

**Old Growth Ridge Trail Extension
Environmental Assessment
EA OR-090-04-09**

Background, Purpose and Need:

In 1992 the initial phase of the Old Growth Ridge Trail was completed and sufficient for public use. During the application process for National Recreation Trail (NRT) interpretive status, the National Park Service agreed to allow such designation with the understanding that a loop would eventually be added on to the original 1.25 mile trail. An informal, interagency agreement ensued and approval was established.

Subsequent to the early usage of the trail, scouting was done, and some surveys conducted, to the east and below the summit, back to Whittaker Creek campground with the hopes of building a loop, fulfilling the original promise.

Time elapsed, and finally in 1997, a proposal for extension was requested and denied for the eastside route. The main issue was the threat of disturbance to nesting spotted owls and marbled murrelets. At that time all effort for an extension was abandoned by the Eugene recreation staff due to lack of suitable information regarding an alternative route.

The up & back style Old Growth Ridge Trail accommodated usage throughout the subsequent camping seasons. A frequent request from the hikers was "When will there be a loop?" Now, in 2004, a possibility exists for continuation of the original goal.

In summary, the need for the proposed action is to complete the 1991 vision of a loop trail system connected to Whittaker Creek Recreation Site for public enjoyment. The proposed trail extension would be located in T. 18 S., R. 8 W., Section 21.

Issues, concerns and opportunities selected for analysis:

- (1) How would trail construction affect T and E species and their habitat?
- (2) How would trail construction affect ACS objectives?
- (3) How would trail construction enhance educational opportunities for the public?

Alternatives considered

Proposed Action Alternative:

The proposed loop would swing west off the existing trail, approximately two-thirds the way up the hill, (see map) remaining in Sec 21 (BLM land), winding down through a second growth Douglas fir stand, and finishing parallel to Whittaker Creek, along an old road grade and back to the campground. This approximately 1.4 mile route was evaluated utilizing the interdisciplinary team process (IDT), involving numerous specialists from the resource area, including recreation, wildlife, fisheries, soils, and hydrology; resulting in a project that would fulfill the purpose and need with minimal resource effects.

The construction of the trail would be implemented during the late spring and early summer of 2004, following public EA review, by a pre-designated youth group from the Eugene-Springfield area. A surface tread width would not exceed 30 inches throughout the route. Live conifers would be left untouched in all situations. Only small live brush species, (hazel, vine maple etc.) would be removed from the trail pathway along with deadfall material. Snags would be monitored for safety, and routine maintenance would be conducted annually, as determined by the trail manager. In some instances snags may be utilized for trail tread support on switchbacks, etc. Some

interpretive signage would be placed along the route. Wooden resting benches would be installed at selected locations along the trail. A particular site along the Whittaker Creek streamside is being considered for a dedication memorial to renowned Eugene District fisheries biologist, Neil Armantrout.

Three design feature structures (listed below and shown on map) would be installed at particular locations along the lower portion of the trail route. Each one of these would serve to mitigate potential effects to the water and soil resources in their respective locations. Other standard trail construction methods such as steps, and switchback support systems using windfall materials would also be utilized. All material cast off during the construction process would be scattered and dispersed (not piled).

Following construction of the trail tread, materials for the design structures would be hand carried to the three separate locations for installation.

Design feature #1: A puncheon walkway about 20 feet long, situated on old road grade. This would allow water seepage to pass under without disturbance to existing locale. This wooden structure would be constructed of a combination of indigenous and commercial materials.

Design feature #2: This structure is a plank style creek crossing where the trail first encounters the draw just uphill from the lower riparian area. Two by twelve cedar boards would be adequate at this 14 foot structure. This would allow undisturbed water flow underneath the structure.

Design feature #3: This final structure, an 8 foot plank style crossing, would serve the same purpose as structure #2. Located about a quarter mile (trail distance) from #2, this structure completes the wooden construction on the trail.

No Action Alternative

This alternative would maintain the existing trail and not enact any new construction whatsoever.

