C8 GRASS-TREE MOSAIC (GTM)

GOAL

ON AREAS KNOWN AS GRASS-TREE MOSAIC (GTM). PROVIDE HIGH LEVELS OF POTENTIAL HABITAT EFFECTIVENESS, HIGH QUALITY FORAGE FOR BIG GAME WILDLIFE SPECIES, VISUAL DIVERSITY, AND PROTECT EROSIVE SOILS.

DESCRIPTION

The strategy applies to all or parts of lands covered primarily with grassland vegetation interspersed with patches or stringers of forest vegetation, often on steep topography with shallow soils. The lands can be further identified as follows:

1. Most of the area is composed of big game winter ranges delineated in coordination with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and Washington Department of Wildlife.
2. The remainder of the area consists of summer range land contiguous to the identified big game winter ranges.

The combination is known as grass-tree mosaic and is identified on Forest planning maps. The designated winter range portions of the GTM encompass areas that provide habitat for 90 percent or more of the wintering elk populations, during the winter use period, 6 years out of 10. Each winter range is assigned a winter use period ranging from 4 to 4 ½ months. In general, the area contains more than 70 percent herbaceous vegetation.

The C8 Management Area applies to areas on the Pomeroy, Walla Walla, and Heppner ranger districts as shown on the management area maps. The area encompasses about 98,500 acres.

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

Generally these areas will remain natural appearing with the predominant view being made up of patches or stringers of timber occurring on open, generally steep hillsides. Many forest stands will appear as mature timber with some having multi-layered canopies. Some stands will be more open as the result of management activities designed to improve big game habitat. Areas of early spring forage green-up will occur in a mosaic pattern over the winter range portion of this area. Forage will be abundant and improved through management. Quality big game habitat will be maintained and enhanced, thereby helping to achieve big game management population and productivity goals. In addition, during an average winter, most of the wintering big game will remain on public lands, helping to keep impacts to private lands low.

Recreation opportunities of all types will be available throughout the area. Through portions of the area, recreationists will be able to enjoy motorized activities. Vehicle access will be restricted on many roads year-round and others seasonally during winter big game use periods, and on important calving areas during the spring and early summer. Additionally, road construction and reconstruction will generally be limited.

The identified roadless areas will remain unroaded and will provide opportunities for recreationists to experience closeness to nature, self-reliance, and tranquility.

MANAGEMENT AREAS STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

Areas mapped as roadless (1984) within the GTM will remain roadless; the roadless areas will primarily provide Semi-primitive Nonmotorized, with some Semi-primitive Motorized settings (ROS). The remaining area may provide Roaded Natural and Roaded Modified opportunities in meeting the goal.

Recreation site modifications and site development should be level 2 or less (See Glossary). Facilities will generally be limited to meeting safety and sanitary needs. A minimum of onsite controls and restrictions will be utilized to protect resources and promote safe use of the area.

RECREATION

Access will be mostly for walk-in and horseback opportunities.

Off-highway vehicle (OHV) use is permitted and will normally be restricted to designated trails or closed roads. However, such use may be curtailed by closure or other measures where it is determined to be detrimental to big game species. Motorized use will be permitted on designated open roads.

Trail and associated facility construction, reconstruction, and maintenance will be permitted. Trail systems will be designed and maintained to disperse use, provide varying but challenging difficultly levels, and meet area objectives. Trail use may be curtailed by closure where and when determined to be detrimental to wintering big game species and/or other resource values.

If needed, implement limits on group size, number of animals, and/or other measures (based on limits of acceptable change criteria) to meet social encounter criteria for semi-primitive recreation opportunities. Utilize a minimum of onsite controls and restrictions to protect resources and promote safe use of the area.

VISUAL

A range of visual quality objectives will apply—from Retention to Modification.

CULTURAL

Meet Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines.

WILDLIFE

Elk habitat will be managed to maintain a habitat effectiveness index of no less than 70, including discounts for open roads. Marginal and satisfactory cover will be managed to the greatest extent possible in order to meet optimum size and distribution criteria, as described in the draft publication 'Habitat Effectiveness Index for Elk on Blue Mountain Winter Ranges' (Thomas and others 1988). The habitat effectiveness standard will be measured on a subwatershed (allocation zone) basis.

Cover

Where possible, a minimum of 10 percent of the winter and summer range parts of the GTM will be managed as satisfactory cover (15-20 percent is desirable). If this is not attainable because of low natural potential, the highest percentage of satisfactory cover potentially attainable will be created or maintained. Where possible, a minimum of 30 percent of an area will be managed as total cover (satisfactory and marginal).

Stands managed for satisfactory cover will meet the following criteria:

- Provide stand width of 600-1,200 feet. Exceptions can be made according to Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines;
- be at least 40 ft. in height with a canopy closure of at least 70 percent in all forest types and in the ponderosa pine type on big game winter ranges maintain a canopy closure of at least 50 percent; and
- should be at least 10 acres in size. Larger cover areas are preferable.

