



File Code: 1950/2350-5

Date: January 9, 2009

REQUEST FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS
Lava Rock OHV Project
Initial Scoping for Proposed Action
Bend/ Fort Rock Ranger District, Deschutes National Forest
Deschutes County, Oregon

You are invited to review and comment on this proposal. For your comments to be most helpful, please respond by February 11, 2009. We would like to hear from you.

The Bend/Fort Rock Ranger District of the Deschutes National Forest is interested in your comments regarding a proposal to implement a motorized off highway vehicle (OHV) trail project on the Bend/Ft. Rock Ranger District. The project would designate a motorized trail system as part of the Deschutes National Forest's strategy for implementing the Forest Service's National 2005 Travel Management Rule. That strategy included identifying areas on the Forest where there was community support for developing designated motorized trail systems, one of which includes the area we have now designated as the Lava Rock OHV project area. The District is developing this proposal to allow for long-term sustainable motor vehicle use on the forest while balancing resource objectives with public and agency needs. Our staff has been working with various members of the community to help develop this proposal, and we are now ready to receive public comment on the proposed action.

Location Description

The Lava Rock OHV project area is located east of US Highway 97 on the Bend/Fort Rock Ranger District and includes portions of the Pilot Butte, Lower Little Deschutes, Long Prairie, Pine and Devils Garden 5th field watersheds. The area encompasses approximately 140,650 acres. The project area is shown on the attached map (see Figure 1), and is roughly bounded by Highway 97 on the west; Forest Road 22 on the south; Forest Roads 2248, 2230 and 2239 on the southeast; the Newberry National Volcanic Monument on the east; Forest Roads 9714 and 1810 on the northeast; and Forest Roads 9701-900 and 1801-400 on the north. More detailed maps will be posted on the Deschutes National Forest website - <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/centraloregon/projects/units/bendrock/index.shtml>.

Legal Description

Legal descriptions of project boundary "corners" are as follows: Township 19 South, Range 12 East, Section 6 on the northwest corner; T22S, R11E, Section 18 on the southwest corner; T23S, R14E, Section 18 on the southeast corner; and T19S, R12E, Section 3 on the northeast corner. The southeastern portion of the project boundary also encompasses T22S, R14E, Section 6 along the Newberry National Volcanic Monument boundary.

Forest Plan Management Areas

The Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) guides all management activities on the Forest. It establishes overall Goals and Objectives, and Standards and Guidelines for proposed activities, including specific "Management Area" guidance for resource



planning. Forest Plan Management Areas within the project area include the following: M8-General Forest (105,429 acres); M9-Scenic Views (19,042 acres); M7-Deer Habitat (10,486 acres); M15-Old Growth (4,558 acres); M30-Other Ownership (791 acres); and M1-Special Interest Areas (345 acres), including the Lava Cast Forest and Lava River Cave areas.

Background on the Travel Management Rule and Environmental Impact Statement

In 2005, the Forest Service codified a national rule that prohibits motorized travel off of designated routes. The Deschutes National Forest is currently in the process of developing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to display the environmental effects of implementing the Travel Management Rule¹, which is expected to be completed by 2010.² The Rule calls for implementing the decision in collaboration with national forest stakeholders and directs the Forest Service to designate routes (roads and trails) and areas open to motorized travel³ with some exceptions⁴. The Deschutes and Ochoco National Forests worked with a chartered federal advisory committee to develop a strategy for implementing the rule that included two distinct outcomes. The outcomes were recommendations for:

- 1) Options and criteria for providing motorized access for dispersed camping within the limits allowed by the rule; and
- 2) Specific areas that could be considered for developing specialized motorized trail systems.

The Lava Rock OHV project stems from item (2) above as a specific area to be considered for developing motorized trails systems. The project area is part of an area identified by a working group during the Travel Management process as a “Community Support” area for designating motorized trails and was also recommended by the Deschutes Provincial Advisory Committee for site specific analysis on the Deschutes National Forest.

