



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Umatilla
National
Forest

2517 S.W. Hailey Avenue
Pendleton, OR 97801

Reply To: 1920/2350-4

Date: January 21, 1994

Dear Forest Plan Reviewer:

Enclosed is a Decision Notice which announces our seventh Forest Plan amendment. This amendment adds additional direction to the plan dealing with the management of the Grande Ronde Wild and Scenic River.


When Congress designated the Grande Ronde Wild and Scenic River under the Omnibus Oregon Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1988, it directed the Secretary of Agriculture and Secretary of Interior to develop a management plan for the river. The Forest Plan provided interim direction for this river until the management plan could be completed.

The Grande Ronde Wild and Scenic River Management Plan and its Environmental Assessment have been completed. This amendment replaces the interim direction with the Grande Ronde Wild and Scenic River Management Plan. This plan provides for the protection and enhancement of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of the river, free-flow, and water quality.

The Environmental Assessment upon which this decision is based was a joint effort between the Bureau of Land Management and two National Forests (Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman) with the BLM taking the planning lead. This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations 36 CFR Part 217. The 45-day appeal period begins February 1, 1994, and ends March 17, 1994. Notices of appeals must meet the requirements of 36 CFR 217.9.

If you have questions or would like to receive a copy of the management plan or environmental assessment, please contact Marty Gardner at (503) 523-6391.

Sincerely,


JOHN P. KLINE
Acting Forest Supervisor

Enclosure



DECISION NOTICE
AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
NATIONAL FOREST ADMINISTERED PORTION OF THE GRANDE RONDE
WILD AND SCENIC RIVER MANAGEMENT PLAN
FOREST PLAN AMENDMENT

USDA - Forest Service
Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests
Walla Walla and Wallowa Valley Ranger Districts
Wallowa County, Oregon

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Forest Service (FS), and Oregon State Parks and Recreation Department have worked cooperatively to prepare an environmental assessment and management plan for the designated Grande Ronde (and Wallowa) Wild and Scenic River. The management plan is required by the Omnibus Oregon Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1988 and Oregon State Scenic Waterways program. Early in the planning process, the three agencies with responsibility for management of the river agreed that one plan should be developed for the entire river, with the BLM as the lead agency.

This Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) documents the Forest Service Decision to implement a management plan and final boundary for the part of the Grande Ronde Wild and Scenic River administered by the Forest Service (see below) under the Omnibus Oregon Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The process and analysis for arriving at the decision is described in the Environmental Analysis (EA) supporting the management plan decision. The EA contains alternatives for managing the river in accordance with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 and other appropriate laws. The selected management plan amends the Forest Plans for the Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests.

The decision is applicable to the section of river and adjacent lands beginning at the confluence of the Wallowa and Grande Ronde rivers at Rondowa and ending downstream at the Wallowa-Whitman Forest boundary (Sections 1, T.4N., R.41E., and 6, T.4N., R.42E., W.M.). This portion of the river contains two classified sections, Recreation and Wild. The Recreation section is approximately 1.5 miles in length from Rondowa to the Umatilla National Forest boundary (sections 11/14, T.3N., R.40E., W.M.) and is all private land. The Wild section is approximately 17.4 miles and is primarily public lands including both Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

The EA for the Wallowa/Grande Ronde Rivers management plan is available for public review at the Umatilla National Forest Supervisor's Office in Pendleton, Oregon, and the Wallowa-Whitman Supervisor's Office in Baker City, Oregon. The document is also available for review at the BLM's Vale District Office in Vale, Oregon, and Baker Resource Area Office in Baker City, Oregon.

DECISION:

As Forest Supervisors of the Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests, our decision is to amend each Forest Plan by implementing Alternative B of the EA for the National Forests' administered part of the Grande Ronde Wild and Scenic River. The decision is applicable to the Recreation and Wild segments described in the above introduction. Our decision is also to recommend the new boundary, including the boundary location on National Forest lands, to the Regional Forester.

The alternative provides a management plan that delineates river corridor boundaries, identifies appropriate management practices, and provides for monitoring. The alternative meets the intent of maintaining free flowing conditions and water quality, protecting and/or enhancing the identified outstandingly remarkable (OR) values, meeting standards for the Wild river classification and addressing the major public issues.

The overall goal of Alternative B is to protect and/or enhance the identified OR values and other special quantities of the Grande Ronde River while recognizing landowner interests and rights consistent with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Acts.

In summary, key management elements of the decision are:

Scenery:

- Preserve the existing landscape (visual quality) within the Wild Section.

