

Section 7 Wild & Scenic Rivers Act Evaluation Procedure under “Direct and Adverse Effect” Standard

Consistency Determination for the Road Decommissioning for Aquatic Restoration Project
Salmon River, Mt. Hood National Forest
September 2008

Step 1 – Project Description: Briefly describe the situation that may prompt action. Include as appropriate (FSM 2354.76):

With this project, the Mt. Hood National Forest is proposing to decommission approximately 84 miles of road in eight subwatersheds across the Forest. In one of the subwatersheds, the Upper Salmon River Subwatershed, road decommissioning activities for about 4.7 miles are proposed within the Wild and Scenic River corridor for the Salmon River. The roads affected are: 5800242, 2600220, 2656130, 2656131, 2600011, 3500120, 2600197, and 2600226.

Background, including Project Proponent: The Mt. Hood National Forest, working in collaboration with representatives from many local, state, federal, and tribal governments as well as non-governmental organizations, identified priority areas for watershed and aquatic habitat restoration within the Fifteenmile Creek, Hood River, and Sandy River basins. Specifically, between 2004 and 2007, a series of meetings and workshops were held in each basin to develop basin-specific aquatic habitat restoration strategies. The primary goal of each strategy is to address aquatic habitat restoration needs for resident and anadromous fish species, while at the same time addressing needs for streamflow and water quality improvements. It is envisioned that each basin-wide strategy would be used to guide restoration investments over the long term in a manner that will achieve tangible, aggregated restoration benefits at the watershed-scale.

Additionally, in 2003 the Mt. Hood National Forest prepared a *Roads Analysis*, which addressed both the access benefits and ecological impacts of road-associated effects. As highlighted in the *Roads Analysis*, Forest Service budgets have not kept pace with what it costs to maintain all roads so they are functioning properly. With this trend of declining budgets expected to continue, the Forest’s backlog of roads needing maintenance continues to impact hydrologic function. In response, the *Roads Analysis* recommends decommissioning road segments having environmental risk factors coupled with low access needs.

Purpose: The basin-specific aquatic restoration strategies identify sixth-field subwatersheds that provide the cornerstone for addressing freshwater habitat restoration needs for federally listed and state sensitive resident and anadromous fish species, as well as water quality improvements. Therefore, the purpose of this proposal is to restore hydrologic function in several specific high priority sixth-field subwatersheds as identified in these strategies, which include: Headwaters Fifteenmile Creek, Upper Fifteenmile Creek, Upper Eightmile Creek, Upper Middle Fork Hood River, Linney Creek, Lower Salmon River, Upper Salmon River, and Still Creek.

Specifically, the need for this proposal is as follows:

- Reduce impacts to water quality, aquatic habitat, and threatened, endangered, and sensitive aquatic species caused by landslides, gullyng, seasonal and permanent impassible culvert barriers, and surface erosion associated with unneeded roads.

- Meet objectives outlined in basin-specific aquatic habitat restoration strategies by reducing risks to water quality and riparian function from roads.
- Reduce road maintenance costs by removing unneeded roads.

Geographic Location: The Salmon Wild and Scenic River is separated into segments that are unique in terms of classification and federal jurisdiction. The project area is located in Segments 1 and 2, which are described below.

Segment 1: The 11.3-km (7-mi) segment from the headwaters to the south boundary line of Section 6, Township 4 S, and Range 5 E is classified as a *Recreational River*, and is administered by the USFS.

Segment 2: The 24.1-km (15-mi) segment from the south boundary line of Section 6, Township 4 S, and Range 9 E to the confluence with the South Fork of the Salmon River is classified as a *Wild River*, and is administered by the USFS.

Legal descriptions for the roads within the Wild and Scenic River corridor are:

- T4S, R9E, Section 18: Forest Road 5800242
- T4S, R9E, Section 7: Forest Road 2600220
- T4S, R9E, Section 6: Forest Roads 2653130 and 2653131
- T3S, R9E, Section 31: Forest Road 2600011
- T3S, R9E, Section 19: Forest Roads 3500120, 2600197, and 2600226

Duration: Duration of the project would be over the next five years. Road decommissioning would be implemented once funding is secured.

