



File Code: 1950

Date: November 30, 2012

Dear Interested Party:

The Red River Ranger District of the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests will be considering the Crooked River Valley Rehabilitation Project proposal and conducting environmental analysis in the near future. Please review the following proposal and submit your comments as described below so they can be included in our analysis. I invite you to participate in the analysis and further refinement of this proposed action by letting me know if you have issues or concerns with the proposed activities.

Introduction

The Red River Ranger District of the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests invites your comments on the proposed actions for the Crooked River Valley Rehabilitation Project that was developed jointly between the Red River Ranger District and the Nez Perce Tribe Department of Fisheries Resources Watershed Division. There are two main focuses of this project which include: 1) Crooked River Meanders - rehabilitation of the lower two miles of the Crooked River valley bottom with meanders, and 2) Crooked River Narrows Road - re-alignment of approximately 3 miles of the Crooked River road through the narrow canyon.

The project is located on the Red River Ranger District, Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests, Idaho County, Idaho at T29N, R7E, Sections 25 and 36; T29N, R8E, Sections 32 and 33; T28 N, R7E, Sections 1, 2, 11, 13, 14, and 24; T28N, R8E, Sections 4, 5, 7, 8, 17, 18, 19, 20. (Boise Meridian), approximately 5 miles southwest of Elk City, Idaho (Map 1). The project boundary extends from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, fish weir near the mouth of Crooked River about 6 miles south to the confluence of Crooked River and Relief Creek. The project boundary also includes the Road 1803 from the junction with Road 222 road along Red River; and Road 522 to the junction with Road 223 along Crooked River.

Purpose and Need for Action

The Existing Condition:

Crooked River Meanders

During the 1930s through the 1950s the lower two miles of the Crooked River Valley were heavily impacted by dredge mining, leaving behind large tailing piles and deep ponds throughout the valley bottom. Gold and silver mining affected most of the valley bottom along the mainstem of Crooked River. Physical changes to the valley bottom have altered stream and riparian process, and have affected aquatic and terrestrial habitat conditions, resulting in degraded ecosystem conditions relative to historical conditions.



The lower two miles of Crooked River were dredged with a bucket-line dredge which left the morphologic condition of the river in an exaggerated meandered shape and limits quality habitat for steelhead, spring/summer Chinook salmon and bull trout. More than 50 percent of the valley bottom is above the appropriate floodplain elevation, which prevents the appropriate distribution of spawning sized gravels in the channel and riparian communities along the streambanks. Disturbed riparian conditions and altered morphology are impairing stream temperatures, availability of large woody debris, and overall instream habitat quality. There is relatively high pool availability for fish however, due to channel re-alignment through the dredge ponds, pool-forming processes such as lateral migration, flow acceleration and large woody debris recruitment are not widely evident suggesting that existing pools may not be sustainable with the present morphology. Also, the majority of the pools in the project area lack the cover and complexity preferred by salmon, steelhead, and bull trout.

Watershed-scale effects of mining and past rehabilitation efforts are influencing geomorphic processes in the project area. Altered geomorphic processes include channel-floodplain interaction, pool development, flow attenuation, and sediment supply/transport. During spring runoff, lateral flow and sediment inputs from side drainages are being stored and routed through dredge ponds resulting in a slower release of water and sediment into the mainstem Crooked River. Similarly, coarse subsurface material may be capturing and conveying annual peak flow and extend flow duration during runoff. These effects are causing Crooked River to behave similar to a spring creek creating a static riverbed that is armored with large cobble, which is unsuitable for spawning habitats.

Crooked River Narrows Road

The county portion of the Crooked River Road runs approximately 12 miles from state Highway 14 to the town of Orogrande, Idaho. The road is under the jurisdiction of Idaho County and is also designated as a National Forest System Road (NFSR) – Road 233. The road follows Crooked River for its entire length and is within the floodplain of Crooked River for approximately 3 miles through the “narrows”. Through the narrows section the road constricts Crooked River, delivers sediment from the road surface, and often floods during spring runoff.

