

File Code: 1950-1

Date: April 30, 2007

Dear Interested Public,

This letter is to notify you that the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Echo Staley Road Storage and Illegal Household Trash Site Management project is available for public comment. This EA is available for comments as directed by 36 CFR Part 215. You have been sent this notification because of your past interest and involvement in this project.

A copy of the EA can be mailed to you upon request, or the EA can be found on the internet at www.fs.fed.us/r6/willamette/manage/nepa/current_middlefork.html, or a copy of the EA can be found on file at the Middle Fork Ranger Station located in Westfir, Oregon.

The Middle Fork Ranger District of the Willamette National Forest is proposing to close up to 23 miles of roads in the Echo, Staley, Simpson, and Noisy Creek drainages within the Upper Middle Fork Willamette watershed to motorized traffic, and place about 21 miles of these roads into maintenance storage condition for 10 or more years. Many of the roads in this portion of the project area that were constructed prior to 1980 used sidecast construction methods. These roads are now at risk for failure because of latent construction defects. In addition, a high percentage of roads were built on steep, erosive soils, conducive to mass failure. This project proposes to place such roads in storage, which means that the roads would be placed in a hydrologically stable condition using various methods such as water bars, ditching over culverts, culvert removal, ditch cleaning, blading, and other road maintenance work to reduce the potential for erosion and road failure. Road entrances would be closed with a combination of an earthen berm, deep ditch, and possibly boulders. While in a storage condition, roads would not be accessible to motorized vehicle traffic. This restricted access to motorized vehicles is necessary to protect the resource management work that would be done to the roads to place them in storage. Closure of 23 miles in the Upper Middle Fork Willamette represents about 5% of the total road miles in that watershed.

To reduce illegal household trash dumping, the District is also proposing to close up to 33 miles of road and access to two dispersed sites to motorized traffic year-round or seasonally with boulders or gates. These sites are all within the Middle Fork Willamette River/Lookout Point, North Fork of Middle Fork Willamette River, and Salmon Creek watersheds. Illegal trash dumping has become a chronic problem on portions of the Middle Fork Ranger District and current trash cleanup and law enforcement measures are not effective in addressing the problem. This project proposes to close up to about 17 miles of road year-round with boulders or gates, up to about 16 miles (Road 5828 system)

seasonally with a gate from Dec. 15 to July 1, and up to two other sites would be blocked with boulders. Closure of 17 miles year-round and 16 miles seasonally represents about 3% of the total road miles in these three watersheds.

Differences in the total miles proposed for closure in the EA and the scoping letter mailed out previously are attributable to a more accurate accounting of the tributary roads that would be closed by default when blocking a given road.

The objectives of this project are to minimize the potential for downslope effects, reduce illegal trash dumping, and implement closures for road storage and trash management in a cost-effective manner. Implementation would occur in Summer 2007 and closures would be enforced with CFR road closure orders prohibiting motorized vehicle traffic.

The roads and sites proposed for closure in this project occur within the Upper Middle Fork Willamette River/Echo Creek, Staley Creek, Lookout Point Reservoir, Middle Fork Willamette River/Deception Creek, North Fork of Middle Fork Willamette River/Dartmouth Creek, and Lower Salmon Creek subwatersheds on the Middle Fork Ranger District, Willamette National Forest, Oregon. The general legal description of the area is T 23 S, R4E; T24S, R4E; T25S, R4E; T25S, R5E; T20S, R1E; T20S, R3E; T21S, R2E, T21S, R3E, T21S, R4E, Willamette Meridian.

The EA contains four alternatives that were fully developed and analyzed. Three action alternatives were developed around the objectives of minimizing potential for downslope effects, reducing the number of illegal trash dump sites, implementing measures in a cost effective manner, and the major issues of public and fire suppression access and water quality. Alternative 1 is the “no action” alternative which provides a benchmark for estimating effects of the action alternatives.

The proposed action may limit recreational and forest activities that involve driving motorized vehicles to access areas of public interest.

The Forest Service evaluated the Proposed Action as well as the following alternatives:

- Alternative 1 is the No Action alternative. We would not implement any restoration if this alternative is selected.
- Alternative 2 is the proposed action.

Echo Staley portion: About 23 miles of roads in the Upper Middle Fork Willamette River/Echo Creek and Staley Creek subwatersheds within the Upper Middle Fork Willamette watershed would be closed to motorized traffic, of which about 21 miles would be placed into maintenance storage condition for 10 or more years. Roads would be placed in a hydrologically stable condition using various methods such as water bars, ditching over culverts, culvert removal, ditch cleaning, blading, and other road maintenance work to reduce the potential for erosion and road failure. Road entrances would be closed with a combination of an earthen berm, deep ditch, and possibly boulders.

