

# DECISION NOTICE/DESIGNATION ORDER

## Finding of No Significant Impact

### *Shaketable Research Natural Area (Forest Plan Amendment #64)*

USDA Forest Service  
Malheur National Forest  
Blue Mountain Ranger District  
Grant County, Oregon

An environmental assessment (EA) that discusses the Shaketable Research Natural Area (RNA) on the Blue Mountain Ranger District is available for public review at the Forest Supervisor's Office, Malheur National Forest in John Day, Oregon.

### **DECISION**

I am deciding to select the proposed action as described in the 2005 *Shaketable Research Natural Area Environmental Assessment* (EA). Specifically, I am deciding to designate 385 acres located 15 miles (23 km) southeast of Dayville, Oregon (Figure 1) as the Shaketable RNA. -The legal location of this tract covers Section 13 of T.15 S., R. 27 E., and Sections 17, 18, 19 and 20 of T.15 S., R. 28 E., in Grant County.

This decision is a non-significant amendment to the Malheur National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) and the RNA will be managed in compliance with all relevant laws, regulations and Forest Service Manual direction regarding Research Natural Areas.

### **RATIONALE**

My decision to establish the Shaketable RNA responds to the need to preserve an example of a significant natural ecosystem, preserve gene pools for this community type, and provide an educational and research area for study of these ecosystems. This designation formally recognizes that the site is representative of western juniper/low sagebrush/bunchgrass, low sagebrush/Idaho fescue, rigid sagebrush/Sandberg's bluegrass, and bitterbrush/bunchgrass woodland identified by the Oregon Natural Heritage Advisory Council (Oregon Natural Heritage Advisory Council 2003). This site, currently tracked as a proposed RNA in Management Area (MA) 9, would be tracked as part of the MA-9 permanent RNA network.

### **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Public comments on the proposal were invited with a scoping letter to interested parties on May 25, 2005. On October 5, 2005 a legal notice was published in the Blue Mountain Eagle notifying the public that the EA was available for review and comment. One comment was received and is available upon request from the Malheur National Forest.

## **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

Two alternatives, the Proposed Action and No Action, were considered. Under the No Action Alternative, the candidate area would continue to be managed as a proposed RNA as directed in the Forest Plan. Management Direction would continue until the Forest Plan is revised or replaced. The Proposed Action would designate in perpetuity 385 acres on the Blue Mountain Ranger District.

## **FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS**

After consideration of environmental consequences I have determined that the Proposed Action is consistent with other laws and regulations.

### ***Consistency with Forest Plan Direction***

The Proposed Action is consistent with the Malheur National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement, Record of Decision and the accompanying Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended (USDA Forest Service 1990), dated May 25, 1990.

## **Forest Plan Amendment #64 and Determination that the Forest Plan Amendment is Not Significant under NFMA**

I have determined that Forest Plan Amendment #64 is not a significant amendment under the National Forest Management Act implementing regulations [36 CFR 219.10(f)] (1982) and is consistent with the planning rule adopted in November 2000 at 36 CFR 219 and subsequently interpreted in an Interpretative Rule at 69 Fed. Reg. 58055 (September 29, 2004). The Forest Service Land and Resource Management Planning Manual (Forest Service Manual 1926.51) lists the changes to the land management plan that are not significant can result from:

1. Actions that do not significantly alter the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management. (Forest Plan Level);
2. Adjustments of management area boundaries or management prescriptions resulting from further on-site analysis when the adjustments do not cause significant changes in the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management (MA area);
3. Minor changes in standards and guidelines;
4. Opportunities for additional projects or activities that will contribute to achievement of the management prescription.

### ***Amendment determination of significance:***

1. When the Forest Plan was approved in 1990, there was one existing research natural area (RNA) - Canyon Creek (approximately 750 acres) and four proposed RNAs within Management Area (MA) 9. Since approval of the Forest Plan, the designation of Dugout Creek RNA in 2006 is the only RNA out of the four proposed that has been designated. Designation of Dugout Creek RNA increased the total amount of

RNA acres within MA-9 to approximately 1,658 acres. Areas proposed as RNAs in MA-9 were treated similar to designated RNAs under the description, goals and general management standards for the management area. In this respect, the proposed RNAs were anticipated by the Forest Plan to be designated at some future time. The designation of Shaketable as a RNA will not alter the multiple use goals and objectives of the Forest Plan. The Forest Plan identified the area proposed as Shaketable RNA as an important addition to the RNA network, however; the amendment does not effect the establishment of any other proposed RNA.

