

Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area



July 2003

Executive Summary

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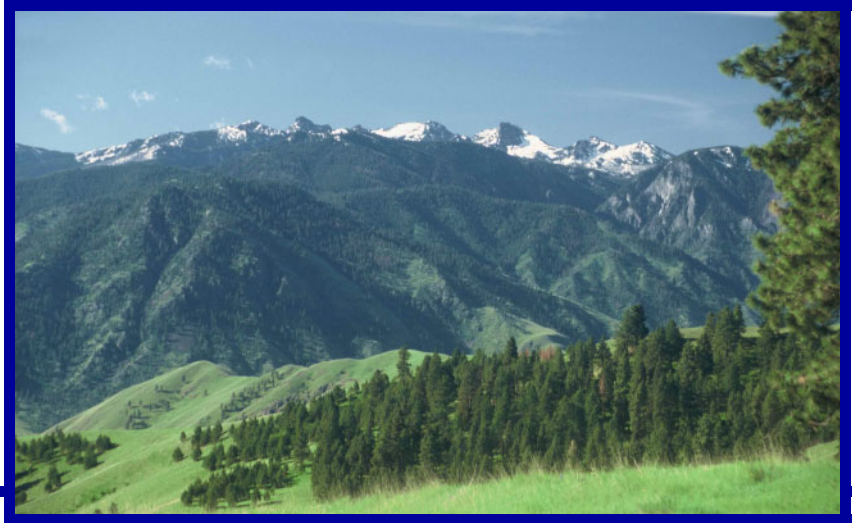
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We are pleased to announce that after a lengthy environmental review process, the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) for the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area Comprehensive Management Plan are complete.

The purpose of the Final Environmental Impact Statement is to update the Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) for Hells Canyon National Recreation Area (HCNRA).

The FEIS reflects years of scientific assessments and studies; extensive public involvement and review; and consultation with county, state, federal agencies, and tribal government.

The new plan is framed by Congressional legislation that established the HCNRA 28 years ago:

“to assure that the natural beauty, and historical and archeological values of the Hells Canyon area..., are preserved for this and future generations, and that the recreational and ecologic values and public enjoyment of the area are thereby enhanced.”

This amended plan provides us the management direction to achieve and continue this shared vision and Congressional direction. The Forest Service team that prepared the FEIS reflects professional and technical expertise from a wide range of disciplines and skills. The team consulted and collaborated with numerous other land managers and resource specialists during the formulation of the plan; and sought extensive public participation, review, and comments during the planning process.

The final EIS presents five management alternatives: a Native Ecosystem alternative, developed by a coalition of conservation and preservation interests; a Wallowa County alternative, developed by a coalition of twelve counties in Oregon, Idaho, and Washington; and three Forest Service generated alternatives.

The ROD selects a modified alternative that is responsive to resource needs and protection, scientific assessments and studies, public comment, and is consistent with Congressional legislation that established the HCNRA.

“My decision for the final EIS, as documented in the ROD, incorporates what I believe is the best scientific information available for the continued protection and stewardship of this unique area. The decision balances the needs and desires of society to use and enjoy this wonderful and valued place.”
Karyn L. Wood, Forest Supervisor.

Background and Need for Change

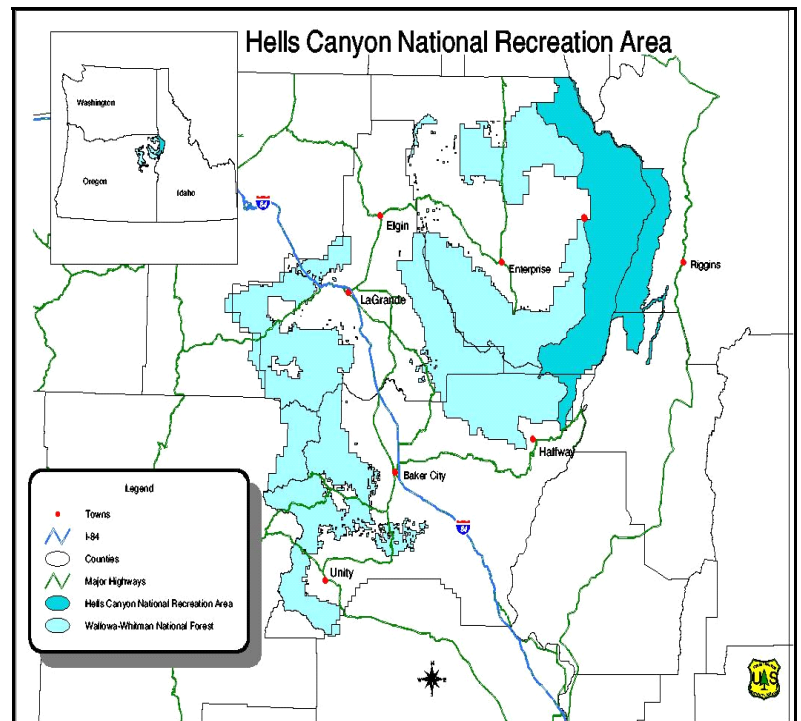
The HCNRA was established in 1975, including the Hells Canyon Wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rapid and Snake Rivers. A CMP was approved in 1982 and incorporated into the *Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan)* in 1990.

The HCNRA is located in western Idaho and the northeast corner of Oregon on portions of the Wallowa-Whitman, Nez Perce, and Payette National Forests. It is administered by the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest (WWNF). There are 652,488 acres within the HCNRA boundary which is approximately 28 percent of the land under the administration of the WWNF. About 33,000 acres of privately-owned land occur within the HCNRA. Approximately 117,073 acres of the Nez Perce and 24,000 acres of the Payette National Forests occur in the HCNRA. It lies within Baker and Wallowa counties in Oregon; Adams, Idaho and Nez Perce counties in Idaho; and near the Asotin County border in Washington.

