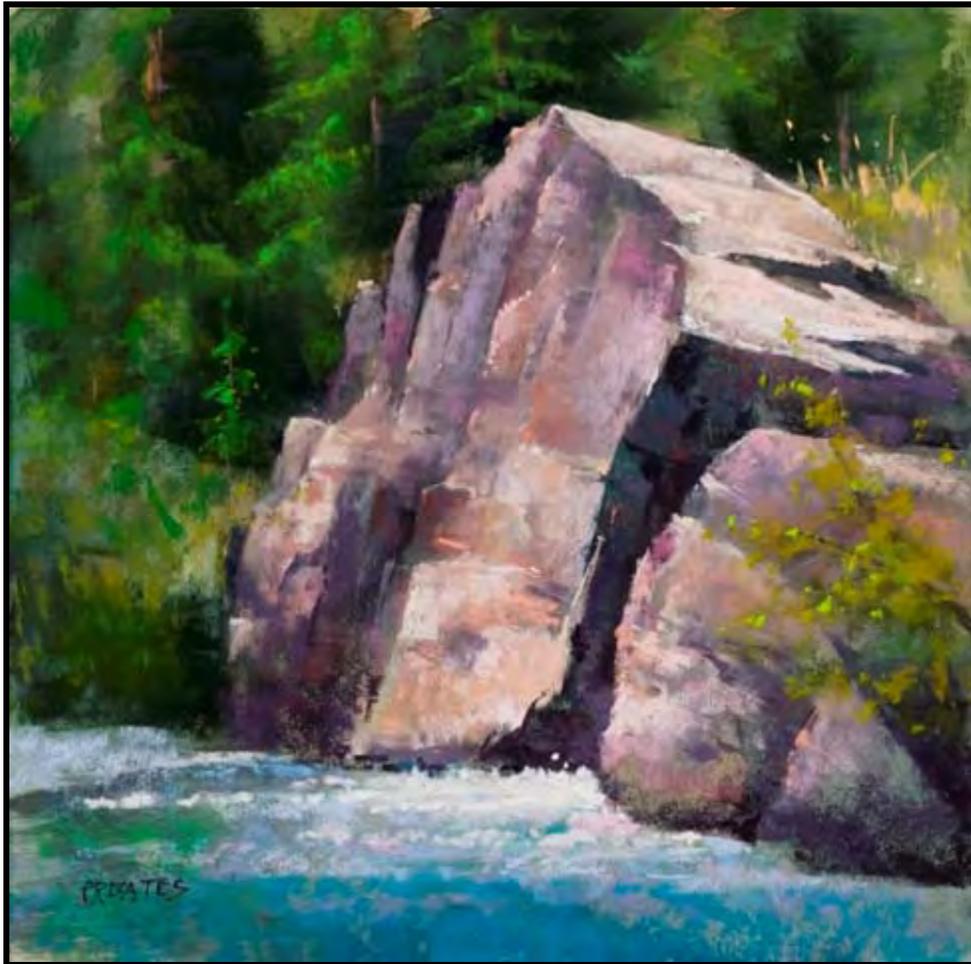




Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Management Plan

Decision Notice, Site Specific Non-Significant Plan
Amendment, Finding of No Significant Impact, and
Response to Public Comments



April 25, 2010
Sisters Ranger District, Deschutes National Forest
Deschutes County, Oregon

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Decision Notice, Site Specific Non-significant Plan Amendment
& Finding of No Significant Impact

Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Management Plan

USDA Forest Service
Sisters Ranger District, Deschutes National Forest
Deschutes County, Oregon
T17S R8E, T16S R8E and R9E, T15S R9E, T15S R10E

Introduction

Background

Wild rivers are one of our nation's greatest treasures. Congress recognized this in 1968 when they passed the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (P.L. 90-542) and established a nationwide system of outstanding free-flowing rivers. These rivers are protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Whychus Creek (formerly Squaw Creek) is located in Central Oregon on the eastern slopes of the Cascade Mountains. It is a perennial stream that is a tributary of the Deschutes River. It is approximately 41 miles long from its headwaters in the Three Sisters Wilderness to its confluence with the Deschutes River. The upper reaches of Whychus Creek and its wilderness tributaries were designated by Congress as a Wild and Scenic River as part of the Omnibus Oregon Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1988 (Public Law 100-557 - Oct.28, 1988) – an amendment to Section 3(a) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (P.L. 90 - 542); USC 1274(a).

The designated area includes 15.4 miles, beginning at its source on the glaciers of the Three Sisters mountains and ending at the hydrological gauging station that is approximately 4 miles southwest of the City of Sisters in Central Oregon. The 6.6 mile segment of the creek within the Three Sisters Wilderness from its sources on the Three Sisters mountains to the Three Sisters Wilderness boundary is classified as "Wild". The sources of Whychus Creek begin on the glaciers of the Three Sisters mountains and include Soap Creek, the South and North Forks of Whychus Creek, and Park Creek, including the East and West Forks of Park Creek. Wild rivers are defined in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act as: *"Those rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments and generally inaccessible except by trail, with watersheds or shorelines essentially primitive and waters unpolluted. These represent vestiges of primitive America."* The 8.8 mile segment from the Three Sisters Wilderness boundary to the USGS hydrological gauging station is classified as "Scenic." Scenic Rivers are defined in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act as: *"Those rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments, with shorelines or watersheds still largely primitive and shorelines largely undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads."*

Special consideration of Carver Lake, a high-elevation moraine lake on South Sister, is included in the designation. In the mid-1980's Carver Lake was identified as a potential flood risk for Sisters and homes along Whychus Creek by the U.S. Geological Survey. The risks have been downgraded in more recent reports, but still exist. The Oregon Omnibus Wild and Scenic Rivers Act designation states: *"Nothing in this Act shall prohibit the construction of facilities necessary for emergency protection for the town of Sisters relative to a rapid discharge of Carver Lake if no reasonable flood warning or control alternative exists."*

The 2007 Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Resource Assessment found that certain aspects of Whychus Creek are unique on a Regional or National Scale. People are astonished by the diverse geology born from volcanoes and glaciers which displays water polished basalts, caves, cliffs along remote steep canyons, and channel-filling boulders. The complexity of the creek's channels, including an abundance of waterfalls, wetlands, and a glacier moraine lake as part of the headwaters makes the hydrology of the creek another unique feature. Whychus Creek is poised to regain its importance as the most significant tributary in the Upper Deschutes basin for the reintroduction of threatened Mid-Columbia steelhead and sustains a native strain of Interior Columbia Basin redband trout which shows little genetic influence from hatchery fish. The glacial headwaters of Whychus Creek on the Three Sisters mountains are a symbol of Central Oregon and the wild unmodified scenery within the corridor will become more valuable as a refuge for people as the years pass. Its long history of use by Native Americans as a travel corridor to and from the obsidian sources in the High Cascades provides a window into the past and how people lived. The traditional use of river-related resources of the creek which gave it several of its historic names remains as a unique feature today to tribal ceded lands, treaty rights, and Native American history.

For these reasons Geology, Hydrology, Fisheries, Scenery, Prehistory and Traditional Use were found to be the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of Whychus Creek that we are required to protect or enhance for present and future generations. Other river related values such as Wildlife, Ecology/Vegetation, Cultural History and Recreation were found to be significant and need some additional protection and management.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of the Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Plan Environmental Assessment is to provide the basis to develop a Comprehensive River Management Plan and boundary for Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River. This decision amends the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan goals, objectives, and Standards and Guidelines to provide specific management direction where needed to protect or enhance the Outstandingly Remarkable or Significant Values of Whychus Creek and address issues related to river management.

This decision also establishes a final river corridor boundary and describes existing conditions, desired future conditions, standards and guidelines, and directs future management and monitoring.

This action is needed to fulfill the requirements of Section 3(d)(1) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act that states that "the Federal agency charged with the administration of each component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System shall prepare a comprehensive management plan...to provide for the protection of river values. The plan shall address resource protection, development of lands and facilities, user capacities, and other management practices necessary or desirable to achieve the purposes of this Act. The plan shall be prepared, after consultation with State and local governments and the interested public within three full fiscal years after the designation."

The proposed Forest Plan Amendment provides an opportunity to achieve the overall goals and objectives of the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan without significantly altering them.

Two alternatives were analyzed in detail: No action (Alternative 1) and one action alternative (Alternative 2). The Proposed Action is Alternative 2.

Summary of Decision and Rationale

Based on my careful review of the Project Purpose and Need, Interdisciplinary Team analysis, and the public comments I (*John Allen, Forest Supervisor, Deschutes National Forest*) received throughout the project I have decided to implement Alternative 2 with some modifications that I will discuss. Alternative 2 has been changed in response to public comments and updated information. I believe that Alternative 2, as I have modified it, best meets the purpose and need of the project (EA, pg 19).

The goal of Alternative 2 is to protect and enhance the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of Whychus Creek, restore degraded resources, and maintain the creek's wild, scenic, and often remote character. Alternative 2 utilizes both existing direction from the many existing plans that apply to the area and introduces new standards and guidelines to address situations that are not addressed in other applicable laws and plans. My conclusions are based on a review of the record that shows a thorough analysis of the relevant scientific information, as well as the acknowledgement of incomplete or unavailable literature.

Some features of Alternative 2 include:

A Wild and Scenic River boundary which protects elements related to the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of Whychus Creek, includes hydrologically significant areas, and will be easier to locate on the ground.

A gradient of management controls intended to provide the desired recreation experience, so that areas closer to the City of Sisters have more managed access and visible controls of visitor use with developed facilities while higher reaches closer to the wilderness have less. The plan will allow development of limited improvements (for example: parking areas, a limited managed trail system, restrooms) close to the City of Sisters to manage use, protect river values, and provide interpretive and stewardship information. Near and within the Wilderness we will manage the area for more primitive character.

New standards for protection of geological features such as requirements for "Leave No Trace" rock climbing. Hydrology and fisheries are protected by a prohibition on removal of instream wood. Standards will define appropriate trails and locations. Inaccessible areas which currently have little visitor use and which provide refuges for wildlife species will be retained. Additional standards guide vegetation management to provide deer habitat in the lower corridor in biological deer winter range, and enhance hardwoods. Additional clarification to assist wildfire managers in protecting river values during wildfire events or management of fire for the benefit of natural resources is provided.

Clarification that any development of facilities allowed in the Wild and Scenic River corridor should be minimal and be primarily for resource protection and education to provide for safer, respectful, and conservation minded use of the area.

Clarification that recreational or social events allowed in the Wild and Scenic River corridor in the "Scenic" section must maintain the desired semi-primitive character, meet demonstrated needs, and have negligible impacts. Special events which do not meet the criteria which require authorization through special use permits will be allowed to cross the corridor at 2 locations where they have minimal effects on the river corridor.

Protection for Whychus House Cave. This cultural site which has been repeatedly damaged by vandalism and graffiti will be managed by instituting a legal order which prohibits camping, campfires, or rock climbing at the cave.

Monitoring is a prominent part of the Management Plan in Alternative 2 using the Limits of Acceptable Change concept to evaluate and achieve the desired future condition.

The Plan promotes sustainability by working with the community, visitors, and partners to provide the mental and physical benefits of outdoor recreation while protecting and enhancing the creek's resource values for future generations. The Forest Service will continue to work closely with the Tribes, state and local governments, partner organizations, and the public to encourage community stewardship and volunteerism.

The Plan establishes carrying capacity by using the Recreational Opportunity Spectrum characterizations I have selected for each river segment. The Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) characterizations of "Primitive" for the Wild Section and "Semi-primitive Motorized" for the Scenic Section define appropriate levels of access, remoteness, naturalness, facilities and site management, social encounters, and visitor management. Standards and guidelines will define appropriate trail locations and allowable authorized uses to maintain the desired social settings over time.

Non-Significant Forest Plan Amendment: Alternative 2 would require a non-significant amendment to the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan in order to establish the final Wild and Scenic River boundary and incorporate additional standards and guidelines. I am also changing land allocations necessitated by the designation of the final boundary as depicted in Maps 1-4 in Appendix 1. I find this to be a non-significant Forest Plan amendment based in part on the following criteria found in the Forest Service Planning handbook, 1900 series, and applicable planning rules.

Timing - The Forest Plan has been in effect since 1990. This amendment is occurring during the second decade of the planning period and is less likely to be significant. The proposed activities are expected to be implemented in the next 5-10 years.

Location and Size - The project area is only 14,607 acres out of the 1.6 million acres found in the Deschutes National Forest. The 1990 Forest Plan identified this area as Wild and Scenic River MA-17 and included interim management direction to utilize until a formal river management plan was completed. Many of the existing standards and guidelines and overriding direction remain the same in the new plan. New or changed standards and guidelines are proposed to address current or potential undesirable conditions. The changed standards and guidelines and management direction will apply only in the project area.

Goals, Objectives and Outputs – There would be no change in the long term relationships between the level of goods and services projected by the Forest Plan Final EIS and the impacts of implementing the action alternative because of the small number of acres involved and because the majority for the area has other overlying direction such as Northwest Forest Plan (Late Successional Reserves, Congressionally Reserved, Riparian Reserves), Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFISH), and Eastside Screens. Minor changes in land allocations will occur but no significant reduction in timber volume produced or outputs of the Deschutes Forest Plan will be affected.

Management Prescription - The amendment applies only to the Whychus Wild and Scenic River area. The amendment does not alter the desired future condition of the land or resources or anticipated goods and services to be produced. Options for future management will be maintained. Very minor reductions in timber outputs would be realized because Management Allocations with a timber output emphasis ("Matrix" under the Northwest Forest Plan and "General Forest" under the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan)

would be changed to emphasize protection and enhancement of the Outstanding Remarkable values of Whychus Wild and Scenic River. Approximately 336 acres of Matrix will be re-allocated to Congressionally Reserved lands and 93 acres of General Forest will be changed to Wild and Scenic River Management Allocation. This change will be immeasurable because of the small amount of acreage involved and because much of this area is overlaid by Riparian Reserves which limit vegetative treatments.

In all other respects, I find this decision to be consistent with the Forest Plan, as amended and with the requirements of the National Forest Management Act.

Rationale for my Decision and Response to Issues

BOUNDARY

The Decision will establish a Wild and Scenic River boundary which protects and enhances the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of Whychus Creek.

I did not select the ¼ mile default boundary for Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Boundary because it is difficult to locate on ground and enforce, and because it excludes some hydrologically linked uplands and does not include Pole Creek swamp, a significant hydrological and cultural feature.

The boundary I have selected for Whychus Wild and Scenic River was located to provide for protection and management of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of the creek and so it is more easily surveyable and administered.

In the Scenic section, roads and section lines which generally enclose hydrologically connected areas provide the most logical and recognizable boundaries for the public and resource managers. Existing protective land allocations adjacent to the corridor such as Late Successional Reserves, Scenic Views, Front Country, and Deer Habitat as well as requirements that apply from the Aquatic Conservation Strategy and the Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFISH) reduce the need for a wide corridor.