The desired cover condition will generally appear as a multi-layered stand, and will meet elk 'hiding' criteria by obscuring 90 percent of a standing elk at a distance of 200 feet or less.

Marginal cover will include stands no less than 10 feet in height with a canopy closure of at least 40 percent and will meet above the above elk 'hiding' criteria.

Forage

Available forage will be allocated to meet big game management objectives. Available forage in excess of wildlife needs may be allocated to domestic livestock.

Big game forage and cover enhancement projects are encouraged. Improvement projects such as prescribed burning, seeding and planting, browse planting, release, mechanical ground and vegetative disturbance, fertilization, and others may be employed. Structural improvements may be used to protect these investments.

Other

All management activities will be regulated during the big game winter use period of December 1 through March 30 or April 15.

Management activities will not create barriers to impede movement of big game animals.

Dead and down tree habitat will be managed to provide or maintain 80 percent of the potential population level for all primary cavity excavators and other non-game wildlife species, as described in Wildlife Habitats in Managed Forests (Thomas and others1979).

FISH

Fish habitat improvement projects and their maintenance will be permitted.

RANGE

Domestic livestock grazing is permitted at a level C management strategy. All available range and livestock management practices may be used consistent with the primary management goals of maintaining or enhancing the big game winter and summer ranges, and providing sufficient residual forage for big game species during the winter use period.

Structural range improvements are permitted to the extent that they are compatible with big game management.

TIMBER

Timber harvest will not be scheduled. However, timber management activities (including harvest, reforestation, and others) may be permitted and used only where analysis shows they are needed to achieve the objectives for big game harvest and for other wildlife species. Under catastrophic conditions, timber may be salvaged and cover reestablished.

EXCEPTION: The time limited or 'sunset' strategy concept may be used on designated areas within C8 under conditions listed in Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines. The concept applies to tentatively suitable lands in and adjacent to the Horseshoe Ridge Roadless Area as described below. Timber harvest volume will be scheduled for such areas. If no actions take place, or if results of timber harvest fail to meet specified objectives above, areas will revert automatically to standard C8 direction (no scheduled harvest) and schedules.

The approximately 9,000-acre Horseshoe Ridge area is south of a line from 'Smith Gate' east to Meacham Creek and is described as follows: Starting at the NE corner of section 19, T. 1 N., R. 36 E. bearing southerly and northeasterly along the proposed dedicated old growth (as shown on the management area maps) to Duncan Canyon, thence down Duncan Canyon to Meacham Creek. Thence southerly, westerly and northwesterly along Meacham Creek to the Forest boundary at about the SE corner of section 30, T.1 N., R. 36 E., north along the east boundary of sections 30 and 19 to the point of beginning. Important attributes for the area are cover for big game, 'spiritual' resources, high riparian and fish values, and visual quality. Timber may be harvested on a scheduled basis as directed by C8 Management Area Standards and Guidelines 'Exception' and resource objectives established for each project (timber sale) until the year 2000. By the year 2000, if the objectives above are not met, 'excepted' areas will revert to C8 without the 'Exception' and be removed from the scheduled cut. If objectives are met, the area

may be allocated to a different management strategy through the project review process and a separate NEPA evaluation.

WATER AND SOIL

Meet Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines.

MINERALS AND ENERGY

Meet Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines.

LANDS

All delineated winter range acres and adjacent land in Federal ownership will generally be retained.

Acquire inholdings within delineated winter range lines and adjacent land where opportunities exist.

Other Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines for lands and land uses apply.

TRANSPORTATION

Where no other feasible and economical options exist, roads may be constructed, reconstructed, and maintained through the area to provide access to other management areas, as long as they are consistent with the stated visual, watershed, and wildlife objectives.

Portions of the grass-tree mosaic (GTM) currently identified (mapped) as roadless will be maintained in an unroaded condition.

Roads will be closed to motorized use, as needed, to meet big game habitat effectiveness objectives.

FIRE

For moderate to high intensity wildfires (average flame lengths over 2 S), all wildfire suppression strategies may be emphasized. Under appropriate fire prediction conditions, wildfires may be permitted to play a natural role on the winter ranges to meet big game habitat and other resource objectives.

FUELS

In the forested areas, fuels should not exceed an average of 12 tons per acre in the 0 to 3-inch size class, and an average residue depth of 6 inches as depicted in the Photo Series for Quantifying Forest Residues (Technical Report PNW 52) (USDA Forest Service 1976b)'

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All types of prescribed fire may be used including broadcast burning, underburning, or range burning.

PESTS

Use integrated pest management (IPM) principles and strategies in meeting management area objectives. Aggressively suppress insects and disease using the cost efficient strategies when outbreaks threaten resource objectives or resources on adjacent lands. Favor biological methods in meeting protection and suppression requirements.

Protect forest stands (habitat) consistent with resource objectives by practicing prevention activities. Prescribed fire may be used to help reduce stocking and conditions favorable for bark beetle and dwarf mistletoes. Control of defoliators may also be accomplished by spraying following approval of an environmental analysis. Use of salvage harvest is limited to catastrophic events.