Notice of Opportunity to Comment

Mission Restoration Project
Preliminary Environmental Assessment and Forest Plan Amendment
Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests
Methow Valley Ranger District

Responsible Official Michael Williams, Forest Supervisor for the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, announces the availability of the Mission Restoration Project Revised Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for public review and comment. The project is located on the Methow Valley Ranger District east and south of Twisp, Washington in T32N and T33N; R19E, R20E, and R21E, Willamette Meridian. The project area covers about 50,200 acres. Proposed activities include up to 1,952 acres of commercial thinning treatments; 8,304 acres of noncommercial thinning treatments; 10,968 acres of prescribed fire treatments; 468 acres of soil restoration treatments; 23 culvert replacements; 8.2 miles of coarse woody debris enhancement; beaver habitat enhancement at six sites; rock armoring at 33 sites; creating hardened fords at four stream crossings; closing, opening, and decommissioning roads; repairing a bridge, and building temporary roads. Treatments are proposed within Riparian Reserves and an Inventoried Roadless Area.

The project scoping letter and initial preliminary EA listed several proposed amendments for this project; since that time, interdisciplinary team members determined through field reconnaissance, aerial photos, modeling results, and clarification of Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines that several proposed amendments were unnecessary because proposed treatments would be consistent with the Standards and Guidelines those amendments would have temporarily altered, or the project could be implemented with reduced flexibility without those amendments.

The proposal for the Mission Restoration Project includes a project-specific Forest Plan amendment to exempt the project from the following Okanogan Forest Plan standards and guidelines in Management Areas 14 and 26 related to the management of deer winter range cover:

Management Area Prescription Wildlife MA14-6A and MA26-6A

Manage all identified deer winter range for the following well distributed cover:

Figure 1. Deer Winter Range Cover Guidance

Winter Range Cover	MA14 & MA26
Snow intercept Thermal	> 15%
Winter Thermal	> 25%
Hiding	> 0%
Total:	**> 40%**

This amendment is needed in order to 1) reduce wildfire hazard in the Wildland Urban Interface; 2) maintain and enhance forest vegetation structure and arrangement; 3) increase ecological sustainability to disturbances such as insects and disease, wildfire, and climate change; and 4) maintain and improve species diversity where conifers are encroaching on aspen.

To meet public notification requirements of the amended Planning Rule at 36 CFR 219.16 related to Forest Plan amendments, the Okanogan-Wenatchee NF is providing a 30-day designated opportunity for the public to provide written comments (36 CFR 218.5(a)) on the analysis of the amendment, including substantive planning rule provisions that apply. The Okanogan-Wenatchee NF has identified the following substantive rule requirements as directly related to the proposed amendment for the Mission Restoration Project:

219.8 (a)(1)(iv) System drivers such as wildland fire, and climate change, and the ability of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems in the plan area to adapt to change; 219.8 (a)(1)(v) Wildland fires and opportunities to restore fire-adapted ecosystems; 219.8(a)(1)(vi) Opportunities for landscape scale restoration; 219.9(a)(1) Ecosystem integrity; 219.9(a)(2) Ecosystem diversity; and 219.11(c) Timber harvest for purposes other than timber production.

Portions of the revised preliminary EA addressing the amendment and substantive provisions related to the amendment are located on pages 1, 24-27, and 307-311. Effects of the proposed amendment on substantive provisions are described on pages 79-80, 98-99, 132-133, 167-168, 209-214, 237-238, 258, 276, 296-297, and 302.

The opportunity for comment applies only to the analysis associated with the proposed Forest Plan amendment. All comments must meet the requirements at 36 CFR Part 218.25 and previous commenters will have eligibility to object under 36 CFR 281.5. Previously submitted comments will be considered and do not need to be resubmitted. Comments on the project must be postmarked no later than 30 days after the date of publication of this legal notice in The Wenatchee World newspaper. Comments should be addressed to the Responsible Official, Michael Williams, Forest Supervisor, c/o Meg Trebon, Methow Valley Ranger District, 24 W Chewuch Road, Winthrop, WA 98862; Phone: (509) 996-4000; FAX: (509) 996-2208; e-mail address: https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?Project=49201. Those submitting hand-delivered comments may do so during regular office hours, 8:00AM to 4:30PM, Monday through Friday, except legal holidays. It is the responsibility of all individuals and organizations to ensure their comments are received in a timely manner. For electronically mailed comments, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of the comments, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means. Electronic comments must be submitted only to the web address shown above.

Only those who submit timely and specific comments regarding the proposed project or activity during a public comment period established by the Responsible Official, such as this one, are eligible to file an objection. For objection eligibility, each individual or representative from each entity submitting timely and specific written comments regarding the proposed project or activity comments must either sign the comments or verify their identity upon request.

Background information and the draft Environmental Assessment for this project are available at https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=49201. Anyone wishing to obtain additional information on the project should contact Meg Trebon at (509) 996-4032.

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