

DECISION NOTICE / DESIGNATION ORDER

AND

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Bunchgrass Meadows Research Natural Area

USDA Forest Service
Sullivan Lake Ranger District
Colville National Forest
Pend Oreille County
Washington

Introduction

The purpose of establishing the Bunchgrass Meadows Research Natural Area (RNA) is to contribute to a series of RNAs designed 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” (36 CFR 251.23).

An evaluation by the Regional RNA Committee in 1973, pursuant to direction in Forest Service Manual (FSM) 4063.04b, identified Bunchgrass Meadows RNA as suitable and desirable to represent a high elevation mountain meadow and associated bog, marsh area, subalpine permanent bog, a subalpine fir/Cascades azalea plant community, masked shrew, and northern bog lemming types for inclusion in the national RNA network. Bunchgrass Meadows RNA also provides habitat for several other species of rare plants, animals, and fish.

In the Forest Plan an area of 642-acres (260-hectares) was identified for Bunchgrass Meadows RNA. The Record of Decision for the Forest Plan recommended establishment of all proposed RNAs. The Forest Plan FEIS stated that the RNA Committee recommended acquiring an adjoining 155-acre (63-hectare) private parcel. This was accomplished on May 25, 1989. As directed in FSM (Forest Service Manual) 4063.1, the boundaries of the proposed RNA were enlarged to 797 acres (323 hectares) in order to protect the integrity of the sphagnum bog. These additional acres would allow conditions within the interior of the RNA to remain largely unmodified.

How the proposed Bunchgrass Meadows RNA contributes to the RNA network by providing examples of these community types is discussed in the Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) Final Environmental Impact Study (FEIS) for the Colville National Forest (p. III-131-136) and the State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan (2005).

In 1996 after discussions with the ranger district, the boundary was changed to parallel Road

1935 at a distance of 50 feet from the center-line of the roadway keeping the road outside of the RNA boundary to better protect the integrity of the RNA. The surveyed boundary of Bunchgrass Meadows RNA encompasses an area of 711.4 acres (287.9 hectares).

Decision

It is my decision to select Alternative A of the *Bunchgrass Meadows Research Natural Area Establishment and Forest Plan Amendment Environmental Assessment* and establish the 711.4 acres (287.9 hectares) Bunchgrass Meadows RNA. It shall comprise 711.4 acres (287.9 hectares) of land in Pend Oreille County, Washington on the Colville National Forest (Sullivan Lake Ranger District). The Bunchgrass Meadow RNA is located approximately twelve miles (19 km) southeast of Ione, Washington, in portions of Sections 23 and 24, Township 37 North, Range 44 East, and Section 19, Township 37 North, Range 45 East, Willamette Meridian. See Establishment Record "Location" and location map, attached.

The existing Special Use Permit with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to operate and maintain a SNOTEL site at Bunchgrass Meadows would continue. Access to the site (by the permit holder only) would continue to be with snowmobiles in the winter season, and by foot from Forest Road 1935 in the snow-free season.

This decision establishes a 711.4 acre (287.9 hectare) Bunchgrass Meadows RNA, which is to be managed according to direction provided in the Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (pp. 4-89 to 4-91). Reference should also be made to the Forest Plan FEIS for the Colville National Forest (pp. III-131 to III-136). Alternative A was selected because it provided the best long-term protection and recognition of the sphagnum bog and associated vegetative community types.

This formal designation of the 711.4-acre (287.9-hectare) RNA will amend the Forest Plan to change the allocation of the Bunchgrass Meadows area from "proposed" to "established" RNA (Management Area 4). This decision also includes minor adjustments to the boundaries of Management Area 4 in the Forest Plan, so as to be consistent with the RNA. The Forest Plan is also amended to allow for a recommendation to withdraw the 711.4-acre (287.9-hectare) RNA from mineral entry.

This decision is being made under the 2008 Forest Service planning regulations (36 CFR 219) which allow plan amendments to be made using the procedures from the 1982 planning regulations during the three-year transition period (36 CFR 219.14(b)(2)). This amendment is being made using the 1982 procedures.

This is a non-significant amendment of the Forest Plan (FSM 1926.51-52) because:

1. The proposed action does not significantly alter the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management.
2. The adjustments of management area boundaries do not cause significant changes in the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management.
3. Changes in standards and guidelines are minor.
4. There are no opportunities identified for additional projects or activities that will contribute to achievement of the management prescription.

5. The changes would not significantly alter the long-term relationship between levels of multiple-use goods and services originally projected.
6. The changes would not have an important effect on the entire land management plan or affect land and resources throughout a large portion of the planning area during the planning period.

Public Involvement

Bunchgrass Meadows, was identified in the Forest Plan as a proposed RNA based on the relatively undisturbed conditions in the area in 1988. Comments on the Forest Plan received from interested and affected members of the public supported establishment of an RNA. At that time, a proposed Bunchgrass Meadows RNA provided the most appropriate site of a mid-elevation sphagnum bog for inclusion in the national RNA network.

Designation of proposed RNAs was considered during development of the Forest Plan and FEIS (p. II-117). Site conditions and public concerns were reviewed. General conditions and environmental effects of designation are much the same as described on pages II-117, III-131 to III-136 of the FEIS.

Scoping began with the 1988 Forest Plan. A scoping letter was mailed to the public in 1993. The Bunchgrass Meadows RNA proposal has been listed in the quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions since spring, 1993. The only issue brought forth was that formal establishment of the RNA would restrict public access for berry picking, horseback riding, and ATV (All Terrain Vehicle) / snowmobile use of the area. However, this issue was not deemed a “significant” issue because RNA establishment would not restrict recreational berry picking, hiking, or horseback riding, and use of All Terrain Vehicles, (including snowmobiles) in Bunchgrass Meadow is already prohibited under the Forest Plan. Although the management prescription for Research Natural Areas in the Colville National Forest Plan states that plant collection is prohibited in RNAs, recreational berry picking will not affect the wetland values this RNA is designed to protect.

