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**Subject:** Specialist Report (Biological Evaluation, Manguson-Stevens Act Assessment, and Management Indicator Species Review)

**To:** Mary Allison – District Ranger  
Al Brown – Natural Resources Planner

## Preface for Specialist Report

This specialist report serves as the following:

- The Biological Evaluation that addresses species listed under the Endangered Species Act (1973).
- The evaluation of effects to fish covered under the Manguson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation Act (MSA) and associated Essential Fish Habitat (EFH).
- The evaluation of Management Indicator Species (MIS) as required by the Willamette Land and Resource Management Plan (the Forest Plan). MIS fish species are designated in the Forest Plan as anadromous fish and resident trout species.

## Executive Summary

All of the alternatives have the same effect on ESA listed fish, MSA-EFH, and MIS fish. That is, **no effect** whatsoever. The following rationale is used for this effects determination:

- There are no listed fish (spring Chinook salmon and bull trout) or designated critical habitat upstream of Tamolitch Falls which is approximately 20 miles “downhill” from the project area. In addition, there are no streams in the project area that have surface connection to the McKenzie River and it is therefore physically impossible for effects from OHV use to be transmitted downstream to ESA listed fish habitat. This rationale is also applicable for a “no effect” to designated critical habitat for spring Chinook salmon and bull trout.
- MSA-EFH is not designated upstream of historical barriers (i.e. Tamolitch Falls). Therefore no EFH exists in the project area, and as described above it is physically impossible for effects from OHV use to be transmitted downstream to EFH.
- MIS fish that inhabit Big Lake were planted in the lake to provide for recreational opportunities. From a biological standpoint they would not be considered desirable to the lake ecosystem. These populations persist naturally and by hatchery plantation (ODFW), and given the impacts from current OHV use and the ability of these fish to persist it is highly unlikely that any alternative would have a negative effect to these fish.
- Executive Order 12962: Recreational Fishing. None of the alternatives would impact fish stocked in Big Lake, and none of the alternatives propose to limit fishing



opportunities or to close boat ramps. The Forest Service would continue to work with ODFW to stock fish appropriate for recreational angling purposes.

## **Project Background**

The 13,854-acre Project Area is located on the McKenzie River Ranger District, Willamette National Forest. The project area is bounded by Forest road 2676 on the west (roadway is included), U.S. Highway 20 on the north, the Willamette National Forest boundary and Pacific Crest divide on the east, and the Mt. Washington Wilderness Area boundary on the south. Public access into this area from U.S. Highway 20 is primarily by the paved Big Lake Road, or Forest road 2890.

The Santiam Pass area is a popular destination for summer motorized recreation, and the project area is part of a larger 17,242 acre Dispersed Recreation, Semiprimitive Motorized Management Area determined in the 1990 Willamette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. In addition to OHV riding, other dispersed recreation activities that occur in the area include dispersed camping, hunting, hiking, horseback riding, bicycling, driving for sight-seeing and to visit the Sand Mountain Lookout.

The project area currently has 66 miles of existing Forest system roads. Unmanaged OHV use has resulted in more than 8 miles of user-created tracks within the project area. Dispersed day-use and overnight-use camping sites are located along Forest road 2890 and on portions of the historic Santiam Wagon Road, which runs east to west through the project area. The Santiam Wagon Road is segmented within the project area as Forest roads 2676-866, 2690-810, and 2690-811. Approximately 3.4 miles of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail runs along the Cascade Crest on the east side of the project area. Developed recreation sites in the project area include the Hoodoo Ski Area, under a special use permit, and the Big Lake Campground Complex.

Legal description of the project: T.13S, R.7E, Sections 13-15, 22-27, 34-36; T.13S, R.7 1/2E, Sections 21-28, 33-36; T.14S, R.7 1/2E, Sections 1-3, 10-12; and T.14S, R.7 1/2E, Sections 1-4, 9-12, 15 and 15; Willamette Meridian; Linn County, Oregon.

## **Purpose and Need**

There is a need to implement a more formal management approach to conditions in the project area, in the Big Lake Campground area, in and around the Hoodoo Ski Area, and in the Santiam Wagon Road and Sand Mountain Special Interest Areas.

Increases in both total use and the types of use have prompted this analysis of methods to provide appropriate uses which result in quality recreation experiences, with an emphasis on opportunities unique to the area. At the same time, heritage resources must be protected, as well as sensitive plant and animal habitats in the area.

