

Recreation, Wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers Report

2015 Southwestern Oregon Mineral Withdrawal

Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest,
Bureau of Land Management Medford and Coos Bay Districts

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Date: March 4, 2016

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Introduction

The Southwestern Oregon Watershed and Salmon Protection Act of 2015 (S. 346 and H.R. 682) was introduced to Congress on February 3, 2015, proposing to withdraw certain lands in Curry County and Josephine County, Oregon from all forms of mineral entry, appropriation, or disposal under public land laws, subject to valid existing rights. This proposed legislation includes federally owned land within the area depicted on two maps submitted with the draft legislation. The areas include approximately 5,216 acres of BLM-managed public domain and revested Oregon California Railroad lands (O&C), and 95,806 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands.

As a result of the legislative proposal, the Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Land and Minerals Management published a Notice of Proposed Withdrawal and Notification of Public Meetings in the Federal Register on June 29, 2015. The notice segregates for two years the described lands from settlement, sale, location, and entry under the public land laws, location and entry under the United States mining laws, and operation of the mineral and geothermal leasing laws.

The purpose and need of the proposed 5-year temporary withdrawal is to **maintain the current environmental baseline, relative to mining, mineral exploration and development, and geothermal energy development**, while Congress considers legislation enacting a permanent withdrawal from mineral entry for the federal lands depicted on the official maps.

Proposed Action: 5-year Mineral Withdrawal

The Forest Service and BLM propose a 5-year withdrawal from location and entry under the United States mining laws, and operation of the mineral and geothermal leasing laws for approximately 5,216 acres of BLM-managed public domain and revested Oregon California Railroad Grant lands and 95,806 acres of National Forest System lands in Josephine and Curry Counties. An additional 1,680 acres of non-federal lands included in the external boundaries of the maps would not be affected.

Under withdrawal, no new mining claims may be located, mineral entry would be prohibited, and no mineral leasing is allowed.

Withdrawal from operation under the mining and mineral leasing laws is subject to valid existing rights (VER). Existing mining claims may be developed after a minerals validity examination determines that a discovery of a valuable mineral deposit existed at the time of the segregation.

No other land management activities are affected by withdrawal from mineral entry.

The duration of the requested withdrawal is five years. At the end of this period, the BLM will reevaluate the withdrawal concerning the desirability and justification for extending the withdrawal for an additional period.

Alternative Action: 20-year Withdrawal

In response to public input received during the 90-day comment period, we will analyze withdrawal for a 20-year period. This alternative is the same in detail as the proposed action, except for the extended time period.

No Action: No Mineral Withdrawal

Withdrawal from location and entry under the mining laws and operation of the mineral and geothermal leasing laws would not occur, and the current segregation would end with the Secretary's decision.

New mining claims could be established, and proposed plans of operation and notices of intent could be submitted. The agencies would proceed with evaluating and authorizing previously submitted PoOs, subject to site-specific NEPA analysis including specified mitigations and project design criteria for mining and mineral development.

Suction-dredge operations could occur outside of the streams currently covered by the State of Oregon's moratorium on motorized placer mining (Oregon Senate Bill 838, July 2013) and on all streams within the project area after the moratorium expires in January 2021.

Affected Environment

The proposed withdrawal areas occur within the watersheds of Hunter Creek and Pistol River in the westernmost area of the proposed withdrawal. The Lower Illinois River (which includes Rough and Ready Creek) and North Fork Smith River (which includes Bald Face Creeks) make up the remainder of the proposed withdrawal area. The nearest communities (Brookings, OR and/or Cave Junction, OR) are generally greater than a forty five minute driving distance to the nearest recreation opportunity within the project area. Recreation will be addressed by combined watershed region where topographical and recreation use similarities are present.

Limited recreational suction dredging is known to occur and represents a small component of recreational activities occurring within the project area. There are three surface mining claims within the proposed withdrawal areas that have existing plans of operations.

