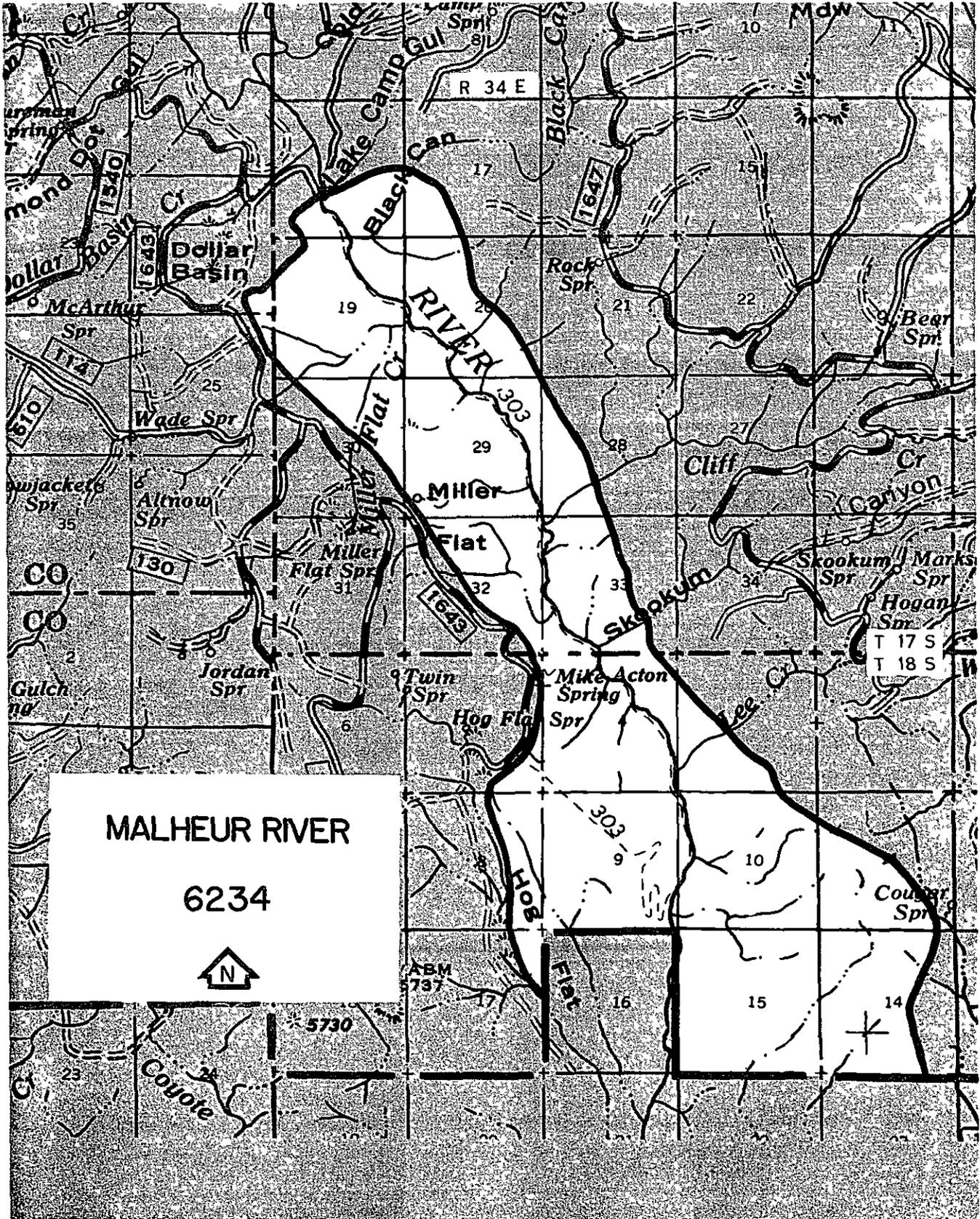


FIGURE C-12



**M. MALHEUR RIVER - 6,984
Acres (RARE II No. 6234)**

1. Description

- a. **History** This area was inventoried in RARE and enlarged in the RARE II inventory. The Silvies-Malheur Planning Unit Environmental Impact Statement and the RARE II Environmental Impact Statement designated the area to nonwilderness uses.
- b. **Location and Access** This area is located near the southeastern boundary of the Malheur National Forest in southern Grant County and northern Harney County, Oregon (T. 17 S., R. 33 1/2 E., T. 18 S., R. 34 E., T. 18 S., R. 33 1/2 E., T. 18 S., R. 34 E., of the Willamette Meridian).
- Access to the area consists mainly of several unimproved roads to the boundary. A trail along the western edge of the Malheur River at the southern end of the area also provides access for horses and hikers. The Malheur River area is about 5 miles long and 1-1/2 to 2 miles wide.
- c. **Geography and Topography** The area is a deeply incised (500+ feet) plateau with a generally narrow (50-100 feet) rocky bottom along the Malheur River. On the east side of the river are a series of steep hills which rise to the east away from the river.
- The area consists of the canyons of the Malheur River as well as some relatively flat table lands along portions of the Malheur Canyon rim. The canyons are fairly wide and very steep with prominent rock outcroppings, particularly along the southwestern edge. See Figure C-12.
- d. **Geology and Soils** Soils in the Malheur River Canyon are those which are generally found on steep slopes of variable aspect. Soil texture varies from clay to loam and some have a recent volcanic ash surface layer. The bedrock under the surface soils is quite variable. Miocene-age volcanic-flow rocks cover most of the eastern portion of the area, with Pleistocene-age basalt flows on the west.
- e. **Vegetation** Vegetation on the northern and eastern slopes of the Malheur River consists mainly of ponderosa pine overstories with understories of Douglas-fir, grasses, and forbs. The area is about 40 percent forested. The table lands and slopes on the east side of the river generally support some scattered ponderosa pine, juniper, mahogany, sagebrush, and a variety of bunchgrasses. The canyon bottoms extending a short way up the slopes are generally timbered with mature ponderosa pine. The rest of the vegetation is grasses and low-lying shrubs. Small, scattered meadows along the Malheur River support a variety of forbs, grasses, and shrubs. About 300 acres in this area meet the Pacific Northwest Region's definition of old growth.
