

Special Recreation Permit Fee Management Plan Limited Entry Permit System

Mt. Jefferson, Mt. Washington, Three Sisters Wilderness Areas Deschutes and Willamette National Forests

Introduction and Purpose

The Deschutes and Willamette National Forests are implementing a Special Recreation Permit Fee authorized by the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act for areas within the Central Cascades Wilderness. The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (REA) authorizes a special recreation permit (SRP) and SRP fee for specialized recreation uses of Federal recreational lands and waters (16 U.S.C. 6802(h)).

Under the Deschutes and Willamette Forests SRP plan, an SRP and SRP fee would be required for day use at 19 of 79 trailheads and for all overnight use regardless of entry point within the identified Cascades Wilderness areas. SRPs are issued as a means to allocate capacity or disperse use, protect natural and cultural resources, provide for health and safety of visitors, and help cover the higher costs for providing these specialized services. A daily SRP permit and fee would be required from the Friday before Memorial Day to the last Friday of September; the rest of the year there will be no daily SRP fees charged. Overnight SRP fees will be charged from the Friday before Memorial Day to the last Friday of September; the rest of the year there will be no overnight SRP fees charged.

Day use and overnight use is considered a specialized recreation activity in the identified Cascade Wilderness areas because of the extraordinary management actions the forests must employ to ensure that the sensitive natural, ecological, and cultural features and resources of the area as well as its wilderness character are preserved and maintained from the high volume of use. Damages and impacts within these wilderness areas have been identified in the Central Cascades Wilderness Strategies Environmental Assessment, which led to the decision to implement a visitor management strategy for these areas, which includes a limited entry permit system and adaptive management plan. The specialized recreation day use at these 19 trailheads and overnight use throughout the wilderness areas is distinguishable from dispersed day use and camping in other forest areas that experience less visitation and lower density levels; where there is far less impact to sensitive natural and cultural resources because of the reduced volume of visitation; and the resources impacted are more resilient to the dispersed use than in the high volume trail systems and destinations in the wilderness areas identified in this SRP Plan.

The trailhead locations where the SRP applies are part of a larger system of trails that funnel use to highly sensitive ecological and cultural areas that serve as destination points within the wilderness. As outlined in the EA, it is the cumulative impacts from these multiple trails that necessitate extraordinary management measures to mitigate impacts to these resources and preserve wilderness character. Extensive visitor and overnight use of the system of trails and nearby destinations covered in this SRP requires constant maintenance to provide access throughout the wilderness area while protecting sensitive natural and cultural features impacted by excessive foot traffic and overnight use.

The extraordinary measures needed to manage these impacts include: protecting and restoring sensitive resources damaged by high volume use; managing capacity in overcrowded areas

through a limited entry permit system; and provide enhanced visitor services such as wilderness rangers, outdoor/wilderness education and interpretation to promote user knowledge, awareness and best practices to safely and responsibly enjoy the wilderness areas covered by this SRP.

The SRP will be issued through a limited entry permit system that will allocate capacity for the Mt. Jefferson, Mt. Washington, and Three Sisters Wilderness areas. The proposed SRP fee would support:

- Restoration activities within the wilderness areas
- Trail maintenance
- Wilderness stewardship activities (e.g. trash removal, resource monitoring, etc.)
- Trailhead facility operations, maintenance, and deferred maintenance
- Visitor education and interpretation services
- Patrolling within the wilderness

This Special Recreation Permit Management Plan outlines the rationale for the SRP, how the SRP revenues will be used in support of a specialized recreation experience, and the requirements of the SRP.

Background

In the Central Cascades of Oregon, the Deschutes and Willamette National Forests jointly manage four wilderness areas (Mt. Jefferson, Mt. Washington, Three Sisters and Diamond Peak) while the Willamette National Forest solely manages one additional wilderness (Waldo Lake). Ongoing and rapidly increasing recreational use in some areas of these five wildernesses is causing a corresponding increase in damage to high-elevation riparian and meadow vegetation through overcrowding, overnight camping, human and dog waste, trail bed expansion and trail braiding as well as invasive species transport. Visitor use has increased rapidly in the past six years, with 2015 and 2016 seeing the greatest increases. For example, the Three Sisters Wilderness had 47,000 visitors in 2011 and 111,000 visitors in 2016 (136% increase in 5 years). In addition, peak visitor use is concentrated on a small subset of trails, which exacerbates the social and natural resource impacts. As an example, in 2016 the five busiest trailheads in the Three Sisters Wilderness accounted for 55% of visitor's trail use.

Most visitors come to these wilderness areas for day hiking and overnight trips, although some visit for long-distance hiking (e.g. the Pacific Crest Trail), hunting, and with Outfitters and Guides.

The Willamette and Deschutes National Forests have completed an Environmental Assessment that proposed a visitor management strategy, including a limited entry permit system, for these wilderness areas, with the goal to sustain recreational use in these Wilderness areas while ensuring the wilderness character of these areas is protected for future generations. The Decision Notice requires limited entry permits for overnight use in the Mt. Jefferson, Mt. Washington and Three Sisters wilderness, and limited entry day use permits at 19 of 79 trailheads in these wildernesses. During the permit season, general recreation access to these areas in and around these trailheads is prohibited, and the limited entry permit system regulates all use during the permit season. Both Waldo Lake and Diamond Peak wilderness areas are included in the adaptive management plan and could see a limited entry permit system implemented in the future, if visitor use increases noticeably and sensitive habitat and resources are negatively impacted. The limited entry permit system is considered one system, encompassing all five wilderness areas; this is critical to the success of the limited entry permit

system, since changes to visitor management in one wilderness is expected to have direct impacts on neighboring wildernesses, because of the interconnectedness of these wilderness areas. The SRP only applies to the Mt. Jefferson, Mt. Washington, and Three Sisters Wilderness areas. If deemed necessary to include Waldo Lake and/or Diamond Peak, the SRP plan will be amended, and the forests will go through an additional fee proposal process.