Alternatives considered but eliminated from further analysis

Eastside Alternative

This was the first proposed route for an extension as previously mentioned and dating back to 1997. This eastside alternative was eliminated from consideration due to potential spotted owl and marbled murrelet disturbance and habitat modification.

Original Layout Alternative

This alternative route was eliminated from further analysis after the trail as laid out in 2004 was assessed by the interdisciplinary team during field inspection. This route was designed to travel through a sensitive riparian area, potentially causing disturbance to the soils and water quality. Re-routing of this original layout design was accomplished by members of the interdisciplinary team, resulting in the Proposed Action Alternative.

Conformance

This Environmental Assessment (EA) is tiered to and in conformance with the "Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and the Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl" (ROD/Standards and Guidelines), April 1994, and the "Eugene District Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan" (ROD/RMP), June 1995, as amended. The Esmo-Whitt Subwatershed Analysis (June 1998) also identified this trail extension as a potential future development for recreational activities.

Affected Environment (Common to all alternatives)

Threatened and Endangered Species

The newly created extension would pass through a second growth Douglas fir stand approximately 40 years old. This area lacks the moderate to large down wood and snags that could sustain prey for dispersing spotted owls; consequently, the area through which this trail would pass does not qualify as dispersal habitat for the northern spotted owl.

There are no known activity centers for any federally listed or proposed terrestrial wildlife species within the proposed project area itself, but there are two historic nest sites, (one murrelet and one spotted owl) within 0.5 mile the proposed trail.

Habitat suitable for the spotted owl, marbled murrelet and bald eagle does exist at the junction of the original trail and proposed extension. The northern junction of the new and original trail is adjacent to an unoccupied Bald Eagle Habitat Area (BEHA). The proposed action area is also designated Critical Habitat for both the marbled murrelet and spotted owl.

Survey and Manage and other Special Status Species

No surveys for Survey and Manage wildlife species are required, and no known sites of these species exist within the proposed trail route. No other special status species or unique habitats were encountered within the project area during various wildlife surveys associated with this proposed action.

Other Wildlife

This area currently provides some foraging habitat for deer and elk, and also could serve as hiding and escape cover for these species. There is evidence these species utilize these areas, particularly along the riparian zone of Whittaker Creek.

Except for the adjacent old-growth stand near the junction of the old and new proposed trail, there is a general lack of snags over 10 inches dbh. Those that do occur here generally are early stages of decay. Consequently, species that rely on such structure for foraging, nesting or denning are scarce within the proposed action area. Such species would include bats, woodpeckers, and nuthatches.

As with snags, levels of coarse woody debris (CWD) not associated with old-growth or mature stands within the area are also low. There are some scattered large down logs in advanced decay, but most CWD in this area is characterized by small size and early decay stages. Large down logs are important as foraging substrates for a variety of species, retain moisture during dry periods, and serve as refugia for various species of amphibians, reptiles and rodents.

Botany

The route of the proposed trail extension was surveyed July 2003 for Special Status and Survey & Manage vascular plants, lichens and bryophytes. Only the Survey and Manage lichen *Ramalina thrausta* was found, and this species has since been removed from the Survey and Manage list. *Cimicifuga elata*, a Bureau Sensitive species, is found on the east facing old growth slopes where the original trail occurs, but no additional *Cimicifuga* was found in the south-facing second growth along the proposed trail route. To survey a small deviation in the final route, an additional botanical survey would be conducted no later than May '04.

Noxious weeds listed by Oregon State were found in the riparian conversion area along Whittaker Creek, including common St. Johnswort, and bull thistle. These weeds were not found in the second growth (43 year old) forest outside the conversion area.

Fisheries

In the southwest portion of section 21 the proposed trail would cross a small intermittent tributary of Whittaker Creek. This tributary is non-fish bearing.