In the Wild section, distances from the outer tributaries described in the Omnibus Oregon Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1988 define the Wild and Scenic River Boundary corridor. The overlying Wilderness designation also reduces the need for a wide corridor. Some comments have suggested that no corridor is needed in the Wild section because of the protections of the Wilderness Act. However, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act provides important protections to the free flow of waters of Whychus Creek that are not provided by the Wilderness Act and for this reason I have decided to establish a boundary for the Wild section in the Three Sisters Wilderness.

In response to public comments regarding where to place the boundary of the Wild and Scenic River I have decided to make several small boundary changes that will make the boundary easier to locate and promote protection of the Fisheries and Hydrology values of the creek. We have reexamined our acres per river miles calculations and found that overlapping boundaries around closely adjacent tributaries in the wilderness provided us with extra acres to use in boundary designation (*Note: The boundary size is limited to 320 acres per river mile*). We received clarification that these acres could be used in any segment of the river corridor, as needed, to protect and enhance the Outstandingly Remarkable Values.

1) **Wild Section-** It was suggested that we include the small islands and peninsulas between tributaries in the Wild section rather than just using a set buffer for easier administration and to better reflect the watershed. I have decided to make this change to better protect and enhance the creek’s headwaters and make boundary location easier.

2) **Scenic Section-** It was suggested that we consider a section of Snow Creek, a tributary of Whychus Creek for inclusion in the boundary. This section has a large block of wetlands near the scenic river terminus and our Hydrologist has been interested in including part of this tributary in the boundary to better manage the Outstandingly Remarkable Hydrology of the creek and include a very cold water source for the Outstandingly Remarkable Fisheries. With the clarification that the adjusted boundary size is within the allowable limits, I have decided to include a portion of Snow Creek and it’s wetlands, into the Scenic Section Boundary. This addition adds an additional 467 acres of land which formerly had the management designation in the Deschutes National Forest Management Plan of “Front Country –Unseen”. An additional 237 acres that had the Northwest Forest Plan designation of Matrix but were largely overlaid by Riparian Reserves will be changed to “Congressionally Reserved” lands.

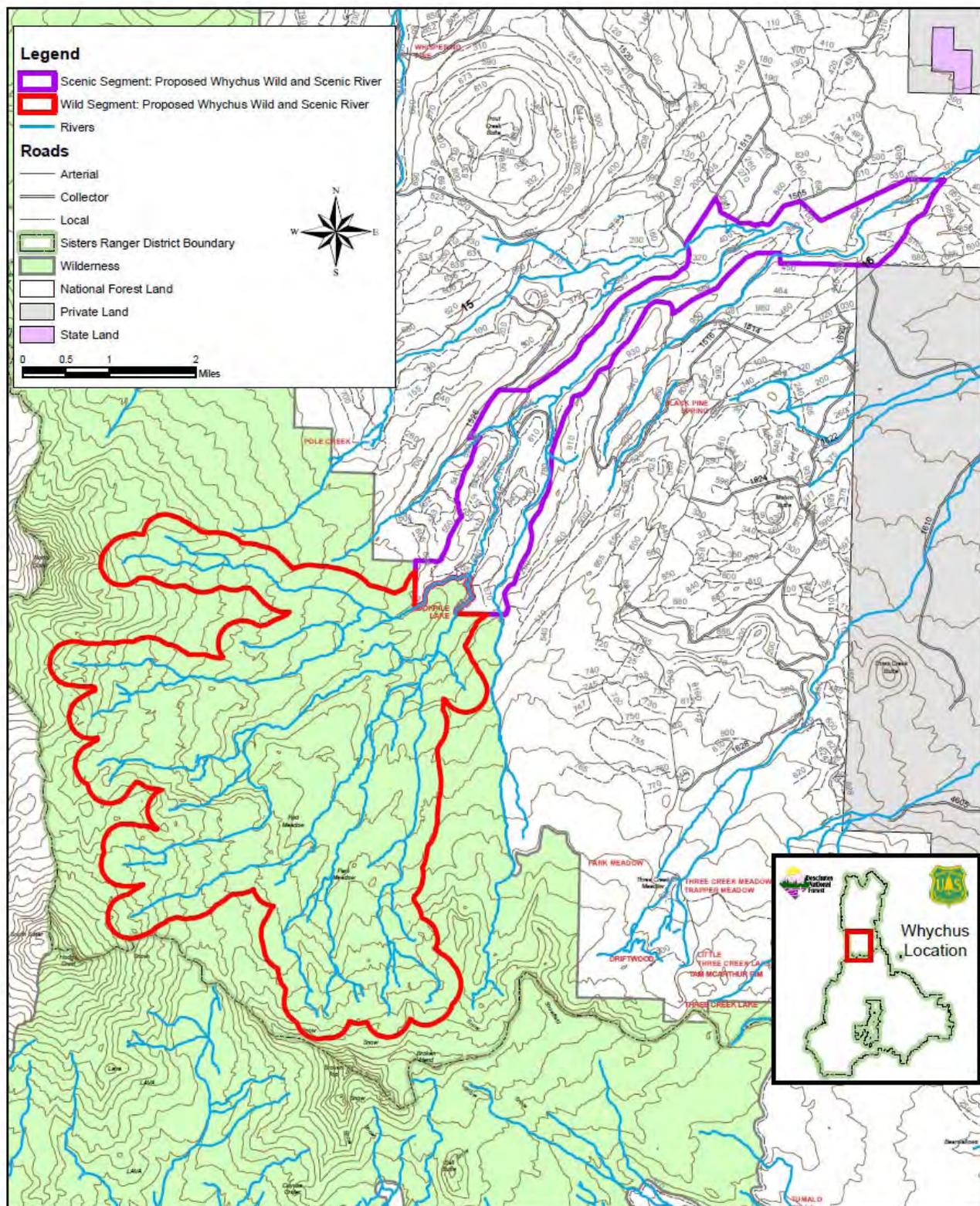
As modified, the boundary area for the Wild section is 11,500 acres in size and the Scenic section boundary is 3,107 acres in size. With a total boundary of 14,607 acres over 54 miles of river (9 miles of Scenic river and 45 miles of Wild river tributaries) this boundary encloses 271 acres per river mile and is within the allowable legal limits of 320 acres per river mile.

Acres that will Change Management Allocation under Alternative 2 (Proposed Action)

<i>Deschutes NF Land and Resource Management Plan</i> Old Management Allocation	<i>Deschutes NF Land and Resource Management Plan</i> New Management Allocation	Acres
Deer Habitat	Wild and Scenic River	1
Front Country Seen/Unseen	Wild and Scenic River	511
General Forest	Wild and Scenic River	93
Scenic Views	Wild and Scenic River	97
Total Change		702
<i>Northwest Forest Plan</i> Old Management Allocation	<i>Northwest Forest Plan</i> New Management Allocation	Acres
Late Successional Reserves	Late Successional Reserves with overlay of Wild and Scenic River	1614
Matrix	Congressionally Reserved with overlay of Wild and Scenic River	336
Congressionally Reserved in the Three Sisters Wilderness	Congressionally Reserved with overlay of Wild and Scenic River	11,778
Total Change		13,728

Maps detailing these changes are found in Appendix 1.

I have asked that the change in the boundary be updated in the Environmental Assessment (EA) along with a new map. After consultation with the Interdisciplinary Team, I have determined that the original conclusions stated in the Environmental Assessment are still correct and the effect determinations for fish and wildlife species and other resources remains unchanged. Therefore, no additional effects analysis is required.



Final Whychus Wild and Scenic River Boundary

GEOLOGY

This Decision will protect and enhance the Outstandingly Remarkable Geology of Whychus Creek.

The landscape around Whychus Creek is defined by the diverse and scenic geological features of steep canyons and cliffs, caves, water polished potholes, and rock spires. Existing direction in the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan adequately protects most geologic features from the potential impacts of mining or geothermal development (EA, pg 71).

However, recreational rock climbing has been increasing in the corridor and is beginning to leave visible traces on streamside cliffs, rock walls, and caves. As this use may increase in the future I am concerned that the scenic values and integrity of geological features could be compromised if I chose No Action under Alternative 1.

The new standards I have chosen to include in the plan require “Leave No Trace” rock climbing, prohibit installations of fixed anchors, require chalk trails to be brushed away, and prevent removal of vegetation from rock walls. Along with programmed monitoring and the partnership of the rock climbing community, these standards provide educational opportunities for low impact behaviors and will help protect the Outstandingly Remarkable Geology of Whychus Creek while allowing for people to continue to enjoy rock climbing in the corridor.

HYDROLOGY

This Decision will protect and enhance the Outstandingly Remarkable Hydrology of Whychus Creek.

The cold waters of Whychus Creek originate on glaciers of the Three Sisters Mountains and are the cornerstone of the area’s ecology, providing habitat for thriving populations of plants, animals, and fish. I am committed to managing for the highest level of water quality throughout the Wild and Scenic River Corridor and continuing to work with partners to restore the instream flows of Whychus Creek downstream to restore connectivity for fish.

Existing Federal and State guidelines, such as those in the Northwest Forest Plan, Aquatic Conservation Strategy, INFISH, State water quality standards, and the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, generally provide adequate protection of the Outstandingly Remarkable Hydrology of Whychus Creek (EA, pg 85). However, I am concerned that the current minimal management of dispersed recreation including the proliferation of user trails, high road densities, sprawl of dispersed campsites, and minimal monitoring would not move conditions toward the desired condition quickly enough if I chose No Action under Alternative 1.

The trampling of stream banks and riparian vegetation makes the banks more susceptible to erosion and adds sediment into the creek. In addition, if kayaking or creek boating during high flows continues to become more popular in the future it may lead to the unauthorized manipulation of instream wood that creates channel complexity and stability.

Many actions I have included in the Management Plan address these concerns and will have benefits to Outstandingly Remarkable Hydrology of Whychus Creek. I have established new standards to set the

stage for future projects which will reduce erosion by consolidating user-created trails into a managed trail system, relocating trails, closing user created roads and trails, and by limiting access to most trails by the river to foot traffic. Reducing trail erosion near Whychus Creek and other hydrologically connected areas will reduce bank instability and sedimentation to Whychus Creek. Also a new standard to prevent instream wood manipulation will help protect stream channel stability.

By monitoring dispersed recreation under a specific plan we will be more responsive to conditions which might affect the creek and regulate use where necessary. By establishing Limits of Acceptable Change for dispersed sites it is easier to determine if unacceptable resource damage is occurring and what remedial action(s) (including closure and rehabilitation) will need to occur. By rehabilitating user trails, non-system roads, and other areas that are contributing sediment, riparian areas will recover and function more effectively during Whychus Creeks frequent winter flood events. Along with programmed monitoring and the partnership of the creek boating community, standards to prevent instream wood manipulation and educational opportunities for low impact behaviors will help protect the Outstandingly Remarkable Hydrology of Whychus Creek while allowing for people to continue to recreate in the corridor.

The new Wild and Scenic River boundary I have established uses topographic features and roads to define the boundary while including important hydrologically connected areas. Defining the boundary based on real on-the-ground features would make project implementation and enforcement of the Wild and Scenic Plan standards and guidelines easier. Likewise, the inclusion of hydrologically connected areas including the modifications I have made in response to public comments, outlined above in the Boundary discussion, will provide greater protection for Whychus Creek's hydrology now and in the future.

FISHERIES

This Decision will protect and enhance the Outstandingly Remarkable Fisheries of Whychus Creek.

As Whychus Creek regains its important role in the life cycle of mid-Columbia steelhead returning to this mountain stream from the sea to spawn, I emphasize my determination to insure sustainable fish habitat and seeing that fish populations are managed according to Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Wild Fish Policy. My goal is to see wild steelhead and redband trout migrate freely along Whychus Creek as they once did, and that the natural processes continue which sustain and protect the habitat of the Outstandingly Remarkable Fish of Whychus Creek.

I did not choose the No Action Alternative 1 for the same reasons as I discussed above in the Hydrology Section. It did not improve conditions quickly enough. I believe the actions I have decided to implement and have described above in the discussion on Hydrology will protect and enhance both Hydrology and Fisheries and move us more rapidly toward our goals for the wild fish of Whychus Creek. Protection of stream banks, riparian vegetation, and streamside forests and their wood recruitment to Whychus Creek are the focus of my direction for recreation management and restoration work. A new standard to prevent instream wood manipulation by boaters will help protect stream channel stability and maintain large logs, overhanging vegetation, undercut banks, and stream structure which are key components of fish habitat.

The new Wild and Scenic River boundary I have established will ensure easier management of hydrologically connected areas and maintain the sources of cold water which are so important to fish along the length of Whychus Creek. The modifications I have made in response to public comments, outlined above in the Boundary discussion, will provide greater protection for the clean cold water that fish need.

SCENERY

This Decision will protect and enhance the Outstandingly Remarkable Scenery of Whychus Creek.

I believe that people that have experienced the wild, relatively unmodified scenery of Whychus Creek recognize the value of this unusual landscape. The rich variety of scenic experiences from distant views of the headwaters of Whychus Creek on the glaciers on the Three Sisters mountains to close views of waterfalls, quiet pools, riparian shrubs, flowers and old growth trees provide a backdrop for people to relax in the beauty of a largely undisturbed natural environment.

Accordingly I have set Scenic Quality objectives for the corridor which maintain or improve the scenery so that it remains essentially like it is today, if not better; the only changes being to improve or remove discordant elements where needed. Existing Federal and State guidelines, such as the amendments to the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan in the Northwest Forest Plan, Aquatic Conservation Strategy, INFISH, Eastside Screens, or State water quality standards, and other portions of the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, generally provide adequate protection of the Outstandingly Remarkable Scenery of Whychus Creek (EA, pg 100).

I am concerned that the current minimal management of dispersed recreation affects scenic quality due to impacts from unregulated camping, dispersed use, and illegal behaviors and this may increase with population growth in the future. I do not think that the No Action Alternative 1 provides enough guidance to make the changes needed to protect and enhance the remarkable scenery of Whychus Creek. As recreational use increases in the corridor, a need for subtle but effective management controls such as parking areas, signs, and relocating or developing trails will also increase. I have decided to include actions to help manage this unmanaged recreational use that are discussed in the Hydrology and Recreation Sections. These actions also protect the area's Outstandingly Remarkable Scenery.

The existing Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Visual Quality Objectives of "Preservation" and "Retention" would continue to require a high degree of sensitivity and mitigations in any activity that affects the natural appearance of the area. The transition to the Scenery Management System is defined in the Management Plan by new standards and includes disturbance ecology and human interaction as part of the landscape ecosystem. In this decision I am emphasizing that the natural fire ecology of the area forests is a part of the view. People can expect to see distant vistas and close views with signs of natural and prescribed fires which are important to the forest, wildlife, and native plants of the area.