Existing Management Direction

The *HCNRA Act* is the principal legislation that guides management of the HCNRA. Several sections clarify the intent for the HCNRA. Section 1(a) of the *HCNRA Act* explicitly states that the HCNRA was created to assure that this area would be preserved for this and future generations, and that the recreational and ecological values and public enjoyment of the area are thereby enhanced.

Section 7 of the *HCNRA Act* states that the recreation area will be administered for public outdoor recreation in a manner compatible with seven objectives. Section 8 directs the development of a CMP to provide for a broad range of land uses and recreation opportunities. Section 10 directs that rules and regulations will be promulgated for public and private lands. Section 13 addresses the recognized traditional and valid uses of the recreation area.



Several changes in direction that apply to the HCNRA have occurred in the past ten years including changes for riparian, ecosystem, and wildlife standards (Eastside Screens), *Public and Private Land Use Regulations*, *Wild and Scenic Snake River Recreation Management Plan*, strategies for fish (PACFISH/INFISH), and termination of sheep grazing.

Purpose and Need for Change

Adjustment of the existing (1982) CMP was initiated in 1993 and the *Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)* was released in 1996. The Forest Supervisor re-initiated the process in 1998 with a revised DEIS (RDEIS) based on:

- Monitoring and evaluation reports indicating areas needing change such as defining desired conditions for visitor management and recreation use
- New standards from the 1994 *Public and Private Land Use Regulations* regarding use of motorized and mechanical equipment, protection and preservation of cultural and paleontological resources, mining, private land use, timber harvesting, and grazing activities
- The need to set clearly defined desired conditions for Wilderness settings
- New scientific information for the Interior Columbia Basin
- Changing social values that indicate people want to retain the natural, undeveloped character of the area

The purpose of the amendment is to align the existing CMP and *Forest Plan* management direction to better achieve the objectives of the *HCNRA Act* including Section 7 and other related laws, regulations, and Forest Service policies.

Public Involvement and Issues

Public participation has been a major component of the process. Many news releases, mailings, and public meetings have occurred to provide information to the public since 1993. Several meetings and ongoing communications have occurred between the Interdisciplinary Team, Nez Perce Tribe, Wallowa County, Hells Canyon CMP Tracking Group, and others to build understanding of their interests.

Two citizen-generated alternatives were submitted to the WWNF for inclusion in the RDEIS. The Native Ecosystem alternative was developed by the Hells Canyon CMP Tracking Group representing conservation, preservation organizations, Umatilla and Nez Perce tribes. The Wallowa County alternative was developed by a coalition of Oregon, Idaho, and Washington counties.

As a result of extensive interest by the public, the Hells Canyon Subgroup to the John Day/Snake Resource Advisory Council (RAC) was established. They actively reviewed the RDEIS when it was released in March 2000 to identify areas of consensus to submit to the RAC and to the Forest Supervisor for the FEIS.

Alternatives Considered

Five alternatives were analyzed in detail in the RDEIS. Alternative E from the RDEIS was modified based on public comment, the purpose and need for change, and the significant issues and presented as Alternative E-modified in the FEIS. No other alternatives were developed for the FEIS.

Alternative A (no action) is a continuation of the management direction as stated in the *Forest Plan*, including the direction in all amendments.

Alternative B (proposed action) is a continuation of the management direction as stated in the *Forest Plan*, including all amendments, but modified to emphasize maintaining the existing recreation experience while maintaining and restoring vegetation conditions within the historic range of variability (HRV).

Alternative E-modified (preferred) is a continuation of the management direction as stated in the *Forest Plan*, including all amendments, but with specific changes designed to address the need for change. It emphasizes maintaining the rustic and primitive nature of the area while restoring the natural role of fire and maintaining vegetative conditions within HRV.

Alternative W (Wallowa County) was developed by Wallowa County. It emphasizes maintaining the rustic nature of the area while restoring vegetative conditions through natural and managed processes of thinning, stand replacement, and plant succession.

Alternative N (Native Ecosystem Alternative) was developed by the Hells Canyon CMP Tracking Group. It emphasizes a healthy native ecosystem and provides for least-impact of human activities to allow native ecosystems and processes to function as naturally as possible.

Section 7 of the HCNRA Act

Except as otherwise provided in Sections 2 and 3 of this Act, and subject to the provisions of Section 10 of this Act, the Secretary shall administer the recreation area in accordance with the laws, rules, and regulations applicable to the national forests for public outdoor recreation in a manner compatible with the following objectives:

- 1) the maintenance and protection of the free flowing nature of the rivers within the recreation area;
- 2) conservation of scenic, wilderness, cultural, scientific, and other values contributing to the public benefit;
- 3) preservation, especially in the area generally known as Hells Canyon, of all features and peculiarities believed to be biologically unique including, but not limited to, rare and endemic plant species, rare combinations of aquatic, terrestrial, and atmospheric habitats, and the rare combinations of outstanding and diverse ecosystems and parts of ecosystems associated therewith;
- 4) protection and maintenance of fish and wildlife habitat;
- 5) protection of archeological and paleontologic sites and interpretation of these sites for the public benefit and knowledge insofar as it is compatible with protection;
- 6) preservation and restoration of historic sites associated with and typifying the economic and social history of the region and the American West; and
- 7) such management, utilization, and disposal of natural resources on federally owned lands, including, but not limited to, timber harvesting by selective cutting, mining and grazing and the continuation of such existing uses and developments as are compatible with the provisions of the Act.

At the heart of the issues is the use of the word 'compatible' in Section 7 of the Act.