- f. **Current Uses** This area provides year-round Rocky Mountain elk habitat with the lower one-fourth of the area identified as elk winter range. Mule deer use this area during the spring, summer, and fall. The close proximity of old-growth forest, rimrock, and riparian habitats in this area supports a majority of the species found in the southern Blue Mountains. The Malheur River supports an inland trout fishery.

Big-game hunting and trout fishing are currently the main recreational uses of the area. Other uses include camping, hiking, rafting, riding, recreational gold panning, photography, and nature study, however, all recreational use in the area is light. (See Table C-2) Access into the area is provided by a National Recreation Trail that follows the river course at a gentle grade suitable for an average hiker. This trail provides early season hiking opportunities when many high elevation trails are still snowed in. The Malheur River ford at the northern tip of the area is a very popular dispersed campsite.

Most of the area receives light or no use by livestock due to natural barriers, steep slopes, and limited forage. Current use averages 400 Animal Unit Months annually by cattle on 2 different grazing allotments.

The table lands around the canyon rims have been logged and roads have been built throughout the area. In contrast to this, the bottom of the canyon provides a pleasant, remote area with a free-flowing river and views of an undisturbed ecological system.

The areas surrounding the review area, except for the southern boundary, have been logged. The northwestern tip of the Bureau of Land Management's Bluebucket Wilderness Study Area touches the southeastern tip of this area.

The major attraction of the area, in addition to the hunting and fishing opportunities, is described as a place to "get away from it all" and to enjoy "peace and quiet without motorized intrusion." Steep rock walls from the canyon rim to the river below may be photographed or used by those willing to find a challenge in rock climbing. The Malheur River is a free-flowing river and a major attraction within the area.

