long and short-term effects on Solitude and Apparent Naturalness.

3.13.6. CONCLUSION

Any of the alternatives together with reasonably foreseeable and ongoing activities would reduce Solitude within the areas with possible unroaded characteristics during the actual activities. Natural Integrity and Apparent Naturalness will also be reduced regardless of the alternative selected due to other reasonably foreseeable actions.

Alternatives B, C and D would also increase the areas with possible unroaded characteristics but to a lesser extent than Alternative E, because of fewer miles of road obliteration. Eventually, these roadbeds would disappear or would be hidden with vegetation and motorized use would decrease. Natural Integrity, Apparent Naturalness, Solitude, Remoteness, and Manageability and Boundaries would be increased in the long-term, most likely to the extent that a balance is reached with the effects of the other ongoing activities within the areas. Cumulatively, the effect would be an increase in the value of the roadless characteristics and an increase in areas with possible unroaded characteristics, as revegetation occurs over the next 30 years.

3.13.7. IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENTS

Alternatives A and E would not result in any irreversible and irretrievable commitment of resources within any of the Areas with Possible Unroaded Characteristics.

Harvest activities at various levels and intensities are proposed in Alternatives B, C, and D within each of the unroaded areas, with the intent to improve vegetative conditions.

While some stumps will persist on the landscape, the natural stand structure and function will be retained or enhanced and over time, the stumps will deteriorate resulting in no permanent irreversible effects on unroaded resource values.

Alternatives B, C, and D would result in an irretrievable commitment within the Areas with Possible Unroaded Characteristics because of the loss of production, and the use of natural resources through harvesting.