Significant Issues

- **Compatibility with Section 7 of the HCNRA Act** – Some people question whether activities meet the intent of Section 7(1-7) in regard to the compatibility and the Act's discussion of traditional and valid uses.
- **Recreation Settings, Experiences and Opportunities** – There is a concern that existing direction would allow for increases in recreation use, diminishing semi-primitive and primitive recreation opportunities.
- **Access and Facilities** – There is a concern that existing direction would allow for increases in motorized access and recreation developments with potential resource impacts.
- **Vacant Allotments Disposition and Satisfactory Range Conditions** – There is a concern that vacant allotments should be closed to provide for long term, naturally functioning grassland ecosystems. There is a concern about defining satisfactory conditions.
- **Forested and Grassland Vegetation** – There is a concern that existing management direction does not adequately define desired conditions for grasslands and forested areas.
- **Heritage Resources** – There is a concern that increased access and recreation use may lead to damage and destruction of prehistoric and historic sites.

Highlights of the Decision (Significant Issues)

The ROD selects Alternative E-modified to provide the needed changes in direction to best meet resource objectives and provide for compatible uses. The decision is responsive to resource protection, scientific assessments and studies, public comment, and is consistent with the *HCNRA Act*.

The decision constitutes a collection of small-focused changes in the long-range strategy for the HCNRA for 16 resource areas (recreation settings, experiences, and opportunities, including Wilderness and scenery; access and facilities; forested vegetation, grasslands, and forest understory; vacant allotments disposition and satisfactory range conditions; heritage resources; federal trust responsibilities; soils; Wild and Scenic Rivers; biologically unique species, habitats, and ecosystems; fire and air quality; riparian/aquatic habitat and water quality; wildlife habitat; scientific research; geologic resources; minerals; land management and special uses. It adjusts goals, objectives, standards, guidelines, monitoring, evaluation, and management areas (MA). The major points of the decision are summarized below in relation to the significant issues and the specific resource areas:

Compatibility with Section 7 of the HCNRA Act

- The WWNF interprets compatibility to mean that uses can occur as long as they meet objectives in Section 7(1-6). The decision maintains the fundamental concept that outright exclusion of uses does not meet the intent of the *HCNRA Act*. It resolves the issue of what compatibility means at two levels.
- Programmatic direction in the form of goals, objectives, standards and guidelines provides the context for uses to be compatible with resource objectives from Section 7(1-6). Site-specific activities will need to meet this direction to be compatible. As long as site-specific activities meet the goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines of the amended direction they are considered compatible with meeting objectives of Section 7(1-7).
- A site-specific compatibility determination will be required for all project-level decisions. If site-specific incompatibilities are identified, then the project will need to be changed or mitigated to avoid the incompatibility. Some incompatibilities may lead to further amendments to the *Forest Plan*.

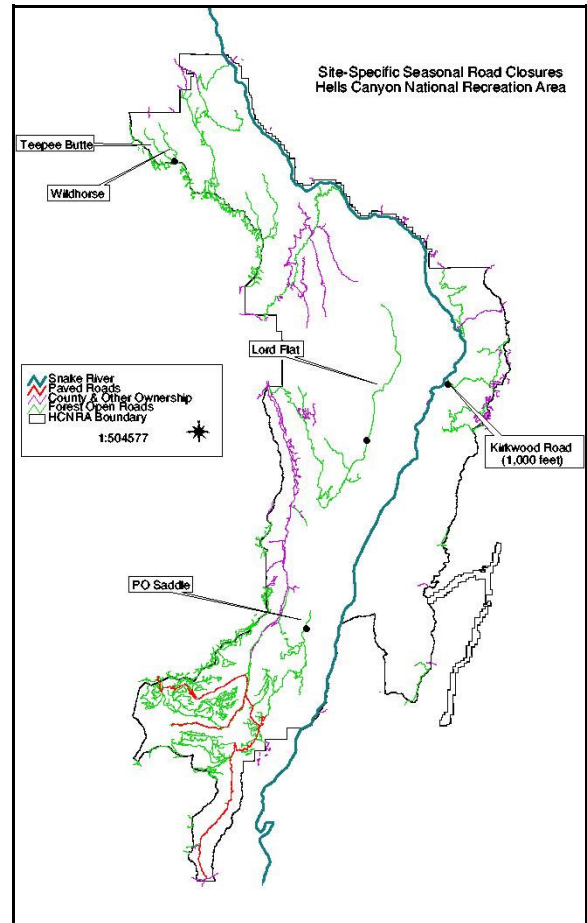
Recreation Settings, Experiences, and Opportunities

- The majority of the HCNRA provides nonmotorized, and semi-primitive opportunities. The Hells Canyon Wilderness encompasses 35 percent of the HCNRA. The decision retains the broad range of high-quality recreation settings and opportunities while emphasizing maintenance of the rustic and primitive character.
- New direction establishes thresholds of use through Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) setting indicators for appropriate levels of access, remoteness, scenery, social encounters, visitor management, impacts, and facilities.
- Recreation use is managed through implementation of visitor management strategies to meet these thresholds. Strategies are defined from least restrictive to most restrictive for managing recreation use at sites or areas where impacts are occurring or occur in the future. Specific social and biophysical standards are further defined for the Wilderness to achieve desired conditions and to prevent degradation.
- Outfitter/guide services are maintained (currently 57% of service days are unused). Growth is enhanced with one new permit for fishing/rafting on the Imnaha River and to provide aviation services (1 term permit with 150 service days and pool of 150 service days for temporary permits) to outlying communities (new total of 22 permits, 15% increase in authorized service days). The decision establishes criteria for new or expanded permits to ensure that the service is needed to continue public recreation as provided by the *HCNRA Act*.
- The Scenery Management System is incorporated into project planning to integrate ecological and social attributes and conserve scenic values contributing to the public benefit. Scenic integrity levels are established to define the sense of place provided by the landscape. Guidelines for acceptable levels of human-caused impacts to landscape character from vegetation, recreation, range, wildlife, and fisheries activities are defined.
- Wilderness will be managed consistent with both the *Wilderness Act* and Section 7(2) of the *HCNRA Act* to protect and conserve wilderness values. The decision provides the needed definition of desired conditions, minimizes negative impacts to wilderness character, and ensures acceptable levels of visitor management and impacts. It manages noxious weeds in a manner consistent with Wilderness objectives.