The proposed boundary also fully protects scenic meadow areas and is easy to locate and enforce during management activities. Monitoring will better track visually detracting elements. The few facilities needed for the purpose of protecting river values will be rustic in character and designed to complement the natural surroundings.

CULTURAL PREHISTORY AND TRADITIONAL USE

This Decision will protect and enhance the Outstandingly Remarkable Cultural Prehistory and Traditional Use of Whychus Creek.

I recognize the non-renewable and generally fragile nature of prehistoric resources. Although there are existing laws and regulations which provide protection for these resources I believe several additional standards and guidelines are needed to emphasize the importance of the cultural resources of Whychus Creek and what they can teach about the way people here lived in the past.

The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon have declared their interest in treaty protected resources of the creek including wildlife, reintroduced anadromous fish, hydrology, prehistoric sites, and cultural significance. Tribal elders have also identified the wet meadows as important sites that may have historically contained traditional cultural use plants.

I did not choose the No Action Alternative 1 because some valuable wet meadows areas were not included within the default ¼ mile boundary. Biological deer habitat in the lower corridor would have not been managed to best sustain the mule deer which the Tribes value. I also wanted to emphasize the importance of increased communications and establish a more formal monitoring program for the area.

For these reasons I have included additional management direction for the Whychus Wild and Scenic River which will benefit significant and unevaluated cultural prehistoric resources by reducing impacts of unmanaged use and increasing programmed monitoring. I have included the wet meadows of Pole Creek Swamp and Whychus Meadow in the river corridor to protect areas which may have historically supported cultural plants important to the Tribes. The Tribes have expressed a special interest in deer habitat and I have developed additional standards for the management of deer in their biological range.

I am determined to better protect Whychus House Cave from the relentless vandalism which has occurred there for years and will institute a closure of the cave to camping, campfires, and rock climbing. Area managers have undertaken lesser measures such as road closures and education but the abusive use has continued and can no longer be tolerated. This closure action will reduce visual and physical impacts of trampling, climber's chalk, and smoke to the site and reduce the opportunities for vandalism to leave trash and graffiti. If monitoring shows that these measures are not sufficiently effective, I will implement additional protective measures.

Guidelines to emphasize increased communication with the Tribes will increase our interactions outside project planning, continue to improve the relationship between the Tribes, the Forest Service, the community, and visitors and provide opportunities for cross cultural learning, respect, and understanding.

WILDLIFE

This Decision will protect and consider the Significant Wildlife of Whychus Creek.

Existing guidelines in the Northwest Forest Plan, Aquatic Conservation Strategy, INFISH, Eastside Screens and the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan are generally adequate to protect the wildlife resources of Whychus Creek. However, I did not choose the No Action Alternative 1 because several important aspects for wildlife management are not adequate. My

concerns are how wildlife might be affected by even minor recreational developments or future growth in recreational use and how best to manage biological deer winter range where it exists on the ground.

By selecting Alternative 2, I have included several measures that provide special consideration for Significant Wildlife found in the Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River corridor. Actions discussed above to manage recreation will protect habitat and reduce disturbance. I recognize that there are many more roads in the corridor than needed for administrative and public access and we must work to reduce road densities in the future. Road closures in the future, as informed by Roads Analysis, will be prioritized on the basis of how they affect the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of the creek, identifying unneeded roads which can help create blocks of undisturbed wildlife habitat or removing roads which are a risk to water quality. Revegetation of reclaimed roads will also accelerate habitat recovery providing additional useable habitat. This process will be done in a future site specific environmental analysis and decision.

Any future recreation development for resource protection will be planned with the intent to minimize impacts to Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas and Riparian Reserves and maximize undisturbed areas that provide or enhance wildlife refugia. We will identify areas which currently have little human use and leave them that way in the future to help maintain the wildness that people and wildlife value and need.

Within the lower 1 mile of the Scenic river corridor, new specific standards and guides for mule deer winter range will be applied. These standards and guides will provide direction for projects proposing vegetation management activities in this area. I have also included the wet meadows at Pole Creek Swamp, Whychus Meadow, and wetlands near Snow Creek in the river corridor which are important for wildlife and amphibians.

VEGETATION AND ECOLOGY

This Decision will protect and consider the Significant Vegetation and Ecology of Whychus Creek.

There is a body of laws and plans that govern and guide the management of the vegetation and ecology of Whychus Creek such as the Northwest Forest Plan, Aquatic Conservation Strategy, Eastside Screens, Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, and the Whychus Late Successional Reserve Assessment and Watershed Analysis. Although I believe the existing direction provides a strong scientific basis for managing vegetation in the river corridor I did not choose the No Action Alternative 1 because I felt some clarification regarding wildfire will be beneficial to protecting the river corridor during fire suppression and emphasizing the role of fire in the ecology of the area's forests and riparian areas.

In selecting Alternative 2, I have added measures to address minimizing impacts to the area during wildfire suppression and encourage the management of wildfires for resource benefits. Standards which address unmanaged recreational use will also protect riparian and streamside vegetation. I have also included standards and guidelines to promote and restore hardwoods habitats which are so important to many species and provide visual and ecological diversity.

CULTURAL HISTORY

This Decision will protect and consider the Significant Cultural History of Whychus Creek.

I have decided that existing direction adequately protects the cultural history of Whychus Creek. Although I have not added any new standards specific to Cultural History, the standards I am implementing to manage recreational use will have the added benefit of reducing impacts to several historic sites. The long human history of the area will be considered in future interpretive programs.

RECREATION

This Decision will protect and consider the Significant Recreation Resource of Whychus Creek.

The question of how best to protect the significant Recreation Resources of Whychus Creek has required very thoughtful consideration because what is unique about the creek is its undeveloped nature and relatively low use. Whychus Creek provides a place near a city where people can still easily find wildness, experience solitude, discover a new waterfall, stand by a huge Douglas fir old growth tree, or see a hawk. How do we prevent a place from being loved to death, over promoted, or over developed so the very thing that makes it unique is lost?

As more people come to Central Oregon and Sisters and find this wild place many first think of the desire for more trails, more access, and more events to make it easier to discover Whychus Creek's beauty. It is our responsibility as the keepers of Whychus Creek for the present and future to draw lines and limits and hold on to its wildness which once lost is very difficult to reclaim. I need your help in the stewardship of this wild and scenic river and its future survival.

I did not select the No Action Alternative 1 because I do not believe the existing direction sets a clear vision for the future recreational experience on Whychus Creek. The existing Recreation Opportunity Spectrum rating for the Scenic Section of the river was "Roaded Natural" which describes a setting where roads parallel and are seen from the river, where you expect to see and hear other people and where moderate development is evident. I do not think this accurately described the current or desired condition of Whychus Creek and I am changing the desired character toward a more accurate and conservation oriented portrayal of "Semi Primitive Motorized". The existing direction also did not create a clear strategy for how to help the creek keep its character and show how protecting the Outstandingly Remarkable Values ultimately creates a valuable and unique recreational experience for people. The carrying capacity for the creek is defined by the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum characterizations I have selected for each river segment with appropriate levels of access, remoteness, naturalness, facilities and site management, social encounters, and visitor management.

Throughout the planning process people have been remarkably consistent in wanting to see more management of Whychus Creek because of the damage caused by an unmanaged proliferation of user trails, illegal trails, some damaging use and vandalism. Only one person has responded that they prefer no change in management and that comment was related to a concern about loss of access and longer walks to trailheads. However, there is still a spectrum of opinions on what should be done ranging from managing the creek for minimal public access to increasing access for a variety of user groups. I have carefully weighed people's concerns, the advice of the Interdisciplinary Team, and reviewed the effects analysis. I believe the actions I have taken in the Management Plan are protective of the areas Outstandingly Remarkable Values while providing managed access for the public's enjoyment and responsible use of the area.

My objectives are to maintain a "primitive" environment in the Wild section where people can experience the highest sense of remoteness, quiet, self-reliance, and isolation. The Wild section will be an unmodified natural environment where few on-site visitor controls are apparent, in keeping with

Wilderness.

In the Scenic Section I intend to maintain a “semi-primitive” environment where people can expect to see few other visitors, have a moderate degree of challenge and risk moving through the landscape and a largely undisturbed natural setting. I intend to institute a gradient of management controls so areas closer to the City of Sisters would provide some facilities to manage use and higher reaches closer to the wilderness show little evidence of development. The plan will allow some limited improvements (parking areas, system trails, restrooms) close to the City of Sisters to manage access and use, protect river values, and provide interpretive and stewardship information that will educate users about the Wild and Scenic River, the philosophy of management, and low impact practices.

I have discussed many of the actions I am taking in the Management Plan in previous sections but would like to highlight several areas where I have modified my decision in response to public comments and further Interdisciplinary Planning Team discussions:

Events: There have been recreational and social events under special use permit (athletic running competitions and fun runs) that have entered the river corridor once or twice a year. Some of these have used user created trails or installed temporary crossings over the creek with boards. Several people who have participated in the planning process were concerned with how the Management Plan would limit the ability of such events to use or pass through the area. We also received a comment that no events should be allowed to pass through the corridor except on the Forest Road 1514 bridge.

Although I appreciate that some people enjoy the event experience, the Interdisciplinary Team and Recreation Specialists are concerned about how even short bursts of large numbers of people can affect the corridor and cumulatively draw more use and how requests for recreational and social events may increase in the future. Events which bring large numbers of people into the corridor affect the wild setting and sense of self discovery that is the unique feature of the Whychus Creek recreational experience that we are trying to perpetuate for present and future generations.

One person brought to my attention that the Environmental Assessment neglected to discuss there are two system trails in the Scenic corridor, the Metolius Windigo Trail and the Three Creeks Road/ Metolius Windigo Connector Trail which was approved by the Forest Service in 2004 as part of the Sisters Community Trails System.

In response to people on both sides of this issue and the information provided regarding the Three Creeks Road- Metolius Windigo Trail, I have decided to allow limited access to the corridor to allow events to pass through a small section of the Wild and Scenic River Corridor on the Three Creeks Road/ Metolius Windigo Connector Trail because it is on a road, on a rim above the creek, not visible from the creek, and provides a way for events to avoid crossing Whychus Creek on the Metolius Windigo Trail. The other permitted crossing for such events in the corridor is the Forest Road 1514 bridge.

Closing the Metolius Windigo trail to large group events which require permits reduces impacts to the creek’s Outstandingly Remarkable Values. It also eliminates the need for temporary bridges and helps limit use within the corridor to maintain the desired social setting and remote character of the creek for the general public. I believe my decision protects the creek’s Outstandingly Remarkable Values while providing a reasonable alternative for events. I feel there are other areas in the District where these “displaced” permitted activities could occur, even changing locations on an annual basis.

After consultation with the project team leader and Interdisciplinary Team members, I have determined that the original conclusions stated in the EA are still correct and the effect determinations for fish and wildlife species, and other resources remains unchanged. The change in event access is within the range of effects that was described in Alternative 2. Therefore, no additional effects analysis is required.

Bridges: The idea of small trail bridges over the creek in the “Scenic” river corridor to provide easier access for crossing was raised during the scoping period and there has been some interest in reconstructing a snowmobile bridge that deteriorated and was removed several years ago. Some concerns were expressed about language in the Environmental Assessment which seemed to indicate that we would be allowing bridges to be built over the creek and felt it was inconsistent with our stated vision.

I agree that facilities such as bridges are not generally consistent with the semi-primitive motorized recreational setting in a “Scenic” River corridor, where resource protection is the primary goal and not promoting significant increases in access. By not providing bridges, the desired conditions of low use levels and natural setting can be better maintained. No new bridges are currently proposed and I do not currently foresee a need for more bridges.

There is one bridge in the Wild and Scenic River corridor now, the Forest Road 1514 bridge. I am allowing for that bridge to be used, maintained, and replaced (if ever necessary). If it is ever necessary to consider a bridge elsewhere for resource protection of the creek’s Outstandingly Remarkable Values, any such proposal would require additional site specific NEPA analysis and have to demonstrate it protects or enhances the creek’s Outstandingly Remarkable Values, is consistent with the Wild and Scenic River Acts Section 7 requirements for activities in the bed or banks of a Wild and Scenic River, meets Aquatic Conservation Strategy or INFISH requirements, as well as multiple other requirements that protect the creek and its natural resources. I have asked the Interdisciplinary Team to clarify this point in the Management Plan but leave an option for bridges related to resource protection open for the future.

MONITORING

This Decision will establish a Monitoring Program to detect changes to the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of Whychus Creek.

A Monitoring Program is an important part of my decision. By using the Limits of Acceptable Change concept to evaluate progress toward or achievement of the desired future condition, rather than on how much use an area can tolerate, I believe we can detect changes that could be harmful to Whychus Creek’s Outstandingly Remarkable Values before they become a serious problem. This is an area I would like to engage community stewards and volunteers in order to increase our effectiveness.

This Decision will Protect and Enhance the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of Whychus Creek.

With these changes, my decision will meet the purpose and need of providing the basis to finalize a Comprehensive River Management Plan and boundary for Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River that protects the Outstandingly Remarkable Values for which it was designated. I believe my decision looks to the future as well as the present and thinks about sustainability. I am implementing these actions to set the management of this Wild and Scenic River on the right path but we cannot manage this river alone. I am anticipating an unprecedented level of assistance from community stewardship, and the continued involvement of visitors and partners who understand the value of this unique wild place.

This Decision will not adversely affect Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Wildlife, Fish or Botanical Species.

I have considered the effect of my decision on Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species (TES) related to the Endangered Species Act. Based on the analysis presented in the EA (EA, pgs 91-96, 109-116, 117-124) and the project record, I have concluded that Alternative 2 as modified will not have an adverse impact to wildlife, fish, or plant species of concern, including Management Indicator Species (MIS) outlined in the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

My decision is consistent with the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and the Project Design Criteria Compliance Checklist for the Joint Aquatic and Terrestrial Programmatic Biological Assessment for Federal Lands in the Deschutes Basin.

Because the Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Management Plan is entirely programmatic no impacts will occur to habitat for Threatened, Endangered, or Sensitive species. See further discussion on what “programmatic” means below. Any ground disturbing activity will require additional site specific analysis and Biological Assessments and Evaluations to be completed

Summary of Effects to Wildlife and Plant Species

Species	Status	Effect
Northern Spotted Owl	Federally Threatened	No Effect
Whiteheaded Woodpecker	Region Six Sensitive Species	No Impact
Lewis’ Woodpecker	Region Six Sensitive Species	No Impact
Northern Waterthrush	Region Six Sensitive Species	No Impact
Pacific Fisher	Region Six Sensitive Species	No Impact
Johnsons Hairstreak	Region Six Sensitive Species	No Impact
Crater Lake Tigh Coil	Region Six Sensitive Species	No Impact
Columbia River Bull Trout	Federally Threatened	No Effect
Interior Redband Trout	Region Six Sensitive Species	No Impact
Mid-Columbia Steelhead Trout	Federally Threatened	No Effect
Chinook Salmon	Magnuson-Stevens Act designated Essential Fish Habitat	No Adverse Effect
Peck’s penstemon	Region Six Sensitive Species	No Impact

Source: The Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Management Plan EA (2010), Biological Evaluation for Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Wildlife Species (April 13, 2010) Aquatic Biological Evaluation for Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species (April 15, 2010), and the Biological Evaluation for Sensitive Plant Species and Invasive Plant Species (April 15, 2010). Region 6 Sensitive Species List 2008.