In Oregon, the only existing limited entry permit system for wilderness use is within the proposed area – the Obsidian Limited Entry Area and the Pamela Limited Entry Area, both managed by the Willamette National Forest. There is no recreation fee associated with these systems; there is a \$6 fee charged by recreation.gov for their administration of the permit system. There are no other limited entry permit systems for wilderness in Oregon, and only one other system managed by the Forest Service in the Pacific Northwest Region: the Enchantments area of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness.

Program costs

Major costs centers that will support the limited entry permit system include:

Visitor Education and Interpretation:

Visitors to these wilderness areas must adhere to wilderness regulations and are strongly encouraged to follow Leave No Trace ethics. In addition to limited entry permit requirements, regulations include restrictions on group size, campfires and camping, stock use, and prohibited activities (e.g. use of mechanized transportation, caching of materials, etc.). While most visitors are well-meaning, not all are familiar with these rules and regulations. Education is the first step of any compliance plan. Enhanced education opportunities include online videos, front desk materials and increased staffing, trailhead host engagement, and wilderness patrols (by volunteers and USFS staff). In addition to education, the permit system will also require increased compliance checks.

Wilderness stewardship activities:

Wilderness rangers, volunteers and interns conduct stewardship activities while on patrol in these wilderness areas. These activities include trash removal, burying human waste, cleaning up campsites, dismantling unauthorized structures, sign maintenance, visitor education, and much more.

Visitor Services:

Many visitors will seek out the help of Forest Service employees to help navigate the permitting system and to issue the permit, or at a minimum, to answer their questions as they gain understanding of the system. With the implementation of a limited entry permit system, more visitors will be using USFS Ranger Stations and Welcome Centers, requiring an increase in staffing to be able to respond to the influx in visitors and calls.

Trailhead facility operations, maintenance, and deferred maintenance:

There are ten trailheads that provide access to these wilderness areas that are currently Standard Amenity Fee Sites, where users of these sites are required to pay \$5 day use fee, or use a valid recreation pass (e.g. Northwest Forest Pass, Interagency Annual or Senior Pass, etc.). The facilities at these trailheads (restrooms, garbage service, picnic tables, etc.) require regular servicing during the summer season. Visitors with limited entry permits and paying the SRP fee would not be required to also pay the standard amenity fee.

Trail Maintenance & Restoration: There are 893 miles of NFS system trails within these five wilderness areas, which are the primary means of access for virtually all wilderness visitors. Most trails require annual maintenance, including removal of fallen trees, brushing, treadwork, and more. Less frequent tasks include trail bridge maintenance, major tread work, trail re-routing, structure (e.g. puncheon, rock walls) repair, etc. Trail work is completed by a combination of Forest Service employees, partners, and volunteers.

Rationale for Recreation Permit Fee

Existing Authority: The Forest Service is authorized by the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act Authorization (REA: PL 108-447, SEC 803(h)) to implement a Special Recreation Permit Fee. Day use and overnight use is considered a specialized recreation activity in the identified Cascade Wilderness areas because of the extraordinary management actions the forests must employ to ensure that the sensitive natural, ecological, and cultural features and resources of the area as well as its wilderness character are preserved and maintained from the high volume of use. The specialized recreation day use at these 19 trailheads and overnight use throughout the wilderness areas is distinguishable from dispersed day use and camping in other forest areas that experience less visitation and lower density levels; where there is far less impact to sensitive natural and cultural resources because of the reduced volume of visitation; and the resources impacted are more resilient to the dispersed use than in the high volume trail systems in the wilderness areas identified in this SRP Plan.

The SRP will be part of a limited entry permit system, which is designed to allocate recreational capacity in the Mt. Jefferson, Mt. Washington, Three Sisters, Waldo Lake, and Diamond Peak Wilderness areas. The limited entry permit system attempts to balance opportunities for the public to experience these wilderness areas while protecting natural and cultural resources. Additionally, the forests have identified some areas of potential health and safety concerns, specifically human waste management in popular areas that may also need to be mitigated. Specialized services to be provided are outlined in the "Specialized Services" section of this plan.

Permit requirements

Under this plan, the special recreation permit fee would be required for all limited entry permits and for some users exempted from the limited entry permit system (outlined below). Implementation of a limited entry special recreation permit fee would be comparable to other federal wilderness permit fees within the National Wilderness Preservation System. Limited entry permits will be required from Friday before Memorial Day to the last Friday in September.

The SRP fees proposed are:

- A \$3 per person *permit* fee for day use at the 19 trailheads
- A \$5 per person, per night fee for all overnight users.

SRP fees will be collected through Recreation.gov, which will host the permit system. Permits will be available online, over the phone, and in person at Willamette and Deschutes National Forest offices. A portion of permits will be available for reservation well in advance of a trip, and the remaining portion will be made available immediately prior to a trip (i.e. the day before).