Existing Condition

Currently, the Bend/Fort Rock Ranger District has approximately 318 miles of designated OHV trails and areas open to a variety of highway and non-highway licensed vehicles. The designated trail miles are primarily 50” wide treads open to quad ATVs (Class 1) and motorcycles (Class 3) within the East Fort Rock OHV trail system. Limited trails are currently designated for 4-wheel drive jeeps (Class 2) in the Edison Butte area (~25 miles) and Groundhog Butte area, and no specific single track trails are designated solely for motorcycles (Class 3). There are currently no designated motorized trails within the Lava Rock OHV project area. However, there are many miles of unauthorized, user-created, single track Class 3 cross-country trails and various hill climb trails used by jeeps, quad ATVs and motorcycles alike.

¹ 36 CFR 212, 251, 261, and 295,

² In accordance with the Travel Management Rule, motorized travel would be prohibited outside of existing designated routes (roads and trails) and areas where it is not already restricted or prohibited by law, regulation, policy, order, Forest Plan direction, or site-specific decision. Road closures (designation as Maintenance Level 1 or decommissioned roads) that were approved under previous decisions will not be displayed as “open to motorized travel” in maps of the proposed action. The Rule would not close any existing designated routes currently open for motorized use, although non-highway licensed vehicles are proposed to be prohibited from some roads based on safety concerns. The Rule requires National Forests to publish a “Motor Vehicle Use Map” (MVUM) that will show designated routes (roads and trails) and areas that are open to motorized travel, including the season of use and class of vehicle for each of the routes and areas. The Rule requires that all national forests prohibit motorized travel off of designated routes or outside of designated areas, with some exceptions.

³ Over the snow vehicles are excluded from the Travel Management proposed action.

⁴ A complete list of exceptions are included in the rule and available on the website. Especially worth noting are exceptions for motorized access that is authorized by written permit such as woodcutting or administering grazing allotments.