This Decision Complies with the Forest Plan and other related Planning Documents

My decision meets the requirements of the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended by other applicable laws and regulations (EA, pgs 9-19). The Management Plan is entirely programmatic in nature meaning that it defines desired future conditions, and provides management direction, standards and guidelines, and monitoring actions needed to achieve the desired future condition but any future actions or projects require site specific analysis and appropriate National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation.

Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, Alternative 2 (as discussed above), I considered one other alternative in detail (Alternative 1) which would continue with existing management direction and a default ¼ mile boundary. A comparison of Alternative 1 and 2 can be found in the EA on pages 60-65.

I also considered two additional alternatives but did not direct the Interdisciplinary Team to analyze them in detail. The third and fourth alternative and my reasoning are discussed below.

Alternative 1 - No Action. (EA, pg 55). Under the No Action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. The corridor boundary would be located approximately ¼ mile from the banks of the creek. No additional standards would be implemented to accomplish the goals of protecting and enhancing the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River. The direction from the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended, including direction for Management Area 17 (Wild and Scenic Rivers) would remain unchanged. See discussion in the Environmental Assessment (EA, pgs 9-19) to see other plans that apply to the area and analysis incorporated by reference.

I did not choose this alternative because it does not fully protect and enhance the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of Whychus Creek. Many of the actions I have discussed in detail in this decision reflect where gaps are found in existing direction that I believe must be addressed in our future management.

A More Recreation Oriented Alternative A third alternative was proposed during scoping with the idea of allowing more trail development along both sides of the entire creek to the wilderness for hikers and mountain bikes (EA, pg 59). This alternative was considered but not analyzed in detail in the Environmental Assessment because of its impacts to riparian areas, wildlife refugia, the desired primitive and semi-primitive character, the desired carrying capacity and the desired social setting (which would be affected by more use and seeing people on both sides of the creek). I emphasize that Recreation was not rated as an Outstandingly Remarkable Value and protection and enhancement of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values must take precedence.

A More Conservation Oriented Alternative A fourth alternative was proposed during the 30 -day public comment period that involved a more conservation oriented approach (Decision Notice Response to Public Comments, Appendix 2, pg 7) . I have given this comment serious thought and looked back on the planning history that led us to the proposed action.

When the Interdisciplinary Team completed the Whychus Creek Resource Assessment in 2007, they recognized the Regional and National significance of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of geology, hydrology, fisheries, scenery, prehistory and traditional use by Native Americans. Recreation was not identified as an Outstandingly Remarkable Value but it was recognized that recreation in the area was significant because it was a place where people can still explore and experience the excitement of discovery and self reliance closer to the Sisters community. The unique character of the recreation experience here is dependent on protecting the Outstandingly Remarkable River Values which create the wild setting. However promoting significantly more recreational use or developing more access would irretrievably alter this wild place and its recreation niche.

The Forest Service developed alternatives based on the issues raised by the Interdisciplinary Team, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, and the public. Although the Wild and Scenic Rivers act protects these rivers for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations and allows for public use and enjoyment, it was recognized that public use would need to be carefully managed and balanced with protection and enhancement of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values as the primary goal.

We recognized that the unique character of the recreation experience and the Outstandingly Remarkable Values were best protected by conserving the largely undisturbed natural environment with little evidence of human development, allowing limited use, having very few access points, and allowing only a few facilities primarily for resource protection, education, and access for public enjoyment and responsible use. These characteristics are defined by the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum classifications we have chosen (EA, pg 37) and are the method of defining the areas carrying capacity and desired recreation opportunities.

I believe the proposed action is a conservation alternative because its primary goal is the protection Outstandingly Remarkable River Values. I have directed the Interdisciplinary Team to state more clearly that any future development requires a primary purpose of resource conservation and protection of the Outstandingly Remarkable River Values.

Public Involvement

Public involvement in planning for Whychus Creek, its values, and future management began in 2003 during the Resource Assessment process. Contacts were made in 2003 through mailings, e-mails, presentations to the local Watershed Council, and through interpretive events associated with “Riverfest,” a week long celebration of river - related events sponsored by the Upper Deschutes Watershed Council. Events specific to Whychus Creek included the “Secrets of Whychus Creek” River walks and a “Charrette,” a brainstorming session to capture information and concerns. The advertising for the Riverfest events reached over 10,000 people through newspaper, radio, television, posters and mailings. Fifty- five people provided comments or participated in events in 2003. Issues pertinent to the Wild and Scenic River corridor included: detrimental impacts to riparian areas from dispersed camping and vehicles, maintaining vehicle access, promoting self discovery, minimizing recreational developments, protection of unroaded areas, the need for better trail locations to protect streambanks, reducing wildfire risk, and exploring educational and interpretive possibilities.

The Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Management Plan was listed in the Deschutes National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions on October 2007 (EA, pg 42). The project was presented to the public and other agencies for comment in a scoping letter on July 11, 2008. Nineteen people sent e-mails, letters or called. On July 29, 2008 a public field trip to the creek was attended by twenty three people who provided oral comments. Comments centered around the need to change user groups on the creek by making low impact recreational use easier and reducing damaging use. A strong interest in volunteer stewardship was heard and the need for more education. Concerns about protecting large trees, commercial logging, post-fire salvage logging, and poor forest health in higher elevation forests due to mountain pine beetles were also discussed (EA, pg 43).

In 2009, Whychus Creek and the Metolius River were chosen by the National Forest Foundation as a Treasured Landscapes, Unforgettable Experiences Conservation Campaign Site called “The Tale of Two Rivers”. The goals of this campaign are to revitalize and restore our National Forests and

strengthen community connections to public lands through stewardship. As part of the campaign in July 2009, in partnership with the Roundhouse Foundation, an art competition was held along Whychus Creek to develop images for a Fall “Friends of the Forest Day” Conservation Event. The winning images are also used in the Whychus Wild and Scenic River Plan and Environmental Assessment. Over one hundred people attended and volunteered along the creek, planting, removing garbage and graffiti, and removing fire rings.

The EA was made available to the public for a 30-day comment period when the legal notice was published in The Bulletin, the newspaper of record, on January 29, 2010. Comments were received from 20 people, all from Oregon. The comments received are addressed in detail in Appendix 2.

Government-to-government consultation with the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon occurred in the form of a letter describing the project area and proposed action as well as multiple numerous contacts with various branches of the Tribal government, Tribal Resource Specialists, and the Culture and Heritage Committee, a group of elders with special knowledge of both history and cultural aspects important to the Tribes. They provided comments by letter and in meetings. The river values identified by the Tribes as most important were:

Hydrology: Especially in regard to the headwaters that are glacially fed and the wet meadow systems.

Fisheries: Especially with respect to downstream effects on habitat and the reintroduction of steelhead and spring chinook.

Wildlife: Especially with respect to migratory corridors for mule deer in transition to summer range and spotted frogs within lake sites. (*Note: there are no known spotted frog sites on Sisters Ranger District*)

Cultural Resources and History: Especially with respect to known cultural sites.

The Culture and Heritage Committee of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs also provided information. They are a group of elders with special knowledge of both history and cultural aspects important to the Tribes. They felt Whychus Creek needed protection. The elders identified that one historic name for the creek meant “The Way to the Mountain” because people traveled along the creek as a route to higher elevations to pick berries, gather herbs, hunt deer, and pick pine nuts. They said Whychus Creek Meadow, a wet meadow site was important to protect. They were concerned about development of recreational facilities and felt that the creek should not be promoted because they feared additional people would mean damage to the creek. Additional consultation occurred with Tribal Resource Specialists in 2009 regarding Whychus House Cave and its future management.

There has been a lot of work to introduce people to the issues we face in managing this little known Wild and Scenic River and listen to people’s concerns. Consequently, I have decided to modify Alternative 2 to address comments raised during the public review of the environmental analysis. The modifications I have discussed in this decision are responsive to concerns raised by some members of the public concerning how to manage the area to protect the Outstandingly Remarkable Values and allow public use and enjoyment. The Management Plan and my decision as discussed in this document were created to address particular concerns where possible while not compromising the protection and enhancement of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the environmental effects described in the Environmental Assessment, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base this finding on the following:

Context: I have considered the environmental effects described in the Environmental Assessment in regards to the context of this decision. The setting for this decision is public land near Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River on the Sisters Ranger District on the Deschutes National Forest in Central Oregon. No other private or public lands are affected. This decision is likely to remain in effect until the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan is revised. The short, long term, and cumulative effects are documented in the Environmental Assessment (pg. 67—134). The scope of effects were found to be limited; that is, the new boundary and standards will cause an insignificant change from the effects documented in the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Forest Plan.

Intensity: I have considered the environmental effects described in the Environmental Assessment in regards to the intensity of impacts of this decision. This consideration includes:

1. Although the scope of the effects are insignificant, there could be relatively minor benefits and negative aspects to the environment. Potential benefits include: better protection and enhancement of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values (EA, pg 63- 65), a more easily enforced and locatable boundary (EA, pg 63), and improvements to people's experience related to a variety of recreational experiences and scenic and environmental quality (EA, pg 131). My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action. Potential minor negative effects to recreational access could be: reduced access to some areas where resource damage is occurring or where a lower level of use is desired to meet the primitive or semi-primitive setting (EA, pg 131).
2. There are no significant impacts on public health and safety. Public safety may improve as management controls are initiated which discourage vandalism and resource damage and as managed stable trails replace eroding and often steep user created trails in highly used areas.
3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the Wilderness, prime farm lands, or historic resources by the implementation of my decision (EA, pg 133). This decision provides the basis for protection of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of Whychus Wild and Scenic River (EA, pg 19).
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the project. Management actions to manage Wild and Scenic Rivers, such as those discussed, are done in other areas throughout this Forest and on many other National Forests.
5. We have considerable experience with the types of activities to be implemented. The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (EA, pages 67-132). The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because these types of projects are common in the region and do not lead to significant effects to the human environment. There are no significant effects associated with the project (EA, pgs 67-132).
7. The cumulative impacts are not significant (EA, pgs 67-132).

8. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (EA, pgs 103-108, 124-125). The action will not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources because heritage sites will be protected during future site specific planning. (EA, pgs 103-108, 124-125). Tribal consultation has occurred and supports protective measures proposed.

9. The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973 (EA, pgs 91-96, 109-116, 117-124). Consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service was not required.

10. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the analysis (EA, pgs 9-19). The action is consistent with the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan as amended by other applicable laws and plans (EA, pgs 9-19).

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

My decision to implement Alternative 2 is consistent with the intent of the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan's long term goals and objectives listed on pages 4-1 through 4-30 of that plan, as amended by other applicable laws and plans (EA, pgs 9-19). The project was designed in conformance with land and resource management plan standards and incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan guidelines for wildlife, plant, and fish habitat, scenery, cultural site protection, recreation management, and soil and water quality protection (EA, pgs 9-19), and the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (pgs 4-31 to 4-202).

Public Review Period and Objection Process

Amendments to Forest Plans that are documented in an environmental assessment are subject to objection under 36 CFR 219.32 (Federal Register Volume 74, No. 242, December 18, 2009, 67073). Any person may object to a proposed amendment prepared under 36 CFR 219. An objection must be filed within 30 days of publication of the legal notice in The Bulletin, the newspaper of record with the reviewing officer (the Regional Forester) and must contain:

- (1) The name, mailing address, and telephone number of the person filing the objection;
- (2) A specific statement of the basis for each objection; and
- (3) A description of the objector's participation in the planning process for the proposed amendment, including a copy of any relevant documents submitted during the planning process.

Within ten days after the close of the objection period, I will publish notice of all objections in The Bulletin. Objectors may request meetings with the Regional Forester and myself to discuss the objection, to narrow the issues, agree on facts, and explore opportunities for resolution. The Regional Forester must allow other interested persons to participate in such meetings. An interested person must file a request to participate in an objection within ten days after publication of the notice of objection as described above.

The Regional Forester must respond, in writing, to an objection within a reasonable period of time and may respond to all objections in one response. The Regional Forester's response regarding an objection is the final decision of the Department of Agriculture.

Objections must be submitted to the reviewing officer, Regional Forester, 333 SW First Avenue, Portland, OR 97204 or PO Box 3623, Portland, OR 97208-3623, phone (503) 808-2468, fax (503) 808-2339. The Regional Office is open from 8:00 am until 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday, excluding legal holidays. Electronic objections must be submitted to: appeals-pacificnorthwest-regional-office@fs.fed.us and be in the body of the email, or in Microsoft Word, Rich Text Format (rtf), or Portable Document Format (pdf). For electronically mailed objections, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of the objection, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

Amendment Implementation

This decision shall be implemented in accordance with Forest Service regulations contained in 36 CFR, Part 219.32(d). I, the Forest Supervisor, may not approve this proposed amendment until the reviewing officer (the Regional Forester) has responded to all objections. My decision as the responsible official approving an amendment or revision must be consistent with the reviewing officer's (the Regional Forester's) response to objections to the proposed amendment or revision.