The current road prism often floods and fails during spring flows. Much of the current road prism is below the two year flow recurrence interval and the majority of the road is within the 100-year floodplain. The road is narrow, providing only one way traffic with soft shoulders along the river. The proximity of the road to the river channel facilitates sediment delivery to the river and is difficult to maintain throughout the year.

The Desired Condition:

Crooked River Meanders

The desired future condition for aquatic habitat in the project area is a rehabilitated stream corridor capable of supporting natural aquatic processes and sustaining the habitat requirements of the focal aquatic species for a range of life stages and seasonal behavior patterns.

The desired future conditions of aquatic habitat include:

- Aquatic habitat that offers complexity through a range of depths, velocities, and substrate attributes to support habitat requirements for a wide range of life states and behavior patterns, including adult and sub-adult migration, spawning, holding and juvenile rearing.
- Aquatic habitats that address temperature requirements by providing thermal refugia for overwintering and summer holding.

- Off-channel habitats, including side channels, backwater alcoves and connected wetlands that provide juvenile rearing habitat.
- Suitable substrate that is available to support spawning and hiding cover in in interstitial spaces and to support insect production for food web support.
- Large woody debris that is available in the channel and on the floodplain to provide cover and support pool development.
- A floodplain that consists of surface elevations that correspond to a range of desired geomorphic features and desired floodplain vegetation communities.

Crooked River Narrows Road

The desired future condition includes improved floodplain interaction and function through the narrows section to allow for off-channel habitats, improved pool quality by maintaining large woody debris through this section, and reduced fine sediment from the road. Full size vehicle access from Elk City to Orogrande with reduced impacts to aquatic conditions and allows floodplain function.

Need for Action:

Crooked River Meanders

There is a need to restore the valley bottom and stream channel to provide habitat for Endangered Species Act-listed fish. This would be achieved by removing the majority of the tailing piles and re-constructing the river and its floodplain to create natural stream sinuosity and morphology; to restore floodplain and hydrologic process; to construct instream channel structures to provide spawning and rearing habitat for steelhead, spring/summer Chinook salmon, bull trout, and cutthroat trout; and to restore riparian areas.

Crooked River Narrows Road

The current road prism is within the bankfull floodplain of Crooked River for much of its length. There is a need to improve the floodplain functions of Crooked River, reduce sediment delivery from the road, improve forest visitor safety, and provide easier maintenance of the road.

Proposed Action

The proposed action is to rehabilitate the lower two miles of the Crooked River valley bottom with meanders and re-align approximately 3 miles the Crooked River Road 233 through the narrow canyon (Map 2).

Crooked River Meanders

- Reconstruct approximately two valley miles of Crooked River by reshaping mine tailing piles and reconstruct over two miles of stream channel.
- Provide instream habitat structures and quality spawning, rearing and migration habitat for steelhead, spring/summer Chinook salmon, bull trout, and cutthroat trout.
- Provide proper riparian and wetland functions and complexity throughout the project area.
- Maintain campsites in the project area.

- Preserve heritage resource areas as identified by the Forest Service Archeologist and the State Historic Preservation Office.

Some of the primary elements of the valley rehabilitation would include:

- Create instream features, including stream slope, meanders, and pool/riffle ratios, that would provide quality habitat for fish and allow for a more natural hydraulic function that would maintain these features in the future.
- Balance earthwork quantities to maximize bankfull floodplain, low (10-year flood intervals), and high floodplains (100- year flood intervals). This would include building up valley bottoms in various sections, filling in tailings ponds, and developing a sloped valley bottom along the east edge of the project area.
- Stabilize newly constructed streambanks using woody material and brush.
- Construct secondary channel features, including side channels, alcoves, floodplain depressions, slope wetlands, and terrace swales.
- Create areas that would support wetland development over time.
- Salvage existing material on site (trees, brush, rocks, etc.) to use in the new channel and floodplain.
- Install large woody debris structures instream and on the floodplain to create pool forming features and retain sediment on the floodplain.
- Use all applicable Best Management Practices for wet weather and/or high flow operations if temperatures warm during the construction period.
- Develop a re-vegetation plan to help stabilize bare soils, reduce sediment sources, and return the area to a natural vegetative state.
- Construct a temporary bi-pass channel that would provide fish passage during construction.

