



File Code: 1900

Date: July 1, 2008

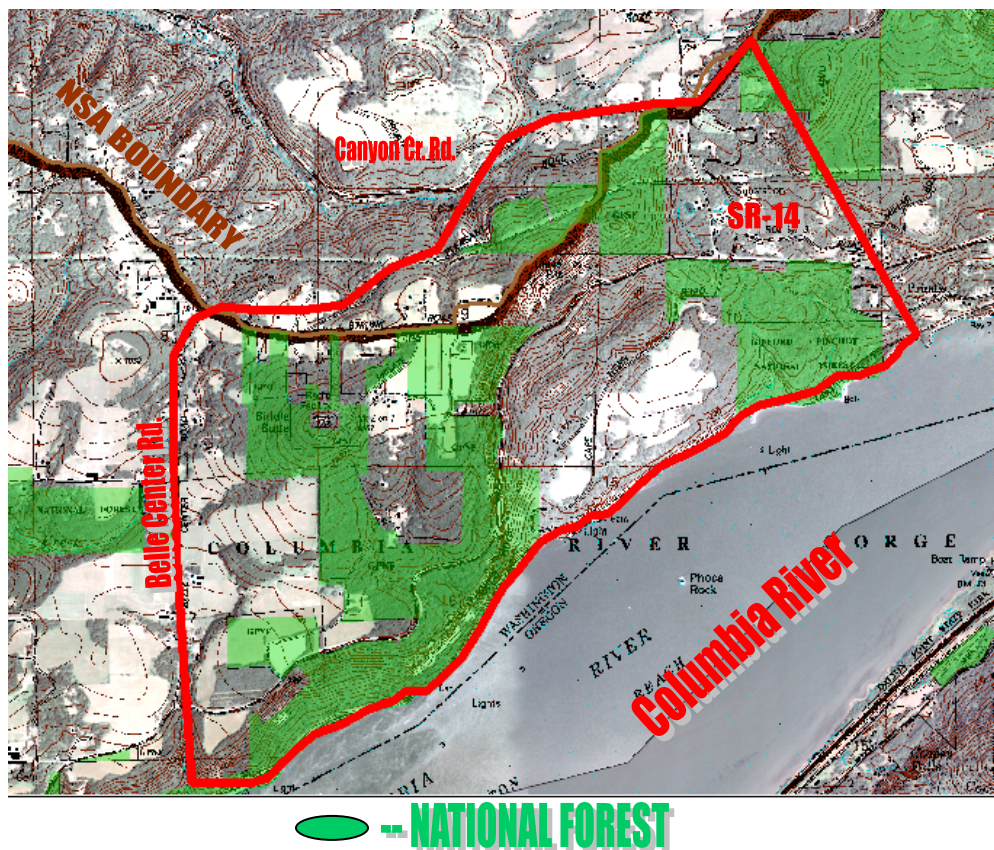
Dear Interested Party:

The USDA Forest Service, Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA), is proposing a recreation development and management plan for the Cape Horn planning area in Skamania County, Washington (see attached maps). We are seeking comments on the preliminary alternatives which were developed collaboratively with the Cape Horn Conservancy and the Forest Service. You are being notified because you have been identified as an interested party, and/or you own land adjacent to National Forest lands in the area.

### Planning Area

The planning area is generally the area on the north and south sides of SR 14 between Bell Center Road and Salmon Falls Road. Canyon Creek Road approximates the northern boundary, while the Columbia River forms the general southern boundary.

The Legal Description is: Washington State, Skamania County, T.1N, R.5E, Sections 3,4,8,9,10,15,16,17 W.M..



The analysis will include surrounding lands and land uses, as they affect or are affected by the proposal in the planning area. The analysis area will necessarily be different for the various resources as defined by each resource specialist.

### **Purpose and Need for the Planning Effort**

#### **Background**

- Property acquisitions in the Cape Horn vicinity of Skamania County, Washington have created sufficient contiguous federal lands to support development of a comprehensive trail management plan for the area.
- Recent land and easement acquisitions by non-federal conservation land trusts set the stage for construction of a scenic overlook as part of the trail system that might rival the views seen from Crown Point on the Oregon side of the Columbia.
- There is currently a non-system trail in use in the planning area.
- Skamania County recently broke ground on the development of a Park-N-Ride facility adjacent to the planning area that might be appropriate for collateral use as a trailhead.
- Washington Department of Transportation is in the planning phase of a proposal to remedy safety issues on State Highway 14 which bisects the Cape Horn trail planning area. Coordination of trail locations and highway realignment locations would enhance recreation use experiences and reduce construction costs because pedestrian underpasses could be incorporated into the highway realignment plans.

#### **Purpose of the Cape Horn Recreation Management Plan**

The purpose of this planning effort is to identify and select the Desired Future Condition for recreation in the area including a safe and environmentally sustainable trail location and associated amenities. It is intended that the plan will be compatible with possible future development of the proposed Steigerwald to Stevenson trail. The existing non-system trail will be analyzed either as the proposed action or as an alternative.

#### **Need for the Cape Horn Recreation Management Plan**

Current unmanaged use in the area is impacting sensitive resources and the increasing demand for a Cape Horn trail system creates a need to consider the establishment of a National Forest System trail. The opportunities provided by the realignment of SR-14, the construction of the Salmon Falls Park and Ride, and the purchase of the Cleveland property by a non-federal conservation trust combine to create a compelling need to design a safe and resource compatible plan for recreation in the area.

#### **Planning Process**

The Cape Horn Recreation Management Plan will be the selected alternative derived from an Environmental Assessment under NEPA. Extraordinary circumstances requiring an Environmental Assessment (rather than a categorical exclusion) include Native American religious or cultural sites, and sensitive plants and animals. In addition, the high level of public interest warrants preparation of an EA.

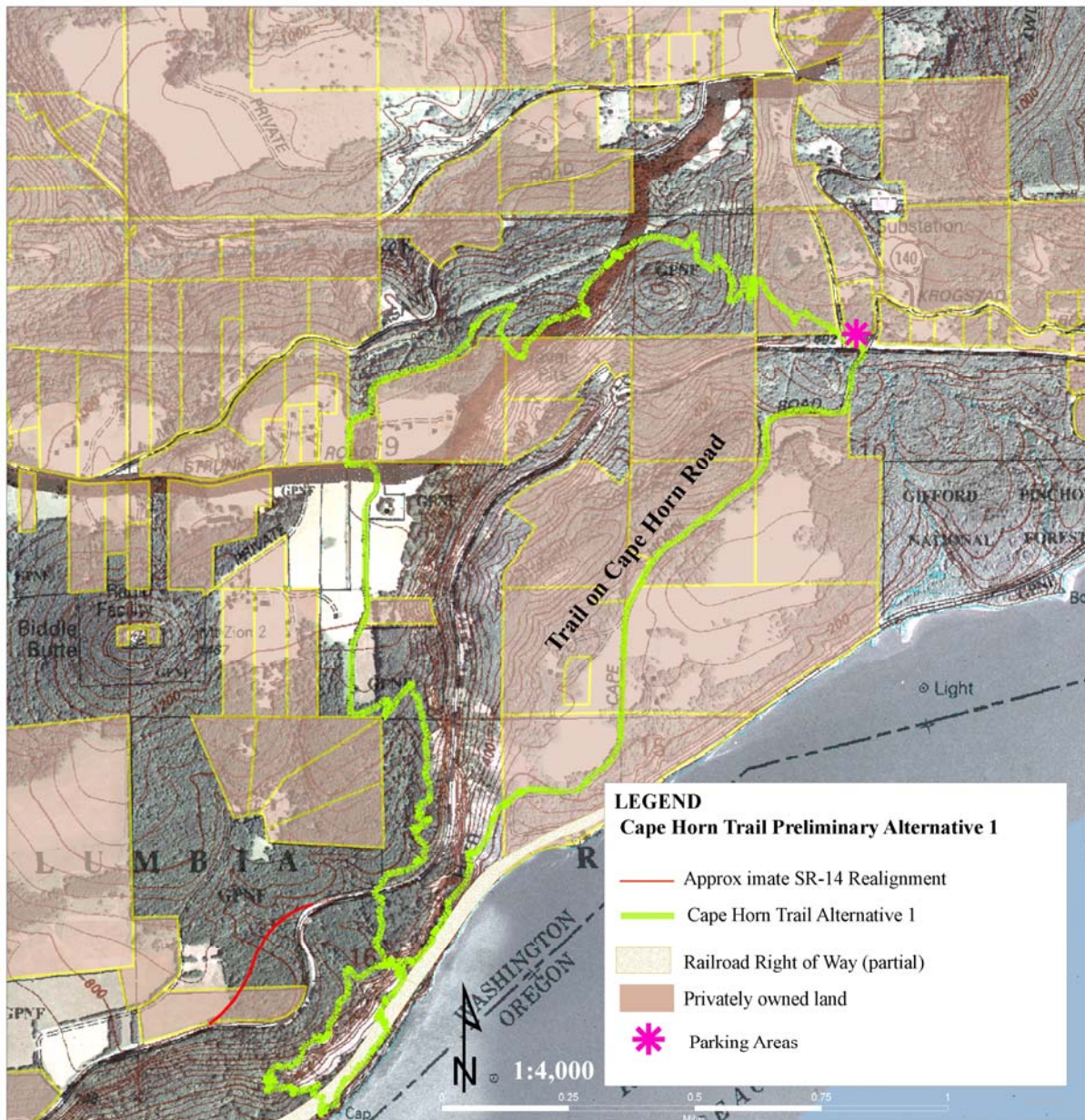


**Preliminary Alternatives**

The following maps generally describe the following preliminary alternatives:

- Alternative 1-No Recreation Management Plan. The existing non-system trails would not be formally analyzed for designation as Forest Service Trails.
- Alternative 2-A Recreation Management Plan with a trail system that does not include a loop below SR-14. This trail would be link in the longer proposed Steigerwald to Stevenson Trail.
- Alternative 3-A Recreation Management Plan with a trail system that includes a loop below SR-14 in order to accommodate views and other special natural features while correcting some of the current impacts to natural resources and adjacent land owners.

**Preliminary Alternative 1-No Action**

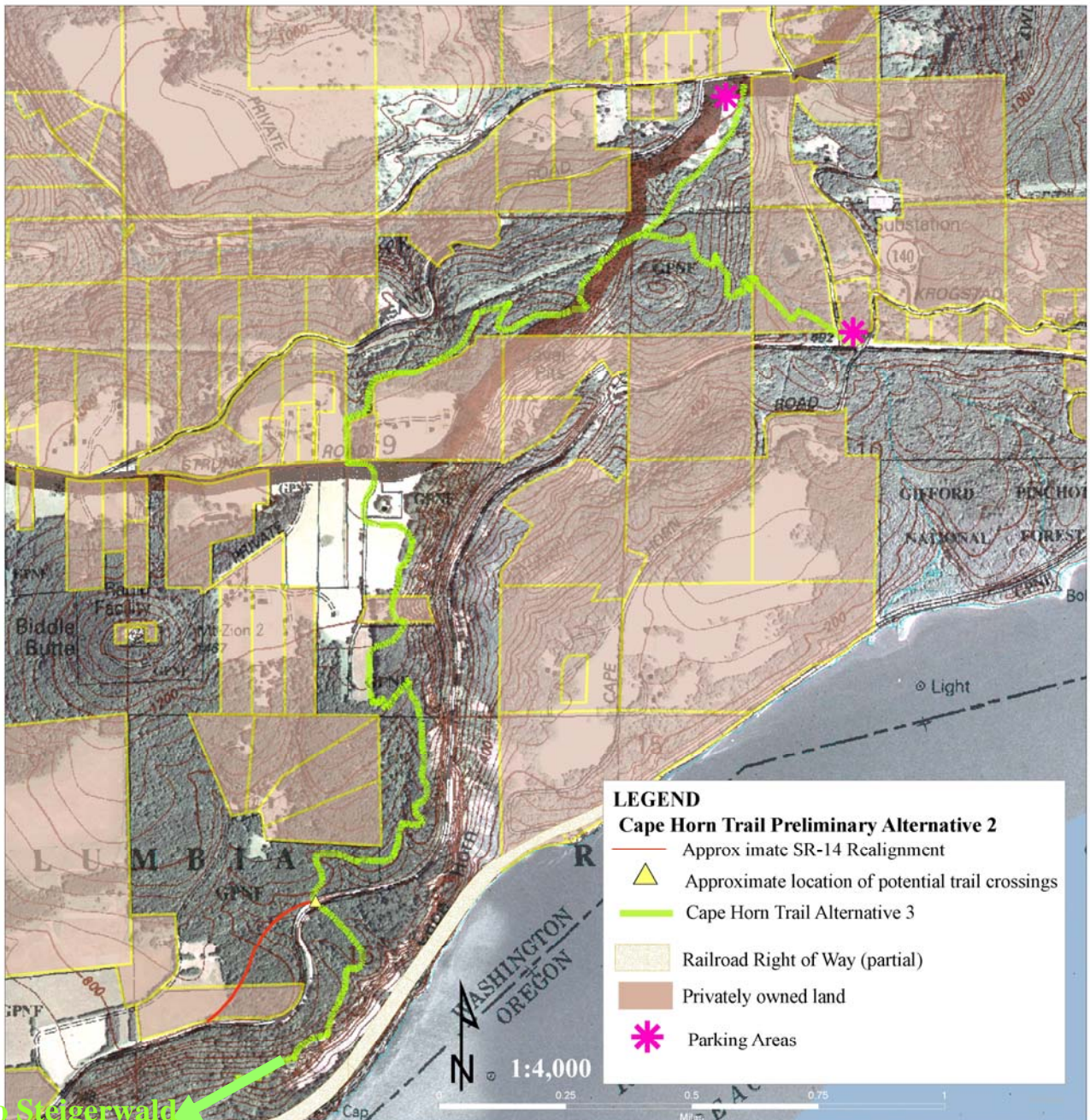




**Preliminary Alternative 2**

Major Features of this Alternative

- Adopts most existing non-system trails.
- Uses trail alignment consistent with a gorge-wide loop trail.
- No lower trail loop, and therefore no SR-14 underpass at Salmon Falls.
- Avoids disturbance of Sensitive Wildlife areas
- Does not use the abandoned segment of the SR-14 re-alignment proposal as a parking area.
- Does not use the old Wagon Road near the northern boundary as a loop in the trail system.
- Does not use Cape Horn Road as a trail.



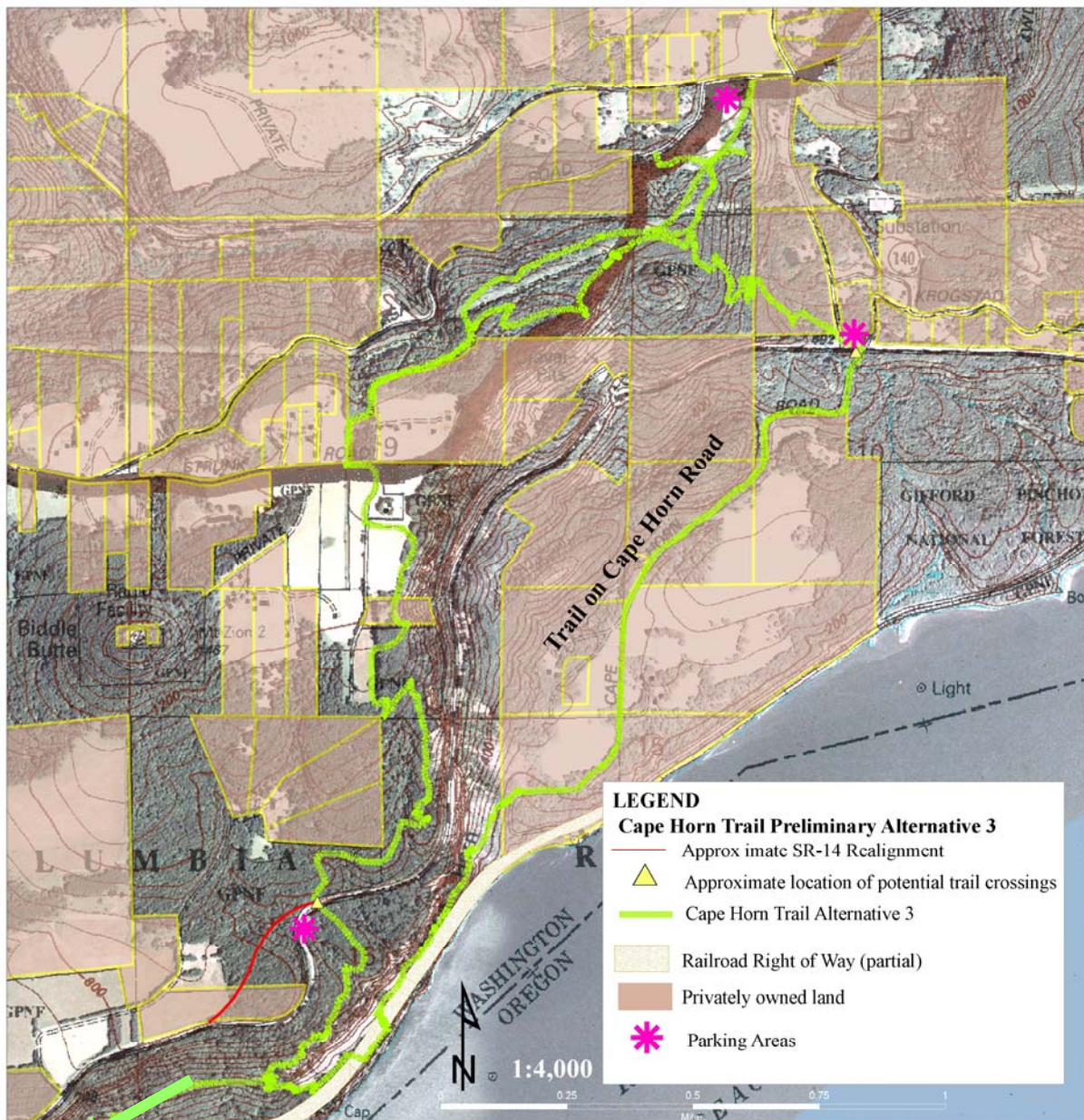
To Steigerwald ←  
To Stevenson →



**Preliminary Alternative 3-Cape Horn Conservancy with Forest Service**

Major Features of this Alternative

- Adopts most existing non-system trails.
- Uses a trail alignment consistent with a gorge-wide loop trail.
- Includes a lower loop trail that requires two underpasses including at Salmon Falls Rd.
- Uses the abandoned segment of the SR-14 re-alignment proposal as a parking area and/or overlook.
- Uses the old Wagon Road near the northern boundary as a loop in the trail system.
- Uses Cape Horn Road as a trail.



To Steigerwald ←  
 To Stevenson →

### **Decisions to be Made**

The Cape Horn NEPA decision will determine the Desired Future Conditions for recreation use in the planning area. Decisions to be made will include:

- Location for a National Forest System trail (including underpasses) that minimizes impacts to CRGNSA resources and is compatible with the larger Steigerwald to Stevenson trail concept.
- Appropriate trail uses (e.g. hiking, bicycling, horses),
- Scenic Overlook location, access, and conceptual design,
- Identification and location of trailheads, gates, fences, safety devices, trail surfacing, etc.
- Management strategies (e.g. law enforcement, search and rescue, fire prevention, timing of use (e.g. dawn to dusk),
- Use of the abandoned SR-14 curve on NFS land.
- Mitigation measures or implementation requirements that respond to resource or social concerns.

### **Current Management Direction**

The following Management direction is applicable to this planning effort:

- National Scenic Area Management Plan: Special Management Area policies and guidelines.
- Gifford Pinchot Land and Resource Management Plan as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan: Forest wide guidelines, NWFP Riparian Reserves, ACS objectives, Survey and Manage Species.

### **Preliminary Issues for the Current Planning Effort**

The following issues surfaced during the initial phases of developing this proposal and during planning for a 1997 State Route 14 Cape Horn Vista Project (which was not completed due to issues with the specific proposal):

Sensitive Resource Impacts of Unmanaged Recreation Use: Impacts to riparian resources, Tall Bugbane and a Peregrine Falcon aerie may affect trail location.

Effect on Adjacent Land Owners and Local Communities: Effects to local communities along Strunk Road due to increased use may affect parking area design and location.

Long Term Management: Construction funding, long term funding and personnel for operations and maintenance are currently not assured and require a strategic plan.

Land Ownership: The current trail system relies on private easements and may affect the Railroad ROW. The Railroad ROW and private land easements may affect trail location.

Safety: The current non-system trail crosses SR-14 at two locations and Salmon Falls Road at one location. The location of underpasses for SR-14 may drive trail location. In addition, some alternatives use Cape Horn Road as a trail.

Recreation use types, levels and access: There are differing options for parking areas, recreation use levels and trailhead locations.

## CONCERNS

- Provisions for Safety, Law Enforcement, Emergency Access and Fire Prevention,
- Protection for Cultural/Historical Resources; Traditional Native American Uses may require mitigation,
- Adjacent Private Land Protection may require management guidelines,
- Natural Resource Protection and Noxious Weed management may require mitigation,
- Recreation facility mitigations for water quality including shorelines management, and
- Scenic Resource effects of the trail and trail access points may require mitigation

## Cape Horn Schedule

<b>Planning Tasks</b>	<b>When in 2008</b>
Project Description and Development	April-June
Public Scoping of Preliminary Alternatives	End June
Prepare Environment Assessment (EA)	August
<b>Publish EA for 30-Day Public Comment Period</b>	<b>End August</b>
<b>Publish Decision</b>	September
45 Appeal Period	October

## Request for Comments

We are interested in any comments you may have on the preliminary alternatives described in this letter. Over the next several months, the Forest Service will conduct the analysis and then provide a document for public review.

Please mail any comments on this proposal to Daniel Harkenrider, Area Manager, at 902 Wasco, Suite 200, Hood River, Oregon, 97031. You may email comments to [comments-pacificnorthwest-columbia-river-gorge-nsa@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-pacificnorthwest-columbia-river-gorge-nsa@fs.fed.us). Comments must be received by **July 30, 2008**.

You may also contact the recreation manager Stan Hinatsu at (541)308-1708, the planner, Diana Ross at (541)308-1716 or Greg Cox, the Staff Officer at (541)308-1732 with any questions. The Forest Service will utilize email and its website in this planning process, and would greatly appreciate receiving the email address of those who wish to participate in this project. Those who respond to this letter or who request it will remain on our project mailing list. Thank you.

Sincerely,

/S/ DANIEL T. HARKENRIDER

DANIEL T. HARKENRIDER  
Area Manager