Contact

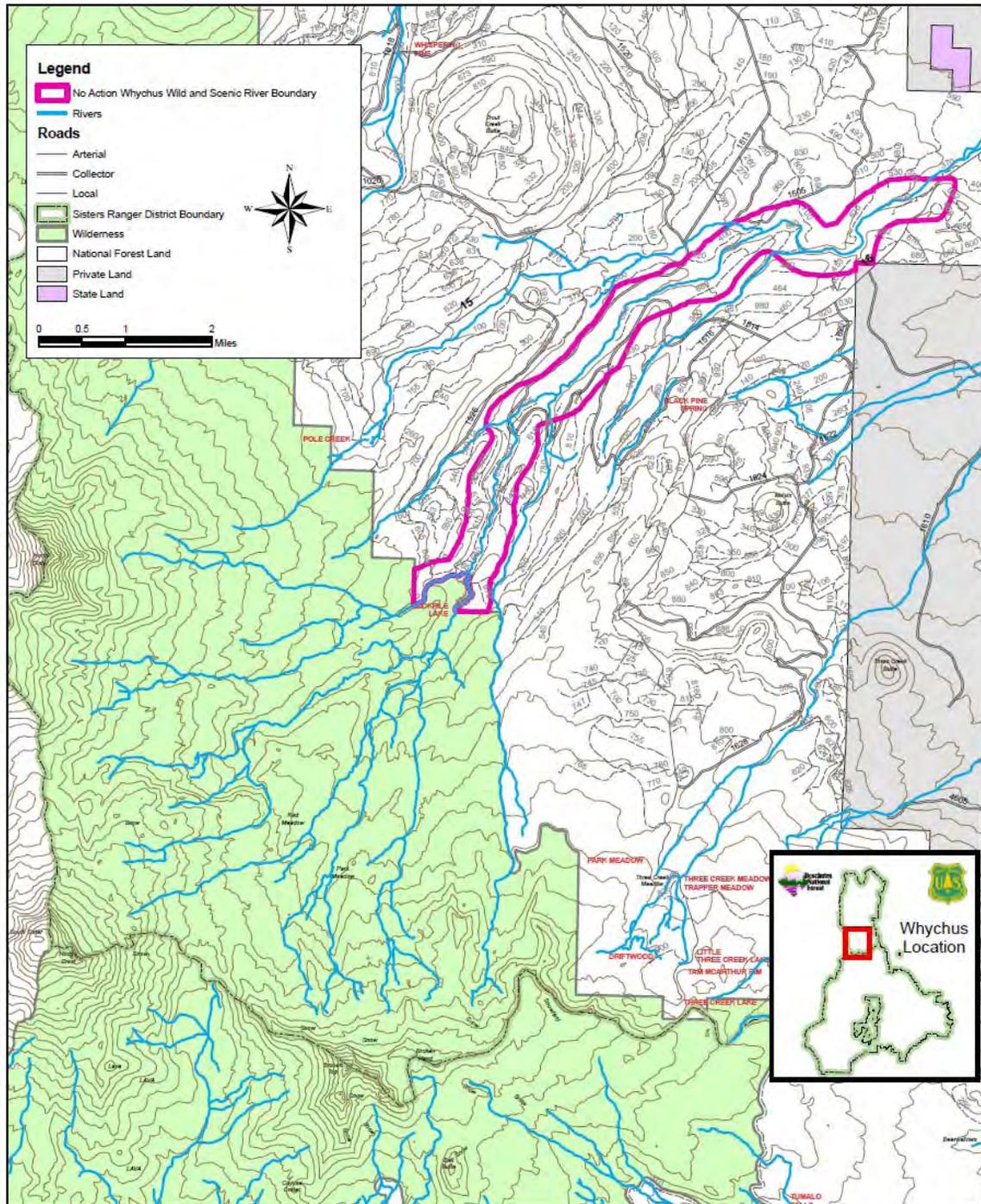
Additional information on the proposed management plan and forest plan amendment can be obtained from Michael Keown, Sisters Ranger District Environmental Coordinator, PO Box 249, Sisters, OR, 97759, (541) 549-7735; e-mail: mkeown@fs.fed.us.

For information on the objection process please contact Susan Skakel, Forest Environmental Coordinator, (541) 383-5563; e-mail: sskakel@fs.fed.us.

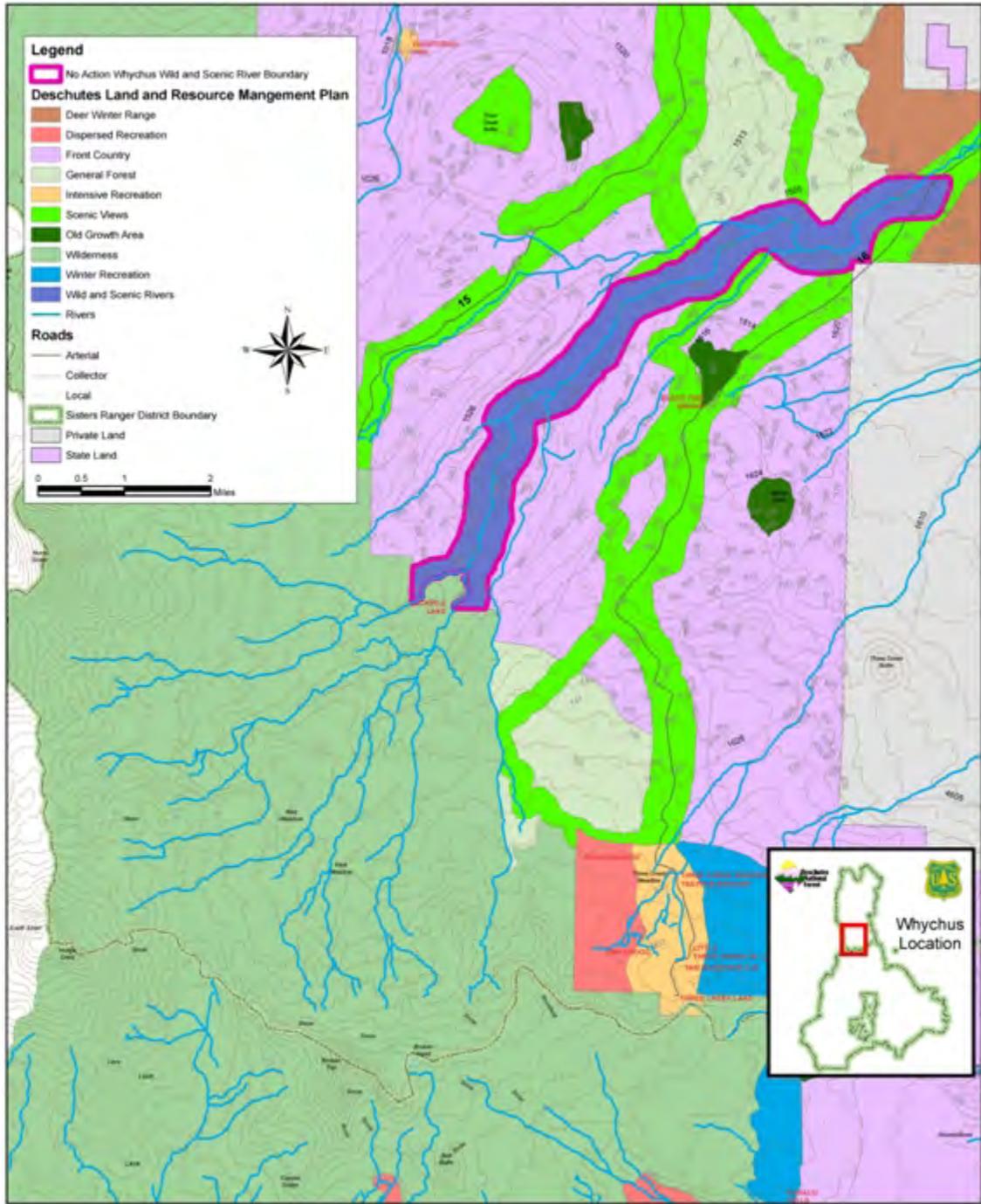
Upon completion of the 36 CFR 219.32 process, this decision will be signed by John Allen, Forest Supervisor, Deschutes National Forest.

Appendix 1- Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Management Plan Environmental Assessment MAPS

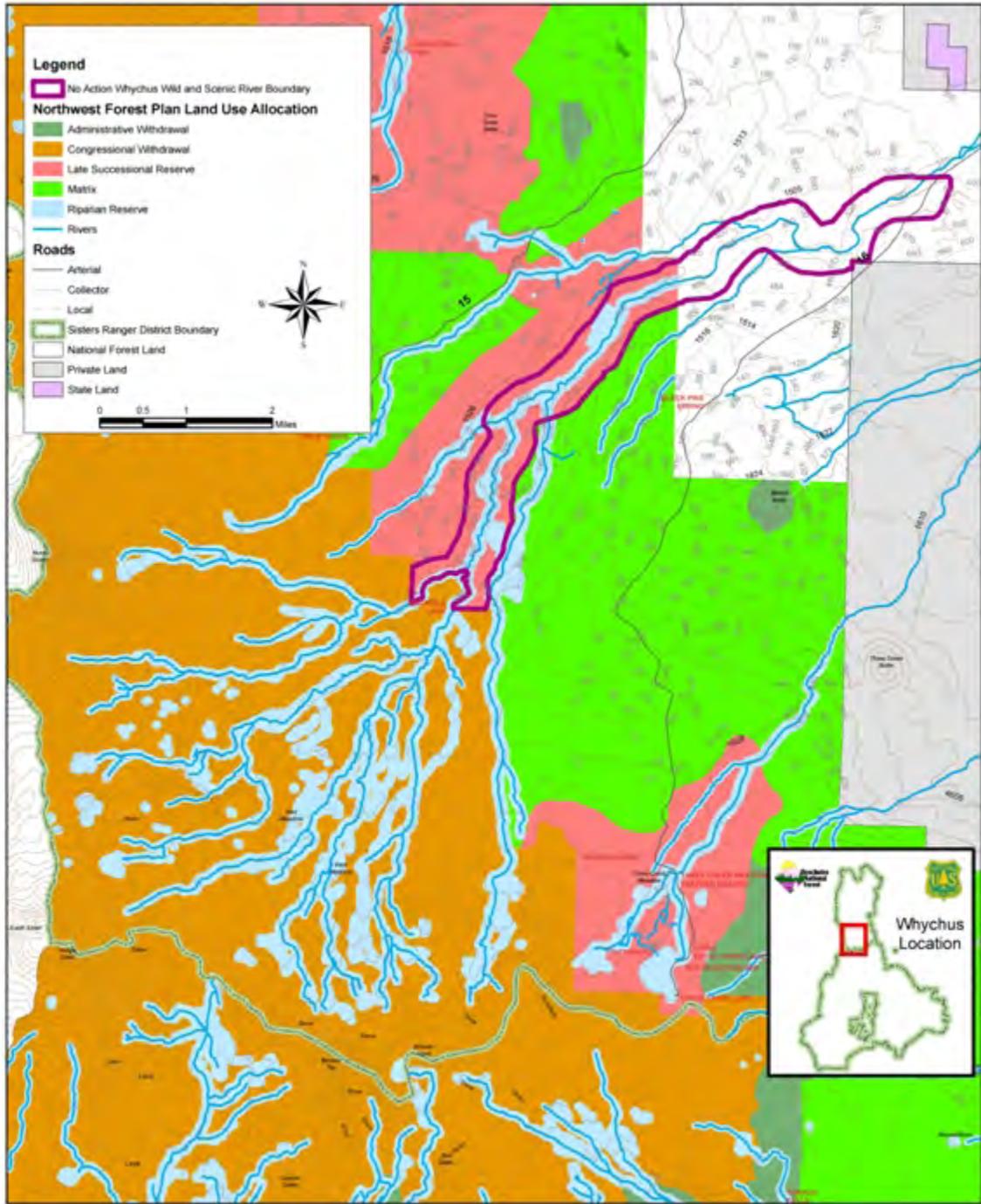
***Note -a map of the Final Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River corridor is found in the Decision Notice on Page 9.**



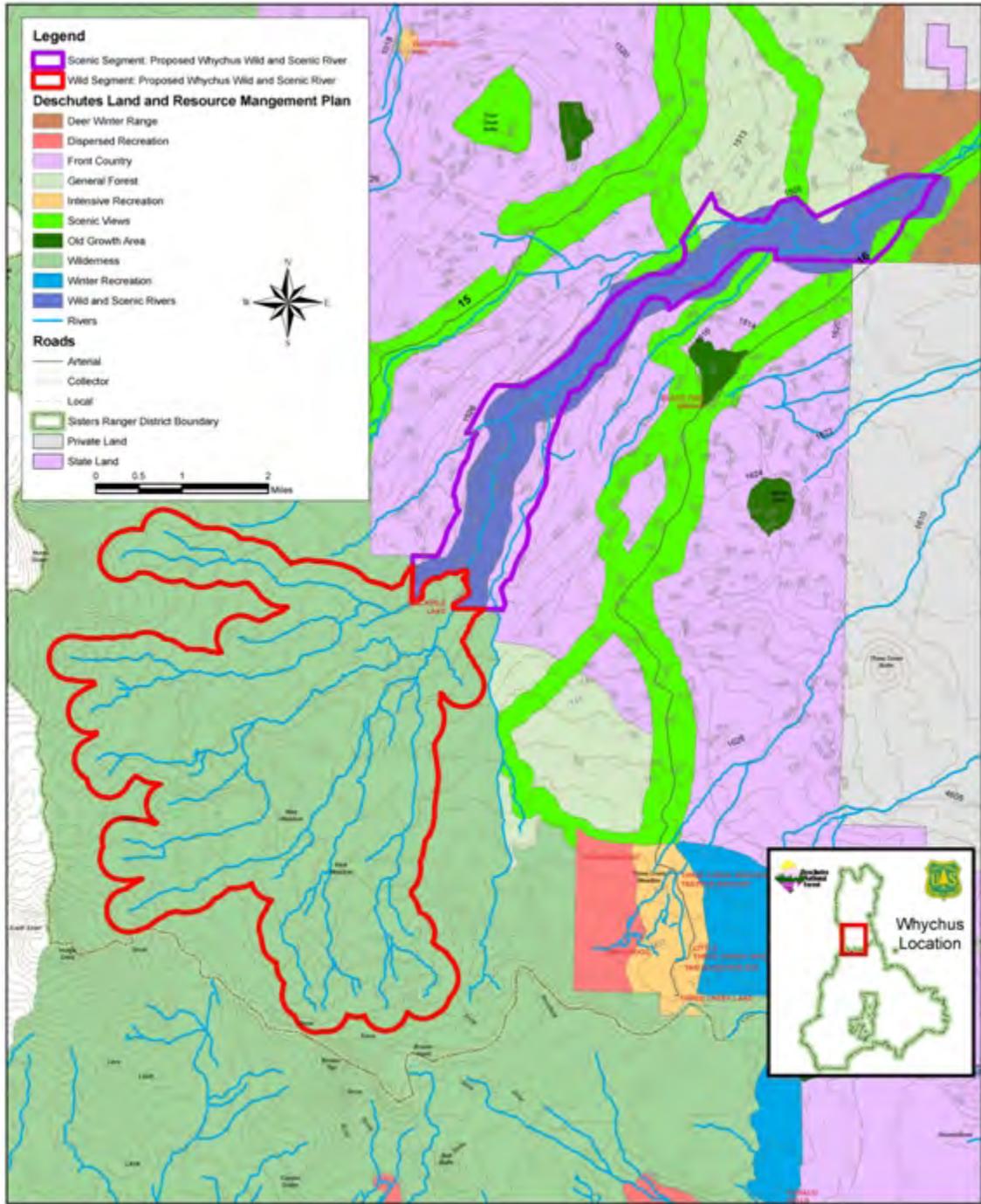
Alternative 1- No Action Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Boundary