Crooked River Narrows Road

- Re-align 3 miles of road within the bottom of the valley to reduce failure potential, and sediment inputs into Crooked River.
- Improve maintainability and safety of the road by providing turnouts, wider road base (approx. 16 feet), buffers between the road and the river, graveled road surface, and stable road base.

Forest Plan Direction

The proposed action responds to the goals and objectives outlined in the Nez Perce National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (also referred to as the Nez Perce Forest Plan [USDA Forest Service 1987a]), as amended, and would improve conditions in the project area to bring them more in line with the desired future conditions described in the plan. The Forest Plan provides direction for the management of the Crooked River Valley Rehabilitation Project area and defines the desired future conditions. In addition, the proposed project responds to the objectives of protecting, restoring, and enhancing watersheds within proximity of the ceded territory of the Nez Perce Tribe. The need for this project was identified by comparing the existing conditions in the Crooked River Valley Rehabilitation Project area with the desired future condition of the area.

Forest-wide management direction in the Nez Perce National Forest Plan related to this project can be found on pages II-1, and include Goals 2, 4, and 12 (USDA Forest Service 1987).

The Nez Perce Forest Plan provides direction for Wildlife and Fish with the following Forestwide standards that would apply for this proposal (USDA Forest Service 1987, p. II-19):

19. Restore presently degraded fish habitat to meet the fish/water quality objectives established in this Forest Plan (see Appendix A of the Forest Plan).

The Nez Perce Forest Plan also provides direction for roads with the following Forestwide standards that would apply for this proposal (USDA Forest Service 1987, p. II-25):

5. Maintain access facilities to the level commensurate with use, user type, user safety, and facility-resource protection.
6. Plan, design, and manage all access to meet land and resource management objectives, meet the State Water Quality Standards, and meet Best Management Practices (BMPs).
8. Minimize impacts from construction in identified key riparian and wildlife areas. Develop rehabilitation plans for existing access facilities that are producing significant impacts on riparian-dependent resources.
9. Design all proposed road systems to mitigate at least 60 percent of the sediment predicted. Utilize proven mitigation procedures in the design and construction of roads to meet up to 90 percent of the sediment predicted, where needed to meet resource management objectives.

Management area direction for Management Areas 3, 7 and 10, and direction related to PACFISH also apply to this project.

Implementation of the Crooked River Valley Rehabilitation Project is proposed to take place in 2015-2020.

Environmental Issues

Environmental issues identified by Forest Service resource specialists include disturbance of stream banks and hillside during reconstruction and the potential instruction of more sediment into streams, use of native plant species, effect to mining claims, timing of activities and impact to forest visitors.

Alternatives

The potential alternatives for the Crooked River Meanders are:

- 1) No Action - Maintain existing condition.
- 2) Restore approximately 2 miles of valley bottom and re-construct over 2 miles of Crooked River.

The potential alternatives for the Crooked River Narrows Road are:

- 1) No Action - Maintain existing condition.
- 2) Reconstruct the existing roadway, through vertical and horizontal shifts, such that the most of the roadway is above the 100-year flood-flow elevation.
- 3) Establish a new location and alignment of the Road 233 road between mile posts 2 and 6, such that the new road is entirely above the 100-year flood-flow elevation. The Forest may consider converting the existing Road 233 to a trail or completely decommissioning the road.
- 4) Use/improve an existing alternative road (Road 522 and 1803, from State Highway 14 at the mouth of Red River up to the intersection of Road 233 at the mouth of Relief Creek). The Forest may consider converting the existing Road 233 to a trail or completely decommissioning the road.