The exceptions to this fee are:

- Tribal members engaging in their traditional cultural practices on these lands would not be subject to permitting regulations or the special recreation permit fee

- Visitors to these wilderness areas from trailheads where the requirement is a free, self-issued permit as identified in the final decision.
- Youth 12 years old and younger (although they would still need to obtain a limited entry permit)
- Volunteers working under a valid Volunteer Agreement (OF 301a) and in coordination with Forest Service staff (or their designated representative)
- Hunters with a valid hunting license and a hunting tag for a hunt identified in the annual permit implementation plan¹.
- Long-distance PCT hikers carrying a valid long-distance permit issued by the Pacific Crest Trail Association, consistent with the guidelines under which they have obtained the PCT long-distance permit ²
- Outfitters and Guides with valid Special Use Permits and approved use in wilderness, as outlined in an approved Operating Plan
- Visitors with a “Cascade Crest Wilderness Pass”. A limited number of these passes will be made available to certain organizations and groups (yet to be determined) to share with clients and individuals who may be deterred from visiting the cascade crest wildernesses because of the cost of the proposed fee. Examples include social service organizations that work with low income community members, libraries, etc.
- Visitors with a “Cascade Crest Wilderness Volunteer Pass.” These passes will be made available to individuals who have volunteered in support of wilderness stewardship within the permit area. The number of hours³ required to receive this permit has not been determined.

Specialized services associated with Special Recreation Permit Fee

As outlined in FSH 2309.13 CH 32.4, SRP revenues may be spent on:

- a. Special patrols by Forest Service employees or authorized agents:
 - i. Wilderness Rangers patrol the wilderness to educate visitors and enforce compliance with wilderness rules and regulations, including the limited entry permit system.
 - ii. SRP funding will be used to increase the base-level of wilderness staffing to support the services provided.
- b. Enhanced interpretive services:
 - i. In addition to educating visitors about wilderness rules and regulations, trailhead hosts engage visitors as they are beginning their trip with natural and cultural history of the area and wilderness education.
 - ii. Trailhead hosts, wilderness rangers, and partners all provide Leave No Trace education;

¹ Exemptions identified in the Decision Notice are the High Cascade Rifle hunt and general archery elk and deer hunts (for day use only). Other hunts may be added in the future.

² Long-distance permits are for the Pacific Crest Trail. It allows you to travel and camp on it. If you’re wishing to do extensive hiking or horseback riding on other trails in areas that require a permit, you’ll probably need to apply for those permits separately. You can travel off the PCT to resupply or access trailheads within 15 trail miles of the PCT. This travel must be done on the most direct trail between the PCT and the trailhead. Long-distance permits do not allow for camping off the PCT corridor, even while traveling to and from trailheads.

<https://www.pcta.org/discover-the-trail/permits/pct-long-distance-permit/>

³ It also hasn’t been determined whether the required hours of service are lifetime, or within a calendar year.

1. The Willamette and Deschutes NFs will look into developing a Leave No Trace video specific to the Central Cascades wilderness areas that would become required viewing for all limited entry permits.
 2. Materials to support LNT actions (i.e. providing trash bags and trowels to users who arrive unprepared).
- c. Use-specific maps and brochures:
 - i. The new limited entry permit system will require the development and distribution of maps and brochures outlining how the system works.
 - d. Cleanup and removal of trash and human waste:
 - i. Wilderness rangers and volunteers will remove trash and bury human waste while conducting patrols and/or participating in wilderness stewardship projects.
 - e. Volunteer programs:
 - i. Volunteers are critical to ongoing management of these wilderness areas and SRP funding will increase the capacity to manage volunteers by hiring a wilderness volunteer and partnerships coordinator.
 - ii. Volunteers will be used for many activities, including:
 1. Trailhead hosting,
 2. Trail maintenance,
 3. Wilderness stewardship activities (e.g. trash removal, campsite cleanup, visitor education, sign maintenance, wilderness monitoring).
 - f. Area-specific environmental monitoring and mitigation/restoration not related to Endangered Species Act monitoring:
 - i. Wilderness rangers and volunteers will monitor the implementation of the limited entry permit system, including visitor impacts and compliance.
 - g. Safety training:
 - i. SRP funding will be used for safety trainings for wilderness rangers and volunteers, including First Aid and CPR, saw trainings, and more.
 - h. Safety advisories:
 - i. Trailhead kiosks will include any advisories.
 - i. Maintenance of and access to portal facilities, such as trailheads:
 - i. Trailhead kiosks will provide information about the permit system.
 - ii. SRP funding will be used to help operate and maintain wilderness trailheads, including facility cleaning, toilet pumping, garbage service, trailhead host programs, and more.
 - iii. SRP funding will be used to increase trail maintenance of wilderness trails, including the funding of youth crews, volunteers, and Forest Service trail crews.
 - j. Issuance and enforcement of special orders:
 - i. All/most wilderness Rangers will be certified as Forest Protection Officers, so they can enforce the limited entry permit system.

Planned uses for Special Recreation Permit Fees:

As a new limited entry permit system, there is a certain level of uncertainty with predicting revenues from the proposed SRP. Based on 2016 use levels, estimated revenue from the proposed fees is approximately \$325,000.

An example of how the permit fees might be applied is included below; additional examples using different combinations of permit/per person or group/day or night fees are included as Attachment A.

All overnight permits would also be subject to the recreation.gov reservation fee of \$6/permit. The reservation fee for the limited entry day use permits would be \$1/person.

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Hiking scenarios	Special Recreation Permit Fee	Reservation fee	Total cost
2 people, day hike	\$ 6.00	\$ 2.00	\$8.00
2 people, 2 night backpack	\$ 20.00	\$ 6.00	\$26.00
2 people, 7 night backpack	\$ 70.00	\$ 6.00	\$76.00
Group of 4, day hike	\$ 12.00	\$ 4.00	\$16.00
Group of 4, 2 night backpack	\$ 40.00	\$ 6.00	\$46.00
Group of 4, 7 night backpack	\$ 140.00	\$ 6.00	\$146.00

SRP fee revenues will be used for the following activities:

- Wilderness stewardship activities (e.g. trash removal, resource monitoring, etc.)
- Trailhead facility operations, maintenance, and deferred maintenance
- Trail maintenance
- Visitor education and interpretation
- Visitor services

The table below outlines how SRP fee revenues may be used in support of the specialized and enhanced services. The table includes a column outlining a base level of funding for implementation of the permit system; however, funding at this level precludes being able to make investments in all of the specialized and enhanced services. The remaining columns suggest how increasing revenue levels may be invested in the specialized and enhanced services.

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Proposed Specialized and Enhanced Services	\$215,000	\$300,000	\$450,000
Visitor education and interpretation			
Expand trailhead host program			\$15,000
Increase Wilderness Ranger patrols and information services. Includes education, enforcement, monitoring, visitor contacts	\$135,000	\$153,000	\$205,000
Wilderness stewardship activities			
Partnership and volunteer programs and support (also supports trailhead host program)	\$5,000	\$57,000	\$60,000
Trailhead facility operations, maintenance			
Maintenance and cleaning, toilet pumping, garbage ⁴	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$70,000
Trail maintenance			
Includes trail work, restoration, bridges	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$75,000
		\$15,000	\$25,000
Youth crews (NYC, Heart of Oregon, SCA, etc.) and force account labor		2-4 weeks of youth crew trail maintenance	3-6 weeks of youth crew trail maintenance

⁴ Offsets the reduction in fee revenue due to the reduced use of the day use fees currently in place at many trailheads under FLREA.

Appendix A:

Group trailhead quotas for overnight use and individual trailhead quotas for day use that would be implemented in a limited-entry permit system as included in the Decision Notice, and subject to change based on adaptive management. Day use quotas for trailheads not included in this table and immediate implementation are subject to implementation through the adaptive management process (see Decision Notice Appendix C).

Wilderness Area Trailhead	Overnight Group Quota	Day Use Individual Quota
Three Sisters Trailheads		
Scott TH	13	12
Obsidian		30
Linton Lake	2	--
Proxy Falls ⁵	n/a	n/a
Foley	7	--
Separation	3	--
Rainbow	3	--
Horse Creek		--
Upper French Pete/Pat Saddle	3	--
Upper Lowder		--
Upper East Fork	3	--
Lower East Fork		--
Lower Lowder	Closed	Closed
French Pete	3	--
Rebel	5	--
Olallie		--
Elk Creek		--
South Fork		--
Crossing Way	7	--
Box Canyon		--
Skookum	5	--
Taylor Burn	6	--
Helen Lake		--
Jack Pine		--
Irish Taylor	3	--
Many Lakes	3	--
Deer Lake		--

⁵ The Proxy Falls trailhead is not proposed for any permit quotas at this time. This trail is a short, loop trail that does not provide access to the larger trail system. This trailhead will be targeted as an area to facilitate wilderness education since it is adjacent to a National Scenic Byway and sees very high use.

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Wilderness Area Trailhead	Overnight Group Quota	Day Use Individual Quota
Winopee/Corral Lake	3	--
Corral Swamp		--
Lucky Lake	5	--
Six Lakes	8	--
Elk Lake	4	--
Quinn Meadow	3	--
Sisters Mirror	4	16
Devils Lake/Wickiup	16	100
Green Lake/Soda Creek	14	80
Todd Lake	3	12
Crater Ditch	4	16
Broken Top		40
Tam McArthur Rim	5	80
Three Creek Meadow	3	--
Park Meadow	3	--
Chush Falls	2	--
Pole Creek	9	--
Scott Pass	4	--
Millican		--
Black Crater		--
Lava Camp		40
Mt. Jefferson Trailheads		
Roaring Creek	4	--
Crown Lake		--
PCT Breitenbush / Breitenbush Lake	4	4
S. Breitenbush	5	12
Triangulation		--
Cheat Creek		--
Whitewater		30
Woodpecker	3	--
Pamelia Lake	11	24
Minto Mountain	4	--
Bingham Ridge		--
Marion Lake	10	40
Jefferson Lake	3	--
Pine Ridge	3	--
Big Meadows Horse Camp	13	--
Duffy Lake		30

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Wilderness Area Trailhead	Overnight Group Quota	Day Use Individual Quota
Maxwell Butte		--
Cabot Lake	5	--
Bear Valley	3	--
PCT Santiam	10	--
Jack Lake	5	60
Round Lake	3	--
Mt. Washington		
Patjens	3	--
PCT Big Lake	2	--
Hortense Lake - Access Point	3	--
Dry Creek - Access Point	3	--
PCT McKenzie Pass	6	24
Hand Lake	3	--
Benson/Tenas	8	30
Fingerboard Prairie	3	--
Tenas Lakes		--
Robinson Lake	3	--

