

C3A SENSITIVE BIG GAME WINTER RANGE

GOAL

MANAGE SENSITIVE AREAS OF BIG GAME WINTER RANGE TO PROVIDE HIGH LEVELS OF POTENTIAL HABITAT EFFECTIVENESS (AT OR ABOVE THE CURRENT LEVELS).

DESCRIPTION

The strategy applies to parts of winter ranges delineated in coordination with the Washington Department of Wildlife (and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife). The sensitive portions of designated winter ranges are the areas used nearly every year by wintering elk populations because of topography, slope, and current quality of cover and forage. The areas are generally at lower elevations of the designated winter ranges and lie adjacent to private lands.

Parts of (extensions) the Asotin big game winter range (Pomeroy) are included in the management area.

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

The area will appear as a mosaic of plant communities, including grassland forage area, brush, and some stands of trees. Use of prescribed fire will be apparent and carried out to maintain or increase the quality and quantity of forage and amount of cover on the area. Areas of early spring forage green-up due to prescribed fire will occur in a mosaic pattern over the winter range. Increased forage and cover will help encourage big game use on public lands and discourage high levels of winter use on the adjacent private lands. Most roads and trails will be closed to vehicle traffic during the winter, and there will be minimum human disturbance to big game during this period.

MANAGEMENT AREAS STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

RECREATION

A Roaded Modified social and physical setting (ROS) may result in meeting the goal. Dispersed recreation activities that meet the goal are permitted.

Recreation site modification and facility development levels 1 and 2 (see Glossary) are permitted.

Access will be mostly for walk-in or horseback opportunities on trails or closed roads, with some road-oriented activities.

Off-highway vehicle (OHV) use is permitted on designated routes. OHV use will be curtailed by closures where this use is determined to be detrimental to wintering big game species.

Trail and associated facility construction, reconstruction, and maintenance will be permitted. Trail activities and use will be curtailed by closures where and when determined to be detrimental to wintering big game species.

VISUAL

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

CULTURAL

Meet Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines.

WILDLIFE

Elk habitat will be managed on sensitive portions of designated big game winter ranges to achieve a habitat effectiveness index of no less than 70, including discounts for roads open to motorized vehicular traffic, as described in Wildlife Habitats in Managed Forests (Thomas and others 1979). The habitat effectiveness standard will be measured on an individual winter range basis.

Cover

Marginal and satisfactory cover will be managed to the extent possible to meet optimum size and distribution criteria, as described in 'Habitat Effectiveness Index for Elk on Blue Mountain Winter Ranges' (Thomas and others 1988).

Where possible, a minimum of 10 percent of each area will be maintained and 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 possible will be maintained. Where possible, a minimum of 30 percent of an area will be managed as total cover.

Stands managed for satisfactory cover will meet the following criteria:

- Provide stand width of 600-1,200 feet,
- be at least 40 ft. in height with a canopy closure of at least 70 percent in mixed conifer types and no less than 50 percent in the ponderosa pine types; and
- should be at least 10 acres in size. Larger cover areas are preferred.

The desired cover condition will generally appear as a multi-layered stand and 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 meet above elk 'hiding' criteria.

Forage

Both the quantity and quality of forage for big game will be enhanced or maintained through improved livestock grazing systems, controlled seasonal use, a prescribed burning program, and other measures.

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

Big game forage and cover improvement projects such as prescribed burning, seeding and planting, browse planting, release, tree removal, mechanical ground and vegetative disturbance, and fertilization may be employed. Structural improvements may be used to protect these investments.

Other

All management activities will be restricted where necessary 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, as described in Wildlife Habitats in Managed Forests (Thomas and others 1979).

FISH

Fish habitat improvement projects and their maintenance will be permitted.

RANGE

Domestic livestock grazing is permitted at Range Management Strategy C. All available range and livestock management practices consistent with the primary management goal of maintaining or enhancing the sensitive portions of big game winter range may be used.

Structural and nonstructural range improvements are permitted to the extent they are compatible with big game winter ranges management.

TIMBER

Timber harvest will not be scheduled. Activities such as harvest and reforestation may be used as management tools to maintain the highest possible cover class over time.

Under catastrophic conditions, timber may be salvaged and cover reestablished.

WATER AND SOIL

Meet Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines.

MINERALS AND ENERGY

Meet Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines.

LANDS

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

Acquire inholdings within delineated winter range lines where opportunities exist.

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

TRANSPORTATION

During the winter use period, close to motorized use roads not needed as through routes or as access to private lands. Roads will be closed to motorized use, as needed, to meet big game habitat effectiveness objectives.

Road construction, reconstruction, and maintenance will be permitted to access other parts of the Forest, except during the winter and spring big game use period.

FIRE

For moderate to high intensity wildfires (average flame lengths over 2 ft.), 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 objectives.

FUELS

Fuels should not exceed an average of 9 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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|-----------|------------|------------------|-----------|
| 3-PP-4-PC | 4-PP-1 -TH | 1 -PP&ASSOC-4-PC | 2-LP-3-PC |
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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 managing insects and disease to meet management objectives. Monitoring and detection of pest conditions and populations will be done so that corrective treatments consistent with resource objectives can be prescribed at the earliest opportunity.

Consistent with resource objectives, protect forest stands (habitats) by practicing prevention activities. Emphasis will be on the prevention of stand and fuels conditions that favor pests increases above epidemic levels. Aggressively suppress insects and disease using cost efficient strategies when outbreaks threaten resource objectives.