Social/Economic:

- Improve river staging areas and access points to better facilitate use and accommodate all river users
- Maintain the "traditional" boating experience.
- Maintain existing campsites in an undeveloped or primitive condition.
- Require mandatory pack-out of human waste and garbage and provide the necessary facilities. Require the use of firepans.
- In the Wild Section, close the river and corridor to motorized water craft or vehicle use. Motorized equipment may be used for administrative purposes.
- In the Recreation Section, motorized use is allowed to continue, subject to results of monitoring studies.
- Special use authorizations are required for commercial use, with some constraints. Outfitter guide permits will remain open to applicants who meet given criteria.
- Trails and trail use will be encouraged outside the corridor, with access to the river discouraged.
- Continue existing use of private lands within the corridor as directed by Wallowa County zoning and Oregon State Scenic Waterway Administrative Rules.
- Reduce impacts/conflicts of recreation use on private land in the corridor.
- Assist Wallowa County and communities in broadening their economic bases and maintain the resource base for recreation-based industries.

Biological:

- Restore, maintain or enhance (as appropriate) fish and wildlife habitat and populations, using a variety of techniques appropriate for the Wild and Scenic River classifications in coordination with State and Federal agencies and Indian tribes.

Water:

- Resource management actions will meet State water quality standards.
- Manage activities and correct pollution sources (where feasible), to protect water quality and quantity.
- Water rights predating designation of the Grande Ronde Wild and Scenic River (October 28, 1988) will be unaffected. Cooperation with senior water rights holders will be pursued to protect OR values.

Cultural:

- Inventory, evaluate, and protect cultural resources, including traditional use areas.
- Protect identified archeological and historic sites through a variety of techniques.

Land Use:

- Authorized livestock grazing within the corridor will continue on public lands and managed to meet riparian plant community standards and protect OR values. Allotment boundary locations will be reviewed as part of the Allotment Management planning process, as scheduled.
- Reintroduce fire as an effective vegetation management tool.
- Continue present fire suppression agreements among agencies.
- Wild classification segment is withdrawn from mineral entry, oil and gas leasing is excluded, and power and water development is prohibited.
- Timber harvest is not scheduled; no new roads will be constructed on public lands.

Administrative:

- Develop and implement cooperative agreements among involved agencies and groups, as needed. Agreements may cover recreation standards and monitoring, emergency situations, law enforcement, facilities maintenance, and threatened, endangered, and sensitive species habitat management.
- Develop and use working groups to assist implementation of the Plan.
- Acquisition of private lands will only be from willing sellers. Condemnation for scenic easements will only be used as a last resort.

Monitoring:

Develop and use monitoring of the variety of OR and other special values, as outlined in the Plan.

SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The public has been extensively involved throughout the process since the river planning process began in 1988. A series of 16 meetings throughout northeast Oregon and southeast Washington were held to identify issues and concerns. About 600 people attended the scoping meetings. Approximately 2,500 interest cards were also mailed to individuals, groups, and agencies along with numerous letters and telephone calls seeking input on the Plan.

In 1989, the BLM established two citizens Ad Hoc work groups; one in Oregon and one in Washington to provide planning direction for the development of the management plan. The team consisted of representatives from state agencies, county governments, Indian Nations, local communities, commercial outfitters, recreation groups, and private landowners. The two groups helped to develop plan objectives and formulate issues and management objectives. The teams met 34 times at different locations and provided the agencies with invaluable assistance in developing the Management Plan.

On April 15, 1992, the BLM sent approximately 1,500 letters of availability for a copy of the draft plan and environmental assessment to the individuals, groups, and agencies who responded to the initial interest mailing. Numerous individuals, groups, and agencies covering a cross section of interested publics provided comment on the draft documents.

ISSUES:

Results of the public involvement form the basis for identification and development of the key issues. For the Grande Ronde River, Wild Segment, six key issues were formulated and carried forward through the process including: land (use), social, cultural/scenery, water, biological and administration.

As characterized in the EA, two broad themes emerged from the public comment and underlie the identification of the issues. One body of interested citizens tended to emphasize protection and enhancement of the free flowing character and ORVs, as described under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Acts. These groups and individuals expressed concerns about providing for water related recreation experiences, allowing access to these opportunities, enhancing the fisheries resources, protecting the scenic, and wildlife resource and providing for diversity. Many

of these people support activities that enhance supplies of cool, clean water, river corridor easements for improved public access, recreation opportunities, cultural resource protection, vegetative practices that maintain or support wildlife, scenery, and riparian habitats. They see a need for management of the river corridor and surrounding lands in the Wild and Scenic River section to minimize development and commodity activities while allowing for more natural processes.