Appendix B – Maps from the Decision Notice

Figure B-1: Mt. Jefferson Day Use & Restrictions

Figure B-2: Mt. Jefferson Overnight Use & Restrictions

Figure B-3: Mt. Washington Day Use & Restrictions

Figure B-4: Mt. Washington Overnight Use & Restrictions

Figure B-5: Three Sisters East Day Use & Restrictions

Figure B-6: Three Sisters East Overnight Use & Restrictions

Figure B-7: Three Sisters West Day Use & Restrictions

Figure B-8: Three Sisters West Overnight Use & Restrictions

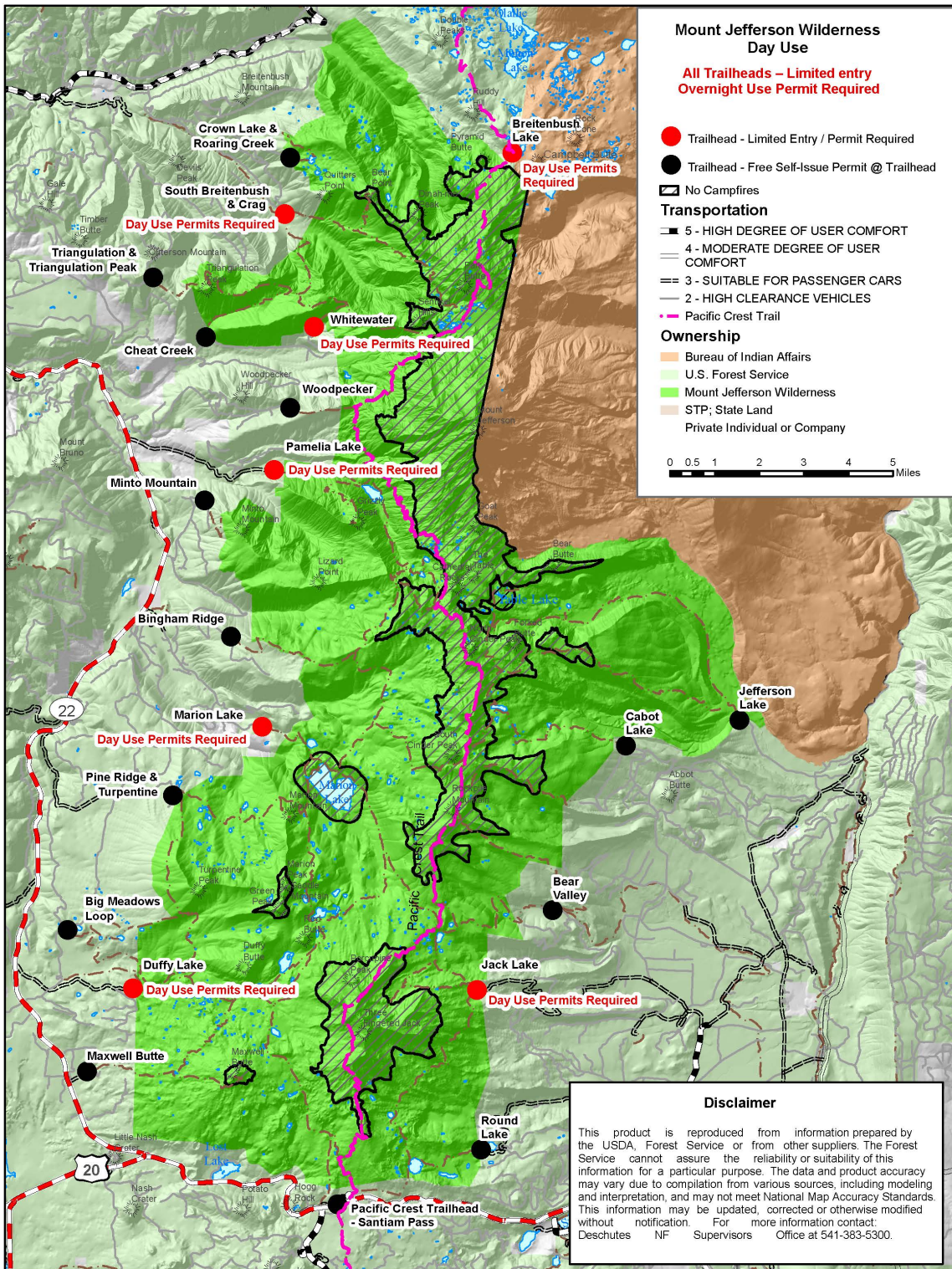


Figure B-1: Mountain Jefferson Day Use and Campfire Ban Area

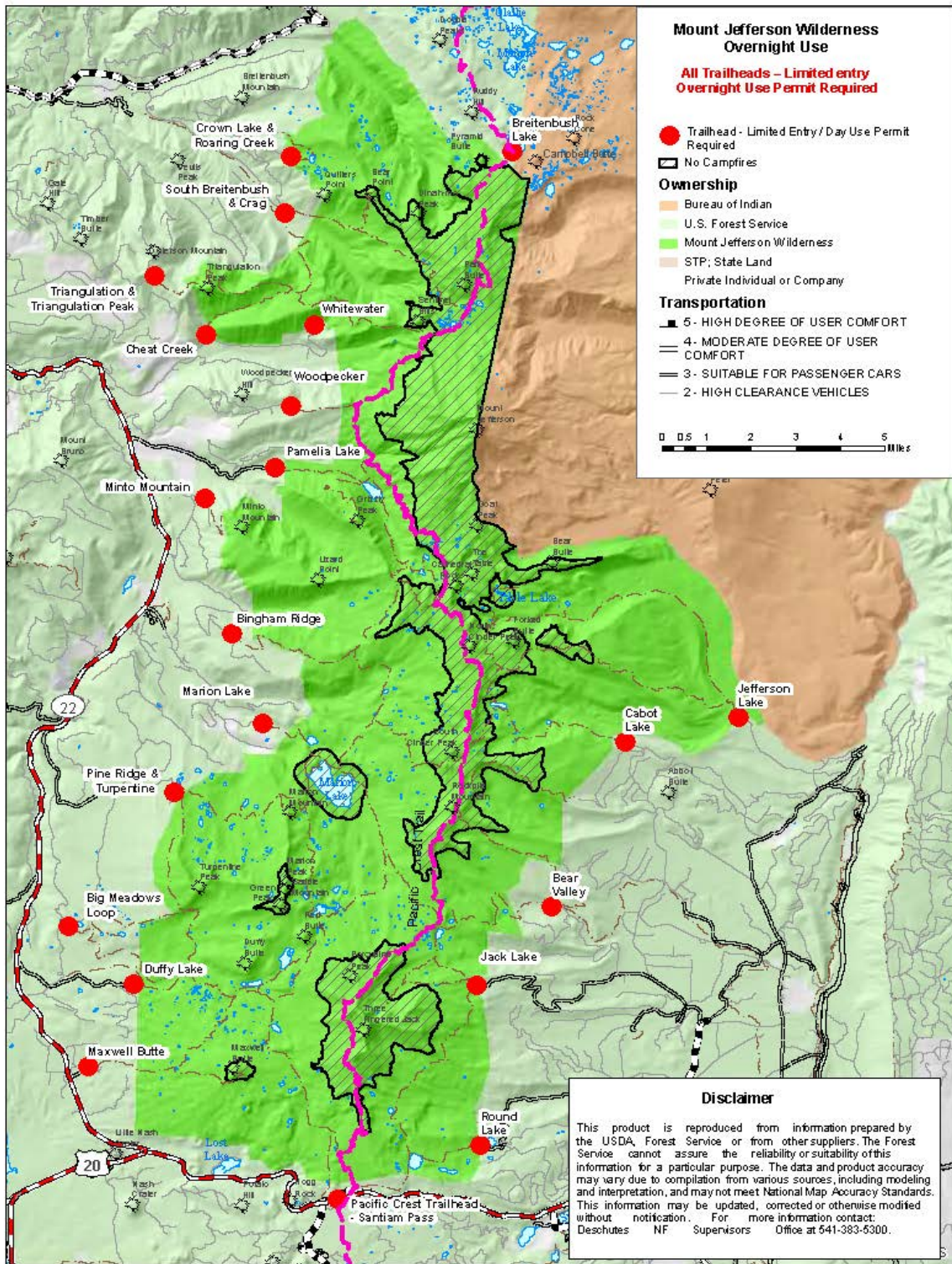
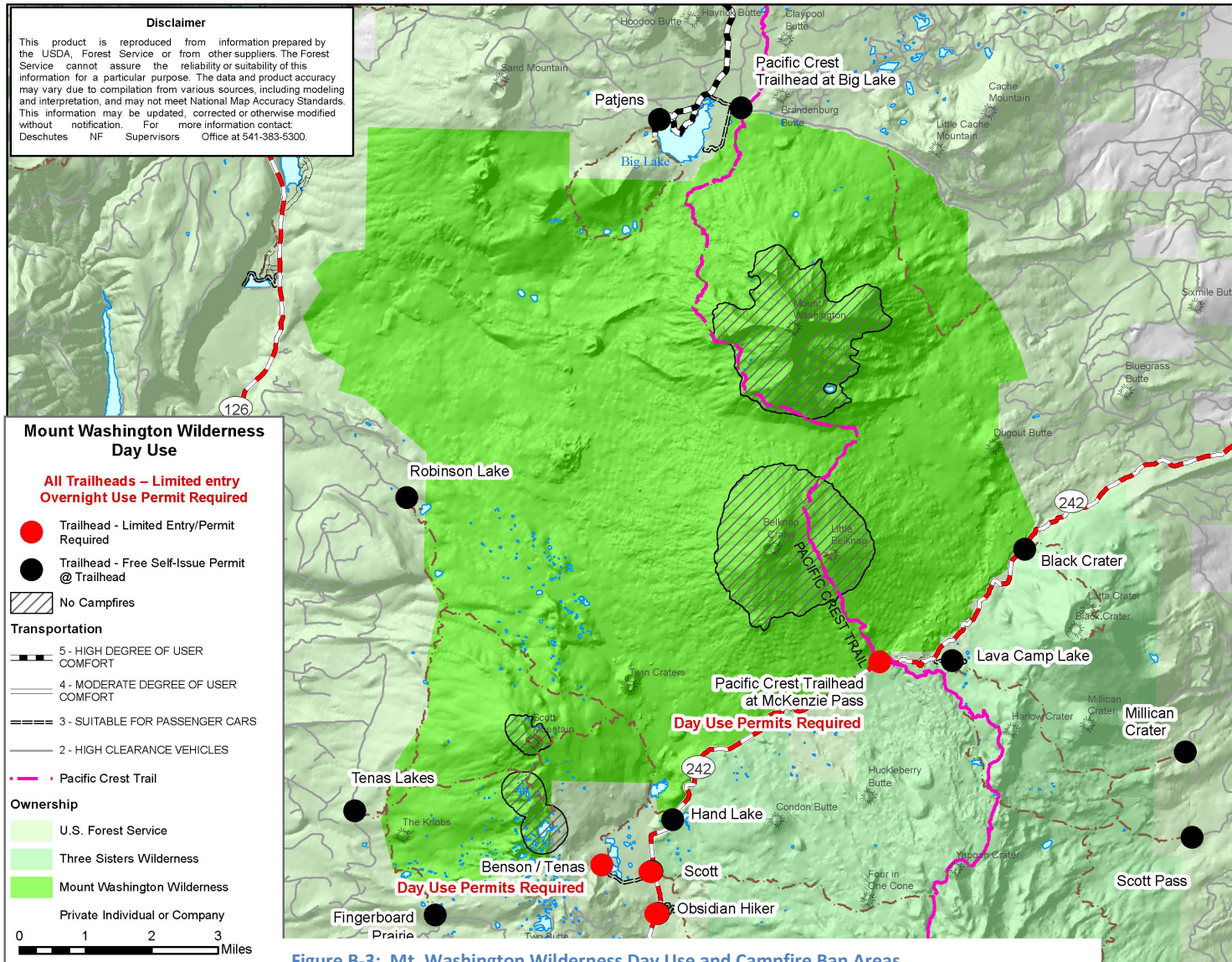