Geology and Soils

The Whittaker Creek area is geologically mapped within the Tye Formation that consists of arkosic marine sandstones that may include minor interbeds of tuff (Walker and Macleod, 1991). The Tye Formation overlies the Flournoy Formation and both share similar lithology. The Tye Formation is composed of delta and turbidite sands from the Klamath Mountains while the Flournoy formations were derived from local undersea volcanoes as well as sediment from the Klamath Mountains (Orr and Orr, 1996). Mountain side slopes in the Whittaker Creek area are typically steep with relatively uniform gradients from ridgetop to the valley bottom. Ridgetops are sharp and narrow. Dry raveling is associated with these slopes and is primarily active on the convex portions of the hillslopes. Debris avalanche occurs in areas where gradients exceed 70 percent typically off the fault scarps of the thick-bedded sandstone of the Tye and Flournoy Formations. Debris torrents may originate from first order headwater streams in the upper reaches where headwalls or hollows of drainages with slope gradients between 90-100 percent may be present.

The proposed Old Growth Trail extension crosses landforms created by a multitude of old landslides. A large rotational slump is located at the top of the mountain and is evidenced by a large depression and headscarps above and below. Within the riparian area, large colluvial debris fans from debris flows and minor landslides have formed swaths of sediment wedges and during high flows the creek channels avulse and migrate back and forth, sometimes braiding into multiple channels before reaching Whittaker Creek.

The general area lies in the Bohannon-Digger-Preacher Soil Association. These soils formed from sandstone in the udic-mesic zone of the Coast Range (USDA, 1987). Whittaker Campground and the riparian area are located within the Nehalem silt loam soil series on the floodplain of Whittaker Creek. The Nehalem silt loam is a well-drained soil that forms in bottomlands in silty alluvium. Permeability is moderate. Typically, the surface layer is very dark brown silt loam about 15 inches thick. Subsoils reach to 60 inches or more (USDA, 1987).

Educational Resource Opportunities

The Old Growth Ridge Trail was, and still is an educational interpretive trail. This special designation enables the managing agency (BLM) to use signage and brochure publications to inform the public about the variety of resource disciplines included during the recreational experience. The proposed loop offers a unique opportunity to further the education and the public's appreciation of these resources. If approved, each interdisciplinary specialist would be involved in the signage process with their expert input. The areas of expertise include wildlife, hydrology, botany, fisheries, geology, soils and recreation.

Unaffected Resources

The following resources are either not present or would not be adversely affected by the proposed action or any of the alternatives: Air quality, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, prime or unique farm lands, wetlands, floodplains, cultural resources, Native American religious concerns, solid or hazardous wastes, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wilderness, and low income or minority populations.

Environmental Effects: Proposed Action Alternative

Threatened and Endangered species

No habitat suitable for any federally listed or proposed species would be modified by this proposal, and activities associated with this proposed endeavor would not create noise at levels that would disturb these species at the above mentioned historic nest sites. Disturbance associated with this proposed activity may temporarily displace some wildlife species, but would not impact the long term numbers and variety of species currently existing in the vicinity.

Fisheries

As previously mentioned the trail would cross a small intermittent tributary of Whittaker Creek. This tributary is non-fish bearing. This would be a “no effect” to fish habitat. Two small wooden bridges are planned to cross from bank to bank. The lower bridge (approx. six feet) will cross at a solid rock location that would have no impact on the tributary. On the upper crossing (see map), there could be an extremely small temporary effect when considering sedimentation problems due to construction, however this site is also crossing at a location where rock is prevalent, potentially creating a “no effect.” In conclusion, there should be “no effect” with sedimentation problems to Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) when considering trail construction and usage anywhere along the planned route.

Soils and Hydrology

There is no slope stability concern associated with the Proposed Action Alternative. Appropriate design features (trail construction standards) would mitigate potential for concentration of flow on the new trail segment to prevent potential mass wasting and sedimentation to the streams.

Soil Compaction/Site Productivity/Sedimentation: The proposed trail is adjacent to an existing campground that has recreational use. The location of the proposed trail includes using wildlife trails already on the hill slope as much as possible. Other design features would mitigate any potential erosion and excess concentration of flows along the trail. All attempts would be made to keep the grade of the trail below 8% and would not exceed 10%. This would prevent concentration of water drainage and potential surface erosion and sedimentation. The trail located along Whittaker Creek, within the riparian area, would be limited to the upper-section of the large alluvial fan that has deposited on the valley floor (final design change). This would avoid any potential interference with the braided nature of the stream channel issuing across the fan. Appropriate design features would maintain ACS objectives.