Another body of concerned groups and individuals focused on the potential impacts that river management may have on opportunities to use lands and resources. They expressed concerns that undue constraints or restrictions resulting from Wild and Scenic River management direction prohibit, reduce, or substantially change a variety of ongoing activities. These include timber harvest (timber supply reductions), livestock grazing, agricultural practices in surrounding or upstream areas, mineral extractions, water use and allocation, use of land for transportation and utility corridors and other activities. Many local landowners and others were concerned about landowner rights such as the ability to develop and manage private property, land acquisitions, water rights, direct impacts to private lands from recreationists and others, and additional access provisions. Many saw a direct or implied threat to their traditional life-styles and way of life, to the economic well being of individuals, and viability of communities, and to the economic and social values of the region. Most of these people support options that maintain or enhance traditional commodity uses; they want to minimize impacts to economic and social outputs and private land uses.

ALTERNATIVES

Four other alternatives developed for the Grande Ronde Wild and Scenic River Segment were considered before selecting Alternative B. Key management highlights of each alternative include:

Alternative A was aimed at managing the river corridor to maximize multiple uses within the parameters of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

- Protect ORV's.
- Increase Recreation (High Intensity Developments).
- Develop additional trail and road access.
- Manage to "Urban" end of spectrum for recreation.
- Emphasis on Tourism, Economics, Social Serv.
- Increase multiple use developments to support commodity uses.
- Will not actively pursue land acquisition.

Alternative C emphasized recreation opportunities and experiences while protecting and enhancing OR values.

- Enhance all ORV's within corridor regardless of land ownership.
- Promote types of recreation use according to river segment classification.
- Utilize Social Factors as the "limiting" factors for carrying capacity.
- Develop intense information and education programs.
- Actively pursue acquisition.

Alternative D gave special consideration to natural conditions and processes, particularly related to vegetation, wildlife, and fisheries while protecting and enhancing OR values.

- Cater to "Primitive" end of spectrum for Recreation.
- Biological factors determine carrying capacity.
- Limit access and developments.
- Maximize challenges and self reliance.
- Restrictions on public use of public and private land.
- Regulate commodity uses.
- Actively pursue acquisitions.

Alternative E provided for meeting minimum legislative intent.

- Protection and/or enhancement of ORV's.
- Meet legal requirement with minimum use of regulations.
- Allow level and degree of existing uses to continue.
- No acquisition of rights by condemnation.
- Will not actively pursue land acquisition.

RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION:

In arriving at our decision, we considered several factors including the character and attributes of the river and its surroundings (OR values), requirement of Wild and Recreation classifications, the issues identified by the public and the alternatives for addressing the issues.

The identified OR values are key elements in defining future management direction on river sections for which the Forest Service has administrative responsibility. An important consideration is to maintain and improve the traditional float experience for beginning and moderate skill levels and associated recreation opportunities in a diverse and scenic environment. We prefer Alternative B because it most effectively (of the alternatives) meets the criteria by promoting existing recreation opportunities and experiences and by protecting the scenic and other values into the future. Fish habitat/water quality and wildlife habitat were also important considerations in our decision. Alternative B best supports our Forest management objectives; activities are designed for protecting and improving fish habitat, fish populations, water quality, and wildlife habitat. We also prefer the more "balanced" emphasis provided by Alternative B to management of OR values because we believe that the public interests and needs are better served under such a plan. In our view, the other alternatives, in whole or in part, are not as effective as Alternative B in protecting and enhancing all of the OR values and achieving a balance between the values.

The selected alternative meets the requirements for each classified river segment from the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, as documented in each of the Forest Plans. Alternative B is also consistent with and reinforces direction in the Forest Plan.

Most of the lands administered by the Forest Service are public and are relatively primitive and undeveloped. The river classification and direction under Alternative B maintains these conditions. However, we recognize that public concerns about Wild and Scenic River management, expressed in the issues, and how the issues are resolved can influence management and future conditions on Forest Service administered sections. From our perspective, Alternative B more favorably addresses the concerns expressed about maintaining opportunities to use private lands and natural resources while protecting and enhancing OR and other important values. We believe that more compatible management for the entire river results from Alternative B. We also believe that the working group process used by the BLM engenders better issue resolution and more support and acceptance for the Plan. With acceptable issue resolution, under Alternative B, we think that the Forest Service can more effectively manage our river responsibilities into the future.

The plan encourages and establishes coordination and cooperation requirements with agencies, Indian Nations, and others and provides direction for continued use of working groups on resources, monitoring, and additional planning issues. We prefer these cooperative approaches to resolving problems and developing agreed upon approaches to management of the river corridor and associated values.