Highlights of the Decision (Significant Issues)

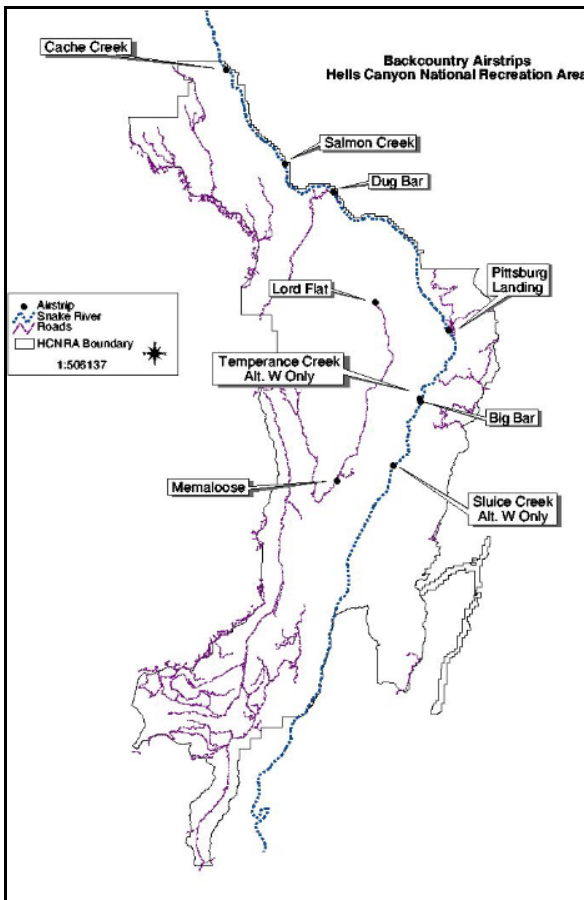
Access and Facilities

- The new direction aligns road management objectives, maintenance levels, traffic service levels, and facilities development to meet ROS settings and the intent of the resource objectives in Section 7(1-6). It places priority on reducing or reconstructing existing roads, trails, and facilities based on user input and recreational demands. The decision provides for maintaining many of the existing recreation experiences while allowing for some reconstruction and improvements to maintain adequate and safe roads and facilities where deteriorating conditions exist. Some roads may be decommissioned to meet resource objectives.
- To protect plants, heritage resources, and prevent the spread of noxious weeds; motorized use (including all-terrain vehicles) will be limited to designated open roads, trails, and dispersed camping sites or areas. Special Fuelwood Areas will be designated through the current *Fuelwood Plan*. The majority of the HCNRA is already currently not accessible by motorized vehicles due to *Forest Plan* travel restrictions that limit off-road travel to 300 feet on either side of open roads for dispersed camping or fuelwood cutting in MAs 10 and 11.
- Two seasonal road closures will be modified and three new seasonal road closures will be implemented (27 miles total) to minimize disturbance to wildlife, protect fish habitat, and prevent resource damage to the roads.
- PO Saddle road has an existing seasonal closure from rifle season (late September) to early June. This closure will be increased from three days before archery season (late August) to June 15th. The seasonal closure on Kirkwood Road (April 1 to June 30) will be retained (1,000 feet to the Kirkwood Historic Ranch) but will be modified to exclude mechanized equipment to protect habitat during critical spawning periods for fish.
- New seasonal closures will occur from three days before archery season on Teepee Butte, Wildhorse roads, and Lord Flat Trail to the end of elk season (late November). Because the most use of these areas occurs in hunting season, seasonal closures provide the most benefit to plateau habitat and associated species.
- Recreation use will still be possible during the summer depending on the snow levels and road conditions (mid-June to end of August). Hunters will still be able to access these popular areas, but their form of access will need to change. These short-term closures present an opportunity for outfitter/guides to fill unused capacity with this demand to continue to provide outdoor recreation compatible with the *HCNRA Act*.
- Most subwatersheds in the HCNRA (51 of 61) have open-road densities at or below 1.5 mi./sq. mi. Some roads will be closed to meet new open-road densities (1.35 mi./sq. mi.) to minimize disturbance to wildlife (approximately 177 miles; 33% of open roads). One subwatershed will be managed at a higher rate (1.9 mi./sq. mi.) because it provides the main access to the Upper Imnaha area.
- These road closures will occur mostly in the southern portion of the HCNRA (McGraw, Upper Imnaha, and North Pine) where past timber harvesting has created an extensive network of old logging roads that have not been closed. Specific roads will be evaluated through a future site-specific analysis. Public input will be important to mitigate impacts to recreation uses while providing for compatibility with protecting wildlife and riparian habitat, heritage sites, biologically unique resources, and preventing the spread of noxious weeds.