2. Wilderness Capability

a. Manageability and Boundaries

There is general agreement that the boundary of the area should be adjusted. The boundary of the originally inventoried roadless area is difficult to locate on-the-ground and would be extremely difficult to manage. It would be possible to move the boundary to the canyon rims. This would improve the locatability and manageability of the area by following topographic characteristics. This boundary change would also eliminate the majority of the area containing evidence of previous human activity (with the exception of the Malheur River Trail). There would be a resulting reduction of approximately 3,800 acres.

b. Natural Integrity

Within the river canyon itself the natural integrity of the area is extremely high. Natural processes have been virtually unhampered by human activities except for fire control and livestock grazing.

The history of fire suppression in the area has caused a gradual change in the understory vegetation from ponderosa pine reproduction to white fir and other tree species. Under natural conditions, low intensity wildfires would have selectively maintained ponderosa pine in the understories.

The effects of grazing in the area are mostly concentrated along the streams. They include fences, salting grounds, cattle trails, some compaction and vegetative trampling, dust beds, the cattle themselves, and other evidence of their presence along the streams.

c. Naturalness Overall, the area within the river canyons appears extremely natural to the average user. The effects of fire suppression would not normally be noticed by most users. The National Recreation Trail is maintained to a fairly low standard.

The impacts of past and present livestock grazing remain the most intrusive activity. These appear unnatural to most visitors and would be extremely difficult to mitigate unless grazing were eliminated. The impacts also occur in the portion of the area most likely to receive the majority of use.

d Opportunity
for Solitude

Within the main canyons, the opportunities for solitude are very high, particularly along the stream bottoms. The depth of the canyons and vegetative cover provide excellent screening. The rim tops offer a limited opportunity for solitude. The views give an impression of a vast, unspoiled canyon area, but there are intrusions from the adjacent table lands. This is especially true during hunting season.

e. Primitive
Recreation
and Challenge

Overall, Primitive recreation opportunities are limited due to the narrowness and irregular shape of the area. Topographic and vegetative cover are significant over much of the area, and trails tend to concentrate users in the stream bottoms or on the canyon rims.

The National Recreation Trail and one sanitary facility are the only recreation facilities. The trail is not difficult because it follows the moderate stream grade. The northern boundary of the review area is at the Malheur Ford. Here, recreationists have placed rocks in the river forming a pool which is used for swimming.

The lack of facilities and access does tend to increase opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation, however, the opportunities for challenging experiences are limited.

f. Special
Features

There is scenic variety both vertically, from ridgetops to canyon bottoms, and horizontally as the scene changes from microhabitat to microhabitat.

There are no reports of Federally listed Threatened or Endangered Species occurring in this area. One sensitive plant species is known to occur.

There is very limited opportunity for educational study. In the past, the area immediately adjacent to the Malheur Ford was flooded, logs were stored in the water and then floated downstream of the Forest to a mill in the vicinity of Bluebucket Creek.

The probability of finding cultural sites is quite high because of fisheries in the Malheur River and the proximity of the area to the Harney Basin and Logan Valley. Several Class I sites have been located during recent surveys.

3. Availability
for Wilderness

a Resource
Potentials

The area currently provides roaded modified, roaded natural and semiprimitive motorized recreation opportunities. (See Table C-3.) Left unchanged, the area has the potential to provide 20,019 Recreation Visitor Days. (See Table C-4.)

There are 2,500 acres of forested land tentatively suitable for timber management activities. These timber stands are predominantly ponderosa pine multistoried stands. The overstories have an average age of 140 years; the understories have an average age of 75 years. There is a standing volume of 26 7 million board feet (4.67 million cubic feet). With the use of intensive timber management techniques, 120 thousand cubic feet (686 thousand board feet) would be contributed to the annual allowable sale quantity in the first decade. The long term sustained yield capacity from this area would be 142 thousand cubic feet per year.

The area has no known locatable mineral potential and contains no mining claims. The U S. Geological Survey considers the area to be prospectively valuable for oil and gas but not for geothermal resources.

b. Management Considerations

During the last 10 years, 5 small fires have occurred in the area. Natural fuel loading in the area ranges from 5-10 tons per acre.