Hunter Creek/Pistol River Proposed Withdrawal Area

The landscapes in these areas are typified by moderately flat ridges and moderate slopes. The area has been managed for timber in the past and has several roads that were developed to provide access for timber removal. As access was created, dispersed recreation uses developed and continue throughout the area. Gold Beach is the nearest community, ranging in drive time from roughly 30 minutes to the Hunter Creek areas to over an hour to some of the further reaches of the proposed withdrawal area. The area is home to the Red Flat Botanical Area, Hunter Creek Bog and North Fork Hunter Creek Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

Plan Guidance

The Siskiyou Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) provides guidance for recreation management. Recreation in the Hunter Creek/Pistol River proposed withdrawal area is guided by direction in the following land management allocations: Management Area (MA) 14 - General Forest Area; MA 4 - Botanical (includes the Red Flat Botanical Area); MA 5- Unique Interest Area; MA 8 - Designated Wildlife Habitat; MA 9 - Special Wildlife Site; MA 11 - Riparian Area; (contains Signal Buttes and Pyramid Rock). Visual Quality Objectives (VQO) under General Forest Area provide for modification and maximum modification. (USFS 1989)

The LRMP employs the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) for designating and establishing management standard across a landscape. The ROS is a recreation classification system, which defines recreation opportunities by access, opportunities for solitude, and facilities development level. Recreation opportunities in the two watersheds are designated as "Roaded Natural."

Roaded Natural is defined as “an area characterized by predominantly naturally appearing environments with moderate evidences of the sights and sounds of people. Conventional motorized use is provided for in construction standards and design of facilities” (USFS 1989). There are no developed recreation sites within the analysis area.

Existing Uses

The predominant recreation activities in the Hunter Creek/Pistol River proposed withdrawal area are dispersed uses associated with hunting, camping, botanical study and viewing (Red Flats Botanical Area), and off-highway vehicle (OHV) use. There are approximately 4 miles of motorized trails identified in the Hunter Creek/Pistol River proposed withdrawal area.

The amount of use is currently unknown. Past monitoring efforts indicate that much of the use is from local citizens (USFS 1998). There are some dispersed campsites throughout the analysis area, which are primarily located along stream and river corridors. Fishing, sightseeing and collecting special forest products were also noted as activities occurring in this area (USFS 1998). The highest use periods are during hunting season and during the summer months.

Studies conducted by Oregon State University in 1999 (Johnson) and 2009 (Lindberg), tracking OHV use and the economic importance of OHV use, indicate that OHV use has increased over the period of 10 years. Based on demonstrated increases in OHV popularity and limited changes in opportunities available within the analysis area, it is assumed that use has increased or remain constant in the analysis area since the 2009 study. It has been noted that most OHV use occurs during the hunting season.

Economic Contributions Associated with Recreation Uses

The Hunter Creek/Pistol River proposed withdrawal area is located in Curry County. The information presented is for the entirety of Curry County. There are no direct correlations to use within the analysis area and economic impacts derived from use in the area. However, limited inferences may be derived from the information. All of the uses included were noted to occur within the analysis area.

Table 1. Economic contributions from travel related to specific recreation uses in Curry County, OR in 2009 (Runyon 2009).

Activity	Travel Generated Expenditures by Trip Type (\$000)		Local Recreation Expenditures*
	Day Use	Overnight Use	
Hunting	\$519	\$209	\$413
Wildlife Viewing	\$9,438	\$585	\$309
Freshwater fishing	\$3,545	\$907	\$673

* Local recreation expenditures represent expenses incurred by residents who traveled less than 50 miles and is not reflected in the day use and overnight use figures.

Rough and Ready Creek/Bald Face Creek Proposed Withdrawal Area

The landscapes in this area are typically remote and rugged, limiting human use historically and today. Commonly the steep mountain slopes with peaks as high as 4600 foot above sea level extend to the watercourses (USFS 1993). The creeks and rivers within these watersheds are noted for exceptional fishing and kayaking opportunities. Timber management activities were limited in this area, resulting in a landscape that leaves little indication of human management activities.

Cave Junction is the nearest community to this proposed withdrawal area. Evidence of historical mining activities is scattered throughout the area.

Plan Guidance

Figure 2 depicts the Management Allocations applicable within the Northfork Smith River and Bald Face Creek proposed withdrawal area.

