

DECISION NOTICE AND  
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

**Steamboat Lake Restoration**

USDA FOREST SERVICE  
GIFFORD PINCHOT NATIONAL FOREST  
MT. ADAMS RANGER DISTRICT  
SKAMANIA COUNTY, WASHINGTON  
Sections 31 and 32, T.8N, R.9E; and Section 5, T.7N, R.9E, W.M

**BACKGROUND**

The Gifford Pinchot National Forest prepared an environmental assessment (EA) for the Steamboat Restoration Project located on the Mount Adams Ranger District, Gifford Pinchot National Forest. The legal land description is: Sections 31 and 32, T.8N, R.9E; and Section 5, T.7N, R.9E, Willamette Meridian.

The proposal is to decommission Forest Service Road 8054-040 and all adjoining unauthorized roads. In order to allow some vehicle access to the lakeshore for the loading of non-motorized boats and watercraft an unauthorized road on the north side of the lake would become an authorized road and nominally surfaced with rock. The purpose of this action is to restore the area and prevent more erosion of the surface roads which is causing sedimentation in the lake-associated streams. The proposal would also prohibit parking along the new road. Parking would be provided at the entrance to Forest Service Road 8854-040, an area already denuded of ground vegetation and with a pit toilet. In addition, a primitive dock constructed of native logs would be constructed. To connect the parking area to the boat launch, a trail would be constructed. This trail would continue around the east side of the lake, incorporate portions of decommissioned road and link to the existing Steamboat Lake Trail. This trail would provide hike-in access to dispersed campsites.

The EA for this project was completed in April 2008 and identified resource needs and management objectives (EA, pages 2-3) for this project that are intended to move the area closer toward the desired future conditions of the landscape, as identified in the *Gifford Pinchot National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* (LRMP), as amended, and actions identified as necessary to attain the Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives.

The Steamboat Lake project was reviewed and recommended for funding by the South Gifford Pinchot National Forest Resource Advisory Committee as a Title II project.

**DECISION**

Based upon my review of the analysis and alternatives, I have decided to implement the proposed action from the Steamboat Lake Restoration EA.

The following are design features and mitigation measures of the proposed action. These can also be found on pages 6-8 of the EA.

### *Wildlife*

1. Activities that generate noise above ambient levels, such as the use of heavy machinery, would only be allowed between June 30 and March 1.

### *Botany*

1. To prevent the introduction of noxious weeds into the project area, all heavy equipment, or other off- road equipment used in the project is to be cleaned to remove soil, seeds, vegetative matter or other debris that could contain seeds. Cleaning should be done before entering National Forest Lands, and when equipment moves from or between project sites or areas known to be infested into other areas, infested or otherwise. Cleaning of the equipment may include pressure washing. An inspection will be required to ensure that equipment is clean before work can begin. (Equipment cleaning clause Wo-C6.35) (Standard 2).
2. Use weed-free straw and mulch for all projects, conducted or authorized by the Forest Service, on National Forest System lands. If State-certified straw and/or mulch is not available, the Forest can certify sources to be weed free using the North American Weed Free Forage Program standards or a similar certification process (Standard 3). Mulch species shall preferably be from native seed sources or annual rye or cereal grain fields. Local contacts for weed free straw can be found in the project file.
3. Inspect active gravel, fill, sand stockpiles, quarry sites, and borrow material for invasive plants before use and transport. Treat or require treatment of infested sources before any use of pit material. Use only gravel, fill, sand, and rock that is judged to be weed free by District or Forest weed specialists (Standard 8).
4. Use native plant materials as the first choice in revegetation for restoration and rehabilitation where timely natural regeneration of the native plant community is not likely to occur. Non-native, non-invasive plant species may be used in any of the following situations: 1) when needed in emergency conditions to protect basic resource values (e.g., soil stability, water quality and to help prevent the establishment of invasive species), 2) as an interim, non-persistent measure designed to aid in the re-establishment of native plants, 3) if native plant materials are not available, or 4) in permanently altered plant communities. Under no circumstances will non-native invasive plant species be used for re-vegetation. (Standard 13). Contact Forest Service representative for appropriate seeding and site preparation prescription. When seed is used it should be either certified noxious weed free or from Forest Service native seed supplies