Other Alternatives Considered

Alternative B (No Action) would continue management of the proposed Bunchgrass Meadows RNA according to direction the Forest Plan until the Forest Plan is revised. This alternative would not meet guidelines in the Forest Plan for formal establishment of proposed RNAs.

Consistency with the Forest Plan and Legal Requirements

Forest Plan

The selected actions described above comply with the Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), including amendments.

- The selected actions meet all standards and guidelines prescribed in Chapter 4 of the Forest Plan for Management Area 4, Research Natural Area (Forest Plan pages 4-89-91),
- The actions are consistent with Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines found on Forest Plan pages 4-35 through 4-60.

- The action would have no effect, and therefore is consistent with direction contained in Regional Forester's Forest Plan Amendment #2 and with INFISH (Inland Native Fish Strategy) direction.

The project is feasible and reasonable, and it results in applying management practices that meet the Forest Plan overall direction of protecting the environment while producing goods and services.

Legal Requirements

- a. **National Forest Management Act of October 22, 1976 (NFMA):**
Provisions of NFMA applicable to this project require the following: (a) resource plans and permits, contracts, and other instruments shall be consistent with the land management plan; (b) insure consideration of the economic and environmental aspects of management, to provide for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, wildlife, and fish; and (c) provide for diversity of plant and animal communities. All of these considerations and requirements are addressed in the EA (see pages 5-8). Therefore, project actions are consistent with NFMA.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based upon an environmental analysis documented in an environmental assessment, this decision (Alternative A) is not a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This determination is based on the following factors (40 CFR 1508.27):

Context.

*Although this is an addition to the national network of RNAs, both short-term and long-term physical and biological effects are limited to the local area (see EA page 8).

Intensity.

*Beneficial and adverse impacts were examined and they are not significant (see EA page 8).

*There are no known effects on public health and safety.

*Unique characteristics of the geographic area would be highlighted and better protected by formal RNA establishment. There would be no adverse effect to park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, or wild and scenic rivers. No significant adverse effects are anticipated to any environmentally sensitive or critical areas (see EA pages 5-8).

*There are no effects on the quality of the human environment that were found to be highly controversial.

*Effects on the human environment are not uncertain, do not involve unique or unknown risks.

*The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects.

*This action, when added to other actions, has no significant cumulative impact to natural resources or other components of the human environment (see EA page 8).

*There are no known effects on historical or cultural resources, or actual or eligible National Register of Historic Places sites (see EA page 8).

*The decision will not adversely affect any federally listed or proposed endangered or threatened species or regionally sensitive species of plants or animals or their critical habitat (see EA page 6).

*The proposed action is consistent with Federal, State, and local laws and requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Implementation

Implementation of this decision shall not occur within seven days following publication of the legal notice of the decision in the newspaper of record: *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*.

Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to Title 36 CFR (Code of Federal Regulations) part 217 in effect prior to November 9, 2000 (see 36 CFR parts 200-295, revised as of July 1, 2005). Other than Forest Service Employees, any person or any non-Federal organization or entity may challenge a decision covered by this part and request a review by the Forest Service line officer at the next administrative level.

Any written notice of appeal of the decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9, "Content of a Notice of Appeal." It is the responsibility of those who appeal a decision to provide a Reviewing Officer sufficient narrative evidence and argument to show why the decision by the lower level officer should be changed or reversed. At a minimum, an appeal must include the following:

1. State that the document is a Notice of Appeal filed pursuant to 36 CFR part 217;
2. List the name, address, and telephone number of the appellant;
3. Identify the decision about which the requester objects;
4. Identify the document in which the decision is contained by title and subject, date of the decision, and name and title of the Deciding Officer;
5. Identify specifically that portion of the decision or decision document to which the requester objects;
6. State the reasons for objecting, including issues of fact, law, regulation, or policy, and, if applicable, specifically how the decision violates law regulation, or policy;
7. Identify specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks.

It is the responsibility of persons making an appeal to submit it by the close of the appeal period. The appeal must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity will be required.

The notice of appeal must be filed hard-copy to:

Regular Mail

Chief, USDA Forest Service,
ATTN: EMC APPEALS,
Mail Stop 1104
1400 Independence Ave SW,
Washington, DC 20250-1104,

FedEx, UPS, Courier

Chief, USDA Forest Service
Ecosystem Management Coordination
Attn: Appeals
Yates Bldg., 3CEN
201 14th Street, SW
Washington DC 20024

The appeal must be postmarked or delivered within 45 days of the date the legal notice for this decision appears in the *Seattle Intelligencer* newspaper. The publication date of the legal notice in the *Seattle Intelligencer* is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal and those wishing to appeal should not rely on dates or timeframes provided by any other source.

The Forest Supervisor of the Colville National Forest will notify the local public of this decision with a legal notice in the *Colville Statesman Examiner* and *Newport Miner* newspapers, and mail a copy of the Decision Notice/Designation Order to all persons interested in or affected by the decision.

Contact Person

For more information on Bunchgrass Meadows RNA, contact Kathy Ahlenslager, Forest Botanist, Colville National Forest at 509-684-7178.

/s/ Liz Agpaoa _____
LIZ AGPAOA
Acting Regional Forester
Pacific Northwest Region (R6)

7/8/08 _____
Date