Decisions to Be Made

The Forest Supervisor is the deciding official for this project. The decisions to be made are:

- Whether or not to complete Crooked River Meanders project?
- If rehabilitation of the Crooked River Meanders is allowed, what is the extent and location of stream reconstruction?
- Whether or not to reconstruct Crooked River Narrows Road?
- If reconstruction of Crooked River Narrows Road is allowed, what is the extent and location of road reconstruction?
- What design and mitigation measures would be included?
- What, if any monitoring would be included?

How to Provide Comments

To assure your written comments are fully considered during the analysis of this project, please submit your comments by 45-days following the publication of the Notice of Intent in the Federal Register, estimated to be on December 14, 2012. Comments submitted after that date will be accepted, but our ability to respond effectively could be reduced. Please note that all comments received will be included in the public record; therefore, names, phone numbers, addresses, and e-mail addresses of participants cannot be kept confidential [7 CFR Part 1 Subpart B 1-27(c)].

Written comments should be submitted to Jennie Fischer, Team Leader, Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests Supervisor's Office, 104 Airport Road, Grangeville, Idaho 83530. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 7:30 am to 4:30 pm (PST), Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral comments must be provided during normal business hours via telephone (208) 983-1950 or in person. Faxed comments must be provided via telephone to (208) 983-4099. Electronic comments should be submitted in rich text format (.rtf) or Word (. doc) to comments-northern-nezperce-red-river@fs.fed.us.

If you choose to comment on the proposal, please include the following: (1) your name, address, and (if possible) your telephone number, and organization represented (if any); (2) title of the project on which you are submitting comments; (3) specific facts and related rationale concerning this project that you feel should be considered. Additional information regarding how to comment can be found at 36 CFR 215.6.

Additional Project Information

Detailed information about this project is also available by visiting our project website:
<http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/fs-usda-pop.php/?project=40648>

If you have questions or would like additional information on this project, please contact Jennie Fischer at (208) 983-4048.

Thank you for your involvement in the management of the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests.