The western spruce budworm is probably prevalent in the Douglas-fir and white fir as it can be found throughout the Malheur National Forest. It is not known to what degree the budworm has infested this particular area. The Douglas-fir is infested with dwarf-mistletoe to varying degrees, and the western pine beetle can be found in the old-growth ponderosa pine

There are no private ownerships or other ownerships within the boundaries of the area. On the southern end of the area, Bureau of Land Management, State, and private lands are adjacent to the Forest boundary.

4. Wilderness Evaluation

The Strawberry Mountain Wilderness is 12 miles north, Monument Rock Wilderness is 23 miles northeast, Black Canyon Wilderness is 65 miles northwest, and North Fork John Day Wilderness is 55 miles north

The ecosystems present in this area are represented to some degree by the Black Canyon Wilderness. They would also be represented by the BLM Bluebucket Wilderness Study Area if that area were designated wilderness.

During the 1979 RARE II study, there were 137 comments favoring wilderness designation, 2,583 comments favoring further planning, and 3,415 comments favoring nonwilderness management. In recent Forest planning public involvement activities, this area was among those receiving a moderate level of comment. The comments showed a definite lack of consensus about best use of the area. The ratio of comments favoring wilderness designation to those opposing it was 1 to 1.1.

Primary reasons for supporting wilderness were the naturalness and scenic quality of the area and opportunities for Primitive, solitary recreation. Protection of fish and wildlife habitat and water quality were major concerns. The proximity of this area to the Bluebucket Wilderness Study Area also creates opportunity for a combined wilderness experience

The reasons for opposing wilderness designation were the small size of the area and a stated preference for management of the canyon area as a roadless or Primitive recreation/wildlife emphasis area.

The nearest major metropolitan centers are Portland, Oregon (280 miles northwest), and Boise, Idaho (180 miles east).

**5. Environmental
Consequences**

Table C-16 displays the various management area assignments for this area by alternative.

In all alternatives 3,066 acres are managed to be within the Wild and Scenic River management area, in accordance with The Omnibus Oregon Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1988 which declared the Malheur River to be a part of the Wild and Scenic River System

The following discussion pertains to those acres outside the river corridor.

- a. **Vegetation/Trees** Significant changes in tree sizes, and stand density and composition are expected in all alternatives except Alternative C-Modified. About 63 percent of the forested acres are affected in Alternatives A, F, I, and NC, and virtually 100 percent in Alternative B-Modified. The appearance of the affected forested areas would change to a managed forest setting

In Alternative C-Modified, little change is expected. Present characteristics would be retained and naturalness overall would be unchanged, except the effects of naturally occurring wildfires.

- b. **Vegetation/Grass
and Shrubs** In Alternatives A, B-Modified, F, I, and NC, forage for wildlife and livestock is expected to increase in forested areas where the overstory is removed and the remaining trees are thinned. Seeding of introduced forage species will provide higher quality and quantity of palatable plants and change the present composition of forage plants. Native forage species of elk sedge, pinegrass, and brome will also increase in vigor and density as tree canopies are opened and thinning occurs in harvest areas.

In Alternative C-Modified, forage production and species composition are expected to remain as they are at present.

- c. **Wilderness** Alternatives, other than Alternative C-Modified, would retain less acreage in a roadless condition. Under all other alternatives, except Alternative B-Modified, the area could be considered for future wilderness but would be smaller in size.

In Alternative B-Modified users would see timber harvest activities, new road construction, and increased motorized vehicle use. Future wilderness consideration would be foregone within the first decade.

- d. **Recreation** The recreational opportunity varies among alternatives from semiprimitive nonmotorized in Alternatives A, C-Modified, and NC, to semiprimitive motorized in Alternative F, to roaded modified in Alternative B-Modified.

In a semiprimitive nonmotorized setting, users would experience a more natural surrounding without motorized intrusion within the canyon walls. Eventually more trails may be constructed to accommodate more users and the present National Recreation Trail would be improved to a higher standard. The primary recreation opportunities of fishing and big-game hunting would remain unchanged.