Trash site portion: To reduce illegal household trash dumping, about 33 miles of road and access to two dispersed sites would be closed to motorized traffic year-round or seasonally with boulders or gates within the Middle Fork Willamette River/Lookout Point, North Fork of Middle Fork Willamette River, and Salmon

Creek watersheds. About 17 miles of road would be closed year-round with boulders or gates (including Rd. 2404 system), about 16 miles would be closed seasonally with a gate from Dec. 15 to July 1 (Road 5828 system), and two other sites would be blocked with boulders.

- Alternative 3 is the second action alternative.

Alternative 3 would be the same as Alternative 2 except the roads in the Echo Staley portion of the project area would not be closed to motorized vehicles. Instead, the roads would be treated with rolling drain dips to stabilize the roads and vehicles would be able to drive over them. Roads and sites in the trash site portion of the project area would be treated the same as in the trash site portion of Alternative 2.

- Alternative 4 is the third action alternative.

Alternative 4 would treat the roads in the Echo Staley portion of the project area the same as in the Echo Staley portion of Alternative 2. Roads and sites in the trash site portion of the project area would be treated the same as in Alternative 2 except the Rd. 2404 system and the Rd. 5828 system would not be closed year-round or seasonally. About 9 miles of road in the trash site portion would be closed. The chronic trash dumping problem would continue to be addressed by Forest Service law enforcement and public education efforts.

Based upon the effects of the alternatives, the responsible official will decide which alternative meet the needs of the forest users, government agencies and will best protect the forest resources.

Preferred Alternative

After a review of the EA, the Middle Fork District Ranger has identified Alternative 2 as the preferred alternative.

In the Echo Staley portion, this alternative would close 37 roads for a total of about 23.3 miles. We would implement road storage measures on 28 of the 37 roads for a total of about 20.7 miles and The roads proposed for closure includes roads that are tributary to the roads that would be closed with a berm or other method. Method of closure would vary by road and closure method needed as determined by present road condition, location on the landscape, location in relation to resource values requiring protection, and availability of funds.

In the trash site portion, about 33.4 miles of road and two additional sites would be closed year-round or seasonally with gates or boulders to reduce the number of illegal household trash dumping sites. Of the 33.4 miles, about 17.6 miles would be closed year-round and about 15.8 miles would be closed seasonally from Dec. 15 to July 1. The seasonal closure period includes the Spring season, which is historically the part of the year with the highest occurrence of trash dumping. Wildlife security would be an added benefit of the seasonal closure during this time of year.

Each road was previously evaluated utilizing the Roads Analysis process. This process evaluates the impact that leaving a road open or closing the road would have on the following use categories: administrative use, public use, terrestrial and aquatic wildlife.

This alternative incorporated a public comment to acquire access to the Rd. 5828 system for volunteer trail maintenance annually in the Spring.

This alternative proposes activities that meet the purpose and need for action described in Chapter 1 of the EA. The proposal is preferable because it:

- Responds to the purpose and need to manage the road system in an environmentally sound manner and reduce the number of illegal household trash sites.
- Maintains and enhances wildlife habitat, protects soil and water resource values,
- Is responsive to public needs and desires,
- Is affordable and efficient and can be maintained within the current and projected forest financial abilities.

If, after review, you have comments on the EA or the preferred alternative, you may send them to:

- 1) Planning Department, Attn: Chip Weber, Middle Fork Ranger District, 46375 Highway 58, Westfir, Oregon 97492;
- 2) Or fax to 541-782-5306;
- 3) Or e-mail to comments-pacificnorthwest-willamette-middlefork@fs.fed.us.

The opportunity to comment ends 30-days following the date of publication of the legal notice in the Register Guard, Eugene, Oregon. Only persons submitting timely comments regarding this proposal may appeal the final decision (36 CFR 215.6). For appeal eligibility, each individual or representative of an organization must sign the comments or verify identity upon request. Timeliness of comments will be determined by postmark, time, and date stamp at the Middle Fork Ranger Station or the agency's electronic acknowledgement for electronically submitted comments.

Please include in your response the following information: 1) name, address, and (if possible) telephone number; 2) title of the project on which comment is being submitted; 3) specific comments along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision. Please refer to 36 CFR Part 215.6 for details on the format for submitting comments such as signatures, oral comments or electronically mailed comments. Comments received will become a matter of public record.

The office of General Council in the Department of Agriculture determined that the names and addresses of persons that respond to solicitations for comments for Forest Service projects are subject to the Freedom of information act and subject to public review. Comments received in response to the proposed action, including names, addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on the proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments received anonymously will be accepted and considered; however those who only submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Part 215. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited

circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied; the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 15 days.

If you have any questions, or would like further information, please contact Eric Ornberg at the Middle Fork Ranger Station, 541-782-5217.

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

/S/ CHIP WEBER

CHIP WEBER
District Ranger