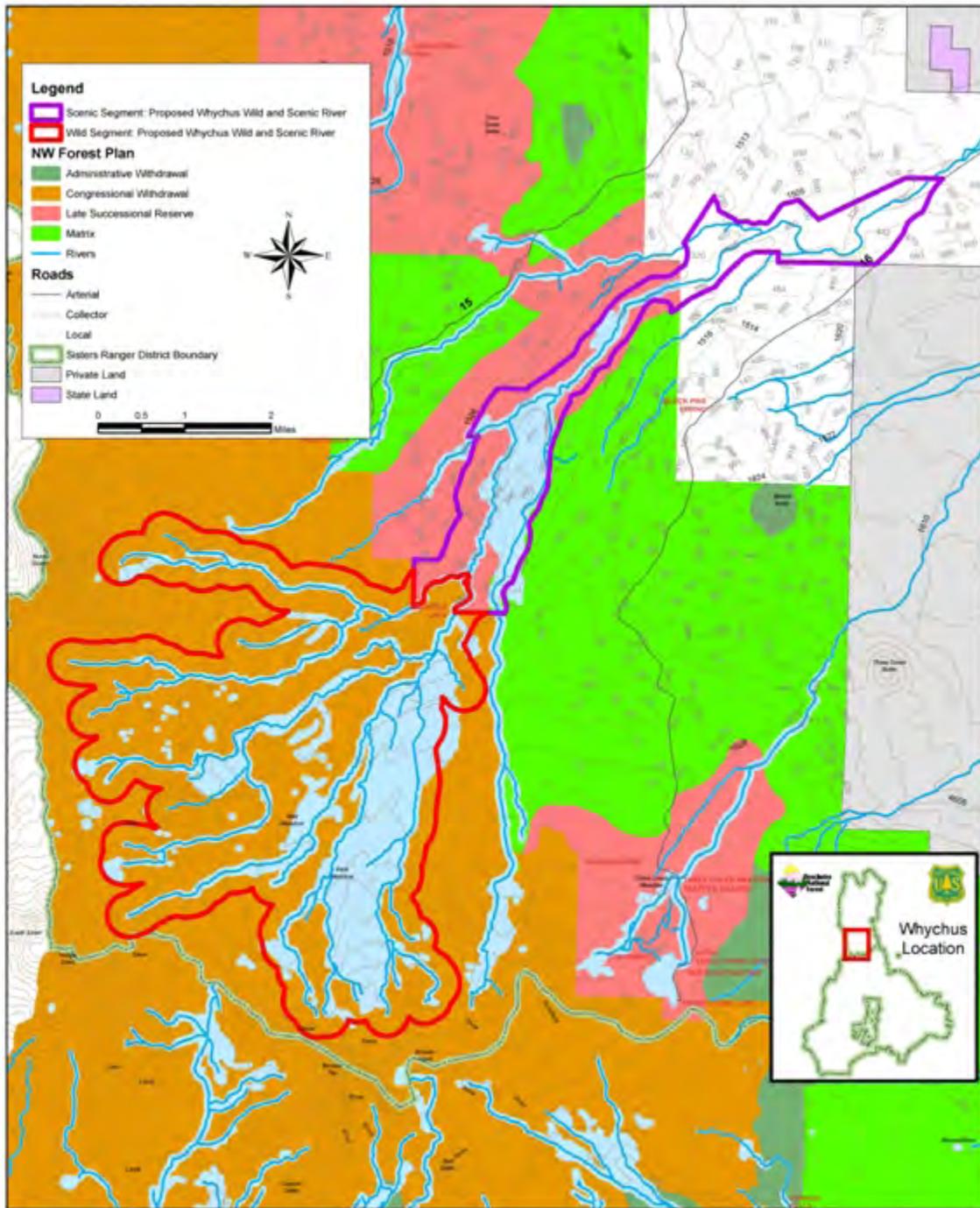
Alternative 1- No Action Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Boundary with Deschutes National Forest Plan Management Allocations



Alternative 1- No Action Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Boundary
with Northwest Forest Plan Management Allocations



Alternative 2- Final Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Boundary with Deschutes National Forest Plan Management Allocations



Alternative 2- Final Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Boundary with Northwest Forest Plan Management Allocations

APPENDIX 2



Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Management Plan Environmental Assessment

Response to Public Comments

Thank you for reviewing the Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Plan Environmental Assessment and taking the time to send us your comments. The following is a summary of the public comment we received at the Sisters Ranger District regarding the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project. Respondents are listed in Appendix 3.

The EA was made available for a 30-day comment period, on January 29, 2010 under the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (40 CFR 1500-1508) and Notice, Comment, and Appeal Procedures for National Forest System Projects and Activities (36 CFR 215). The comment period closed on March 1, 2010. One comment was received on March 11, after the comment period closed. These comments are considered here but the respondent does not have standing in the CFR 215 appeal process. Only individuals or organizations who submitted substantive comments during the comment period may appeal.

Content analysis is a method for analyzing public comment. This process strives to identify all the relevant issues people raise in their reviews. The intent is to represent the public's viewpoints and concerns as fairly as possible, and to present those concerns in such a way as to assist the decision maker and the Interdisciplinary Team in responding effectively. It is important to recognize that the consideration of public comment is not a vote counting process in which the outcome is determined by the majority opinion. Relative depth of feeling and interest among the public can serve to provide a general context for decision-making. However, it is the appropriateness, specificity, and factual accuracy of comment content that serves to provide the basis for modifications to planning documents and decisions. For ease of reference, comments are arranged by topic.

Comments were received from 20 people, all from Oregon. The majority of respondents (13) were from Sisters and 5 from elsewhere in Central Oregon (Bend, Redmond, Terrebonne, or Camp Sherman). One respondent was from Eugene and one from Portland.

Most concerns about the project centered on the recreation management, specifically how to manage recreation to protect the significant recreational value of the creek and how to protect the outstandingly remarkable values of the creek from recreational impacts. However, other concerns included: where the wild and scenic boundary was located, how to manage vegetation, and how wildlife refugia will be protected.

All page numbers cited refer to the Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Project Environmental Analysis (EA).

PLANNING AND RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES

Comment: *We are generally concerned about lack of specificity in this “programmatic” document. 16a*

Response: The Environmental Assessment is the basis for comparing general alternative management approaches and the Comprehensive River Management Plan is written and available at the time of the final decision so that it incorporates the decision makers response to public comments. The Comprehensive River Management Plan is entirely programmatic in nature meaning that it defines desired future conditions, and management and monitoring needs but any future actions or projects require site specific analysis and appropriate National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation.

Comment: *There are several areas where Forest Service has not been protective enough in its plans. Although it appears the Forest Service has recognized that a conservation orientation is appropriate due to the “Wild” and “Scenic” designations (as opposed to “Recreation” designation) more of a conservation approach is needed. (Gives examples: bridges, snowmobile bridge, travel management, trail development, events). There is not a reasonable range of alternatives -a more conservation oriented approach could have been used. More of a conservation approach is needed. There is not a reasonable range of alternatives where a more conservation approach could have been an alternative. 16b, 16k*

Response: When the Forest Service Interdisciplinary Team completed the Whychus Creek Resource Assessment in 2007, they recognized the Regional and National significance of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of geology, hydrology, fisheries, scenery, prehistory and traditional use by Native Americans. Recreation was not identified as an Outstandingly Remarkable Value but it was recognized that recreation in the area was significant because it was a place where people can still explore and experience the excitement of discovery and self reliance. The unique character of the recreation experience here is dependent on protecting the Outstandingly Remarkable River Values which create the wild setting. However promoting recreational use or developing more access would irretrievably alter this wild place and its recreation niche.

The Forest Service developed alternatives based on the issues raised by the Interdisciplinary Team, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, and the public. Although the Wild and Scenic Rivers act protects these rivers for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations and allows for public use and enjoyment it was recognized that public use would need to be carefully managed and protection and enhancement of Outstandingly Remarkable Values is the primary goal.

An alternative to provide more recreational access was considered but not analyzed in detail because we recognized that the unique character of the recreation experience and the Outstandingly Remarkable Values were best protected by conserving the largely undisturbed natural environment with little evidence of human development, allowing limited use, having very few access points, and allowing only minimal facilities primarily for resource protection, not to accommodate visitors nor provide for visitor comfort.

These characteristics are defined by the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (EA, page 37) and are the method of defining the area’s carrying capacity and desired recreation opportunities. The existing

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum rating for the Scenic Section of the river was “Roaded Natural” which describes a setting where roads parallel and are seen from the river, where you would expect to see and hear other people and where moderate development is evident. We did not think this accurately described the current or desired condition of Whychus Creek and the plan will change the desired character toward a more accurate and conservation oriented portrayal of “Semi Primitive Motorized”. As it stands, we believe the proposed action is a conservation alternative because its primary goal is the protection Outstandingly Remarkable River Values. We have clarified the examples given regarding bridges, snowmobile bridge, travel management, trail development, events to state more clearly that any future development requires a primary purpose of resource protection of the Outstandingly Remarkable River Values.

***Comment:** Would like to see you make the Northwest Forest Plan Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives and standards & guidelines a part of the river plan. 15e.*

Response: They are part of the river plan. The Northwest Forest Plan Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives and standards & guidelines are a part of the Record of Decision for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old Growth Forest Related Species within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl” (USFS and BLM 1994) which amended the the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (USDA 1990). The plans consistency with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives is discussed in the Environmental Assessment on pgs 88-90). We will be adhering to these guidelines in the future.

BOUNDARY: Where should the Wild and Scenic River Boundary be located?

***Comment:** Agrees with approach to define boundaries based on hydrologically connected areas.13a*

Response: We appreciate this comment because the Team used hydrologically connected areas to identify important areas to include in the boundary to protect the rivers Outstandingly Remarkable Hydrology.

***Comment:** Suggest drawing boundary to exclude the Three Creeks connector to the Metolius Windigo Trail. Primary concern is to continue to allow access with on a designated trail and existing road and allow events to pass through this area. 14b.*

Response: The Three Creeks Road-Metolius Windigo Connector Trail is part of the Sisters Community Trails system. It was erroneously left out of the existing condition in the Environmental Assessment and this has been corrected. The trail comes close to the creek and over a mile is within ¼ mile of the creek, although it is largely on an existing road and is out of sight of the corridor on a ridge above the creek. It allows people access to the Metolius Windigo trail and proceed west without having to cross Whychus Creek in the Wild and Scenic River area (although they have to ford the creek below the Wild and Scenic River Boundary near Rd 220 or cross on a bridge near the City of Sisters on Rd 4606.) This trail reduces the need for crossing of the creek in the Wild and Scenic River section.

People can continue to use the trail and there are no plans to restrict permitted uses here or close the trail unless monitoring shows an impact of the use to the rivers Outstandingly Remarkable Values. The question of events is discussed below, under “Recreation events”.

There is no compelling reason to move the boundary in this case because it was located where it is for easy administration for protection of the Outstandingly Remarkable River Values and recreation use can continue as long as it protects river values.

Comment: *The Wild and Scenic River boundary in the headwaters area leaves several awkward islands and peninsulas of land that are excluded from the river corridor. Why not simplify the boundary by making it conform to the watershed boundary. Will make future detailed survey of the boundaries much easier. 15g.*

Response: We agree. We have reexamined our acres per river miles calculations and found that overlapping boundaries around closely adjacent tributaries in the wilderness provide us with extra acres to include these islands and peninsulas. The modification in response to this comment is discussed in the Decision Notice.

Comment: *The Locator Map on page 2 is wrong (provided map). The correction is significant because the adjoining areas must be managed as wild (even if they are not in the wilderness). That should not be hard to do here where just a couple of old logging roads segments would need to be closed. 16f*

Response: The locator map on page 2 of the Environmental Assessment is meant to show locations in a general way and is not detailed. However, the location of the Wild section of Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River was designated by Congress as the wilderness boundary and we are unable to change this. The areas indicated are part of the “Scenic” section of the Wild and Scenic River. As discussed on page 44 and 45 of the Environmental Assessment these areas will be managed on the “Wild” end of the spectrum and road closures are a recommended management action in the river corridor to benefit hydrology, fisheries, and wildlife (pg. 33 and 46).

Comment: *The boundary should be expanded in three areas to include Snow Creek a tributary, a scenic ridge above road 1514, and a steep ridge above the river which provides some depth to the experience of the Wild and Scenic corridor above the river (provided map). Plenty of acres to work with since you don't need wide boundaries in the already protected wilderness. The 320 acres/ mile rule is not limited to each section of a river but applies to the entire designation of a wild and scenic river. 16h*

Response: In the case of adding a section of Snow Creek, we agree that including the wetlands associated with the tributary near the scenic river terminus would be beneficial protecting the Outstandingly Remarkable Hydrology of the creek. We have reexamined our acres per river miles calculations and found that overlapping boundaries around closely adjacent tributaries in the wilderness provide us with extra acres to expand the boundary in this section. We have received clarification and agree that these acres can be used in the Scenic River section. The modification in response to this comment is discussed in the Decision Notice.

In the case of adding sections to include ridges above the creek, we believe that the scenic quality of these ridges are adequately protected by existing management direction. In addition, any site specific activities that could have direct, indirect or cumulative effects on the Outstandingly Remarkable scenery or other Outstandingly Remarkable Values of Whychus Creek would have to be analyzed through site specific analysis and appropriate National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation.

HYDROLOGY: What should be done to manage and protect the Outstandingly Remarkable Hydrology of Whychus Creek?

Comment: Notes that based on physical hydrology, target flows for Whychus Creek may need to be 60 cfs in order for the creek to meet State temperature standards, rather than the target flows of 20-33cfs derived from ODFW instream rights. 9a,

Comment: Notes importance of Indian Ford Creek springs in providing a cool water refuge.9b

Comment: Provides new information references addressing dissolved oxygen and macroinvertebrate sampling on the creek. 9c

Comment: Clarify that warm water temperatures in the creek occur only below the irrigation dam. 9d

Comment: Correct author sequence on a reference. 9e

Comment These technical corrections from the Upper Deschutes Watershed Council provide new background information or clarifications and have been included in the Hydrology existing condition report. The reference was also corrected. They do not alter the effects analysis or conclusions.

Carver Lake:

Comment: I remember the community concerns of several years ago regarding Carver Glacier. The EA does not suggest any high degree of anxiety. Have the facts changed--or is there a more reasoned interpretation--about the hazard of the breaching of the moraine there?

Response: The latest assessment of the risk of a flood from Carver Lake is addressed on pg 78 of the Environmental Assessment. Scientists from USGS met with officials in Sisters on January 14, 2009 and addressed the issue. They explained that while examining the assumptions in the debris flow model used in the 1987 study in relation to worldwide examples from later studies it appears that the starting conditions of 1987 model are extreme and rare. The probability of Carver Lake breaching is unknown but is believed to be less than the 1 – 5% stated in the 1987 USGS report because most breaches occur within the first two decades after the lake was formed. (U.S. Forest Service 2009). However, the risk of yearly winter floods from rain-on- snow appears to be increasing and is higher risk than Carver Lake dam failure for homes built downstream within the floodplain (EA, pg 75).

FISHERIES: What should be done to manage and protect the Outstandingly Remarkable Fisheries of Whychus Creek?