### *Fisheries*

There will be a Pollution and Erosion Control Plan (PECP), which will include a Spill Prevention Control and Containment Plan (SPCCP), in writing and ready to execute at all times during implementation, and it will include the following elements:

1. Minimize site preparation impacts
  - a. Establish staging areas for construction equipment storage, vehicle storage, fueling, servicing, hazardous material storage, etc. at least 200 feet beyond

- Steamboat Lake in a location and manner that will preclude erosion into or contamination of the lake and small streams within project area
- b. Minimize clearing and grubbing activities when preparing staging, project, and stockpile areas.
  - c. Materials used for implementation such as large wood, vegetation, sand, topsoil, and other excavated material may be staged within 200 feet of the lake
  - d. Place sediment barriers prior to construction around sites where significant levels of erosion may enter the stream directly or through road ditches. Maintain these throughout construction
2. Minimize heavy equipment impacts
    - a. The size and capability of heavy equipment will be commensurate with the project
    - b. All equipment used for work within 200 feet of Steamboat Lake or its associated streams will be cleaned and leaks repaired prior to entering the project area. Remove external grease and oil, along with dirt and mud, prior to construction. Thereafter, inspect equipment daily for leaks or grease accumulations and fix identified problems before entering streams or drainage areas to streams or wetlands.
    - c. All equipment will be cleaned of all dirt and weeds before entering the project area.
    - d. Equipment will be fueled and serviced in an established staging area outside of riparian zone (at least 200 feet away from Steamboat Lake and its associated streams). When not in use, vehicles shall be stored in staging area.
    - e. Existing roadways or travel paths will be used whenever possible
  3. Site restoration
    - a. Upon project completion, remove project-related waste.
    - b. Initiate rehabilitation of all disturbed areas in a manner that results in similar or better conditions than pre-project. Planting if required for this project, be completed no later than spring planting season of the year following construction
    - c. All riparian plantings shall follow FS direction on use of native and non-native plants on National Forests and Grasslands.
    - d. When necessary, loosen compacted areas, such as access roads, stream crossings, staging, and stockpile areas.
  4. Where road decommissioning is immediate to the lake edge, log barriers would be placed to stem erosion.

### *Heritage*

1. Place geofilter fabric over the boat launch area prior to the placement of gravel.
2. No ground disturbance (grading, etc.) should occur within the boundaries of the existing boat launch.

### ***Rationale for the Decision***

As recreation has increased at Steamboat Lake, some users have driven vehicles off authorized roads which has led to increased surface erosion and sediment run-off into Steamboat Lake. It has also decreased the quality of the experience of other uses. It is time to correct this use before water quality is further degraded. The proposed action is the best way I see to reduce current and future impacts, while still allowing use at the site.

A forestwide roads analysis was conducted in 2002 (Gifford Pinchot National Forest Roads Analysis, July 2002). During that process, Forest Road 8854-040 and adjoining roads were not recommended for decommissioning or closure. The recommendation was to leave Forest Road 8854-040 open and maintained for high-clearance vehicles. Presumably, recreational access was a driving force in this recommendation. In addition, erosion and water quality concerns were not as grave as they are today. Since the time the roads analysis was complete increased use and illegal road creation has led to the need to reduce vehicular access to Steamboat Lake.

I recognize that some vehicle access is important at Steamboat Lake for launching non-motorized boats and/or heavy camping gear. By surfacing the road on the north side of the lakeshore with rock and keeping it open to access the lakeshore as a short-term, drop-off area, I am confident this approach will meet the needs of the users at Steamboat Lake.

One significant issue was brought up during the comment period which focused on removing the ability of disabled persons from accessing Steamboat Lake. Because there will still be access to the lakeshore for loading and unloading of boats and gear, this decision is not reducing overall access to recreational sites. Older individuals, disabled persons or persons limited in mobility can still be dropped off at the lakeshore once the currently unauthorized road north of Steamboat Lake is surfaced.