Sincerely,

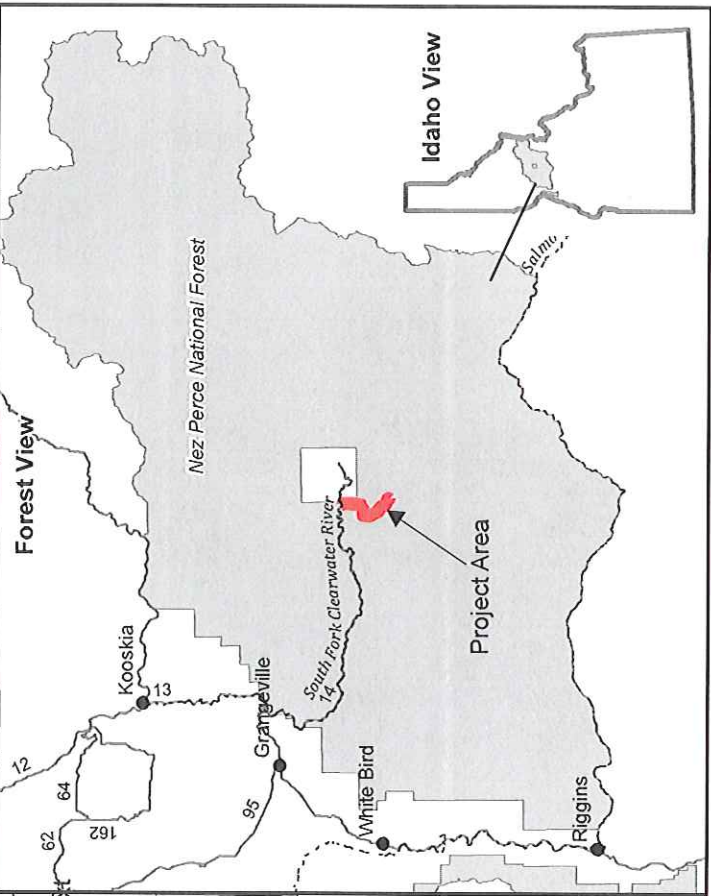
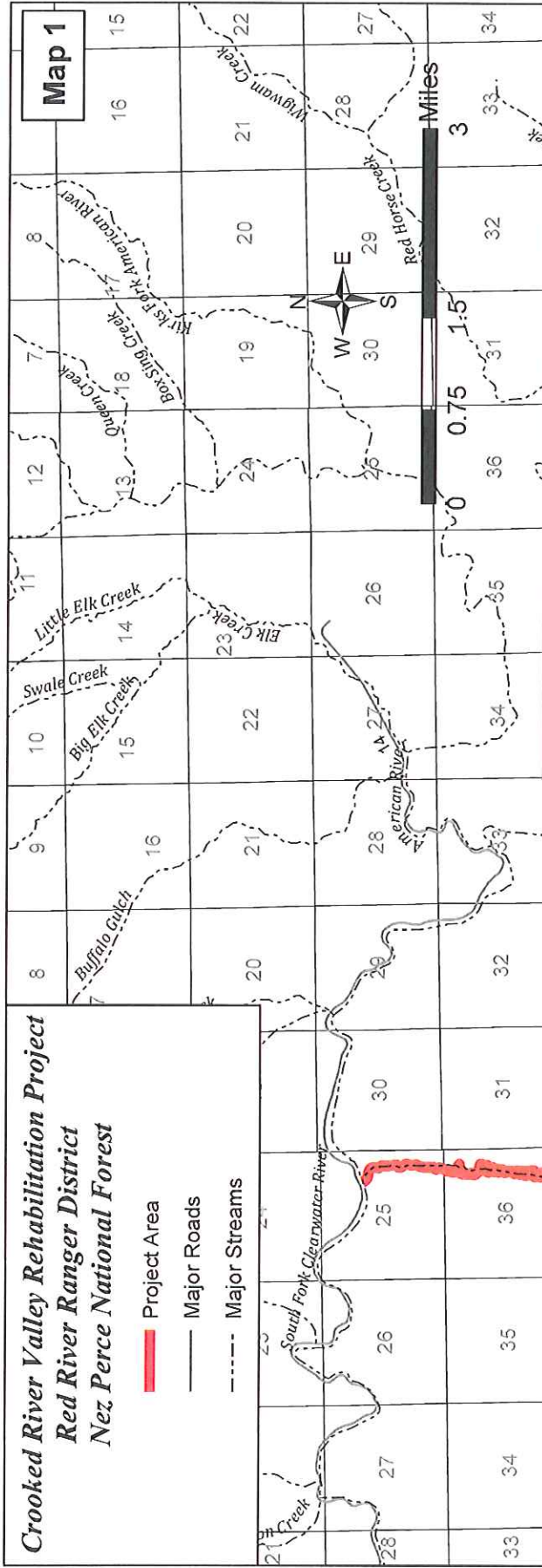


TERRY NEVIUS
District Ranger

Map 1 – Crooked River Valley Rehabilitation Project - Vicinity Map
Map 2 – Crooked River Meanders and Crooked River Narrows Road

**Crooked River Valley Rehabilitation Project
Red River Ranger District
Nez Perce National Forest**

-  Project Area
-  Major Roads
-  Major Streams



Crooked River Valley Rehabilitation Project

*Red River Ranger District
Nez Perce National Forest*

- Proposed Rehabilitation of 2 Miles of the Crooked River Meanders
- Proposed Crooked River Narrows Road Realignment

Map 2