SPECIFICALLY REQUIRED DISCLOSURES:

There are no unavoidable, adverse effects associated with implementing Alternative B of the Grande Ronde Wild and Scenic River segment that are not already identified in the Final EIS for the Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman Forest Plans.

Short-term uses are not proposed in the Management Plan. Promoting long-term health and productivity of the Forest's ecosystems is an objective of the river management plan.

No irreversible or irretrievable losses from implementing Alternative B have been identified that are not already described in the Final EIS for each of the Forest Plans.

There are no unusual energy requirements associated with implementing Alternative B.

There are no specific projects planned within wetlands or floodplains that can be implemented under this decision without further analysis and a separate Decision Notice issued addressing wetland or floodplains.

The management plan will cause no adverse effects on any Threatened or Endangered species or critical habitat; prime farmland, rangeland, or forest land; cultural resources; or civil rights, women, and minorities not already identified in the Final EIS for the Forest Plans.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based on a review of site-specific environmental analysis documented in the Environmental Assessment, we have determined that the Management Plan and Forest Plan Amendments for the Forest Service administered portion of the Grande Ronde Wild and Scenic River are not major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary. The direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts discussed in the EA have been disclosed within the appropriate context and will have limited intensity. Our determination is based on the following factors from Title 40 CFR 1508.27:

1. The beneficial and adverse environmental effects described in the EA for Alternative B were considered independently and cumulatively to determine if the project would significantly effect the human environment. No significant impacts were identified.
2. Public response has indicated that the Plan is not likely to cause effects that are highly controversial. Refer to the EA for a description of the public scoping process.
3. The Management Plan causes no highly uncertain effects and no effects that involve unique or unknown risks.
4. There will be no significant cumulative effects from implementing the plan in conjunction with past, present, and foreseeable future actions.
5. The plan will not adversely affect any sites or features listed or eligible to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places, or any significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.
6. The effects of the plan on threatened and endangered species as well as sensitive species were analyzed in biological evaluations (BE's). There will be no risk of adversely affecting these species with the plan as described in the EA. The plan will have no adverse effect on threatened, endangered, or sensitive species habitat. Over time, the plan is expected to have positive effects on threatened, endangered, and sensitive species.
7. The River Management Plan is consistent with all known Federal, State, and local laws. Regulations related to the National Forest Management Act and the Endangered Species Act have been incorporated in the project.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS, TREATIES, AGREEMENTS

We have determined that this amendment is not significant under the National Forest Management Act of 1976. Adoption of this amendment will not significantly alter Forest Plan goals, objectives, standards, guidelines, or management direction. Indeed, this amendment will enable managers to better meet the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and existing Forest Plan goals, objectives, and management direction.

Implementation of this Wild and Scenic River Management Plan for the (lower) Grande Ronde River is consistent with the Forest Service trust responsibilities for protection of treaty rights of the Nez Perce tribe. Specifically, the emphasis of selected Alternative B will provide the best opportunity for protection and enhancement of fish habitat in and along the river. This decision further supports the Forest Service commitments to the tribes to improve fish populations as agreed to in the Columbia River Basin Anadromous Fish Habitat Management Policy and Implementation Guide, 1991.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

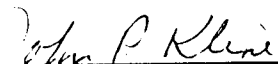
Implementation of this decision shall not occur within 30 days following publication of the legal notice of the decision in the Baker City Herald and East Oregonian.

APPEAL RIGHTS

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 217. Any Notice of Appeal of this decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9 (content of a Notice of Appeal) and must be filed with John Lowe, Regional Forester, P.O. Box 3623, Portland, Oregon 97208 within 45 days of the date stated in the legal notice of this decision, which appears in the Baker City Herald or the East Oregonian.

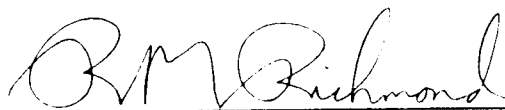
CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information regarding the Grande Ronde Wild and Scenic River Management Plan, contact Marty Gardner at the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Supervisor's Office, P.O. Box 907, Baker City, Oregon 97814 or at (503) 523-6391; or Gerry Meyer, at the Baker Resources Area Office, P.O. Box 987, Baker City, Oregon at (503) 523-6391.



JOHN P. KLINE
Deputy Forest Supervisor
Umatilla National Forest

12/13/93
Date



R. M. RICHMOND
Forest Supervisor
Wallowa-Whitman National Forest

12/15/93
Date