2. Due to specific on-site analysis, the management area boundaries for the Shaketable RNA (MA-9) would be increased from the 1990 Forest Plan proposal of 375 acres to 385 acres. This change would allow an example of western juniper/low sagebrush/bunchgrass, low sagebrush/Idaho fescue, rigid sagebrush/Sandberg's bluegrass, and bitterbrush/bunchgrass woodland to serve as a benchmark for comparison with areas of similar vegetation that are intensively used. The amendment will increase the RNA network by 385 acres. Shaketable RNA is currently embedded within MA-10 Shaketable Semiprimitive Nonmotorized (SPNM) area, which is also part of the Shaketable Inventoried Roadless Area as mapped under the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (USFS, 2001a). Shaketable SPNM is approximately 8,997 acres and managing an additional 385 acres as MA-9 would only affect 4% of the Shaketable SPNM area.
3. Although the amendment will officially designate the Shaketable RNA, the management prescription for the area would not change from current management. The amendment does not change the goals and objectives for other resources in the Forest Plan. Since the area has been managed under MA 9 since 1990, there would be no expectation of a change in timber, wildland fire or range management. Therefore, anticipated changes brought about by this amendment in the levels of resource activities and outputs projected for this planning period are not expected to be measurable.
4. The amendment is intended to facilitate achievement of management prescriptions for a continuous research natural area (RNA) network. Region 6 developed a network of RNAs designated to "illustrate adequately or typify for research or education purposes, the important forest and range types in each forest region, as well as other plant communities that have special or unique characteristics of scientific interest and importance." This amendment provides for the designation of a RNA for perpetuity.

***Summary: Amendment determination of significance:***

The Malheur Forest Plan was approved in 1990 and is currently in the process of being revised. Amendment #64 will result in permanent designation of the Shaketable RNA, would remain in effect in perpetuity and would be included in any revised Forest Plans as a designated RNA.

The planning area for the Malheur National Forest is about 1.5 million acres (Forest Plan, p. I-2). Under the Forest Management Plan, Research Natural Areas fall into

Management Area (MA) 9 and this RNA would increase the total acreage in the MA network by 385 acres of formally established RNA acres. Designation of Shaketable RNA would affect less than 1% of the total Malheur National Forest acres.

On the basis of information and analysis contained the EA, and all other information available, it is my determination that adoption of the management direction reflected in my decision does not result in a significant amendment to the Forest Plan.

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

Based on the analysis in the EA (which incorporates by reference the discussion on environmental effects), I find that the establishment of the Shaketable RNA is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment, therefore an environmental impact statement is not needed. My rationale for this finding is as follows (40 CFR 1508.27):

### ***Context***

Although this decision is an addition to the national system of RNAs, both long-term and short-term physical and biological effects are limited to the local area. This decision preserves and protects intact ecosystems, as discussed in the Shaketable Research Natural Area Environmental Assessment (EA).

### ***Intensity***

- 1) There are no effects on public health or safety because this is decision preserves intact ecosystems and does not have consequences to human well-being.
- 2) There are no significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to the natural resources or other components of the human environment from designation of land as an RNA.
- 3) Effects on the human environment are not uncertain, do not involve unique or unknown risks, and are not likely to be highly controversial from designation of land as an RNA.
- 4) There are no known effects on historical or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm land, wild and scenic rivers or wetlands and floodplains. There are no known historical resources, park lands, prime farm lands, or wild and scenic rivers affected by this decision). The effect of establishing the RNA is to protect ecologically sensitive areas and therefore only beneficial effects are anticipated to any environmentally sensitive or critical area, including wetlands or floodplains.
- 5) The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects because it is limited to a protective designation.
- 6) The project will not adversely affect any federally listed or proposed threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat since the designation decision does not implement any on-the-ground projects rather than potentially posting the RNA boundaries. Specifically, the determination of effects for endangered and threatened wildlife species or their habitats is No Impact. The determination of effects for sensitive species wildlife species is No Impact. There are no threatened or endangered plant species or their suspected habitat on the Malheur National Forest. Designating

the research natural area will have no impact for sensitive plant species because there would be no environmental effects. In addition there are no listed aquatic species present within the designated area. There will be no negative impact on sensitive aquatic species.

- 7) The proposed action is consistent with federal, state and local laws and requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

Legal Notice of this decision will appear in the Oregonian, as newspaper of record for Regional Forester Decisions in Oregon, as well as in the Blue Mountain Eagle, the newspaper of record for the Malheur National Forest. A copy of the legal notice will be mailed to all persons stating interest in the project. Implementation of this decision shall not occur within 7 calendar days following publication of the legal notice in the Oregonian.

## **APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES**

This decision is subject to appeal under 36 CFR 217 but does not require notice and comment under 36 CFR 215. Any Notice of Appeal of this decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9 (Content of Notice of Appeal) and must include the reasons for appeal. Written notice of appeal must be postmarked or received by the Appeal Deciding Officer, Abigail Kimbell, within 45 days of the date the legal notice appears in the Oregonian. Submit written notice of appeal to:

Chief, USDA Forest Service  
ATTN: NFS Appeals  
14<sup>th</sup> and Independence SW  
P.O. Box 96090  
Washington, D.C. 20090-6090

/s/ Liz Appaoa  
Regional Forester

April 24, 2008  
Date