



**AMERICAN
WHITEWATER**

Scott Harding
Stewardship Associate
PO Box 34
Forks of Salmon, CA 96031

May 27, 2022

Curtis Booher, District Ranger
Clackamas River Ranger District
Mt. Hood National Forest
ATTN: Clackamas Fires Danger Tree Assessment
16400 Champion Way
Sandy, OR 97055-7248
971-280-3520

Re: Clackamas Fires Roadside Danger Tree Assessment Draft EA

Dear Ranger Booher,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments for the Clackamas Fires Roadside Danger Tree Draft Environmental Assessment.

About American Whitewater

American Whitewater is a national river conservation non-profit founded in 1954. With approximately 50,000 supporters, 7,000 dues-paying members, and 80 locally based affiliate clubs, we represent whitewater enthusiasts across the nation. Our mission is to protect and restore America's whitewater rivers and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely. We are the nation's primary advocate for the preservation and protection of whitewater rivers, and we connect the interests of human-powered recreational river users with ecological and science-based data to achieve the goals within our mission. Core to our work is the belief that the public should have access to their rivers for recreation and other uses.

A significant percentage of our members live in or visit the Pacific Northwest and many of these members use the Clackamas River and its tributaries for boating, fishing, and hiking as well as for education, interpretation, inspiration, and for physical and mental health. For our members living in Multnomah and Clackamas counties, the Clackamas River is enjoyed as the most consistent and dependable close-to-home whitewater that flows year-round. Many of our members also work in the local outfitting industry and provide experiences for the public to enjoy this place. While the forest has been significantly impacted by the fire, the river itself remains a spectacular section of whitewater that our members and the public seek to enjoy.

*Our mission is to protect and restore America's whitewater rivers
and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely.*

Comments

Danger trees should not be cut within the wild-classified corridor of the South Fork Clackamas River.

Where a portion of the South Fork Clackamas River's wild-classified corridor overlaps with the Clackamas River's recreational-classified corridor, the management direction for the wild-classified corridor should be used to guide management actions. Although confusing to have two overlapping corridors with different classifications, only the more restrictive management direction for wild-classified rivers will adequately protect the corridor and river values of the South Fork Clackamas River.

The Forest Plan provides direction for all designated rivers in management prescription B1-001:

All management activities in the river corridors shall protect and/or enhance the identified outstandingly remarkable values.

Management prescriptions B1-038 and B1-039 pertain to wild river segments:

Within wild river segments... salvage activities may occur only for insect or disease control, fire, natural catastrophe, disasters, public safety...

We note that although the prescription B1-001 directs that management activities “protect and/or enhance the identified outstandingly remarkable values” (emphasis added), section 10(a) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act requires the Forest Service to administer Wild and Scenic rivers to a more protective standard that protects and enhances not only the identified outstandingly remarkable values but all values which caused each river to be included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.¹

Further, Section 10(a) legislatively directs the Forest Service to give “primary emphasis” to protecting the rivers’ “esthetic, scenic, historic, archeologic, and scientific features” for all designated segments regardless of their classification. There is no statutory basis for placing the primary emphasis on “public safety” or diminishing the Act’s protect and enhance standard to salvage trees within wild river corridors.

The Visual Report’s rationale for managing the South Fork Clackamas River’s wild corridor to a lesser standard is unconvincing and lacks alignment with Forest Plan VQOs and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The Visual Resources Report recognizes that project activities occurring along Road 45 within the wild corridor “would be potentially visible in the foreground and middleground of the South Fork Clackamas River and would therefore have the potential to affect that WSR corridor’s scenery ORV.”² The report then narrows its focus from the wild corridor as a whole to examine only the scenery impacts at the large waterfall in the lower part

¹ Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. P. L. 90-542; U.S.C. 1271 et seq. 2 October 1968.

<https://www.rivers.gov/documents/act/complete-act.pdf>

² Visual Resources Report, April 19, 2022, at page 43. <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=61043>.

of the river. Ignoring the previously identified impacts to the foreground and middleground elsewhere within the wild corridor, the report concludes that there will be a minimal impact on scenery because the large waterfall is in the middleground and that the less restrictive Retention VQO can therefore be applied. This convoluted logic does not work: all of the wild corridor is required to be managed under a Preservation VQO and the location of the large waterfall in the middleground is irrelevant. The Preservation VQO does not permit the cutting of trees and however inconvenient this may be for the project, it is the management direction for this area and, absent an amendment to the Forest Plan, must be followed pursuant to National Forest Management Act requirements.