Extent and Magnitude: The proposed project work would be limited to the road prism.

To determine if an in-depth Section 7 evaluation is necessary, answer the questions listed in A - F on the following pages. Define and document the time scale over which any identified effects are likely to occur.

A. Describe any changes to within-channel conditions.

Are there any discernable changes to channel location, geometry, slope, form, water quality, or navigation of the river? Also consider how likely within-channel changes affect ORVs.

Yes: **No:**

Explain (if yes): No changes within-channel are expected.

B. Describe any alteration to riparian or floodplain conditions.

Are there any meaningful changes to vegetation, soil compaction, exposure of bare ground, or bank stability or susceptibility to erosion?

Yes: No:

Explain (if yes): Road restoration would restore riparian vegetation on the existing road prism, decompact and vegetate the road prism, and restore natural flowpaths (both surface and subsurface) that are currently intercepted by the existing road prism.

C. Describe any alteration of upland conditions.

Are there any meaningful changes to vegetation, soil compaction, exposure of bare ground, drainage patterns, surface and sub-surface flows, or identified ORVs?

Yes: No:

Explain (if yes): Road restoration in upland areas would restore riparian vegetation on the existing road prism, decompact and vegetate the road prism, and restore natural flowpaths (both surface and subsurface) that are currently intercepted by the existing road prism.

D. Describe any on-site changes that will alter hydrologic or biological processes.

Are there any meaningful changes to the ability of the channel to change course, re-occupy former segments; inundate the floodplain; change the amount, timing, or pattern of channel flow; affect flood storage; affect biological processes such as fish spawning, amphibian/mollusk needs, and streamside vegetation?

Yes: No:

Explain (if yes): The project's activities are not expected to alter the course of the Salmon River. Road restoration is expected to enhance the Salmon River's ORVs.

E. Describe any magnitude and spatial extent of any off-site change.

Are there specific processes involved (such as water and sediment) that might be meaningfully influenced in other parts of the river system, what these changes might be, and the likelihood they would occur?

Yes: No:

Explain (if yes): This project is not expected to meaningfully influence other parts of the Salmon River.

F. Describe Effects to Management Goals.

Are there any meaningful effects to management goals relative to free flow, water quality, riparian area and floodplain conditions, ORV's and river classification?

Yes: No:

Explain (if yes): No long-term adverse impacts to the water quality or riparian area and floodplain conditions are expected to be caused by this project. Decommissioning roads would allow the Forest to meet management goals of long-term health of the Salmon River. Over the long term, the free-flow of the river would be improved by improving flood-plain connectivity and enhanced water quality. Within the project area, the biological community would benefit from increases in habitat diversity and complexity.

Management goals and objectives for free-flow, water quality, riparian area and floodplain conditions, and ORV's (Scenery, Recreation, Fisheries, and Wildlife) would be achieved soon after decommissioning activities are completed.

Step 2: Section 7 Determination

Based upon the above analysis, two possible decisions can be reached: (1) an in-depth Section 7 evaluation is required; or (2) there is enough information to determine that the proposed project will not have a "direct and adverse effect" to the values (free-flow, water quality, or outstandingly remarkable values) for which the river was added to the National System.

Road restoration is a key component to recovering and preserving the outstandingly remarkable values for which the Salmon River was designated. The final plan for the Salmon River provides for balanced protection and enhancement of all values found to be outstandingly remarkable: scenery, recreation, the anadromous fishery, wildlife, hydrology, and botany/ecology of the Salmon River corridor (USFS 1993). Decommissioning roads near the Salmon River would enhance water quality, fisheries, and wildlife ORV's for which the Salmon River was designated. In conclusion, I find that there is enough information to conclude that the proposed project would not have a "direct and adverse effect" to the values for which the Salmon River was added as a Wild and Scenic River. In fact, road decommissioning within the Salmon River corridor are expected to enhance the river's ORVs.

	Signature	Name	Date
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District Ranger Review:	/s/ Bill Westbrook	Bill Westbrook	October 2, 2008
Forest Supervisor Review:	/s/ Kathryn J. Silverman for	Gary Larsen	December 19, 2008