Comment: Please add following statement to Desired Future Condition – “Coldwater springs that recharge the creek help keep water temperatures conducive to anadromous fish spawning. Creek flow volumes are sufficient at all times of year to sustain native fish populations.” 13g

Response: Our fisheries biologist concurred that this statement could be added and clarified it to read as follows: “Coldwater springs that recharge the creek help keep water temperatures suitable for successful anadromous fish spawning and rearing. Stream flow volumes are sufficient at all times of year to sustain native fish populations.” It will be added to the Desired Future Condition statement.

CULTURAL RESOURCES: What should be done to manage and protect the Outstandingly Remarkable Prehistory and Traditional use of Whychus Creek?

Comment: Has seen this protecting rock art and suggests plexiglass over rock walls can protect rock walls or cave walls. 10a

Response: We appreciate the suggestion. In our situation we are trying to keep rocks and cave walls looking natural to protect scenery and there is no rock art to protect. With increased monitoring and volunteer stewardship and reduced access to the problem are we hope to stop this vandalism.

WILDLIFE: What should be done to manage and protect the Significant Wildlife of Whychus Creek?

Comment: Would like the plan to state more specifics on how wildlife refugia will be identified and protected. 13h

Comment: Concerned with statement regarding inaccessible areas which currently have little use and provide high quality wildlife refugia will be retained.” We do not want to see protection limited to where refugia are shown to be “high quality”. We do not want to see recreation development. 16j

Response: The specifics of this standard can be viewed in the Management Plan in the Wildlife Section. It is recognized that wildness once lost is very difficult to reclaim. Common wildlife species are found throughout the corridor and although wildlife was not rated as an Outstandingly Remarkable Value, maintaining the wild character of the creek protects the Significant Wildlife Resource from unnecessary disturbance and helps maintains the desired settings and carrying capacity. The intent of these standards is to protect remote areas which have little human use from the imposition of a developed trail bringing more use into an area. Very little new trail development is planned because Recreation is not an Outstandingly Remarkable Value and the Significant Recreation Resource is based on the ability for self discovery. Some trail development may occur where heavy use is causing resource damage at the corridors lower terminus near the City of Sisters and these standards will help limit effects on wildlife.

ECOLOGY/VEGETATION: What should be done to manage and protect the Significant Ecology and Vegetation of Whychus Creek?

Salvage:

Comment: Add additional standards & guidelines which explicitly prohibit salvage logging and retain all large trees (>20" dbh) live or dead. 15d

Response: During the analysis we reviewed existing standards which would protect and enhance the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of geology, hydrology, fisheries, scenery, prehistory and traditional use. No new standards and guidelines were proposed for vegetation management (including salvage) except for improving deer habitat and restoration of hardwoods. This is because the corridor is within Late Successional Reserves and Riparian Reserves under the Northwest Forest Plan to be managed for old growth habitats and streamside habitats or in the Three Sisters Wilderness where allowed

vegetation management is minimal (trail clearing, wildfire management) or covered by the Eastside Screens and INFISH Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas which limit activities where old forests are less common than in the past or where activities could affect streams.

The Whychus Watershed Analysis and Late Successional Reserve Assessments have identified the lack of large trees and large snags and emphasize the need to protect existing large dead and live trees and grow more. Any vegetation management in the corridor must utilize these recommendations and protect or enhance river values. Large old trees, replacement trees, and abundant dead trees in riparian areas are part of the desired future condition. Existing direction is also protective of forest and riparian vegetation and requires a natural or near natural appearance to protect scenic quality and includes the natural scenery provided by fires. It is also required that dead or dying trees adjacent to the river be evaluated for their value to hydrology, fisheries, and wildlife as well as any safety and disease control risks they may pose.

Natural Processes:

***Comment:** Add additional standards & guidelines which allow natural disturbance processes to operate as much as possible (in recognition that natural processes are the primary mechanism for the creation and maintenance of ORVs over time). 15f*

Response: The discussion on Desired Future Condition of Vegetation on page 34 of the Environmental Assessment discusses the spectrum of fire regimes along the steep elevational gradient along the creek and the desired role of natural periodic disturbances in maintaining these forests and riparian communities. For this reason additional standards were proposed and are incorporated in the Management Plan to clarify direction to allow wildfires to burn where appropriate for ecological benefit.

In the “Wild” section of the river corridor which is within the Three Sisters Wilderness, Management Direction from the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan for wilderness still applies (Management Area 6) and natural processes are emphasized including the natural role of fire, insects and disease, the role of native species, and natural revegetation except in impacted areas where native species need to be reintroduced if resting the area does not reestablish vegetation.

In the “Scenic” section of the corridor natural processes are important as discussed above, and management options may also be needed to allow restoration projects that produce significant ecological gains to protect or enhance the Outstandingly Remarkable Values. These Outstandingly Remarkable Values are based on an objective evaluation of the condition of certain resources compared to regional and national examples - not on the mechanisms that may have helped define them.

Carbon Storage:

***Comment:** Make carbon storage an explicit goal of the plan. (The writer clarifies) carbon storage as a goal would need to be harmonized with other objectives, e.g. other efforts to protect and enhance ORVs. If carbon storage was the sole goal, then vegetation manipulation would likely be uncalled for, but if there is a real need for forest restoration I would not see carbon storage as a barrier. Would need an evaluation to determine whether the ecological gains from restoration would justify the carbon costs. Thus restoration projects that produce significant ecological gains while removing small*

trees (and small amounts of carbon) would be easier to justify, than projects that produce little of no ecological benefits while removing big trees (and large amounts of carbon).

And Mitchell et al even identify a small subset of cases when light thinning of dry P pine might provide carbon benefits, but again no one has crunched the numbers, and it depends a lot on assumptions/guesswork about future fire frequency severity, etc.) Also Mitchell et al (2009) show that although thinning can affect fire behavior, we can't predict where or when fire will occur and with what severity, so thinning must be widespread in order to affect random fire events, thus efforts to control fire will end up removing far more carbon by logging than will be saved by reducing fire effects. Adding carbon storage as a goal in the WSR Plan might slightly shape future restoration efforts and help distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate restoration activities. If thinning projects get proposed, then the District would get the fun job of doing this cutting edge analysis comparing ecological benefits and carbon consequences ;-) 15a

Response: We recognize that carbon and sequestration are important issues both nationally and regionally. Currently, Forest Service national policy and guidance for managing carbon and sequestration does not exist. Neither are the tools for estimating carbon or sequestration fully developed at this time. However, since retaining and growing more large trees is a goal in this watershed as discussed above, more stored carbon is an outcome. Any vegetation management in the corridor would have to be directly tied to protecting and enhancing the Outstandingly Remarkable Values.

Wildfire:

Comment: Supportive on: ...protecting river values during and after wildfire. 15b

Response: Protecting the area after wildfire is a primary concern of the Forest Service as well. In the event of a wildfire the responsible official can order assistance from a Burned Area Emergency Rehab Team to insure that any watershed issues are addressed that could affect the water quality, fish habitat, or allow invasive plants to spread. Additional standards that clarify wildfire suppression guidelines to protect river values and allow wildfires to burn where appropriate for ecological benefit were developed for the Management Plan. Late Successional Reserve guidelines also provide guidance in the event salvage is considered.

Comment: You do discuss wildfire, but did not get a sense of urgency in those sections. Our experience the past decade, plus the facts about the density and nature of the forest cover along Whychus Creek, would suggest that wildfire poses a significant and immediate threat to the integrity of the wild and scenic river area. 20d

Response: The Management Plan incorporates existing direction and recommendations from the Whychus Watershed Analysis (USFS 1998 and 2009) and the Whychus Late Successional Reserve Assessment (USFS 2001). These documents discuss in detail the changes to forest vegetation from fire suppression and past management and the risks of wildfire. They provide guidance for forest restoration and risk reduction incorporated into this plan by reference so we did not repeat this information. Overall management direction of the Northwest Forest Plan, and the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, including the Eastside Screens also provide guidance to reduce fuel loadings to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire.

RECREATION and SPECIAL USES: What should be done to manage and protect the Significant Recreation Value of Whychus Creek?

General Recreation Management:

Comment: Agrees with approach for recreation management. Appreciates focus on fish habitat and riparian protection. No action not acceptable- need to change what's happening now. 3a.

Comment: Agrees with approach if it will protect the area from vandalism and destructive behavior. Has question about what will happen outside the corridor will someone be able to patrol it? 8a.

Comment: Agrees that changes and upgrades suggested are needed. 10b.

Comment: Agree with needs statement on recreation management, graduated management controls, prohibiting water motorized uses, rehabing unneeded roads, establishing clear trail network. 13b

Comment: Supportive on: Leave no trace rock climbing, prevent wood manipulation for boating, reduce road densities and encourage rehabilitation of closed roads, ... design and build a trail system that protects river values, limit commercial and non-commercial events and special uses that may impair ORVs, 15b

Response: We appreciate these comments in support of the change in management outlined by the Proposed Action, Alternative 2. As to the question posed on patrolling outside the corridor, the area is patrolled by Field Rangers, Law Enforcement Officers, Forest Service employees, and volunteers at varying levels of intensity.

Comment: Emphasize again- this is not a recreation river. New trails, group events, campgrounds, special mountain bike or trail runs are not appropriate. 16i

Response: We agree that Whychus was designated as a “Wild” River and a “Scenic” River and not a “Recreation” River. Recreation was not identified as an Outstandingly Remarkable Value but it was recognized that recreation in the area was significant because it was a place where people can still explore and experience the excitement of discovery and self reliance. The unique character of the recreation experience here is dependent on protecting the Outstandingly Remarkable River Values which create the wild setting. We recognize that promoting recreational use or developing more access could irretrievably alter this wild place and its unique recreation niche.

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act protects these rivers for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations and allows for public use and enjoyment as long as the Outstandingly Remarkable Values can be protected or enhanced. A few new trails may be needed to protect the Outstandingly Remarkable values in area near the City of Sisters where high use is causing multiple user trails in unsustainable locations. The Management Plan provides direction on how to manage requests for events in the corridor to prevent impacts on the desired primitive and semi-primitive setting. No campgrounds are proposed. The Decision Notice clarifies these points in response to this comment.

Comment: Have seen vandalism and damage in their roles as volunteer River stewards on Whychus. With increased growth this will only increase. Trails should be constructed rather than multiple mishmash of user trails. Block unnecessary roads to prevent unauthorized use. Respect for Native American sites needs to be maintained. 17a.

Response: We agree that vandalism and damage have been increasing and believe that by implementing the proposed management actions in the Management Plan conditions will improve. Future site specific analysis will determine where user trails will be rehabilitated and whether a trail is appropriate. Road closures are recommended because road densities in the corridor exceed Forest plan recommendations and would also be looked at by future site specific analysis. A closure to activities such as climbing, camping and campfires at Whychus House Cave is proposed to protect this cultural site and more regular monitoring of other cultural sites and access points will improve their security. Thank you for your stewardship of the creek as volunteers.

Access:

Comment: It makes sense to have more access downstream and aim for smaller groups and more primitive access upstream. 3b

Comment: Agrees with approach of limiting access near wilderness and restoring areas downstream. Area deserves and needs protection. 7a

Response: We appreciate these comments which agree with the approach we have outlined.

Comment: Urges closure of user roads and trails to reduce vandalism.4a

Response: Road closures are recommended in the Management Plan because road densities in the corridor exceed Forest Plan recommendations and they will be looked at in detail by future site specific analysis.

Comment: Dismayed at changes at Park Meadow trailhead increasing distance to walk. Feels USFS is intent on limiting recreation uses and accessibility. Likes hiking and is not happy about changes he sees. 6a

Response: We appreciate the dilemma that to protect resources may require changes in ease of traditional access points and we are regret that the writer is unhappy. Park Meadow is outside the river corridor, and outside the scope of this project, however similar actions may be needed in the future in the creek corridor to protect the Outstandingly Remarkable Values or the desired experience. If such changes are proposed they will be looked at in detail by future site specific analysis and we will invite public comment to find the best solutions. There will continue to be many easily accessible hiking trails in the Sisters area.

Comment: Believes the Sisters Trails Three Creeks Road- Metolius/Windigo trail should be “exempt” from the plan where it comes within the boundaries. By this he means it would remain open to vehicles, horses, etc. 14a

Response: People can continue to use this trail as currently allowed and there are no plans to restrict permitted uses here or close the trail unless monitoring shows an impact of the use to the rivers Outstandingly Remarkable Values. However there is no compelling reason to make the trail “exempt” from the plan. It is very close to the creek in some areas and its use needs to protect or enhance the creek’s Outstandingly Remarkable Values.

Trails:

Comment: *Trails should be limited to existing roads which will be closed and where there is otherwise damage being done to the protected resource (such as around the gauging station). The guidelines on pg 53 are too loose. 16g*

Response: The discussion in page 53 of the EA is a general response outlining how the issue was addressed and not meant to serve as guidelines. More detailed guidelines and standards are included in the Management Plan. We agree that any new trails should be limited to existing roads (which may be closed) and where there is damage being done to the protected resource (such as around the gauging station).

Bridges:

Comment: *Do not think it is appropriate to provide bridges across river for recreation, including foot, horse, mountain bike or RV. This is a “scenic” and “wild” river- not a “recreation” river. There is no need, contrary to statement on pg 52. One can cross on downed logs or wade. Such natural crossing are what you should find on a “wild” or “scenic river” 16c*

Comment: *Inappropriate to build to build a new snowmobile bridge. They can cross on Road 1514 and the elevation difference is not significant enough to warrant a new bridge. Also inappropriate along this scenic section and too close to wild section. Motorized activities should not be encouraged so near the wilderness... see your discussion of “gradient” of management and follow it. At the time of the act there was no lawful bridge there. Just because a later one with some NEPA replaced this one is irrelevant to this process.16d*

Response: We agree that facilities that are consistent with the semi-primitive motorized recreational setting in a “Scenic” River corridor do not include developments to accommodate visitor comfort or provide ease of access like bridges. By not providing bridges it also helps maintain low use and the natural setting which are a desired condition. No bridges are proposed.

However, in the future it may be necessary to replace the Rd 1514 bridge, which is the only bridge crossing in the corridor, in the event of a winter flood washout or flood from a Carver Lake dam breach or consider a bridge elsewhere for resource protection of the creek’s Outstandingly Remarkable Values. Any such proposal would require site specific NEPA analysis and have to demonstrate it protects or enhances the creeks Outstandingly Remarkable Values, is consistent with the Wild and Scenic River Acts Section 7 requirements for activities in the bed or banks of a Wild and Scenic River, meets Aquatic Conservation Strategy or INFISH requirements, as well as multiple other requirements that protect the creek and its natural resources.

