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Service

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Environmental Assessment

Pierre Lake Campground Improvement

**Three Rivers District, Colville National Forest
Stevens County, Washington
T36N, R37E, Section 5**

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SUMMARY

The Colville National Forest proposes to make improvements to the Pierre Lake Campground. The project area is located on County Road 4013, approximately 22 miles north of Kettle Falls, Washington and 6 miles south of the Canada border. It is wholly within the Three Rivers Ranger District, Colville National Forest, Washington. This action is needed, to update facilities at, and increase user safety of, the Pierre Lake Campground.

No extraordinary circumstances were found to exist that would cause the proposed action to have significant environmental effects. The project would have no effect on congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas. The project is not located in an inventoried roadless area. The project would not be located in an existing or proposed research natural area. The project has no effect to any federally listed species. This project could impact Common Loon nesting, though timing of the proposed activities and coordination with the District Wildlife Biologist will reduce or eliminate potential negative effects to nesting loons. No other USDA Forest Service (Region 6) sensitive species would be impacted. The project is consistent with the Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFISH).

As per 36 CFR 251, because there are no unresolved conflicts of significant issues identified in project scoping, no alternatives other than the No Action and Proposed Action were evaluated.

Given the purpose and need, and the effects of the alternatives, the deciding official will make the following decision:

- The specific areas that will be treated to increase campground safety and update facilities to bring them into compliance with current laws and regulations.
- The specific activities that will take place in the action including road, trail, campsite, septic system, picnic shelter, and dock construction, reconstruction and relocation.
- The associated actions that will be included such as post-activity road and, or, gate management, noxious weed treatment, clearing limits tree removal, specific mitigations, monitoring, and best management practices.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The Forest Service has prepared this Environmental Assessment in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations. This Environmental Assessment discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the proposed action and alternatives.

Additional documentation, including more detailed analyses of project-area resources, may be found in the project planning record located at the Three Rivers Ranger District Office in Kettle Falls, Washington.

Location

The Pierre Lake Campground Improvement is wholly located on the Three Rivers Ranger District, National Forest System lands, Stevens County, Washington (see figure 1). It is approximately 22 miles north of Kettle Falls Washington and 6 miles south of the Canada border (T36N, R37E, Section 5) on County Road 4015.

Background

The Pierre Lake Campground Improvement was constructed in 1953 and 1954. It received only minor upgrading until installation of toilet replacements and water system improvements in 2003 and 2004. Currently the campground has awkward and potentially unsafe traffic patterns with multiple points of ingress and egress that do not meet current standards. Additionally, campsites and trails are in need of maintenance and upgrades to bring them into compliance with current law, regulations and the Colville National Forest plan and its amendments.

Purpose and Need for Action

The proposed action is intended to bring Pierre Lake Campground into compliance with all current laws and regulations, and the Colville National Forest plan and its amendments, and to provide a safe and user-friendly campground and road system. This action is needed, because the aging facilities require updating to reach compliance with current laws and regulations such as the Highway Safety Act of 1966 (P.L. 89-564), the Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFISH, 1995), the American Disabilities Act (ADA), and the Colville National Forest Noxious Weed Guidelines (2000). The proposed action responds to the goals and objectives outlined in the Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1988), and the Recreation Site Facility Master Planning (2006), and helps move the project area towards desired conditions described there in.

Proposed Action

Proposed actions include road and trail modification (construction and reconstruction); construction of a new picnic shelter, septic system and shoreline docks; and placement or relocation of barriers, gates, signs and picnic tables and fire rings. This project is expected to take place over multiple years and as funding allows (see figure 2).

Included in the proposed action are:

Reconstructing 0.5 miles of road and constructing 0.5 miles of new road within the site. Changes would provide a more controlled centrally located entrance and exit from County Road 4015 and improved access and parking at the day use area. The current County Road 4015 access locations at the north and south ends of the campground would be obliterated as part of this phase. Additionally, campground traffic safety would be improved with turnouts and increased line of sight.