Additional guidance for recreation in the Rough and Ready Creek/Baldface Creek proposed withdrawal area is guided by direction in the following land management allocations: MA 14 - General Forest Area; MA 4 - Botanical (includes Oregon Mountain Botanical Area); MA 6 - Backcountry Recreation (includes Cedar Mountain); MA 9 - Special Wildlife Site; MA 11 - Riparian Area; MA 13 - Partial Retention (North Fork Wild & Scenic River).

Recreation opportunities in the Rough and Ready/Baldface Creek watersheds are predominantly Semi Primitive Non-motorized with corridors of Semi-Primitive Motorized where roads exist. Areas along the southern most border of the proposed withdrawal area are designated Roaded Natural. The proposed withdrawal area also falls within portions of the North Fork Smith River watershed. Recreation opportunities within this area are predominantly within the Roaded Natural spectrum. The North Fork Smith River Wild and Scenic River is designated Semi-Primitive Non-motorized (USFS 1989). Much of the Rough and Ready Creek/Baldface Creek watersheds are within the RARE II South Kalmiopsis Roadless Area (USFS 1997).

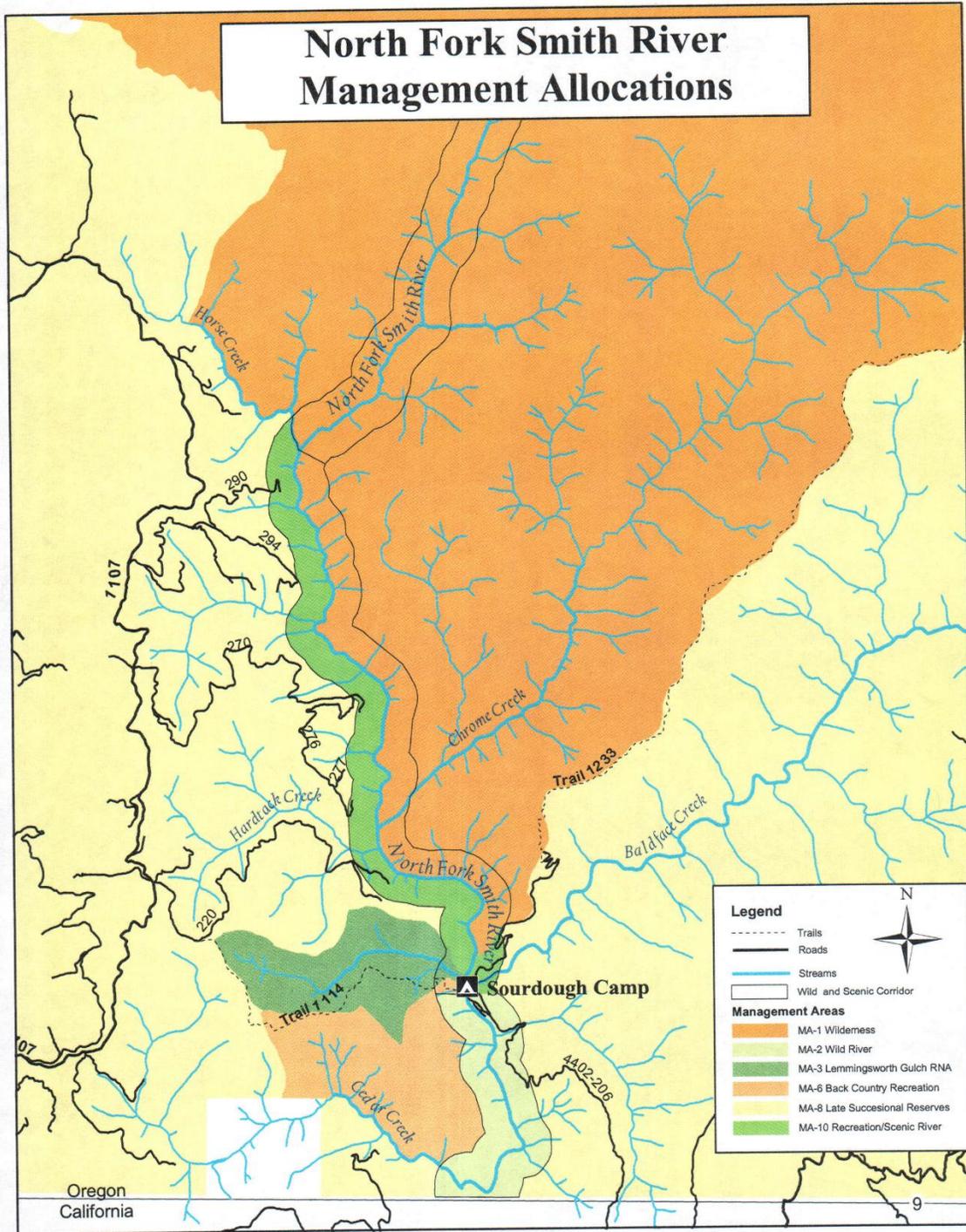


Figure 2. Land use allocations within the Northfork Smith River drainage.

Existing Uses

The predominant recreation uses in the Rough and Ready /Baldface Creek proposed withdrawal area are hiking, dispersed camping, OHV/4WD travel along the McGrew Trail, and kayaking. Hunting, wildlife viewing and botanical explorations make up the remainder of known recreation activities. Based on the remoteness of the areas, proximity to communities, and limitations of

roaded access, use throughout the withdrawal areas, with the exception of the McGrew Trail, is considered to be low.

The most popular concentrated dispersed use area is known as Sourdough Camp. This area is used for camping and provides access to swimming, fishing, hiking and recreational panning and suction dredging activities (USFS 1997). The area is also a favorite among users of the four-wheel drive (4WD) McGrew Trail. There are no developed recreation sites within the analysis area.

Four trailheads are found within the Rough and Ready/Baldface Creek portion of the proposed withdrawal area. Due to the remote nature and distant proximity to local communities, use on these trails is generally considered low.

Table 2. Miles of trails within the 2015 SW Oregon Mineral Withdrawal areas.

Trail	Trail Number	Trail Length (miles)	Features Accessed
