

## **Decision Memo:**

### **South Prairie and Takh Takh Meadow Boulder Placement Project**

USDA Forest Service  
Mount Adams Ranger District, Cowlitz Valley Ranger District  
Gifford Pinchot National Forest  
Skamania County, Washington  
South Prairie: T5N R9E Section 17, 20  
Takh Takh Meadow: T09N 10E Section 17  
Additional sites: T10N R10E Section 13, T10N R10E Section 35

Forest Service policy directs that viable populations of all native and desired nonnative wildlife, fish and plant species be maintained on National Forest System lands throughout their geographic range (FSM 2670.22) and that Sensitive species must receive special management emphasis to ensure their viability and to preclude trends toward endangerment that would result in the need for Federal listing (FSM 2672.1). The Gifford Pinchot National Forest Resource Management Plan (1990) incorporates these requirements, and directs that measures necessary to protect Sensitive species and/or special habitats should be undertaken, whenever possible. Motor vehicle damage to Sensitive species habitat has been observed and documented at a number of sites located adjacent to existing roads and parking areas. The purpose of this action is to prevent future damage to these habitats from unauthorized motor vehicle access.

The proposed action involves the placement of recessed boulders to block access to motor vehicles that have been illegally driven into sensitive wet meadow habitats at South Prairie and Takh Takh Meadow, causing damage to Sensitive plant species and their habitat. In addition, this project will block illegal wheel tracks accessing Mt. Adams Wilderness near Divide Camp Trailhead and junction of Forest Road 2329 at Adams Creek through the placement of recessed boulders. Lastly, surface level (non-recessed) boulders will be added to reinforce existing breached boulder blockages located along Forest Road 2329115 designed to block access to the closed 655 spur and dry meadows adjacent to Forest Road 2329115. Boulder placement will not compromise any of the resource or recreational values of these sites, but will help preserve them for future generations.

#### **Decision**

I have decided to implement the boulder placements as described above. The areas indicated in red on the attached map define the location and extent of the activities covered by this decision.

This decision includes the following required mitigation, which are further described in the project file:

1. Site disturbance will be kept to the smallest footprint practical.
2. Heavy equipment used for this project will be cleaned prior to entering the National Forest to remove any debris that may contain noxious weed seed.
3. Work at South Prairie will not occur between March 1 and June 30.

This action falls within a set of actions that may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment under FSH 1909.15, Sec. 31.12, para. 4: “Repair and maintenance of roads, trails, and landline boundaries”, and under FSH 1909.15, Sec. 31.2, para. 6<sup>1</sup>: “Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction (Service level D, FSH 7709.56).”

Effects to northern spotted owls were identified as the only potential impacts. The wildlife Biologist determined that effects to spotted owls can be effectively mitigated to eliminate impacts. Thus, I have determined that there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. I considered the potential effects to water quality, listed fish and wildlife species, botanical and cultural resources.

South Prairie is located adjacent to forest stands that have been mapped as spotted owl nesting habitat within Critical Habitat Unit WA-41. As a result, a work timing restriction will be implemented in order to mitigate potential impacts from the project: work will not occur between March 1 and June 30<sup>th</sup>. The planned activity would have no effect on suitable habitat. Noise created by the use of heavy machinery could disturb nesting owls if there were a nest within about thirty-five yards of Forest Road 6615 at the work site. Due to the presence of the road, and the large opening created by South Prairie, it is unlikely that there would be a spotted owl nest within 35 yards of the project site. In addition, mitigation to conduct the work between June 30 and February 28 would prevent noise disturbance during the critical early nesting season.

I have determined that there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. I considered the potential effects to water quality, listed fish and wildlife species, botanical and cultural resources.

All resource specialists’ findings are documented in the project file.

## **Public Involvement**

Since this is primarily a maintenance activity, public comment was not solicited for this proposal. Scoping was conducted internally. The proposal was provided to District resource specialists, and their survey results, comments, and recommendations are documented in the project file.

## **Finding of Consistency with National Forest Management Act**

As required by the National Forest Management Act, I find that this action is consistent with the

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<sup>1</sup> This category of actions is identified in the September 16, 2005 order issued by the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California in Case No. CIV F-03-6386JKS (*Earth Island, et al. v Ruthenbeck* subject to formal public comment and appeal of the decision (36 CFR 215). However, this action does not involve the harvest of trees or prescribed burning and is therefore not covered by this order.

*Gifford Pinchot National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* (1990) as amended by the *Record of Decision for Management of Habitat for Late Successional and Old Growth Forest Related Species within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl* (1994) hereafter referred to as the “Northwest Forest Plan.” The amended Land and Resource Management Plan is referred to as “Amendment 11” in this document. The project was designed in conformance with Forest Plan standards and incorporates appropriate Forest Plan guidelines for activities in Riparian Reserves (Amendment 11, pages 2-59 through 2-62.)

### **Findings Required by Other Laws**

This action is consistent with the Endangered Species Act of 1973. There will be no effects to federally listed wildlife species, fish species, sensitive animal or plant species, or species that are identified as “Survey and Manage” species in the Northwest Forest Plan (2001, as amended by annual species reviews, 2001-2003).

This action complies with standards of the federal Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act.

There are no impacts to resources of cultural or historical significance therefore this action is consistent with the National Historic Preservation Act.

This action does not violate other Federal, State, or local laws designed for the protection of the environment.

### **Other Findings**

Public health and safety will not be affected by this action.

This action does not affect prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

The effects of this action are not highly controversial and do not involve highly uncertain, unique or unknown risks.

This decision does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

This action is not related to any other actions that would have significant cumulative impacts.

### **Implementation Date**

This project will be implemented in the summer of 2006.

**Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities**

This decision is not subject to administrative appeal.

**Contact Person**

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Andrea Ruchty, Botanist, Mount Adams Ranger District, ph.: (509) 395-3414.

Recommended:

/s/ *Nancy Ryke* 4/11/2006

NANCY RYKE  
District Ranger

Date

Approved:

/s/ *Claire Lavendel* 5/11/2006

CLAIRE LAVENDEL  
Forest Supervisor

Date

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