Road construction will occur in four areas: a campground host site, a loop road on the point in the day use area, a loop turnaround at the north end, and a (j-hole) turnaround and turnout at the south end of the campground. All roads would be one lane with turnouts and aggregate surfacing. Rock barriers would be used along the roads for safety, traffic management, and to protect resources. Traffic control and recreation signs would be upgraded. Some relocation of picnic tables and campfire rings would also occur to accommodate the new road system in the day use area on the point. Where possible campsites, including tables and fire rings, will be reconstructed to meet ADA standards.

Excavation for this project includes laying back the hillside to the north of the new entry to improve the line of sight on the north road, and the construction of the j-hole turnaround at the south end of the campground. The on-site material from these excavations and some additional material from a Stevens County pit site or a commercial source would then be used to construct the campground host site. The material will be inspected for noxious weeds prior to removal, and all heavy equipment would be cleaned and inspected prior to reaching the site. Additionally, the campground host campsite will be cleared to prepare for the installation of a new septic system. This system will meet all State and other legal requirements.

The project would improve campground quality and safety by leveling and resurfacing campsite pullouts and spurs. A sheltered picnic site is also planned to be constructed in the day use area. The picnic shelter would include a cement slab on grade and footings for the shelter supports. Additionally, gates would be installed allowing portions of the campground to be blocked off for increased security and to reduce maintenance expenses during the off seasons.

User created trails between the south end campsites and Pierre Lake would be upgraded and relocated. New trails in the south part of the campground would lead to small docks placed along the bank where boats could be tied. Use of unneeded secondary trails would be discouraged through signage and natural barriers. Rehabilitation of such abandoned trails would include scarification (as needed) and

seeding at a minimum (following CNF Seeding and Planting Guide, 2000). This portion of the project would mitigate erosion issues identified along the southern shoreline.

Management and Direction

This project complies with the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), Clean Water Act, and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements. The project is consistent with standards and guidelines in the Colville National Forest Land and Resources Management Plan (Forest Plan) as amended by the Regional Forester's forest Plan Amendment 1 and 2 (1993 and 1995) and INFISH (1995), and is tiered to the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Forest Plan (1988). The Pierre Lake Campground project would take place in a developed site within Management Area 5, an area of Scenic/Timber emphasis. The Colville National Forest Plan states the management goal of this area is to provide a natural appearing foreground, middle and background along major scenic travel routes while providing wood products. Under the Forest Plan, developed sites are allowed in this Management Area.

The project would have no effect on congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas. The project is not located in an inventoried roadless area. The project would not be located in an existing or proposed research natural area.

Public Involvement

The proposal was first listed on the Colville National Forest public website (<http://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/>) in the Schedule of Proposed Actions on 01/01/2007.

On March 19, 2007 letters were sent to the Chairs of the Kalispell Tribe of Indians, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, and the Spokane Tribe. This letter described the proposed action, location, and purpose and need. It met requirements of official consultation under Executive Order 13175. No response was received.

Legal notices of the opportunity to comment on this project were posted in the *Colville Statesman-Examiner* newspaper, the newspaper of record for this decision on April 4, 2007, and in the *Republic News Miner* on March 29, 2007. The legal notice included a general description of the project, the project location, and purpose and need. It also described the comment process and gave contact information for interested parties. The legal notice in the *Colville Statesman-Examiner* began a 30-day comment period which ended May 4th, 2007.

Scoping letters were sent to eleven (11) local land owners in the project area, the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition, The Lands Council, and Conservation Northwest, and Senator Bob Morton. These letters described in more detail, the project location, proposed actions, timelines and the comment procedure.

Two responses were received: (1) a phone call to Jean Lavell, the Colville National Forest West Zone Planning Leader, and (2) a visit to the Three Rivers District Office where the concerned party spoke with Carmen Nielsen, the Outdoor Recreation Planner in the West Zone planning area. Both parties were in support of the project, though some non-significant public concerns were identified (see following *Issues* section).