Sourdough	1114	3.8	Lemmingsworth Research Natural Area
Red Mountain	1105	.1	Kalmiopsis Wilderness Area
Baldface Creek	1215	6.8	Kalmiopsis Wilderness Area;
Kalmiopsis Rim/Buckskin Peak	1124	7.0	Kalmiopsis Wilderness Area

Motorized use within this proposed withdrawal area is limited by the lack of roads through the area. The McGrew Trail, however, is a popular four-wheel drive trail (Forest System Road (FSR) 450) that travels for approximately twenty miles through the southernmost extent of the proposed withdrawal area. The trail is a popular destination for local enthusiasts, as well as those who travel hundreds of miles to participate in the challenges afforded by the rugged terrain.

Many of the creeks and rivers in the proposed withdrawal area are noted for their native salmon and steelhead runs. Due to the remote nature, they typically receive low visitation and use. Baldface Creek, Rough and Ready Creek, and the North Fork Smith River are renowned for whitewater adventures but are accessible only to those rafters and kayakers who pack in their boats and gear through the rugged terrain.

There are 32 placer claims in Rough and Ready Creek/Baldface Creek proposed withdrawal area.

Economic Contributions Associated with Recreation Uses

The Rough and Ready Creek/Baldface Creek proposed withdrawal area is located in Josephine and Curry Counties with nearly two thirds of the proposed withdrawal area occurring in Curry County. The information presented is for the entirety of Josephine and Curry Counties. Because use numbers within the analysis area are unknown it is impossible to make direct correlations to economic contributions shown below with uses occurring within the analysis area. However limited inferences may be derived. All of the uses included were noted to occur within the analysis area.

Table 3. Economic contributions from travel related to specific recreation uses in Curry and Josephine Counties in OR, 2008 (Runyon, 2009).

County	Recreation Generated Expenditures by Activity (\$000)*		
	Hunting	Wildlife Viewing	Freshwater Fishing

Curry	\$1,141	\$10,331	\$5,125
Josephine	\$2,303	\$7,343	\$5,032

Additionally, each year events are permitted on the McGrew 4WD Trail attracting between 200 and 300 participant. The Oregon State study indicates that OHV recreationist spend between \$106 and \$169 per trip per day. Assuming participants stay 2 days, the event(s) may bring between \$42,000 and \$101,000 to local businesses during the permitted event(s).