Highlights of the Decision (Significant Issues)

- The intent of the access and facilities decision is to manage existing use while providing a more enforceable management situation for the future. Areas will be closed unless designated open or as specifically allowed by permit. Roads, areas, and sites will be signed as open to make it obvious where uses are allowed. Some users will need to change their location or season of use, but the impacts are expected to be mitigated at the site-specific level.
- All currently open backcountry airstrips (7 total) will remain open. Five airstrips along the Snake River will remain open year-round for private, commercial, and administrative use as previously decided in the *Wild and Scenic Snake River Recreation Management Plan* (Big Bar, Dug Bar, Pittsburg Landing, Salmon Bar, Cache Creek - private use only). Two airstrips in the uplands will remain open to private, commercial, and administrative use (Lord Flat and Memaloose). A self-registration system will be employed to monitor use.



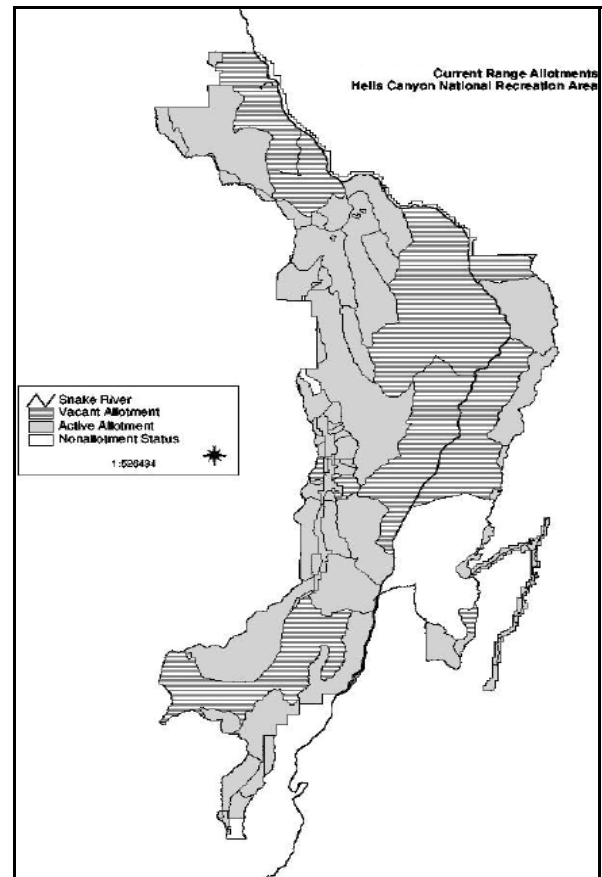
- The Imnaha River Road (Forest Road 3955) will continue as part of the Hells Canyon Scenic Byway. Trail construction/reconstruction opportunities (4 mi.) for viewing the canyon and access to the Snake River are provided. Motorized trails along the Imnaha River, across Rapid River, and near Big Canyon will continue.
- Opportunities to see and experience the HCNRA in the winter-time will continue on designated snowmobile routes (132 miles) and snow-play areas (40,262 acres). Minimum snow depths on routes (12") and areas (24") will be necessary before use can occur. Popular parts of the HCNRA in Oregon (Salt Creek Summit, McGraw, and Halfway) and Idaho (Cow Creek, Sawpit, Low saddles, and Cold Springs) will remain available.
- Facilities will be managed to meet ROS settings with an emphasis on replacing worn out facilities with new, low-maintenance facilities to correspond with the public's desire to keep the rustic and primitive character.
- Some incompatible uses are adjusted through these changes to meet the intent of Section 7(1-6) and to fit the public's desire to maintain the rustic and primitive nature of the HCNRA.
- The majority of the HCNRA will continue to provide many opportunities for outdoor public recreation users seeking a nonmotorized experience while allowing the continuation of motorized uses compatible with Section 7 of the *HCNRA Act*.

Vacant Allotments Disposition and Satisfactory Range Conditions

- Almost 40 percent (267,506 acres) of the HCNRA contains allotments that have been vacant for two decades or more due to difficulty of management and remote locations that limited access and contributed to uneconomical operations. Many were not restocked due to lack of interest when they originally became vacant. Three allotments were closed (1995) due to the incompatibility between domestic and bighorn sheep.
- The vacant allotments provide large blocks of intact, native grasslands that are limited in the Interior Columbia Basin. They also provide a diversity of habitat and edges between cold forest, moist forest, dry grass and shrubs, and riparian woodlands.
- To reduce fragmentation, improve connectivity between habitats, and allow for potential recovery of some terrestrial species, the majority of vacant allotments (245,782 acres) will be closed except for two (Hope and Turner) along the Imnaha River (3,641 acres). Part of the vacant allotments (18,083 acres) will continue as administrative horse pastures.

Highlights of the Decision (Significant Issues)

- The same level of active sheep and cattle grazing as currently exists (298,905 acres) is retained. About 46 percent of the HCNRA will continue to support grazing operations.
- Hope and Turner allotments provide flexibility for future grazing on a temporary basis where fire, flood damage, or other unforeseen situations may displace permittees from active allotments. These areas will need to be evaluated before stocking occurs.
- Satisfactory range conditions are defined to achieve a mid-seral ecological status with an upward trend for grasslands. Direction is provided for fall, winter, and spring forage utilization specific to the HCNRA based on plant phenology, climate, and plant responses to grazing.
- Social values and economic benefits associated with livestock grazing as part of traditional lifestyles in the Imnaha Wild and Scenic River corridor will be maintained. Closure of the vacant allotments will continue to maintain recreation experiences and social values associated with solitude in ungrazed areas of the Wild and Scenic Snake River corridor and the Wilderness.
- The decision balances meeting the objectives of Section 7 and maintains livestock grazing as a traditional and valid use as stated in Section 13 of the *HCNRA Act*.