Issues

The Forest Service separated the issues into two groups: significant and non-significant issues. Significant issues were defined as those directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action. Non-significant issues were identified as those: 1) outside the scope of the proposed action; 2) already decided by law, regulation, Forest Plan, or other higher level decision; 3) irrelevant to the decision to be made; or 4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence. The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations require this delineation in Sec. 1501.7, "...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)..."

The Forest Service received comments from 2 concerned parties. Both parties were in support of the project, but raised 3 non-significant.

1. **Garbage Management:** A resident in the area, Debbie Ginter, was concerned about garbage collection. Her neighbors and she want to see dumpsters provided at the campground to reduce incidents of illegal dumping of garbage on nearby private land. Though actions of individual users on private lands are outside the scope of this EA, the Proposed Action would raise the status of the campground to a Level 4, a condition under which dumpsters could be provided. However, a concurrent increase in user fees may be required to accommodate this. As improvements are made as per the Proposed Action, presence of a campground host is expected to reduce garbage issues during at least part of the year. Ms. Ginter was supportive of the project and in getting a campground host.
2. **Fire Concerns:** Ms. Ginter also had concerns about possible fires caused by presence of electricity in the picnic shelter. Though there are no plans at this time to extend electricity to the shelter, potential wildfire is always a concern of the Forest Service. The shelter would be located in a day-use only site behind a gate. The presence of a campground host and after hours gate closures are expected to reduce associated vandalism.
3. **Day Use Parking:** Mr. and Mrs. Adams, residents south of Pierre Lake, were supportive of the project. They stated that directional parking is needed in the day use area. The Proposed Action would fulfill this request by creating a one-way loop road in the day use area with clearly demarcated parking.