Commercial uses of the stream and rivers have not been permitted. The economic contributions of individual users (hiking, backpacking, and whitewater boaters) who travel from local communities and significantly greater distances should also be considered when determining economic contributions from recreation, although use associated with these types of activities is generally considered low.

Wilderness Character

The proposed area of the withdrawal is bordered to the north by the Kalmiopsis Wilderness Area and to the south by the Smith River National Recreation Area. The area contains the Packsaddle Roadless Area and the South Kalmiopsis Roadless Area.

The South Kalmiopsis area is typified by forested, steep, mountain topography with elevations ranging from 500 feet to 4,000 foot. Primitive roads traverse the southernmost area. The roads are, in large part, a result of past mining and mineral exploration (South Kalmiopsis Forest Plan FEIS p. 263). The clear waters of the creeks and rivers, outstanding scenery, botanical and ecological diversity; high potential for solitude and primitive unconfined recreation, and a landscape that shows little evidence of management activities are key characteristics of the area that led to the proposal for wilderness designation. In 2004, roughly 34,150 acres of the South Kalmiopsis Roadless Area was proposed for designation to the wilderness system.

The Siskiyou Forest Plan similarly evaluated the Packsaddle Roadless area for the capability of potential wilderness recommendation. The analysis concluded that this area did not demonstrate wilderness potential. The area does, however, contain the Lemmingsworth Gulch Research Natural Area.

As previously noted, there are three trails within the proposed withdrawal area that provide access to the Kalmiopsis Wilderness Area. Due to the remote locations and limited access, use in this area is considered low.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

The North Fork Smith River is a designated National Wild and Scenic River under the Omnibus Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1988. Mineral entry was excluded in the Wild segment of the river through the 1988 Omnibus Act. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 withdraws from mineral appropriations under mining laws and from operation of the mineral leasing laws, all public lands that constitute bed or bank or that are within two miles of the bank of a designated river, subject to valid existing rights (WSRA).

Eligibility studies have been completed for three creeks located within the project boundary: Rough and Ready Creek, Bald Face Creek, North Fork Rough and Ready Creek. In each instance, the studies determined that the creeks are free-flowing and possess at least one Outstandingly Remarkable Value. The creeks are thus managed to protect the values identified until such time they are designated, or further determination is made that they are unsuitable for designation.

Table 4. Outstandingly Remarkable Values by waterway

Waterway	ORV	Source/basis
North Fork Smith River	Scenery	Legislation
	Water quality	
	Fisheries	
Maintstem Rough and Ready Creek	Botanical/ecological	Eligibility study
	Wildlife	
	Geologic/hydrologic	
North Fork Rough and Ready Creek	Botanical/ecological	Eligibility study
Baldface Creek	Fisheries	Eligibility study
	Water quality	

Management Area 2 – Wild River and Management Area 10 – Scenic/Recreation River provide direction for management activities and protections within the designated river corridor.

Existing Uses

Recreation uses throughout the Rough and Ready/Baldface Creek proposed withdrawal area are considered low due to limited access and the steep topography. Use has been noted to be from local residents who visit the area for hiking, fishing, hunting, swimming, plant study and viewing, and horseback riding (USFS year?). The North Fork Smith River provides Class III and IV whitewater rafting and kayaking opportunities. Put-in is generally at the Sourdough Camp site, although the more ardent enthusiasts hike with their boats and gear to reach more remote and challenging river and stream segments.

There is no known mineral activity currently occurring in the designated segments of the North Fork Smith River Wild and Scenic corridor.

Economic Contributions from Recreation Use

Due to the relatively low use associated with the stream and river corridor, it is impossible without focused efforts to ascertain economic contributions derived from the limited recreation that occurs within the Wild and Scenic River and eligible stream corridors.