Forested and Grassland Vegetation

- The decision provides a goal of promoting forested vegetation within HRV for structural stages. It promotes achieving the potential natural community for grasslands (community that would result if succession were completed without interference by humans while allowing for natural disturbances).
- Ecological processes of forested and grasslands in the context of HRV are emphasized through these desired conditions to maintain the HCNRA as a healthy ecosystem that functions within the Interior Columbia Basin. The decision emphasizes the restoration of sites where possible to maintain or restore ecosystem function, conserve soil, and enhance native plant species and communities to achieve HRV. However, some sites may already be so altered such as old homesteads that they are not restorable to this condition.



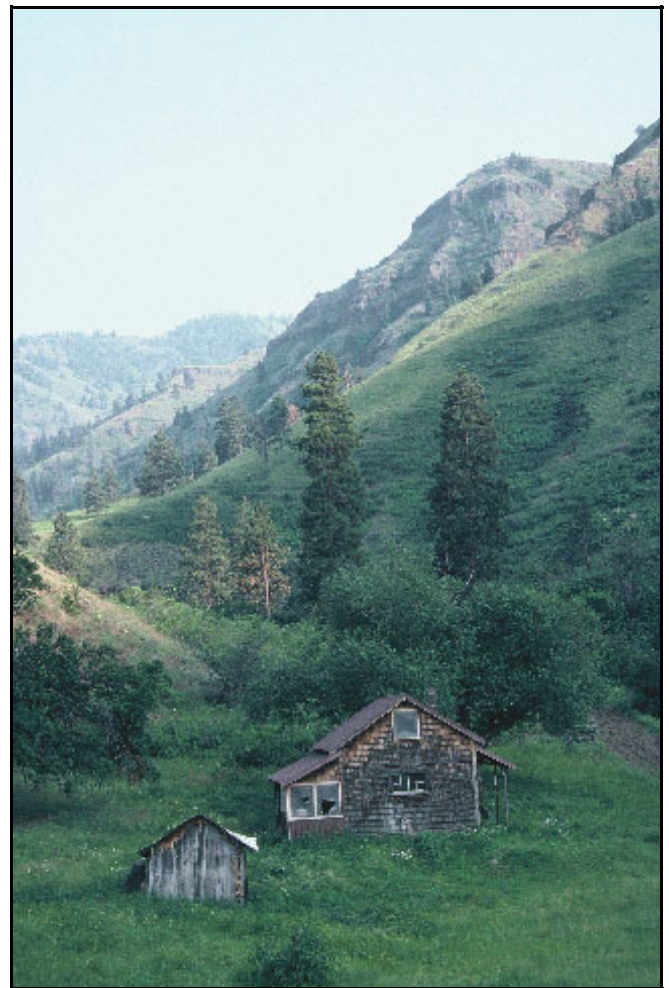
- Current direction does not fully portray fire's ecological function within the HCNRA, or address the role of fire in the natural and current disturbance regimes of the HCNRA.
- The new direction provides a refined goal for returning fire to its natural role, as nearly as possible, within the Hells Canyon Wilderness.
- Prescribed fire will be an option in Wilderness to reduce fuel loadings in order to maintain acceptable fire effects to conserve scenic, wilderness, cultural, scientific, and other values as specified by Section 7(2) of the *HCNRA Act*.

Highlights of the Decision (Significant Issues)

- Outside the Wilderness, wildland fire use for resource benefits (WFU) and prescribed fire will be expanded to emulate the historic function of fire where compatible with Section 7 objectives of the *HCNRA Act* while providing basic protection to human life and property. WFU will be the primary method to achieve desired vegetation conditions in MAs 8, 9, 11, and 12 (Wild and Scenic Snake River, Dispersed Recreation/Native Vegetation, Dispersed Recreation/Timber Management, and Research Natural Areas).
- Prescribed fire will be used to replicate the naturally-occurring processes which have shaped the character of the landscape in MAs 7, 10, and 11 (Wild and Scenic Imnaha and Rapid Rivers, Forage Emphasis, and Dispersed Recreation/Timber Management).
- Selective cutting will be restricted to uneven-age management, precommercial thinning, commercial thinning, and salvage and sanitation harvesting to meet the objectives of the *HCNRA Act*. These tools will help manage risks to private land, campgrounds, bridges, facilities, and scenic qualities to conserve scenic and cultural values as specified in Section 7(2) of the *HCNRA Act*.

Heritage Resources

- Specific direction for the development of a management plan for heritage resources will result from the decision. Managing for self-discovery interpretation opportunities will protect prehistoric sites in low recreation-use areas and within Wilderness. In high recreation-use areas outside the Wilderness, prehistoric sites will be protected by custodial maintenance of existing interpretation.
- The most significant historic structures (outside and inside Wilderness) will be maintained, stabilized, or restored. Other historic structures will be allowed to deteriorate following data collection.
- Nonhistoric structures outside Wilderness will be evaluated for stabilization, restoration, or maintenance based on potential historic value. Sites used in Wilderness administration and permitted livestock operations will remain.
- Direction for heritage resources will reduce the risk of resource damage or loss by addressing increasing or improperly managed recreation use. It will emphasize restoring historic sites that typify the economic and social history of the region, determining the relative significance of all heritage resources within the Wilderness, and levels of protection and/or preservation of unique vestiges of early homesteading and ranching in the Wilderness.
- It will also ensure that the rights and interests of the Nez Perce Tribe are appropriately protected.



Federal Trust Responsibilities

- Specific management direction for consultation and coordination with the Nez Perce Tribe in the planning and implementation of resource projects will ensure meeting treaty rights and tribal interests.
- The decision affords greater assurances that federal trust responsibilities will be met through government-to-government consultation and that the rights and privileges afforded to the Tribe by virtue of the *Treaty of 1855* will continue.