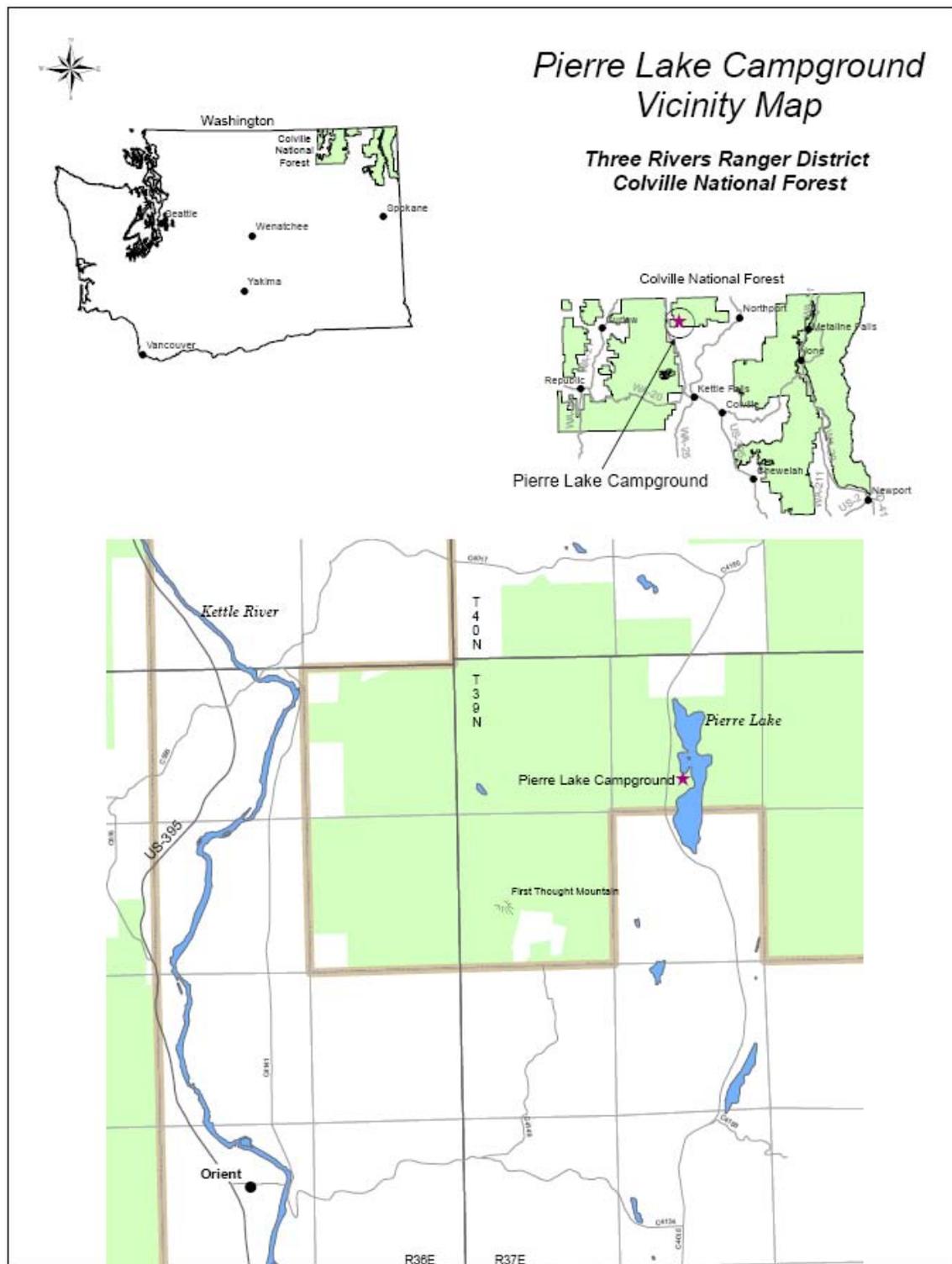


Figure 1. Pierre Lake Campground Vicinity Map

CHAPTER 2

Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action _____

Under the law (NEPA section 102(2)(E)) the Forest is directed to “study, develop and describe appropriate alternatives to recommended courses of action in any proposal which involves unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources.” Because there were no significant issues identified, and no unresolved conflicts, alternatives (other than the No Action) were not developed nor considered.

This chapter describes and compares the Proposed Action and No Action alternatives for the Pierre Lake Campground Improvement project. This section also presents the alternatives in comparative form, sharply defining the differences between them and providing a clear basis for choice among options by the decision maker and the public. Some of the information used to compare the alternatives is based upon the design of the alternative and some of the information is based upon the environmental, social and economic effects of implementing each alternative.

Alternatives _____

1. No Action

Under the No Action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. No road improvements, campground improvements or other activities would be implemented to accomplish project goals. Secondary trails and user created roads will continue to impact soil and vegetation in the campground, particularly in areas subject to INFISH requirements. No improvements to user safety would be made; road systems and parking will continue to be awkward and line of site along roads poor. Ingress and egress from the campground will continue to violate the State Highway Safety Act. There will be no increase in campground security because the site does not accommodate a campground host, and user access is difficult to control. Vandalism of vegetation and other facilities would remain as is or increase as conditions decline. Maintenance needs and costs will maintain or increase.

2. The Proposed Action

The action proposed by the Forest Service to meet the purpose and need includes road and trail modifications (construction and reconstruction); construction of a picnic shelter, host campsite, septic system, and shoreline docks; and placement or relocation of barriers, gates, signs, picnic tables, and fire rings.

This project would reconstruct 0.5 miles of road and construct 0.5 miles of new road within the project area. It would provide a more controlled centrally located entrance and exit from County Road 4015 in compliance with the State Highway Safety Act and fWashington Department of Transportation intersection criteria. The current County Road 4015 access locations at the north and south ends of the campground would be obliterated, seeded, and, or planted, and barricaded. This would include removal of 2

campsites reducing the number of overnight camp sites from 14 to 12. Another site currently used for camping will be converted to day use only.

Access to, and parking within the day use area would be improved. Additionally, traffic safety would be improved with turnouts and improved line of sight. Improvements which include road construction and widening would include some clearing width and hazard tree removal which would result in a small commercial timber sale.