Events:

Comment: *Also would like option of keeping events on the Three Creek/Metolius Windigo Connector trail and not limiting them because it comes within the WSR boundary. You can’t see the trail from the river is on a rim above. Is in favor of closing roads but this is a well used gravel and dirt road (Shows as Rd 1505-700 and connects to Rd 520). There is probably a little over a mile within WSR boundary.14a*

Comment: *Believes events, including those type not generally allowed inside the river corridor, should be allowed to cross the Wild and Scenic Corridor on the Metolius Windigo trail as well as the Rd 1514 bridge. Would like to be involved in any evaluation of effects of events on the wild character of the creek and social setting. 14d*

Comment: *Emphasize again- this is not a recreation river. New trails, group events, campgrounds, special mountain bike or trail runs are not appropriate. 16i*

Comment: *Suggests allowing running events on established trails on the lower section of the Wild and Scenic area. Running on trails is a low environmental impact sport which does not cause resource damage to the area, and allows visitors to enjoy the scenic beauty of the creek. 18a*

Response: Before the Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Resource Assessment was completed and before potential effects could be fully evaluated, some events drawing hundreds of people have been allowed in the creek corridor. Some of these events allowed runners to use steep, eroding user made trails off Peterson Ridge or crossed Whychus Creek on temporary bridges made of boards. Although we appreciate people enjoyed this experience the Forest Service is concerned with how even short bursts of large numbers of people can affect the corridor and cumulatively draw more use. Large commercial and non-commercial events which require a special use permit and bring large numbers of people into the corridor affect the undeveloped setting and sense of self discovery that is the unique feature of the Whychus Creek recreational experience that we are trying to perpetuate for present and future generations.

The Decision maker has considered all of these comments and has decided to modify the plan to allow events to pass through a small section of the Wild and Scenic River Corridor on the Three Creeks Road- Metolius Windigo Trail because it is on a road, on a rim above the creek, not visible from the creek, and provides a way for events to avoid crossing Whychus Creek on the Metolius Windigo Trail. The other permitted crossing for events in the corridor is the Road 1514 bridge.

Closing the Metolius Windigo trail to commercial events or noncommercial events which require a permit helps reduce impacts to the Outstandingly Remarkable Values, eliminates the need for requests for temporary bridges, and helps limit use within the corridor. Limits on the size and frequency of such events is included in the Management Plan to help maintain the desired social setting and remote character of the creek for the general public.

Equestrian interests:

Comment: *Urges separation of horse and bike/hiking trails because of effects of horses on trail quality for hiker/bikers. 2a*

Response: There are two existing mixed use trails allowing hikers, mountain bikers, and equestrians in the corridor, the Three Creeks Road- Metolius/Windigo Connector (also called the South Whychus – Metolius/Windigo Connector). There have been few reported conflicts on these trails, probably due to light use. Most use is outside the river corridor on specialized trails discussed further below.

Comment: *Our organization has adopted the Metolius- Windigo Trail through the Wild and Scenic corridor. Want to ensure the existing permitted equestrian uses of the area are continued to be allowed. List includes: Metolius Windigo trail, including trail crossing at Whychus and Pole creeks,*

trail 4070 from Pole Creek trailhead to Park Meadow including wilderness crossings at Soap, North and South Forks of Whychus, West Fork of Park, Trail 4074 from Trail 4070 to Camp Lake including crossings at Soap Creek and North Fork of Whychus, access to trail from Three Creeks road to the Metolius Windigo. Interested in small trailer parking area south of river boundary near Rd 220 for horse trailer parking to access Metolius Windigo. Rd 220 not accessible to horse trailers. Interested in being included in future roads to trails discussions and helping with trail building. 12a,b

Response: We appreciate the leadership of the Central Oregon Chapter of the Oregon Equestrian Trails in adopting and maintaining this segment of the Metolius Windigo Trail. There are no proposed changes in equestrian access to any of the trails mentioned. The area mentioned on Road 220 is outside the scope of this project but we appreciate the information. We will continue to rely on help and information from your group in managing the Wild and Scenic River corridor.

Comment: *Take into consideration a trail or trails for horses as you design the plan. The Equestrian community is important to economy historically and today. 19a.*

Response: We appreciate the stewardship of the equestrian community who are long standing partners with the Forest Service in taking care of the National Forest. Central Oregon and the Sisters area provide a wealth of equestrian opportunities. Twelve trails in Sisters provide 37 miles of shared use opportunities for bikes, horses and hikers. The Metolius Windigo Trail is hundreds of miles long and a favorite of equestrians. There are hundreds of miles of dirt roads that can be ridden. Equestrians can continue to pass through the river corridor on existing designated routes and trails, or ride anywhere they like cross country. Trail opportunities are displayed on the Sisters Trails Alliance Website at: <http://www.sisterstrails.com>.

Deschutes National Forest Recreation Specialists have found that both horses and mountain bikes cause impacts to trails that increase soil erosion and require more maintenance. For this reason in this narrow riparian corridor the plan states that riverside trails (except the Metolius Windigo where it crosses Whychus Creek) would be limited to foot traffic and no new trails open to horses or bikes are planned next to the creek to protect river values. There may be opportunities for converting roads to trails on canyon rims if needed. We want people to enjoy the Wild and Scenic River but not every type of use is appropriate next to the creek. The primary goal of the management plan is to allow public use and enjoyment which protects or enhances the creeks Outstandingly Remarkable Values for present and future generations.

Mountain bike access:

Comment: *Sisters Country has a very active, enlightened, organized mountain biking community that contributes hundreds of hours per year to trail-building and maintenance. The management plan should address why or why not bike access is to be allowed on any existing or new trails. If bike use deemed incompatible due to impacts on the resource this should be stated. If biking is allowed, allowances need to be made to reduce potential conflicts between hiker, bikers, and horseback riders. 13f*

Response: We appreciate the stewardship and care of the mountain biking community who are active partners with the Forest Service in taking care of the National Forest. Central Oregon and the Sisters area provide a wealth of mountain bike opportunities. Twenty five miles of specialized mountain bike trails are located immediately adjacent to the Whychus Creek on the Peterson Ridge/Sisters Mountain

Bike Trails System. Another twelve trails in Sisters provide 37 miles of shared use opportunities for bikes, horses and hikers. There are another 38 miles of paved bike routes near Sisters and there are hundreds of miles of dirt roads that can be ridden. These opportunities are displayed on the Sisters Trails Alliance Website at: <http://www.sisterstrails.com>.

Deschutes National Forest Recreation Specialists have found that both horses and mountain bikes cause impacts to trails that increase soil erosion and require more maintenance. For this reason in this narrow riparian corridor the plan states that riverside trails (except the Metolius Windigo where it crosses Whychus Creek and the Three Creeks Road- Metolius/Windigo Connector) would be limited to foot traffic and no new trails open to horses or bikes are planned next to the creek to protect river values. Mountain bikes can continue to pass through the river corridor on existing designated routes and trails. There may be opportunities for converting roads to trails on canyon rims if needed. We want people to enjoy the Wild and Scenic River but not every type of use is appropriate next to the creek. The primary goal of the management plan is to allow public use and enjoyment which protects or enhances the creeks Outstandingly Remarkable Values for present and future generations.

Motorized recreation- snowmobiles and off road vehicles:

Comment: Urge USFS to modify recommendations to limit motorized uses to designated official routes that provide access to campsites or scenic overlooks. Agree with reducing road densities, creating unroaded areas, revegetating reclaimed roads. Plan should address specific measures that will be taken to protect the resource from both legal and illegal ORV use on trails. Add "driving through the creek or on the riverbank" as an undesired and illegal behavior. 13c

Comment: Promoting and preserving quiet, non-polluting recreation with minimal disruption of wildlife and habitat should be the preferred management objective of the USFS on Whychus. Juniper Group Sierra Club strongly urges the USFS to prohibit motorized, off-road travel on both the Wild & Scenic portions of Whychus. The voice of the Creek (as aptly described in the vision on p. 20) will not be heard over the disruptive noise of snowmobiles, quads, Off road vehicles if machine travel is allowed. 13d

Comment: Notes seeing increase in off-road vehicle damage and littering. Noise of vehicles impacts tranquility of stream corridor. Hopes Alt 2 will deal with these issues. 5a.

Comment: Not clear what is meant buy motorized use is allowed as specified by Deschutes/Ochoco Travel Management Plan. A wild and scenic river should trump whatever would be allowed and no motorized use should be allowed except on Rd 1514. Narrow corridor bordered by roads makes it vulnerable to impacts. Not appropriate to make river banks accessible by roads. 16e

Comment: Worried about the incursion of the ATV crowd, with its possible soil disturbance and littering. You seem to be depending on the forest transportation plan. Since I don't know the specifics of the standards and possible enforcement activities, I cannot really evaluate the adequacy of the protection to the wild and scenic areas. Might be better to get a head of problems incident to ATV use rather than to have to respond afterward. 20b

Response: The Monitoring Plan (pg 9 on Appendix 1 in the Environmental Assessment) and the Management Plan note that the standard to meet is that motorized use is confined to designated routes. The specific measures that can be taken are also listed under the monitoring plan under sample

methods. The intensity and frequency of patrols and monitoring by law enforcement, field rangers, and other Forest Service specialists varies commensurate with where issues occur. We will rely more heavily on volunteer river stewards to notify the Forest Service of illegal use and trespass as more systematic monitoring begins with the implementation of the Management Plan. We will add the suggestion as noted above regarding driving through the creek.

Motorized use is a legitimate use of the National Forest and is the way most people get to Whychus Creek. No motorized travel of any sort is allowed in the “Wild” section of the corridor because it is within the Three Sisters Wilderness. In the “Scenic” section motorized travel is allowed on designated routes. The Sisters Ranger District has worked to pull back motorized access and define dispersed campsites to reduce sedimentation and devegetation on streambanks and riparian areas on 59 sites in the creek corridor in the Whychus Creek Riparian Protection project (pg 84 of the Environmental Assessment). These closures and dispersed camp sites will be continue to monitored and further closures are allowed as needed to protect the creeks Outstandingly Remarkable values. Additional road closures are recommended and will be addressed through future site specific analysis. Recreational experience is also a monitoring item (pg 7 in Appendix 1 in the Environmental Assessment) and “remoteness” or meeting people’s expectation of isolation from the sights and sounds of others is an element of that assessment and a goal of managing the area.

The Deschutes and Ochoco Travel Management Environmental Impact Statement is discussed because it is a reasonably foreseeable action. The Environmental Impact Statement is currently between draft and final stages and will regulate where motorized access is allowed. We have coordinated with the Travel Management Plan Team to propose to limit motorized access in the river corridor.

Site management and evaluation:

Comment: Please add water quality as a criteria to evaluate in recreational facilities management such as trails or dispersed camping sites. 13e

Response: The Interdisciplinary Team’s Hydrologist and Fish Biologist believe that site specific monitoring of water quality data such as turbidity, suspended sediment, or temperature would not be the best method of tracking environmental changes due to the spatial and temporal variability of the data.

Instead they proposed monitoring both dispersed recreation sites and trails for signs of erosion, riparian degradation, and inadequate drainage. Addressing the problems that contribute sediment directly to Whychus Creek and/or reduce streamside shade would improve and protect water quality. We will also continue our summer water temperature monitoring at various long-term sites throughout Whychus Creek and repeating our stream surveys, which include bank stability monitoring.

Interpretation, Public outreach, and education:

Comment: Urge that all interpretive signage and public outreach done as part of Whychus watershed work explain the critical importance of linking the upper, middle and lower Whychus with consistently adequate water flow. The challenge of maintaining water temperatures that sustain native fish should also be explained. 13g

Response: We agree these are important themes to include in future interpretive and educational materials. These subjects are also being shared through outreach materials developed by partners such as the Upper Deschutes Watershed Council and the Deschutes Land Trust as they work in concert with the Forest Service and other agencies to restore anadromous fish passage and habitats on Whychus Creek.

Comment: Feels that community engagement could be put to good use in monitoring and public education. Need for consistent monitoring, enforcement and public education. Suggests: 1) involving Sisters Middle and High school students in area to observe vandalism and derive solutions and help monitor, 2) Encouraging public participation in protection of resources, 3) Educational signs at trailheads- news articles, 4) Offer educational programs through COCC Lunch and Learn, would help us as facilitator of that program. 11a

Response: We agree with these ideas and would welcome the assistance offered. The use of community stewardship and increased volunteerism is a goal of the management plan.

References:

Gregg, M. 2010. Biological Evaluation for Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Wildlife Species, Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Management Plan Environmental Assessment Planning Files.

Riehle, M. 2010. Aquatic Biological Evaluation for Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species, Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Management Plan Environmental Assessment Planning Files.

Pajutee, M. 2010. Biological Evaluation for Sensitive Plant Species and Invasive Plant Species, Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Management Plan Environmental Assessment Planning Files.

USFS. 1990. Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. Deschutes National Forest, Supervisors Office, Bend, OR.

USFS 1998. Sisters-Whychus Watershed Analysis. Deschutes National Forest. Sisters Ranger District, Sisters, OR.

USFS 2009. Whychus Watershed Analysis Update. Deschutes National Forest. Sisters Ranger District, Sisters, OR.

USFS. 2010. Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Management Plan Environmental Assessment. Deschutes National Forest. Sisters Ranger District, Sisters, OR.

Appendix 3
Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River Management Plan
Environmental Assessment

List of Respondents to 30 Day Public Comments

Number Code	Name	Organization	Date received	Format	City	Number of comments
1	Karen Shadley	Public	1/29/10	email	Sisters	1
2	Suzanne Pepin	Public	1/30/10	email	Sisters	1
3	Eva Eagle	Public	1/31/10	email	Sisters	3
4	Bruce Mason	Public	2/02/10	email	Sisters	1
5	Gary and Jan Guttormsen	Public	2/04/10	email	Sisters	1
6	Thomas Pryor	Public	2/08/10	email	Sisters	1
7	Bill Stevens	Public	2/08/10	email	Sisters	1
8	Mr and Mrs Donald Bilodeau	Public	2/08/10	Letter	Portland	1
9	Leslie Jones	Upper Deschutes Watershed Council- Water Quality Specialist	2/09/10	email	Bend	5
10	Linda Spillum	Public	2/10/10	email	Sisters	2
11	Norma Funai	Public	2/14/10	email	Sisters	1
12	Rhonda Marquis	Central Oregon Chapter Chair Oregon Equestrian Trails	2/10/10	letter	Terrebonne	1
13	Merry Ann Moore	Sierra Club	2/24/10	email	Sisters	9
14	Eugene Trahern	Public/Sisters Trails Alliance member	2/24/10	email and letter	Sisters	4
15	Doug Heiken	Oregon Wild	2/27/10	email	Eugene	7
16	Paul Dewey	Central Oregon Landwatch	3/01/10	letter	Bend	11

Number Code	Name	Organization	Date received	Format	City	Number of comments
17	Terry and Keith Miske	Public- Local volunteers	2/28/10	email	Sisters	1
18	Sean Meissner	Public	3/01/10	email	Sisters	1
19	Tracy Stout	Public	2/12/10	fax	Redmond	1
20	Kent Gill	Friends of the Metolius	3/11/10 received after a comment period closed	email	Camp Sherman	4