Highlights of the Decision (Other Issues)

Soils

- Soil stability will be managed for mid-seral ecological status with an upward trend. Soil surface conditions will be managed consistent with the potential natural community to maintain soil productivity and stability.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

- Six outstandingly remarkable values are established for the Wild Rapid River (traditional/cultural use, prehistoric/historic cultural resources, scenery, fisheries, and water quality). Additional direction for the other resource areas will protect these values to meet the intent of the *Wild and Scenic Rivers Act* and Section 7(1).
- Management direction from the *Imnaha Wild and Scenic River Management Plan* (USDA 1993) and the *Wild and Scenic Snake River Recreation Management Plan* (USDA 1999) is supplemented with direction for motorized and mechanical use, forested stands, grasslands, recreation, administrative facilities, heritage resources, and access to protect the outstandingly remarkable values for these Wild and Scenic rivers.
- The decision aligns party sizes for hikers and pack stock in the Wild and Scenic Snake River corridor with the party sizes for the Hells Canyon Wilderness (8 people and 16 stock animals) to maintain integrity of the Wilderness values and outstandingly remarkable values for the corridor.

Noxious Weeds, Nonnative Plants, and Invasive Species

- The presence of noxious weeds continues to be a serious concern. New direction provides a focus on nonnative, invasive species in addition to noxious weeds. Managing grasslands for the potential natural community will require evaluation of the persistence and contribution of native species to restoring sites.
- Successful restoration techniques are still being developed, but the decision emphasizes maintaining or restoring native grasslands to resist occupancy by noxious weeds. Public education efforts will be increased with reporting mechanisms. Partnerships will continue to be important to integrated weed management.

Biologically Unique Species, Habitats, and Ecosystems

- The decision defines biologically unique species, habitats, and ecosystems as those that are (1) limited solely or principally to the HCNRA, (2) limited within the HCNRA although they may be relatively common within neighboring ecoregions, or (3) limited within the three neighboring ecoregions. Biologically unique categories are identified as rare plant species (including plants with 'disjunct' populations in the HCNRA that are geographically separated from the main distribution of a species); endemic plant species; rare combinations of aquatic, terrestrial, and atmospheric habitats; and rare combinations of outstanding and diverse ecosystems and parts of ecosystems to meet the intent of Section 7(3) of the *HCNRA Act*.
- New direction for biologically unique species, habitats, and ecosystems will manage the HCNRA for high biological diversity and endemism to ensure sustainability of native ecosystems that contribute to biological uniqueness. These species, habitats, and ecosystems will be protected through project-level planning.

Riparian/Aquatic Habitat and Water Quality

- The decision incorporates watershed management objectives from the *Wallowa County/Nez Perce Tribe Salmon Habitat Recovery Plan with Multi-Species Habitat Strategy* (Wallowa County 1999) and inventory elements from the *Coarse Screening Process* (Rhodes et al 1994). The intent is to meet the goals of the *Spirit of the Salmon Plan* (CRITFC 1996) to restore fish habitat in the Columbia and Snake River subbasins.
- Water quality direction is added to determine total maximum daily loads and to develop plans for water quality management and restoration with other federal and state agencies to meet the *Clean Water Act*.

Highlights of the Decision (Other Issues)

Wildlife Habitat

- Forested areas in the HCNRA provide late/old structure (25%) for forest-associated species. The HCNRA will be managed as a healthy ecosystem that is an integral component of a larger bioregion. Managing for all structural stages, including late/old, will achieve functional old-growth habitat for associated species.
- The decision establishes objectives to protect and maintain wildlife habitat for existing native and desired nonnative vertebrate wildlife species and invertebrate organisms. Specific direction is provided for protecting bald eagles, Townsend's big-eared bats, lynx, wolverines, elk, old-growth species, and native land birds to ensure meeting the objectives of Section 7(4) of the *HCNRA Act*. The amended direction incorporates the *Canada Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy* for the HCNRA to meet the *Endangered Species Act*.

Scientific Research

- Supplemental direction is established for scientific research to optimize and enhance scientific knowledge, and focus research on resolution of management issues.

Geologic Resources

- Paleontological and unique geologic resources are afforded protection from damage or destruction, through protection measures, scientific research, interpretation and education, and restrictions on access to caves.

Minerals

- Mining is maintained subject to existing rights determination based upon claims as of 1975 (36 unpatented mining claims exist and no significant activity has occurred). No new mineral entry is allowed.

Land Ownership

- Direction for managing land ownership, access to private lands, and standards for use and development of private land in the HCNRA will meet Section 13 of the *HCNRA Act* to allow for occupation of homes and lands as a traditional and valid use while protecting the objectives in Section 7 of the *Act*.