### **Other Alternatives Considered**

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered the No Action alternative.

#### ***Alternative B***

Alternative B is the No Action alternative. This alternative was analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, (CFR 1502.14 (d)) and provided a baseline to evaluate the proposed action. As part of this alternative, none of the proposed activities would occur, including: decommissioning of Forest Road 8854-040, decommissioning of all unauthorized adjoining roads, extending the Steamboat Lake Trail (#70), resurfacing the unauthorized road on the north side of the lake with rock, or building a primitive boat dock.

I did not select this alternative because it would not meet the purpose and need of reducing erosion and sediment run-off into Steamboat Lake, nor reduce illegal user-created roads.

### **Public Involvement**

The proposal was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions on April 2007. The proposal was provided in a letter to the public and other agencies traditionally interested in projects on the Mt.

Adams Ranger District for a 30-day comment period starting on August 9, 2007. We received four letters or emails from individuals and organizations interested in the project. Three letters were in support of the project and proposed minor changes to ensure effectiveness of the closure. One individual expressed concern over the proposal and was in general not supportive of road decommissioning or reducing access to recreational opportunities.

In addition, in the late summer of 2007 signs indicating the proposed closure of Forest Road 8854-040 were displayed at the Steamboat Lake Restoration area.

## **Finding of No Significant Impact**

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

1. Adverse and beneficial impacts have been assessed and found to be not significant. The analysis considered not only the direct and indirect effects of the projects but also their contribution to cumulative effects (EA, Wildlife, pages 9-14; Aquatics, pages 15-18; and Botany, pages 18-19). Adverse effects from the proposed action have been reduced or eliminated through project design and mitigation measures (EA, pages 6-8). My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action. Past, present and foreseeable future actions have been included in the analysis. No significant cumulative or secondary effects were identified.
2. I find there will be no significant affects to public health and safety. No public health and safety issues were raised during scoping. Road decommissioning, resurfacing and trail building does not have a history of causing public health or safety concerns.
3. I find there will be no significant effects on unique characteristics or ecologically critical areas, including historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, rangelands, wetlands, or Wild and Scenic Rivers. Although there is a cultural resource site in the project area, there will be no impact to this site due to the implementation of project design criteria and mitigation measures. There are no park lands, farmlands, or rangelands within the planning area. There will be no impact to wetlands due to the implementation of project design criteria and mitigation measures.
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the project. The comments to the EA indicate that the potential *effects* from this project are not considered to be controversial.
5. The effects of this project are not highly uncertain, and do not involve unique, or unknown risks. Road decommissioning, road resurfacing and trail building, especially at this scale, has been implemented routinely across the Forest for years.

6. I find that this action is one of several similar actions undertaken on National Forest System lands and is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, or represent a decision in principle. The decision implements the Gifford Pinchot Forest Plan, as amended.
7. I find that the cumulative impacts are not significant. Cumulative impacts are addressed by issue in Chapter 3 of the EA (EA, Wildlife, pages 9-14; Aquatics, pages 15-18; and Botany, pages 18-19).
8. I find that the action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer for Washington State has been conducted and the officer has concurred that there will be no effect to archeological sites with the mitigation measures in place (EA, page 8 and 20).
9. I find the action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973. As long as the project is implemented between June 30 and March 1, the effects determination for northern spotted owl is *may affect and not likely to adversely affect* (EA, page 11-13). The project had no effect on any other terrestrial species. The effects of this project are covered under the *Programmatic Biological Assessment for Forest Management for the Gifford Pinchot National Forest* (August 2001), which was renewed by agreement with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in 2006 and 2007 and additional consultation with USFWS is not required.

The proposed action would have *no effect* on any proposed, threatened, or endangered aquatic species (EA, page 17). Steamboat Lake is not a bull trout, Lower Columbia River steelhead or Lower Columbia River Chinook watershed, so consultation on potential effects to this species is not required.