## **The Proposed Action**

The Proposed Action, represented as Alternative 2, would satisfy the need to provide designated motorized use within the project area; to restore recreation-related resource impacts to heritage

resources, to restore plant and animal habitat and to protect these resources into the future. In general, the following would be implemented in this proposal:

### **OHV, Road and Trail Development:**

- Designate 37.3 miles of Forest Road open to Motorized Mixed Use.
- Designate 7.6 miles of Forest Road open to ATV Class I & III only.
- Close 16.3 miles of Forest Road to motorized use.
- Reconstruct 4.4 miles of user created tracks, which will be open to ATV Class I & III.
- Construct 7.9 miles of new motorized trails open to ATV Class I & III
- Close 5.6 miles of user-created tracks to all motorized use and rehabilitate.

### **Santiam Wagon Road**

- Designate 6.0 miles of the Santiam Wagon Road open to Motorize Mixed Use.
- Rehabilitate all portions of the Santiam Wagon Road to approximate historic route, profile, and width, close and rehabilitate user-created OHV crossings.

### **Staging Area Development**

- Establish two, day-use staging areas for off-loading OHVs from trailers, one located along the Big Lake Road at the junction of Forest Road 2690 and south side of 2690-860, and the other near the junction of Forest Road 2690 and 2690-810, (Santiam Wagon Road). User education and information kiosks and toilet facilities would be included at each site.

### **Regulated Camping Zone**

- Designate 34 dispersed campsites within the Regulated Camping Zone, along Big Lake Road 2690 and Santiam Wagon Road, the 2690-810 portion.
- Block and rehabilitate existing dispersed campsites not incorporated into this action.

### **Open Play Area and Kiddy Loop**

- Establish 22.4 acres as Open Play Area within the sand blowout feature that exists at the junction of the Sand Mountain lookout road 2690-810 and Santiam Wagon Road 2676-866 portion.
- Establish a 18.3 acre Kiddy Loop Trail Area north of Big Lake Campground between the Big Lake Road 2690 and Santiam Wagon Road, 2690-810.

## **Alternative 1 – The Current Management Situation (No Action)**

This alternative assesses the present condition of the affected environment and serves as the basis of comparison for the other alternatives analyzed. Under the existing management scenario, within the project area, recreation use will continue to be managed as it currently is.

Alternative 1 would not take actions to meet the need to manage motorized use within the Santiam Pass Summer Motorized Recreation Project Area. It does not restore and protect recreation-related resource impacts to historic properties and sensitive habitat for plants and animals. The no action alternative does change the opportunity for quality recreation experiences within the project area.

Current trends of OHV use in the project area at Santiam Pass would continue. The McKenzie River Ranger District would continue current monitoring and enforcement under existing regulations for OHV use on the forest roads and unauthorized user-created tracks within the project area.

This alternative does not close and or rehabilitate, unauthorized user-created tracks and no existing dispersed campsites would be rehabilitated. Camping by motorized users at existing dispersed camp sites is likely to continue unchanged. Unregulated dispersed motorized camping would expand existing campsites into undisturbed areas. Loading and unloading of OHVs at existing camp sites would continue in the current unregulated manner.

No new information Kiosks or sanitation facilities would be built. No Open Play Areas or Kiddy Loop Trail Areas would be added.

## **Alternative 2 – The Proposed Action**

Alternative 2 – the Proposed Action, is generally the same alternative that was presented in the February 3, 2005 scoping letter. Minor changes were made to this alternative after considering scoping comments received. Alternative 2 would implement the following actions, which meets the project purpose and need to provide designated motorized use within the Santiam Pass Summer Motorized Recreation Project Area; and to restore recreation-related resource impacts to heritage resources and plant and animal habitat and protect these resources in the future.

### **OHV, Road and Trail Development:**

- Designate 37.3 miles of Forest Road open to Motorized Mixed Use.
- Designate 7.6 miles of Forest Road open to ATV Class I & III only.
- Close 16.3 miles of Forest Road to motorized use.
- Reconstruct 4.4 miles of user created tracks, which will be open to ATV Class I & III.
- Construct 7.9 miles of new motorized trails open to ATV Class I & III
- Close 5.6 miles of user-created tracks to all motorized use and rehabilitate.

### **Santiam Wagon Road**

- Designate 6.0 miles of the Santiam Wagon Road open to Motorize Mixed Use.
- Rehabilitate all portions of the Santiam Wagon Road to approximate historic route, profile, and width, close and rehabilitate user-created OHV crossings.

### **Staging Area Development**

- Establish two, day-use staging areas for off-loading OHVs from trailers, one located along the Big Lake Road at the junction of Forest Road 2690 and south side of 2690-860, and the other near the junction of Forest Road 2690 and 2690-810, (Santiam Wagon Road). User education and information kiosks and toilet facilities would be included at each site.

### **Regulated Camping Zone**

- Designate 34 dispersed campsites within the Regulated Camping Zone, along Big Lake Road 2690 and Santiam Wagon Road, the 2690-810 portion.
- Block and rehabilitate existing dispersed campsites not incorporated into this action.

### **Open Play Area and Kiddy Loop**

- Establish 22.4 acres as Open Play Area within the sand blowout feature that exists at the junction of the Sand Mountain lookout road 2690-810 and Santiam Wagon Road 2676-866 portion.
- Establish a 18.3 acre Kiddy Loop Trail Area north of Big Lake Campground between the Big Lake Road 2690 and Santiam Wagon Road, 2690-810.

### **Alternative 3**

Alternative 3 would implement the following actions, which meets the project purpose and need to provide designated motorized use within the Santiam Pass Summer Motorized Recreation Project Area; and to restore recreation-related resource impacts to heritage resources and plant and animal habitat and protect these resources in the future.

#### **OHV, Road and Trail Development:**

- Designate 30.6 miles of Forest Road open to Motorized Mixed Use.
- Designate 12.1 miles of Forest Road open to ATV Class I & III only.
- Close 18.5 miles of Forest Road to motorized use.
- Reconstruct 5.2 miles of user created tracks, which will be open to ATV Class I & III.
- Construct 9.8 miles of new motorized trails open to ATV Class I & III
- Close 4.8 miles of unauthorized user-created tracks to all motorized use and rehabilitate.

#### **Santiam Wagon Road**

- Designate 4.5 miles of the Santiam Wagon Road open to Motorized Mixed Use; starting at the junction of Forest Road 860 / 810, east to the Forest boundary.
- Close 1.5 miles of the Santiam Wagon Road to ATV Class I, II, and III; from the junction of Forest Road 890, west to the junction of Forest Road 2676
- Rehabilitate all portions of the Santiam Wagon Road to approximate historic route, profile, and width, close and rehabilitate user-created OHV crossings not incorporated in the trail system.

#### **Staging Area Development**

- Establish a day-use staging areas for off-loading OHVs from trailers, located along the Big Lake Road at the junction of Forest Road 2690 and 2690-860.
- Designate a section of Ray Benson SnoPark for day use parking.
- Designate Little Nash SnoPark at the junction of Forest Road 2676 and HWY 20/126 as a staging area.

#### **Regulated Camping Zone**

- Designate 20 dispersed campsites within the Regulated Camping Zone, along Big Lake Road 2690 and Santiam Wagon Road the 2690-810.
- Block and rehabilitate all other dispersed campsites not incorporated into this action.
- Designate a section of Ray Benson SnoPark for overnight fee camping.

### **Open Play Area and Kiddy Loop**

- Close the sand blowout feature that exists at the junction of the Sand Mountain lookout road 2690-810 and Santiam Wagon Road 2676-866 portion to all motorized use.

- Establish two Kiddy Loop Trail Areas: one northwest of Ray Benson SnoPark and one south of the Santiam Wagon Road.

## **Alternative 4**

Alternative 4 would implement the following actions, which meets the project purpose and need to provide designated motorized use within the Santiam Pass Summer Motorized Recreation Project Area; and to restore recreation-related resource impacts to heritage resources and plant and animal habitat and protect these resources in the future.

### **OHV, Road and Trail Development:**

- Designate 17.8 miles of Forest Road open to Motorized Mixed Use.
- Designate 14.5 miles of Forest Road open to ATV Class I & III only.
- Close 24.3 miles of Forest Road to motorized use.
- Reconstruct 2.7 miles of user created tracks, which will be open to ATV Class I & III.
- Construct 6.6 miles of new motorized trails open to ATV Class I & III.
- Close 7.3 miles of user-created tracks to all motorized use and rehabilitate.