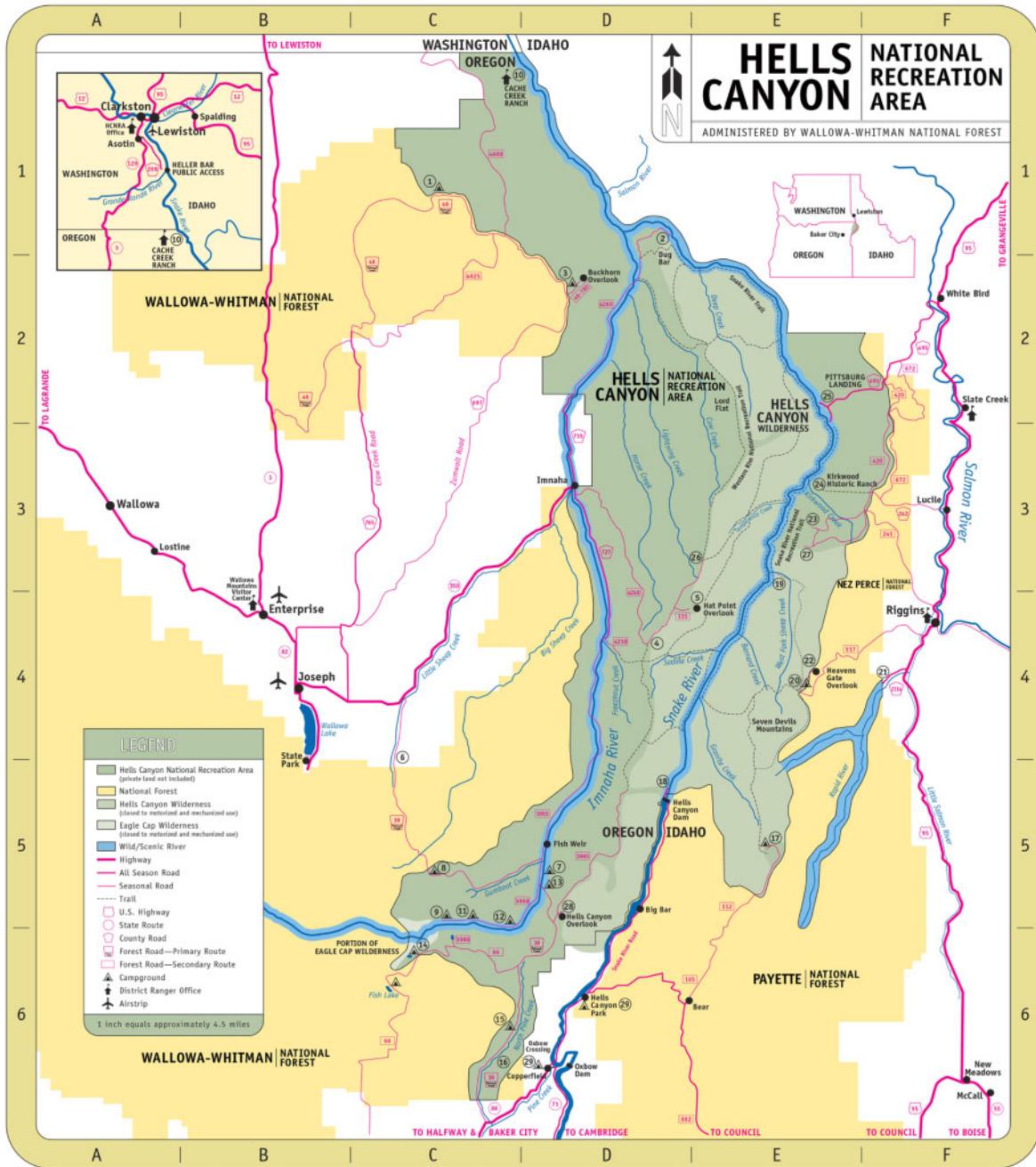
Monitoring and Evaluation

- A specific monitoring and evaluation plan is established to supplement existing *Forest Plan* monitoring to ensure the amended goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines meet the intent of the *HCNRA Act*. Monitoring efforts emphasize cooperative agreements with users of the HCNRA.

Socioeconomic Conditions

- Selective cutting may provide a benefit to local communities surrounding the HCNRA. Livestock grazing will continue to support related employment and income. As recreation use (including outfitter/guides) increases in the future, related employment and income provides an opportunity to support benefits primarily in Wallowa and Baker counties due to the majority of visits occurring in that part of the HCNRA.
- Traditional and valid uses of ranching, grazing, farming, timber harvesting, and the occupation of homes and lands as specified in Section 13 of the *HCNRA Act* will continue to be maintained and contribute to the quality of lifestyle that is important to local residents and communities around the HCNRA.





Document produced by:
 USDA Forest Service
 Pacific Northwest Region
 Wallowa-Whitman National Forest

Photos by Charles G. Johnson Jr.

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Implementation Strategy

Implementation of this decision begins seven calendar days from the day after the legal notice of this decision is published in the *Baker City Herald*, Baker City, Oregon; the official newspaper of record. Access and Travel Management decisions will be phased in with public education over the next year. Seasonal road closures will be implemented in April 2004 and August 2004.

Appeal Rights

This decision is subject to appeal in accordance with 36 CFR Part 217. A *Notice of Appeal* must be submitted in writing and clearly state that it is a *Notice of Appeal* filed pursuant to 36 CFR Part 217. The 45-day appeal period begins the day after the date the legal notice of this decision is published in the *Baker City Herald*, Baker City, Oregon (official newspaper of record). This period is not extendable. The *Notice of Appeal* must be filed (two copies) with the Reviewing Officer (Regional Forester) and must include sufficient narrative evidence and argument to show why this decision should be changed or reversed (36 CFR 217.9). Send *Notice of Appeal* to: Linda Goodman, Regional Forester; ATTENTION: 1570 Appeals; P.O. Box 3623; Portland, Oregon 97208-3623.

Further Information

The Record of Decision (ROD), Summary of the FEIS, and FEIS are available to the public on the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area web site at <http://www.fs.fed.us/hellscanyon/>. Printed desk copies of the documents are available for review at Forest Service offices in Enterprise, Baker City, and Halfway, Oregon; Clarkston, Washington; and Riggins, Idaho; and at public libraries in Enterprise, Halfway, La Grande, and Baker City in Oregon; and Lewiston, Riggins, and Council in Idaho. A compact disc containing the above documents will also be available to the public in early August. Send requests for information to Elaine Kohrman via e-mail R6HellsCanyonNRA@fs.fed.us. An open house to facilitate public understanding of the final decision is scheduled from 3-7 p.m., August 27, 2003, at the Joseph Community Center, in Joseph, Oregon.

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