There will be four areas of new road construction: a campground host site, a loop road on the point in the day use area, a loop turnaround at the north end, and a (j-hole) turnaround and turnout at the south end. All roads would be one lane, have turnouts and aggregate surfacing. Rock barriers would be used along the roads for safety, traffic management, and to protect resources. Traffic control and recreation signs would be upgraded. Some relocation of picnic tables and campfire rings would also occur to accommodate the new road system in the day use area on the point, and to meet ADA standards.

Excavation for this project includes laying back the hillside to the north of the new entry to improve the line of sight on the north road, and the construction of the j-hole turnaround at the south end of the campground. The on-site material from these excavations and some additional material from a Stevens County pit site or commercial source would then be used to construct the campground host site. Additionally, the campground host campsite would be cleared to prepare for the installation of a new septic system. This septic system will meet all State and other legal requirements.

The project would improve campground quality and safety by leveling and resurfacing campsite pullouts and spurs. A sheltered picnic site is also planned to be constructed in the day use area. The picnic shelter would include a cement slab on grade and footings for the shelter supports. Additionally, gates would be installed allowing portions of the campground to be blocked off for increased security and to reduce maintenance expenses during the off seasons.

The project would include an upgrade and relocation of user created trails between the south end campsites and the lake. New trails would lead to small docks placed along the bank where boats could be tied. This would encourage concentration of recreational activities along the shoreline and allow for the rehabilitation of the many user created trails currently causing resource damage. Use of unneeded secondary trails should be discouraged through signage and natural barriers. Rehabilitation of such abandoned trails would include scarification and seeding at a minimum (following CNF Seeding and Planting Guide). This portion of the project would mitigate erosion issues identified along the southern shoreline.

Mitigations for the Proposed Action _____

In response to public comments on the proposal and resource needs, mitigation measures were developed to ease some of the potential impacts the proposed action may cause.

1. Work would be scheduled to avoid peak recreation periods, (Labor Day and July 3rd to 5th), and common loon nesting time unless coordinated with District Wildlife Biologist.
2. All disturbed ground including obliterated or abandoned roads and trails, would be ripped (as needed) and seeded/planted to prevent noxious weed establishment as per the Colville National Forest Seeding and Planting Guide.
3. A qualified archaeologist or cultural resource technician would be present when new ground disturbing activity occurs. This includes new cuts into undisturbed soils, but does not include previously surveyed areas along the existing road.
4. Vegetation removal would insure that appropriate levels of tree and shrub species will be available for future utilization as a developed recreational facility with emphasis on natural species composition.
5. Hazard trees felled within the 150 foot INFISH riparian buffer should be retained on site for future long-term site productivity and enhancement of aquatic habitat conditions. Directional felling toward the lake should be implemented wherever feasible within the limitations of site safety and recreational requirements. Trees felled for site plan implementation should be treated similarly. Trees thus felled should be signed to prevent further utilization by recreational users. Consultation with the Forest or District Fish Biologist should be conducted regarding slash disposal of trees felled in or near the water. Trees felled across trails should be sectioned to remove only the portion blocking the trail tread.
6. Any pit material brought to the project site would be inspected and treated for noxious weeds prior to removal, and all heavy equipment would be cleaned and inspected prior to reaching the site.

Monitoring for the Proposed Action _____

The areas around the boat launch and riparian trails should be monitored for new trails or areas of excessive widening (for example, doubling of trail width, or loss of vegetation). Damaged areas would be treated to reduce impacts. This may include debris placement, adjusting the trail to meet the need, and seeding.

Comparison of Alternatives _____

The project has no effect to any federally listed species. This project could impact Common Loon nesting, though proposed timing of the activities, and coordination with the District Wildlife Biologist will reduce or eliminate potential negative effects to

nesting loons. No other USDA Forest Service (Region 6) sensitive species would be impacted. The project is consistent with the Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFISH).

This section provides a summary of the effects of implementing each alternative. Information in the table is focused on activities and effects where different levels of effects or outputs can be distinguished quantitatively or qualitatively among alternatives.