DESCHUTES NATIONAL FOREST Proposed Lava Rock OHV Project

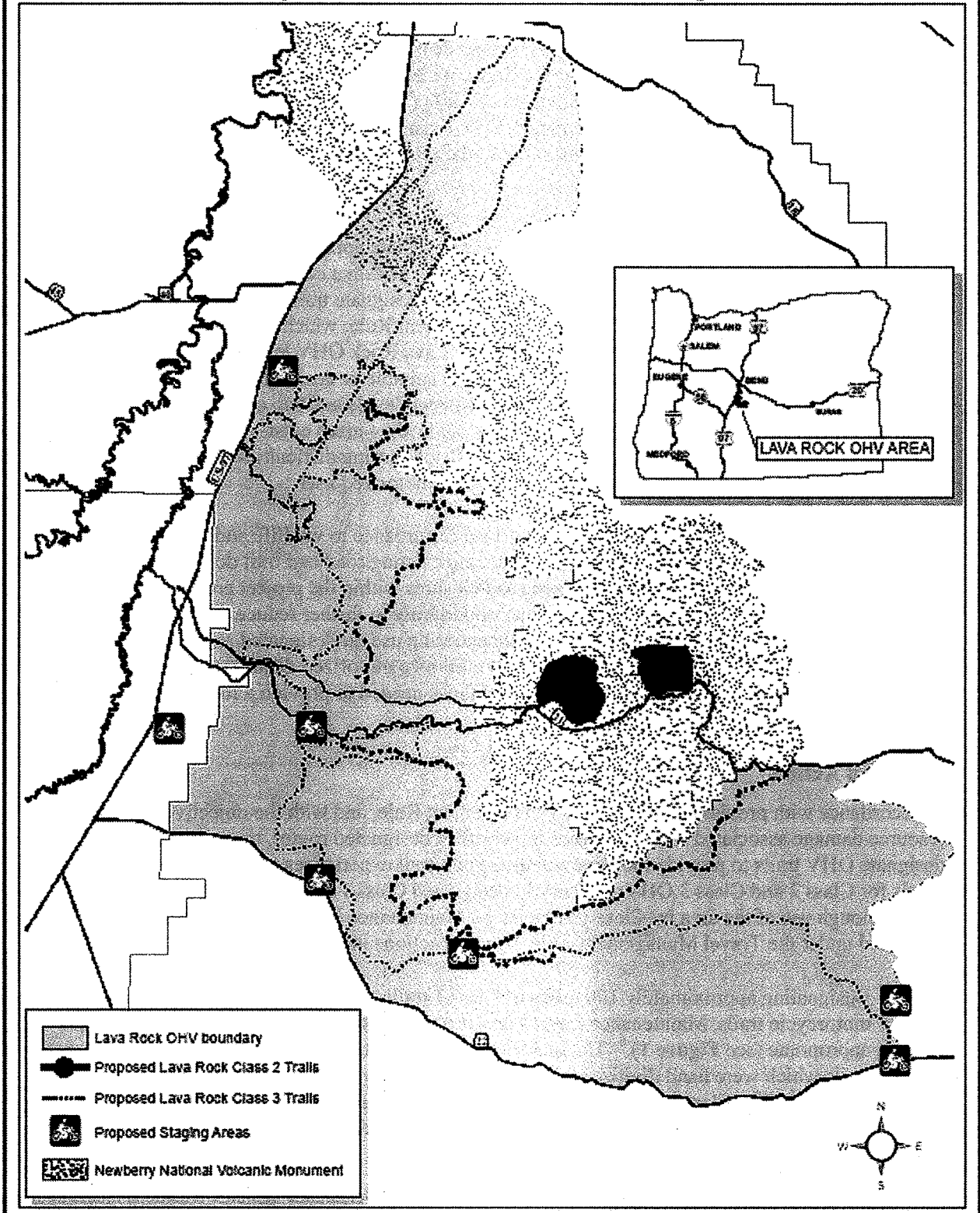


Figure 1. Lava Rock OHV Project area and proposed trails

The Lava Rock OHV project area currently has hundreds of miles of Maintenance Level II roads within the project area open to motorized use.⁵ Current road densities are in excess of target road densities recommended in the Deschutes Forest Plan for limiting disturbance to big game species. Road densities exceed Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines for wildlife (WL-53), as well as Management Area specific Standards and Guidelines for deer winter range (M7). Existing user-created trails have further increased the disturbance from motorized travel routes within the project area.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Lava Rock OHV trail project is to designate appropriate motorized trails for Class 2 and 3 OHVs while reducing overall road and trail densities within a consensus area identified by the Travel Management Working Groups. There is a need to designate trails for use by motorized OHVs in response to implementation of the 2005 Travel Management Rule, which would prohibit current motorized use off of the designated road system in the Lava Rock OHV trail project area. Because the designated road system currently does not provide for a suitable or desirable “off-road” recreational experience, there is a need to provide a variety of challenge levels and trip options in an area where opportunities for local rides and links to other designated riding areas exist. Appropriate options include 20+ mile loops and differing length point-to-point trails of varying difficulties for Class 2 and 3 OHVs in order to meet the desired recreational experience for the motorized user.

At the same time, there is a need to reduce motorized disturbance to wildlife and other users within the project area by designating trail locations and reducing existing road and trail densities. Although recent planning document decisions have authorized road closures within the project area and moved road densities closer to Forest Plan targets, there is an opportunity to further reduce disturbance from motorized vehicles within the project area by concentrating use on designated routes and creating larger blocks of unfragmented habitat. There is a need to minimize motorized disturbance to wildlife through the closure of roads and user-created trails in excess of those needed to provide a functional trail system and administrative access.

Proposed Action

In accordance with provisions of the Travel Management Rule, and with the objective of minimizing resource damage associated with motorized travel off of designated routes, the proposed action would designate OHV trails to provide loop and point-to-point trail experiences with a variety of challenge levels for Class 2 and Class 3 OHVs. No newly designated Class 1 trails are proposed within the project area, although use of the area by Class 1 vehicles on Maintenance Level II roads would continue to be permitted under the Travel Management Rule. Specific actions include:

- Designating approximately 100 miles of Class 3 trails utilizing existing user-created single track motorcycle trails, Maintenance Level I and II roads, skid trails and new trail areas, where appropriate (see **Figure 1**).⁶ The majority of proposed trail miles are located on user-created trails which were hand digitized from maps provided by the public or were a part of trail inventory GPS files collected in 2004. Proposed new trail segments that are not on user created trails or Maintenance Level II roads are generally located on maps and will be defined more

⁵ A “Maintenance Level II road” is a road that is open for use by high-clearance vehicles. Traffic is normally minor, usually consisting of one or a combination of administrative, permitted, dispersed recreation, or other specialized uses.