Analysis Framework

Analysis of the action alternatives (5-year and 20-year withdrawal) will display the effects of precluding mineral entry. Analysis of the no action alternative will display the general effects of these known activity areas being open to mineral entry, as contrasted with mineral entry being precluded. Specific details and effects of the proposed PoOs will not be analyzed. Site-specific NEPA for those projects would include alternatives, project design criteria, and required mitigation measures, which are beyond the scope of this analysis.

Analysis will focus primarily on

1. areas where proposed mineral plans of operation under consideration at the time of segregation;
2. areas of suction dredge activity, as characterized by recent levels permitted by the State of Oregon;

3. the distribution of existing claims and the potential for resource conflicts (e.g. whether or not existing claims occur in areas with TES species, sensitive wetlands, popular recreation sites, or other high-value resources).

Three proposed plans of operations (PoOs) for nickel laterite mining or exploration were submitted, but not yet approved, prior to segregation. Those PoOs include:

- ◆ RF-38 (location: T37S, R13W, Sec. 18, 19, 29-32; T37S, R14W, Sec. 13, 24, Willamette Meridian)
- ◆ Cleopatra (location: T41S, R10W, Sec. 5-8, 17, 18; T41S, R11W, Sec. 1, 12, Willamette Meridian)
- ◆ RnR (location: T40S, R9W, Sec. 8, 9, 21, 22, Willamette Meridian)

Existing claims in the withdrawal areas total 234 lode and 45 placer claims. To date, no existing claims have been proven valid following the BLM's validity examination process.

Environmental Consequences - Recreation

Proposed Action – 5-year Withdrawal

There are three surface mining claims in the proposed withdrawal area(s) where PoO's have been filed. Additionally, there are 32 suction dredging claims within the proposed analysis area. To date, a determination of validity has not been completed on any of the claims. Under withdrawal, suction dredging would be prohibited, unless a validity exam determined a valid existing right. Only two suction dredge permits within the withdrawal area were issued by the state of Oregon in recent years. Both occurred on BLM land along Rough and Ready Creek.

The proposed withdrawal provides that land within the analysis area would be restricted from "location and entry under the United States mining laws, subject to valid and existing rights." Therefore, no mining activity could occur for any claims where a minerals validity exam had not determined a valuable discovery.

Recreation activities and other resource management actions would continue to be guided by the Rogue River-Siskiyou LRMP as amended. If claims establish a valid existing right through a minerals exam, environmental analyses would have to be completed prior to commencement of mineral operations. The potential effects of any site-specific claim would be evaluated under a detailed analysis process.

Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects - Recreation

Any suction dredging activities occurring during the segregation and proposed withdrawal period would require a validity exam to be conducted. Only those claims determined valid would be allowed to operate. As a result, suction dredging operation is unlikely to produce a measurable change in uses common to the withdrawal area(s) i.e. hiking, OHV travel, camping, kayaking, rafting, horseback riding, swimming, fishing, scenery viewing, botanical viewing and study. The uses are expected to continue at their current levels and increase or decrease based on industry trends. The proposed action would likely bear no relevance on any future trends in use changes for these activities.

Recreational suction dredging and recreational panning would decrease as a result of the proposed action. The decreased potential for mining claims and operations would increase the opportunities for solitude and scenery free of equipment or disturbance.

Economics

Based on the overall low use rates for the proposed withdrawal area, effects to local economies would be essentially immeasurable.

Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects - Wild and Scenic Rivers/Eligible Streams/Rivers

Suction dredging would be limited to claims where a validity examination resulted in a determination of viability of the proposed operations.

Scenery

The proposed withdrawal would effectively maintain the remarkable scenery and landscapes that exist within the North Fork Smith Wild and Scenic River corridor and the Rough and Ready/Baldface Creek areas for the two-year segregation period followed by the 5-year proposed withdrawal period.

Water Quality

The proposed withdrawal would effectively maintain the water quality for the two-year segregation period followed by the 5-year proposed withdrawal period. The amount and duration of turbidity would be diminished on streams where suction dredging operations currently occur. (See hydrology report for additional information).

Fisheries

The proposed withdrawal would effectively limit impacts to fisheries and maintain the current habitat conditions for the two-year segregation period followed by the 5-year proposed withdrawal period. (See fisheries report for additional information).

Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects – Wilderness Characteristic

The decreased potential for mining claims and operations would increase the opportunities for solitude and scenery free of equipment or disturbance. The proposed withdrawal would effectively maintain the remarkable scenery and landscapes that exist within the South Kalmiopsis and Packsaddle Roadless areas.

Alternative Action – 20-year Withdrawal

Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects

The overall effects of a 20-year withdrawal are expected to be the same as those identified for the 5-year period. Recreational suction dredging and recreational panning opportunities would continue to be excluded from the proposed withdrawal area. All other activities would be expected to be enhanced and continue, based on industry trends. Landscapes and resources would continue to be managed based on guidance from the Rogue River-Siskiyou LRMP and policy, regulations and laws current to the period.

No Action – No Withdrawal

Suction dredging would be expected to continue at current interest and activity levels. There are three surface mining claims within the proposed withdrawal areas that have existing plans of operations, which would provide for test drilling in two of the three claims covered by plans. The third claim will remain non-operational pending further findings.

Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects - Recreation

The No Action alternative would provide for continued existing uses and mineral operations. Uses and management actions would continue to be guided by the Rogue River – Siskiyou LRMP, policy, regulation, and law. Suction dredging activities are currently restricted under Oregon state regulations in critical salmon habitat areas. For the period of the moratorium, user conflicts would be limited to only those areas where dredging occurs outside of a habitat area. Recreation conflicts are limited in those areas, based on the light recreation use that occurs. Beyond the extent of the moratorium, it is likely that where user conflicts result from recreational uses of the waterways and suction dredging operations, these conflicts would continue.

Continued interest in the pursuit of surface mining activities is expected to continue. However, impacts to recreation uses that may be associated with specific claim operations (either as a result of a filed Notice of Intent or Plan of Operations) would be covered in a separate site-specific environmental analysis.

The most likely impacts to recreation in the Hunter Creek/Pistol River proposed withdrawal area would occur in the North Fork Pistol River and Pyramid Rock area of the eastern tributaries to the North Fork Pistol River. Uses here are associated with the Red Flat Botanical Area, OHV use, and hunting.

Within the Rough and Ready/Baldface proposed withdrawal area, impacts to viewsheds along the McGrew Trail and possible improvements to McGrew trail resulting from mining access needs would likely diminish the OHV recreation experience. Impacts may also be anticipated to dispersed uses in the Rough and Ready Creek and Baldface Creek areas. The expectation for primitive recreation experiences could potentially be jeopardized, as well as views from trails and or trail destinations.

Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects - Wild and Scenic Rivers/Eligible Streams/Rivers

Scenery

The outstanding remarkable values of the North Fork Smith Wild and Scenic River corridor are protected to the extent allowed by law under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968. There are no claims within the North Fork Smith River corridor, however portions of some claims do occur proximate to the two mile offset.

The slopes and topography surrounding the North Fork Smith and the Rough and Ready and Baldface Creeks are very steep, lending to limited sight distances from the river and creek corridors. It may be expected that, based on the steepness of the immediate waterway corridor, impacts to those adjacent viewsheds resulting from surface mining would be limited.

While not protected by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the LRMP does provide guidance for management for the Rough and Ready Creek and the Baldface Creek corridors. All activities under a plan of operations would be analyzed for impacts under a separate site-specific analysis.

Water Quality

Water quality for the two-year segregation period would be improved during the period of the state moratorium for those areas within the critical salmon habitat reaches. It would be expected that quality may diminish to pre-moratorium levels once the moratorium expires. The amount and duration of turbidity would be expected to resume to current levels on streams where suction dredging operations currently occur. (See hydrology and aquatics reports for additional information).

Fisheries

See aquatics report.

Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects – Wilderness Characteristic

The remarkable scenery and landscapes that exist within South Kalmiopsis and Packsaddle Roadless areas would be jeopardized under the No Action alternative. The areas would continue to be subject to current mining laws. New claims may be established and existing claims may continue ongoing processes for testing and approval for operations. In the case of suction dredging, operations would continue and/or potentially increase based on prospective interests and the relative value of precious metals.

The opportunities for solitude and scenery free of equipment or disturbance will likely diminish in the No Action alternative.

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