Table 1. Comparison of Alternatives by Issue

Purpose and Need, or Issue	No Action	Proposed Action
Safety	Current access from County Road 4013 does not meet Washington Department of Transportation intersection criteria.	Meets Washington Department of Transportation intersection criteria.
Safety	Use difficult to control.	Campground Host and gates are expected to better control use in day-use area.
INFISH and Clean Water Act	No improvement, continual violation of INFISH and Forest Plan direction	Erosion decreases, soil compaction decreases, site is brought into standard with INFISH and the Forest Plan
Economics	No additional cost. Some maintenance costs.	Estimated total project cost \$356,700, potential grant money available. Annual maintenance costs will be reduced.
NFMA	Continued loss of productivity due to erosion and compaction.	Specific problematic sites would be addressed, and overall erosion reduced.

CHAPTER 3

Environmental Consequences

This section summarizes the physical, biological, social and economic environments of the affected project area and the potential changes to those environments due to implementation of the alternatives. It also presents the scientific and analytical basis for comparison of alternatives presented in the chart above.

Fisheries, Soils, and Hydrology

The following discussion is summarized from the Fisheries and Hydrology report (Honeycutt and Coates 2007) available in the project file.

INFISH: “For existing recreation facilities inside Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas, Assure that the facilities or use of the facilities would not prevent attainment of Riparian Management Objectives or adversely affect inland native fish. Relocate or close recreation facilities where Riparian Management Objectives cannot be met or adverse effects on inland native fish cannot be avoided.”

Vegetation in the campground is showing the effects of compaction (from recreation use), vandalism, shallow soils, root disease, and Douglas-fir bark beetle. Large woody debris appears deficient in the campground, particularly in the southern portion. User created roads and trails are degrading soils in many areas. All these on going activities and impacts have the potential to, or are, contributing sediments to Lake Pierre. The No Action alternative would do nothing to prevent or reduce these impacts. The proposed action would remove or improve condition and location of trails, campsites and parking throughout the area to places better suited to this kind of use, or less subject to erosion.

The Proposed Action includes placement of a minimum of two docks which would provide users with locations to fish from or tie boats. Both activities are currently breaking down the lakeshore, destabilizing the lake banks. Creation of the docks would help eliminate the current problem and mitigate any problems associated with increased use should Pierre lake receive additional use due to improvements.

Soil conditions have been degraded in campsites and on roads and trails throughout the area; due primarily to foot and vehicle traffic. Developed campgrounds are not managed primarily for site productivity, and the Forest Plan soil standards for detrimental conditions do not apply in these areas.

Recreation and Roads

Highway Safety Act of 1966 directs states to have a highway safety program designed to reduce traffic accidents. The State of Washington has prepared a safety program. This project is consistent with this program by making entrance management, signing, and traffic control devices consistent with FSM 7701 and 7730, and FSH 719.31.

Recreation opportunities would be improved, though numbers of campsites would be reduced from 15 to 12. This tradeoff is considered desirable because it places all campsites outside the INFISH riparian buffer area and brings the density of campsites into compliance with the recreation opportunity spectrum for the project area. Visual quality is not expected to be negatively affected by the project.

Wildlife and Sensitive Plant Species

The following discussion is summarized from the Biological Evaluation and Wildlife Effects to Management Indicator Species (Loggers 2007), and documentation by the Forest Botanist (Ahlenslager 2007) available in the project file.

Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, requires federal agencies to "ensure" that actions authorized, funded, or carried out by them are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of endangered (E), threatened (T) or proposed (P) species, or result in the destruction or adverse modification of their critical habitats. Also, the Forest Service established direction (Forest Service Manual 2670) to guide habitat management for endangered, threatened, proposed and sensitive species to ensure that these species receive full consideration in the decision-making process.

A biological evaluation of the potential impact of the Proposed Action on threatened, endangered, and sensitive species was completed on July 6, 2007. The project has no effect to any federally listed species. This project could impact Common Loon nesting, though proposed timing of the activities, and coordination with the District Wildlife Biologist will reduce or eliminate potential negative effects to nesting loons. No other USDA Forest Service (Region 6) sensitive animal or plant species would be impacted.