Botany

In the proposed action “no effects” are anticipated to Special Status and Survey & Manage vascular plants, lichens or bryophytes.

Due to canopy cover, and the small amount of ground disturbance, little or no increase in noxious weed cover is expected within the project area. Within the Whittaker Creek riparian conversion area, the trail essentially already exists, so that minimal additional disturbance is expected.

Environmental Effects: No Action Alternative

Soils

This is an area with an existing trail and a campground that is currently under recreational use and maintenance. By taking no action, soil site productivity and potential sedimentation would remain at current levels. ACS objectives would be maintained. There are no slope stability concerns with the No Action Alternative. No additional soil compaction or soil displacement would occur with no action.

Under this “no build” alternative, the educational opportunity to interpret geology, landforms, past logging history, or other resources along this trail extension would not occur.

Wildlife

There would be no short-term human disturbance and temporary displacement of local species with the No Action Alternative.

Botany

No effects are anticipated to Special Status and Survey & Manage vascular plants, lichens or bryophytes with the No Action Alternative.

In the riparian conversion area along Whittaker Creek little or no increase in noxious weed cover is expected.

Cumulative Effects

The proposed action and alternatives considered would not result in any overall negative impact to the productivity of the treated areas or nearby aquatic resources. Recommended mitigation using standard trail construction techniques and structures would fully mitigate any potential impacts and maintain ACS objectives.

Due to canopy cover, and the small amount of additional ground disturbance, little or no increase in noxious weed cover is expected within the project area.

Construction of this proposed extension would add approximately 1.4 miles of trail to the existing Whittaker Creek Old Growth Trail system of about 1.25 miles. No long-term disruption of local fauna is anticipated due to this addition.

List of Preparers:

- Gary Hoppe: Team Leader
- Soil /Geology: Karin Baitis
- Hydrology: Graham Armstrong
- Fisheries: Rob Preece
- Wildlife: Dan Crannell
- Botany: Douglas Goldenberg
- Cultural Res: Mike Southard

Consultation and Coordination:

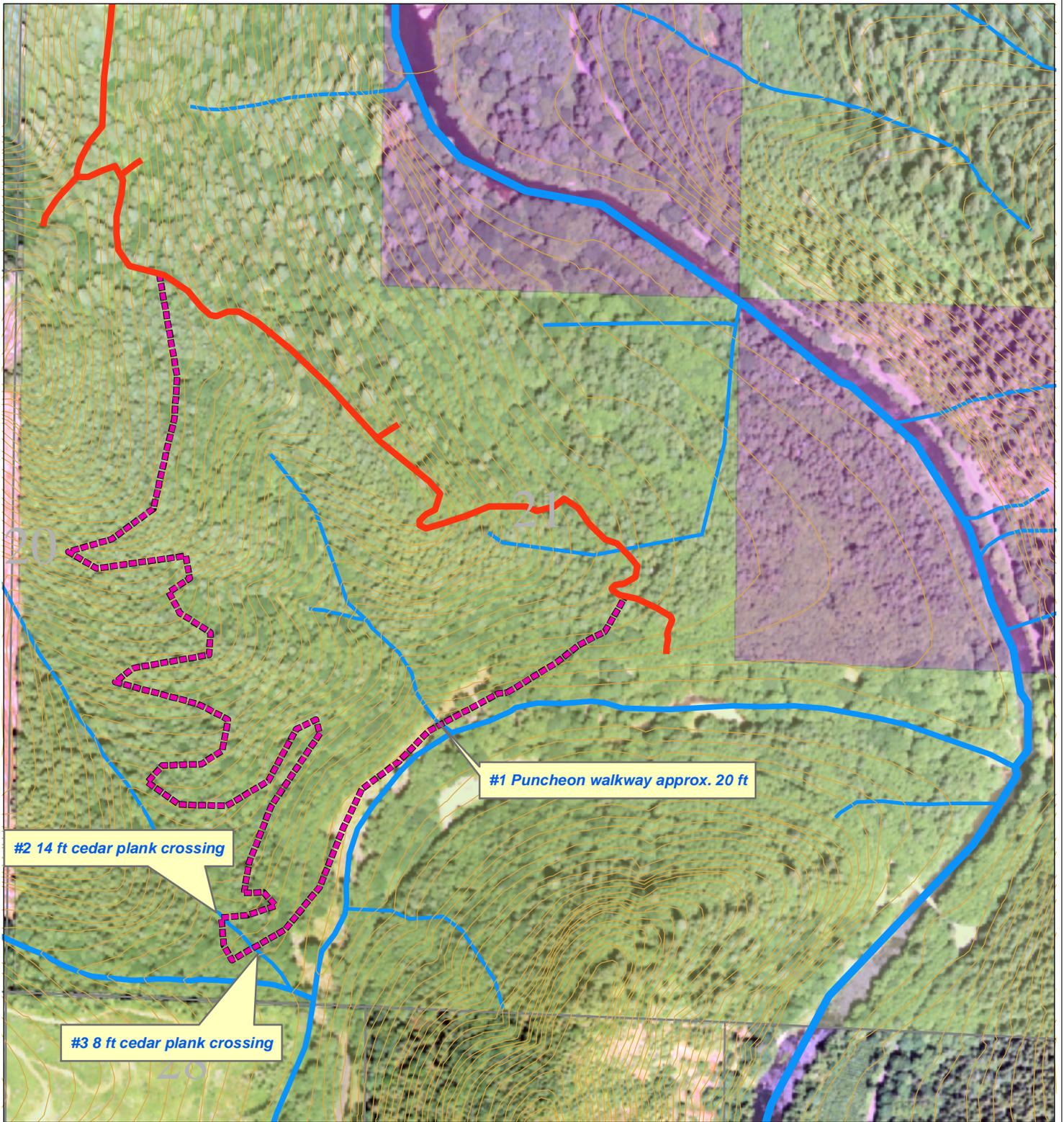
No effects to Essential Fish Habitat where identified. Consultation with NOAA – Fisheries regarding EFH was not required.

There would be “no effect” to Threatened or Endangered wildlife species known to inhabit the area. Consultation with the USFWS was not required.

The Whittaker Creek Trail Extension project is within the Oregon Coast Range physiographic province and the terms of Protocol D between the Oregon Historic Preservation Office and the Bureau of Land Management are in effect. Pre-project cultural resource field inventories are not conducted for projects in the Coast Range physiographic province.

References:

- Orr E.L. and W.N. Orr. 1996. *Geology of the Pacific Northwest*. McGraw-Hill. U.S.A.
- U.S.D.A. 1987. *Soil Survey of Lane County Area, Oregon*. Soil Conservation Service.
- Walker GW, and N.S. Macleod. 1991. *Geologic Map of Oregon*. U.S.G.S.



T18S, R8W, Sec. 21 Whittaker Creek Trail System

Legend

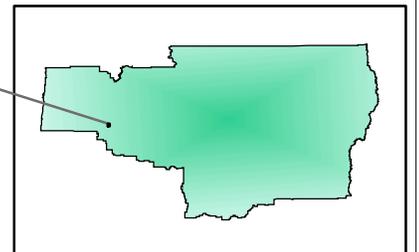
- 20 ft contour lines
- sections

Land Use Allocations

SUBJ_LUA

- CON
- GFMA
- LSR

- proposed trail addition
- existing trail



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
EUGENE DISTRICT OFFICE

Preliminary Finding of No Significant Impact
for
Old Growth Ridge Trail Extension
OR 090-EA-04-09

Determination:

On the basis of the information contained in the Environmental Assessment, and all other information available to me, it is my determination that implementation of the Proposed Action or alternatives will not have significant environmental impacts beyond those already addressed in the Record of Decision (ROD) for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (April 1994), and the Eugene District Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan (June 1995) as amended, with which this EA is in conformance, and does not, in and of itself, constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement or a supplement to the existing environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared.

Steven Calish, Field Manager
Siuslaw Resource Area

Date: