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Public comment sought on draft North Fork plan

VALE, Oregon – The Bureau of Land Management's Vale District is accepting public comment through May 22 on its recently released North Fork Malheur Geographic Management Area Plan and Environmental Assessment.

BLM Field Offices throughout the West have been directed to conduct rangeland health assessments. The purpose for the assessments is to provide BLM with a rational basis for determining whether current management practices are meeting the Fundamentals of Rangeland Health as described in the Code of Federal Regulations.

The North Fork Malheur Geographic Management Area (GMA) is located on the western boundary of the Vale District at the junction of Malheur, Harney and Grant counties. The area encompasses 123,000 acres of public land consisting of 19 grazing allotments managed by 14 livestock permittees.

The upland rangelands and riparian areas within the North Fork Malheur GMA were assessed by an interdisciplinary team of resource specialists. The team, representing the biological and physical sciences, were involved in the collection and analysis of assessment data. This document reports the findings of the assessment as well as develops recommendations that should provide progress in meeting the Standards.

The recommendations are described under three alternatives and were developed to address natural resource concerns within the GMA. The proposed alternative would implement changes in livestock management, and proposed rangeland projects would be constructed or implemented in order to make progress in achieving the Standards.

Some of the proposed rangeland projects in the plan include: spring reconstruction; noxious weed control; seedings of perennial grass, forbs and shrubs; fence construction, and use of prescribed fire and mechanical methods to manage western juniper. In addition, recreation projects are planned within the GMA including improvements at the Chukar Park Campground and proposed campsite developments near the old Castle Rock Fire Guard Station.



Special management areas associated with the GMA include two Wilderness Study Areas, a congressionally designated study river under the direction of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and two Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. Important and relevant values associated with these special management areas include: scenic, cultural, historic, and wildlife habitat. Bull Trout, a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act, occurs within a segment of the North Fork Malheur River, and approximately 30 percent of the GMA provides sage grouse, a special status species, with nesting and wintering habitat. Columbia spotted frog, a candidate species, also occurs within riparian areas throughout the GMA.

The proposed alternative for management of the area was developed in accordance with the Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement. Following the 30-day comment period, the District will issue a Record of Decision.

If you are interested in receiving a copy of the plan, please contact the Malheur Resource Area Manager at 541-473-3144.

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