⁶ A “Level I road” is an inactivated road closed for current use but remaining a part of the designated road system. Basic custodial maintenance is performed to keep damage to adjacent resources to an acceptable level and to perpetuate the road to facilitate future management activities. Emphasis is normally given to maintaining drainage facilities and runoff patterns. Planned road deterioration may occur at this level.

accurately as the project proceeds and alternatives are developed. The final location of proposed Class 3 trails may vary slightly from the current location based on field reconnaissance and resource issues. New Class 3 trails would be constructed by defining a 24" wide single track in mineral soil and clearing trees and brush where necessary.

- Designating approximately 45 miles of Class 2 trails using existing user-created trails, Maintenance Level I and II roads, skid trails and new trail areas, including barren lava flows (see **Figure 1**). Proposed trail locations were identified by stakeholder user groups and hand digitized on to maps. The current map location of the majority of proposed miles is general in nature and will be adjusted according to public input, landscape features and resource issues. New Class 2 trails not located on Maintenance Level I and II roads would be defined with carsonite stakes and have limited clearing and definition of the trail tread before being opened for travel. More detailed maps of Class 2 and 3 trail locations will be posted on the Deschutes National Forest website at - <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/centraloregon/>.
- Close user-created trails and non-system roads in excess of those designated as part of the proposed trail system and not needed for administrative access. It is estimated that approximately 50 miles of trails and non-system roads could be identified for closure. Trails and roads would be closed by obliteration of tread where appropriate to prevent travel off of designated roads and trails. An accurate survey of the total miles of trail and non-system roads to be closed would be completed during the planning process in the spring and early summer of 2009.
- Close Level II roads in excess of administrative and public access needs. A complete survey of possible road closures will be completed during the planning process in time for the public comment to the draft EA. It is estimated that approximately 50 miles of Maintenance Level II roads could be proposed for closure. Most Level II roads would move to a Level I status and would not be included on the travel management map as designated for motorized use. These roads would be closed to motorized use and returned to natural drainage where appropriate. Roads determined to be unnecessary for long term use would be decommissioned from the system using berms or other obliteration methods to reduce actual road bed miles within the project area.

Public Involvement

We are seeking your input to help us identify any issues associated with the proposed action. We welcome your comments anytime during the project; however, **your comments would be most helpful if received by February 11, 2009**. Please make your comments as specific as possible. We plan to complete an Environmental Assessment (EA) in mid-2009. Following the release of the EA, we will have a 30-Day Public Comment Period for your review and comment. This will be followed by the release of a Decision Notice projected by December 2009. **If you would like more information or to discuss the project, please contact Peter Sussmann at (541) 383- 5594.**

How to Provide Comments

I am inviting your comments on this proposal. This scoping comment period is intended to provide those interested in or affected by this proposal an opportunity to make their concerns known prior to a decision being made by the Responsible Official. Your comments will be used to help us determine if this proposal is appropriate to implement as described or if alternate activities should be considered. Your comments would be most useful if received on or before February 11, 2009.

Comments may also be submitted electronically to comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes-bend-

frock@fs.fed.us. Please put "Lava Rock OHV Scoping" in the subject line of your email. They must be submitted as part of the actual e-mail message, or as an attachment in Microsoft Word, rich text format (rtf), or portable document format (pdf) only. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a comment, a verification of identity will be required for appeal eligibility. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification. E-mails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed above, in other formats than those listed, or containing viruses will be rejected.

Comments may also be submitted in writing by mail or in person. Written comments should be sent or delivered to: Shane Jeffries, District Ranger, Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District, 1230 NE 3rd Street, Suite A-262, Bend, Oregon 97701. Hand-delivered and oral comments may be delivered to the same address during normal business hours: 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral comments may also be provided via telephone (541) 383-4000 during normal business hours.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Shane Jeffries". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

A. SHANE JEFFRIES
District Ranger