Figure B-2: Mount Jefferson Overnight Use and Campfire Ban Area



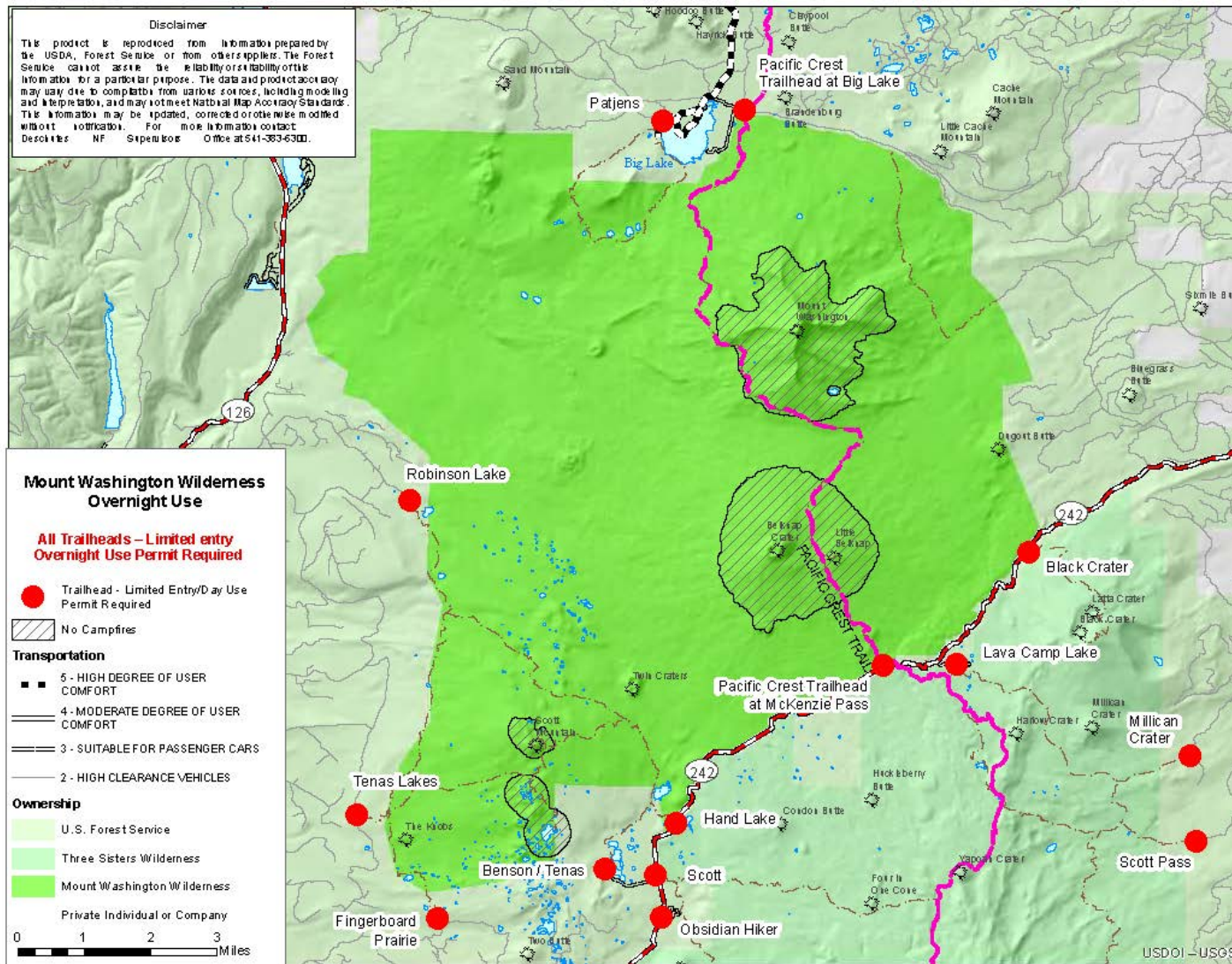


Figure B-4: Mt. Washington Wilderness Day Use and Campfire Ban Areas

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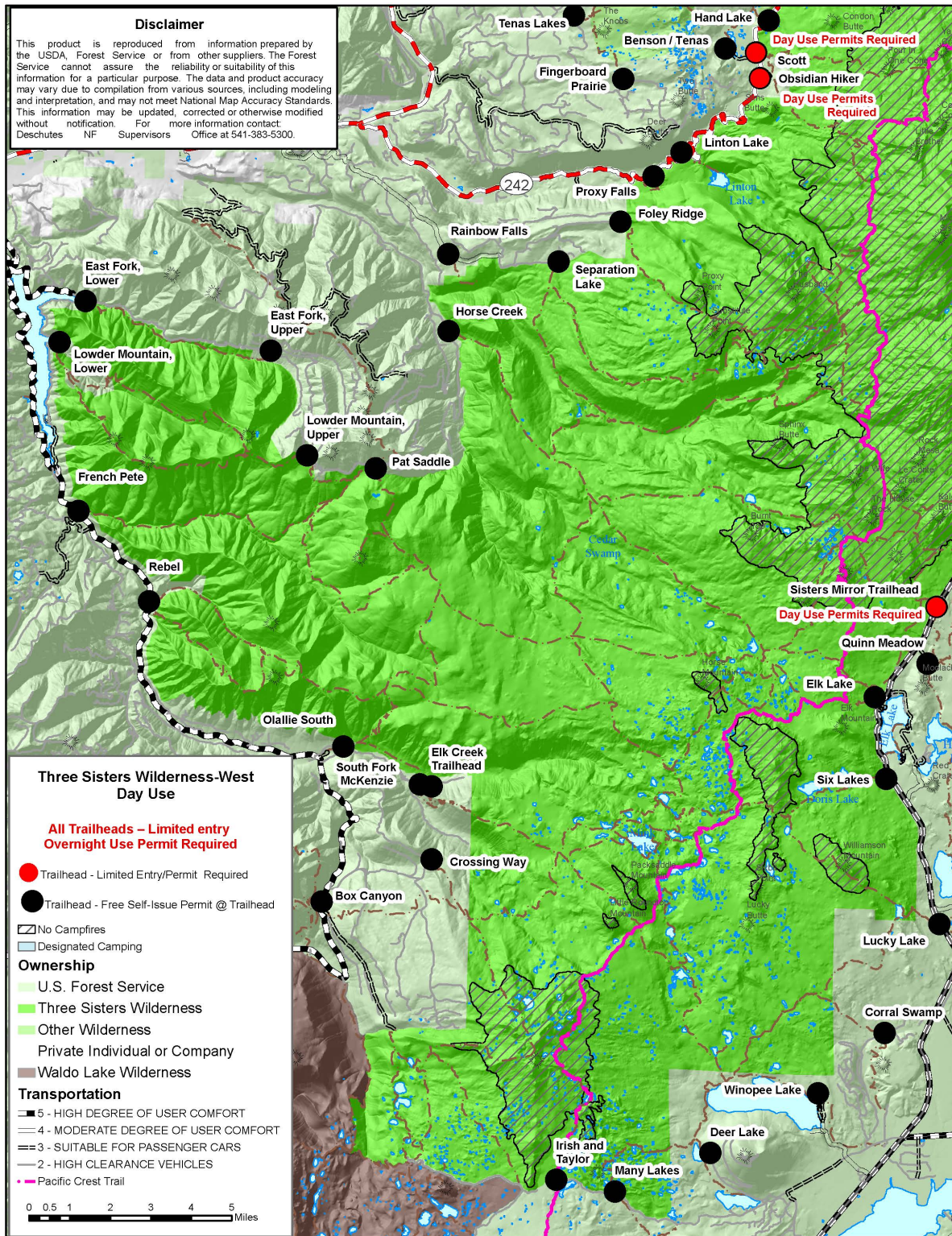