### **Santiam Wagon Road**

- Designate 4.1 miles of the Santiam Wagon open to Highway Legal Vehicles; starting at the junction of Forest Road 2676-866 and Sand Mountain Road, east to the Forest boundary.
- Close 1.9 miles of the Santiam Wagon Road to all motorized vehicles from the junction of Forest Road 2676, east to the junction of Forest Road 2676-866 and Sand Mountain Road.
- Rehabilitate all portions of the Santiam Wagon Road within the planning area, to approximate historic route, profile, and width. Establish two motorized trail crossings to facilitate access to Big Lake Campground.

### **Staging Area Development**

- Establish a day-use staging areas for off-loading OHVs from trailers, located along the Big Lake Road at the junction of Forest Road 2690 and 2690-860.
- Designate a section of Ray Benson SnoPark as a day use staging area.

### **Regulated Camping Zone**

- Designate 15 dispersed campsites within the Regulated Camping Zone, along Big Lake Road 2690 and Santiam Wagon Road the 2690-810.
- Block and rehabilitate all other dispersed campsites not incorporated into this action.
- Designate a section of Ray Benson SnoPark for overnight fee camping.

### **Open Play Area and Kiddy Loop**

- Close the sand blowout feature that exists at the junction of the Sand Mountain lookout road 2690-810 and Santiam Wagon Road 2676-866 portion, to all motorized use.
- Establish a 3.6 acre Kiddy Loop Trail Area northwest of Ray Benson SnoPark.

## **Description of the project area as it relates to fish.**

The project area lies within that portion of the watershed that is dominated by the Early High Cascades Platform. This area is characterized by very porous and permeable soils, and has relatively few perennial streams. The majority of streams in the area are ephemeral in nature and have no surface connection to the McKenzie River.

Big lake is the only fish bearing water body in the project area. Historically it is a fishless lake, but is currently stocked by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). The Upper McKenzie Watershed Analysis documented that brook trout, rainbow trout, cutthroat trout, and kokanee (landlocked sockeye salmon) are stocked in Big Lake. ODFW has recently begun stocking spring Chinook salmon in the lake in order to decrease the kokanee population. Like the kokanee, these Chinook salmon are landlocked (i.e. there is no outlet streams that would allow the fish to fulfill their anadromous life history).

The hatchery Chinook salmon planted in Big Lake are not considered part of the ESA listing because there is no opportunity for the salmon to migrate to the ocean. The non-ESA listed status of the hatchery Chinook was affirmed by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in an e-mail message to the Willamette National Forest. In that message NMFS stated the following:

*The lake is out of the range of naturally migrating and outplanted listed fish, with no access by other Chinook populations. The fish stocked into Big Lake are surplus to the smolt program in the North Santiam River and are not needed, nor intended for, conservation/recovery purposes of the ESU. This release is strictly for fishing purposes in the lake.*

*Because the purpose of the fish in Big Lake is recreational fishing opportunities, the effects of other actions will not affect the ESU. Depending on when your proposed actions take place, they may be gone--and further outplantings are not expected. The Hatchery ESA Listing Policy was described originally in Federal Register Notice 69 FR 31354, and summarized in the final policy in 70 FR 37204 with the following statement germane to these stocked fish:*

*‘Tribal harvest, non-tribal harvest, and other beneficial uses of surplus listed hatchery fish may be allowed provided they are managed consistent with the conservation and recovery needs of listed salmon and steelhead ESUs. Specifically, NMFS proposed to allow for the harvest of hatchery fish listed as threatened that are surplus to the conservation and recovery needs of the ESU, in accordance with fishery management plans approved under section 4(d) of the ESA.’*

*In this situation, the Chinook stocked in Big Lake, not for reintroduction or recovery purposes, provide no conservation value to the ESU, and fit the intent of our regulations.*

## **Effects Determination**

The proposed action, and all of the alternatives, would have the same effect on ESA listed fish, MSA-EFH designated fish and habitat, and MIS fish: **no effect**.

Rationale:

None of the alternatives would have actions adjacent to Big Lake (the only fish bearing water body in the project area); There is no designated EFH upstream of Tamolitch Falls; the hatchery Chinook salmon planted in Big Lake are not necessary to the conservation of the ESU (Evolutionary Significant Unit); and there are no streams with surface connection to the McKenzie River.

The proposed action is consistent with Executive Order 12962 (Recreational Fishing) as it would not limit recreational fishing opportunities in Big Lake.

**/s/ Ramon Rivera**

**RAMON RIVERA**

Supervisory Fisheries Biologist