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News Release

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Eastside Restoration Efforts Supported by La Grande Ranger District on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest

BAKER CITY, OREGON – As plumes of smoke from wildfires filled the skies over eastern Oregon this summer, the need for forest restoration work was on everyone's minds. The Eastside Restoration Initiative in eastern Oregon focuses on restoration activities to restore resiliency to fire-dependent forests, watersheds and aquatic ecosystems, and wildlife habitat. The La Grande Ranger District has been working hard to contribute to these restoration efforts.

The Sandbox Vegetation Management Project is located adjacent to several roadless areas and the Eagle Cap Wilderness in the South Fork Catherine Creek area southeast of La Grande. Years of fire suppression in the Sandbox area has allowed not only fuel loadings to buildup to hazardous levels but also has seen the ingrowth of trees and shrubs, which act as ladder fuels allowing active wildfires to move from the ground up into the crowns of trees. Crown fires account for high levels of tree mortality and a high rate of fire spread, especially when driven by wind.



The Sandbox project will produce two timber sales to be sold in 2014 and 2015, totaling an estimated 6 million board feet of timber and a variety of service contract



for the greatest good

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work to complete thousands of acres of small tree thinning and fuel reduction treatments. It will not only improve forests by thinning crowded stands of trees, but also will reduce fuel loadings along strategic roads and ridge tops within the project area, providing safer and more effective options for firefighters during fire suppression activities. While the project was not designed to stop a wildfire, once it is complete these areas will provide safe places from which firefighters can work to keep wildfires from coming out of or going on to private lands, wilderness, and roadless areas. “Having these key areas treated will provide opportunities to more safely manage future fires and help reduce unwanted impacts in the event of a wildfire in the area,” reported Bill Gamble, La Grande District Ranger.

Also within the heart of the Sandbox area is the Corral Creek Road Relocation project focusing on the restoration of aquatic ecosystems in Corral Creek

and South Fork Catherine Creek. These creeks provide important habitat for Snake River Basin summer steelhead and Snake River Basin spring chinook salmon, which are listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

This project will construct 0.35 miles of new road out of the Corral Creek draw bottom and reconstruct portions of Forest System Roads (FSR) 7700600 and 7700620 to improve drainage, reduce



sediment into Corral Creek and the South Fork Catherine Creek, and improve fish passage in these

creeks. More than a half mile of the draw bottom road pictured above will be removed once the new road up slope of Corral Creek is completed. Large wood will also be placed in the creek, and riparian shrubs and trees planted, to improve fish habitat and riparian conditions. Construction began on this project this summer and the roads mentioned above are currently closed to traffic. Once complete this fall, the roads will provide improved public access through this area, and improved habitat for fish and other aquatic species.

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Along the northern edge of the Sandbox project area two bridges were recently constructed near where Buck Creek (constructed in 2010) and the Middle Fork Catherine Creek (constructed in 2013) flow into



North Fork Catherine Creek. The North Fork Catherine Creek provides important habitat for Chinook salmon, summer steelhead, and bull trout, which is also listed as a threatened species under the ESA. The old bridge near Buck Creek was condemned years ago and eventually closed and removed because it was no longer safe for use.

“Construction of the new bridge in 2010 allowed us to re-establish this popular access route from the North Fork Catherine Creek road (7785) to the Buck Creek trailhead,” said District Ranger Gamble.

The new bridge over North Fork Catherine Creek on FSR 7785100 near the Middle Fork Catherine Creek replaced the ford that previously existed in this area. The ford was impassable to vehicles during high flows and the culverts under it were undersized, easily plugged, and acted as a barrier to fish passage during low flows. The installation of the new bridge pictured above has improved fish habitat and access to the high quality habitat upstream, while also providing safe access for the public to the trails and areas accessed by FSR 7785100.

“We are proud to contribute to the Eastside Restoration efforts by reducing fuel loadings, improving aquatic habitat, and providing for safe public access on the La Grande Ranger District. These efforts will not only lead to improved resource conditions and resiliency of watersheds, but also provide a variety of employment and economic benefits to communities surrounding the Forest. We are committed to doing the right thing for the resources we manage on behalf of the American public,” shared District Ranger Gamble.

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