Within a semiprimitive motorized setting, users could expect to see and hear trail bikes within the canyon. The National Recreation Trail, which is presently maintained to a low standard, would provide a challenge to off-road cyclists seeking such experience in a vast, unspoiled canyon area.

Within a roaded modified recreation opportunity, there would be increased vehicle use and sounds along timber access roads constructed along the canyon rims or river benches. Removal of old-growth ponderosa pine would cause the area to appear unnatural and may provide for higher hunter success due to reduction in hiding cover

e. Scenery

The scenic views of a vast, unspoiled canyon would be retained under all alternatives except Alternative B-Modified. Above canyon rims the scenic variety of open slopes to forested table lands would be least affected by Alternative C-Modified and equally affected to a greater degree by all other alternatives. Viewers would see evidence of activities such as timber harvest and access roads above the canyon rims in all alternatives except Alternative C-Modified. Naturalness and scenic views would be affected to the greatest extent by Alternative B-Modified, which would change the areas within the canyon, as well as the table lands above the canyon, to a managed forest appearance.

f. Wildlife

Old-growth timber and snags would be available to a greater extent in Alternative C-Modified, to a lesser extent in Alternatives A, F, I, and NC, and least in Alternative B-Modified. Management standards would adequately protect key habitats of all wildlife under all alternatives. Old growth is retained in all alternatives to meet guidelines for pileated woodpecker and pine marten habitat. Elk winter range covers the lower one-fourth of the area and would be affected by timber harvest activities. In all alternatives except Alternative C-Modified, hiding and thermal cover would be decreased, and forage would increase

g. Water, Riparian, Fisheries

The Malheur River is the only major stream which supports trout and a riparian zone in addition to small scattered meadows. All alternatives are considered to be equal in effects on these resources since management standards would adequately protect the resources.

h. Cultural Resources

All alternatives are similar in effects on cultural resources. There is no discernible difference between alternatives when considering existing regulations, laws, and management standards affecting cultural resources. Alternatives A, B-Modified, F, and NC present the greatest risk of inadvertent damage to the resource. They also present the greatest opportunity for discovery and interpretation of cultural resources.

i. Soils

Alternatives A, B-Modified, F, and NC present greater risk of inadvertent damage to the soils as well as acceptable amounts of compaction as a result of harvest activities. All of the alternatives adequately protect the resource through application of management standards

TABLE C-16
MALHEUR RIVER MANAGEMENT BY ALTERNATIVE
(Acres)

Management Area	NC ^{1/}	Alternatives				
		A	B-Mod	C-Mod	F	I-Preferred
1 General Forest	N/A	1,043	1,516		975	975
2 Rangeland		1,871	672		1,297	1,297
3 Riparian Areas		228	394		219	219
4A. Big-Game Winter Range					826	826
4B. Big-Game Winter Range Enhancement						
5. Bald Eagle Winter Roost						
6A Strawberry Mountain Wilderness						
6B Monument Rock Wilderness						
6C Pine Creek						
7 Scenic Area						
8 Special Interest Area						
9 Research Natural Area						
10 Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized	N/A	66		3,918		
11 Semi-Primitive Motorized						
12 Developed Recreation						
13 Old Growth	N/A		300			
14 Visual Corridors		197	594		109	109
15 Unit Plan Wildlife Emphasis Areas						
16 Minimum Level Management		513	442		492	492
17 Byram Gulch Municipal Supply Watershed						
18 Long Creek Municipal Supply Watershed						
19. Administrative Sites						
20 Wildlife Emphasis Areas with Scheduled Harvest						
21 Wildlife Emphasis Area Non-Scheduled Harvest						
22 Wild and Scenic River	N/A	3,066	3,066	3,066	3,066	3,066
TOTAL ACRES	N/A	6,984	6,984	6,984	6,984	6,984

^{1/}The Timber Management Plan, upon which the No Change Alternative is based, was developed in 1979. The plan was not an integrated plan and, consequently, did not address all resource uses and outputs in an integrated manner. As a result, these acreages are not available.