There is no habitat for *Howellia aquatilis*, the only federally listed plant species suspected to occur on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, therefore it was found that the project would have *no effect* to listed species (EA, page 18).

10. I find that the action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (EA, page 3). The action is consistent with the *Gifford Pinchot National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* as amended (EA, page 2, 3).

### **Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations**

The proposed action is consistent with Management Area goals, desired future conditions, and standards and guidelines identified in the *Gifford Pinchot National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan*, as amended (Forest Plan).

Steamboat Lake is located in a **matrix** land allocation according to the Northwest Forest Plan and the project is consistent with matrix objectives. The Steamboat Lake area is also considered in a General Forest Management Area according to the Forest Plan and consistent with those standards and guidelines and objectives as well (EA, page 2, 3).

There will be no significant adverse effects to Forest Service, Region 6 **sensitive species**. No sensitive aquatic species are found within the project area (EA, 17). Of the terrestrial species with potential habitat presence in the project area, there would be no impact to the common loon because loons are not expected to nest there; there would be no impact to peregrine falcons since the activity area is more than one-half mile away from suitable cliff habitat; and, no impact to terrestrial mollusks because the project will occur on previously disturbed habitat (EA, pages 13, 14). Botanical sensitive species were not found in the project area. There are a number of “survey impractical” lichens and fungi for which presence has been assumed. For these species, a determination of may impact individuals and habitat, but is not likely to contribute to a trend towards federal listing, or cause a loss of populations or species viability (EA, page 18).

I have considered the effects to **management indicator species** (MIS) as disclosed in the EA (EA, 14). MIS on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest include pileated woodpecker and other cavity excavating and late-successional species, elk, deer, wood duck, and goldeneye duck.

The project is consistent with the **Aquatic Conservation Strategy** (ACS) objectives, and the **Clean Water Act**. The purpose of this project is to improve water quality and reduce erosion. I find that the project “meets” or “does not prevent attainment” of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives.

Surveys were completed for **Survey and Manage** species. Both terrestrial and aquatic mollusks habitat is found within the allotment (EA, page 14, 18). Surveys were conducted for all Survey and Manage species in compliance with the 2001 Survey and Manage Record of Decision (USDA and USDI 2004).

## **Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities**

This decision is subject to administrative review (appeal) pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215. The written appeal must be filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, or express delivery) with the Appeal Deciding Officer at:

Regional Forester  
ATTN: Reviewing Officer 1570 Appeals  
PO Box 3623, Portland, OR 97208-3623

FAX (503) 808-2255  
email: [appeals-pacificnorthwest-regional-office@fs.fed.us](mailto:appeals-pacificnorthwest-regional-office@fs.fed.us).

The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered appeals are: 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays. Electronic appeals must be submitted in a

format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Word (.doc), or portable document format (.pdf). In cases where no identifiable name is attached to an electronic message, a verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature is one way to provide verification. E-mails submitted to email addresses other than the one listed above, or in formats other than those listed or containing viruses, will be rejected. It is the responsibility of the appellant to confirm receipt of appeals submitted by electronic mail.

Appeals, including attachments, must be filed within 45 days from the publication date of a legal notice of decision in the *Columbian*, the newspaper of record. Attachments received after the 45 day appeal period will not be considered. The publication date in the *Columbian* is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

### **Implementation Date**

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

### **Contact**

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Erin Black, South Zone Team Planner, during normal office hours (weekdays, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) at the Mount Adams Ranger District office (Address: Hwy 141, Trout Lake, WA 98650; Phone: voice (509) 395-3411; Fax: (509) 395-3424; e-mail: [ekblack@fs.fed.us](mailto:ekblack@fs.fed.us)).

Recommended By:

*/s/ Nancy Ryke*

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**NANCY RYKE**

District Ranger

Mt. Adams Ranger District

Approved By:

*/s/ Lynn Burditt*

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**LYNN BURDITT**

Acting Forest Supervisor

Gifford Pinchot National Forest

*June 9, 2008*

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**Date**



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