Project Design Criteria B1(g) is unclear as to whether instream restoration projects are a component of the Clackamas Fires Roadside Danger Tree Project.

Project Design Criterion B1(g) states:

Where it is safe and feasible in Riparian Reserves, cut trees may be placed off to the stream side of the road or used for instream restoration projects. Maximize the length of the bucked portion of logs that may then be placed into riparian areas or streams.

This criterion is unclear as to whether the “instream restoration projects” are part of the currently planned project or whether they are separate projects previously authorized or future projects not yet planned. The current project’s draft EA does not include any analysis of new instream restoration projects, yet it references the use of project-generated wood in such projects. The language for this criterion should be more specific to this point. If the current project in fact does include instream restoration components, additional analysis and public outreach needs to be conducted prior to a decision.

Although we do not strictly oppose the placement of wood in streams and rivers as part of instream restoration projects, we recognize that the placement of wood in rivers used by whitewater paddlers and other members of the public has the potential to pose significant hazards. Such restoration projects need to be properly located, designed, and constructed to minimize hazards to river users, and the planning process needs to meaningfully engage with potentially affected river users.

For a detailed assessment on design considerations for instream restoration projects on streams and rivers used by whitewater boaters, please consult American Whitewater’s Integrating Recreational Boating Considerations in Stream Channel Design and Modification Projects.³ We request that the Mt. Hood National Forest consult with American Whitewater during the planning stages of any instream restoration project on boatable streams and rivers or on other reaches which may affect downstream river users.

³ Available for download at <https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/Document/view/id/1006>

Danger trees should not be felled into Fish Creek without analysis of impacts to river users.

Project Design Criterion B1(g) states:

The danger trees along road 5400 adjacent to Fish Creek (between the road and the stream), would only be felled where they are classified as “imminent or likely” according to the danger tree protocol. Trees may be felled into Fish Creek or moved into Fish Creek but only after a Wild and Scenic River Section 7 review for compliance with Wild and Scenic River guidance is completed.

Felling trees directly into Fish Creek or moving felled trees into Fish Creek is highly likely to create hazard to boaters and other users of the creek. Fish Creek is a recognized whitewater boating run and is in American Whitewater’s National Whitewater Inventory.⁴ Although it is lesser used than more popular streams and rivers nearby, it is part of the assemblage of boatable streams in the Clackamas River watershed that contributes to the outstanding diversity of recreation in the area.

A Wild and Scenic Rivers Act section 7 review may be appropriate for a project that intentionally fells trees into the active channel of a designated reach; however, this would not constitute an adequate review of the public safety impacts of the tree felling upon river users. Recreation is not a recognized ORV for Fish Creek and, consequently, a section 7 review would not focus on recreation or public safety. Nonetheless, these impacts need to be analyzed and disclosed in the project’s environmental analysis so that an informed decision can be made.

It is ironic that the purpose of this project is to reduce safety hazards yet felling trees into Fish Creek may decrease safety for river users. This may pose liability concerns for the Forest Service.

The Forest Service should make project geospatial data for this project available.

Given the large geographic scope of this project, it is difficult to provide a detailed assessment and comments without the ability to use computer-based mapping tools such as GIS analysis. The Forest Service should provide geospatial data for its proposed projects from the scoping stages forward on its project websites, without the need for a Freedom of Information Act request. Doing so will promote public engagement and assist the Forest Service with receiving detailed and substantive comments that can help improve agency projects.

Conclusion

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to comment on this project.

⁴ For more information about whitewater boating on Fish Creek see <https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/view/river-detail/10445/main>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott Harding". The letters are cursive and fluid.

Scott Harding
Stewardship Associate
American Whitewater
scott@americanwhitewater.org
541-840-1662

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom O'Keefe". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Thomas O'Keefe
Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director
American Whitewater
okeefe@americanwhitewater.org
425-417-9012