The Colville National Forest (CNF) based the habitat capability objectives listed in the Forest Plan (page 4-13) on 1980 populations. Because the Forest Service (FS) manages habitat and the State of Washington manages wildlife populations, the FS objective is to provide habitat capable of supporting the desired population of each management indicator species (MIS). Though there may be very limited (in space, and, or time) impacts to some management indicator species' habitat, the Proposed Action will not negatively affect MIS species populations.

Noxious Weeds and Range

The Alternatives are consistent with the Environmental Assessment for Integrated Noxious Weed Treatment, Colville National Forest, and the Regional Forester's 2005 Record of Decision and Forest Plan amendment for *Preventing and Managing Invasive Plants*. Disturbed areas would be seeded with Washington State certified weed-free seed.

The project area is not currently included in a grazing allotment. There will be no effect to permittees or grazing management.

Heritage

The following discussion is summarized Heritage Section 106 Compliance form (Kramer 2007) available in the project file.

The Preferred Alternative is an "Appendix B" undertaking. A qualified archaeologist or cultural resource technician must be present when new ground disturbing activity occurs. This includes new cuts into undisturbed soils, but does not include previously surveyed areas along existing road.

Fire, Fuels, and Forest Vegetation

The project area is in what is known as the Douglas-fir/Ninebark plant association with some areas of hardwoods. Construction and reconstruction of roads would involve removal of trees, shrubs and other vegetative material. Trees along the clearing limits for the roads and hazard trees within reach of the proposed roads and reconstructed roads were analyzed for this project. A total of approximately 100 trees were identified for removal; enough to comprise a small timber sale. Slash and other non-merchantable material will be removed from the site, piled and burned, or made available to campers for firewood. Slash disposal will be in coordination with District Recreation Specialist.

Economics

The proposed project is estimated in 2008 dollars to cost a total of \$356,700 and is comprised of the following items:

• Road Reconstruction/Construction	\$126,000
• Boat Launch Parking Reconstruction	\$6,000
• Rehab/Reconstruct Camping Spurs	\$8,200
• Fee Station Upgrades	\$15,000
• Complete Host Site Utilities	\$17,000
• Picnic Shelter Construction	\$88,000
• Tables and Fire rings	\$50,000
• Vegetation Management	\$10,000
• Signs	\$7,500
• Rock Barriers	\$3,000
• Mitigation to meet INFISH requirements	\$26,000

Environmental Justice

(Executive Order 12898) – This Order requires consideration of whether projects would disproportionately impact minority or low-income populations. This decision complies with this act. Public involvement occurred for the project, the results of which I have considered in this decision-making. Public involvement did not identify any adversely impacted local minority or low-income populations.

Other Required Analysis

This is not a major Federal action. It will have limited context and intensity (40 CFR 1508.27), individually or cumulatively, to the biological, physical, social or economic components of the human environment. It will have no adverse effect upon public health or safety, consumers, civil rights, minority groups and women, prime farm land, rangeland and forestland, roadless areas, or to old growth forest options.

CHAPTER 4

Consultation and Coordination _____

The Forest Service consulted the following individuals, Federal, State, and local agencies, tribes and non-Forest Service persons during the development of this environmental assessment:

ID TEAM MEMBERS:

Jean Lavell, West Zone Planning Team Leader
Karen Honeycutt, Fisheries Biologist
Joe Coates, Hydrologist
Chris Loggers, Wildlife Biologist
Carmen Nielsen, Recreation Specialist
Marjorie Bodie, Landscape Architect
Ginger Gilmore, Engineer
Catherine Phillips, Writer/Editor

FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES:

County Commissioners of Stevens, Ferry and Pend Oreille Counties, Senator
Robert Morton

TRIBES:

Kalispel Tribe of Indians
Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation
Spokane Tribe

OTHERS:

Alan B. Wiley
Wallace Ginter
Beverly J. Adams
Addison L. McVay et al.
Daniel J. Bryant
Gallatin Northeast Washington
William D. King et al.
Ronny C. Beckett et al.
David A. Geary
George W. Ginter Jr. et al.
The Lands Council
Conservation Northwest
Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition

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