Figure B-7: Three Sisters-West Day Use and Campfire Ban Areas

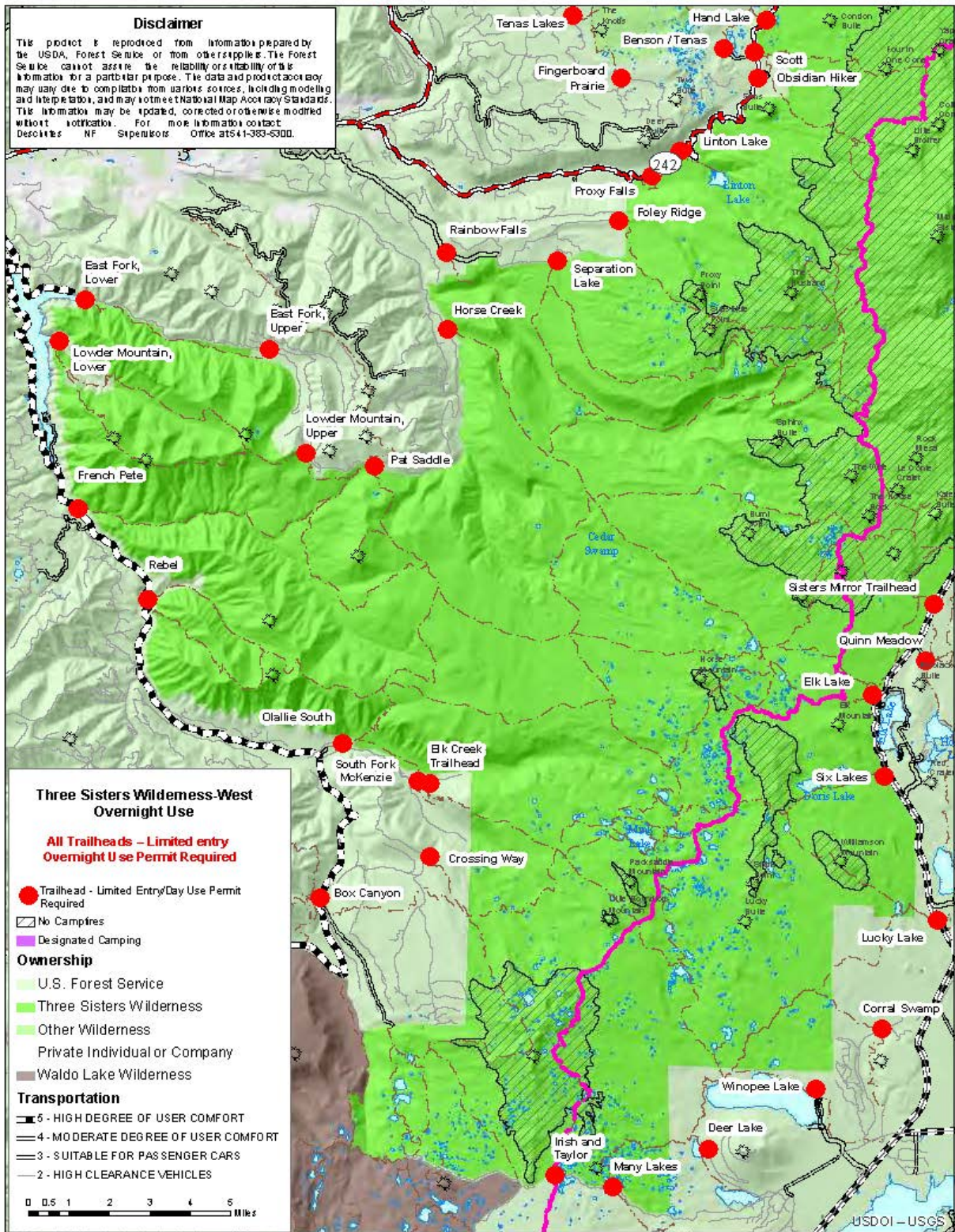


Figure B-8: Three Sisters Wilderness-West Overnight use and Campfire Ban Areas